

# **The Letter to the Galatians**



# THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

**An Explanation of this Letter  
Especially for You**

Rock Solid #4

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uitgeverij  
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## Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible</b>	<b>9</b>
Old Testament	9
New Testament	10
<b>Explanation of general format</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Outline of the Letter to the Galatians</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The Letter to the Galatians</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction	13
<b>Galatians 1</b>	<b>16</b>
Greeting and Blessing   <i>verses 1-5</i>	16
There Is Only One Gospel   <i>verses 6-12</i>	20
Paul, a Unique Apostle   <i>verses 13-24</i>	23
<b>Galatians 2</b>	<b>27</b>
Defense of the Gospel   <i>verses 1-5</i>	27
Paul With and Against Peter   <i>verses 6-14</i>	30
Live By Faith In the Son of God   <i>verses 15-21</i>	34
<b>Galatians 3</b>	<b>38</b>
Foolish Galatians   <i>verses 1-7</i>	38
Blessing Or Curse   <i>verses 8-14</i>	42
Law and Promise   <i>verses 15-22</i>	46
The Era of Faith   <i>verses 23-29</i>	50
<b>Galatians 4</b>	<b>53</b>
From Child To Heir   <i>verses 1-7</i>	53
The Danger of Falling Back   <i>verses 8-15</i>	57
Again In Labor   <i>verses 16-23</i>	61
Children of the Bondwoman Or of the Free Woman   <i>verses 24-31</i>	65

<b>Galatians 5</b>	<b>69</b>
The Christian Freedom   <i>verses 1-6</i>	69
Called To Be Free   <i>verses 7-15</i>	73
The Spirit Against the Flesh   <i>verses 16-21</i>	77
The Fruit of the Spirit   <i>verses 22-26</i>	80
<b>Galatians 6</b>	<b>84</b>
Bear One Another's Burdens   <i>verses 1-6</i>	84
What a Man Sows, He Will Also Reap   <i>verses 7-11</i>	88
The Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ   <i>verses 12-18</i>	91
<b>Other Publications</b>	<b>96</b>

## Foreword

Dear friend,

I'm glad I can offer you this volume of the 'Rock Solid series'. I wrote this book for you. When I wrote it, I tried to put myself in your shoes. I thought of you as one who has

- either just got to know the Lord Jesus
- or already known Him longer

but in either case, someone who wants to become better acquainted with the Savior who died for you to give you life.

Until recently, you may not have been interested in getting to know Him better. I once had this attitude, but a tremendous change occurred. This change pleased the Lord Jesus because He loves to become more important to you. Having the desire to know Him better will help you discover the enormous riches you have in your hands — the Bible. The more you read it, the more you will find your love for the Lord Jesus increasing.

It doesn't matter how old or young you are – what matters is the change in your feelings towards the Lord Jesus and what He has become to you. This is why you now want to start reading the Bible. With this book, I want to help you read and study the Bible. Here are a few practical tips that might help you:

1. Provide yourself with a good translation of the Bible. Some good translations are the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), the *New King James Version* (NKJV), the *New Translation* by J.N. Darby (JND) and the *King James Version* (KJV), preferably with the New Scofield word updates. I will be using the NASB, with permission granted by The Lockman Foundation on February 10, 2016 when referencing and quoting Scripture unless I note otherwise.

2. I tried to write this book in a way that encourages you to use the Bible. At the beginning and end of each section, I have listed the Bible verses pertaining to that section. I encourage you to read those verses before and after reading the section. It would be a good idea to keep your Bible open to those verses so you can easily refer to them.
3. Self-discipline is very important. You have to be willing to discipline yourself to take time to understand the Bible better. I suggest that you read the Bible at a set time that's best for you.

To help you with this, I have divided this book into twenty-two sections. I also noted with a 'V' which verse is explained. You can read one section, with its verses, every day in about fifteen minutes. You take more time eating each day and certainly *spiritual food* is as important as physical food. If you can be self-disciplined in this, then after three weeks, you will have gained a little more insight into a liberating letter of the Bible.

The whole Bible is a splendid book and it's my prayer that you'll get this impression in an increasing way.

I wish you God's blessing!

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## **Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible**

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### **Old Testament**

Gen	-	Genesis
Exo	-	Exodus
Lev	-	Leviticus
Num	-	Numbers
Deu	-	Deuteronomy
Jos	-	Joshua
Jdg	-	Judges
Rth	-	Ruth
1Sam	-	First Samuel
2Sam	-	Second Samuel
1Kgs	-	First Kings
2Kgs	-	Second Kings
1Chr	-	First Chronicles
2Chr	-	Second Chronicles
Ezra	-	Ezra
Neh	-	Nehemiah
Est	-	Esther
Job	-	Job
Psa	-	Psalms
Pro	-	Proverbs
Ecc	-	Ecclesiastes
Song	-	Song of Songs
Isa	-	Isaiah
Jer	-	Jeremiah
Lam	-	Lamentations
Eze	-	Ezekiel
Dan	-	Daniel
Hos	-	Hosea
Joel	-	Joel
Amos	-	Amos
Oba	-	Obadiah
Jona	-	Jonah

Mic - Micah  
Nah - Nahum  
Hab - Habakkuk  
Zep - Zephaniah  
Hag - Haggai  
Zec - Zechariah  
Mal - Malachi

## **New Testament**

Mt - Gospel of Matthew  
Mk - Gospel of Mark  
Lk - Gospel of Luke  
Jn - Gospel of John  
Acts - Acts of the Apostles  
Rom - Letter to the Romans  
1Cor - First Letter to the Corinthians  
2Cor - Second Letter to the Corinthians  
Gal - Letter to the Galatians  
Eph - Letter to the Ephesians  
Phil - Letter to the Philippians  
Col - Letter to the Colossians  
1Thes - First Letter to the Thessalonians  
2Thes - Second Letter to the Thessalonians  
1Tim - First Letter to Timothy  
2Tim - Second Letter to Timothy  
Tit - Letter to Titus  
Phlm - Letter to Philemon  
Heb - Letter to the Hebrews  
Jam - Letter of James  
1Pet - First Letter of Peter  
2Pet - Second Letter of Peter  
1Jn - First Letter of John  
2Jn - Second Letter of John  
3Jn - Third Letter of John  
Jude - Letter of Jude  
Rev - Revelation

## Explanation of general format

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS** are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

**BRACKETS** [ ] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

**SHARP BRACKETS** <> are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

**ALL CAPS** in the New Testament are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

## Outline of the Letter to the Galatians

The division of this letter is simple:

1. **Gal 1:1-5 | Introduction**
2. **Gal 1:6-2:21 | The historical part**

In this part Paul explains the source of the gospel he preached, his call and his relationship to the brothers in Jerusalem and to Peter.

3. **Gal 3:1-4:31 | The doctrinal part**

In this part he explains the difference between justification through faith and justification through the law; he also clarifies the meaning of the law.

4. **Gal 5:1-6:10 | The practical part**

This part is about the characteristics of the new life and how that becomes visible in the daily life of the believer.

5. **Gal 6:11-18 | Epilogue**

## The Letter to the Galatians

### Introduction

Read chapters 1-2 as an introduction.

(Do it carefully. If you have about thirty minutes at your disposal then it is recommended you first read the *whole* letter.)

The *letter to the Galatians* is a unique letter in several ways. For instance it is the only letter which is written to a *group of churches*. It is not exactly clear if these churches were in North-Galatia or in South-Galatia. To me, it seems most likely that these churches were in South-Galatia because there were a number of well-known cities such as Antioch, Iconia, Lystra and Derbe. You can read about these cities in the *Acts 13* and *14*. Paul had been there preaching the gospel.

The letter is also unique because of the cool tone and the powerful language Paul uses. After a short, necessary introduction he starts directly to denounce the evil for which the Galatians had opened their minds. In other letters he always starts with a word of appreciation for the good that was present; only after that he starts writing about the wrong. He doesn't do that with the Galatians but cuts straight to the point. He's in a rush. That has to do with the reason of his writing. What was going on?

In the churches in Galatia people had come who said that the believers should be circumcised and that they had to keep the law. These people also said that Paul was not a real apostle. The serious point was not that these people were there. Such people have always been there and they still exist today. But the worst part is that their false message was accepted by the Galatian believers. It is a serious matter that such people, with such a false message, still find their way into the church today. That's why this letter is still very relevant, even today. Perhaps you're not yet aware of

the depravity of this doctrine that these people bring. Even the Galatians weren't. But the further we get into our examination of this letter the clearer it will be for you.

A good way to help you understand Paul's attitude, is a comparison between this *letter to the Galatians* and two of the previous letters he wrote. I refer to the *letter to the Romans* and the *first letter to the Corinthians*. I assume that you have already studied these letters a little. So it will sound familiar to you if I say that Paul in his *letter to the Romans*, so to the believers in Rome, wrote about the gospel as *the only possible way* for a sinner to be justified before God. The sinner is justified through faith.

In the *letter to the Galatians* Paul also writes about justification through faith. The difference is that he writes this letter to believers who were inclined to rob this tremendous truth of its power and blessing by introducing again the law in their lives. Whoever does this, affects the perfection of the work of Christ. In an impassioned plea Paul writes in this letter a crystal clear defense of being justified through faith alone, without works of law. He demonstrates in an unquestionable way how faith and law exclude each other completely as the means to be justified before God. Therefore the *letter to the Galatians* is a very impressive and essential complement to the *letter to the Romans*.

If we compare the *letter to the Galatians* with the one that is written to the Corinthians, something else will become clear. The church in Corinth was not what you would call a model church. Okay, it was an example, but one as a church should not be. In his letter to them Paul needed to mention many cases that were unacceptable and he had to exhort them about it. They even tolerated a sin you couldn't even find among the Gentiles. Still Paul wasn't as sharp in that letter as he is in the one he wrote to the Galatians.

In Corinth the mistake was mainly in the behavior of the Corinthians. They lived very carelessly; they had not yet judged all their heathen practices. Their thoughts about a practical Christian life were not sufficiently formed by the knowledge of God's thoughts. In his letter to them Paul does his utmost to correct this.

Their sinful practice was totally unacceptable, but you still find that Paul is willing to give them time to change these things. He even starts his letter with blessings and thanksgiving.

For the Galatians he has a very short blessing and not even a thanksgiving. The reason is that the Galatians had opened their minds to another gospel than the gospel of Christ that he had preached to them and that they had accepted. This other gospel was a mixture of faith and keeping the law and it meant a flagrant violation of the perfect work of Christ. Christ and His work were at stake. That's why he uses such a cool tone in this letter and he lets them hear the powerful protest.

We are much more quickly convinced of the wrong practices found with the Corinthians, than we are of the wrong doctrine that found acceptance with the Galatians. Paul wasn't. We may be thankful to God that He led His servant Paul to write this letter. Because of this, we are able today to judge the evil for its true content and deal with it in the way God wants.

Now read chapters 1 and 2 again.

Reflection: Why did Paul speak so severely against the Galatians?

## Galatians 1

### Greeting and Blessing | *verses 1-5*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*1 Paul, an apostle (not [sent] from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), 2 and all the brethren who are with me, 3 grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom [be] the glory forevermore. Amen.*

V1. Paul begins with an extensive emphasis on and defense of his apostleship. In the former part I have already said that there were some people who wanted to undermine his apostleship. That really was smart, because, if the Galatian believers started to doubt his apostleship, they would also start doubting the message he had brought. For instance, they said that Paul was not a real apostle because he did not belong to the twelve apostles who were with the Lord Jesus on earth. Therefore Paul states very clearly how it is with his apostleship.

In fact Paul's apostleship is a higher one than that of the twelve. The twelve were called by the Lord Jesus to be His apostles when He was on earth; but He called Paul to be an apostle when He was in heaven. The source, the origin of his apostleship was not on earth, but in heaven. That is what Paul means when he says "not from men". In *Acts 9* you can read how that happened.

But he adds something: "Nor through the agency man." What he means by that is, after being called by the Lord, he was not appointed by any man to be an apostle nor officially confirmed in his apostleship. People had nothing at all to do with his call and

confirmation as an apostle – it all happened “*through Jesus Christ and God the Father*”.

So in the first verse he immediately emphasizes the independency of his service to any men. What Paul says of himself here implies an important point. Every believer has received a gift of the glorified Lord (*Eph 4:7*). The habit that has taken root in almost the whole of Christianity to appoint people in an official or unofficial way in the service of any gift or to send them out, is against the instructions the Scripture gives here.

In these five introductory verses the Lord Jesus and the Father together are mentioned three times. In this is shown the Divinity of Christ and His being one with the Father. But They are clearly distinguished in Their work. The first time (in *verse 1*) you see that the Lord Jesus died and that the Father raised Him. The addition “*who raised Him from the dead*”, emphasizes again that we have to do with an accomplished work of redemption accepted by God. When the law regains a place in the life of a Christian, it indicates a denial of God’s work of redemption.

V2. There is something else they put at stake. Paul doesn’t stand alone in defending the truth. A number of brothers who are with him completely agree with him. It had to become clear to the Galatian believers that by opening their minds to this deceit they were denying the common faith of the saints.

V3. On the whole it is becoming clear from the start how serious the situation was in the churches in Galatia. The wish of the apostle that they should receive “*grace*” and “*peace*” is also found in other letters. But here that wish is the more important because grace is clearly opposite to the law and peace is clearly opposite to the curse of the law. In this wish the Lord Jesus and the Father are mentioned the second time, only in the reverse order. Grace and peace is only found in Them (and not in the law). They are the source. In *verse 1* the emphasis is on the Father; now the emphasis is on what the Son did.

V4. It's touching to see how Paul makes himself one with the Galatians when he says that the Lord Jesus gave Himself for *our* sins. He doesn't say *your* sins or *my* sins. Above all it is touching that the Lord Jesus gave nothing less than "*Himself*". Only He and His work are able to direct the hearts of wandering believers to the right goal.

Our sins are gone. But that is not the only thing. His work didn't only have the goal of saving us from our sins – however great that might be – He also wanted to "*rescue us from this present evil age*". 'Evil age' means: all evil influences and inclinations which are present in this world and by which satan keeps people under his control.

Among God's children there is far too little awareness of the radical separation between the believer and the world in which he lives. This radical separation is the result of what the Lord Jesus did on the cross. He who opens his heart to something of this world is tearing down the work of Christ. Below in this letter you will see that by reintroducing the law it causes you to behave yourself as if you still belong to this 'evil age', while the purpose of the work of the Lord Jesus was to pull you out of it. Every believer who is aware of this will be on his guard that nothing of this influence will be allowed into his life.

Added to this is the fact that the Father wants it this way. In the goal – indicated by the word "*that*" – of what the Lord Jesus did, you see for a third time the Father and the Son together. The Father wants to have a nation for Himself, a nation that will give Him glory forever and ever. The law – and everything that is associated with it – is completely opposite to this. He who allows the entrance of the law into his life again loses sight of the Father's will.

V5. So you see how Paul in these first verses has already shown the Galatians the position of the Christian in a most simple way. This position goes from the will of the Father, via the work of the Lord Jesus to the eternal glory. God and the Lord Jesus want us to enjoy that now. Paul links into that and commits himself to it

in this letter. The word “*amen*” at the end of these introductory verses testifies to it. Let us agree wholeheartedly with it.

Now read Galatians 1:1-5 again.

Reflection: What do you learn in these verses about the Father and the Son?

**There Is Only One Gospel** | verses 6-12

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is [really] not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! 10 For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. 11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but [I received it] through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

V6. Paul is very indignant of the fact that the Galatians are about to accept a false gospel. As is shown by the salutation of other letters it was his habit to start a letter with a few words of praise and thanksgiving. Here that is out of question. The seriousness of the matter orders that he goes straight, without any detours, to the occasion of his letter. It concerned nothing less than abandoning God Himself. God had called them. In that calling they had recognized the grace of Christ. Now people arrived with “*a different gospel, which is [really] not another*”. Paul was perplexed that they were so easily persuaded and so quick to listen to that gospel.

V7. When he says “*a different gospel*”, he means a gospel that is a mixture of law and grace. This was a gospel other than that which he had preached. Because there is only one gospel, there is no such thing as “*a different gospel*”. A gospel, in which law and grace are brought together and are connected together, is no gospel at all. Anyone who opens his mind to it will be confused. It is a perversion, a falsification of the gospel of Christ and is radically opposed to the gospel he preached.

V8. To reinforce his words and indicate how serious this case was, he even calls out a curse over himself, or over an angel, if he or an angel would bring a different gospel which was contrary to what he had been preaching. It's not how eloquent the preacher is, or how important or well-known he is, but it is about what he *says*.

This is still a very important criterion. If you hear someone say something about the Bible, do not be impressed by the person speaking, but listen to what he says. The content of his preaching has to fit with what the Bible says and you have the responsibility to test it. The pure gospel doesn't tolerate anything alongside it. It is complete, absolute and final. Nothing can be mixed with it and nothing can be added.

V9. Paul reminds them of the gospel they had received, and had accepted once and for all. For the second time and thus more emphatically, he calls out a curse on those who brought this pernicious doctrine. Nothing less than eternal damnation will be the part of him who so affects the work of Christ.

This is not about ignorant and erring ones. It concerns people who consciously teach that man must add his own works to the work of Christ. They didn't deny the work of Christ, but said that God in Christ had done His part and that the Galatians had to accomplish their part too.

V10. Paul preached a gospel without compromise. He didn't say things to flatter people in order to win their favor. His only intention was to please God. If his goal was pleasing people, he "*would not be a bond-servant of Christ*". Before his conversion he was only pleasing men and wanted to be popular, but being popular and pleasing Christ exclude each other. You'll notice that yourself if you want to share the gospel with someone. Christ was not popular; neither are His followers.

V11. From *verse 11* Paul explains the unique character of his message and his apostleship. In *verse 1* he has already spoken about his apostleship, but now he adds more details. What is striking in *verse 11* is the word "*brethren*". It shows that he knows he is still

associated with them and that he draws a distinction between the Galatians who are being deceived and the deceivers themselves. This also applies to us! We too can serve a brother or sister only if we are aware of our family ties in faith with him or her.

Paul, prior to showing them the true source of the gospel he preached, mentions three sources which as an origin of the gospel are put aside. First he says that it *“is not according to man”*. This means that the gospel is not adapted to the natural or carnal man; it also means that it has not risen in the heart of any human being. It shows indeed that it stems from the heart of God.

V12. Secondly, he says: *“I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it.”* That he did not ‘receive it from man’ means that men did not have any mediating role; they didn’t entrust that gospel to him. Indeed, he received it from God Himself. Thirdly, he was not ‘taught’ by men, which means that no one lectured him this gospel. It is indeed God Himself who showed him the rich content of the gospel. You and I and most other Christians have received it and were taught of it by other men. Paul received it directly from the Lord.

The point here is that the gospel doesn’t come from the area or the environment of men. The good news didn’t originate in the brain of a man. Even Peter hadn’t informed him about it, nor had it originated from the Old Testament. Its true source was *“through a revelation of Jesus Christ”*. That ‘revelation’ may refer to what happened on his way to Damascus, when the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to him. That ‘revelation’ also may refer to *what* the Lord Jesus showed him: the content of the gospel. In any case, the glorified Lord is the true source of his gospel. When Paul saw Him, he saw the entire content of the gospel, for *Christ is the gospel*.

Now read Galatians 1:6-12 again.

Reflection: What assurance do you have that the gospel you have accepted is the only pure gospel?

## Paul, a Unique Apostle | verses 13-24

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

**13** For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; **14** and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. **15** But when God, who had set me apart [even] from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased **16** to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, **17** nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. **18** Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. **19** But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. **20** (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) **21** Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. **22** I was [still] unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; **23** but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." **24** And they were glorifying God because of me.

*Introduction.* In *verse 13* and the following verses Paul proves that his gospel and apostleship do not have a human but a divine source. In *verse 13* he testifies of his hatred against the Christians as a Jew; in *verse 14* he talks about his fanatical zeal as a Jew; in *verses 15-16* God enters his life; and in *verses 16-24* he stresses that his apostleship is independent of that of the twelve apostles. He says something about his life before, at and after his conversion.

V13. His "former manner of life in Judaism" made him a persecutor and destroyer of the church of God. With this testimony Paul condemns the tendency of the Galatian believers to return to that which had taken Paul on that way. It has always been the case

and it still is that a man, who falls back into legalism, becomes a persecutor of one who wants to live by grace.

V14. Behind the terrorist acts of Paul was his fanaticism for the Jewish religion. Even before his conversion he knew that a combination of law and grace is impossible. Then, he was only looking from the side of Judaism and the law. He had a thorough knowledge of Judaism. He knew all of Judaism to which the Galatians wanted to return. It should be clear to his readers, that what a man such as Paul had been before his conversion, he would never be convinced by any other man now that he was teaching something wrong – not even by the apostle Peter.

V15. His conversion could only be the work of God's grace. Therefore we read "*when God ... was pleased*". God's intervention in his life had not been sought by him, neither had he deserved it. His salvation came only from God.

Everything he had been before his conversion – his ancestry, education and occupations – it was all in preparation for the special calling which he would receive by God's grace. An excellent example of God's plan is displayed here. God knew what he would do with this man. That does not mean that God wanted the sins of Paul or caused them. God is never the Author of sin. God is above it. He can use someone because of his past for a task that fits with that past. He did this with Paul and He still does this with people today. He also wants to do it with you!

V16. The starting point for Paul's service is the revelation of God's Son in him. It does not say 'to' him, but "*in*" him. This shows the inner and intimate connection that is created at the conversion between the believer and the Lord Jesus and continues to exist thereafter. That connection is reflected in the words Paul heard at his conversion: "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" (Acts 9:4). He persecuted the believers, members of the church of God, but that meant he was essentially persecuting the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus and the church are one.

The name “*Son*” contains all the richness of the gospel. That name was the subject of his first sermon (*Acts 9:20*). There is a *Person* preached, not a *doctrine*. This Person is the eternal Son. Therefore, the preaching cannot be limited to Israel, but also the nations must hear about Him.

V17. After his conversion Paul did not visit the ‘spiritual top’ in Jerusalem. He sought the loneliness in Arabia, probably a desert, to be alone with God. He wanted to be instructed by God for the ministry he had to exercise. Anyone who wants to serve the Lord needs his or her ‘Arabia’. It was so with Moses, David, Elijah and others in the Bible. This is also true for you. You get your gift and task from the glorified Lord. You will be taught by Him by reading His Word and talking to Him in prayer. If there really is a service of the Lord, the church will recognize that.

As it was with Paul and others in the Bible, it is quite different than going into the service of the Lord after a course at a Bible school or at a theological faculty which is completed with a degree. After his conversion Paul was three years in Arabia and Damascus ‘at school’ with God.

V18-19. Only after that he goes for a short visit to Jerusalem to see Cephas (i.e. Peter, see *John 1:42*). Of the other apostles he has only seen James, the Lord’s brother. Everything indicates that recognition, training or a task given by the twelve is out of question.

V20. Now that he is at this point in the story of his life, Paul strongly confirms his story. He does so to emphasize that everything he has told them is the pure truth.

V21. Then he mentions a stay in Syria and Cilicia, where he may have spent ten or more years. He probably mentions this fact to indicate that he spent a long time without having any contact with the apostles in Jerusalem.

V22-24. Neither had he had contact with the Judean “*churches ... which were in Christ*”. These churches had not seen him, but they had heard of the gospel work that he (undoubtedly) had done in

Syria and Cilicia. Therefore they glorified God. In this way they agreed that he preached the pure and genuine message of the gospel.

Here, once again, is a lesson for the Galatians (and us): the result of the truth of the gospel is that God is glorified. This is opposite to the result of a gospel that is mixed with the law: by that man is glorified.

I hope that God, rather than us, will be glorified in all things you and I may do for the Lord.

Now read Galatians 1:13-24 again.

Reflection: Revelation and order belong together. In what manner does the Lord show Himself to you, and what is the impact of that on your task?

## Galatians 2

### Defense of the Gospel | verses 1-5

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*1 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. 2 It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but [I did so] in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. 3 But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 But [it was] because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. 5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.*

V1. In *chapter 1*, Paul has made clear that his apostleship is entirely independent of that of the twelve apostles. In *chapter 2* he shows that the twelve explicitly recognized his special apostleship to the Gentiles. This was done while visiting Jerusalem, fourteen years after his last visit. The cause for this visit can be found in *Acts 15*. There you read about a discussion in Antioch which was organized because of the dispute about whether the believers from among the Gentiles have to keep the law. This is precisely the subject on which Paul writes to the Galatians.

*Verse 1 of Acts 15* sets the tone. People came from Judea to Antioch to tell the believers that in order to be saved, they had to be circumcised. This doctrine is totally contrary to the gospel of God that Paul preached. It added something to that gospel, and this is neither possible nor permissible. Hence Paul and Barnabas counter this doctrine. It was then decided that this controversy should

be dealt with in Jerusalem, where Paul and Barnabas and some others would talk about it with the apostles and elders.

There was a reason why this dispute should be decided in Jerusalem and not in Antioch. In Jerusalem, where the apostles and the church in many respects kept the law, the freedom of believers from among the Gentiles had to be recognized. Otherwise there would have been the great danger that two types of churches were created: a church that kept the law, as in Jerusalem, and a church that was free from the law, as in Antioch.

Thankfully, God prevented that. The church is one unit and all local churches are to act in unity. That a division arose – even so soon after the establishment of the church – is the result of abandoning God’s Word. Separation of local churches, with their own interpretations of the truth, is not in accordance with God’s thoughts.

V2. Paul’s statement to the Galatians that he went to Jerusalem “*because of a revelation*” seems contrary to what we read in *Acts 15:2*. But these are two sides of the same thing. I can do something because I know that it is the will of God, while at the same time following the advice of brothers with whom I have spoken about it.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he first went to the brothers who carried the responsibility amongst the believers. However, it was not to ask them if he was right, neither was it to call the gospel into question; he was totally convinced of his case. He was only looking for the support of the twelve in the defense of the gospel. Paul knew that if they agreed with the content of his preaching, the church in Jerusalem would be spared a division, and unity with the churches of the Gentiles would be preserved. His work would not have been in vain.

V3. To emphasize his words, he had taken Titus with him as a kind of a ‘test’. Titus was a Greek, and therefore a Gentile. It seems that pressure was put on Paul to circumcise Titus, but this had not been a demand of the church in Jerusalem. In this Paul had a practical case to support his preaching: that someone can be acknowledged as a believer, without imposing on him the demands of keeping the law.

In the case of Timothy, who had a Jewish mother, it was different. Paul circumcised him in order to give Timothy a better entrance to the Jews – not to gain him for Christ (*Acts 16:1-4*). Paul firmly rejects the idea that circumcision is a requirement for salvation. For us, this means that we must reject a preaching in which is stated that a man is saved by faith in Christ *plus* something else, such as good works or keeping the ten commandments.

V4. The need to defend the gospel arose because of the false brethren who had crept in – the enemies of the gospel. They wanted to rob the believers of their freedom in Christ by bringing them under the bondage of the law. No matter how you look at it: anyone who wants to keep the law, puts himself under the bondage of the law. In *Acts 15:10* Peter calls the law “*a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear*”. With this statement and what he further says, Peter unambiguously puts himself on the side of Paul. It is impossible to connect law with the gospel without losing the freedom that is in Jesus Christ.

V5. Therefore Paul does not deviate an inch for these people. Here he defends “*the truth of the gospel*” as the only truth in which God’s grace shines through the finished work of Christ – a truth that is intended for all Christians, whether of Jewish or Gentile origin. Any value that man thinks to add to the gospel deprives it of grace.

That’s what the Jews do by adding the law and that’s what the Gentiles do by adding their philosophies. The latter is shown in the *letter to the Colossians*, where in *chapter 1:5* we read about “*the truth of the gospel*”, while in *chapter 2:8* of that letter we are warned of philosophy. Paul did not want this rich and unique gospel to be taken away from them. They should not compromise under any circumstances, but they must keep the gospel as a solid possession: the property of the Galatians (and ours as well).

Now read Galatians 2:1-5 again.

Reflection: In Acts 15, what is the occasion of the discussion in Jerusalem and what was the outcome?

Paul With and Against Peter | verses 6-14

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

**6** *But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter [had been] to the circumcised 8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in [his] apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we [might go] to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 [They] only [asked] us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do. 11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he [began] to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. 13 The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how [is it that] you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?*

V6. Paul is still busily refuting the accusation of the false brethren that between him and the twelve apostles there could be no agreement. A rift between him and the apostles would of course be grist to those people’s mill (a potential advantage). Before Paul demonstrates how they totally agreed and that there is no question of a rift, he stresses again that he has received nothing from the twelve that he needed for his preaching. That’s why he also says: “*Those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.*” He means to say that the twelve and others too had found no lack

in the content of the gospel he preached. They couldn't add anything to his message.

V7. Paul received the authority for his preaching from Christ alone and not from the respected place the twelve had. By taking that stand he wasn't denigrating them. He acknowledges the place they received from God and they acknowledge the place God gave him. Paul and the twelve didn't preach a different gospel, but each got their own working area from God for his preaching, his own audience.

V8. God gave Paul a task among the Gentiles – the uncircumcised; to Peter and the others He gave a task among the Jews – the circumcised (*see also 2Cor 10:13*). In the same way God gives you a task in your own sphere – that is the area in which you live.

V9. It must have been a splendid scene, those five men standing there together. You see them standing, they shake hands together, committing themselves to preach the gospel to the world of both Jews and Gentiles. That is real 'fraternity'. No jealousy, no competition, but together pursuing the same goal, together convinced of the necessity of preaching the gospel. (By the way: four of these five men have together written twenty-two of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.) By giving each other the right hand, they express their fellowship in the work for the Lord. From the side of the brethren in Jerusalem it also means that they acknowledge the special mission of Paul to the nations.

The difference in the working sphere between Paul and Peter is also an important matter with regard to the history of the church. How often it is said of Peter that he is the head of the church, while God by Paul founded His church among the Gentiles. The claim of the roman-catholic church for Peter to be 'the first pope' is therefore totally ill-founded.

V10. After the division of labor is confirmed, the five go their separate ways. The only request that is given to Paul has to do with the care of the poor. Nothing is said about the preaching of the Word. Here you can see how the great apostle is not only

concerned for the soul, but also for the physical condition of the fellow believers. In *Hebrews 13:16* and *1 Corinthians 16:2* the same thing is said to us.

V11. In *verse 11* you read about the third meeting between Paul and Peter (after the first one in *chapter 1:18* and the second one in *chapter 2:1-10*). But this meeting is not as friendly as the other ones. You may ask how it was possible that Peter started to act in such a way that Paul had to resist him publicly. After what God had shown to Peter in *Acts 10* and after his own declaration in *Acts 15* and after what he has acknowledged in *Galatians 2*, it is hard to understand why he is withdrawing from the Gentiles and siding with the Judaists. He does it, because he was “*fearing the party of the circumcision*”. In *Proverbs 29:25* you read: “*The fear of man brings a snare.*”

I hope you know yourself a little. How often do we do or not do something out of fear of what others might say? We shouldn't blame Peter too much, while at the same time we can also be grateful for the clear correction Paul gives. Paul understands what is happening. In the same way Paul confronted the false brethren, here he confronts a real brother when he makes the same mistake.

V12-14. That Peter was wrong is clear. First he is very pleased that he can eat with the believers of the nations. Therewith he accepts that the difference is gone, just as he himself told in *Acts 15:9* that God “*made no distinction between us and them*”. But now he is making this distinction again by separating himself. By this, what had been prevented in Jerusalem happens here: a schism is created. Now in fact there are two churches in Antioch: one for the Gentile Christians and one for the Jewish Christians.

This is not different to the divisions we see in Christianity today: people want a church to their own taste. We should be just as indignant about those divisions as Paul is here. Divisions don't do any justice to the truth of the gospel; they conflict with the gospel.

We can add something else to Peter's attitude here: you never walk alone if you go astray, away from God. You will always take

other people with you. Peter is taking a lot of people with him (*verse 13*). The more prestige someone has, the more fatal are the consequences if he errs. Peter is a warning example. Paul is an encouraging example in his firm stand against the mistake that is made, even if it concerns someone like Peter.

The public reproof by Paul didn't cause bad feelings with Peter. We can see that in the second letter Peter wrote. There he writes about "*our beloved brother Paul*" and draws the attention of his readers to "*all his letters*", i.e. the letters of Paul (2Pet 3:15-16), to which also belongs the *letter to the Galatians*. This is greatly to be praised in Peter and important for us to follow.

Now read Galatians 2:6-14 again.

Reflection: Which task and which work sphere did you receive from God?

Live By Faith In the Son of God | verses 15-21

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

**15** “We [are] Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; **16** nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. **17** But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! **18** For if I rebuild what I have [once] destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. **19** For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. **20** I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the [life] which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. **21** I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness [comes] through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

V15. Paul is still addressing Peter when he says that “we [are] Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles”. The difference between Jews and Gentiles was indicated by God. But what was the advantage of this difference for the Jews? Had they been, as God’s chosen people, faithful servants of God? Had they done what God in the law asked them to do? No! With them it had been precisely shown how they had transgressed the law. That’s why that same law had to condemn them. On the principle of works of the law every right to justification was lost. Peter realized and knew that. He had witnessed to that fact in *Acts 15:10*. Now that it seems he has forgotten that, Paul reminds him.

V16. In a long sentence (*verse 16*) he wants to persuade Peter (but also the Galatians and us!) that “no flesh”, so really nobody, neither Jew nor Gentile, will be justified on the principle of works of the law. It concerns not so much the ten commandments but everything which can be called “law”. By ‘law’ you not only have to think of your yoking someone (putting them under bondage:

see Gal 5:1), but also of yoking yourself by which you think you can please God if you succeed in accomplishing something you have put upon yourself as an obligation.

But that is not so! “A man”, that is to say somebody of the human race without differentiating between sex, origin or nationality, can only be justified by means of and on the basis of faith. A man also cannot be justified by a combination of faith and works. Faith and law exclude each other.

What actually does that mean: justified? Someone who is justified is acquitted of any conceivable accusation. That doesn't happen because of a lack of evidence, but because he is seen as a person who never did something wrong; no suspicion rests on that person at all. How is that possible? Well, it says, “*that we may be justified by faith in Christ*”. God acquits of any accusation every person who believes in Christ, the One Who took all the guilt on Himself on the cross of Calvary and washed it away by the blood He shed.

God sees such a person as being made one with His Son. All sins are gone, sin has been judged. The sinner has become a child of God and God doesn't see him as a sinner anymore. God grants him His own righteousness. As you see, this “*being justified*” happens completely without any action of man. It is an act of God (and not a process!) on the principle of faith.

V17. And what happens if someone like Peter, Barnabas, the Galatians and ten thousands of Christians today, want (again) to keep the law? Then they will make two things clear. In the first place they will say that it is wrong to give up the law as a way to be justified; to give up the law will be a sin. In addition they will say (and how serious this is!) that Christ is a minister of sin. Wasn't it indeed Christ Who persuaded them to give up the law as a way to be justified? So now Christ brings them to sin by giving up the law? I hope you understand this. Paul rejects this argument with a powerful “*may it never be!*”

V18. ‘For’, so he continues, ‘if I first break down something because it was not good, but later on build it up again because it

actually was good, then I indicate that I did wrong to break it down.'

Thereby he doesn't say that the law is not good. In *Romans 7:12* he clearly says: "*The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*" How could it be possible that something which comes from God should be bad? What then is there which is not good? It is not good to use the law as a means to be justified. That's not what God meant with the law! The law was given that man should see his sinfulness and acknowledge that he deserves death.

V19. That is exactly what Paul says, when he goes on: "*For through the law I died to the law.*" Thereby he acknowledges the judgment of death contained in the law. At the same time he says that from that moment on the law has nothing to say about him anymore. For what effect can the law have on someone who is dead? Is it possible to say to a dead person, 'you shall' and 'you shall not'?

V20. In the magnificent *verse 20* Paul explains how he died to the law and how it is with him now. That applies also to every man who is a child of God. I really hope that you can repeat this with all your heart. He says: 'As to my old man, my old 'I', I am crucified with Christ; but I also have a new 'I', that is my new life, which I live by faith; therefore "*I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*"'

With this last 'I' Paul means the 'I' of his personal responsibility. In the life of the believer there is always the tension between the old 'I' and the new 'I'. This cannot be solved by fighting against the old 'I', but by remembering that the old 'I' is crucified with Christ. Further, you can find in the Son of God all the power needed to experience a rich life in faith. He gave Himself. You may look upon Him continuously. He loves you. Looking upon Him you always will find the power to "*live to God*".

V21. Paul doesn't set aside the grace of God. How would that be possible? Those people who want to maintain the law are exactly the ones who set aside God's grace. Maybe they even say that you

need grace to keep the law. But grace and law exclude each other, just like faith and law. It is God's endless grace that Christ gave in death. If the law was a means for a man to attain to righteousness (or to be made righteous) then it wouldn't have been necessary for Christ to have died.

Now read Galatians 2:15-21 again.

Reflection: Memorize verse 20.

## Galatians 3

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### Foolish Galatians | verses 1-7

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed [as] crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain — if indeed it was in vain? 5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.*

*Introduction.* Now Paul begins with the dogmatic part of the letter. Some Christians think if they hear the word ‘dogmatic’ that it means tough, dry explanations, which you cannot use in practice. Well, let me tell you that there never can be a good practice, without a sound ‘doctrinal’ knowledge or training. That’s also how it is in social life, isn’t it? First learn at school, and then apply in practice what you have learned. That’s why this part of the letter is very important. And even this dogmatic part begins in a very practical way.

V1. Paul is going to ask some questions to let them think about it. Is this practice or not? He is lashing out against them, because they have become so foolish. In his voice we don’t hear contempt, but indignation. How was it possible that they came under the spell of false teachers? If they had kept in mind what Paul had shown them when he preached the gospel to them, this wouldn’t

have happened. You can see now that it is very important in practice to remain with the clear, pure gospel.

If you think about the situation in Christianity now, Paul would, I think, say to a number of Christians today: 'O, foolish Christians!' It is also necessary for us to be reminded again and again of the Lord Jesus as the crucified One. The cross is mentioned seven times in this letter.

It takes a central position in resisting the deception which found entrance among the Galatians. He who has taken his refuge in the cross has consciously taken the place of being despised and rejected; he has thereby said that in himself there is no good to be expected.

V2. In the second question you detect a certain irony, because the answer to the question is so obvious. Of course the Holy Spirit came into their life solely on the ground of the faith that was preached to them and was accepted by them. Paul doesn't doubt that they had received the Spirit. He is sure about that. He just wants to show that the Spirit and the faith go together and not the Spirit and the law. They hadn't received the Spirit by their own efforts. A person receives the Holy Spirit if he believes the gospel of his salvation and rests therein. Such a person knows Who God is, Who the Lord Jesus is, he knows who he himself is, and he knows what the law is.

This is the first time in this letter that the Holy Spirit is mentioned. He dwells in every believer on earth. In *chapter 2:20* it is about Someone Who is in heaven. The Lord Jesus as Man in heaven and God the Holy Spirit on earth are the quintessence of Christendom. This shows how crucial the apostle's argument is!

V3. The answer to the third question doesn't need much reflection. This question he also puts with an indignant "*are you so foolish?*" They had received the Holy Spirit and had started their way in faith under His power and His guidance. How could they ever think that flesh could finish the work of the Holy Spirit?

V4. Furthermore, as he says in his fourth question, they had to consider what they had suffered after they had accepted the gospel. They had suffered a lot. Was it all in vain? Persecution by the Judaists (see Acts 14:1-5) had not shaken their faith. Would that still happen now by the deception of these people?

V5. But he clings to the genuineness of their faith. Hence his fifth question, in *verse 5*, which connects to his question in *verse 2*. There he spoke about receiving the Holy Spirit once and for all; here he speaks about the ongoing work of the Spirit. He is pointing to the undeniable proofs of the operation of the Holy Spirit. The question he connects to that fact is: Does God respond to this in answer to obedience to commandments or as the result of accepting the gospel in faith?

V6. After what you might call the subjective experience in *verses 1-5*, Paul switches in *verse 6* to the objective proofs of Scripture. Scripture remains the perfect touchstone, whether it concerns experiences, or it concerns doctrine. The opponents stated that the Galatians should be circumcised. They therefore appealed to *Genesis 17*. For the origin of circumcision every Jew would refer to Abraham.

Paul's defense to that is superb. He beats the Judaists with their own weapons and breaks down their entire building of doctrines. He actually refers to the same Abraham to demonstrate that Abraham was not justified by circumcision, but by faith. Abraham was a sinner by nature just like everyone else and had no righteousness. Righteousness was reckoned to him by the faith he already had *before* he was circumcised (see *Rom 4:9-10*). It had nothing to do with works.

On the contrary, Abraham did nothing but believe in what God had said about a numerous posterity, even when there was nothing to expect anymore of him and Sara. His faith rested in what God had said. That faith was by God "*reckoned to him as righteousness*". That means: God declared him righteous. Therefore he was able to be connected with the righteous God.

V7. All who have such faith are sons of Abraham. They all resemble him and are in the same position before God. Perhaps the *letter to the Galatians* has only *now* come into its full power, in our time. With the Galatians the evil could be excluded, but Christianity in our day has placed itself under the law. How many Christians believe they are acceptable to God because of outward ordinances such as baptism or belonging to the – in their own eyes – right church? This letter has a very clear message, especially for them.

Now read Galatians 3:1-7 again.

Reflection: What contrasts do you find in these verses?

**Blessing Or Curse** | *verses 8-14*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, [saying,] "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. 10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." 12 However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"— 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

V8. The false teachers referred to Abraham as proof of their theory. This, however, was entirely wrong. Paul makes clear who the real sons of Abraham are. These are not the Jews who proudly claimed that they were the physical posterity of Abraham. The real sons of Abraham are those, both Jews and Gentiles, who have the same faith as Abraham. He who possesses that faith receives the blessing. This blessing means, among other things, that he who believes will be justified. As stated, this means that such a person is declared righteous by God. It is as if God says: 'You trust Me, that's why you belong to Me; I give you a place in My presence.'

It really was good news to Abraham, when he heard that in him God would bless all nations with the same blessing he too had received. So this blessing was not only for him personally and for his physical posterity, but also for all nations.

God made this promise to Abraham when there was not yet a word of the Old Testament put on paper. Moses only did that several hundred years later. Still it is written: “*The Scripture, foreseeing ... preached.*” From this it is evident that the Scripture and God are one and the same. That makes the Bible so exceptionally impressive. It is truthfully the Word of God.

V9. So it is clear that it is not the keepers of the law – those who try to keep the law – who will receive the blessing, but those who believe. They are blessed with the *believing* Abraham and not with the *circumcised* Abraham. All the emphasis is on faith; the law is completely excluded.

V10. But the adversaries are not yet silenced. Well, they might say, Abraham is justified by faith; but the law came in later on, didn't it? You can't put that aside, can you? Well, Paul also says, the law did indeed come in later. But let us take a good look at the law. It is clear that in the law God tells people exactly how He wants to be served. Obedience is the key word. But does man desire to submit himself to the law? Is he able to fulfill the law?

No, Paul says in *Romans 8:7*, the flesh “*does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able [to do so]*”. So the next question might be: if I am justified, and I am risen to a new life, then don't I desire to keep the commandments of God? However, the question is not if I *desire* to obey the commands of the law but if I *do* what the law commands. Acknowledging the law and fulfilling the law go together, in order to be acceptable to God and to be rewarded by Him.

That brings us to the question: am I able to keep all that God has commanded? Who, as a christian, dares to say: yes, I can, deceives himself and makes God a liar (*1Jn 1:8,10*). And what if I don't succeed? As soon as I stumble in one commandment and so don't succeed to keep them all to the full, I fall under the curse. The law shows no mercy in case of violation (*Heb 10:28*). There is no pardon!

The quotation where the curse is pronounced upon all who don't persevere comes from *Deuteronomy 27:26*. There Moses speaks about six tribes that had to bless and six tribes that had to curse. And what do you read about the blessing? Nothing at all! And what do you read about the curse? That is pronounced in detail at the end of the above quotation, which you find cited here in *verse 10*. That is significant.

The quotation is introduced with the words "*for it is written*". Let these words affect you with power. They contain the acknowledgment of the authority of the Scriptures with which you can defeat the enemy. The Lord Jesus did just that in the desert where the devil tempted Him (*see Mat 4:4-10*). Here Paul does the same to refute the false doctrine. "*It is written*" is the only guarantee to escape from the wiles of the devil.

V11. Paul has more quotations from Scripture. Habakkuk already has said that the righteous will live by faith (*Hab 2:4*). By law you can only expect judgment. Law and faith don't match in any way. That's why it is an error when someone talks about keeping the law 'out of gratitude'.

V12. The verse that Paul quotes can help in refuting this false doctrine. It is written in *Leviticus 18:5*. You can't contradict that a Christian lives by his *faith*. What sense does it make to involve the law? The law is meant to *earn* life, and you can only earn that life if you practice "*them*", that is, if you have done what the law says.

V13. You can see very clearly in *verse 13* that Paul doesn't wipe out the law with his arguments. In a moving way he confirms the law in that verse. You see the merciless character of the law by what the Lord Jesus did on the cross. When the Lord Jesus on the cross ("*the tree*") took the sins upon Him of everyone who believes and would believe in Him, He became a curse. In the Lord Jesus the law has taken full effect. When He lived He perfectly kept the law and fulfilled it. However, we are not redeemed by the perfect way in which the Lord Jesus kept the law. We are redeemed because on the cross He took the curse of the law on Himself.

During His life God's pleasure was upon the Lord Jesus; on the cross, in those hours of darkness, God cursed Him and He became a curse. By that – and by that alone – we are redeemed from the curse we deserved. That is substitution in the true sense of the word (*see also 2Cor 5:21*). The price He paid is His blood.

*V14.* Because He turned the curse of the law away from us, it is possible that the blessing freely flows in all its fullness to both Jew and Gentile. Both receive the Holy Spirit only by faith.

Now read Galatians 3:8-14 again.

Reflection: What do you learn about the law in these verses?

**Law and Promise** | *verses 15-22*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

**15** Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is [only] a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. **16** Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as [referring] to many, but [rather] to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. **17** What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. **18** For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. **19** Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. **20** Now a mediator is not for one [party only]; whereas God is [only] one. **21** Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. **22** But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

V15. Paul doesn't get tired of trying to convince the Galatians how foolish and dangerous it is to make room for the law in their Christian life. He makes a comparison between the law on the one hand and the promise on the other hand. It's magnificent to see how he approaches them. He starts with an encouraging "brethren", because that is what they were in spite of their openness to the influences of the Judaist false teachers. He thus makes them feel his association with them.

Then he appeals to their common sense and he refers to how things work in interpersonal intercourse. Could it be so, he says, that if you have a covenant with someone that you can just change that – of course not. Especially if that covenant is also confirmed

in writing and signed with an official autograph. Anyone who can think a little bit logically will say: Of course it isn't possible.

V16. Well, Paul continues, promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. At this point Paul briefly comments on the subject of the seed of Abraham before he develops further the difference between law and promise. The word 'seed' requires some explanation. In the plural it means 'offspring' and in the singular it means 'descendant'. The addition makes it clear that the latter is meant here. Added to that, Paul indicates Who that Descendant is, namely Christ. In Him all promises of God will be fulfilled. But at the moment the law was given, Christ was not yet come. That means that the promises fully remained as they were.

V17. Moreover, note that the law was given four hundred years after the promise. Paul brings this argument forward to indicate the absurdity of trying to link the unconditional promises of God with the law which indeed includes conditions.

Just imagine: someone promises to give you a thousand dollars, within a year. That's nice, you say, and as time progresses, you think more and more about receiving those thousand dollars. But after ten months the generous person tells you that he expects some performance from you as a condition by which you can earn those thousand dollars. That beats everything, you would say, and being very disappointed you turn your back on the flatterer. This is not the way to go along with each other. Well, it is exactly the same with the law and the promise. When God makes promises, He doesn't change them by telling you later that it depends on performance.

V18. You certainly see here that law and promise exclude each other. They have nothing in common. That's why it is so beautiful that God *granted* the inheritance to Abraham by promise. What that means is not told here. You may think of the entire expanse of the land of Canaan, where Israel during the millennium will live. The point here is how the inheritance will be obtained: by law or by promise? It should be clear that it will be obtained by promise.

V19. But then the question is given as to what function the law still has. The answer is: the law *“was added because of transgressions”*. Now you must read very carefully. It does not say ‘because of sin’. How could it? God doesn’t give something by which man *becomes* a sinner. On the contrary, the law makes it clear that man is a sinner, without pointing him at a possibility to escape the penalty that rests on sin.

You can compare it to a mirror that shows you how dirty you are. The mirror shows you are dirty, but the mirror is not a soap you can use to wash off the filth. In the same way the law shows that you are a sinner, but it doesn’t give you the means by which you can be redeemed from your sins. The remission of your sins is only possible through the blood of the Lord Jesus.

Then there’s still another difference between the promise and the law. With the promise God gave it to Abraham directly, without involving anyone else. It’s different with the law: God gave the law by mediation of angels in the hand of another mediator, Moses. That’s how the law came to the nation. Therefore, the promise is greater than the law.

V20. The promise shows a gracious, giving God, Who unconditionally takes everything upon Himself to fulfill the promise. On that man has no influence at all. That’s why it’s written *“God is one”* meaning that He is the only One who takes all responsibility to deliver what He has promised. The law however shows a holy, demanding God, Who holds man to the obligations he took upon himself.

V21. After reading the above, the question may arise as to whether the law is in conflict with the promises of God. That of course can’t be so. Both come from God and how could it be possible for God to contradict Himself? The answer to this question is that both present a different side of God. The law shows God’s righteousness and the promise shows God’s grace. It was never God’s intention to give life through the law. Law isn’t able to produce life because man is a depraved sinner. The law indeed promises

life, but is not able to give it. It makes visible what is in the heart of man.

V22. Therefore, it can be said that *“the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin”*. For example, in *Romans 3:9-24* you read about the sinfulness of man. Whoever is – or becomes – aware of his sinfulness, can go to God for forgiveness. Then the Lord Jesus and faith in Him come into view.

The law or Scripture determines without any possible contradiction the depravity of every man. The purpose of this is (the *“so that”* of verse 22) that man will take refuge by faith in Jesus Christ. There is no distinction here. The promise is ready for *“those who believe”*.

Now read Galatians 3:15-22 again.

Reflection: Mention some differences between the law and the promise.

**The Era of Faith** | *verses 23-29*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor [to lead us] to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*

V23. In this part Paul puts two eras opposite to each other. One era is that of faith, that is the period in which God deals with man by faith. The other period is that of the law, that is the period in which God deals with man by keeping the law, so do what the law says. The era of 'faith' is in essence the Christian era – the period that started when Christ came to earth, accomplished His work on the cross and returned to the Father. After that the Holy Spirit came on earth and Christendom started.

The era of the law was characterized by strict statutes which God had imposed on Israel, His earthly people. To the Jew it was a yoke (bondage), under which he suffered as a prisoner. It took away all his freedom of action, it governed his whole life. On penalty of death he had to keep it. The law protected him from mingling with the nations around him (*see Eph 2:14*). But the era of the law had a restricted period of validity. This era lasted until "*the faith which was later to be revealed*" (*verse 23b*); that means that with the coming of Christ a new era would begin.

V24. After presenting the law as a prison, Paul uses another example for the law: a tutor. A tutor is a person in a household who is responsible for the care and discipline of the children. He takes

care of the physical wellbeing of a child. That is how the law functions. The law ensures that man adheres to the commandments of God which are given to him to obtain life. However, since man is depraved and is not able to keep the law, the desire arises in him for a Deliverer.

The law doesn't show the way to Christ. You may not read *verse 24* in that sense. The law reminds us that we are incorrigible sinners who fall under the condemnation of God. He who is going to realize that, searches for a solution to escape from that condemnation. God has prepared that solution in Christ and in His work of reconciliation on the cross. Because the Lord Jesus has accomplished His work on the cross, it is possible to be justified in Him by faith. This is by faith alone, not by law nor by any effort of man.

V25. Since the accomplished work of Christ, God no longer deals with man on the basis of law, but only on the basis of faith. Therefore it can be said: *"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."* The law has had its time. The Galatians had to be fully aware of this and with this awareness they have to shake off the Jewish false teachers.

V26. Then Paul makes a powerful statement to prove that the law has lost its validity for the Christian. By faith the Christian has come in a new position to God: that of son. Yes, you read it right: SON! That's quite different from being a slave, such as is the position of someone under the law, or someone who places himself under the law.

If you fully understand what it means that you and all believers are *"predestined ... to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ"* (Eph 1:5), how would you ever give room to the law in your life again? Have you become a son by keeping the law or by the faith in Jesus Christ? The answer here is *"through faith in Christ Jesus"*.

V27-28. Also bear in mind what you confessed when you were baptized. (Or have you not been baptized yet? What's hindering you?) If you have been baptized, you are attached by your baptism to a dead Savior (see Rom 6:3-4a). In the death of Christ each link with

the law is broken. He has borne the curse of the law (*Gal 3:13*) and thus removed the penalty of the law for all who believe in Him.

The law has no authority anymore over Someone Who died (the Lord Jesus) nor over those who died with Him (the believer). You confessed the latter – that you died with Him – when you were baptized. But the Lord Jesus didn't remain dead and you didn't stay in the water-grave. The Lord Jesus is risen and it may be expected of you that after you were baptized you will live in connection with Him. Then people will see that you “*have put on Christ*”.

It may sound a little bit disrespectful, but it is like putting on a new coat. People see that you have something new. To show Christ your nationality, your social status or your gender is of no importance. Everyone who is baptized has put on Christ and shows *Him* in his life rather than himself. There is only One Who is seen.

That does not mean that after your conversion these distinctions no longer exist. What Paul says here, concerns the position of the believers as God sees them in Christ. But in other letters slaves are addressed in their position, and wives have in every respect to give to their husbands the attitude ordained by God and that applies in reverse as well. It is God's will that man and wife respect His order in creation in always wearing short or long hair and in not covering or covering the head during prayer and prophecy (*1Cor 11:1-16*). Also during the meetings of the church, God wants to see these distinctions being maintained (*1Cor 14:34-35*).

V29. The last verse makes clear once again what has already been demonstrated by Paul. Whoever belongs to Christ is an offspring of Abraham, because Christ is ‘the seed’ of Abraham (*verse 16*). He or she receives the promise that he is an heir. In the next chapter we will see what that means.

Now read Galatians 3:23-29 again.

Reflection: What contradictions do you find in these verses? What blessings do you encounter?

## Galatians 4

### From Child To Heir | verses 1-7

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.*

V1-2. Chapter 4 is related to the previous chapter and in the first verses Paul takes a closer look at the heir. He describes the contrast between the heir under the law and those who are heirs through faith in Christ. The comparison between a child and a slave makes clear that, as long as a child is under the authority of his educators, there is no difference between them.

A child may have rich parents, but all those riches have no use for him as long as he is unable to access them independently. Until that time, in earlier days, a child lived under the authority of "guardians" (who especially took care of the personal well-being of the child) and "managers" (who especially watched over the possessions of the child). That lasted until the time when the father regarded the child as an adult who was responsible enough to make his own decisions.

V3. The period in which the child was not allowed to act independently, can be compared with the period in which the believer lived before the coming of Christ. During that period the law controlled his relationship with God. There was no relationship possible with God as Father, and therefore the Father could not share His thoughts with the believer about being an heir. This period of childhood was marked by a sort of slavery to the law. Whoever is under the 'law', whatever that may be, is not free. By any definition, being under the law, means slavery and bearing a yoke, just as Peter calls the law in *Acts 15:10*.

Here Paul uses another expression for the law, "*elemental things of the world*". The law belongs to the world. Indeed, the law was given to a nation in the flesh, a natural people, with no care for the spiritual condition of their nation. The law was never intended to bring man into relationship with God in order to know Him as a Father. The essence of the law is that man should learn to know himself.

V4. The fact that the law didn't bring man to know God as Father in order to possess the inheritance is most strikingly seen at the cross. The nation, to whom the law was given, brought the Giver of the law to the cross. Then "*the fullness of the time*" had come. The law had fully served its time as an opportunity for the nation to receive all the promises of God. Man is found to be a sinner in the deepest part of his nature and has lost all rights to the fulfillment of the promises. When the time had come that man revealed himself in full depravity, then that was the moment that God fully revealed Who He is.

God gave the law by the mediation of angels, but He gave His Son Himself, without involving anyone else. Christ was "*born of a woman*", because sin also came into the world through a woman. He was born of a woman, but begotten by the Holy Spirit – therefore without the nature of sin. He always had the form of God (*Phil 2:6*), but took a body, a body God had prepared for Him (*Heb 10:5*). That Christ was 'born of a woman' proves His true humanity. It also proves His true pre-existence as God. If it had not been

so, what then would have been remarkable about the fact that He was born of a woman?

V5. It was also necessary that He was “*born under the law*”. Only then could He redeem those who were under the law. In His life He glorified the law, for He fulfilled it and bore in His death the curse of it. But by keeping the law faithfully He could never have saved a man. Moreover, His keeping of the law was an accusation against every man who violated the law. He became a substitute for the sinner not by His obedient life, but by bearing in the three hours of darkness the sins of all who believe in Him. And the magnificent result of His work on the cross is that we may stand as sons before God!

It is significant to know that there is a difference between being a *child* of God and being a *son* of God. To be a child of God means above all that you have the life of God, that you are a partaker of His nature (2Pet 1:4). The nature of God is light and His essence is love. That is what a child of God shows in his life; he’s walking in the light and in love.

Sonship especially has to do with a position, with the value you have for God. He wants fellowship with sons. Sons are predestined for Himself (Eph 1:5). A believer is both a child and a son. It has nothing to do with a process of growing, in which you would outgrow the stage of being a child to become a son.

V6. Then Paul connects sonship to the fact that “*God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts*”. First, God sent His Son; after that He sent the Spirit of His Son. Here you see how the three Persons of the Godhead accomplished the blessings of sonship in God’s plan of salvation. God sent His Son to give us sonship; He sent the Spirit of His Son in our hearts to give us the consciousness and the joy which come with that.

Here the Holy Spirit is called “*the Spirit of His Son*”. This emphasizes that sons of God possess the same Spirit as *the* Son of God. That which the Spirit of the Son works out in the sons, is the same

as what characterizes the Son: the conscious relation to God as Father.

The word “*Abba*” speaks of confidence; it is the word the child of God uses when he speaks to his Father, just as we might call our father ‘daddy’. The Father is pleased when we come to Him in that way.

V7. He who, conscious of being a son, says ‘*Abba, Father*’, can’t be a slave anymore. Such a person knows that everything that belongs to the Father, He shares with His sons. They are the “*fellow heirs*” with the Son (*Eph 3:6*). That and that only and nothing else is the place God has destined for those who are His sons.

Now read Galatians 4:1-7 again.

Reflection: Do you already call God “*Abba, Father*”? What do you think this means to God? Praise Him that as a son you are an heir.

## The Danger of Falling Back | verses 8-15

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. 12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I [am], for I also [have become] as you [are]. You have done me no wrong; 13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus [Himself]. 15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.*

V8. In the part of *chapter 3:1* to *chapter 4:7* Paul has made it clear that not the law, but only faith in the Lord Jesus is the way to salvation and all blessing. To this he now adds a very serious warning to not place oneself under the law, nor allow anyone else to. He reminds the Galatians of the time before their conversion when they didn't know the true God and were prisoners of the idols they served as slaves.

In *1 Corinthians 12:2* he also gives a review of the past. It is a good thing to remind yourself sometimes of where you came from. Not to throw yourself back into the past again; Paul warns about that in *Ephesians 4:17-19*. But if you are inclined to deviate in your faith, then you should think back on the simple gospel which was preached to you and which you have accepted.

V9. Because the Galatians were in danger of falling back into idolatry, Paul on the one hand looks back to "then" and on the other hand exposes the present, "now". The so-called 'gods' had

brought them no benefit – because there is only one God and one Lord (see 1Cor 8:4-6). They now knew the true God; they were brought into connection with Him, became His sons and could therefore call Him “*Abba, Father*”. That is quite a lot.

But it is even greater to be known by God. It shows that everything has proceeded from Him. *He* has accepted them; *He* has chosen them, even before they were born; *He* called them when they were in bondage to sin and idolatry. If you realize that, how could it then be possible that you turn away from Him and return to the things that belong to the past?

Now you might wonder how the law, which was once given by God, can be compared with returning to idolatry. Well, consider the following. In earlier days the law was indeed given by God to His people. By fulfilling all regulations and ordinances, God’s people would honor the Giver of the law. However, God’s people failed miserably. Even if they had fulfilled all regulations and ordinances, still their relation to God would only be that of a slave to his master.

Then the Lord Jesus came. He has fulfilled all that is written in the law. He takes as it were the place of the law as the only way to God, as Mediator between God and man which is infinitely more than the law. By this the law is completely set aside as a means to be connected to God. Now no one can come to the Father except through Him (*Jn 14:6*). He who, in his relationship with the Father, wants to honor the law again, reverts to a means that brings him back into slavery again. The law cannot replace Christ; neither can it have a place beside Christ.

The law consists of all kinds of statutes and ceremonies. Anyone who submits to them again, gives credit to tangible things, outward ordinances, which belongs to the world. As long as these things were sanctified by God to serve Him, it was good to keep them. But now, because in Christ the reality has come, and God has abolished the law as a tutor, it is equal to returning to the world if these things take a place again in the service of God.

And besides that, they are also “*weak and worthless elemental things*”. They are ‘weak’, because the law with its ceremonies doesn’t have any power to deliver a man from his sins. They are ‘worthless’, because the law doesn’t have any possibility to make rich. The gospel possesses both power and richness for all who surrender to it in faith.

V10. Paul mentions some things the Galatians were maintaining which were signs that they had already been caught up in Judaism. Keeping all kinds of special days and feasts does not fit the life of Christians. All Christian feast days and holy days are originally pagan festivals which are Christianized.

The only special day that the Christian knows is Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of the Lord. That day speaks of the accomplished work of Christ which is accepted by God. On that day the church assembles together to remember all the great salvation truths, and above all *Him*, Who accomplished the work on the cross.

V11. The concern Paul expresses that he might have labored in vain for the Galatians, has unfortunately come true in Christianity! By keeping of certain days we see how the evil that Paul demonstrates here has infiltrated Christianity.

V12. After this urgent warning not to return to the ‘shadow service’ of the law, Paul even more intensely and emotionally appeals to the Galatian’s love for him. He beseeches them to become like him: that is being free from the law. At the same time, however, he is very careful not to give the impression that he was personally offended or hurt, in case they thought they may have wronged him personally. That they turned away from the true gospel was certainly a painful thing for him. But he speaks to them with a heart full of love and compassion, showing great concern about the way they had gone to their own detriment.

V13-14. He reminds them of his first visit to them. They had accepted him and also the message of the gospel, despite his physically weak appearance. Many would rather have quickly

run away (he was that repulsive), than listen to the message he preached. Still, the Galatians had listened to him and had not succumbed to the temptation to run away from him. They ignored Paul's appearance because of the wonderful message of the gospel that he brought. They accepted him as a messenger from another world and they received him as if they received the Lord Jesus Himself (*cf. Mat 10:40*).

V15. How happy they had been! But what was left of it? They had expressed their love and gratitude to him by putting their most valuable possession, their eyes, at his disposal. But their attitude has now changed. This is the result of their listening to false teachers!

Now read again Galatians 4:8-15 again.

Reflection: What does it mean to you to understand that God knows you?

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**Again In Labor** | *verses 16-23*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. 18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you — 20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. 21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.*

V16. In an emotional argument Paul tries to make clear to the Galatians how mistaken they were. He had brought them the truth of the gospel, not to connect them to himself but to the Lord Jesus. They had embraced the gospel and received it in their hearts. How grateful they were then.

But now other people had come. They had told the Galatians that Paul deceived them with his gospel. Those others were very well aware of the law and God's commandments of the Old Testament. They said that Paul concealed that from them and that Paul didn't seek the best for them. He wasn't their friend but their enemy. Yeah, yeah, Paul said, I tell you the truth by which you are saved and then I become your enemy?

Everyone who wants to minister the truth will experience what is happening to Paul here. When you teach the doctrine of Paul, it will be accepted gratefully as a commandment from God, especially by people who can find an answer to their need in this doctrine. But if someone dislikes that doctrine, it can be used to try to turn people against the teacher. Take, for example, Paul's teachings about the silence of women in the meeting; he has sub-

sequently been called a woman hater, although it is a commandment of God as well (*see 1Cor 14:34,37*).

V17. Then Paul points the Galatians to the false teachers and the way they behave. They come and bring a different gospel that Paul didn't preach; neither did the ones who were with him (*Gal 1:8-9; see also 2Cor 11:4*). And the Galatians paid attention to that gospel willingly. The false teachers were allowed to spout their ideas and these people were diligent! But, Paul says, beware of the fact that they bring a separation between us. Their intention is that you commit yourselves to them.

Paul is trying to make the Galatians understand, that, while he had sought their spiritual welfare, the false teachers had in mind to make them followers of themselves. They were like the pharisees, who were traveling all over the country to convince people of their doctrine. Then they could boast of a great number of followers. The Lord Jesus pronounces 'Woe' unto them (*Mat 23:15*).

V18. Now certainly there is a good kind of zeal, for example the kind of zeal the Lord Jesus showed. He was zealous for the honor of God's house (*Jn 2:17*). It seems that the Galatians showed this good zeal during the time Paul was with them. It would have been great if they had also continued to do so during his absence.

V19. But no, Paul felt how the Galatians had departed "*from the simplicity ... to Christ*" (*2Cor 11:3*). Again, that caused him the pain and trouble he had experienced when he preached the gospel to them. In his spirit he experienced again the sufferings he had endured in his struggles to win the souls of the Galatians. At that time it was to deliver them from the slavery of idols. Now it was to deliver them from the legalistic and outward religion of the Jews.

Paul compares himself with a mother. How important are motherly feelings when you see that a believer is inclined to deviate. Only with such feelings it is possible to win the other. What a touching proof of his love for them this is: he could afford to suffer again the "*labor*" in birth. He wants to do everything possible

to win them back and bring them back to the unmixed gospel. He appeals to them as “*my children*”. How this must have touched their hearts.

His only goal was that “*Christ is formed*” in them. Through the influence of legalism the image of Christ was disappearing more and more from the Galatians. All that a man wants to do in his own strength to serve God is detrimental to the image of Christ in his life.

V20. Their deviation from the truth had given him a sense of desperation. How he would love to be with them! How he would love to speak to them with more love (although this letter was exactly a clear expression that he loved them deeply).

V21. After this emotional plea to win their hearts, from *verse 21* on he makes a new attempt to make them understand that they were doing wrong. Now he addresses their mind or understanding. In *verse 21* the word ‘law’ is used two times. The first time this word means a legalistic principle, something you impose on yourself as a law. You can impose yourself to keep the Ten Commandments. The second time, to listen to the law, ‘the law’ has a broader meaning. Here that word means the five books of Moses. You can see this in the example Paul is quoting from the law.

V22. He brings forward Abraham, whose history is written in *Genesis*. Paul mentions Abraham, because the false teachers also mentioned him to emphasize their demand that the Galatians should be circumcised.

Paul introduces his example with “*for it is written*”. Thereby he focuses attention on the authority of the Scriptures (see *Mat 4:4,7,10*). Then he points to Isaac and Ishmael and their mothers, whose names he doesn’t mention. It is not about their names, but about their positions, because that is what the mothers transmit to their children.

V23. After having discussed the position he points to the origin of both sons. Ishmael was born by a self-willed action of Abraham,

but Isaac he received by God's promise. What spiritual lessons there are, which the Galatians – and we as well – can learn from, are written in the following verses.

Now read Galatians 4:16-23 again.

Reflection: Have you ever been concerned about the spiritual development of someone else? What do you think you can do for such a person?

Children of the Bondwoman Or of the Free Woman | *verses 24-31*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*24 This is allegorically speaking, for these [women] are two covenants: one [proceeding] from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." 28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him [who was born] according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.*

V24. What Paul said in *verses 21-22 "is allegorically speaking"*. It means that this history has a deeper meaning than you would think at first glance. When the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write down this history, He did it just because of that deep meaning. In *1 Corinthians 10:6,11* you find the same and also in *Romans 15:4*. Apart from that, the fact that Old Testament histories often have a deeper meaning doesn't change the historical accuracy of the history itself.

What then is the deeper meaning Paul is quoting here? The two sons of Abraham "*are two covenants*", that means, they represent two covenants. You can compare it with what the Lord Jesus says about the bread when He instituted the Supper: "*This is My body*" (*Mt 26:26*). That also means: "*This represents My body.*"

V25. The one covenant, the first one, is the covenant that is made at Sinai. That covenant speaks of Hagar. Hagar was Abraham's

slave who gave birth to Ishmael. And because she was a slave, automatically Ishmael was a slave as well. Children get the position of the mother. At Sinai the law was given. That's why the people of Israel came into bondage. Whoever puts himself under the law puts himself in the position of slave. The "*present Jerusalem*" [i.e. the earthly Jerusalem] is the centre of the law and therefore "*is in slavery with her children*" (her children are the citizens).

If the Galatians therefore, or like so many Christians today, accept the law in their lives, it means that they accept Hagar as mother. They want to keep the covenant of Sinai and therefore declare themselves citizens of the earthly Jerusalem. Another character of Mount Sinai is, it says, that it is situated "*in Arabia*". That emphasizes again is, that whoever connects himself with this, connects himself with a place outside the country of blessing and that is Canaan. Whoever connects himself with the law, will be deprived of every blessing in Christ (*Gal 5:4*).

V26. After stating the position of Christians who honor the law in their lives, Paul moves onto the real "*mother*" of the Christian: the free, heavenly Jerusalem. It is the place God has given, from where His promises in grace are given and where the Christian is at home. This is his 'mother-city'. Here he gets his education and his Christian character is formed. It relates to what is written in the *letter to the Philippians*: "*Our citizenship is in heaven*" (*Phil 3:20*). The big question today in Christianity is: By which mother are you being raised, or what is your mother-city?

V27. Paul cites *Isaiah 54:1* to show what it means to belong to "*the Jerusalem above*". This verse is originally intended as a comfort for Israel after a time of being dominated by foreign powers. It is a song of joy at the beginning of the millennium, when God has accepted His people – that is the remnant – again into His favor after they have confessed their sins in humility to God. Then they will be free to enjoy everything that God has prepared for them.

Paul uses this event and the time it will happen, as an application for the Christian in the present time. There, where there was nothing to be expected from human efforts and where there was

only unfruitfulness, God performed a miracle in His grace and brought people to repentance. Like Isaac, the Galatians and all Christians are born in a supernatural manner. For the Christian it means that he is born “*not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God*” (Jn 1:13).

The amazing thing about this quotation from *Isaiah* is also that all Christians belong to the Jerusalem that soon will be the centre of the millennium. The present Jerusalem is not related to God. It is illustrated as the sent away woman because of her unfaithfulness (see *Hos 1*). As mentioned earlier, this situation will come to an end. Jerusalem will then look back to a time when she was not fruitful for God. But then she will see that in that fruitless period, God Himself has begotten a numerous posterity which He accounts to her.

In that time grace has made Jerusalem what God always had in mind: a city by which He can freely bless all people. It is the same grace by which He in these days has redeemed so many from the yoke of sin and has set them free.

V28. In *verse 28* Paul assumes that the Galatians went in the wrong direction only outwardly, but that they inwardly had not yet accepted the wrong teachings. He speaks to them as being convinced that at heart they were true children of God.

V29. To this is connected a life by grace alone. To live that life consistently means persecution from people who want to serve God in their own strength. Persecution is inevitable, because to live by faith is a great accusation against any form of religion that emphasizes its own performance.

V30. The blessing of God can never be obtained by a kind of co-operation between law and grace. Everything that has to do with the law cannot be allowed anymore in the life and the mind of a Christian. Unfortunately, many Christians do not heed this call. Many are in the hands of the ‘wrong mother’, so they are constantly in doubt about their relationship with God. How visible

is the influence of Judaism in Christianity: you see everywhere, sacred buildings, and also a clergy being maintained.

V31. It all fits in with the "*children of a bondwoman*", but not with the children "*of the free woman*" and that is what we are!

Now read Galatians 4:24-31 again.

Reflection: By which mother are you being educated?

## Galatians 5

### The Christian Freedom | verses 1-6

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.*

*Introduction.* Now Paul can start with the practical part of his letter. In *chapters 1-2* he dealt with a piece of history and in *chapters 3-4* he elaborately dealt with the doctrines that the false teachers brought. In the last two chapters Paul talks about the practical impact of the teachings he presented in the previous chapters.

*V1.* Verse 1 is very suitable to move from doctrine to practice. This verse is to close the doctrinal part and at the same time it is an introduction to the practical part. Add it to the end of chapter 4 and it sounds like a conclusion. The main idea is this: the Christian is free from all sorts of laws that kept him in bondage. From this point of view, the negative part is in the foreground – that which is put away.

*Verse 1* also can be seen as an introduction to the next section. From this point of view, the positive part is in the foreground, and that is what Christ had in mind when He set us free: that is freedom itself. He wanted to give us the same freedom which He

Himself knew. That is real freedom: to be free as He is. His freedom was and is to accomplish the will of His Father. Our freedom has the same goal: the desire to do the will of the Father.

The Lord Jesus obtained this freedom for us on the cross. By doing so, he has made us free from every imaginable kind of slavery, whether it concerns the law or sin. In *chapter 3:13* which also speaks of freedom, the emphasis is on the price He paid. Here the emphasis is on freedom. Whosoever once shared in this freedom is foolish if he allows himself to be brought again under a yoke of bondage.

The yoke of which the Savior speaks in *Matthew 11:29-30* is a yoke of a totally different order. This yoke testifies to a voluntarily and joyfully accepted assignment. It is also a gentle yoke; it does not oppress.

V2. Paul exhorts the Galatians to stand firm in this freedom that Christ has acquired. For them, there was a great danger that they would give up this liberty and fall back under an oppressive yoke. To emphasize his exhortation he uses his position as an apostle when he urgently warns them what the consequence is of adhering to legalistic requirements. A look at *Acts 15:1* and the following verses makes it clear what was at stake.

To require circumcision as a condition of salvation meant a degradation of the work of Christ. Circumcision in this case is not a surgical operation but represents a whole system of salvation by works. By putting yourself under the law, you put yourself into a position which does not give you any profit from Christ and His work. Being under the law, you are separated from Christ and if you are separated from Christ you are deprived of all blessings.

V3. Because of the gravity of the case, Paul again brings this clearly to the attention of the Galatians and of "*every man*". It is a matter of general interest with a general validity, an issue which did not concern the Galatians only. It touched and still touches the foundations of Christian faith. It is all or nothing. You cannot say: I do my part by keeping the law and Christ is doing His part

by doing what I cannot do. No, either Christ did everything or He has done nothing. Whoever wants to keep the law is bound to keep the law completely. Therein you cannot act selectively. Again Paul emphasizes the incompatibility of the law and grace.

V4. The law sets conditions. No human being is able to meet these conditions; hence he forfeits all the blessing, if he seeks to keep the law. In so doing, you fall away from grace. This falling away does not mean that you can lose your salvation. A passage like *John 10:28-29* is a guarantee that that can never happen. Once you are a child of God, you are always a child of God. To fall from grace means that he who seeks to keep the law abandons grace.

V5. After his serious warnings about keeping the law, Paul speaks about the privileges that are connected to grace. In *verse 5* we do not read about the hope *for* righteousness. If so, this verse would indicate that there is still an uncertainty which results from seeking righteousness out of one's own efforts. No, we read about "*the hope of righteousness*". Every believer possesses righteousness. With that righteousness hope is connected. Again, this hope is not uncertainty but the solid certainty of something that will come – something you expect. Through the Holy Spirit, Who indwells you, you're eagerly looking forward to the glory of God. Isn't that so?

Just read what *Romans 5:2* says. The glory of God is the place to which the Lord Jesus ascended after His death and resurrection. The hope of righteousness is looking forward to that very moment when we shall share the glory that Christ already has right now. The Lord Jesus spoke about this to His Father in *John 17:24*: "*Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me.*" We will come to this very place when the Lord Jesus comes to take us (*Phil 3:21*).

V6. What the Christian expects is in every way contrary to what the Judaist expects. Judaists expect to be able to keep the law by carnal efforts in order to deserve righteousness. The Christian is looking forward – through the Spirit – to what has been earned

for him and what will therefore undoubtedly and securely be his part. This is all related to being “*in Christ Jesus*”. That is the position of the Christian. And whether you are circumcised or uncircumcised, it does not have any effect on your position in Christ. Whoever is in Christ will show his faith, not by works of the law but by love. Love is the driving force behind all acts that are done in faith.

Now read Galatians 5:1-6 again.

Reflection: In your life as a Christian, is there still (or again) a yoke of slavery, or can you rather say that your faith is working through love?

## Called To Be Free | verses 7-15

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion [did] not [come] from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump [of dough]. 10 I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. 11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. 12 I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves. 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only [do] not [turn] your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the [statement], "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*

V7. When Paul says "you were running well", he uses the picture of a race. The Galatians made a good start to running the race. Without any reservation they had accepted the gospel. But now obstacles were put on the race course which had tripped them up. They no longer obeyed the truth of the gospel.

V8. They had listened to other voices and stopped listening to the voice of God Who had called them through the gospel Paul preached. In that call of God no trace could be recognized of what the Jewish false teachers wanted them to believe.

Paul doesn't name these people. It is enough to know that what they preached did not come from God. Likewise the Lord Jesus speaks in *John 10:4-5*. His sheep know His voice. If a stranger comes, they will not follow him because they do not know that voice. They will flee from him. It is not necessary to examine all kinds of false teachings (unless you have a command from the

Lord to do so). If you do not hear the voice of the Lord – that is, if it is contrary to the Word of God – you can reject it immediately.

V9. If you allow the slightest bit of wrong doctrine, as we see here, or the slightest sinful practice, as in *1 Corinthians 5*, and don't condemn it, your life and the church where you are, will finally be destroyed. Evil which is not judged works like leaven – it permeates everything.

V10. If Paul looks to the Galatians, he is desperate (*Gal 4:20*). But if he looks up, to the Lord Jesus, he is confident that He will not abandon His own. Paul knew how to bring his concerns to the Lord. This is an important lesson for me. If I'm worried and there seems to be no way out anymore, I must be aware of the way upward to the Lord.

Paul was convinced that the Galatians in their final evaluation of these things would come to the same conclusion as he had proposed to them from the beginning. As far as those who had brought them into confusion were concerned, he commits them to the judgment of God.

V11. Now they had also said something about Paul, which he had to respond to. They said that Paul still preached circumcision. Of course that was a trick of the opponents to deceive the Galatians. Even today it still happens that things are put into Paul's mouth that he never said or intended that way.

As to circumcision, it was clear that he didn't preach that practice. Otherwise, why would the Jews chase him like that? And if Paul preached circumcision, it would mean that there would still be something left of own works – and that would be completely contrary to the preaching of the cross.

The cross shows the depravity of man right to the very roots of his existence and it demonstrates that man is an enemy of God. Therefore the cross and the complete salvation by grace are always a stumbling block for someone who wants to give a little credit to the flesh. Anyone who adds something to the gospel of

Jesus Christ by giving man the possibility to do something for his salvation, will surely reap appreciation, but not with God nor with those who hold onto God's truth.

V12. Paul sees here how through the deception of Judaism the gospel is robbed of its power and souls are ruined. That causes his strong exclamation in *verse 12*. But what do we see since the days of the apostle? Legalism has got a grip on a great part of Christianity. And where do we hear now the righteous indignation that marked Paul?

The exclamation of the apostle is an allusion to circumcision! Thereby he seems to mean that he wished that the false teachers would cut themselves loose from the Galatians and the Christian churches in general. The attempts to bring God's people back into bondage of any kind of law are still going on.

V13-14. Again Paul points to the truth that you are called to be free. That does not mean you're now free to sin. The Christian may have been freed from the law, but that does not mean that he is no longer under authority. Christian liberty does not allow sin, but rather encourages us to serve through love.

Real freedom can only be found within the limits set by God. The perfect example is seen in the Lord Jesus. If you serve one another through love, you fulfill what the law requires. Now you might think: so I do have to keep the law after all? No, Paul doesn't return to the law. What he shows is that the law's demands – which man could not accomplish – will be achieved in the practice of Christian freedom.

V15. Love endures weaknesses, does not demand, does not put on conditions and longs to serve. The law knows nothing of mercy; it is not compliant and must condemn anything that is not in accordance with the perfectly righteous requirements. Where the law, or something derived from it, becomes standard in the relationship to God and to each other, the inevitable result is the arising of conflicts.

The law requires us to love one another, but with the Galatians at that time, and in Christianity today, the opposite happens. Whoever keeps the law builds up his own righteousness and cannot have pity on others. It requires a tough attitude; otherwise the law is not law anymore.

The fighting resulting from legalism – and the fighting resulting from combating legalism as well! – leads to destruction. First there is biting, then devouring and finally consuming. It looks like *John 10:10* where the Lord Jesus speaks about the thief coming to “steal”, then “kill” and finally “destroy”.

Now read Galatians 5:7-15 again.

Reflection: Do you feel free? How do you use your freedom?

## The Spirit Against the Flesh | *verses 16-21*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

**16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. **17** For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. **19** Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, **21** envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

*Introduction.* In *verse 1* of this chapter, Paul contrasted freedom with slavery. In *verse 13* he contrasted freedom with lawlessness. Now he shows how true freedom is experienced and manifested, namely in a life led by the Spirit.

*V16.* The section of *verses 16-26* is one entity. Therein the Spirit is mentioned no less than seven times. *Verse 16* is directly opposite to *verse 15*. The latter verse refers to biting and devouring one another. However, if you walk by the Spirit, such things will not happen.

To “walk by the Spirit” means that you perform the purposes of the Spirit and that you make your decisions in the light of His holiness. It means that your conduct seeks to glorify Christ in your life, because that’s why the Holy Spirit came to earth (*Jn 16:14*). If you walk by the Spirit, the result is that you keep the flesh as dead. Actually, it is impossible to have Christ before your eyes and sin at the same time!

*V17.* Indeed the Christian has two natures: the new life and the old life. The new life longs to be guided by the Spirit, the old life wants to meet the desires of the flesh. The Spirit and the flesh are contrary to one another as enemies. The flesh is committed to pre-

venting you from walking by the Spirit, and the Spirit withstands the operation of the flesh to prevent it from performing its will.

So the flesh is still present in the Christian, it is not dead or exterminated. The flesh “lusts” still, but you are no longer obliged to listen to what it wants. When you were converted God could have taken away sinful flesh. Yet He has left it in us to remind us constantly of our weakness and by that consciousness to keep us continuously dependent on Christ.

Well, who wins that battle which is now going on in you and me? This is where our responsibility comes into play. Someone once compared the two natures with two dogs: a white one and a black one that are constantly fighting with each other. ‘Do you know’, he said, ‘who wins? The dog I give food to!’ You realize that the Spirit does not quite get a chance to lead your life if you, for example, watch bad movies on TV or the internet, or if you are reading dirty books or magazines, or if you live dissatisfied with your neighbors. Then you give food to the black dog.

However, if you “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is” (Col 3:1), if you want to know Him more by reading the Bible and good books about Christ, if you like to tell those who surround you about the joy you have in knowing the Lord Jesus, yes, then you give food to the white dog.

So actually, it is a fight you yourself don’t have to fight. It’s your business to be led by the Holy Spirit. That guidance by the Holy Spirit is not an issue that would be applicable only on certain occasions, for example in the meetings of the church. No, it is a matter for everyday life. It is also not a matter for ‘well advanced’ Christians. No, it’s a matter for every Christian, because every Christian has received the Holy Spirit at the moment he believed the gospel of his salvation (1Cor 15:1-4, Eph 1:13).

V18. Whoever is led by the Spirit, is lifted above self-preoccupation with the law and the flesh, and is engaged with Christ. Whoever is led by the Spirit, doesn’t have the law as the rule of life to be justified thereby.

It is remarkable to see that it looks like Paul always mixes the law and the flesh. Paul in this letter also clearly demonstrated that the law was given to a people in the flesh that thought to be able to meet God's law. The law was given to prove that the flesh "*does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able [to do so]*" (Rom 8:7).

V19-21. The law makes clear what the works of the flesh are. It is the whole activity of man who is not led by the Spirit of God. This obviously applies to people who are not born again, but it also applies to people who are, but who, instead of being led by the Spirit are led by the flesh.

Paul lists a number of works of the flesh. This list is not complete. In *Matthew 15:19* and *Romans 1:29-31*, just to mention a few other places, other works of the flesh are mentioned. It is quite possible that Paul mentions these sins, because these sins happened among the Galatian Christians.

Paul presents as many as fifteen works of the flesh. The first three sins are sexual sins. "*Immorality*" is prohibited sexual intercourse. This concerns all sexual intercourse outside marriage and before marriage and not just sexual intercourse. "*Impurity*" refers to dealing with sexuality in a dirty way in thoughts, words, deeds and lusts, which can also happen within marriage. "*Sensuality*" is shameless behavior in sexual things without restraints and without caring what others think. This can also occur within marriage.

"*Idolatry*" and "*sorcery*" belong together as sins directly committed against God by ignoring His exclusive rights. The remaining works of the flesh are sins which concern my neighbor or brother.

Whoever does such things as daily practice, therefore not doing it accidentally, has no part in Christ and is beyond God's kingdom.

Now read Galatians 5:16-21 again.

Reflection: In what ways do you experience the struggle of verse 17?

**The Fruit of the Spirit** | *verses 22-26*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.*

V22. In *verse 19* we read about the “works [plural] of the flesh”. In *verse 22* Paul mentions the “fruit [singular] of the Spirit”. If you think of the works of the flesh, you see those works more as a result of what a man does. As to the fruit of the Spirit, you rather think of an inner attitude. It is a fruit, not of ourselves, as is the case with the works of the flesh, but of the Spirit. You could compare it to a factory and a garden. In a factory, people are working hard to realize a certain production. In a garden grows what is sown in it, without any work of man (except probably weeding).

The *fruit* of the Spirit is not the same as the *gifts* of the Spirit. Anyone who has received the Holy Spirit has also received certain spiritual gifts. Every believer has different *gifts*. With the *fruit* of the Spirit this difference is absent. It is a fruit which has to be present in every believer.

As mentioned, the word ‘fruit’ is in the singular. It is one fruit, but it is composed of nine parts. You can think of a diamond which is one stone, but with a difference in brightness, depending on how the light shines on it. You can also think of a flower with nine petals. If you remove a petal, the flower loses its beauty. Similarly, the nine parts of the fruit of the Spirit are not available separately. The Holy Spirit wants every part of the fruit to be fully exposed in unity with the whole.

1. The first part that is mentioned is “*love*”. That is understandable. It is the nature of God. God is love (1Jn 4:8,16)

and His love “has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:5).

2. The second part is “joy”. This is the joy which the Holy Spirit works in us as we think of God and what He has done for us in His Son, despite the difficult circumstances in which we can sometimes be. It is the joy “in the Lord” (Phil 3:1) and that is our strength (Neh 8:10b).
3. “Peace”, the third characteristic of the fruit, is the inner calmness and peace which is in God. It is the peace of God which, through the Holy Spirit, is worked in us if we are led by Him. Again, this peace will be ours, regardless of the difficult circumstances in which we can sometimes be.  
Of these three: love, joy and peace, the Lord Jesus speaks of in *John 14:27* and *John 15:10-11*: “My love”, “My joy”, “My peace”. Between Him and the Spirit is a perfect agreement.
4. How important “patience” (the fourth feature) is. How your patience is tested sometimes if you are in a difficult or hopeless situation or if you have to deal with difficult people.
5. A subsequent feature (the fifth) is “kindness”. In *Titus 3:4*, this feature is used for God. It shows His friendly mind and benevolent attitude to sinners. Are His mind and attitude, seen in your life? They surely are, if you are led by the Spirit.
6. “Goodness” (the sixth characteristic) shows that you are generously and compassionately looking for what is good for others. In *Ephesians 5:9*, goodness is connected with the fruit of the light.
7. You show “faithfulness” (the seventh feature) if people can trust you, if you are trustworthy.
8. “Gentleness” (the eighth feature) means that you are willing to take a humble position. It is not a spineless weakness,

but an attitude you consciously take and for which you need much spiritual strength.

9. The list ends with the ninth characteristic: "*self-control*". The Holy Spirit leads you to a disciplined life, in which you don't yield to the impulses of passions and desires. He gives you the ability to control yourself.

This nine-fold fruit cannot be worked out by putting yourself under the law. This fruit will only grow and prosper in all freshness if you are led by the Holy Spirit. We see this fruit in its full maturity in the Lord Jesus, with the exception of self-control because that word contains the idea of wrong impulses which have to be tamed. Of course such impulses were not present in the Lord Jesus.

V23. The fruit of the Spirit is beyond the reach of the law. But even if the law had had something to do with it, there is still nothing in the fruit of the Spirit that should fall under the judgment of the law. All the features or parts of the fruit of the Spirit are a delight to God, are useful for our fellow man and have a beneficial effect on our own spiritual life.

V24. This fruit is found in "*those who belong to Christ Jesus*". They have radically given up "*the flesh*" and all "*passions and desires*" which belong to the flesh. For you this means that you must put into practice what you recognized when you were converted. Then you made yourself one with the judgment God accomplished on the cross regarding the flesh.

Paul does not say to crucify the flesh, but to keep it as crucified. So it is not a painful and slow process of mortification, but a case of accepting in faith what God says. That is in retrospect to what happened on the cross.

V25. At your conversion you received life by the Spirit. Now the point is also to walk by that Spirit. This refers to the present, the here and now. The thought is that a certain position (*living by* the Spirit) must be demonstrated in practice (*walking by* the Spirit).

V26. The law could not give life; neither does it give strength to a life in which fruit is borne for God. The last verse indicates again where keeping the law leads: to the pride of the flesh and the contempt of others.

Now read Galatians 5:22-26 again.

Reflection: Memorize the fruit of the Spirit off by heart.

## Galatians 6

### **Bear One Another's Burdens** | *verses 1-6*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; [each one] looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have [reason for] boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. 5 For each one will bear his own load. 6 The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches [him].*

V1. To emphasize again his connection with the believers of Galatia and their connection to each other, Paul begins his closing admonitions with the wonderful word “brothers”. Of course this includes the sisters. This also is a good introduction to the following verses, which show that the connection is experienced in a special way, namely in the care which should be given to each other as ‘family members’.

In the previous chapter Paul showed the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. He clarified that the Christian life must have the character of the Holy Spirit, to expose the fruit of the Spirit. Paul demonstrated here that if a person fails to walk by the Spirit sin waits for him and then overtakes him.

Sin is lurking and strikes at the moment when the vigilance of the believer weakens even for just a second. An example of how you can go wrong is: telling a lie to save yourself out of an awkward

situation, by yielding to a sexual desire, or by taking somebody else's money if you see it laying on the table.

The law has no mercy on these offenses, only righteous retribution (*Heb 10:28*). The Galatians, who wanted to bring themselves under the law again, are encouraged to deal with such an offender as they have now been taught of the Holy Spirit.

However, they had to consider some requirements before they could deal with the offender. First such a person had to be spiritual. You may wonder: Who dares to say that of himself? I think the following points make that clear. Someone who is spiritual will have "*a spirit of gentleness*". You cannot judge another person with an arrogant attitude. What a contrast to the harshness of the law!

Secondly, "*looking to yourself*" will give the consciousness that I am no better than the other. What a contrast to legalistic people, regarding their self-esteem. A legalistic person is unable to suffer with someone else. I must be fully aware that if God did not guard me, I would make the same mistake as – or maybe worse – than my brother did.

Concerning this case I found a very striking similarity in the book of *Job*. It is about the good mind we notice in Elihu, when he speaks to Job. Elihu says: "*Behold, I belong to God like you; I too have been formed out of the clay. Behold, no fear of me should terrify you, nor should my pressure weigh heavily on you*" (*Job 33:6-7*). If you want to deal with someone who has fallen into sin, it is necessary that you bow down to him and to make yourself one with him and his sin. That is the meaning of eating the sin offering by the priest who had to bring a sin offering for someone else (*Lev 6:26*). That is the way to lead the other one to repentance and so to be restored by God.

V2. After this example of bearing a burden with specific conditions, *verse 2* appeals to all believers to bear the burdens of one another. The burdens that are meant here are all sorts of afflictions and struggles that can make life so difficult. The Lord Jesus was

and is the great 'burden Bearer'. On Him we may cast all our care (1Pet 5:7).

But God in His wisdom has invented ways for us to help each other to carry one another's burden so that we in this way will learn to appreciate and experience more of the fellowship we have as brothers and sisters. We can notice the power of a local church amongst other things by the way the believers sympathize with each other when there are troubles and try to lighten the burden.

By bearing one another's burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ. The purpose of this law is that we see that the life of the Lord Jesus was focused on the will of the Father for the sake of others. In a way Paul is saying here to the Galatians: 'Well, if you insist on having a law, here you have one; start with this one.' Christ never did anything for Himself.

V3. People who preach or keep the law are totally different. They honor themselves and think they are capable of doing everything they want, without considering the needy ones. But in fact such people are "nothing". They are blind to seeing that no good thing dwells in the flesh (Rom 7:18). They deceive themselves by believing that they are able to do good by keeping the law. Such people always measure others by their own standards and of course they seek to appear better than others.

V4-5. We should not compare the things we do and what we have, with what others have or do. Your own work and everything you are doing for God, including your whole attitude and all your actions, you should test in the light of God. It is from you and you do it for God. You should be happy with what you can do for Him. And at the end, before the judgment seat of Christ, you will only be responsible for your own work, your "own load". The latter means that you have to appear before God with your own load of activities.

V6. The third form of bearing loads is about supporting those who teach God's Word. Please note that this concerns teachers

of the Word of God and not people who have their own ideas or interpretations about the Word. This support is called “*share all good things*”.

Primarily this can be financial support. Are you alert to this need? It can also be a kind of sharing in spiritual blessings by which a minister of the Word is encouraged. Have you ever shared with such a minister a personal and wonderful experience you’ve had with the Lord, just to encourage him? Other ways of sharing involve all sorts of practical matters, such as transport and housing.

Now read Galatians 6:1-6 again.

Reflection: Where do you see opportunities to bear a burden? Does it bring you to bearing that burden?

**What a Man Sows, He Will Also Reap** | verses 7-11

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

*7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will 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. 9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. 11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.*

V7. Concerning these verses we can say that they deal with the government of God. The government of God has to do with someone's behavior and with the consequences of this behavior. Whatever you do, it always has a certain effect, a specific result. It does something, it leaves a trace. It does not only influence your own life but also the lives of those who are involved in your life.

It is true that the grace of God is perfect and that by the work of the Lord Jesus you are perfectly saved. Nothing or nobody can snatch you out of the hand of the Lord Jesus and out of the hand of the Father (*Jn 10:28-29*), but that does not mean that it is unimportant how this is exposed in your life and how you walk in your practical life. God has connected infallible consequences with the way you live.

It's something you can easily observe just by having your eyes open. Eliphaz has also made such an observation: "*According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it*" (*Job 4:8*; see also *Pro 8:22* and *Hos 8:7* where you find the same idea). Think for instance of the slogan that has been used for an anti-drink campaign: 'Drink destroys more than you love'. This means that someone who has drunken too much may cause a fatal accident through his rashness. When he is sober he may confess that, and be forgiven. He will not lose his salvation, but the victim will still be dead. The awareness of this accident and

the knowledge of being responsible for somebody's death will remain with him.

This principle can be applied to many other situations. It is important to realize that you are constantly sowing, day after day, by what you think, say and do. The environment in which you sow this 'seed' and in which it develops, is the breeding ground. Therefore ask yourself again and again: where do I find myself, where do I go to (at work or doing other duties), where am I through my own choice, what do I read, what am I watching, what am I listening to?

*"Do not be deceived"* here means 'don't deceive yourself in this regard'. God is not mocked, you cannot fool Him! Actually it also means: don't treat Him with disrespect. And that's what you do if you don't consider what He has said in His Word. This might be the connection between *verse 7* and the previous one, which is about the Word. Indeed the Galatians were to blame in that they listened to the Judaists with their human doctrines and therefore put aside the Word of God. Well, if you do not listen to the Word, you mock God and there will be consequences for you. I put it rather sharply, but that's what Paul does here as well.

V8. The choice is yours. You can sow to the flesh, or you can sow to the Spirit. If you sow to your own flesh, you're seeking your own interests, so you're feeding selfishness. You think of your own pleasure and comfort. The inevitable consequence is that you will reap corruption. No good will be left. If you sow to the Spirit, if you're busy in His interests, you don't think of yourself, but of Christ and His own. This results in nothing but enjoyment of what eternal life is about and this enjoyment will be perfected when we are finally with the Lord Jesus.

V9. Paul means in this verse that your life will not be made comfortable. In fact, we often have to wait for a long time before we see the results of sowing to the Spirit. Then suddenly the thought may arise: 'What really is the use of the things I do? I don't see any result; actually it's only getting worse and worse.' Hence the admonition *"not to lose heart in doing good"*. As in the metaphor: if you cast seed into the ground today, you cannot have a rich

harvest tomorrow. Continue to do well, remain true in your daily activities, for the harvest is surely coming. Do well generously and you will have a rich harvest.

Do not weaken, just hold on. Do not be disheartened by the setbacks and the pain you experience when your good work is rewarded with evil. God will reward you at the right time.

V10. Look at all those people around you. They need someone like you, someone who knows the grace of the Lord Jesus. Sow His grace around you. The people in the world need that grace to be saved; Christians who are captured by legalism need that grace to be freed; Christians who have difficulties in other ways, need that grace to be encouraged.

So you have a great area to sow: in all the people you encounter every day. The field in which you sow – in other words, your target group – consists of all people. When there is an opportunity, you can do them good. By that you also show Who God is. God's target group, speaking reverently, also consists of all people (cf. Mt 5:45; Tt 2:11).

Amid all these people is living a particular target group called "*the household of the faith*". You ought to do them good in a special way. 1 Timothy 4:10 says God also acts in that way. The 'household of faith' includes all of God's children, all members of the church, no matter what group or what denomination they have joined.

V11. With these admonitions Paul seems to have reached the end of his letter. Although the letter is relatively short, he points out that it is a long letter. He had written it completely by himself. Usually he dictated his letters and added a salutation with his own hand (1Cor 16:21). This letter is an exception. Because of the gravity of the error for which the Galatians had opened up their minds, he did the writing himself.

Now read Galatians 6:7-11 again.

Reflection: Consider your 'sowing activities' and ask yourself in whose interest you 'sow': to your own flesh or to the Spirit?

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**The Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ** | *verses 12-18*

First carefully take in the Bible verses of this section; please read them thoughtfully.

**12** *Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy [be] upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.*

V12. I have already mentioned that Paul in *verse 11* seemed to have finished his letter. But it is as if he has reread his letter before he writes down *verse 11*. And because of the importance of his writing he wants to stress once again its purpose. People who only sought their own interests had infiltrated the Galatians. These people 'sowed to the flesh'. They emphasized external things, religious statutes and customs.

To impose circumcision on the Galatian believers had no other purpose than to avoid the persecution which was associated with the cross of Christ. This is what the Galatians had to hear again right at the end. Even today you see that where a religion is preached or defended where the flesh and therefore human efforts are being respected, it is an escape from total rejection. Complying with external conditions gives man a nice appearance. In general this is a great danger, but in religion this is the greatest danger.

Whosoever preaches the cross and defends it as the only way to salvation and the only means to live as a Christian, must not

expect acclamation. The cross puts an end to the wisdom of the world and the pride of the Jewish religion.

V13. The preachers of circumcision and the law did so only for their own honor and glory. They could show off with that. The same is done in our day when people boast in the number of persons they have baptized or in those who are convinced by their clever arguments about how to serve God in the best way, while in the meantime the cross is passed by. But, Paul says, do not be fooled. These people, who so strongly insist on the importance of the ordinances, don't keep them themselves. They are hypocrites.

V14. Paul contrasts this with his own attitude and he does so in the light of the meaning of the cross. To him the cross is the place where all became clear. There he sees the true character of the world and there he sees all the perfections of the Lord Jesus; there he sees Who God is and there he sees what man is. Whoever keeps the law glories in the nature of man and what he is able to do. Whoever glories in the cross doesn't glory in anything of himself. Isn't the cross indeed the place where the full judgment of God is executed on the evil, sinful nature of man?

It is "*the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*". Here Paul is using the full name of his *and* their ("*our*") Savior. This makes the cross, the place of shame, rejection and condemnation, at the same time the place where all the glory of God has become visible through faith.

The cross is the radical separation between the world and the believer. There I am judged in Christ, and so to the world I am finished, just as Christ is finished to the world. The world, and especially the religious world, nailed Christ on the cross. Away with him! That's the way the world is looking at me.

It is also true vice-versa. The world also is judged for me. By the cross the full malice and wickedness of the world is made visible. As a believer I don't want to deal with the world anymore. The world has nothing desirable for the heart of someone who looks at the cross and accepts it as Paul presents it here. Any compro-

mise with the world is like a slap in the face of God and Christ, and makes the cross a ridiculous thing.

I sincerely hope that you share with me the desire to see more of the meaning of the cross of Christ and also the desire to live consistently in accordance with that meaning.

V15. All outward ordinances have no value to God at all. What matters is whether someone is “*a new creation*”. As a new creation, you will be able to see things as God sees them.

V16. Do you want a rule to live by? You can find it here. This rule is: Live the new life you have received at your conversion. In that new life Christ is the Object on Whom you focus and the Holy Spirit is the power therein. In that way you’ll find “*peace and mercy*”. You will not find those things if you want to keep the law. If you want to keep the law you’ll only receive condemnation, damnation and death.

Paul mentions “*the Israel of God*” separately. These are the believers in Israel who during this time, the time of grace, have accepted the Lord Jesus as Savior. So they belong to the church. In *Romans 11:5* Paul says of this same group of believers: “*In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to [God’s] gracious choice.*”

Since the rejection of the Lord Jesus, Israel as a nation is not recognized by God as His people. When the church is caught up to be with the Lord, God will then continue His purpose with His people here on earth and fulfill all the promises he has made to this nation. All this you can learn from *Romans 9-11*. The few of His earthly people who have become believers in this time, the time of grace, are recognized by God as His Israel without making them a people separated from the church.

V17. Paul hopes that the Galatians will no longer bother him. They had troubled him by their wandering away from the gospel he had preached to them. In this letter he fervently defended this

gospel accompanied by a great inner struggle. That should be sufficient.

The scars he bore due to scourges and by being stoned (see 2 *Corinthians* 11:23-25 for this and more hardships), he calls “*the brand-marks of Jesus*”. He calls his Master as an exception ‘Jesus’ without further addition. This points to the life of the Lord Jesus on earth: a life of humiliation, shame and pain which He suffered (*Isa* 52:14). Paul desired to be as much as possible like his Master (see *Phil* 3:10). That was his honor!

V18. Then Paul ends his letter as he had begun: short and cool. There are no greetings as in other letters, although many brothers were with him (*Gal* 1:2). His own greeting is missing. He only wishes that the “*grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*” would be with their “*spirit*”, as only grace and nothing else can be the counterbalance to the influence of legalistic thinking. That’s what I need; that’s what you need. That grace must thoroughly affect the heart, the thinking and the spirit of the Christian.

Here Paul again writes “*Lord Jesus Christ*”, preceded by “*our*”. This ‘our’ indicates the bond that existed between Paul and the Galatians. That bond is also beautifully expressed in the word “*brothers*”, which also shows how deeply he loved them. He thus expresses that he had written to them out of the deep consciousness of the relationship he had with his children in faith. Should there be, after all he had written, still some doubt about how he saw them, then that doubt was now suppressed.

The last word of the letter is “*amen*”. Of all the letters Paul wrote, only the *letter to the Romans* ends in the same way. That is another indication of how the two letters are connected; they both have the same significant issues, namely the presentation and the defense of the gospel. With this ‘amen’, which means ‘so it is’, Paul as it were seals the letter. What it says remains so!

I would like to conclude this commentary with the words of another believer (GC Willis) and I add this with the prayer that this

letter will affect your life and mine with the purpose that God the Holy Spirit had led him to write:

'It is impossible to say how hard it must have been for Paul to write this letter, but what a treasure we have in it for today. At that time it certainly was the work of the devil to send those teachers of the law to Galatia. But there was a higher hand and a heart of love which led everything.

Because of the attack of the enemy, God forged for us a sword of the finest steel by which all the attacks of the enemy in the past twenty centuries were resisted. And it's still as fresh and powerful as it has been all these centuries. May God Himself exercise our hands to battle with it, and our fingers to fight with it (*Psa 144:1*) to His glory. Amen.'

Now read Galatians 6:12-18 again.

Reflection: Read the letter again and write down how many times you read the words 'cross' or 'crucified'. Consider in what context those words occur and what that means for the practice of your life of faith.

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