Lessons on Galatians

John Hendershot

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Dedication

To our friends from the Becoming Closer class, for their constant encouragement and support.

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Another Gospel - Galatians 1

It is a well known fact: as soon as the truth is proclaimed, Satan will be there to edit it into something more palatable. Paul encountered this with the churches in Galatia, and this letter is his response to just that problem.

Gal 1:1-5 NASB 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, To the churches of Galatia: (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.

Background

The phrasing of the opening in this letter seems somewhat confusing. It is a part of the style of writing of Paul's time; letters tend to be short when you know you can run out of paper. Paul begins with proclaiming that he is an apostle – and telling us how he became one:

- It was not by a committee vote. We often entrust sensitive decisions to committees, thus ensuring that a reasonable compromise might be reached. The Gospel does not come from compromise, but from truth.
- lack + Nor was it an appointment by a particular individual. This tells us much about the nature of the church. It is not a top down hierarchy of appointments; it is a church whose leaders are servant leaders. They rise by being of service, as seen by the Spirit. Whoever would be the greatest must be
- 🖶 It was through Jesus Christ, and God the Father. And if you by chance have forgotten how this authority came about, he tells you of the power behind the authority: the power that raised Christ from the dead.

"We preach Christ crucified." It is the center of the Gospel message, and it is the center of Paul's message:

- 🖊 It is an act of power and the Apostle shares in this power. To him is granted the power to heal the sick, for example – so that the Gospel message will be seen for what it is.
- It is an act of grace and the Apostle is the ambassador of grace.

So Paul introduces himself as author of the letter. But note that the letter is also from the brethren who are with him. No one in the service of the Lord performs solo, not even the Apostles. Paul recognizes this, and courteously includes those who are with him.

First Focus

Paul has some drastic things to say to the church at Galatia – he intends to call them back to their first love. So he places before them the core of the message:

He puts before them the central doctrine of the faith: the atonement.

¹ Matthew 28:18 is instructive on this point. ² 1st Corinthians 1:23, KJV

- He then tells them that the purpose of the atonement is their rescue! Like the Coast Guard, the atonement has a purpose but not a price tag.
- Rescue from what? From the present evil in the world. Christians are to be in the world, not of the world and that can happen only through the atonement of Christ.
- This is no accident, but the will of God from the beginning and great glory for Him.

Paul intertwines his apostleship with the thought of the atonement. In so doing, he proclaims the nature of truth for the Christian:

- ↓ It is truth which is revealed and corroborated by our own experience.
- It is revealed by those whom God has chosen and he chooses those not by their merits, but by His own method. The Gospel is carried by unlikely characters so that we will pay attention to the Gospel and not the character.

A Different Gospel

Gal 1:6-12 NASB 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.

Does it happen?

It comes as a surprise to the average churchman that the question could even be asked: is there something wrong with the Gospel as preached at my church? One reason we are reluctant to ask this is due to humility; so few of us are graduates of a specialized Bible college. We proclaim ourselves to be a Bible believing church; how could we go wrong? Let me give you a few current examples:³

- The "Prosperity Gospel." A fine method of missing the entire point, this message proclaims that God wants you to be rich. And you get that way by sending in contributions. And that's what's important.
- ♣ Consider also the schism developing within the American branch of the Episcopal church dividing those who are "modern" (homosexual priests and bishops, gay marriages) and "old fashioned."
- For one you've seen in this church, the "Temple of the Spirit" movement.⁴ The body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit therefore you should eat organic foods and join a health club.⁵

Whv?

What would induce a "Bible believing" church to move to such heresy and wickedness? Here are a few explanations:

³ Our current teaching on marriage serves as another example, as it is indistinguishable from radical feminism. But as I'm trying to make a different point, we shall refrain.

⁴ My own terminology; I know of no particular label for this heresy.

⁵ 1st Corinthians 6:15-20. Is it not obvious that Paul is talking about prostitution here?

- ★ We want to be approved in the eyes of the world. We want people to think we are hip, with it, the church of what's happening now. So every time we encounter a little scriptural difficulty, we merely explain that it's "cultural" true in Paul's time, false in our own. This is usually accompanied by the modest statement that, after all, the matter is not really of first importance now, is it?
- ♣ Sometimes, it's a matter of maintaining control. It's easy to paint those who object as being old fashioned and unable to comprehend bold new ideas ("Can't teach an old dog new tricks.") This is particularly common when the old guard is not quite large enough to win a vote at the elders' meeting. Plead for the unity of the church; doctrine is not that important.
- ♣ Alternately, it's a way to be viewed as a Scripture expert. Finding some passage to justify your actions takes some doing. There are those who have attempted to justify themselves in dreadful sin.

The history of the church is full of such things. We need to be on our guard.

Paul's response

Paul's answer to this problem is short and to the point. He reminds us:

- His authority came from God. The Gospel he preached came from God, not Paul's imagination. Therefore, it doesn't matter who has decided to give us the revised version; it's the wrong version.
- The matter is so important that the man who does such a thing is to become an anathema to the church. That is, he is to be thrown out and pronounced to be under a curse for the way he misused the things of God.⁶
- This applies to those who teach a "gospel" which is either directly contrary or distorted from the truth.

It is just possible that Christ considers true adherence to His teachings to be of some importance.

Evidence

Gal 1:13-24 NASB 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.

⁶ The intent of which is to bring home how serious the matter really is. Discipline, not punishment.

The power of the Gospel

Paul never hesitated to use his own life as a bad example – which turned out to be a glory to God. It would seem that the faith of many is weak because they have never encountered anyone like Paul. But consider the change Jesus made it this man's life:

- His root philosophy of rules and regulations disappeared; he went from Pharisee and persecutor to Apostle and persecuted. If nothing else, this should convince you that his conversion was genuine.
- → Often unnoticed is this: Paul did not begin the new life by making a big splash, but retreated into Arabia to learn in humble solitude. He then went to Damascus, waiting many years before approaching the Apostles in Jerusalem.
- Only after such a period of humbling does he seek out Peter; then only to validate what God has told him.

We sometimes forget that in the Gospel there is the power of God.

Not according to man

There is a theme in this chapter: handle the things of God in God's way. To do this, one must sometimes ignore what others might think. It's not that it's needful to become defiant; it's just that the approval of men is irrelevant.

- ♣ Paul, you will note, never really does seek approval from the other Apostles. They never act to him like masters. Rather, both seek the approval of God for their actions.
- ♣ Paul also knows that he must wait for God's timing, not for man's. Three years in Damascus is no great price to pay for this.

And all this? All this goes to the glory of God, who turns our enemies into friends. We sometimes forget just Who's in charge around here.

Unity of the Church - Galatians 2

Paul is no stranger to the problems facing the typical church congregation. In this section he gives us a practical example of practicing the unity of the church while still remaining true to its doctrine.

Running in Vain

Gal 2:1-2 NASB 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.

Have you ever wondered if you are really doing the things God wants you to do? Paul has the same difficulty here, and we may be instructed by his example.

Revelation

Paul's first answer is simply this: God (somehow) revealed that he should go up to Jerusalem. But does God still use revelation this way?

- ♣ He certainly does reveal His will for us in the Scriptures. Sometimes this is in the general meaning of the Scriptures; others find that certain passages speak to them in a powerful way, as if it is their special duty to be guided by such.
- → Sometimes He reveals His will directly. Some of us seem to have this as an everyday occurrence. Others might get once in a lifetime. Some never have this at all. There's a lesson in faith in that, which is left as an exercise for the student.
- → Often, too, He works to reveal His will by His providences. Have you ever noticed that He opened this door and closed another?

Checking with others

Not often mentioned, but usually a good idea, is to ask those who should know. We seldom hear this advice, but it is very sound.

- First, it is a form of mutual submission. Not one of us is so wise as to ignore the wisdom of all of us. Others may see it differently; take wise counsel as you may.
- Next, note that Paul did this privately. That way, if he had been in the wrong, neither he nor the church would be publicly disgraced not to mention how much softer the blow when delivered one on one.
- Today, we also have generations of Christians whose writings are still with us, that we may consult. Often enough, the ones that survive are those of Christians of great strength and wisdom – which at least is conducive to humility.

No hurry

It took Paul 14 years to get to this point — a period which has some numerical-mystical importance. Seven (days in a week) is often interpreted as being a complete period of time. Paul has waited twice that. We may see from this, however, that our impatience and desire for immediate answer sometimes must wait. Why?

♣ Some things take time to develop. Patience is a virtue; perhaps that's what God is teaching you.

There is also virtue in "waiting upon the Lord." When you do, you cast your future upon Him, not giving direction but waiting in hope.

Sources and Solutions

Gal 2:3-14 NASB 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. (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?

"False brothers"

If everyone in the church were but pious, devout and humble, we'd have a lot less friction. They're not. So it pays to know who might be the source of our troubles. There are three we need to deal with as "false brothers":

- Frankly, there are some who are really sent by Satan. You might as well face that fact. But do not worry; you will soon know who they are, for by their fruits you will know them.
- ♣ More common are the legalists those with a Bible verse to end any discussion.
- We still have the hypocrites with us too.

Peer Pressure

More common than any of these are those who succumb to peer pressure. Most of us are born followers, and sometimes we see things that way:

- We worry about "who's who." Will the wedding coordinator be offended if we have pink bridesmaid dresses?
- We have those who care for appearance above all else. We should ask ourselves, "How would this look?" Sometimes the answer should be, "It doesn't matter."
- ♣ One form of this is, "How would this look to non-Christians?" This often leads us to soft-pedal the truth.

Lack of clear thought

"Broad-minded is just another way of saying a fellow's too lazy to form an opinion" (Will Rogers). One of the reasons a church gets into a muddle is that they do not really have a clear doctrine. It should be fairly clear that without same, any challenge will produce a confused, half-hearted response. Be prepared; know what you believe.

Buildings of brick with no framework collapse during earthquakes. With no coherent doctrine, the church collapses too. The difference between a fine building and a pile of bricks is doctrine; when shaken, the world finds out. ⁷

The usual reason for this is that a church does not emphasize the knowledge of the Bible. That's not just memorizing verses – it's doing the Word.

What to do about church conflict

So what do you do about it?

Seek common ground

You see the example in it here: the care for the poor. The passage seems superfluous at first; it's rather an obvious thing. But do you not see that Paul and Peter sought out something in which to stand together? When you do this, you have the beginnings of rational discussion – for you start in agreement. This common ground minimizes the conflict, and separates out what needs to be resolved.

If you don't do this, things can become rather nasty in a hurry. This method allows only "us"; the opposite method starts with "them and us."

Do not yield

It's a delicate line. You don't want to violate what your conscience prohibits – but you don't want to have an argument about it either. So it's importance to see the difference between permission and commandment. In this section, they're arguing about things like dietary law. If you're the one who is opposed to this restriction, it's important that you don't give in – but it's also important that you allow the other fellow to follow his conscience too.

Want an example? Take the "coat and tie" issue. I've known some that hold that a man must wear a coat and tie to church; anything else is disrespectful. I don't see it that way – but since I permit and they do not, I make sure to make sure it's not an issue. I still don't wear one, but I don't debate it either.

Confrontation

So when do you confront someone? I suggest three tests:

- Is the harm being done readily apparent? Can it be seen that allowing this to go on is hypocrisy or sin, for example?
- Is the harm being done immediate? Or is it something that can wait until the next elders' meeting?

⁷ And our doctrine on marriage is?

Is the harm being done irreparable? Is it something that can be prevented, but not easily fixed?

Dead to the Law

Gal 2:15-21 NASB "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."

Satan's attack

Legalism has long been a fruitful avenue of attack for Satan. A good example is the history of the Temperance movement – so important at the time; looking back, we see its legacy and should be warned.

But perhaps a more mundane example might help. Your author was once an elder in a small church, for which I ask forgiveness. In the course of events the board of elders decided that no music should be played during communion. This decision resulted in much anguish; various people at various times felt aggrieved, rejected, insulted or left out. Ask the question: just how important is this?

How important is this?

Very. Paul repeats to us the foundations of the faith, which are touched here:

- ♣ By the law Jewish or moral we are convicted of sin. But there is no hope of justification by keeping any law. To claim that we can is to proclaim our moral perfection.
- But the law that declares us a sinner cannot justify us before God. Only faith in Christ can do that. Is it not true that the cure usually doesn't resemble the disease?
- And as a result of this justification by faith, Christ now lives in me.
- Is it important? If you died today, where would you be tonight? Heaven, or hell? Is that important?

Law and Curse - Galatians 3

Paul continues his discourse on the Law and faith.

Five questions

Gal 3:1-5 NASB 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?

Paul asks the Galatians to think back on their own experiences, and see if they should return to the Old Testament Law. The questions are old, but still apply today.

- Who bewitched you? We still speak of "spell binding" orators in our day, and that is a good translation here. We especially are fond of "who said it." For most of the sheep of this nation, a rock star is a high authority. That's the sense of this question. If you think it doesn't apply, think about such names as Rick Warren, for example.
- → Did you receive the Holy Spirit by faith, or by law? Think back; did you obey your way into receiving the Spirit, or was it by faith? Your mind was clear when it happened; you are your own witness to this. So why would you change now?
- ♣ Are you being perfected by the body, or the spirit? A question worth asking in this time when we preach that the body is the temple of the Spirit and therefore we should join a health club and eat organic foods.⁸ It is an old deception.
- ♣ Did you suffer for the faith in vain? In those days being a Christian was dangerous (which is beginning to apply to us today). These people have suffered for the faith; are you now saying that such suffering was unnecessary? Will you throw away the rewards God has promised just to be comfortable? Is your Christian walk worth anything beyond talk?
- ♣ Does Christ work by the Spirit, or by rules and regulations? Search the Scriptures; you will find no result but the Spirit. Good works are an effect of the faith, not its cause.

To make his case, Paul now reminds them of the Old Testament – as witness to the righteousness that comes by faith.

Old Testament Witness

Gal 3:6-18 NASB 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. (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

⁸ The Church of What's Happening Now.

⁹ The early church had the same problem throughout its hidden period. See the Montanist controversy for how this was resolved.

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. (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.

Faith – Old Testament style

Paul begins with the most esteemed of the patriarchs, Abraham. This man preceded the Law by about 430 years, from which Paul makes these points:

- Faith came first. The fact that the Law came later does not nullify faith; God's covenants still stand.
- Most particularly, this faith was intended to benefit the Gentiles as well, for Abraham was promised that one of his offspring would bless the world. That someone is, of course, Christ.

Even during the period of the Law, faith still applied. The prophets testify consistently that "the righteous shall live by faith." How so? Right conduct – good works – are the result of a faithful life. So when God condemned the Israelites in the Old Testament it was for their hard hearts – hearts which kept the ceremony of the Law, but not its essence. A righteous man practices what the Law commands. But righteousness is hard; self-justification is easy. And we are lazy.

Concept of "the curse"

It surprises some that the God revealed as the one Who is Love would also be the God who curses – but it is so. When man sins, God curses man. It has been so from the beginning:

Gen 3:17 NASB Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.

When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they were commanded to assemble and repeat the blessings and curses of God. Blessing and curse are a part of the Law. A curse could not just be ignored; it had to be dealt with. It could only be lifted by an appropriate sacrifice. In the Old Testament the sacrifice was a specified animal; in the New Testament, it is Christ.

Covenant

A covenant is God's way of dealing with man. It is sometimes described as a contract, but this is incorrect. A contract is between two (theoretical) equals. A covenant is a pronouncement of God concerning how He will deal with man.

That is its main restriction. A covenant may be superseded, but not amended. So it is with Abraham's covenant; the Law did not change it; the promises made to him still stood. The blessing for all nations was yet to come, but in the fullness of time Christ arrived.

Significantly, it seems that covenants may need a mediator – someone to stand between God and man.

- **♣** Such a man may be a prophet. Moses "stood in the gap" for the Israelites, and turned God's fierce anger away.
- Such a man may be a priest. Samuel was such a man, speaking to God for the Israelites.
- **♣** Such a man may be a king. David, at the time of the plague, interceded for the people.

In our time, Christ is all three. He is the perfect mediator of the covenant of grace. If you want to build a bridge from God to man, you must have a foundation on each side. Only Christ is wholly God and wholly man.

Law and Faith

Gal 3:19-29 NASB 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. (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.

Why the Law?

It's a common question; why should Christians pay any attention to the Old Testament. In particular, why should I care about the details of the Jewish Law?

- The Law is a tutor. Being one of those book collectors who never throws a textbook away, I justify my attitude by saying, "I might need to look something up in it." Just because I passed the course doesn't mean I can forget what I was taught. 10
- ➡ Without the Law, transgression has no meaning. When Christ debated the Pharisees, this was their common ground. The woman taken in adultery is condemned by the Law − and forgiven by the Lord.
- **The Law defined both sin and sacrifice.** Thus it gave a clear picture of the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world.

¹⁰ Most of the condemnation of homosexuality is in the Old Testament.

The Law also defines the Jews

Perhaps you haven't noticed, but God is rather arbitrary with the Jews. He sends Moses with the Law – no negotiating – and tells them they will obey, or He will act. Why? Because they are His chosen people.

Note that the Jews had no choice in the matter. None. God picked them, they did not pick Him. In so doing, He defines what "my people" means — those who are in obedience to Him — in short, those who trust Him to keep His Word.

When the time comes, then, that definition will be extended – the children of God are now those who trust Christ.

Now

Paul now ties this back together with an astounding statement. We, he argues, are baptized through faith. The physical act alone is no more than a bath. But when we are baptized through faith, we put on the uniform of Christ – and become children of God.

Let me explain it this way. When I was in the army, our platoon had a drill sergeant. One day he went down the row of men asking, "What color am I?" It was a touchy question at that time. A lot of pushups were assigned to those who didn't know the answer.

The answer? Olive drab – the color of the uniform. When you're in the army you can see rank – but not the person. "Salute the uniform, not the wearer." If this is true with the army, how much more should we see it in the church – where the uniform of Christ covers us all. Christ has broken down the barriers between man and God – and also the barriers between man and man. The one who claims Christ as Lord is brother and/or sister to me.

Son and Heir - Galatians 4

In this lesson we are introduced to one of the more controversial aspects of interpreting the Scripture: the use of allegory. It is a frequent contention of many evangelical preachers that the Scripture is not to be interpreted allegorically. Alas, we must put that belief away if we are to follow what the apostle teaches.

Labored in vain

Gal 4:1-11 NASB 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. (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.

The question: why is the Law no longer applicable?

It's a question the early church had to face. It is the clear contention of Christianity that Christ's coming was prophesied throughout the Old Testament; indeed, that the point of the Old Testament was to look forward to the Messiah. He has arrived; but why does that set the Mosaic Law aside?

Paul's answer is to draw a parallel to a child with an inheritance. As a young child, he is just as much subject to the orders of the trustees and guardians appointed over him as a slave (common in that time) would be. Only when the appointed time came could he break free of this. Indeed, we would expect the guardians to so train the child that he would use his freedom wisely. All depends upon the time appointed.

So it is with the Law. The time appointed has come; the guardianship is over. That does not mean that the Law is useless; it's still a good example. We may extract from it the wisdom intended, and use it in the freedom given in Christ.

The benefits of Christ

Indeed, like our heir in this, it is to our benefit to leave the tutelage of the Law. Paul points out three benefits that the Law could never deliver:

¹¹ This is largely related to the literal (6 day, 6,000 year old universe) interpretation of Genesis. If there are no allegories in Scripture, then Genesis 3 can't be an allegory. Which it obviously is. This does not prevent it from being literally true as well.

- ♣ Deliverance. We are delivered from the Law and also the curse on man which caused that Law to be given to the Israelites.
- **♣** Son-ship. Our relationship to God has changed; He is still the awesome God; he is also our Father.
- Heirs of the kingdom. This is no poverty stricken son-ship; no, all the joys of the kingdom of God are ours, both now and at His return.

What about the Gentiles?

The example seems to break down if we're not talking about the Jews. They never had the law of Moses in the first place. But is it really that different?

- They were enslaved in an even worse position; they were slaves to "gods" who were not gods at all. Indeed, Paul assures us that these "gods" are in fact demons.
- Such "gods" had their own equivalent law, often bizarre. If it's good to be released from the Law of Moses, how much more so the law of demons?
- ♣ Worse if it is evil to go back to the Law of Moses, how much more evil is it to go back to the worship of demons?

Paul sees the storm coming in the Galatian church; but the ship is not yet wrecked. He now makes his personal plea.

Personal Plea

Gal 4:12-20 NASB 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. (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.

The example of Paul

Paul makes an emotional argument to remind the Galatians where they have been, spiritually. He begins with himself as example:

- ♣ He started as one who persecuted the church which, as we will see later, is the fate of those who are spiritual.
- He was a thorough legalist.
- Most important of all to the Galatians, when Paul arrived there to preach the Gospel, he was a sick man. 12

So how did the Galatians deal with this man?

 $^{^{12}}$ From this context some have concluded that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was a cataract problem, effectively rendering him blind.

Reaction of the Galatians

Paul recalls to them their reaction. They did not scorn him; far from it. The bearer of the Good News was treated quite differently:

- First, he was received despite his medical problems; indeed, his difficulty only leant credibility to his words.
- Second, the message was so precious to them that they sympathized with his ailments to the point of organ transplants, if that were possible.

The result of this? Not bitterness, but a sense of blessing. The Galatians knew they were on the receiving end of things.

There is a parallel today to which I would call your attention. In a recent sermon on tithing, our preacher compared the reaction he gets from those who are sure they cannot tithe, and those who do tithe. The former, when asked about it, plead how tight the money is in their household; there is nothing they could give up that would produce a tithe. The latter, when asked, hem and haw a bit and begin their explanation with, "Well, God has blessed us so much..." The one who gives more, is blessed more. God works that way, you know?

Paul's worries

Paul now expounds his concerns for his children in Galatia:

First, he is concerned that they will remain "in the truth." He fears that they will be suckered into going backwards. It is instructive to see how this is done, as the method is still used today.

The method is simple: you create an "exclusive" club – and demand an entrance price. The price is the abandonment of grace and the embrace of salvation by works. Make this as attractive as possible, and it will seem a good thing to join this club – no matter how much work.

Now, it is a good thing to have people want you to be with them. But it can be twisted, as in this instance. Satan still cannot create, only twist.

Second, Paul longs to be with them. He knows that if he were, his tone of voice would be different – and hopes that this letter has the same effect.

Finally, he is anxious that "Christ is formed" in them. The Greek word (related to our verb morph) implies that the ingredients are there, but the pie is not assembled and baked. In short, he wants them to shun this temptation and continue to grow in the Spirit..

Allegory

Gal 4:21-31 NASB 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. (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.

A Pedagogical Diversion

The ancient church held that there were four ways to interpret the Scripture ¹³:

- First, there is the literal interpretation. Hagar was a real person, this is what happened.
- Second, there is the allegoric interpretation: using the literal as symbols for the more general. In this instance, Hagar represents the physical Law, the old way of external observances. We conclude that we are to believe that the spiritual way is the right way.
- ♣ Third, there is the moral interpretation: just what is it that I am supposed to be doing because of this? In this instance, I would avoid going back to the ceremonial law, as I have the spirit of One who is greater than the Law.
- ♣ There is also a mystic interpretation, which asks the question: what should I hope for, because of this passage? Should I not hope for the new Jerusalem, the Jerusalem above?

There is an easy way to remember these last three: faith, hope and love. For the allegory, what should I believe? For the mystic, what should I hope for? For the moral, what should I do, doing all things in love?

Two ways

The comparison here is still one which is valid today. There is the way of the flesh and the way of the spirit. The way of the flesh, represented by Hagar and her son, says that (in this instance) circumcision is required – going back to the old Law. This method usually emphasizes the physical: what regulations must I follow, what should I do with my body – in short, focus on things which are physically visible.

The way of the spirit, represented by Sarah and her miraculous offspring, also uses a ceremony for entrance (baptism) – a ceremony with explicit allegorical meanings. The spiritual emphasizes the heart, encouraging love, but the focus is on the things invisible.

Choice

The choice often looks like this. On the one hand, there is a hard set of rules to follow – but if followed completely, there is the reward of being one who is in the inner circle. Acceptance at last! The spiritual looks much easier – but starts with the admission that no amount of holy labor will save.

I would bring to your minds three final points:

¹³ The method is still in use. Protestants generally deny that <u>every</u> passage can be interpreted this way, which was the belief of the early church fathers.

- The choice must be made. You cannot sit on the fence; either the rules are right or the Spirit is. You cannot do both; to try is to fail at both.
- The physical inevitably persecutes the spiritual. There is no more diligent foe of the faith than the man who follows all the rules and has all the answers. Paul knew that from personal experience.
- Count the cost: if you turn back from grace to a set of rules you can follow, what will the Lord of grace do about that?

Real Freedom - Galatians 5

Many Christians underestimate the impact that Adam and Eve have on our understanding of the Bible. Their behavior teaches the Christian that there is a third answer to the question: "Just what is the nature of man?"

Man is good

A Christian can tell you right away that this is not the case. If it were, there would be no need for repentance. But that's not the way some in the world see it. For example, the great myth of the "Noble Savage" quickly unravels. Thoreau, Gauguin and others have given us the picture that the noble savage, unspoiled by the horrors of western civilization (like Jesus), is in his native state one whose character is marked by a pure, unshackled goodness. Gauguin in particular moved to Tahiti to live among such people. He returned to France a few years later, after discovering that Tahitians share all the vices that civilized man cherishes. Original innocence, isn't.

The idea is not new; one of the continuing efforts of Christendom is the monastic movement, or its cool counterpart, the commune. Simply, you enter into this heaven on earth by voluntarily committing to obey the rules. The failure comes when you need to kick someone out of the commune. Where can they go? Back to those naturally good people you're trying to avoid by living in the commune?

The usual answer is, "Come the revolution..." All we need to do is overthrow the government, take over and then peace and freedom will blossom. Of course, in taking over, you become the government, which...

Man is evil

If the noble savage has no need to repent, this view will tell you that repentance is of no use. People are going to fail again. Indeed, "There but for the grace of God go I" fits nicely here. This view holds that you are the product of your heredity and environment completely. Therefore a strong hand is needed.

Heaven on earth can be achieved in this view. The "right" people take power and rule with an iron fist. Strict discipline and swift enforcement are the tools needed for the job.

The method has seen several implementations. Religions which base themselves on works (Mormonism, for example) use this method. One might also recall the Knights of Malta and other military orders of monks; indeed, much of the autocracy of old was based upon this thought.

One serious problem of this view is this: Who watches over and corrects the faults of those holding the bull whip?

Man is fallen

This view holds that God created us as very good – but our sinful nature has degraded us. In this view, repentance is not only useful – it's essential. Failure is always with us, but we know that we are not designed to fail.

Heaven on earth? There is no such thing, but for our comfort and assistance we have the church. We are accountable to each other.

As we shall see, this view of human nature gives us a point of view regarding our freedom.

Nature of Freedom

Gal 5:1-15 NASB 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. (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.

Freedom in Christ

Paul makes three main points concerning freedom in Christ:

- This freedom is obtained through Christ the gift of God, not the gift of revolution.
- This freedom will be assaulted from many directions. It is contrary to the way of the world. Therefore we are to stand firm in that freedom.
- It can be lost. You can fall from grace; the way mentioned here is by going back to the Jewish law. But there just might be other ways, as well.

The inner nature of freedom

Freedom proceeds from within. How often have you seen someone who is a prisoner of their past? Someone who is "locked up" by the behavior of their parents, perhaps? You can chant freedom to such a person over and again – but until freedom grows within, they are still prisoner. To them, the bonds of time are real; all they can see ahead is more bondage.

For the Christian, freedom is "faith working through love." Take this step by step:

- To begin, there must be faith. Our past holds us captive when we feel that we cannot change the future. But faith steps in and tells us that God has the future in His hand.
- It must be a "working" faith. We see no change if we do no work. If you won't commit to God, will you see faith at work?
- Lt is done "through love." We cannot continue to work through agony and hatred. The free man works this way; the slave cannot.

You are free if...

Pardon the repetition, but the point bears it.

Suppose you capture an eagle, and tie it up with ropes. It is certainly not free, and if you were asked why you would simply point to the ropes. The ropes cause this lack of freedom. Now suppose that you take the eagle into a submarine, untie the ropes, stuff it into a torpedo tube and fire it out into the sea. Is the eagle free? Not really.

So we might conclude as follows:

- Just because you remove that which caused the loss of freedom does not mean you are free.
- We need thus to recognize the difference between "free" and "unrestrained."

Suppose you inherit a large sum of money. You never need to work again; and you decide to give your desires free reign over your life. You will behave however your desires flow. Don't you see that you are not free? Your desires are running you. "I can do anything I want" is thus not a declaration of freedom but of slavery.

Permit me, therefore, a change of definition. Freedom means that you have the unrestricted ability to do what God intended you to do. Eagles must fly; that's what God designed them to do. They are free if they are flying. So if we are to know freedom, we must know what God intended for us. Paul now gives us a list.

The Lists

Gal 5:16-26 NASB 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. (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.

By their fruits you will know them; here are the outward lists which tell us of the inward man.

Deeds of the flesh

Can we be brief here? Look at this list and see how many things are still with us today, even inside the church. Take a look at these:

- # Immorality The word is the one from which we get our word "pornography." Also known as freedom of speech, or "I just read it for the articles."
- Impurity actually, unwillingness to cleanse oneself. It is the negative of the word from which we get our word, "catharsis."
- Sensuality the rule of bodily desires.
- ♣ Idolatry the worship of something other than God. Modern candidates are money, science, influence and health clubs. Sometimes this includes hobbies as well.
- ♣ Sorcery the word from which we get "pharmacy." It seems that doing drugs is not as recent as we thought.
- Factions the root word from which we get "heresy." Who could commend the constant division of the church to satisfy someone's ego?

Fruit of the Spirit

It's a familiar list – and therefore all the more useful.

- **Love** is <u>agape</u> in the Greek. This is the commanded, willed love. It is the act not of passion but of determination. This is not spur of the moment but planned love.
- **Joy** is <u>chara</u> from which we get our word "charismatic." Barclay puts it this way: "it is the joy whose foundation is God."
- ▶ Peace (eirene) is that tranquility of the heart that comes from knowing God. The Greeks used this word to mean the serenity which came from a well governed society. By extension, it is our peace that comes from knowing that God rules our lives.
- ♣ Patience (makrothumia) means more than just resignation to the facts. It might even better be translated "persistent waiting." For that is what it really means; the ability to wait upon God's time, not idly but also not fretting.
- **Kindness** (chrestotes) can also be translated "goodness;" when used of wine, it means "mellow." This is the word that is used of Christ's yoke. The basic idea is that of a goodness which is kind.
- **♣ Goodness** (agathosune) is a rare word in Greek; it can be defined as "virtue equipped at every point." Goodness will clean the Temple; kindness will forgive the woman taken in adultery.
- Fidelity (pistis) means simply trustworthiness. Is your word your bond? Does the Spirit convict you of promises made?
- Gentleness (praotes) is, by Dr. Barclay, almost untranslatable! It is used in three senses:
 - submissive to the will of God (see Matthew 5:5, 11:29, 21:5)
 - ♦ being teachable not to proud to learn (James 1:21)
 - being considerate (I Cor. 4:21, II Cor. 10:1, Ephesians 4:2)
- ♣ Self-control (egkrateia) meaning self mastery. It is used of the disciplined athlete; it is used specifically in mastery of sexual desire by Christians (I Cor. 7:9). One major use in political writings of the time is the idea of an Emperor who never lets his private interests influence the government of his people.

Live in the Spirit

It may seem foolish to conclude by recommending the obvious, but may I point out three advantages of this lifestyle?

- Christ promised that His yoke is light.¹⁴ It is the lightness of being forgiven, and the joy of working alongside Him.
- ♣ You were designed to love God and enjoy Him forever and you are never more free than when you are doing that.
- ♣ This life starts on the inside where real change is made.

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¹⁴ Matthew 11:28-30

Final Warnings - Galatians 6

If you've ever sent your son or daughter off to college (or the military) you know that your farewell words consist of a series of proverbs and warnings intended to convey your love. Paul has a similar set here.

Bear each other's burdens

Gal 6:1-6 NASB 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*.

Spiritual restoration

We must always remember that our attitude towards another Christian's sin is that of restoration. In the original, the word translated "caught" is also translated as "overtaken." It's the picture of someone who couldn't run fast enough to get away from sin, so it caught him from behind. Ever had that feeling?

Here's one of the great beauties of the church. Those who are spiritual Christians are to restore such a sinner. It's as if no judgment is needed; we all know it's sin. Nor do we need condemnation, for we know it is wrong. We need help in getting rid of the sin.

And those who do the restoring are cautioned:

- They are to do so in meekness (often translated gentleness), not with arrogance or condescension.
- While they are doing it, they are to looking out for temptation themselves.

Doctors conduct surgery with rubber gloves as a barrier against infection. So the spiritual are to be careful of temptation.

We are told to bear one another's burdens (verse 2). There's a good reason for this; you might be well able to assist me in my imperfections. Alone, each of us will be overpowered with those temptations to which we are most susceptible. But where I am weak you may be strong – and together we may triumph in Christ's name.

Bear your own load

In another sense, however, we are to bear our own load. Paul seems to contradict himself here. But the distinction is clear when you start at verse 3. It is the arrogant Paul warns. How, then, does one avoid this arrogance? The essence of the matter is honesty:

- First, we are to examine ourselves. Are we really as good as we think we are? (A particular burden to those who are praised for their efforts).
- Interestingly, we are then to take credit for what is genuinely our accomplishment. Humility is not a low opinion of yourself; it's an honest opinion.

Such self-examination and honesty also convicts us of the spiritual tasks given to us.

Teacher and student

Paul now makes a short statement about students and teachers. To understand this remark, we need to examine the culture and technology of the day:

- Books were hand copied and therefore expensive. A man who sought to be a teacher could therefore expect to be handed a financial burden.
- ♣ Our modern series of concordances, topical Bibles, etc. did not exist. Consider that Nave's Topical Bible, a standard work of scholarship, took fourteen years to create and was not truly attempted before the late 19th century. In those days, your memory was everything.
- In addition, writing out a lesson was a tedious, hand writing process. The keyboard is mightier than the crayon.

So it is no surprise, then, that the Scripture makes it clear that those who preach the Gospel are to be supported by the church. Here, the point is extended somewhat to say "all good things." The support of a teacher evidently is a bit more complicated than that of the full time preacher. But it is the joy of the teacher to share "all good things." (Have you seen my granddaughter's pictures?)

Expectations and Results

Gal 6:7-10 NASB 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.

Reap what you sow

Actions have consequences. Even when you think that "it wouldn't harm anyone," the consequences are still there – and all the more so if we try to wish them away. One such set of consequences is for the teacher – his students' definition of "good things" depends very much on his teaching. If your teaching is pointed at the things of this world, that's what you get. For what it's worth.

But if your teaching is aimed at things of the Spirit – you get (both for you and your students) the reward of eternal life. Which is why teachers know first and foremost to teach Christ, and Him crucified.

The effects of time

So why is it that we're not simply awash in good things? Paul tells you – don't lose heart, it comes in God's own good time. It's a point of character that you have patience to wait for the Lord.

Sometimes that wait might be until you reach heaven's shores. Consider, for a moment, the ancient practice of almsgiving. In Paul's world there were beggars at every intersection, pleading for money. The early church considered it a privilege to be able to help such a man, knowing full well this laid up treasure in heaven. Our shorter patience wants results a lot more quickly than that.

Almsgiving? Consider it as an opportunity to do Christ's will. Ask yourself:

"Do I have the money now? Why, then, would I not give it?"

"Do I see the need now? Why, then, would I not meet it?"

Your gift is not so much to the beggar as to your Lord. Let Him worry about the frauds; take care of the treasure in heaven.

A side note: it is clear in the Scriptures that the first claim on such giving is within your family; then those in the church, and finally those in the world.

Life in the flesh

Gal 6:11-18 NASB See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. (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.

Sometimes our giving is not money, nor even time – but suffering. Paul, many scholars believe, suffered from cataracts, a condition which had no cure in his day. His readers knew this, so when they saw that he had written part (or all, we're not sure) of this letter himself, they undoubtedly sympathized.

Boasting in the flesh

Some of us, however, suffer far too eloquently.

- "Look how many people are doing it my way, despite the pain and suffering it causes. There's your motivation; I'm leading the way even in the prospect of pain.
- ♣ This, of course, inflates the ego wonderfully. Worse, it inflates the egos of both the teacher and the student so everybody "wins."
- Worse, this carries no positive effect. It is all for nothing.

In the Cross of Christ I glory

When Paul says that, we know that this is the subject in which he's an A student. He expresses it to us in comparing the old creation to the new creation in Christ.

- ♣ The old creation with its laws and emphasis on outer things is now useless since the new creation has begun.
- How did this come about? At the Cross.

So then we are to live in the new creation – and if we do, the result is that we experience peace and mercy. There is a pang of compassion in that statement; despite the flap over circumcision he still wants this peace and mercy for the nation of Israel. They are his brothers; he cares for his family, so to speak.

Purple Heart

Paul has suffered bodily for the cause of Christ – and on many occasions. We award soldiers a Purple Heart if they are wounded in combat; Paul's scars are his medal of suffering. They are a powerful sight.

An old story – I cannot find confirmation that it is true – concerns a missionary jailed and beaten for crime of preaching Christ. While in prison his body received many visible scars. At the end of his sentence, the ruler asked him what he was going to do now. He replied by asking permission to go back to the villages he was preaching in. The ruler absolutely refused: "My people are not such fools as to believe your stories, but they will be convinced by your scars."

In all things, grace. Even in conflict inside the church, let grace abound.