

Galatians - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Miscellaneous Papers, Fair Show in the Flesh, A (6:12)

"The truth," or the doctrine of the Son, as the Lord Himself teaches us (John 8:32-36), sets free all those who receive it. It is the "law of liberty" (James 1-2); it is "mercy rejoicing over judgment"; for judgment has been duly and fully marked against us as guilty, but through the blood of sprinkling mercy is secured, and by the gospel that mercy is published; so that the truth—the doctrine of the Son, the gospel, or the law of liberty, which are all titles of the same revelation of God—sets the sinner free. In this precious liberty is included freedom from sin, from the law, and from the flesh. This is the excellent and wondrous teaching of Rom. 6- 8. Sin had been a master. But the believer in Jesus is dead in Jesus; and death being the end or wages of sin, sin is gone. "He that is dead is freed (justified) from sin." Sin has no claim on him. He is no longer to be its servant; for by death the entire connection between him and sin is dissolved. So is the believer freed from the law; for the law addresses itself only to living man. It is the husband only of such, by its energies working on the flesh. But the believer being not a living, but a dead and risen, man—a man in union with a dead and risen Christ—the law is of necessity discharged as an old husband, and the believer is acted upon by the virtues of the risen Christ, the new husband.□ So also is the believer out of the flesh. The flesh is the living man, man in his nature, as derived from corrupted Adam. But the believer is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, and the Spirit of God dwells in him (Rom. 8). He is in the new man, in the second Adam; he is in Christ, and being one with Him, he is spirit—for he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).

These are the three blessed characteristics of the believer's liberty, as we are taught in these three glorious chapters. This is the standing of the "man in Christ." The truth has made him free, the Son has made him free; and this has been accomplished by taking him out of himself, and planting him, through faith, in the dead and risen Christ of God. Sin has no claim to his service, as a lord; the law has no power over him, as a husband; nor is the flesh the condition in which he is.

But this doctrine, which is Christianity, does not suit the legal, fleshly mind of man. Above all the difficulty which Paul had to meet in his care of the churches, that which arose from our disposedness to return to the law, or to "confidence in the flesh," was the most frequent and the greatest.

In Galatia he found this abundantly. The church there had been eminent for attachment to him, because of the gospel which was preached. They had received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus, and would have plucked out their eyes for him. They had been in a particularly blessed state of soul; they had begun in the "Spirit," in the doctrine of faith; and this devotedness of heart to the apostle who had brought them that doctrine, was the fruit of it. But they had been "bewitched." They had been drawn back from their place in Christ, and were in bondage again. Instead of being dead to the old husband, they had re-embraced him, and were deriving influence out of him once more. Not that they had formally renounced Christ, as Jews or Pagans. They still professed Christ, but together with Him, they were insisting on, and trusting in, "days, and months, and times, and years." They were teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. They were reenacting ordinances; they were turning again to beggarly elements. A life of simple faith in the Son of God, as the one who had loved them and given Himself for them, was defiled; and they were living to the law, putting themselves under observances, as under so many tutors and governors. They were servants and not sons—in bondage, and not in liberty; they had gone back to the school-master, which they could not do without leaving the Father's house.

All this must have been connected with an increasing show of religion among them. This necessarily was the case; for "days and months" were so increasingly observed, the bonds of the law and of carnal ordinances were so multiplied, that to an eye not instructed by the Spirit, they must have had a great "name to live." But Paul speaks of all this as "leaven," threatening to corrupt the whole mass. In his view it was the symptom of death, and not of life. "A fair show" it was; but it was a fair show "in the flesh." Thus, under his eye, it was the garnishing of a sepulcher, and his energy is employed in re-quickenning them. He travails in birth again with them, if haply they might be raised out of this sepulcher, or place of death, and brought forth, as Isaac from Sarah's dead womb, by the precious ministry of the truth—that is, the doctrine of the Son taught by the Spirit.

This epistle is a word of solemn admonition. It shows us that the most promising may be beguiled, so that all have to watch. We may have the blessed assurance of our holy keeping; but we none of us keep the book of life. Therefore we can only say of one another, "if ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled." And this epistle shows that we may be disappointed even in the most promising—in a Galatian-disciple; but it also shows us that the Spirit of God is alive, most sensitively alive, to the least infraction of the truth, or "the law of liberty." He speaks of it as He speaks of some of the foulest moral stains that could defile the garments of the saints: both are the leaven that leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

But it is to be observed still further, as to the nature of this leaven that was working in Galatia, that it was not the revival of a hope, under what is termed the moral law of the ten commandments, as though by strict moral obedience, a righteousness could be produced. This was not the gross thought of the disciples there; but they were returning to observances and ordinances. It was a more refined and religious confidence in the flesh, but still it was confidence in the flesh. They had begun in the Spirit, with Christ's sufficiency; but now they were looking for perfection from and in the flesh. It was a departure from the liberty in which Christ, by His death and resurrection, had put them; and the apostle clearly treats them as a people whose condition made him to stand in doubt of them, and to feel towards them as though he must begin his toil among them afresh, and travail in birth again till Christ be formed in them, till all fleshly confidence should depart from their hearts, and Christ and His liberty—Christ and the virtue of His death and resurrection, Christ and His completeness for the poor sinner—be welcomed and received there alone.

All at Galatia was as death while the flesh, and its observances, and its righteousness, were thus confided in. A sepulcher it was, garnished by much religious drapery; but the apostle was not to be deceived by such fair show; he lays it bare; he takes off the trappings to exhibit the corruption that was under them: for it was the flesh that was under them, and the flesh is a dead thing. They might ornament the flesh, but it is all uncleanness; and deck it out as we may, it is the flesh still, in which there dwelleth "no good thing." The days, the months, and times, and years, religiously enforced as they were, and fitted to give their votaries a name to live with those who judge after the flesh, were but a painted sepulcher to the eye of Paul.

Indeed God is not truly known where such things are trusted. If the living, blessed God be really before the soul, He is known as one who quickens the dead; but confidence in the flesh, such as existed among the Galatians, gives up God. Thus the apostle has to say, "howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service to them which by nature are no gods; but now after that ye have known God (or rather are known of God), how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, wherein ye desire again to be in bondage?" For, indeed, as we may infer from what he says in Galatians 2:19, the only way to be alive to God is to be dead to the law. Truly blessed this is. As long as the soul is alive to the law—as long as it derives the motions and sanctions which influence it from the law, it is dead to God. For self is its end and object: to take care of one's self, of one's own interest and safety is its purpose. God is not lived for; His glory and service are not the aim of the soul; that cannot be because the law is set up, and the law puts us upon caring for ourselves—upon the anxious, uneasy, servile question of our own interest and safety. This is shown in the person of the unprofitable servant. He was under the law. All that he cared about was to come off well in the day of reckoning. He treated the Lord as an austere man who must be satisfied. He feared Him, not having learned that way of "perfect love" which is His, and which casts our fear; and thus he was alive to the law, but dead to God. Paul, however, stood in another mind "I," he says, "through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." But from this life the Galatians had now been "bewitched." They had begun it, but they were now deserting it, and no time was to be lost, if haply the apostle might now call them back to Christ, or to that "faith" which works by love, setting the heart and conscience at liberty before God, so that He may be loved. They had to be taught again that nothing availed but "a new creature" (Gal. 6); that before God the flesh is gone, sin judged, and the law taken out of the way; that the old master of Romans 6 is no longer in power, and that we are become dead to the old husband of Romans 7; but that by faith in a dead and risen Christ, we have escaped from these bonds and penalties, to find our liberty in the fullness of Christ.

But if the standing in the "righteousness by faith" be given up, and "confidence in the flesh" be adopted, then there is both a fall from grace, and debtorship to do the whole law (Gal. 5:1-5). Christ will not share the confidence of our souls with the law. He is a jealous husband, even as God is a jealous God. And we may bless Him that He is; we may bless Him that He will have us as a chaste virgin, with mind kept uncorrupted in His simplicity. If we return to the law, whether ceremonial or moral, we are debtors to the whole of it. We are to glory in the cross of Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world (Gal. 6:14). We are not, by subjection to ordinances, to manifest that we are still living in the world (Col. 2:20). The cross has met everything for us. It has honored the rights and demands of God. It has answered and silenced the malice of the enemy. And in spirit we have been carried on high, in and with Jesus, beyond the voice of the law; for that spoke for God on earth and we are above the earth, in the heavens, with the ascended Christ (Eph. 2:6). This being so, we are called to leave the world, and all thoughts of sanctification in the flesh, remembering that it is with nothing else than with the "increase of God" that we are nourished (Col. 2:19). What words! But not too great; for our life is hid in God, and therefore partakes of its proper, divine nourishment. It is not we that live, but Christ that lives in us. All this truth was so precious to Paul, that the teaching of those who were reviving the law, or bondage to ordinances, was especially his sorrow; and as such had leavened the churches in Galatia more than any other, his most aggrieved letter is to them. It was the jealous care of the apostle to keep the doctrines of unsullied Christianity in full purity, and to spread the savor of them through the hearts of the elect. And this doctrine of Christ tells us that man is utterly worthless—that he has been touched again and again by the finger of God, and been found to be an instrument entirely out of tune, having no music for Him at all. Man is, accordingly, in the boundlessness of divine grace, laid aside, and Christ is taken up, risen from the dead, as the head of a new creation. Believers are God's workmanship in Christ Jesus. Christ is formed in them. They are born of God, and His seed remains in them—that incorruptible seed of the word of the gospel. They are a new creation, of which Christ is both the head and the character. He is in them, and they are in Him. It is not they who live, but Christ liveth in them. They are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, as has been before said, but to write again these precious truths is safe and pleasant. The believer is in Christ, and not in himself, and thus he has done with condemnation as much as Christ has. Christ was once condemned; He died unto sin once; but now He dieth no more, death has no more dominion over Him. And so with the believer who is in Him: "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

All this is for the effectual relief of the conscience, to give it perfect rest. But in the doctrine of Christ there is much more. It may be expressed thus, in mind, body, and ESTATE, believers are one with Jesus. How divine the love that could take such a counsel! The poor soul that believes is one with Christ in spirit now, and is to be one with Him in body and in inheritance by and bye. He that is joined to the Lord is already "one spirit" with Him; and the present vile body is to be hereafter changed into the likeness of "His glorious body"; and further still, we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ"; for in Him and with Him we have obtained an inheritance. Thus are believers "conformed to the image of the Son." In mind, body, and estate they are one with Him Great features of the precious mystery of Christ these are; and, shall I say, still more marvelous is it, that the same love which rests on the Son rests on them (John 17:23).

Thoughts quite beyond any but the mind of the Spirit open to us in all this. But while tracing the mystic oneness of Christ, we are to remember the teaching of Scripture, that Jesus is the Sanctifier, and believers but the sanctified (Heb. 2). And this shows that notwithstanding the existence of this oneness, yet the proper personal distance between Him and us originally was as great as light from darkness, as heaven from hell, as God Himself from sin. And we are also to remember that by His blood alone are we called into this condition. The blood is our only title, though the things to which it entitles us are thus immeasurable. Now all this glorious mystery is soiled and clouded by those who taught circumcision or the law of commandments contained in ordinances. No wonder, then, that our apostle so withstood them; for such doctrine revives the flesh—revives man in himself; and that is destructive of the first element in pure, unmixed Christianity. It builds again that which has been destroyed; it rakes among old ruins; it seeks the living among the dead; it busies itself in clothing a carcass; it is not in any wise a fellow-laborer with the Spirit, for it is dealing with man and not with Christ; it is of the world; for the apostle, in the strong language already conferred to in Colossians 2:20, challenges subjection to ordinances as a living in the world, and as unsuited to one that is dead and risen with Christ.

No wonder, then, that the apostle sets himself so zealously to the service of teaching the saints the great mystery, so bright and full as it is of the glory of God; and also to the service of gainsaying the leaven of the "teachers of the law," so destructive is it of glory. If he prized the

grace of God in its purity and fullness, if he prized the liberty of the souls of the saints, if he valued the blood and work of Jesus, he must set himself to these services; he must withstand the pretensions of the flesh, wherever he met them, and spread among the saints the light and savor of this mystery of Christ. And so we find he did according to the working of God which wrought in him effectually. It was his jealousy lest that doctrine should be tainted; it was his delight and desire that that doctrine should be known. For the flesh, with all that it had, and all it could glory in, whether its wisdom, strength, or religion, he had left to perish in its own corruption.

And in closing, let us ask, what will commonly be found in this enacting of days, and months, and times, and years—in this reviving of ordinances, and of the rudiments of the world? In those who impose them, there has been of old the design of fastening their own bonds round the hearts of their votaries; in those who adopt them, there is generally the blindness of the mere natural mind: but at times these things are the fruit of growing worldliness in professors. This “doing, doing,” in religious observances is the miserable substitute for the walk of faith and communion with God in the Spirit. The world that crucified Jesus is not heartily renounced, nor is Jesus Himself heartily embraced. The sweet savor of His name is departing, the freshness of His presence is fading, and the conscience, unsettled by this, seeks relief in the increased religiousness of the fleshly mind. The dark, cold heart, as it recedes from Christ, loses the vigorous, happy, genial sense, and puts on ornaments to hide from itself the growing feebleness of old age. It is well if they do not prove the very funeral trappings of a dead body. The heart knows its own wretched ways and deceits too well not to be able to speak of these things. Would that we were more simple concerning such evil. But Christ in His sufficiency is only the more prized and the more clung to as either one’s soul is tempted this way, or as one’s eye and ear understand that this way is growing in a generation of large and corrupted profession.

Bible Treasury: Volume 19, Walk in the Spirit (5:16)

“Out of the eater came forth sweetness” has been the test of divine providence exemplified in all ages of the world. Sin, with all its misery, brought Jesus. In the church at Corinth the misery of the flesh disclosed many a secret. If the eater had not gone to Corinth, a stronger than he had not gone after him, nor out of the eater such sweetness come forth to us; nor in the Colossians such fullness of the Lord Jesus.

But the Galatians eminently show forth how the eater had gone in and given occasion for a blessed expression of the Sufficiency of the Lord Jesus, and the blessedness of a simple-hearted acquaintance with the Son of God. Oh! what a blessed profession it is when we profess the Son of God and none but the Son. No epistle is more fervent taking its character of fervency from a fresh delight in Jesus, a fervency well accounted for by the thought of Jesus defending (not merely fervency in defense of impugned truth, but) the fervency of a soul given to taste afresh the virtues and divine perfection of the Son. And what would you covet but this in these days when the world is on every side challenging the rights of the Son, bringing in man’s religion, edifices, and ceremonies, and ordinances? The strong man enters in to challenge the claims of the Son of man; and shall we see it and be without the fervency of Paul?

Let us turn to the first chapter where we find the first virtue of the Son revealed to his soul, making him entirely independent of flesh and blood; let us read verses 15 and 16. Having got the Son, Paul had got all, Jerusalem was nothing, even apostles were nothing; standing as a sinner brought entirely home, he wanted nothing besides. How fine is this fervency thrown in the face of Galatian error! The moment the Son was revealed, he conferred not with flesh, and blood. Those rights of the Son, so divine, so supreme, only let them be understood; and I ask your convicted conscience whether they are not claims so exclusive, that nothing else can be thought of. We cannot see Jerusalem, in one sense, cannot see even brethren, cannot confer with flesh and blood: can we each of us throw ourselves open to be read? Mark how Paul did. The moment the Son was revealed he went not to Jerusalem, nor to the apostles but into Arabia, independent of all belonging to flesh and blood, With what emphasis he reads out the first virtue of the Son in that divine independency of everything short of Himself! And ought not each of us to go about showing to the world and all about us this precious independency of all but the One revealed to our souls? Imputed righteousness is as much ours as it was Abraham’s; Paul had not a richer profession than mine. O let this divine independency be read in us by all! The claims the Son had on Paul’s conscience instantly made him independent of everything. If Jerusalem, the apostles, brethren, and all the claims of flesh and blood, be put together in the balance of a conscience: put the Son in one scale, with all this in the other and would it not be as the fine dust in the balance?

In the second chapter we have not only independent Paul, but bold Paul. Peter had been the companion of the Lord Jesus, when Paul was the enemy of Jesus Christ; and if anyone could have intimidated Paul, this Peter must have been able to do so. But the man in Arabia was not to be intimidated by flesh and blood. O for more of Paul’s boldness to show we have been on the road to Arabia with the Lord! Do we ever make in private an essay of what we have in Jesus? Are there any to whom we give place? Read vers. 4, 5: there Paul’s soul was making an essay of all he had in Jesus; and beautiful is his independence of flesh and blood. And yet this is the man who could have his heart broken by other’s tears, who could ask for the prayers of saints as one feeling need of help!

But now it is another style altogether. Had he then ceased to be feeling and gentle? Not a bit! but the claims of the Son are abroad, he cannot withstand them; and when he meets Peter it is with the boldness of a lion. If flesh and blood could make him tremble, it was in Peter. Did he tremble? No but withstood him to the face, and yet Peter was serving Christ. But Paul had that in him that could not suffer for a moment the dissimulation of the flesh in Peter. And this is the spirit we want in this day when the claims of the Son are so challenged by the Galatian spirit on many a side. Paul teaches us how to have this boldness, and he does not merely teach, but shows it is our property as well as his. If the Son has been revealed in me, I want nothing but Himself: churches and ordinances can do nothing for me. If I have the Son, I have everything.

We see in Paul the fervency and the sensitiveness of love: he could not allow the claims of the Son to be touched or to be soiled for a moment. It was the revelation of God, and was deep in his soul; and that is what you want. Give the deeper parts of your soul to Jesus and will you be any other than independent? Get Jesus deep down into your soul, and you will have Paul’s spirit to whom God had given the Son, and He was deep in his soul. I want Christ to be so revealed as to make me independent of all flesh and blood, of everything but Himself Who puts each one and thing in its due place.

In the third chapter, having traced Christ revealed in the independent man of Arabia, the bold man of Antioch, we shall now find him as a son in the Father's house in the presence of God.

Read chapter 4. Observe he would have you there with himself in the same liberty. "I beseech you be ye as I am" is the happy freedom of a son in the Father's presence, (the spirit of Isaac, laughter, not Hagar gendering to bondage). He will not have a bit of bondage, he has the Spirit of the Son in his heart. And O what manner of people has the Spirit of God made us! how entirely setting us free from the claims of flesh and blood, and nothing less than a Father's house! is there anything beyond that wanted to set you free? Happy, if happy, because brought into relationship with the Father; and nothing can make you happy but that; nothing does for the heart personally but the sense of relationship; and this is what He has brought me into, calling me to His kingdom, and giving me a home there. If you look round in the sense of relationship, cannot you feel you have a home on high? You are not only a son, but an heir, of God through Christ. The excellency of the gift I will never challenge, nor let others. I want all that the Son is to me deep down in my soul, but oh! let me have the simple childlike mind that knows I have a home up there. The son of the bondwoman has no more right to be in the Father's house than Peter with his subtleties had to bring the children of the free woman into bondage. Is not this Epistle as a whip of small cords to drive out all such things from amongst the children of promise? To know the presence of God as a sanctuary and home for my soul, this is what I want. J. G. B.

Brief Expositions and Spiritual Meditations, Faith of the Son of God, The (2:20)

There is a character of truth in the Epistle to the Galatians, very seasonable at this present time, and very strengthening to the soul at all times.

It teaches us to know that the religion of faith, is the religion of immediate personal confidence in Christ. A truth which is, again. I say, seasonable in a day like the present; when the provisions and claims of certain earthly church forms, and a system of ordinances, suggested by the religious, carnal mind, are abundant and fascinating. To learn, at all times, that our souls are to have their immediate business with Christ is comforting and assuring. To be told this afresh, at such a time as the present, is needful.

The apostle is very fervent in this epistle — naturally and properly so — as we all should be, as we all ought to be, when some justly prized possession is invaded; when some precious portion of truth, the dearest of all possessions, is tampered with.

In this epistle, in the first instance, as at the beginning, the apostle lets us know, with great force and plainness, that he had received his apostleship immediately from God; not only his commission or his office, but his instructions also; that which he had to minister and testify, as well as his appointment and ministry itself. He was an apostle immediately from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; and what he knew and taught he had by direct, immediate revelation.

And, in connection with this, he tells us that as God had thus dealt immediately with him, so had he, in answering confidence, dealt immediately with God. For, having received the revelation, having had the Son revealed in him, he at once withdrew from conversing with flesh and blood. He did not go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before him, but down to Arabia, carrying, as it were, his treasure with him; not seeking to improve it, but as one that was satisfied with it just as it was, that is, with the Christ who had now been given to him.

And, here, let me say, this brings to mind the Gospel by John, for that gives us, before this time of Paul, sample after sample of the soul finding its satisfaction in Christ. Every quickened one there illustrates it. Andrew, and Peter, and Philip, and Nathanael — in the first chapter, afterward the Samaritan and her companions at Sychar, and then the convicted adulteress and the excommunicated beggar — all of them tell us, in language which cannot be misunderstood, that they had found satisfaction in Christ, that having been alone with Him in their sins, they were now independent — having had a personal immediate dealing with Him as the Saviour, they looked not elsewhere. Arabia will do for them as well as Jerusalem, just as in the experience of the Paul of the Galatians. They never appear to converse with flesh and blood. Ordinances are in no measure their confidence. Their souls are proving that faith is that principle which puts sinners into immediate contact with Christ, and makes them independent of all that man can do for them.

How unspeakably blessed to see such a state of soul illustrated in any fellow-sinner, in men "of like passions with ourselves," like corruptions, like state of guilt and condemnation. Such things are surely written for our learning, that by comfort of such Scriptures we may have assurance and liberty.

And what is thus, in living samples, illustrated, for our comfort, in John's Gospel, is taught and pressed upon us in this fervent Epistle of Paul to the Galatians. Having shown the churches in Galatia the character of his apostleship, how he got both his commission and his instructions immediately from God, and was not debtor to flesh and blood, to Jerusalem, the city of solemnities, or to those who were apostles before him, for anything; and having discovered, as it were, his very spirit to them, telling them that the life he was now living was by the faith of the Son of God, he begins to challenge them; for they were not in this state of soul.

He calls them "foolish," and tells them they had been "bewitched." For how could he do less than detect the working of Satan in the fact, that they had been withdrawn from the place where the Spirit and the truth, the cross of Christ and faith, had once put them. But then he reasons with them, argues the matter, and calls forth his witnesses. He makes themselves their judges, appealing to their first estate. "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" He cites Abraham in proof that a sinner had immediate personal business with Christ, and through faith found justification. And he rehearses the character of the gospel which had been preached to Abraham, how it told of Christ and of the sinner and blessing being put together and alone. "In thee (Abraham's seed, which is Christ) shall all nations be blessed." Precious gospel! Christ and the sinner and blessing bound up together in one bundle.

And he goes on to confirm and establish this, by teaching them how Christ bore the curse, and, therefore, surely was entitled to dispense the blessing.

Surely these are witnesses which may well be received, as proving the divine character of the religion of faith, which is the sinner's immediate confidence in Christ.

But then, he does further and other service in this same cause. He goes on to tell us the glorious things faith works and accomplishes in us and for us. "After faith is come," he tells us in Galatians 3:25-27, "we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized unto Christ have put on Christ." Here are precious deeds of faith! It dismisses the schoolmaster; it brings the soul to God as to a father, and then it clothes the believer with the value of Christ in the eye and acceptance of God. And "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). And "we are redeemed from under the law" (Gal. 4:5). Can any more full and perfect sense of an immediate dealing between Christ and the soul be conceived, than is expressed and declared by such statements? We are brought from under the law — the schoolmaster, and, with him, tutors and governors are gone; we are children at home in the Father's house, and have the rights and the mind of the first-born Himself put on us, and imparted to us! Can any condition of soul more blessedly set forth our independence of the resources of a religion of ordinances, and the poor sinner's personal and immediate connection with Christ Himself?

But Paul finds the churches in Galatia in a backsliding state. They had turned again "to weak and beggarly elements." They were "observing days, and months, and times, and years." It was all but returning to their former idolatry, as he solemnly hints to them, "doing service to them which by nature are no gods," as they had been doing in the days of their heathen ignorance of the true God (Gal. 4:8). What a connection does he here put the Christianity that is merely formal and observant of imposed ordinances into? Is it not solemn? Was it not enough to alarm him? And does it not do so? "I am afraid of you," says he to the Galatians in this state, "lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain."

But, man of God as he was, gracious, patient, and toiling, according to the working of Him who was working in him mightily, he consents to labor afresh — yea, more painfully than ever — to travail in birth again of them. But all this was only to this end, that Christ might be formed in them; nothing less, or more, or other, than this. He longed for restoration of soul in them, and that was, that they and Christ might be put immediately together again; that faith might be revived in them — the simple hearty blessed religion of personal and direct confidence in God in Christ Jesus; that, as in himself, the Son might be revealed in them; that, regaining Christ in their souls, they might prove they needed nothing more.

How edifying it is to mark the path of such a spirit under the conduct of the Holy Spirit! How comforting to see the purpose of God, by such a ministry, with the souls of poor sinners! How it lets us learn what Christianity is in the judgment of God Himself! The going over to the observance of days and times, the returning to ordinances, is destructive of this religion; it is the world. "Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" as the same apostle says in another place. Confidence in ordinances is not faith in Christ. It is the religion of nature, of flesh and blood; it is of man, and not of God.

And surely it carries in its train the passions of man. Man's religion leaves man as it found him — rather, indeed, cherishes and cultivates man's corruptions. This showed itself in Ishmael in earliest days — nay, in Cain before him — but in Ishmael, as the apostle in this same epistle goes on to show. And he declares that it was then, in his day, the same; and generations of formal corrupt Christianity in the story of Christendom, the prisons of Italy some few years since, and the prisons of Spain still later, declare the same. "As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so is it now." Man's religion, again I say, does not cure him; he is left by it a prey to the subtleties and violence of his nature, the captive still of the old serpent, who has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

The decree, however, has been pronounced. It was delivered in the days of Isaac and Ishmael, of Abraham and Sarah; it is rehearsed and resealed by the Spirit Himself in the day of the Apostle Paul; and we are to receive it as established forever. It is this: "Cast out the bondwoman and her son" (Gal. 4:30).

What consolation to have this mighty question between God and man settled! And, according to this consolation, we listen to this further word: "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

All, surely, is of one and the same character. The Holy Ghost, by the apostle, is preparing the principle, the great leading commanding principle, of divine religion. It is faith; it is the sinner's personal and immediate confidence in Christ; it is the soul finding satisfaction in Him, and in that which He has done for it; and such a religion as this, the sinner in possession of this faith is set, as I may express it, next door to glory. The apostle quickly tells us this, after commanding us to stand fast in the liberty of the gospel, for he adds, "We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal. 5:5). This hope is the glory that is to be revealed — "the glory of God," as a kindred passage has it (Rom. 5:2). We do not wait for any improvement of our character, for any advance in our souls. Should we still live in the flesh, only fitting will it be to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." But such things are not needed in the way of title. Being Christ's by faith, we are next door to glory. "Whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. 8). Being in the kingdom of God's dear Son, we are "meet to be partakers, of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). As here, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, we wait only for glory; glory is the immediate object of our hope, as Christ is the immediate confidence, of our souls.

It is all magnificent in its simplicity, because it is all of God. No wonder that Scripture so abundantly discourses to us about faith, and so zealously warns us against religiousness. The "persuasion," as the apostle speaks, under which the Galatians had fallen, had not come of God who had called them; and the apostle sounds the alarm, blows the blast of war on the silver trumpet of the sanctuary, uttering these voices in their ears — "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"; again, "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:8-9,18).

And in the happy structure of this epistle, as I may also speak of it, the apostle ends with himself as he begins with himself. We have seen how he told them, at the first, of the peculiarities of his apostleship, how he had received both his commission and his instructions immediately from God, and how he had then, with a faith that was an answer to such grace, at once conducted himself in full personal confidence in Christ, and independently of all the resources of flesh and blood. And now, at the close, he tells them that, as for himself, he knew no glorying but in the cross of the Lord Jesus, by whom the world was crucified to him, and he to the world; and he tells them further, that no one need meddle with him or trouble him, neither fret him nor worry him, with their thoughts about circumcision and the law, or the

doings of a carnal religiousness, the rudiments of a world to which he was now crucified, for that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord. He belonged to Jesus by personal individual tokens, immediately impressed on him as by the appropriating hand of Christ Himself; and no one had any right to touch the Lord's treasure.

Precious secret of the grace of God! Precious simplicity in the faith of a heaven-taught sinner! It is not, beloved, knowledge of Scripture, or ability to talk of it, or even teach it, from Genesis to Revelation — it is not the orderly services of religion — it is not devout feelings — but, oh! it is that guileless action of the soul that attaches our very selves to Jesus, in the calm and certainty of a believing mind.

Paul's Apostleship and Epistles, Paul's Ministry (1:12)

I do indeed judge that it is very profitable to the saints that they discern rightly, that Paul's ministry was thus one stage in the Divine process of telling out the purposes of God. That he holds a distinguished place in the Church, the feeling of every saint will at once and without effort bear witness; for there is no name more kept in the recollections of the saints than that of our Apostle, save the name of Him Who in the hearts of His people has no fellow.

And his office being thus from heaven, he refuses to confer with flesh and blood—refuses to go up to Jerusalem to them that were Apostles before him. He was not to get himself sanctioned there or by them. Before this, the twelve at Jerusalem had all authority. But the Apostles at Jerusalem are nothing to Paul or his ministry. They had not cast the lot over him, nor are they now to send him forth; but it is the Holy Spirit Who says, "Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." And having thus received grace and Apostleship from the Lord, in the glory, and being now sent forth by the Holy Spirit, in full consistency with all this, he and Barnabas receive recommendation to the grace of God, from the unconsecrated hands of some unnamed brethren at Antioch. All this was a grievous breach upon that order that was to establish the earth in righteousness, beginning at Jerusalem.

Not only was Paul's Apostleship and mission thus independent of Jerusalem, and of the twelve; but the gospel which he preached (the nature of which we have before considered), he did not learn either there or from them. He received it not from man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. He goes up, most truly, from Antioch, with Barnabas, to Jerusalem, to confer with the Apostles about circumcision; but before he does so, he withstood some, though they had come from James, and rebuked Peter before them all. And these things were ordered in the provident wisdom of the Spirit; just as our Lord's rebukes of His mother; the Spirit of God, foreseeing the boasts in the flesh which would arise from both these sources, from Mary and from Peter; and thus has given the wayfaring man these tokens of his heavenward path. He circulates the decree upon the question of circumcision, for present peace. But when counseling the Gentile Churches afterward on one of the subjects which this decree determines, namely, eating meats offered to idols, he does so on the ground merely of brotherly love. He never refers to this decree (1 Cor. 8.) He was taught his gospel entirely by revelation (Gal. 1:12), for at his conversion it had been so promised to him (Acts 26:16). And accordingly it was from the Lord Himself that he received his knowledge of the death, burial, resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3), and his knowledge also of the last supper and its meaning (1 Cor. 11:23); though these things lay within the common acquaintance of those who had companied with the Lord, and he might have received them from them. But, no, he must be taught them all by revelation. The Lord appeared to him in those things of which he was to be a minister and witness. The Lord was jealous that Paul should not confer with flesh and blood—should not be a debtor to any but to Himself for his gospel. For as the dispensation was to allow of no confidence in the flesh, neither was Paul's Apostleship. All that might have been gain in the flesh, was to be counted loss. Confidence with those who had seen and heard, eaten and drunk with Jesus, might have been gain; but all this was set aside. Paul would thankfully be refreshed in spirit by the mutual faith of himself and the humblest disciple. Nay, he would have such acknowledged; all such in whose belly the Spirit had opened the river of God for the refreshing of the saints (Rom. 1:12; 1 Cor. 16:18). But he could accept no man's person. The previous pillars of the Church could not be used to support his ministry. The Jewish order was gone. Of old, Jehovah we know, had respect to that order. It was according to the number of the children of Israel, that at the first He divided the nations (Deut. 32:8). Afterward He distributed the land of Canaan according to this number also, that is, among the twelve tribes (Josh. 13-19). So David in his day, under the guiding of Jehovah, had respect to the same number, when he settled the ministries of the temple; and the officers of the palace at Jerusalem (1 Chron. 23-27). And in like manner, the Lord provided for the healing and teaching of Israel, appointed twelve Apostles, still having respect to the Jewish order. And this order of twelve Apostles was preserved, as we have seen, under the hand of Peter afterward; for he was the guardian of the Jewish order, and pastor of the Jewish Church. But Paul's Apostleship is at once an invasion upon all this. It has no respect whatever to Jewish, earthly, or fleshly order. It interferes with it. It is a writing under the hand of the Spirit of God for the revoking of that order. And this was, as was natural, a great trial to the Jewish Christians. They could not easily understand this undue Apostleship, and we find that he was considerate of them under this trial. And, indeed, those who stand with him in the assertion of the sovereignty of the Spirit, and in the rejection of all fleshly authority, should with him likewise be considerate of the difficulties which many now experience from the Jewish feelings and rules of judgment, in which they have been educated. But still, Paul was an Apostle, let them hear, or let them forbear.

And not only was it a trial to Jewish believers, but there were found evil men moved of Satan, who made their use of this state of things. We find it to have been so at Corinth. In Galatia it was not this. In his epistle to the Churches there, he does not speak of his Apostleship, because it had been slandered among them; but because it was the Divine sanction of that gospel which he had preached, and from which they had departed. But at Corinth his Apostleship had been questioned, and by what witnesses would he have it approved? why, by his pureness, his knowledge, his armor of righteousness (2 Cor. 7). How does he seek to be received? why, because he had corrupted no man, he had defrauded no man (2 Cor. 7) How does he vindicate and establish his ministry? Read his proofs in such words as these—"Am I not an Apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are ye not my work in the Lord? If I am not an Apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you, for the seal of mine Apostleship are ye in the Lord." And again, "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Does he not by all this commit the proof of his Apostleship to the manifest presence of the Spirit with him? His children in the faith were the seal of his office (1 Cor. 9:2); the epistle that ought to commend it to the acceptance of all men. The signs of an Apostle had been wrought by him (2 Cor. 12:12). And must it not have been so? What office or ministry could now be warranted without the presence and exercise of the gifts received for men? Could the purpose of the ascension be evaded or annulled? Could fleshly authority and order be allowed in despite of the revelation now given, that the ascended Head was the

dispenser and Lord of all those ministries that were for “the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”?

Paul's Apostleship and Epistles, Paul's Gospel (1:12)

It was the Gospel of this life and glory that Paul was specially called out to minister. Peter and the others forwarded it we know; but Paul was the distinguished steward of it. And Peter and the others did not forward this Gospel as being the twelve at Jerusalem. As the twelve, they had borne their testimony to Israel, and been rejected like their Lord, and now had become witnesses to the heavenly calling of the Church. The vision which instructed Peter in the fact that God had sanctified the Gentiles, might also have told him that God had made heaven, and not earth, the place of their calling, and the scene of their hopes. The vessel with its contents was let down from heaven, and then taken up again into heaven. This was, by a symbol, a revelation of the mystery hid from ages. It denoted that the Church had been of old written in heaven and hid there with God, but now for a little season was manifested here, and in the end was to be hid in heaven again, having her glory and inheritance there. This was signified by the descending and ascending sheet, and such, I judge, is the character of the mystery hid from ages and generations. And according to this, Peter, under the Holy Spirit, speaks to the saints of their inheritance “reserved in heaven”; and exhorts them to wait with girded loins, as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. He presents the Church as having consciously come to the end of all things here, and looking, like Israel in the night of the passover, towards Canaan, having done with this Egypt—world.¹

But Paul was apprehended in a special manner for this ministry. A dispensation of the Gospel was committed to him, and woe to him if he did not preach it (1 Cor. 9:16-17). Though, as he speaks, it were even against his will, yet he must preach it. The Son was revealed in him for this very purpose, that he might preach Him among the heathen (Gal. 1:16). For when the Lord converted his soul, He sent him out with this Gospel, “Rise, and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.”

clickbible.org