

Galatians

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Contents

Introduction	3
1 How May I Live to Please God? (Chs. 1 and 2)	7
2 How May I Be Sure of my Inheritance? (Ch. 3)	15
3 How May I Enjoy True Freedom? (Chs. 4–6)	28

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Introduction

Reading: Galatians 1:1–10; 2:11–21.

As we begin to study together the Epistle to the Galatians, we are aware that it is not necessarily everybody's favourite epistle. It is none the worse for that, and we do not blame people for having their favourite parts of Scripture. Perhaps the reason why Galatians is not normally a person's favourite portion of Scripture is that this small epistle by Paul is full of argument from its beginning to its end.

There are some people who enjoy arguing and a good many others who do not. In fact, there are some people who say that you should not argue at all in the things of God. If that is true, the sooner we shut Galatians the better, because there is scarcely a comma in it that is not a part of an argument. It is easy to see, however, what people mean when they say that you should not argue in the things of God. They have in mind some unfortunate Bible Studies in which people have lost their patience, if not their tempers, and things have heated up somewhat. They have fought through those kinds of argument where it is evident that people are trying to win an argument for the sake of winning an argument, and are trying to show everybody how clever they are and how much theology they have learned. All such things are profitless and vain, and by God's help we should avoid that kind of argument.

Arguments that are necessary

But we shall not read far into the New Testament before we find that there is another kind of argument, and arguing that is exceedingly necessary in the cause of the gospel. Galatians is one example of this and of what Paul was doing nearly every day of his life as he went with the gospel into the Jewish synagogues, opened the Scriptures and had to argue with the Jews. He argued with them the evidence from the Old Testament that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, that he was indeed raised from the dead, and how a man is saved according to the Old Testament Scriptures.

Our blessed Lord too, as we gather from very many chapters in the Gospels, was constantly involved in arguing with the people of his day, notably with the Pharisees, the Scribes and the Sadducees. So we, as the people of God, will need to learn how to argue, not for the sake of winning an argument, but for the sake of the gospel itself and so that we may be used of God to help other people.

Arguing for the truth of the gospel

If folk are going to be saved, they have got to know what the gospel is. There are many people who are religiously-minded, but they are not yet saved, and the reason they are not

saved is because they do not really understand what the gospel is. Their minds have been perverted from the start by listening to preaching that has purported to be Christianity and really is not Christianity at all. They have been taught that in order to be justified by God, they have to bring their merits, their good works, their confessions, their penances, and all sorts of things in order to have peace.

We who know that it is not so, know that the very salvation of those people will depend on God enlightening their minds to see that the gospel is not what they thought it was. For that reason we shall have to be prepared to argue with our unconverted friends.

Arguing for the truth of eternal security

We must also be prepared to argue to help our fellow-believers. There are believers who rejoice in the fact that they have eternal life. They have been forgiven, they are right with God; but they have come under teaching that has told them that their place in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is not secure—it might be lost. They may be cast out of that kingdom and be in the darkness where there is weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, and they may have to go through a kind of a purgatory. There are not many believers like that, but there are some. If we ever find one we will need to know where they have gone wrong, and what kind of arguments we could bring to bear on the situation to help to show them what is true, and so deliver our fellow-believers from years of slavery, burden and enchainment.

Arguing for the truth of practical sanctification

Then there are other believers who have got it into their heads that because salvation is by faith and by grace, it does not really matter how they behave, because, in the last analysis, even though they do wrong, they are justified, they are saved, they have eternal life. If we ever come across any believers like that we shall have to be ready to show them where exactly they have gone wrong, and what the truth of the gospel is, that they might walk accordingly.

The order in which to argue

This book is full of all sorts of different arguments. One of the things we shall do in these three short studies is to notice the different kinds of argument that the apostle uses in the course of this great exposition of the gospel to show us how we may be right with God.

Suppose we get into conversation with one of our neighbours and happen to say that we are sure we are saved. Our neighbour says that we should surely not say that we are saved. We have to be initiated into Christianity by some sort of a baptism, then by God's grace try to keep his law and do the best we can, and hope that in the end God will grant us eternal life, like Titus 3:7 says, 'So that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.' What should we say in those circumstances? Where would we begin? What argument would we put first and what arguments would we put second, and what arguments would we use to bring up the rear, so to speak.

Well, if we ever got to talking with our next door neighbour like that, we should not use the arguments Paul uses, nor in exactly the same order. In each case we should be led by the

Holy Spirit as to what arguments to use. But it is good to know what arguments are available. Here we shall find all kinds of arguments available, like a veritable armoury stored with ammunition and weapons so that, as the occasion demands, we shall know what weapon to use just then. But if we do not know the weapons that are there, we shall not think of using them.

We shall get some instruction from Paul about the order in which to use the arguments. For instance, he tells us in the course of his epistle that some of the men who were teaching this false doctrine (that you are justified by keeping the law) were not good, sound and sincere men (6:12–13). Their motives were highly questionable. We may know a lot of men like that, making a lot of money out of religion. That is so, on occasions. Where in the argument would we use that particular line of attack? Would we say to our neighbour over the fence that his leaders and teachers are a lot of rotten men? We should not say that at the opening of our discussion, for we would not get much further with him if we did. That is an argument to be used in its place. Paul uses it as the very last argument in the book, but not until he has proved that the doctrine of the false teachers is false. Then he comes to exposing the evil motives of the false teachers.

How Paul argues from Scripture: (1) explicit quotations; (2) typology

He uses arguments from holy Scripture, that is, from the Old Testament, in two notable parts of this epistle. These arguments from the Old Testament are basically of two kinds. One is drawn from the typology of the Old Testament—the story of Hagar and Ishmael, and how God told Abraham that he had to cast out the bondwoman and her son. Paul goes on to say that Hagar represents Jerusalem that now is—an allegory drawn from the Old Testament (4:21–31). It is valid to use arguments from typology, and we should not be afraid to use them in their place.

But then we would be wise to copy Paul in this, because when he comes to argue from Scripture he does not put this argument from typology first—he puts it second. The first argument from Scripture is formed by six different, precise, literal, straightforward quotations of verses from the Old Testament that put quite clearly and categorically the principles of salvation.

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness (v. 6—Gen 15:6).

In you shall all the nations be blessed (v. 8—Gen 12:3).

Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them (v. 10—Deut 27:26).

The righteous shall live by faith (v. 11—Hab 2:4).

The one who does them shall live by them (v. 12—Lev. 18:5).

Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree (v. 13—Deut 21:23).

We shall notice when we come to them that Paul has these six particular verses ready in his mind to use again and again. He had used them thousands of times, and knew exactly where to put his finger on them. He knew exactly the order to quote them in, and what things they were relevant to.

So, he firstly argued from Scripture by using precise, explicit statements of fact and doctrine, clear and incontrovertible, and when he had proved that the gospel was this way through those verses, then, and only then, he brought in the argument from the typology of Scripture.

So, we shall learn things about arguing for the sake of the gospel from this Epistle to the Galatians. We shall learn how to argue and what arguments there are, and we shall do it not to win arguments and show people how clever we are. We shall be doing it with a view to saving people. There is not an epistle in the New Testament that introduces us more to the glorious riches of salvation, making it abundantly clear to us the wealth we have in Jesus Christ our Lord. While we shall be looking at these different kinds of argument we shall principally be concentrating on aspects of salvation.

We have three occasions to study the epistle together, so we shall divide it into three parts and give a bird's eye view of each part on each occasion. This is not the only summing up that could be given, but it draws out one, at least, of the main points of each of these three parts of Galatians.

1. How may I live to please God? (chapters 1–2)

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. (2:19)

What is the proper way of living to God? How may we go about it? How may we rightly live to God? What a lovely part of our gospel it is that tells us what provision God has made and what method we are to follow so that we might rightly live unto God.

2. How may I be sure of my inheritance? (chapter 3)

And if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (3:29)

This verse tells us very clearly that all who are in Christ are heirs, inheritors of a vast inheritance. What is my inheritance? We shall want to know what exactly this inheritance is that God has covenanted to us in Christ.

3. How may I know true freedom? (chapters 4–6)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (5:1)

This is the clarion call for every believer to stand up and be counted on the battlefield for freedom and to resist all attempts to submit him again in yokes of slavery. That will involve us in asking what freedom is. It obviously is not freedom to live how we like. So, we shall ask what true freedom is and then seek to find out how we may know true freedom in our spiritual lives and experience.

As we study these three different topics, we shall also be noting the different kinds of arguments that Paul uses in order to establish and explain the truth.

How May I Live to Please God?

Chapters 1–2

As we begin to cover the first section, we ought to notice one of the most important arguments of all. When it comes to arguing for the gospel we shall learn from this first part of Galatians that one of the most powerful arguments is the way that we as believers live. We shall be reminded in this section that it is possible to know the gospel, to believe the gospel and to be saved by the gospel, and then not live consistently with the gospel. By the way we live and behave we can confuse the very gospel we are supposed to support.

Even such an eminent Christian as Peter the apostle once fell into that trap. Although he knew the gospel and believed it, he was trapped into living in such a way as confused it, if not even positively denying the very gospel that he said he believed (2:11–14). So the argument that walks about in boots is still a very important argument. How may we then live to please God; how may we so live to God that by our lives we make the gospel message clear and do not confuse it?

Let us now do what we perhaps did when we were at school. There used to be some glorious school books that had in their middles the exercises that had to be done, and at their ends the kind publisher had put the key. So, when you had a difficult exercise to do (it was against the rules, of course), you would go and look up the key at the back and find the answer, and then hopefully, though not always successfully, you would try and find the way to the answer and make it look as if you had found the answer yourself. It is not always a bad thing to do, to answer your questions by looking at the end of the book first!

How may we live to please God? Well, when we come to the end of this first part in chapter 2, the answer is given to us in the glorious words, 'For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God' (v. 19). That is how it is done. It is not done by keeping the law, but rather through the law; we die to the law to live to God. How can it be said that we have died to the law? Read the lovely verse 20,

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

There are two things here that Christ did for us

1. He gave himself for us

He was delivered up for us to the death of the cross to pay and to suffer the penalty of that broken law, and to die the death we deserved. The Son of God loved us, and gave himself up for us. He died for us.

2. He now lives in us

If we would learn to live to God the secret will be found here in the Lord Jesus, who not only gave himself to death on our account, but now is alive and lives in us.

So it may be summed up by two phrases taken from chapter 2

1. 'If, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ . . .' (v. 17)

That phrase is telling us that we are 'in Christ,' and that our justification before God depends on that. Apart from Christ there is no possibility of justification. If we keep all the laws we could possibly keep and are outside of Christ, there is no being right with God and there is no living to God. The secret of living to God is, first of all, being justified before God, and the key to that is to be in Christ.

2. 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (v. 20)

This is the other half of the secret. The first phrase tells us that we are 'in Christ,' and the second phrase tells us that Christ is 'in me.'

We shall need both sides of the story. Sometimes we have to emphasize the first—the legal side of the gospel. Once we trust Christ we are in Christ and legally clear before God, justified before him, and that is delightfully true. But that alone is not enough to live to God. If we are going to live to God we must not only be justified in Christ, but the other thing must be true as well—Christ is in us, living in us. That is the whole story of how we may live to God.

The importance of Paul's credentials

Now let us look at some of the arguments with which Paul explains, maintains and sustains this truth of the gospel. What kind of arguments does he use? What kind of facts do we need to know in order to enjoy and then explain to others this gospel?

In his first paragraph (1:1–5), Paul feels it wise that we should know a fact about his status as an apostle. Why is this important? To start off with, he wrote Galatians! We believe that Galatians is a part of the Bible and inspired by God, but a lot of people in Paul's day did not believe that. They said that this is only what Paul says. Today, if we start to preach the gospel to some folks, they will presently turn round and say that too. They say that it was rather a pity that Paul came along.

'Jesus Christ did preach to us a lovely gospel. He told us the story of the prodigal son and how the father welcomed the prodigal home, and there was no nasty talk about law-courts

and penalties and condemnation and justification and atonement and sacrifices and punishment. No; when the prodigal came home the father just fell on his neck and kissed him and there was none of the legal talk we find in Romans and Galatians. It was a pity that Paul came along with his difficult concepts and spoiled all the lovely message of the love of God that the Lord Jesus preached.'

If we try to press home to them what Paul says, they will tell us that it is only Paul who said it. How would we help a person in that situation? Paul was faced with it thousands of times. When he entered the synagogues they did not all take off their hats and stand up and say that he was the inspired apostle. In the Jewish synagogues they did not believe that, and some of the false teachers in the churches did not believe it either.

To reject Paul is to reject the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead

What facts do we have to get hold of about the status of the apostle Paul? He tells us that he is 'an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead' (1:1). Why did he describe God like that? If God had not raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, there would have been no gospel to preach. 'If Christ has not been raised,' says Paul, 'you are still in your sins' (1 Cor 15:17). Paul wants them to get hold of the fact that the very God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead so that there could be a gospel, appointed himself as an apostle.

It is not that God set the gospel going and one day Paul got to hear it and thought that it was a good story, liking it so much that he decided to appoint himself as a preacher. No. The same God who invented the gospel invented Paul to preach it. He was appointed an apostle by the very God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. He was not appointed an apostle from men nor through men, but by God directly. That is fact number one here. You cannot say, if you profess to be a Christian, that only Paul said such and such. To reject Paul is to reject the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

The authority of the gospel is not dependent on the man who preaches it

The next fact to get hold of is the status of the gospel (1:6–10). Paul says here that if anybody else comes along and preaches a different gospel, let him be accursed. He says that even if it is an angel from heaven, or even if it is himself that preaches a different gospel, let them be accursed. The authority of the gospel is not dependent on the man who preaches it.

Why make that point? For a very practical reason. There are a great many pleasant, well-meaning, sincere and righteous-living people in this world, and sometimes when people are trying to make up their minds about the gospel and whether this or that doctrine is true, they are inclined to say, 'Mr So-and-So says that when you are baptized it somehow or other helps to save you, and Mr So-and-So is a very nice man.' They then add, 'You would not say he is wrong, would you? He is a fine and sincere man. His life, with his kindness to people, is an example to us all.'

It is perfectly true that Mr So-and-So is all these things, but it does not alter this—if he does not have the right gospel, the fact that he is such a kind and good man does not make the message that he has right. 'For if I myself,' says Paul, 'for some reason or other, was to

forget myself and go and preach a different gospel, that would not make it right. And if an angel from heaven in all his angelic splendour was to come and preach a different gospel, we should not say that he is such a marvellous being—an angel—and so must be right. If he preaches a different gospel from what we find in the New Testament, let him be accursed.’ In deciding what the gospel is, we must decide it on the grounds of what God says in inspired Scripture.

Paul based his arguments on church history

In the third paragraph Paul goes into a very long argument and we shall not be able to go into all its details here. It is an argument from church history (1:11–2:21). Do we need to know a lot of church history? Yes, church history from one period, for that is what this is. It must be important, for Paul spends half of chapter 1 and the whole of chapter 2 on it. It is one of the longest arguments in the book. Why do we need to bother ourselves about history? Shouldn't we forget about history and get on with the facts and the preaching of the gospel? But there are certain chunks of history that are gospel. *You cannot preach the gospel without knowing about history.*

It is a historic fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It is a historic fact that he was born in the reign of Tiberius Caesar and that he suffered under Pontius Pilate. If anyone could prove that that is not history, then exit the Christian gospel. The gospel that we preach is not a fairy tale; *it matters that our gospel is historically true.* It is no good trusting it just because it sounds nice, if it is not true.

The world outside are not fools. They perhaps were not brought up by Christian parents and in gospel halls, but had atheists as their parents and school-teachers, and have been given to believe that the gospel is not historically true. They think it is intellectual suicide to listen to us, and what we have got hold of are fairy stories like Little Red Riding Hood.

Therefore, if we present the gospel to them we have to say, like Paul said to Agrippa, 'This thing was not done in a corner; it is historically true' (see Acts 26:26). What is more, it is not only the great facts about Jesus Christ our Lord, how that he was born, lived, died and rose again; but what happened in the early church is also an important bit of gospel history.

If we read the details of this long argument, we find that they are about Paul's life and his relationship with the other apostles. He divides this bit of history into three parts and in each part he shows his relationship with the other apostles, and in particular with Peter (1:11–24; 2:1–10; 2:11–21).

1. Paul was independent of Peter (1:11–24)

When he first got converted he did not immediately go to Peter, and he certainly did not get converted through Peter, but he went off into the desert and only subsequently did he meet Peter (vv. 15–18).

2. The apostles agreed that Paul was the equal of Peter (2:1–10)

In the second bit of this historical lesson he tells us that when he went to Jerusalem to meet the apostles they agreed that Peter was the apostle to the Jews, the circumcision; Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (2:8).

3. Paul challenged Peter about his hypocrisy (2:11–21)

And in the third part he shows us that, on one occasion at least, he was in fact superior to Peter and had to rebuke him (2:11).

What has church history got to do with our practical living?

I can best illustrate it by telling the story of a personal encounter I once had. There came to me one day a good man, sent by some friends. His friends were believers, and they were keen that he should come and talk to me because he was going to become a monk. He had not been sat down very many minutes until he said, 'You know, you evangelicals have got it all wrong. You maintain that to be saved you have to have some kind of emotional experience when you are born again. But that is false; you do not need any kind of emotional experience like that at all. Salvation is not by works and it is not by your experience; it is by faith in Christ. All you need is to be baptized as an infant, which is the great objective fact, and it is not a matter of your emotions or your response to it. You are baptized and you are saved. You have got it wrong, if you think otherwise.'

One thing followed another, and he told me that he was going to become a monk and change his church.

'That is something I could never do,' I said.

'Why is that?' he asked.

'Because the church that you propose to join curses me.'

'Oh, no! Of course not,' he replied.

'It does indeed, for that church declares that anyone who says that he is saved by faith alone, by trusting in the Saviour, and not by works, let him be accursed.'

'Yes,' he said, 'but you do have to have the works.'

'But I thought you told me just now that you are saved simply by faith in your baptism?' I asked.

'But you have to work as well, or else you might lose it,' he said.

'That is curious,' I said. 'You disappoint me somewhat. I thought you said that you were saved by just believing objective facts, but now you say that you become a Christian by being baptized and then it all depends on your works.'

'Of course it does. If you do not work well enough you lose it all.'

'So I am wrong then,' I said. 'I thought I was saved simply by faith in Christ, and that I could be sure of salvation.'

'Oh, no. You cannot be sure,' he said.

'Let me read you a verse in the New Testament,' I continued. And I read to him what we all would have read in that situation—the famous words from Romans 4:4–5.

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

'I do not understand that,' he replied.

'Well, it says, "to the one who does not work."''

'But it cannot mean that,' he said.

'Well, that is what it says. It says "to the one who does not work."'

'Ah, there you are,' he said. 'You are always doing that, you kind of folk; you think you can come to the Bible and just interpret it yourselves. That is where you go wrong. If you took that to a priest, you would find that it does not mean that; it means something else. It is no good you trying to interpret it yourself, I would like to take it to a priest and ask him what it means.'

'Well, that is very curious,' I said. 'Did Paul write that?'

'Yes, Paul wrote that, but he said some funny things which are difficult to understand.'

'Well, Paul wrote that, and he was an apostle,' I continued. 'Suppose that when he was in Arabia all by himself (Gal 1:17), I had been troubled about my spiritual state and, wondering how I could be put right with God, I had gone to him and asked him about it. If he had told me by word of mouth what he here says in Romans 4:4–5, "To the one who does not work, Gooding, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness," and I had listened and understood that salvation is free, although I had broken God's law and deserved its penalty I accept Christ who died for me. Because I trust him, I died with him, I have been crucified with him and I have died to the law. Now Christ is risen and he has given me his own life, he lives in me and it is all simply through faith in Christ, and not according to my own works (2:19–20). —Suppose I understood all of that, could I have believed it there and then on the spot and been justified by faith, when Paul was telling it to me there in Arabia? Or would I have had to copy down what he said and go to Jerusalem and find Peter and James and the rest of the apostles, to ask them if it was right or not?'

'Oh, you would have had to go to Jerusalem and ask the church,' he said. 'It is the church that has given us the Bible and we have to let the church say what it means. You cannot go off and interpret it by yourself.'

'You have got half of that wrong,' I replied. 'The church did not give us the Old Testament; the church was not there when the Old Testament was written. Was it the church that gave Paul the gospel? When Paul tells me the gospel, therefore, shall I have to go the church to see what it means?'

I then did what we all would have done, I turned to Galatians. I was glad at the time that I knew this little bit of church history that we are now thinking about.

'When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians he said, "Paul, an apostle, not from men" (1:1). That is clear, is it not? It was not from any man that he got his authority. He got it from God.'

'Yes, that is true,' said my friend. 'He got his authority from God, the source of authority, and God gave it through the church.'

'But read the whole verse, "Paul, an apostle—not from men, nor through man" —neither from nor through man!'

'But the church did give him his authority,' he retorted.

'Just let me read the Bible to you,' I said. 'Paul says that eventually he went up to Jerusalem, and when he got there the apostles added nothing (2:6). That is what it says and it is no good to argue against it. This is the history; they that were pillars added nothing. All

they said was that he should be careful for the poor, and he was doing that in any case' (vv. 9–10).

The source of the gospel

Salvation by faith does not mean that we go out and live just as we like. If it is true salvation it will lead to good works. Yet salvation is not by works. And the point at issue is, did Paul get it directly from God, or did he get it through the church? If the church gave him the gospel, we shall have to go to the church to find out what it means. But if God gave the gospel straight to Paul, then we may go straight to Paul and get the gospel from him. We cannot hear him speak it, but we can go directly to his writings, read what he has written, understand, believe; and believing, be saved. If we were in Arabia too, and all we had was the Epistle to the Galatians and we wanted to know how to be saved, we could read it, understand it, believe and be saved there and then, without going to anybody in the church.

Do we begin to see why this is important to our personal salvation and our personal freedom? This bit of church history is about how we got the gospel, where it came from, and through whom it came. The fact is that it came from God to Paul directly and the church added nothing. Therefore, since we need to be saved, we can come to Paul directly ourselves and he is sufficient to tell us how we may be right with God, without going to the rest of the church about it.

It is not a bad thing to know and have up our sleeves, this piece of church history, if we are going to help folks find the Saviour, who were brought up to believe that they must not try to understand the Bible for themselves, but let the church interpret it for them.

Peter's mistake

If we have got this straight—that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law—then we shall have to avoid the mistake that Peter made. Peter understood very well that salvation was by faith. Peter was not depending on the works of the law, nor on circumcision, nor on anything else for salvation. In his heart of hearts, Peter believed that the Gentiles were saved through faith in Christ, plus nothing, but there were some folk up at Jerusalem that had not got the gospel as clear as they should have. They were out of focus a little and they were not quite so sure whether Gentiles should be allowed into fellowship.

So, one day, when Peter was at a conference at Antioch, some of these fellows came down from Jerusalem. When it was time to eat with the Gentile believers at the tea interval he suddenly did not feel well, with a stomach ache or something, and withdrew and would not eat with them. But it had nothing to do with stomach ache, it was the presence of these visitors from Jerusalem and he was afraid of what they would say. He withdrew from the Gentiles as though it was not fitting for him to eat with them (vv. 11–13). Why not? Were they not saved? They were saved—by exactly the same salvation as Peter was saved.

This is a very big issue. If we refuse to eat with people, even though we are all saved by the same salvation, we are contradicting the gospel that we preach (v. 14). We are preaching one thing with our lips and then denying it by the way we treat those fellow-believers in Christ. What really is the basis of fellowship? All of us must give heed by the way we live and

by the way we treat fellow-believers, that we treat them consistently with the gospel we preach.

Why is this important? It is important for us to be truthful, but also for another reason. Let Paul himself quote an example to us. On one occasion, when he was up in Jerusalem talking to the apostles, there were some false brethren that demanded that Titus, one of Paul's companions, should be circumcised (vv. 3–5). Titus was a Greek. Paul says 'I would not give way.' He refused, and Titus was not circumcised. Why did he make all the fuss? 'So that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you' (v. 5). If Paul had fluffed it on that occasion and said that it was all right to have Titus circumcised, we might be asking ourselves today, 'What exactly is the gospel? Paul says in one place that you are saved by faith and not by the works of the law; but on another occasion, when people said that you have to be circumcised because circumcision contributed to salvation and is necessary for it, he said it was all right and had Titus circumcised.' Now where is the gospel? Had Paul behaved like that we, two thousand years later, might not be quite clear as to how exactly a person is saved.

If we are saved ourselves we must take heed how we behave and how we treat fellow-believers, so that what we do about salvation, by word and by behaviour, will make it clear that God accepts men and women solely on the ground of faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

May this bird's eye view of chapters 1 and 2 be used by God to stimulate our study into all the details, and fill our hearts with love for our fellow-men, that we might help them to salvation and confirm them therein by a clear presentation of God's truth. We are thankful to God for his holy word and that he appointed the apostle Paul, and what his word through Paul has meant to us. What liberty and peace it has brought us. We must learn to proclaim the gospel clearly, lovingly and faithfully, and in our behaviour stand firm for it and be beacon lights in this troubled world amidst all the confusing voices, so that men may know through us too, how they might be right with God.

How May I be Sure of my Inheritance?

Reading: Galatians 3:1–29.

In addition to studying this passage and finding the answer to the question, how may I be sure of my inheritance? we shall be looking at the kind of arguments Paul is using here. He was a master at arguing for the sake of the gospel; not just to win arguments, but in order to convince people of God's truth and thus to lead them to salvation. When he set about arguing a case he would marshal every possible argument he knew, in order to convince of the truth of that case. We are going to try and steal a leaf out of his book so that when we find ourselves in situations where, for the truth's sake and to help our friends and neighbours, we have gently to argue the case of the gospel, we shall know what arguments there are at our disposal and how we may employ them.

In our first study we noticed that the bulk of chapters 1 and 2 is an argument taken from early church history; what church history has to do with the gospel, and why it is important that we know about it. The arguments in chapter 3 are of a different kind, and we should read it very carefully and try to observe them. May God use his word as we do so to strengthen within us the assurance and enjoyment of our inheritance.

We come first of all to the major topic that is embraced in this chapter, which may be summed up with the question, *How may I be sure of my inheritance?* There are people who say that we can be sure of very little in the Christian life. Some of them tell us that we cannot be sure of the forgiveness of sins, and also that we certainly cannot be sure of eternal life. They say that eternal life is a thing you get after you die and you cannot have it now, by definition. But we see immediately how false that is, when we have the Saviour telling us categorically, 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life' (John 3:36). Holy Scripture declares that every believer has been born of God and has received the life of God, so it is evident that we not only have eternal life, but we can be sure of it.

There are some other good believers who tell us that you can be sure of eternal life and justification by faith, but they are the only two things you can be sure of. When it comes to your inheritance, you cannot be sure of it. They say that if believers do not behave, when the Lord comes and reigns in his millennial kingdom, they will be excluded from the kingdom. They teach a doctrine that is known as 'A Conditional Kingdom'. They say that only those who suffer with the Lord Jesus will reign with him. They imply that there are some believers who do not suffer with the Lord Jesus, and when he comes they will not reign with him. They will be excluded from the kingdom and therefore from the inheritance; if need be they will spend the period of the millennial kingdom in the outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Such teachers tell us that the wicked servant, whose talent was withdrawn, was a servant who was cast out into the outer darkness and missed the bridegroom's feast (Matt 25:14–30). They also tell us that the parable of the Ten Virgins is to be applied to Christians. Five of the virgins, being true believers, went into the marriage supper, but the other five virgins were foolish believers and did not get into the kingdom, but were shut out. They were all virgins (Matt 25:1–13).

So they teach their doctrine that has been called a conditional kingdom. It will be worthwhile knowing the answer to these things, since so much is at stake, even if we do not come across such teachers ourselves. So we seek to find the answer to this question, 'How may I be sure of my inheritance?'

What inheritance?

That is a good question! What is this inheritance of which Galatians chapter 3 speaks? We can begin to tie it down starting from verse 15. It is an inheritance that is promised to Abraham and his seed (v. 16 KJV). If we want to know what inheritance it is, we shall have to go back to the book of Genesis. Moreover, this paragraph tells us that it is an inheritance promised to Abraham and his offspring and *guaranteed by a covenant* (vv. 15–17).

What was this covenant that God made with Abraham?

God made two covenants with Abraham in Genesis; which one is this paragraph speaking about, that guarantees the inheritance to Abraham and to his offspring? The answer to that must surely be that it is the one we read of in Genesis 15. How can we be sure of that? Let us go back and look at Genesis 15. In verse 6 of that great chapter comes the verse that is so basic to Paul's theology of the gospel, 'And he [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.' This is the very foundation verse and principle of justification by faith that Paul quotes in Galatians 3:6.

When Abraham was justified by faith God immediately began to speak of something else in addition to that. God said to him, 'I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give thee this land to inherit it' (Gen 15:7 KJV). God begins to speak of an inheritance, not only justification by faith—God brought him out to give him the land, to inherit it. Abraham, being a very good man, and a very good businessman in addition, on seeing this wonderful thing, wanted to be sure he was going to get it. 'How shall I know I shall inherit it?' (v. 8). The answer that God gave to Abraham was the covenant he made with him that day— 'On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram' (Gen 15:18).

We may write over chapter 3 of Galatians, 'How do we know that we are going to inherit it?' We have got to be like lawyers here, since so much is at stake. How can we really be sure that this is the covenant? Might it not be the covenant of circumcision in Genesis 17? 'That I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly' (v. 2); and then circumcision was instituted.

How can we be sure which covenant it is that guarantees the inheritance? We can be sure if we read Romans 4, where Paul is recurring to the self-same theme. Once more Paul is in the process of teaching that justification is by faith and, in order to prove that, he goes on to

prove that something more, as well as justification, is by faith. 'For the promise to Abraham and his offspring *that he would be heir of the world* did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith' (v. 13).

This business of the inheritance is altogether by faith. 'How do you know that?' says a critic to Paul. Let us go back and we shall find how we know it.

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (Rom 4:9-13)

The promise that he should be heir of the world was given to Abraham when he was still uncircumcised, and that must be before Genesis 17 when circumcision was instituted. While Abraham was still uncircumcised he was not only justified by faith, but he was also given the guarantee of this promise of world inheritance.

So we have sorted out which covenant it is that is going to give Abraham and his offspring absolute security on this matter of the inheritance, but has something gone wrong here? Romans 4:13 says that the promise is that he would be heir of the world, and that is not in Genesis 15. The terms of the covenant in Genesis 15 are very clear. Let us read them:

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.' (vv. 18-21)

That was only a certain few thousand square miles in the Middle East; it was not the whole world. Where did Paul get the idea from that Abraham was going to inherit the whole world?

Romans 4 says that it is so, and Romans 4 is in the Bible, so there it stands. But let us remind ourselves of one of the first things about covenants. The man who makes the covenant and promises thereby to pay a certain sum, or give a certain gift, may not change many things afterwards, but he may change one thing. Let us illustrate this.

An illustration

If one of these days we should decide to have a bungalow for our retirement, and we agree with the builder to have him build us this bungalow to our specification for fifty thousand pounds; if he builds the bungalow to our specification we shall pay him fifty thousand pounds. We sign on the dotted line and it is a contract, a covenant. The bungalow is built to

our specification and the builder invites us to come and see it. We are impressed that he has fulfilled all the conditions very well. He then asks us to fulfil our conditions in the contract, and asks us for fifty thousand pounds. At that very moment the covenant between us says that we have to pay fifty thousand pounds; we must not pay forty-nine thousand, we must pay fifty thousand. But, if we wanted to, we could pay sixty-five thousand pounds and the builder would not object, nor would any lawyers, nor the judge on the bench. We would be at perfect liberty to do such a thing; we must not pay less than we had agreed to pay, but we may give more.

If God covenanted to give this to Abraham (Gen 15:18–21), he may not give him less, but he can give him more if he pleases. The covenant in Galatians 3 is the covenant of Genesis 15, and now the basic question comes again, How can I be sure that I am going to have this inheritance that the New Testament interprets as world-inheritance (Rom 4:13)?

It may surprise you, but there are some Christians who do not want it at all! They say, 'Let Abraham and the Jews have it; it is earthly. We belong to the church and do not want a few square miles in the Middle East, or the whole world either. We are going home to glory and do not want any acres down here in this world. That is for God's earthly people. That is their portion; we have got a heavenly portion.' But they are going to have it, whether they want it or not! *It is covenanted to Abraham and to his seed, and the seed is Christ.*

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ . . . For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:16, 26–29 KJV)

Christ is never going to say, 'Thank you Father; you have given me the heavens but I do not want the earth.' To suggest that it would be unspiritual of the Lord Jesus to have it would border on blasphemy. The Lord Jesus is going to inherit all things, our little planet included. There is nothing unspiritual about this and here is the great covenant that makes it absolutely sure to Abraham and to his seed.

How could Abraham be sure of his inheritance?

Let us stay with legal things for a moment longer. This is what Abraham asked the Lord, 'O Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess this inheritance?' (Gen 15:8). God told Abraham to make a sacrifice, a covenant-sacrifice (vv. 9–21). It all sounds a bit odd in our modern ears. Abraham got the animals for the sacrifice and killed them. He then cut them up into their pieces, though he did not divide the birds, and put the pieces in two rows. That was because in the ancient world, when people made a covenant between man and man or, as here, between God and man, they put the parts of the sacrifice in two rows and then the parties to the covenant walked solemnly between the rows of the sacrifice.

There is another example of this in Jeremiah 34:18–19. On that occasion the nobles in Jerusalem decided that they were going to set their Hebrew slaves free. These good nobles

were Hebrews themselves, and by the law they should never have made slaves of their Hebrew brothers. On being convicted of their sin in having Hebrew slaves at all, they decided to repent and set them free. They made a covenant about it before God; they promised to do it. God did not have to promise it, but they were going to make a promise to God and covenant with him that they would set the slaves free. So they got the covenant victims, cut them in pieces, put them all into two rows and the men of Judah walked through. God did not walk through; he did not have to do anything; it was a one-sided thing. So the men of Judah walked through, for they were binding themselves to fulfil their covenant and to do what the covenant said they had promised to do. They walked between the pieces. In a two-sided covenant in those ancient days, both parties had to walk through the pieces.

Let us think again about our bungalow. If we had lived in those ancient times, we would have had the covenant victims placed in two rows and the builder would have walked through, because he was promising to build the bungalow. We would also have walked through, because we were promising to pay the fifty thousand pounds for the bungalow. *Both of us would have had a promise to fulfil, so we both would have walked through.*

We do not do it like that nowadays. We go to a solicitor and he gets some rather expensive paper, and with a very expensive pen and some very expensive sealing wax he writes out the thing. Both the builder and we would sign it, since both of us have things to do and fulfil. That is a two-party covenant; he builds the house, we pay the money. If we break it and do not pay, we do not get the house. If he breaks it and does not build the house, we do not pay the money. It is a two-sided affair.

There are also the other covenants in our legal world. One-sided covenants, like the one from Jeremiah 34:18–19, where the men of Judah made God a promise and God had not to do anything in it.

All of us probably hope that one of these days we shall come into the good of a one-party covenant, when our Uncle Carson from Florida dies and the lawyers write presently and tell us that he has left us his house and his seaside chalet, his two ocean-going yachts, his ranch and shares in the businesses he was in. It is all ours; it has been left to us in his will. What do we have to do for it? The lawyer says we need do nothing at all. How can we be sure we are going to get it? We have not signed anything for it. We would have no promises to fulfil and nothing to do, but just receive it. This would be a one-party covenant—a will. This man who makes the will and guarantees us that when he dies this would be ours, has to sign it, but not us. We just have to take it. Of course we could, if we wished, throw it away and say that we do not believe in that kind of stuff—silly old nonsense, not worth the paper it is written on—and tear it up. We could reject it if we wanted to. But if we wanted to have all that was our Uncle Carson's, that he guaranteed us by his will so that no-one else would run away with it, we only have to believe that he has done so and take it all.

The difference between a two-party covenant and a one-party covenant

God made a promise to Abraham, that he and his seed would be heirs of the world. It is no wonder that Abraham asked how he would be sure of it all. God made a covenant, and we who have a vested interest in the matter are all eyes and ears to see what Genesis says. What kind of a covenant was it? Was it a two-sided thing? Did God promise to give it to Abraham

and to his seed if Abraham and his seed kept the law of Moses? Was God going to do something, and had Abraham to do something as well? Was it a two-party covenant? Or was it a one-party covenant like a will?

We can soon answer this question; Genesis 15 is very careful to tell us in very plain words what happened after Abraham had put the pieces in place. 'When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch that passed between these pieces' (v. 17). Who was that? It was the symbol and outward manifestation of the very presence of God, as God walked between the pieces. Did Abraham not walk between the pieces? No. How do we know? Because he was asleep (v. 12). 'As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram' so he was not walking through any pieces of sacrifice.

'How shall I know that I shall inherit it?' Abraham asks, and the answer is given through the covenant-sacrifice. What kind of a covenant? A one-party covenant in which Abraham had nothing to do and God did everything. God signed it, thus binding himself that he would give this inheritance to Abraham and to his seed. It is marvellous, is it not? All Abraham had to do was to believe it and take it.

The law was given later and did not alter the terms of the covenant

But we may say to Paul that God did require the Israelites to keep the law. 'Yes,' says Paul, 'so he did.' But please notice when God asked the Israelites to keep the law; it was long years after this covenant (Gal 3:17). It was four hundred and thirty years after the covenant with Abraham that the law was given to Israel. Paul says,

To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified . . . This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterwards, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. (vv. 15, 17)

This is the next thing we must learn about covenants; once a covenant has been concluded you cannot add to its conditions. We have seen that you can add to its benefits, but you must not add to its conditions. Think of our bungalow once more. We have signed the covenant and the bungalow is being built to its specifications for fifty thousand pounds. It is no good when, five years later, the builder comes and says he has finished it, and also that we have got to give him another fifty thousand pounds on top of the first lot, because things have gone up in price. It was a fixed-term contract; there was no clause in it that if after five years prices had gone up the builder could ask for more. It was fixed and he cannot demand extra terms and conditions.

If God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, and there were no conditions for Abraham to fulfil—he simply had to believe it and take it—God himself could not come to Abraham four hundred and thirty years later and say that he originally meant to add in the Ten Commandments, and that for Abraham to obtain the inheritance he would have to keep them. Once a covenant has been signed, sealed and settled you cannot add to the conditions it imposes.

That is Paul's argument. 'Is it not rather a crude businessman-like argument?' someone may say. Yes it is. Paul says that he speaks after the manner of men (v. 15 KJV). God would

not want to add to the conditions; he knew exactly what he was doing. He made this covenant with Abraham four hundred and thirty years before the law, and there was not a mention of it in all its terms of the law. It was a one-party covenant; Abraham was not required to do anything except believe God and thus become an heir of the promise.

How may we be sure of our inheritance?

May we know that we shall inherit this world-wide inheritance? Yes; we know it on the basis of a covenant of God. But the covenant with Abraham was made merely with animals—animal-sacrifices; can we be absolutely sure of the benefits that come from a covenant that was made on the basis of animal sacrifices? Although it was a good business deal in its day and God does not go back on his business deals, since that time Jesus Christ our Lord has died and by his sacrifice has validated all those ancient covenants.

That great covenant that we celebrate every time we take the cup into our hands at the Lord's Supper—the cup of the new covenant—is like that earlier covenant (see Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). It is a one-party covenant, where Christ pledges himself and all we have to do is to take it and receive it.

Who is Abraham's seed?

How may I be sure of my inheritance? Surely there is one thing not yet tied up in this matter? Abraham can be sure of it, because the covenant was made with Abraham; the seed can be sure of it because the covenant was made with Abraham and his seed; but we are not Abraham's seed, so how can we be sure of it? If we are not Abraham's seed, then we shall never have it, for there is another thing you cannot do with covenants, you cannot add any names to them once they have been settled.

Another illustration

Suppose you hear that your aunt from Canada has died; a dear old girl she was, and tremendously rich, and you had been visiting her quite regularly when she was a little bit frail, out of the kindness of your heart. You decide to attend the funeral and hear the will read, for you might hear something to your advantage (as the lawyer says). You go along, and the family lawyer reads the will. There is so much to Tommy, there is so much to Edward, there is so much to Marjorie, and there is so much plus the chicken-shed to William. Very good! And then the lawyer says that that's that!

'But no,' you say, 'that can't be that. You have made a mistake. My name must be in there too.'

The lawyer asks who you are, and you are Wilhelmina. He looks again, but says, 'Sorry, there is no Wilhelmina down here.'

'But it can't be. I knew my aunt; she would have left me something for sure.'

'Your name is not down here,' says the lawyer.

'Oh well, put it down,' you say. 'I am sure she would have wanted me in it.'

This covenant is promised *to Abraham and to his seed*, and if we are not Abraham's seed we shall never inherit it. We cannot add names to it now; it is thousands of years too late to do that. It is no use saying, 'I think it really meant Abraham, his seed, and David Gooding.' That is nonsense; it is just to Abraham and his seed.

So how can we inherit it? By keeping the law and trying to be good, and being able to tell God that we have nearly kept his law perfectly, so we think he owes it to us and we can qualify for this inheritance? Nonsense!

Well, how, then? Paul tells us, 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ' (v. 27). It is like how a man would take a large flowing robe, such as they wore in the ancient world, and go inside it, the robe being put over him and covering him completely from head to foot. If you have been baptised into Christ, you have put on Christ; Christ covers you completely and when the law looks at you all it sees is Christ, for you are in Christ. It is a covering that obliterates all other distinctions. All national, social and sexual distinctions in people in the ancient world were readily recognizable by their different clothes, but being 'in Christ' obliterates all those distinctions because he covers you completely.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (vv. 26–29 KJV)

'If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed'—for the Lord Jesus is the seed. If you are in him, what comes to him comes to you. The thing to get hold of is whether or not you are in Christ. It is not a question of whether or not you have kept the law—even if you have kept it perfectly—for that would not qualify you. It has nothing to do with the covenant. But if you are in Christ, you are the seed referred to in that very chapter of Genesis.

If this has not dawned on us, we should get down our Bibles more often and read it in black and white in Genesis 15. There is the covenant made with Abraham and his seed, who is Christ; and we are 'in Christ.' There it is, written in the inspired document given to us by God; that term, 'the seed,' includes us. It includes me! Can we be sure of that? Is it not only one person's seed? No. 'It is not to seeds, as of many, but seed, as of one' (Gal 3:16).

That is an old fashioned way of talking of a collective noun. 'Seed' is grammatically singular, and yet it can be plural. If we see a person with a pretty little packet in his hand that he has just bought from Hallmark or somebody else, and ask him what he has got, he may say that he has got some seed in his packet. He would, of course, be referring to perhaps one hundred seeds. Seed in Hebrew, as in English, is a singular word with a plural meaning.

And when God said *to Abraham and to his seed* it referred to Christ. But Christ is not just one solitary individual. The Christ is the blessed Lord Jesus and all who have been baptized into him in their myriads upon myriads; they are in him and therefore seed of Abraham, and therefore heirs according to the promise.

Who can imagine what it will be? It is so easy to go through the legal arguments, and we do well to do so. But may God give us a moment to think about it and an imagination so that by his Spirit's help and grace it may begin to sink into us, what is the length and breadth and

height and depth; and to realise that when our blessed Lord, Abraham's seed, is given his inheritance from shore to shore, the whole universe through, because we are in him it will be given to us.

Justification by faith is only a beginning. On top of justification there are the promises, and there is the covenant, and there is the inheritance; and all are on the same glorious principle—not of works and not by the law, but through faith.

What has this got to do with the argument in Galatians?

Let us now take a hurried side-long glance at other matters here. We have now found out from the chapter how we can be sure of our inheritance, and what our inheritance is. The argument in Galatians is aimed basically at this point; if we have trusted Christ for justification, do we have to add the works of the law to qualify for or to keep our justification?

Do we have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be justified? Is it so that we can trust Christ (and that is good), but to that we shall have to add circumcision and the keeping of the law, in order to be justified?

The answer is, No. We are justified by faith in Christ, apart from the works of the law. How does Paul prove this? He would prove it in all sorts of ways. One of the ways he proves it here is by showing that the Old Testament not merely says that justification is by faith, but that the promise is by faith, and the covenant is by faith, and the inheritance is by faith. If our inheritance is given to us through the covenant simply by faith, that the promise might be sure to all the seed, it stands to reason that justification is too. If it is a serious thing to preach that justification depends on works of the law, it would also stand to reason that it would be a serious thing to preach that our inheritance depends on the works of the law.

What other arguments does Paul bring to bear on the situation?

Arguments from experience

It is only a little argument occupying the first five verses of chapter three, but it is worth making.

How did they start in the Christian life? Well, they should carry on in the same way.

How did they receive the Spirit—through the works of the law? No, it was through faith. That is how they should carry on.

Did he who worked miracles among them do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? In Galatia they had not seen many miracles, nor had they even heard the gospel until Paul came. But they believed the gospel and God gave them his Holy Spirit and performed some miracles to authenticate it. It was all through the gospel of faith. So, if that is how they started, that is how they should keep going on.

Paul asks, '*Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?*' (v. 3).

An analogy

Let us use an illustration here, which may look a little foolish to us. It is an analogy, so let us use it to see the point and force of the argument. Suppose that one of these days you decided to take a ton of potatoes to Dublin. You get out the garden wheel-barrow and load the potatoes on to it, and you start to wheel them to Dublin. You get a little way along the Lisburn Road and it is proving to be a long way to Dublin—the potatoes on the wheel-barrow are going to take a lot of pushing! You begin to wonder if you will ever get to Dublin. Up comes your friend who has a twenty ton diesel lorry. He brings it alongside you and says that he will take you, the wheel-barrow and the potatoes to Dublin. So you get into the big lorry with its one hundred and twenty horse power under the bonnet. The propulsion is now by a different method—it is by the diesel in the engine. When you get over the country border it is time to stop and have lunch, and you go into some place to do so. You are already miles further on than you would have been if you had been pushing the wheel-barrow. You wouldn't even have been at the traffic lights at Lisburn and here you are half-way to Dublin. After lunch you hurry out, and when your friend comes out he finds you at the back of the lorry leaning against it with your shoulder. He wonders if you are unwell; but you are feeling all right. It is just that you have decided to push the lorry for a while. It was nice that the lorry brought you some of the way, but now that you are started you are going to add your pushing to it. How stupid you would be! Having begun by diesel, are you now going to get along the way by pushing? You cannot push a twenty ton diesel lorry; it is not one of those things, like a wheel-barrow, that you can push. If you want to do some pushing, you should not have come by lorry.

You have begun by the Spirit because you could not get salvation by the works of the law; you had to abandon that, trust Christ and be born again by his Holy Spirit—a miracle of God's grace. And that is how you will have to proceed. Suppose that, having started by the miracle of God's grace and by his Holy Spirit, you then add a little bit by meritorious keeping of the law.

To take another analogy; you could try to swim across the Atlantic, if you wished. But if you decided to go by aeroplane it would have to be all the way by aeroplane; you could not mix them together.

Arguments from Scripture

With that little appeal from experience over, Paul now comes to another set of arguments, and all of them from Scripture. What a man he was when he started to argue Scripture!

1. How did God supply his Spirit to them?

There is no doubt about it, '... just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"' (v. 6; Gen 15:6).

But he does not leave it to just one Scripture. He uses six of them, like peas in a pod! He uses Scripture after Scripture after Scripture; he had them all at his fingertips. He did not say, 'There is a Scripture in Deuteronomy; now where is it? I am sure it is there!' An unsaved friend looking on would say, 'Yes, tell me another. Where is there such a Scripture that says

you can have eternal life, free?' What use would it be to say that you think there is such a Scripture, perhaps in Genesis, perhaps in Revelation? You have to have them at your fingertips if you are going to do any good with them. It will not be enough to quote the first one—your friend may say that it is just your way of looking at it, but there is another way; so you had better have another Scripture to counter that.

Watch Paul using the Scriptures. Look at the succession of them here from verse 6 onwards. First of all there is the basic verse, '... just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." —'Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham' (vv. 6–7—Gen 15:6). That's Scripture number one.

2. But here comes an objector

'That is all right for Jews, Paul. We are Gentiles, so it does not have to be the same for Gentiles as it is for Jews.' Paul has got a Scripture ready for that, he had thought of this objection before they had. 'And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed"' (v. 8—Genesis 12:3; 18:18 and 22:18). So it refers to Gentiles as well. That is Scripture number 2.

3. Another objector

'You do it that way, do you, Paul? You make Abraham your model; we make Moses our model. You can get to heaven by justification by faith; we shall get there by keeping the law. You go your way and we shall go our way.'

What is wrong with that? How does Paul know that they will never get there that way? 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them' (v. 10— Deuteronomy 27:26). So, if you try the way of keeping the law, that verse says you will be under a curse. That is Scripture number 3.

4. See the old rabbi sitting in the synagogue

'Who do you think you are talking to, Paul? You may not be able to keep the law, but we can.' What will Paul say now? He has got another Scripture ready for him. 'Suppose you could keep the law (it is a big supposition, is it not?); you still would not be justified, because the Scripture says, "The just shall live by his faith"' (v. 11—Hab 2:4 KJV). It is not by keeping the law.' Scripture number 4.

5. The rabbi again

'I have got faith that if I keep the law I shall be right with God.' 'Well,' says Paul, 'you can't have read Leviticus then, for it tells us quite plainly that the law is not of faith. When God tells us that the just shall live by faith, he is talking about the opposite of the law, because the law runs on a different principle. "The one who does them shall live by them"' (v. 12—Lev 18:5). The law is on the principle of *Do*; salvation is on the principle of *Believe*.' That is Scripture number 5.

6. But here comes one of those folk who claim to be a Christian; very God-fearing, doing their best

'I could not be sure that I am saved and have been justified. I do think we have to keep the law. Of course, I could not say this to my credit. If, in the end, when God judges me and I

have kept the law well enough to get salvation, it is still by God's grace—God gives me the grace to do the works to keep the law that merits the salvation. That is why I trust Christ. I pray to him every day to give me the grace to keep the law so that I shall merit salvation. Surely that is what Christ came to do; it was to help us to keep the law so that we could merit salvation, and it is all by his grace if we succeed by his help to keep the law to get salvation.'

'Nonsense,' says Paul. 'Absolute nonsense. Christ did not come to help you to keep the law to get saved; he came to bear the curse of the broken law that we could not keep, so that, by bearing its curse for us, we may be quit of the law.'

'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (v. 13—Deut 21:23). That is Scripture number 6.

What is meant by 'grace'?

There are hundreds of sincere men and women who think that Scripture says that salvation is by grace, which means that they pray to Christ and he gives them grace to keep the law, which then merits their salvation. That is not so; that is not what is meant by grace. It is the opposite, in fact. Christ faced the fact that we have broken the law and deserve its curse. He is not now giving us the grace to keep the law and avoid its penalty. He faced the fact that we broke it and were cursed and he became a curse for us that we may be set free.

What was the law for?

If we say that, anyone who knows his stuff will come back at us with one more question. 'You keep bringing up these verses that salvation is by faith; I don't know about them, but I do know that the law of Moses is in the Bible. You keep saying that salvation is not by the law; what was the law for, then?'

It is no good if at that point we have to say that we do not know. It is in the Bible and God has not put it there without purpose. If we have proved that salvation is by grace through faith, we must be ready with our next answer to the question, 'Why then the law?' (v. 19), so that negatively and positively we may sew up the argument both ways.

We do not belittle the law. The law is God's law; it is holy, righteous, good and spiritual (Rom 7:12, 14). And it had its proper function; it was to show us our transgressions as so impossibly bad and to keep sin under restraint until Christ would come, and that, in showing us what impossible sinners we were, it might bring us to the Saviour to be justified through faith in him (vv. 19–24). It was meant to convict us of sin and bring us to Christ for salvation. Not only for justification, but the promise, and the covenant, and world-wide inheritance also, given free and for nothing to those who are nothing but bankrupt sinners.

Let us praise God for his word. How magnificent his salvation is; how infinite is his grace. It would have been marvellous if he had simply forgiven us, but when we think what his abundant and divine grace has planned and now covenanted for us, we would bow at his feet and sincerely want to thank and praise him. As heirs of God to infinite riches through

Jesus Christ, we would seek to walk worthy of it and to have compassion for those who still live in the bankruptcy of sin and of mere religion, so that they may be delivered and set free.

How May I Enjoy True Freedom?

Reading: Galatians 5:1, 13–15; 6:12–16.

We come now to our third study in this series where we have been trying, not to expound Galatians verse by verse and comma by comma but rather to get a bird's eye view of the epistle. For that reason we have, somewhat arbitrarily, divided it into three parts, and from each part chosen one major theme on which to concentrate our attention.

From the first two chapters we took the question, *How may I live to God?* We found the answer to be summed up in two phrases, 'justified in Christ' (2:17) and 'Christ who lives in me' (v. 19). That is how we may live to God; it is by being in Christ and having Christ in us. It is by being justified in him and having him live in us.

For our second study we looked at chapter 3 and asked of it the major question, *How may I be sure of my inheritance?* We had to spend some time finding out what the inheritance was, and when we found that out we found that the answer to our question lies in the great covenant-sacrifice that God made with Abraham and his seed long before the law and, therefore, not dependent on the law or its conditions. It was an unconditional, one-party covenant made by God with Abraham and his seed. That is how we can be sure of our inheritance.

We found that the way we enter into the good of that inheritance is by being baptized into Christ, thereby putting on Christ and, therefore, becoming the seed to whom God promised that inheritance by covenant. That is, we are sure of our inheritance by being baptized into Christ, by putting on Christ by faith; thus becoming Christ's, and thereby becoming the very seed of Abraham to whom the inheritance was given by covenant.

Paul's major arguments

The third section is the longest, comprising chapters 4, 5 and 6. We shall sum up one of its major features by asking the question, *'How may I enjoy freedom and what is true freedom?'* There are many other things dealt with in these chapters, but this is one of the major themes.

Before we settle down to answer this question, let us firstly remind ourselves of the other thing we have been doing in our studies. We have been casting a side-long glance at Paul himself as he was writing this epistle and seeing the kinds of arguments he uses. He has used the *argument from church history* (a large chunk of it), and we have seen its importance in the matter of justification by faith.

In our second study we noticed an *argument from experience* (3:1–5). It is a very brief argument slotted in between other major arguments; it is always valid to argue from

experience, but not from experience alone. Arguments from experience should not be our biggest arguments; they certainly are not the biggest in this epistle.

We have also considered Paul's *argument from Scripture* itself, very carefully put together by a judicious selection of key verses that explicitly state the principles on which a man is justified with God. It was not the first time he had used those texts; he had used them like the sword of the Spirit, perhaps thousands of times, in synagogues. They are a good example to us. In our work for the Lord in trying to help people, we shall not be able to remember or quote the whole Bible. It is an exceedingly good idea to copy Paul and have certain key positive statements of Scripture, covering the basic principles of salvation, at our fingertips. We shall also be looking at the kinds of arguments Paul uses in this third section.

How may we enjoy freedom, and what is true freedom?

There are two big positive answers to that question, 'What is true freedom?' The first answer is, true freedom is being governed by God as a father treats a son, rather than a little child; learning to live in the family of God not just like a little infant, but like a grown-up son. That argument is found in the opening paragraph of chapter 4 (vv. 1–11). It is an argument that Paul begins with the words,

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (vv. 1–7)

Analogies are there to illustrate; not all analogies are valid

It is a lovely argument and we notice at once that it is an argument from analogy, which is a rather pompous way of saying that it is a comparison of the way the believer lives, with the way a grown-up son lives in an ordinary human family. The analogy extends from the way a parent will deal with a little infant, to the way he will deal with his fully grown-up son.

We have always to be very careful when we argue by analogy. First of all, analogies never prove anything, they only illustrate a point. If you are arguing about spiritual things it is exceedingly important to make sure that your analogy is a scriptural one, or at least has scriptural authority. It is possible to use analogies that seem good, but are not; they are, in fact, very bad.

Suppose someone stood before you arguing about salvation—How is a man saved?

'It is evident that salvation is like the village pump—those old-fashioned pumps. When you tried to get the water out, it would not come, so you had to prime the pump with a little water. You had to put some water in, in order to persuade the pump to work and deliver you a lot of water into your pail. Salvation is like that; you put your bit in first and then God will give you his salvation. If you do the best you can, God will reward you.'

Well, perfectly so, if salvation is like the village pump. But it so happens that salvation is not like the village pump! The village pump is one of the last things on earth that salvation is like.

The questions to ask about analogies are, Who said so? What gave you the authority to use the analogy?

An analogy taken from life

The way a parent will treat a little child and the way a parent will treat an adult child

It is valid because it was given to us by an inspired apostle, and because this business of children and sons lies at the very heart of the gospel. Just as we were born into human families and had fathers who disciplined us, so when we receive salvation we are born again, born into the family of God, God becoming our Father. When we are forgiven we are not just cast loose on our own, but it is a matter of entering the family of God. One of the things that comes as a result of that is we have to learn to live in the family of God. How will God treat us as believers in the Lord Jesus and how does he propose to govern us? He does it in a way that brings true freedom.

Paul asks us to consider the difference between an infant and an adult in an ordinary human family. When the father's heir is only a little nipper he is very little different from a slave. He is under tutors and teachers, with lots of rules and regulations. When some of us were children, our families could not afford private tutors and things like that, but there were still plenty of rules.

One very simple rule that most of us came across very early in life had to do with doormats. If we were playing in the garden or running through every puddle we could find our boots were caked with mud, and we were taught that as we came into the house there was a doormat. If we did not use it we were taken by the scruff of the neck and shown the doormat! It was then explained to us (in words of one syllable) what doormats were for. If we did not learn the lesson quickly and use the aforesaid doormat, steps were taken to impress on us the necessity for using it. Our parents were not going to have the carpets ruined by a whole tribe of infants running in and out with muddy boots. Seeing we were only infants and had no sense in our heads, means were brought to bear upon us to use the doormat. There were many other rules and regulations and sometimes we resented them all; the bathroom, the time to be in at night, etc.!

Then we grew up (in age at least) and became adults. When we became our father's grown-up sons the stick was put away and we were no longer taken by the ear and shown the doormat. Why not? Our fathers hoped that growing up from children to adults had made a very big difference. Now we had the same way of looking at things, we realised how much carpets cost and we did not want to make a pigsty of them! Having now the same outlook on such things as our fathers had, and guided by their sense of values, we used the doormat. There were times when we forgot to, of course, and we noticed there were times when they did too! But normally we did it, not because we had to or there was a stick in the cupboard, but because we looked at things as our parents looked at them. Do we find it burdensome to

use the doormats in our homes? No, we want to use them. Why? To keep the carpets beautiful—we like carpets, just as our parents do.

Paul is here considering what freedom means. It means living in the family of God. It means also being treated by God our Father as grown-up children instead of little infants. Israel under the law were like little infants. They were put under teachers and rules and the law itself, with fearful penalties attached to it if they did not keep it. They had to be persuaded to keep it by such penalties.

But now it is different

It is not that God has grown slack and says that the law does not matter anymore. But now, in Christ, we are no longer infants, but spiritually grown-up sons and daughters. 'And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"' (v. 6). We look on God as he looks on God and sustain a similar relationship to him, having the Spirit of God's Son within us. We want to do what God's Son would want to do. That is how God's salvation works.

There are days when we want to do things that we know are wrong. Yes, indeed, but we are thinking here of basic principles and presently we shall see how to deal with that other side of us, that old flesh that still wants to do things that are wrong (5:16–21).

The basic point is this: freedom, true freedom, means living in the family of God, no longer as infants but as grown-up children.

Let us notice the way Paul puts it. He does not say, 'God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts so that we could become sons.' He puts it the other way round, '*Because you are sons*, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.' God determined to make us his grown-up sons and daughters and chose us as his heirs in Christ; and because he wants us to learn how to live as his children he has given us the Spirit of his Son.

That is the first point in this section on true freedom. The difference is between being a Jew under the law as an infant and very little different from a slave; and being a Christian, a believer, in the family of God as a grown-up child. Not under rules and regulations, and certainly with no penalties of the law, but positive of God's Son in our hearts making us want to do the things he would want to do. *He gives us his values.*

Doctrine affects behaviour

Having made that point, Paul turns aside and argues from experience once more by showing the effects this false doctrine has had on the believers (4:8–20). This is a very important argument too. You can very often test whether a doctrine is right or wrong (among other ways) by asking what effect it has on the life of the believer. Does it make him more Christ-like? Does it make him more holy? Does it make him more loving? Or does it do the opposite of these things?

Paul turns now to discussing the effects that the wrong doctrines were beginning to have on the believers in Galatia. He says, 'I stand in doubt of you, my brothers and sisters. I cannot understand it: when you have the chance of living as grown-up children of God and being treated by him as his children, you turn back to the slavery in which you once were with all sorts of rules and regulations and observing of days and months and years.' That is bondage.

As though Christianity consisted of observing certain rules, and so long as you keep the rules—the right day, the right month, the right year—then you are spiritual. That is quite false. The only way to be spiritual is to have the Spirit of God’s Son in you. It is not a matter of being able to say that you have kept the rules so you must be all right.

It is easy to drop into that kind of thinking and adopt a whole lot of rules and regulations, and just because you have kept them, and also have not done this, that, or something else, you imagine that you must be all right. What a pathetic notion that is! It is not spirituality at all. There they were going back to bind themselves with rules and regulations—‘I stand in doubt of you,’ says Paul (v. 11).

Then he says another very interesting thing. They were not only going back to observing a lot of man-made rules and regulations. He adds that he has noticed the effect this wrong doctrine was having on their attitude to him. It may not be one of the most obvious things, and we may not have thought of it, but it is still very true; you may test the rightness or wrongness of a doctrine by the effect it has on people’s attitude to Paul. If a person’s doctrine leads him to say, ‘Oh, that was only Paul held that, I do not hold that view,’ it is a very curious thing he has got hold of.

We would not be saved at all if it had not been for Paul bringing the gospel to Europe. It was an uncomfortable sign when this doctrine that these people had led them to withdraw their sympathies from Paul, the very man who had brought them the gospel. And there was a further unpleasant sign, when these people who had this rigid doctrine of law tried to monopolise those converts and would not let Paul near to them. ‘They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out’ (v. 17)—that is, from Paul’s company. Paul was not allowed to get near to them. It is always an unhealthy sign when teachers of some doctrine try to monopolise people and not let anyone else come near to them.

If God treats us like grown-up sons and daughters, he trusts his people to know the truth and be able to see it by his Holy Spirit’s illumination. He does not treat them like infants who must not be allowed to decide for themselves.

An argument from typology

That was an argument from experience, not a very long one, and from it he turns to a long and major argument on this matter of freedom. It is an argument from Scripture (4:21–5:1). It is the second major biblical argument in the course of the epistle and, interestingly enough, an argument from Scripture typology. We are going to hear the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac from the Old Testament book of Genesis. Paul is going to draw an analogy and say that those passages are typology.

Paul has two major arguments from Scripture in Galatians. He has the series of direct quotations in chapter 3 of verses explicitly expressing the basic principles of salvation. Now comes his second argument, from Scripture typology. Both arguments are valid and perhaps the order Paul uses them in is deliberate. It is better to start with the explicit statements of the principles, then bring in the very illuminating picture-language of ancient history and typology.

We should carefully observe Paul’s use of it here, for we are liable to use typology ourselves on occasions and not get it right. You can prove all sorts of marvellous things by

typology that there is no authority for elsewhere in Scripture. However, typology is only valid when it squares with the explicit statements of holy Scripture. So Paul, having listed for us in chapter 3 a whole series of explicit theological statements, now comes to clinch the point with another biblical argument founded on typology. It is going to answer for us our question, *How may we enjoy freedom, and what is true freedom?*

The story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac

This passage says that true freedom is being able to look forward to our inheritance on the ground of being freeborn sons and daughters, and not slaves. What a lovely freedom this is to have before us, the hope of our inheritance and to be able to regard it as freeborn children regard their inheritance. They have it by birth, they have it by right. It is a gift of their fathers, theirs by being their fathers' children and by being freeborn. They do not have the prospect uncertainly, like a slave who may hope that one day, if he behaves himself and works hard, he may amass enough money or merit to be given his freedom. Life becomes a drudgery that way. No, they have it as freeborn sons, conscious that the inheritance is there because they are freeborn sons. That is freedom.

Paul enforces the lesson by quoting that tremendous climax from the Abraham story, where God commanded Abraham to do what Sarah had said and turn out the bondwoman and her son. Why turn them out? Listen to the reason, 'For the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman' (v. 30; Gen 21:10). His inheritance is on the basis of being a freeborn son and the slave shall not inherit along with the free. It is not just a question of being justified in the past; we live looking forward to the great future inheritance on the ground of being freeborn sons and daughters.

The parable of the Prodigal Son

What difference does it make? Let us think together of a parable given for other purposes, or perhaps it really was written for the reason we are about to consider. It is the parable of the so-called prodigal son. It was aimed at the unconverted and at the Pharisees in particular. They resented our Lord and the fact that he received sinners—he actually went and ate with sinners (Luke 15:2). They thought that it was the most awful laxity and moral irresponsibility that they had ever heard of. Fancy receiving sinners and eating with them, when the sinners were the kind of sinners mentioned by Luke. Our Lord answered the Pharisees in a three-fold parable (15:4–32).

What man of you if he had a hundred sheep and lost one would not leave the ninety-nine and go after the one, and when he would find it would bring it back with great rejoicing? (v. 4)

Why would he do that? Because that one sheep represents his profit. No farmer would ever say that he has one hundred sheep and it does not matter if he loses any of them, even one of them. No grocer would say that he has a dozen packets of tea and, as long as he sells nine of them, it does not matter if three of them get lost on the floor. Those three are his profit. So a farmer will seek a lost sheep.

Or what woman if she had ten pieces of silver on her beautiful necklace around her head, and lost one of them would not search the whole house until she found the one that was lost, and when she found it rejoice with her friends? (see vv. 8–9)

Why would that be? Imagine having a lovely coronet with ten pieces of silver in it and a gaping hole in the middle; what woman would wear that? You might as well ask a woman to go to a party with a tooth missing! Appearance is a tremendously important thing.

These Pharisees were not prepared to do for their lost and erring brothers what they were prepared to do for a lost sheep and for a lost piece of silver. Our Lord did not then say, 'What man of you if he had two sons and lost one of them would not go and look for him . . .'. That was precisely what the Pharisees were not prepared to do. When the father in the parable welcomed the prodigal son back in his rags and repentance, the elder brother objected. Why did he object? Let us listen to him,

That wretched son of yours. You call him a son. Look what he has done. He has squandered your inheritance. And me? I worked for you all these years and you have not given me anything. (see vv. 29–30)

His father scratched his head and could not make out what his son was talking about. 'What do you mean,' he said, 'that you have worked for me all these years and I have never given you anything? What are you talking about?'

'I have worked hard for you all these years and have not got anything out of it. I might as well have gone off like my brother and painted the town red. Here I have been a good man, keeping all the rules, working hard and I have got nothing for it.'

Now we discover what the disaster has been all the years. He has been working like a slave, thinking that the inheritance depended on his working, and when he sees this prodigal coming back and getting a little bit of calf out of it he is jealous.

The father was dumbfounded. 'All I have got is yours. What are you talking about, that I have never given you anything—all of it is yours!'

It is possible to live, though you may be heir of all, and to get into the way of living as though you were a slave. What a different way that elder brother would have gone about the farming had he realised that he was the heir, since he was the father's elder son. When the prodigal came home, who had so messed up his life, ruined everything and thrown away his potential, he came home in repentance and his father welcomed him and proposed to give him one fattened calf. If the older brother had realised that all that the father had was his, he would have asked the father if one fattened calf was enough, if one change of dress was enough, if one pair of shoes was enough. But because he thought his father had never given him anything he had no sympathy in his heart.

What we think about our status and our inheritance will determine how we live and our attitude to other folks. If it dawns on us that we are freeborn children of the Father with an incalculable inheritance, how it will transform our attitudes to poor, broken people who have wasted their lives.

The son of the bondwoman and the son of the free

Let us return to the story of Abraham and Hagar, and Ishmael being cast out because as the son of the bondwoman he could not inherit with the son of the free woman. Paul has come in for a lot of criticism from certain theologians for using this story as an illustration. They say it is an allegory—arbitrary and bad. It is nothing of the sort! It is actually a chunk of real history, and if we confine ourselves simply to the level of history we shall find the same principle in Abraham as Paul applies presently to us. Let us think of it at that level.

Abraham has been justified by faith—Genesis 15:6 tells us so. God had told Abraham that he was going to give him a vast inheritance that he covenanted to him and to his seed. At that moment Abraham believed that he and his seed were going to have this great inheritance. But he had not got any seed, and one day Sarah began to talk about this. She had a curious suggestion, 'The Lord has prevented me from bearing children. We can get round that if you take Hagar' (16:2). What was she doing? If the Lord had restrained her from bearing children, perhaps he had some purpose in that; why was she suggesting ways of getting round what God was doing? God had promised the seed, but he had not given it yet. Sarah could not trust God to give them the seed and she thought of ways of acquiring the seed by their own effort.

The more we ponder it, the more foolish it becomes. To have accepted it from God would have made her life that of a freeborn daughter of God; but now, if they have got to fulfil God's promise by their own effort, they are turning themselves into slaves. How significant that she took one of the slave girls to try by human effort to fulfil what God had intended to give them as a gift.

When Hagar saw that she was going to have a child, and she was only a slave girl and her mistress had not got a child, it was too much for Hagar and she began to put on airs and graces (16:5). There was a sense now in which she was better than her mistress; she became a queen overnight. How much better than Sarah she was.

It is bad enough if you are in a forty-room mansion, having someone like that around, but much worse if you are living in tents. She had greater attainments, was better off and more saintly than Sarah herself. (It is surprising what airs and graces people give themselves, when they think they have made better progress than other people!) However, Sarah could not take it anymore, so she persuaded Abraham to turn her out. But God met her and sent her back again (16:9). Sarah and Abraham did not get rid of their mistakes quite as quickly as that. They had to learn, for their and our benefit, what that kind of attitude leads to.

So God sent Hagar back and told her she was going to have a child, and then he said some very true, but not very complimentary, things about the child that would be born (vv. 11–12). 'He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him.' Fancy living with that kind of child, not to say when he became a man! Abraham and Sarah had some unpleasant years in their home with that lad about the place—a wild donkey, he was difficult to restrain and discipline. He had a wild unregenerate nature. He did not have Sarah's hope or Abraham's faith, he was merely the son of the slave woman. Ishmael was in the house of Abraham with Hagar until the promised seed came, and as soon as he came the command went out, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son' (21:10).

Paul's analogy

It was after all those years with the slave boy in the house, with the difficulties of disciplining him, that God fulfilled his promise and gave Abraham and Sarah the son of promise, a free born son to be his heir. Paul sees in that actual bit of real history a very clear analogy. Abraham was given justification by faith and the promise of the inheritance through the seed, but there came the intervening centuries when God put Israel under the law of Sinai until the promised seed came, namely our blessed Lord himself. Why did God put them under the law? It was to do for Israel what Abraham had to do for Ishmael, 'The law was added because of transgressions' (Gal 3:19), to keep Israel under those stern measures of law plus penalty. When the promised seed, Jesus Christ our Lord, came, that made a tremendous difference.

In Abraham's case, what happened when Isaac came? Genesis 21, he came; Genesis 22, he was taken up the mountain and offered in sacrifice to God; Genesis 24, God began a new movement. He had started by bringing Abraham out from the Gentiles and forming a nation; he kept him waiting until the promised seed came; when he came he offered him on the mountain of sacrifice; Abraham was sent out by God to the Gentiles and from them there came another big movement in the person of Rebekah when she was joined to Isaac.

So it has been in history. God visited the nations and took out Abraham and started the Jewish nation. He promised him that the seed would come. Until he came Israel were under the law. When the blessed Lord Jesus came, he and the Father walked to Calvary together and the seed was offered. The inheritance was covenanted through the sacrifice of Calvary, and then God began the next big movement with the Gentiles on the day of Pentecost. We were brought in and we have been joined to the promised seed, the heavenly Isaac.

Paul is not playing at typology here in Galatians. The principle was first of all true in the literal history of Abraham's own life, and that history was so controlled by God that it became a prototype of the greater history from Abraham to Christ and on to the present day. The same lesson applies to us. How shall we gain our inheritance? Not as slaves, like Hagar and Ishmael, but as freeborn sons, like Isaac.

Where does false doctrine take us?

Then the argument from experience becomes much more solemn (5:2–12). Paul steps aside to argue that false doctrine is wrong. He shows it to be so desperately wrong by drawing out its implications. The thing to do with false doctrines is to push them to their logical conclusion and see where they go to. Paul does so here.

They could be heirs through faith as freeborn sons, but they were going back to the miserable doctrine of circumcision and the law with human rules and regulations. Paul tells them that they cannot have both, 'I testify to you that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. You who would be justified by the law have fallen from grace, because you cannot mix the two principles. Either you inherit on the terms of grace, or you try to inherit on the terms of law, but you cannot mix the two. Christ is of no effect for you if you will be justified by the keeping of the law' (5:3–4). False doctrine is not an alternative version of Christianity. It is an either/or situation and they could not have both of them.

What freedom is

He then comes again to talk of freedom (5:13). These are well known and exceedingly important verses. We have already thought about what freedom is; it is living in the family of God as a son or daughter under a father and not as a little infant (4:1–7). It is going about our Father's work as freeborn children. We have a great inheritance because we are children of our Father. We did not deserve it but have got it by grace and we are just as interested as our Father is in developing the inheritance—not like slaves trying to earn it, but because it is ours we develop it (4:21–5:1).

What freedom is not and why sin matters

Freedom is not permission to do as you like. It is not permission to sin as though it does not matter. 'You have been called to freedom,' says Paul. 'Do not use your freedom as an occasion for the flesh.' In 5:13–15 and 6:6–10 Paul tells us why sin matters. It is only one of the reasons, but it is a serious reason. Although a believer is freed from the penalty of sin, he is not necessarily freed from the consequences of sin, and if he sins he will reap its consequences. Sometimes we have so emphasized that there is no penalty for the believer (and there is no penalty), but we have failed to emphasize that there are certain consequences, even for believers.

Paul names some of these consequences, 'Take heed, and do not start biting and devouring one another.' These are timely words of wisdom. If evangelicalism has suffered from one blight more than any other, it has been where Christians have bitten and devoured one another. There is no penalty for it, but there are consequences—'If you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another' (5:15). This can spoil our inheritance. The peace and joy in our lives, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in practical terms in the church will be ruined.

Imagine a father giving his twenty-one-year old son a beautiful Jaguar car, free and for nothing.

The son says, 'In days gone by, if I had misbehaved, you would have given me six of the best. Suppose I go out and drive this car at one hundred and twenty-five miles per hour, skid and put it into the ditch, would you give me six of the best?'

The father answers, 'No, I would not.'

'There is no penalty, then? I shall go and smash it up.'

Since there is no penalty for sin, does it matter if we sin? Paul says, 'Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap' (6:7).

Sowing and reaping

Let us now imagine a farmer. God has told him to plant wheat in his field and the man sows barley. It begins to grow and the man realises the fool he has been. He comes to God and asks for pardon. The Lord forgives him—what then? Does the Lord perform a miracle and change the barley to wheat? No, what a man sows he reaps.

If believers misbehave and damage one another and churches, there is no penalty for it; but what consequences there are! 'The one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life' (6:8). That means that we shall enjoy it as the Holy Spirit within us develops the

life that God has given to us with all its potential. We shall enjoy eternal life and even here in this world begin to reap its blessed consequences. 'The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption'—tears, brokenness and things that in this life can perhaps never again be put right.

The Holy Spirit within

How can we know freedom if there is always the danger of consequences because of our foolishness? By having the Holy Spirit within us and by being led by him. Being led by the Spirit is a different principle from obeying the law. It is not command-plus-penalty, it is the life of the Holy Spirit within. One of the strongest arguments for the truth of the gospel which Paul preached is that justification by faith does not lead to ungodliness of life, because at the same time as you receive justification you get God's Holy Spirit within.

God has given to us his Holy Spirit, but that does not mean that the old flesh has gone. It is still very much there. 'For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do' (5:17). Here comes the flesh with all its ugly desires of spitefulness and revenge and narrow-mindedness, urging itself forward. How shall we overcome it and put it in its place? If we are believers the Holy Spirit will be giving us his desires. In that moment when we are about to be malicious and unkind and slander our brother or sister, another voice will be saying to us, 'No you don't!' He will desire the opposite of those things in us. Paul's argument is given in detail in 5:16–25.

An analogy

As we come to the end of our study let us think of an analogy. There are different types of showers available today. Some are very good and some not quite so good. There are those that are fixed to the bath taps, and when you turn the hot tap on, then you have to turn on the cold one to cool the hot water a little. Often you find that the cold water will not come out at all and you get scorched. Then, when you are not thinking, the shower becomes like an iceberg—out comes the cold water and there is no hot water at all. A plumber will explain that there are two jets of water and one of them is so strong that, as it is coming out, the other cannot get out into the stream. They cannot mix, the cold water gets the upper hand and the hot cannot penetrate it.

The principle is a little bit like the Holy Spirit and the flesh. 'These are opposed to each other' (5:17). The Holy Spirit is given to us that we might listen to his desires and yearnings and allow him to surge forward in our lives and, by his surging forward, to cut off what otherwise would be the expression of our flesh.

Paul adds many other arguments, but perhaps we have covered the major ones. What is freedom and how may I enjoy it? When all is said and done it is not through the law, it is through Christ. If any of us have a theology, a secret of holiness that gives us the credit, it is false (5:26–6:5; 6:11–18). 'Those who want to have you circumcised do it that they might boast in your flesh. God forbid that I should glory,' says Paul (6:13–14). If we are living godly lives, may God forbid that we should take the credit for it. May each of us be able to say with Paul,

'God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.' That is the means by which 'I have been crucified unto the world, and the world unto me' —it is not by the law.

We have spent a long time in this study and we are thankful to the Lord for its intrinsic interest; how it delights our minds. By the Spirit's power may he use the word in our minds, cleansing our thoughts and causing it to abide, so that we may bring it out in the day of need. We should also privately, as we have the opportunity, go over it so that what has been of God in these studies may be indelibly written on our hearts, so that we may use it in our daily struggle against our flesh until that great day when the Spirit's work will be complete and we shall be conformed to the image of his Son.