

STUDIES IN GALATIANS

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1. LETTER OF LIBERTY Based on Gal. 1:1-9

The author of a tract entitled Come To Jesus got engaged in a theological dispute, and he wrote another publication in which he cut his opponent to pieces with razor sharp sarcasm. He let a friend read it and then asked if he had any suggestions for a title. His friend said, "How about Go To The Devil by the author of Come To Jesus." The author recognized the inconsistency and responded to the rebuke by not publishing the product of his anger. Be ye angry and sin not said Paul. That is a easier thing to preach than to practice. Many men of God have failed by displaying improper anger. Moses let out a burst of rage and it cost him the privilege of entering the promised land. Jonah's character will always be marred by the fact that he was angry at God's mercy being shown to those who deserve judgment. The fact is, it is very hard for any servant of God to keep a proper balance, and be able to hate sin and love the sinner.

The book of Galatians is an example of the fact that it can be done. This is the only letter we have by Paul that was obviously written in anger. Paul was fighting mad as he dictated this Epistle. He reveals more of his emotions in this letter than anywhere. He is angry at the Judaisers for trying to get the Galatians to give up their

liberty in Christ and go back under the law. He is angry and frustrated at the Galatians because they are so foolish as to even consider such a move.

Henricksen writes of the Epistle, "The spiritual atmosphere is charged. It is sultry, sweltering. A storm is threatening. The sky is darkening. In the distance one can see flashes of lightning....when each line of verses 1-5 is read in the light of the letters occasion and purpose the atmospheric turbulence is immediately detected." Every commentary points to the atmosphere of anger surrounding this letter. Paul uses restraint in the first few verses, but as soon as he gets through the introduction he lets go with both barrels, and in verses 6-9 he blasts both the Galatians for their folly in listening, and the Judaisers for their folly in preaching a perversion of the Gospel. Let them be cursed says Paul, and then he repeats it for emphasis.

Paul is angry because he loves Christ and the church too much to see it injured by the folly of man. A study of this letter will not only help us grasp better what we have in Christ, but it will help us also to see just what we should get angry about as believers. We are too often angry at the wrong things, and not angry about the things that made Paul angry. Jesus and Paul both got angry when other people were being robbed of their liberty by legalism.

Paul did not thank God for the Galatians, or for anything about them, as he does in all of his other letters. It is not only what he writes but what he leaves unwritten that tells us of his anger. There is a legitimate place for anger in the Christian life, and even toward fellow Christians. If it is handled properly it becomes a powerful blessing. Paul's anger that motivated him to write this letter changed the course of human history. We must grasp something of the background of this letter before we study its contents, or we will never come to appreciate its contents.

All of the first Christians were Jews, and as Jews they continued to live under the law of Moses even as Christians. They did not immediately throw off the Old Testament, for it was their Bible, and the law of Moses was still their guide, and the temple was still their holy place of worship. Most all of the leaders of the early church were also Jews. When Paul began to bring Gentile converts into the church, and establish Gentile churches, the Jewish leaders felt it was their duty to go to these Gentiles and make it clear to them what was required of them to be good Christians. These Judaisers, as they were called, were sincere Christians, in many cases, who wanted to make sure the Gentiles obeyed the law of Moses.

The problem was that they cast doubt on the sufficiency of Christ. They said that faith in Christ was not enough, for you must also keep the law. This was confusing to the Gentile Christians, but they had no basis to argue with men of authority. They assumed that they must know what they were talking about, and since they wanted to do what God demanded they began to conform and make their Christianity a part of the Old Testament system of law.

When Paul heard this he was angry, for this action robbed the Christian of the liberty that Christ brought, and put them back under legalism. Galatians is the great proclamation of religious liberty in Christ. G. Campbell Morgan said, "The essential message of the letter has to do with liberty." Hendriksen called Galatians, "The Christian Declaration of Independence." If Paul had not written this letter and fought against those who sought to lead Christians back into bondage to the law, Christianity may have become a mere branch on the tree of Judaism. Christians would have been just another sect like the Pharisees and Saducees. Thanks to Paul the church escaped from the bondage and limitations of the law, and launched out into the vast uncharted world of the Gentiles with a message of good news to all people.

If Christianity would have had to require circumcision and dietary regulations of the law of Moses, it never would have had a universal appeal. The whole mission and history of the church depended on Paul gaining a victory on this issue. That is why this letter is one of the most revolutionary documents in the history of mankind. We are what we are today in large measure due to this letter. Wilbur M. Smith put it, "Had the Judaizers in the early church been allowed to force the Christian Gospel into a Judaistic strait jacket, the church would have always remained weak, narrow, and small, and you and I possibly would never have heard the Gospel."

Merrill C. Tenney wrote, "Few books have had a more profound influence on the history of mankind... Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had it never been written." No wonder Luther loved this book so dearly. It was the battle cry of the Reformation. The battle Paul fought was fought all over again, and thanks to Paul's letter Christian liberty won out again over legalism and bondage to law. Luther said, "The Epistle to the Galatians is my Epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine." I don't know how Katherine his wife felt about this competition, but thanks to Luther's love of Galatians. We are under Protestant liberty rather than legalistic bondage.

The value of this background is that it makes this letter exciting to study because it has already been a major influence in our lives, even if we have never read it. The truth of this letter has benefited us even without us knowing it. It becomes even more precious, however, as we enter consciously into its riches. In our study we are not trying to understand something that is irrelevant, but we are trying to gain a deeper appreciation of what is highly irrelevant to our lives so that we can apply it more fully and personally. A knowledge of this book will add greatly to the joy and liberty that is

ours in Christ. It will protect us from getting sidetracked in a world of many voices, and it will make us more effective communicators of the Gospel of grace.

There are two extremes that people fall into in their search for the ideal life. The one is legalism and the other is license. The first says touch not, taste not, handle not, and the second says eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Neither of them represent the biblical path to the abundant life. Paul in this letter shows us that the way to get the best of both of these extremes, and avoid the dangers of both, is by liberty in bondage to Christ.

If you are a slave to anyone or anything but Christ you are in bondage, but if you are a slave to Christ, you are the most free of all people. If the Son shall make you free you are free indeed. You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free. This is what the Galatian letter is all about. It is the Christian guide to the balance life of liberty. Charles Erdman divides the book into three sections of two chapters each. The first two deal with the Apostle of liberty; the second two with the doctrine of liberty, and the last two with the life of liberty. We have then in this letter a personal, doctrinal, and practical perspective on Christian liberty.

Paul begins with the personal, and he exposes his soul for all to see. We get to see Paul as never before. We get to see him when he is angry and frustrated, and in a state of shocked bewilderment. In the letter to the Philippians all is peace and joy, but in this letter we see him on the battlefield engaging the enemy. His whole ministry is at stake, and the foundation of the Gospel is at stake, and he fights with all the weapons at his disposal. The very fact that this letter exists teaches us plenty. It destroys completely the idea that the saints of God are meant to be happy little islands isolated from the turmoil of the world. This letter shatters that myth and shows us that Christians are to be right in the middle of the battlefield. There

are always forces trying to move Christians off center and get them to go to one extreme or the other, and so we must constantly fight for liberty and balance.

One of the paradoxes of life that stands out here is the fact that it was other Christians who caused Paul his grief and heartache. Paul could glory in his sufferings at the hands of unbelievers for the sake of the Gospel, but there was nothing to rejoice about when Christians perverted the Gospel and tried to ensnare others, and destroy his work and authority. The Judaisers accused Paul of getting so involved with the Gentiles that he had gone astray and had forsaken the law of Moses. They cast doubt on Paul's authority and threatened to undermine all he had done in bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles.

All of this was done by sincere Christians who disagreed with Paul and his approach to the Gentiles. We see the paradox of Christian history here. Most men of God have their greatest problems, not in relation to the world, but in relation to other groups of Christians who disagree with their emphasis. Being stoned and blasted by the world is almost pleasure compared to the criticism and folly one has to endure from others within the kingdom. Paul would have been able to say amen to this poem:

**To live above with the saints we love
Oh that will be glory.
But to live below with the saints we know
That's a different story.**

Galatians is a record of just how serious and harmful the battles can be within the body of Christ when any portion of the body gets off center and begins to teach anything that robs Jesus of His sovereign role as all-sufficient Savior. Liberty in Christ means that there is only one requirement to be a Christian, and that is faith in

Christ. Any other requirement is imposed by men and is a threat to both our liberty and the sufficiency of Christ as Savior. It is sad but it is a fact of life that the fight for Christian liberty and balance is as much a fight with other Christians as it is with the world.

As Christians we are constantly facing appeals to jump on the bandwagon of other Christians and go off the deep end of one extreme or the other. Satan knows there is great power when the church is united and that it becomes weak and ineffective when it fights itself and create division. That is why the church is constantly being broken into divisive groups who have their own pet theology, and that is why it is so important to study this letter of Paul that will help us stay on the right track and maintain our liberty in Christ.

2. AN APOSTLE OF AUTHORITY Based on Gal. 1

Charles Dickens tells of how men react to bad news. Martin Chuzzlewit learns that the 50 acre tract in America in which he had invested all his savings turns out to be a hideous swamp. He sinks into a fever because of his sorrow, but Mark Topley who savings were also sunk in that same swamp refuses to be overpowered by calamity. He gives himself a blow on the chest and says to himself, "Things is looking as bad as they can look, young man. You'll not have such another opportunity for showing your jolly disposition, my fine fellow, as long as you live. And, therefore, now is the time to come out strong, as never!"

This is the very kind of positive thinking that must have gone through Paul's mind when he heard that his investment in the Galatian church was threatened. He had preached his heart out to these people, and now they were ready to forsake their freedom in

Christ and enter into the bondage of the law. Paul could have thrown his hands up in despair and given up on the Galatians. He could have layed down and died of grief at his loss and the terrible fickleness of human nature, but instead he said, now is the time to be strong. If ever I spoke with authority to defeat the forces of evil, it must be now or never. Paul did not greet bad news with an attitude of defeat, but with an attitude of determination to never admit defeat. This letter was his weapon, and it has been the primary tool for many a victory since.

Paul must have said I'll never have a greater opportunity to defend the Gospel of grace than this, and so I must come out strong now or never! The first thing Paul does in this letter is to defend his authority as an Apostle. Paul usually just states the fact of his authority, but here he is fighting those who reject his authority, and so we see the letter is different right from the start. We usually skip through Paul's introductions with little attention. Quite often the preface or the introduction is skipped to get right to the body of a book. I use to do it all the time until I realized that the key for a full appreciation of the book is often found in the introduction. Information on the author and his or her background, and what they had in mind in writing the book, can make the book so much more meaningful.

The Bible is often boring to people because its historical setting is not grasped. We cannot see how it relates to our lives because we have not taken the time to understand its original setting and the purpose for which it was written. We must be able to enter into the emotions of Paul's letter and understand what he is doing if we are to appreciate its relevance for today. The best of Bible students have their dry days, however. John Bunyan wrote in his Grace Abounding, "I have sometimes seen more in a line of the Bible than I could well tell how to stand under, and yet at another time the whole Bible has been to me as dry as a stick; or rather my heart has been

so dead and dry unto it that I could not conceive the least dram of refreshment, though I looked it all over."

We cannot escape the dry spells of life, but these are of little consequence in our lives if we develop the habit of finding refreshment at the fountain of the Word regularly. One of the ways to add value to Bible study is to get all the information you can on the author and his purpose. We want to do just that with this letter to Galatians. The more we can understand Paul's feelings and intentions the more meaningful this letter will be.

Let's begin with the name Paul. We all know that Paul's name is Saul in the book of Acts when he first appears on the stage of biblical history. After his conversion and his appointment as God's ambassador to the Gentiles he is called Paul. Many have assumed that his name was changed, but the likelihood is that he had both names from birth. This is the conviction of men like J. Gresham Machen and John Brown, who are great scholars on the life of Paul. Their reasoning makes sense. As a Pharisee it was natural for Paul to go by the name of Saul. This was his Jewish name, but when he became Apostle to the Gentiles it was equally natural for him to go by his Roman name of Paul. He was a Roman citizen by birth, and so it is likely that he was given this Roman name at birth. Paul means little or small, and is a name more likely to be given to a little baby than one given to a grown man at the time of his conversion.

God chose this man even before his birth to accomplish the great task of getting the Gospel to the Gentiles, and one of the ways of preparing him was to see that he was born in Tarsus, a great Gentile center, where he would be exposed to the very people and culture he would spend his life reaching. He had his Roman citizenship at birth, and likely also his Gentile name of Paul.

AN APOSTLE. An Apostle is one sent with the authority with the

one who sends. There are other words for send in the New Testament, but this word for Apostle stresses that the one sent has the authority of the one who is sending, and is also fully responsible to the sender. In Heb. 3:1 Jesus is called the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. He spoke to us more directly from God than did Moses, and he speaks directly to God on our behalf. The term Apostle carries in it the idea of highest authority. Communication with an Apostle is dealing as direct as possible, unless it be face to face. Jesus bestowed the highest dignity on his Apostles when He said in John 17:18, "As the Father has sent me into the world, so send I you." An Apostle is one who speaks for Christ directly, and with His approval and authority.

Paul says his authority is not for men. He does not waste any time before he gets to the real issues. He begins to defend his authority immediately. He says right off that he is not an Apostle because of human agency, but he has his authority directly from God. You don't go around defending your credentials like this unless someone is attacking them. Paul is making clear he is equal with the twelve Apostles in authority. It is obvious that the Judaisers have tried to undermine Paul's ministry by attacking his authority. They apparently accused him of being a maverick who has gone off on a tangent and whose doctrines threaten to overthrow the foundations of true religion, by which they meant the Old Testament laws.

They could say that Paul was not chosen by Christ as were the other Apostles. They said he received his authority from men. These were very serious charges, and you can see how easy it would have been to get Gentiles to question Paul's authority. Who was he to tell them what God required when others were telling them the law of Moses was their foundation? Paul knows that the cause of Christian liberty in Christ depends upon the Galatians respect for his authority. If they are not convinced that he bears the authority

of an ambassador sent directly by God, they will follow those authorities who are coaxing them to submit to the law of Moses.

The first major issue of this letter, therefore, is the issue of authority. Either the Galatians are obligated to obey the revelation that God gave to Moses, or God has given a new revelation of liberty in Christ through the Apostle Paul. Which they follow depends upon their being convinced that Paul is truly God's spokesman, and not just the agent of men who are sponsoring a new approach to religion. There is probably no issue that is more relevant to every age than the issue of authority. Everything we are and believe is based on some authority. The authorities we accept determine what we become.

If we accept the authority of the book of Mormon, we will be Mormons. If we yield to the authority of the Koran, we will be Mohammedan. If we buy into the views of Jehovah Witnesses, we will become one. We are creatures of authority. We do not swallow color liquid by the tablespoon because we have studied its nature. We take it on the authority of others who say it will help a problem. Because this is so, it is very important to determine the validity of any authority. We cannot afford to just accept any authority. We have an obligation to investigate and prove the worth of any authority. Paul makes this clear by the very fact of the existence of this letter. It is in large measure a defense of his authority. He did not just say he was an authority. He had to prove it and demonstrate the validity of his claim to be a spokesman for God.

We take Paul's authority for granted, but the early church did not. They had no New Testament to go by. They had only the Old Testament and Paul was challenging the authority of its laws. That is why he had to show to the Galatians how God worked in his life, and how the truth of the Gospel makes the law obsolete. He had to show by sound argument and historical facts that it was so. He had

to show them how his battle for the truth of Christian liberty even won out over the Apostle Peter. This was the kind of evidence that was necessary to convince them that his authority was equal to the Twelve.

Paul is not being proud in this letter when he speaks of the other Apostles as adding nothing to him. If you don't know the great issue behind this letter, you might think that Paul had little respect for the Twelve when he visited them in Jerusalem. In chapter 2 Paul refers to those of repute and in verse 6 says, "What they were makes no difference to me, God shows no partiality." You can only grasp what Paul is doing here when you know that he is defending his authority as an Apostle equal to the other Apostles. God chose him for an unique ministry to the Gentiles just as He chose Peter for a ministry to the Jews. Paul is not being disrespectful, but he is trying to show that the Judaisers are wrong when they deny his authority, and say it is of man. He proves it is of God by showing that the other Apostles had to acknowledge his authority.

All through history the primary battle has been the one over authority. Paul won out and the New Testament became the primary authority for the church. In time there were traditions that came to have an equal place with the Scripture as a source of authority in the church. What the early church fathers believed was quoted as an authoritative guide, and not because it was necessarily biblical, but because of who they were. The church began to substitute the authority of men for the Word of God. The church places men's interpretation of the Word of God on a level equal to the Word itself. This robbed the Word of its authority, and put it into the hands of men.

One of the purposes of the Reformation was to restore the Word of God to its place as the soul authority for faith and practice. Whatever can be demonstrated to be biblical becomes authoritative

for the church. Many groups claim to support all kinds of contradictory ideas on Scripture, however, and, therefore, there is no way to escape the need to appeal to reason. We must give sufficient evidence to show that a view is truly the message God has conveyed through His Word. Paul defends his authority by appealing to evidence. The mind must be convinced before any authority can be accepted. Reason is not the ultimate authority, but it is necessary to combine it with the revelation of God.

Our minds must be persuaded concerning any view of Scripture before we can honestly accept a view as the Word of God. We must demand of any interpretation what Paul gives to the Galatians to support his teaching on justification by faith, and that is reasonable evidence which makes it superior to any rival claim. Paul goes into all sorts of arguments to show that faith in Christ alone is all that God requires, and that the law is now obsolete as a means of salvation. He gives the Galatians evidence to satisfy their minds. He knows that the truth can only survive by minds being persuaded that it is in fact the truth.

So often Christians give the impression that the truth of God's Word is different than any other kind of truth, but not so. It must appeal to and persuade the mind before it is believed and submitted to as authority. Several centuries ago Cotton Mather, the great American Puritan, gave this as the Puritan view of the relation of reason and revelation: "The light of reason is the law of God, the voice of reason is the voice of God. We never have to do with reason but at the same time we have to do with God, and our submission to the rules of reason is an obedience to God., As often as I have evident reason set before me let me think upon it. Therein the great God speaks to me."

Paul certainly believe this, even though he knew the mind of fallen man was depraved and its wisdom folly. He urged Christians

to let the mind of Christ be in them and to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, for it is the mind that he appeals to all along in defending his authority. He calls them foolish for not seeing the obvious evidence of the truth of the Gospel. He goes to great length to make it clear to them that God has demonstrated in his life the truth of the Gospel he preaches. Evidence and argument is what this letter is all about. He spent his life in debate and argument proving that Jesus was the Messiah and that we are saved by faith in Him.

What does this mean for us today? It means that the power of persuasion is the greatest power there is for the capturing of men's minds. Men will accept as their authority for life that which has enough evidence to persuade them that it is God's Word to them. Christians who are truly concerned about the truth will be open to new light, and be ever in search for more evidence to support his convictions. No Christian can have a valid reason to oppose scholarship and the search for more light to give us a better understanding of the Word of God. It is not the Bible only that is the Word of God, but the Bible rightly interpreted and understood. Many texts of the Bible are used to teach error and even heresy.

Paul got his revelation direct from God, but it comes to us through the agency of men. His Greek letters have had to come to us by means of men who put it into English. In a day of many translations we need to recognize that none of them are the final authority. We need to study all that the Bible says on an issue and not just take any text and build our theology on that. We need to examine all the evidence and be fully persuaded in our minds that a certain teaching is the Word of God. If opinions differ, then we need to weigh the evidence for the different views and choose that which is most reasonable and which has the most evidence to support it. We are in the same boat as the Galatians who had to weigh Paul's reasons for his authority. This is part of what it means to be loving

God with all our minds.

3. A LIVING AUTHORITY base on Gal. 1:1ff

A Christian school teacher offered a dollar to the one who could give her the name of the most famous man in history. She wanted them to say Jesus, of course. They all began to shout out names like Washington, Lincoln, Edison, and Columbus, and finally a little Jewish boy said Jesus. When he came up to get his dollar the teacher asked him, "You are a Jewish boy, why did you say Jesus?" He said, "I wanted to say Moses, but business is business."

Paul was under great pressure to choose Moses also as the greatest authority in the realm of religion. The Judaisers demanded it and were accusing him of error in not giving Moses his rightful place. Paul, however, also felt that business was business and his business was to exalt the Living Christ to the place of supreme authority. The issue of authority was crucial to Paul and has been ever since. John R. Stott wrote, "After the question of religion itself, which involves the nature of God's being and activity, the next most vital question is that of authority." It was a key issue in the life of Jesus also. The people heard him gladly because he spoke with authority and not as the scribes.

When Jesus was about to leave this earth he said, "All power in heaven and on earth is given unto me..." The Greek word is exousia which means authority. Jesus is the final and ultimate authority in the universe. It is Paul's goal to see that Christians put Jesus where He belongs, and that is in the place of supreme authority.

Sir Bernard Lovell, Prof. Of Radio Astronomy at the University

of Manchester tells of the financial troubles they had in construction of the radio telescope at Jodrell Bank. One of his colleagues said to him jokingly, "Why don't you issue a gramophone record with some strange noises on it and claim that you have received messages from intelligent beings on the planet Mars? The sales would be immense and our financial problems at an end!" Dr Lovell responded that our authority and careers in scientific research would also be at an end." Any authority that cannot hold up under investigation will collapse and that is why any ideas that men have to endure has to be supported by unimpeachable authority. That is why Paul begins his letter to the Galatians by stating that his authority is not based on the sand of human sources, but on the solid rock of the will of Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.

Paul makes reference to the resurrection of Christ in this first verse, not just because it is a precious truth, but because it is so relevant to the battle he is fighting here. He wants to establish right from the start that there is a great contrast between the authority of those who oppose him and himself. His authority is not the dead letter of the law, but the Living Lord. The Judaizers look to a book, while he looks to the author of the book, and that is the risen Lord who is guiding his people into new light. He has fulfilled the law and now has a new and final revelation for his people.

Paul knew he had an advantage over his opponents because of the Living Christ. They tried to make it sound like he could not be equal with the 12 Apostles because he was not selected by Christ in his earthly ministry. Paul countered that argument by reminding them that he was the only Apostle selected by the risen and ascended Lord. His was the only appointment made directly from heaven. Imagine that your mother left you with a note to shovel the driveway when you get home from school. And as you are getting ready to do it she comes home and says never mind the neighbor is going to do it with his power mower. Would you ignore the living revelation of

this change of plans, or would you persist in keeping the letter of the law that you have in print? You would recognize that the note has been made void and obsolete by the living voice of the author of it.

Paul's reference to the risen Christ is not incidental, but is a vital factor in Paul's defense. It is the living authority of Christ as opposed to the dead authority of Moses that is the issue here. The mere claim is not enough in itself, however, for if it was we would be obligated to listen to the authority of all the cults and false teachers who make great claims to authority. Paul goes on and gives evidence to support his claim. This whole letter is an appeal to the minds of the Galatians. Paul is saying "Look at the facts of my life and examine the doctrines that I preach in the light of the way God has worked in history. Then you will see it is nothing short folly to reject the truth that I have brought to you."

Once the authority of Paul was established and the truth of the Gospel of grace was established, then those who followed him did not need to receive their authority directly from Christ. It does not make any difference who preaches the Gospel now, for it is the revelation of God, and even if one does not believe it, if he preaches it there can be results for the kingdom of God. It is the power of God unto salvation, and an atheist could explain the Gospel to someone and they could receive Christ as Savior and have eternal life. The authority of the Gospel no longer depends upon the authority of the people who preach it. It did with Paul, however, and that is why this defense of his authority is such a vital factor in the history of the church. It was a battle that Paul had to win, and we can all thank God that he did.

Paul did not abuse his authority, but took the matter very seriously. When he wrote to the Corinthians on some issues of which he had no direct word from Christ he made it clear that he was only sharing his enlightened convictions, and not speaking with

the authority of a spokesman directly from God. Only a man with a very high view of his responsibility as a spokesman for God would call attention to the fact that he did not always speak with equal authority.

Many godly people through the ages have spoken with deep conviction on every subject under the sun. We can respect their convictions, and possibly even agree that they were right in the context of which they spoke. However, the Christian of today cannot rely on the authority of people of the past. The battle of the Reformation was over the issue of the authority of the church and its decisions of the past. The Catholic church took the position that it could never be wrong in its official teaching. This has been a tough view to defend in the light of the folly of the past.

The Reformed position denied that absolute authority of the church. The Westminster Confession states it clearly. "The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error.....all synods or councils since the time of the Apostles, whether general or particular, may err, and may have erred; therefore, they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a health in both."

It is a hard paradox to accept sometimes, but the fact is, the only way to keep Jesus and His Word as our absolute authority is to be constantly questioning the authority of those who claim to speak for Him. It is a sign of immaturity to never question authority. The child whose parents tell him there is no God, and that religion is of no value, will never be a mature person if he does not question that authority. The child whose parents tell him his church and his denomination has all the truth, and that all others are wrong, will never be a mature Christian if he never rebels against that authority. No Christian is truly mature until they come to the point where they live under the direct authority of the living Christ.

The goal of the Christian home, and the ministry of the church, is to bring people to this point. I don't want my children to believe the Bible is God's Word because I say so, but because they have themselves listened to God speak to them through it. A parent and a pastor is something like the law, which was an instrument or school master to bring people to Christ. The goal is not to get people to believe them, but to believe Christ and submit to His authority. If we do not accomplish this, and send youth off into the world believing only on the basis of the authority of men, they will be tempted to overthrow that authority, for it is not based on their experience with the living Christ. It is based on the experience of others.

A teacher can tell students that Shakespeare is great, but they will leave school and never read Shakespeare again unless they experience the greatness of his writings. So it is with music and every other subject. The student can be told of how wonderful Beethoven is, but they will never really know in a lasting way until they experience the wonder themselves. So it is in our relationship to Christ. He must become for us what He was to Paul, and be a vital living authority in our lives.

The Greek word for authority is exousia which means, "Out of that which is ones very own." Only the Christian who settles the issue of authority can have any authority and assurance. I can be told that God forgives me, but that will not bring peace of mind unless I accept the forgiveness personally. I must enter into the direct authority of God's Word, and not try to live on the basis of indirect authority.

We have spent a lot of time looking at this issue of authority because it was the key issue in the battle Paul is fighting in this letter. It is also a key issue in each of our lives. The only way to avoid becoming a legalist is to keep ever conscious of the fact that

the living Christ is our ultimate authority. The philosophy popularize many years ago by Sheldon in his book In His Steps is valid yet today. Keep asking yourself in all the decisions of life, "What would Jesus do?"

There are many moral issues that Christians must struggle with that have no specific answer in the Bible. We are in the same boat Paul was in when the Corinthians asked him about a number of issues concerning marriage problems. In I Cor. 7 he admits he had no specific revelation, so he had to wrestle his way to a conclusion seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In Rom. 14:5 he says of issues like meat offered to idols and observance of special days, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." The point I am trying to drive home is this: When we have no written authority to determine our position, we must come to a decision based on evidence and argument. We must be persuaded in our minds that our conclusion is consistent with the mind of Christ. Only then are we loving God with all our mind, and only then are we acting responsibly under the authority under the living Christ.

4. THE PESSIMIST AND THE OPTIMIST Based on Gal. 1:4

Sam Levenson told of how his father took the 6 children, chained hand to hand, through a museum. Suddenly, in irritation at the slowness of their progress, he said, "Look kids, if you're gonna stop and look at everything, you ain't gonna see nothin." Anyone who has been in a large museum can understand the paradox. When my father-in-law and I had only a few hours to get through all the buildings in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., we had to practically run. We felt the full force of the fatherly wisdom, and we knew we couldn't stop to see everything, or we wouldn't have

seen anything.

The Bible is even more vast in its treasures than any museum, and we don't have an infinite amount of time to examine them, and so this truth applies to our study of the Bible. Grace and peace are two of the greatest treasures that can be found in the Word of God, but we are not going to stop and look at them now. We are going right to verse 4 which is an exciting verse because it gives us a view of life from Paul's perspective. This verse shows us that the Christian view of life is a paradox, for it is both pessimistic and optimistic. The Christian can combined these two opposites in his mind at the same time. We want to examine them one at a time to see how this can be so. First let's look at Paul's-

I. PESSIMISM

Paul refers to this present evil world, or this present evil age. The Greek word is aeon, and it refers to the world as viewed from the standpoint of time and change. It is this present transitory era. It is present as distinct from the original creation, and the final state of things. The present world is disordered, and not the kind of world that was, or will be.

Keep in mind that Paul was talking about the first century. It is foolish to talk about the good old days of the church. The church never did live in good days, and never has, for the present evil age covers all days from Paul's time to ours. If you wish you would have lived in Paul's day, you will only be wishing yourself back to an evil age. If men could travel back in time, no matter where they stopped, they would still in be the present evil age where Satan reigns in the hearts and minds of rebel men.

That sounds like kind of pessimistic view of life, and the reason it sounds that way is because it is. Every generation of men have

added another chapter to the history of evil.

**My granddad viewing earth's worn cogs,
Said things are going to the dogs;
His granddad in his house of logs
Swore things were going to the dogs;
His granddad in his old skin togs
Said things were going to the dogs.
Author unknown**

There is no way to get back to the good old days, because they are nowhere back there. The good days are all out ahead, for the best is always yet to be for the believer. Paul was a positive thinker, but he was also a realist. You do not have deny the reality of evil to be an optimist. Christian Science has tried that road, and the latest statistics tell us they are failing. You cannot deny the reality of this present evil world and fool most people any of the time. Evil is real, and the Christian who is wise and honest and not pretend it isn't so.

Paul believed in evil and in its power. He suffered much pain and sorrow because of the opposition of men, and that was not even the worst of it. The real battle was not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and spiritual forces of evil. Paul warned believers of many dangers of life, and he urged them to put on the whole armor of God. The Christian does not dwell in a paradise, but on a battlefield. In any war there are casualties on both sides, and Christians do suffer in the battle of light against darkness. The point I am getting at is that the Christian does have a legitimate pessimistic perspective. It is a present evil world, and all around us the forces of evil are active, and they often succeed in making life miserable for the children of God.

It was Paul's honest awareness of the reality of evil that made

him so concerned about his converts. He was writing this very letter because of the threat of evil to destroy the fruit of the Gospel. In chapter 6 he urges them to bare one another's burdens, and to rescue the fallen brother. This implies that we live in a present evil world where the battle never ceases. Paul saw all of the reality of life's evil, and he experienced much of it against himself, but he never became a sour pessimistic skeptic like so many who have suffered. For example, Mark Twain summed up human experience in these pathetic words.

"A myriad men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for mean advantages over each other. Age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; those they love are taken from them. At length ambition is dead; pride is dead; longing for release is in their place. Death comes at last-the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them-and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence."

History is filled with men who were so captivated by the reality of evil that they could not see beyond it. Out of their dark and dismal perspective came philosophies that have multiplied the world's miseries. Schopenhaur and Neitzsche were so pessimistic that had they been God they would have drown the world and done it up right with no ark. Their pessimistic views of life produced men like Hitler who could feel that might is right, and its every man for himself. When you see only the power of evil, you submit to that power, and you become yourself and instrument of evil. This leads to either self-destruction, or the destruction of others. Dorothy Parker expressed the minds of many pessimists in poetry.

**There's little in taking or giving,
There's little in water or wine;
This living, this living, this living,**

**Was never a project of mine.
Oh, hard is the struggle and spare is
The gain of one at the top,
For art is a form of catharsis
And love is a permanent flop.
And work is the province of cattle
And rest's for a clam in the shell,
So I'm thinking of throwing the battle-
Will you kindly direct me to hell?**

It is not likely that a believer would fall so low as this, but it is possible for a believer to get so entangled with the pessimistic view of life that he become a hindrance rather than a help. It is possible for a Christian to be part of the problem instead of part of the answer. Stewart Hamblen, after his conversion to Christ, said that his greatest stumbling block was not his old cronies out in the world, but the skeptical Christians waiting and watching for him to stumble. He said, "Nothing in the world is more beautiful than a new Christian before he has gotten around some old Christians." Hamblen is himself in danger here of getting overly pessimistic. Not all old Christians are a hindrance as he implies. Pessimism is a real and legitimate perspective, but unless it is balanced by a strong Christian optimism, it becomes a terrible perversion in the Christian life. We need to look at how Paul balanced his pessimism concerning the present evil world with a positive optimism concerning deliverance from it.

II. PAUL'S OPTIMISM.

Paul says in this first verse that it is possible to experience the grace of God and enjoy peace, even in this present evil world because Jesus gave Himself for our sin to deliver us from it. This doctrine of deliverance is what brings the sun of optimism into this dark world. The deliverance is just as real as the sin. The pessimist

is right, but so is the optimist, and that is why the Christian with the total view is both. If the Christian is looking at the present evil world, he must naturally face the facts and be skeptical about man's schemes to bring about a paradise. He knows the sinful nature of man will corrupt every ideal that humanism can create.

On the other hand, when the Christian looks at the cross, and sees what Christ has done for man's sin he is an incurable optimist. He recognizes that every man can attain perfection and paradise in Christ. There is an answer, and there is a way out. Deliverance is possible from this present evil world, for that is what the Gospel is all about.

Shopenhaur was a terrible pessimist, and he said if he could conduct the optimists through the hospitals, prisons, and battlefields of the world they would soon lose their optimism. He knew of the reality of evil, but what he didn't know was the reality of deliverance from evil. Christian optimist like Paul are not unaware of the tragedy and misery in the world. On the contrary, they are the ones who are doing something about it, for they know something can be done.

The pessimist only complains in despair and adds to the darkness, but the Christian optimist brings light into the darkness. It has been Christian optimists that have done more to relieve human misery around the world than anyone else. They have labored in the realm of medical missions, prison reform, aid to orphans, widows, and the handicapped. The heroes of history have been optimists who did not hide their head in the sand and deny evil, but who looked it square in the face, and by the grace of God brought deliverance.

Jesus entered this vale of tears to die for the sins of man, and to offer a way out of all the evils of this present world. In Luke 4:18 Jesus read a prophecy from Isaiah that He said He came to fulfill.

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

This present evil world is heading toward a day when the kingdoms of this world shall be the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, even in the midst of evil the Christian is an optimist because he has a message of hope and victory to offer the world. Sin has been conquered, and those who trust in Christ will be delivered from this present evil world.

Paul suffered as much as any man because of the sin and folly of man. He spent much time in the darkness of a dungeon because he sought to spread the message of light. It was indeed a present evil world for Paul, but he could still sing in the dungeon because he was an optimist.

**Despite the ancient evil;
Despite the jaws of darkness;
Despite the fear of death,
Rage, O world, snarl and spring:
Calm and confident,
Here I stand and sing.**

Author unknown

Paul would not allow the reality of evil to rob him of his joy in the reality of deliverance from evil. Too often the Christian allows the negatives of life to get his goat. That expression comes from a practice of owners of high-strung race horses. They kept a goat in the stall with these sensitive horses because the very presence of the calm and relaxed goat help the horse to relax. On the day before a very important race a rival would steal another owner's goat. This would make the horse nervous so it would not run at its best.

Someone got his goat. The world gets our goat when it so overwhelms us with the reality that it is a present evil world. We often take our eyes off Christ, and we forget that in Him we can have peace and joy, for He has overcome the world. We must always keep the whole picture in mind so we can always be both pessimists and optimists.

5. THE ATTRIBUTES OF OPTIMISM Based on Gal. 1:5

Bob Harrington tells of how he was standing on the street preaching when an angry bartender took a mug of beer and poured it on his head. He said to the bartender, "Come here." When he came over he said to him, "I want to thank you for that." The bartender said, "You want to thank me for that?" "Yes," said Harrington, "I want to thank you for that because it makes me realize I am saved. If I didn't have the Lord in my heart I would have stomped you through that blacktop." The bartender responded, "I'm glad you are saved too preacher."

The real test of your Christian character is how you react to negatives. If you meet negatives with negatives, your life has not risen above the level of the world. To get angry at one who is angry at you is the path of least resistance, and is a path the weakest can travel. It takes spiritual strength to be kind to one who is angry, and to be patient in a time of affliction. Anyone can say praise the Lord and hallelujah when all their dreams are coming true, and they don't have an enemy in the world. Unfortunately, that state of life doesn't last long, if it ever comes. Therefore, the real test of Christian optimism is seeing in how a believer reacts when the road gets rough.

This letter to the Galatians gives us a beautiful opportunity to see how a great optimist like Paul reacts to negatives. His labor is being undone, and all his fruit is threatened. Everything seems to be going against him, and he is under heavy attack from the Judaizers. There is no question about the fact that he is deeply disappointed at the turn of events in the Galatians church. He is clearly aggravated and angry. Now is the time to look at Paul's attitudes to see the foundation for his optimism. It was easy to be optimistic in his letter to the Philippians. He could overflow with rejoicing, for they were doing wonderful in their growth in grace. The Galatians church is a different story, and it is here that we should look for the clues as to how to be an optimist in negative circumstances.

In verse 5 Paul ends his introduction with a doxology. He reaches a high note of positive optimism before he plunges into the negative task of rebuke and defense. This doxology is the point from which Paul launches his attack, for it is the basis for his incurable optimism. He has to fight a battle on the level of this present evil world, but as he just stated, in Christ we are delivered from this present evil world. In any battle the forces that control the high points have the advantage. Paul makes it clear in his introduction to this battle that he is about to enter that he does so from the high point of advantage. The very Gospel he is defending is a Gospel of deliverance from the world. He will not be fighting on the level of those who attack him with their narrow, limited, and pessimistic views, but on a level far above that, which is made possible by Christ who enables us to rise above the world.

This deliverance from the low level of the world, which is bound by sin, to the heights of freedom in Christ is, says Paul, according to the will of our God and Father. Just knowing it is God's will that the Gospel of deliverance is a reality assures Paul that he cannot lose in his fight for its defense. He ends with the doxology in which we see three attitudes expressed which become the foundation of an

incurable and unchangeable optimism. First is-

I. THE ATTITUDE OF PRAISE.

"To whom be glory forever and ever." The glory is for both the Father who willed it, and the Son who won it. What has been accomplished by Christ is a fact that can never be altered, and whatever evil perversions enter the world, nothing can change the fact that the Gospel of deliverance is a reality. Knowing this, Paul gives this victory shout of praise, even before he begins the fight. You cannot defeat a man who knows he cannot lose, and the man who knows that is a perpetual man of praise. As long as a believer maintains a proper perspective on what God's will has already accomplished he cannot help but have an attitude of praise.

Glory has many meanings in Scripture, but here it is synonymous with praise. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, means praise be to the three Persons of the Godhead. Glory often refers to the dazzling splendor of His nature also, but that never changes. Paul is not referring to unchangeable glory of God, but to that glory or praise that God receives from men because of their deliverance from the present evil world. This is a glory that can vary in quantity, quality, and intensity. Paul uses this phrase so frequently it is as if it was his constant prayer that believers enter more often into the realm of praise. If the Galatians would have constantly praised God for their deliverance in Christ, they would not be tempted to rely on the law for their deliverance. A breakdown in praise can lead us into all kinds of foolish things, but an attitude of praise keeps us ever dependant upon God, and every in a state of optimism.

In Rom. 11:36 Paul ends that chapter with these words: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen." He ends the letter to Romans in 16:27 with,

"To the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen." We cannot look at all the praises which Paul offers to God, but just a few of them show why Paul was an optimist no matter what. Every time he thought of the completed redemption he had in Christ, that no circumstance on earth could ever change, he broke forth into a doxology of praise. When he wrote to Timothy about how God chose him as the chief of sinners to be an example of His grace to others who would believe and receive eternal life in Christ, he could not hold back the praise, and he concluded in I Tim. 1:17, "To the king of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."

When he thought of his own deliverance from the present evil world he praised God. In the second letter to Timothy he faced so many negative circumstances. He faced death in prison, and he knew the time of his departure had come. Demas had forsaken him, and others had departed also. He was almost totally alone, and no one was there to defend him. He had left his books and parchments behind at Troas and apparently had nothing to study. If ever a man had reason to be down in the dumps and pessimistic it was Paul in those circumstances. Everything seemed to be against him, but how does he end the paragraph? Listen to II Tim. 4:18, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for His heavenly kingdom, to Him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen."

We note that Paul was not a Pollyanna optimist-one who says all is well, and everyday in every way its getting better and better. Paul could face honestly the facts of life, and admit that everything was rotten and all wrong. Sometimes the circumstances of life were almost totally negative, but still he was an optimist because he had an attitude of praise. He could praise God, not for the circumstances, but for the fact that circumstances cannot alter the fact of what was accomplished in Christ for our salvation, and for the fact that no matter what we endure in this life, we will enter into

the fullness of our salvation in the heavenly kingdom. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, and that is what we see Paul doing in every aspect of his life. He would have enjoyed singing-

**Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above;
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.**

That phrase, "Praise Thee without ceasing," is so characteristic of Paul that it leads us to a consideration of the second attitude that he expresses that is a key to his optimism.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF PERMANENCE.

Forever and ever are the recurring words in Paul's praise. Paul's concept of praise to God is never temporary. It is never based on what may be today, but gone tomorrow. Christian optimism must be based on permanence. This is what we mean by living with eternity's values in view. You can remove some parts of objects and still have the object. You can remove the arm of a chair and still have a chair; you can take the cover off a book and still have a book; you can take a bumper off a car and still have a car. There are some qualities of an object you cannot remove, however, and still have it. If you take away the length of a book you have eliminated the whole book. If you take away one side of a triangle you do not still have part of a triangle-you have a non-triangle. It just isn't a triangle anymore. All sides of a triangle are essential to its existence.

The point of all this is to make it clear that the Christian faith ceases to exist once you remove permanence. Permanence is as essential as Paul's optimism as is any side of the triangle. Remove permanence and all is gone. Forever and forever is what makes

Christian optimism relevant in the present evil world. Paul said in I Cor. 15 that if Christ had not conquered death, and if our faith in Him is for this life only and not forever, then our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins. In other words, if there is no forever and no permanence, then we are not delivered from this present evil world. Without an eternal perspective there is no basis for Christian optimism.

**Since our dying race began,
Forever was a leading light of man.
The good, the true, the pure, the just,
Take the charm "For ever" from them,
And they crumble into dust.**

Author unknown

As Christians we need to challenge the world with this attitude of permanence. It is the basis for our hope, but it is also a necessity for men to be logical. If there is no forever in man's concept of the future and his destiny, then he is forced into some very pessimistic conclusions. If time is all we have, then there are turtles and trees who have more life than man, and man cannot be considered the highest and most noble creature on earth. He is the most complex, but the great redwoods of California lived for centuries longer than man, if he has no forever. That means they have achieved a life span far superior to man.

Even greater yet are inanimate objects. They never need to die at all, and so they come closest to what man hungers for, which is perpetual existence. Louise Untermeyer expressed this paradox in poetry.

**"Eternity it thrust upon a bit of earth, a senseless stone,
A grain of dust, a casual clod. Receives the greatest gift of God.
A pebble in the roadway lies-It never dies.**

**The grass our father cut away Is growing on their graves today.
There is no kind of death to kill the sands that lie so meek and still.
But man is great and strong and wise And so he dies."**

Man does not die because he is great and strong and wise, however, but rather because he has fallen. But Jesus has delivered fallen man, and He can reverse his downward destiny and enable man to rise to newness of life, and eternal life, and glorify God forever. If a man denies this hope, he must confess to be less than the sand in his shoes, and the rocks in his driveway. Forever is what enables the Christian, like Paul, to praise God even when the present evil world threatens to crush them. The now can never rob us of the forever, and so we can rejoice and be optimistic under any circumstance.

"To whom be glory forever and ever, Amen." Paul had an attitude of praise, and an attitude of permanence which kept him in a state of perpetual optimism. You note that Paul always ends his doxology with an amen. That final word expresses the third attitude which completes the trinity of attitudes that Paul has as the foundation for his optimism.

III. THE ATTITUDE OF POSITIVENESS.

Amen is a word we use often, but seldom think about as to its meaning. For all practical purposes it simply means the end. We use it as a verbal period to indicate we are done praying. It is the last word. Sometimes it is used to conclude a sermon also. One pastor had a message that went on until it was getting unbearable. At last he paused and said, "What more my friends can I say?" Someone in the back shouted, "Amen!" Amen can be a very positive word even when it is used this way, for it can mean, thank heavens its all over. We will now conclude, is a phrase that cause many of mind to utter amen.

This is not the way Paul is using the word, however. He is just begun his letter, and it is far from over. His prayer was only a couple of words, and so obviously no one could be weary of its length. Paul's amen is an expression of his positive conviction concerning what he has just said. Paul is glad and thrilled that God should be praised forever and ever, and the amen is his commitment to be one who gives God the glory forever and ever. Amen means, so be it, or let it be so, and let me be a part of what I have just prayed. It is a positive affirmation. You only use the word to express a firm commitment. If I said a few scholars have speculated that there is a remote possibility that we will praise God in heaven, no one will shout amen, or even think it. Amen expresses a certain conviction, and not a speculative hunch.

Amen is an expression of positiveness, and not a mere verbal symbol of signing off, like saying goodbye on the telephone. It means, what I have prayed I believe is authentic, and so be it. What you are saying by your amen at the end of a prayer is, I really mean it. When John Knox cried out, "Give me Scotland or I die!" his amen at the end of his prayer meant, "O God, I mean it with all my heart, let it be so." Paul ends his prayer with this amen as a positive attitude of optimism that is assured of an answer. Optimism is not saying that God is in His heaven, and all is right with the world. It is never all right with the world. Optimism is saying that even when all is messed up there is hope for the world, and certainty for eternity. We are Christian optimists, if we, like Paul, can have these three attitudes at all times in this present evil world.

6. STRIVING FOR STABILITY Based on Gal. 1:6

Back in the early part of the 20th century some architects in

Washington began to visualize how the Jefferson Memorial ought to look from across the lake when reflected in the water. They decided it would be best to cut down the fringe of cherry trees that threatened to obscure the view. A group of women in Washington heard about it and dedicated themselves to protect those trees given to our nation by Mr. Ozaki of Japan. They were so outraged at the scandalous sacrilege of destroying such beauty that they actually went to the scene and tied themselves to the trees with robes and chains. The architects were awed, and the woodchoppers were scared stiff. Margaret Applegarth in reporting on this story concluded, "The city was charmed by the uproar. And of course the cherry trees themselves bloomed safely from April to April, year after year."

The Apostle Paul could have read a story like that with a great deal of appreciation, for the emotions of those women must have been very much like Paul's emotions as he wrote to the Galatians. Some crack pot officials have come into the church in Galatia with the intention of cutting down the tree of life. That is, they planned to remove the cross of Christ from its central place in Christianity. It seems that to them it was obscuring the view of the law. Just as the Washington officials wanted to remove the living beauty of the cherry trees to keep the cold dead stone of the memorial in view, so the Jewish officials of Paul's day wanted to remove the real roses of redemption by grace, and the living lilies of liberty in Christ, in order to keep the cold dead stones of the law in view.

When Paul heard of this he was as outraged as were those sensitive and sensible ladies in Washington. He is angry with the Judaizers and amazed at the Galatians for listening to their false gospel. In verse 6 we see Paul expressing his first negative emotion in this letter. It is translated by a variety of words. Some have it, "I am amazed." Others have, "I am astonished, I marvel," and one has it, "I am dumb founded." Paul just cannot comprehend the

profound folly that would lead men to exchange liberty for bondage. It is beyond him how people can, without threat and compulsion, but voluntarily give up the Gospel of grace for the gospel of law, which he says is no gospel at all.

Paul has suddenly become aware that even Christians can be very fickle, and they can waver from a position of stability so easily. It is good that he discovered this, for now it is a matter of public record, and all Christians are thereby informed. Christians can develop along two different lines in their thinking and attitudes. They can become so vacillating and variable that they are tossed about by every wind of doctrine that comes along, or they can develop along the lines of a steady, settled and unwavering stability. In this context we want to consider Paul's condemnation of the one and his call to the other. Consider first-

I. THE CONDEMNATION OF THE SPIRIT OF FICKLENESS.

The fickle persons are those who allow their emotions to be their guide. This leaves them with a very unreliable guide, for emotions can be so unstable and inconsistent. I have watched clever salesman demonstrate a potato peeler or tomato cutter with such skill and efficiency that I felt like buying one even though I didn't need it. My emotions were captivated by a job well done. The cults operate on this same basis. They know well what they have to offer, and it sounds so good to seeking hearts. Many are captivated by the skill and efficiency of their presentation. The Judaisers were men who were skilled in the law, and they could make a deep impression on those who were not educated as they were. They were successful because there are so many people who have a fickle spirit. They commit themselves to one thing this year, and next year they are off in a totally different direction. They are always being moved by their emotions to go in new directions.

Joseph Parker wrote, "We are amazed at fickle religious people, because they make such fools of themselves. They are always finding some new little pieces of paper on which there is written something they cannot make out, but which perfectly entrances them by the brilliance of its genius." Such people are consistently inconsistent, and they are like sitting ducks for all the cults and religious racketeers who make a fortune selling religious junk and secret formulas for instant happiness. Paul has to fight this fickle spirit in Christians constantly, and he urges, "Be ye steadfast and unmovable."

Paul was amazed that anyone could be so unstable as to forsake the solid rock of the Gospel for the quicksand of the law. Such a spirit of fickleness makes building a solid life in Christ impossible. He would have said amen to Byron's lines:

**I hate inconstancy-I loathe, detest,
Abhor, condemn, abjure the mortal made
Of such quicksilver clay that in his breast
No permanent foundation can be laid.**

Paul, and all of the writers of Scripture condemn the wavering and inconsistent spirit of fickleness. The only way to avoid this defect in human nature is to give heed to his second point.

II. THE CALL TO THE SPIRIT OF FIRMNESS.

Stability is an absolute essential for building a Christian life pleasing to God. The Gospel of salvation by faith in Christ is the Rock on which a Christian must build. It is so solid and unchangeable that nothing is to be allowed to alter our confidence in it. If an angel appeared to you and told you there is another way to be saved apart from faith in Christ, Paul says we are not to believe it. He says any with that message are to be cursed. Paul is using

strong language because he wants it to be clear that no one could possibly miss his point.

The Gospel of Christ is absolutely unchangeable. When Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished," the foundation was firmly laid forever, and nothing in the universe can change it. Paul believed in change, and he was a man who loved variety and new methods. He could be all things to all men, but he had a foundation that never varied. A person who cannot stand change is doomed to be very unhappy, but the person who does not have a stable unchanging foundation is doomed to be even more miserable. Those who are free to enjoy change most are those who know there are some things that will never change.

The ideal Christian is one who can fit in well in almost every setting and be amazingly flexible in relation to people and issues, and yet never leave the slightest doubt as to their loyalty to the Lordship of Christ. Nothing could separate Paul from the love of Christ, and nothing could cause him to deviate to making Christ central in all He did and taught. The stable Christian is a Christ-centered Christian. This is where the Galatians were failing. They were taking their eyes off Christ and His cross, and they were listening to the clever appeals of men. What happened to them explains why Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to be perpetually observed until He comes again. Jesus knew about the fickle spirit of man and his ability to forget. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me," because he knew that history would be filled with appeals to make something other than His death the foundation of faith.

No one ever risked their life to get the works of other great authors into the hands of the lost people of world, but many have laid down their lives to get the message of Christ's death for man's sin into the hands of people all over the world. The poet has Christ asking:

**Canst thou love me when creeds are breaking,
Old landmarks shaking
On earth and sea?
Canst thou restrain the earth from quaking,
And rest thy heart in me?**

Millions of stable believers in troubled times all through the centuries have answered by their steadfast love and loyalty, "Yes!" Helen Keller said our worst foes are not belligerent circumstances but wavering spirits." May God help us, as we focus again on the cross, to be people who build on the solid rock foundation of loyalty to Christ, and thereby be always striving for stability.

7. CAN A CHRISTIAN BE CURSED. Based on Gal. 1:8

The war between the states ended as it did in large measure because of Stonewall Jackson's defeat by his own men. Jackson was fighting brilliantly, and he had the entire Eleventh Union Corps on the run. He then planned his strategy for the final blow. He was within half a mile of the one road over which Hooker's whole army must retreat. He was in a position to destroy the main Federal Army, and it looked like nothing could stand in his way.

Riding forward with a few officers, his own men mistook the party for enemy cavalry, and they fired. Jackson was hit and carried back to a field hospital where he lay unconscious. He was unable to share his plans for a glorious victory, and so the chance for it passed and never returned. It has been true time and time again through history that men have been their own worst enemies. This has been true for the church as well. Very seldom has the church been injured or stopped by outside forces. Usually outside

opposition has helped the church to grow. The real enemy of the church has always been division within.

Religious wars have been the most fierce, and more Christians have died at the hands of other professing Christians than by any other group. All of God's prophets were killed by God's own people, and finally they even killed His Son. The majority of the great martyrs in Christian history were killed, not by atheists or unbelievers, but by those who professed to believe in the God of the Bible. It is a paradox, but the fact is, Christians have suffered their greatest defeats at the hands of other Christians.

Quite often it has been the case that powerful unbelievers, or hypocritical believers, have been able to stir up Christians against one another. Hitler was able to get many thousands of Christians to fight against other Christians. The point of this is to introduce us to the perplexing issue of just who the Judaizers were who were disturbing the Galatians, and just what did Paul mean when he called a curse down upon them? Paul uses the strongest language he ever used in this passage, and we need to ask some questions about it. We need to ask if Paul is consigning the Judaizers to eternal damnation by this curse. He says, "Let them be anathema. What is the meaning of anathema?"

Paul used it of himself in Rom. 9:3 where he expresses deep emotion. "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsman by race." Obviously Paul had no real desire to be accursed, but he expressed just how deeply he loved his own people and longed for their salvation. If Paul was willing to be accursed for the sake of unbelieving Jews, then it is likely that his curse upon the Judaizers is not a wish for their damnation. If it is so interpreted, then Paul is so mad that he is not being consistent with his own teaching. He wrote in Rom. 12:14, "Blest those who persecute you; bless and do not

curse them." Paul goes on just a few verses later and tells of how he persecuted Christians and tried to destroy the church. It was only by the grace of God that he was not accursed, for no one deserved it more than him. But God forgave him, and we cannot doubt that Paul would rejoice in other Jews repenting of their folly and trusting in Christ for their salvation.

It must be possible to be accursed and yet still repent and be free of the curse. If not one could make one mistake and be in a hopeless state. In Gal. 2:11 we see that Peter stood condemned, and even Barnabas. Paul's great friend and companion were persuaded by the Judaizers to compromise the Gospel of grace. We know these two were true believers, and yet they were persuaded to become enemies of themselves and of the Gospel. It is likely they were persuaded because the Judaizers were very godly Christian men who had compelling arguments. It is hard to believe they would be willing to listen to non-believers.

They would argue that Jesus was circumcised, and if we follow the Lord in baptism, why not in circumcision? Lets be consistent they would argue, and they were able to get even these strong believers to waver and be confused. The point is, these Judaizers were not godless men with no interest in the church. They were believers who were out to save the church from Paul's Gospel, which abandoned the law and let the Gentiles into the kingdom of God all too freely by grace. The battle was an internal one among believers, and this makes a big difference in how we understand Paul's curse.

If you have any doubt about the Judaizers being true Christians, all you have to do is to study Acts 15. That whole chapter deals with the great controversy of believers over grace and law. The Judaizers lost the controversy, but there is no question about their being believers. Verse 5 says, "But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, 'It is necessary to

circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.'" It is possible to be a believer who is still a legalist who tries to modify grace with the law. This was not a gathering of leaders to consider the views of non-Christians. It was to consider the views of those who were sincerely convinced that they were defending the will of God by trying to impose the law on the Gentiles.

So what does this mean in the light of being accursed, as it applies to believers? Paul included himself, Peter, the angels, and anyone who preaches a different gospel. Is Paul hoping that all who disagree with him will go to hell and be damned forever because of this curse? Not at all. He is not hoping to populate hell by these strong words. Their purpose is to prevent both abuse of the Gospel and acceptance of any abuse or perversion of it. Jesus had to get severe with Peter once and said to him, "Get thee behind me Satan," right to his face. Peter was allowing himself to be a tool of Satan to oppose the will of Christ. Believers can fall into dangerous error, and they can be used by Satan to hinder the truth.

Paul's purpose in Acts 15 and here is to get the Judaizers to fully grasp what the Gospel of grace is all about, and to get them to stop perverting it with legalism. The use of anathema here needs to be seen in the light of the three degrees of its meaning. 1. It can refer to the being cast out of the synagogue as a warning to repent. 2. It can mean a death sentence, which is a taking of their physical life. 3. It can mean the infliction of God's wrath in the day of judgment. Any one of them can apply to a believer, and Paul may have had all three in mind here.

In the synagogue it meant that one was excommunicated, and it came to have this meaning in the church. By the fourth century anathema meant a heretic was excommunicated from the church. This is likely the meaning Peter had in mind when he used anathema in connection with himself in Mark 14:71. "But he began to invoke a

curse on himself and to swear, I do not know the man..." In Acts 23:12 it is used in connection with a strong oath. "...the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul." Both Peter and these Jews failed and brought on themselves their curse. Obviously they were not condemning themselves to hell.

In the light of this usage of the word, Paul, no doubt, meant that the Judaizers were not to be welcomed into the church. They were to be excluded, cut off, and rejected as men bearing a message that contradicted the Gospel. Let them be anathema, or keep them out of you fellowship, for they will pervert your faith. They were to be rejected because they were contaminating the Gospel. John says something like this in II John 10, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting." In other words, we are not to give ear to, nor support to, those who pervert the Gospel with legalism, or any other perversion. Let them be anathema. Let them be excluded from fellowship and support.

If this person is a believer, they will have to change when they see they are rejected, or they will have to face the judgment of God in the final day. They are condemned, but not damned. It can be so serious that the death sentence can be involved. Paul writes in I Cor. 5:5 about one who was perverting his sex life, and it was known in the church. He said, "You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." He would be ultimately saved, but he was to lose his life in judgment for his perversion. He suffers the curse of anathema and is cut off from the church and life, but he is not condemned to hell.

Paul's point here in Galatians is that anyone who perverts the Gospel is to be accursed. They are to suffer the condemnation of the

church so that they will repent. If they do not do so, they must suffer the judgment of God. Does this happen to believer? Yes it does, and there is a whole history of believer who have had to suffer this curse because of their perversions of the Gospel.

8. ENEMIES OF OURSELVES Based on Gal. 1:6-9

Saint-Exupery was a French aviator who wrote a number of books that have been an inspiration to many. He was recalled to military service in World War II. On July 31, 1944 he was flying an observation mission in a plane with no guns. He was shot down that day by a young man from Germany who was writing his doctrinal thesis. Believe it or not, he was writing his thesis on the works of Saint-Exupery. When the young gunner learned that he had shot down his own hero, he went to pieces and had to be taken to a psychiatric hospital. All he could say was, "I killed my master, I killed my master."

This true story is a perfect illustration of how men can become the enemy of that which they most love. This perplexing paradox began in the Garden of Eden where man was persuaded to take sides against himself and spoil paradise. Sin might well be defined as man's incredible ability to be persuaded to cut his own throat. All God wants for man is for his own good, and yet he is so easily persuaded to forsake God's plan and follow a path that leads to sorrow. Man is his own worst enemy. It is easy to say, when you do that which makes you an enemy to yourself, that the devil made me do it, but the fact is, you are held personally responsible for the choices you make.

Paul is amazed that the Galatian Christians would choose to

desert the Gospel of grace and turn to another gospel. He is absolutely astonished that men can voluntarily decide to be enemies of that which is most precious and beneficial to them. Here are people who are actually joining the forces of those who threaten to destroy them, and like the young German gunner, they are in danger of opposing Him that they most admire. Paul is trying to save them from themselves. He does not let them off the hook by saying the devil made you do it. Paul is fully aware of the power of Satan, what he does not always assume that Satan is to blame for the folly of believers. They are responsible agents who can be guilty of foolish choices on their own.

Paul is dealing with two categories of people in this paragraph, and both of them are considered to be free agents who can do something different from what they are doing, and so they are responsible for their decision. The two categories are the deserters of the Gospel, and the distorters of the Gospel. We want to look more closely first at-

I. THE DESERTERS OF THE GOSPEL.

Paul is appalled that they would alter the altar before which they bow, and change from the cross of Christ to the law of Moses. The KJV has, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed." The RSV has, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting." The Living Bible has, "I am amazed that ye are turning away so soon." Stephen's Epistles of Paul in Modern English has it, "I am surprised that so soon after your conversion you should have deserted the doctrine of grace."

Paul is actually accusing them of desertion from the army of Christ. They are turning from the Captain of their salvation and are marching under another banner in which Moses is their commander. The issue here is not the great battle of Calvinism and

Arminianism concerning the once saved always saved theme. There is no question about their salvation, but rather their loyalty to Christ and the Gospel of grace. When we get to the distorters of the Gospel we will see that even many of them are saved men. There is no doubt as to their love of Christ, for even Peter and Barnabas were persuaded by them to join their ranks. The battle in Galatians is not between believer and unbeliever, but one's priorities. Is Christ central, or is the law of Moses still first in the Christian life?

What these deserters of the Gospel are illustrating for us is that it is possible for a believer to become an enemy of the one he loves most. It is possible for a born again Christian to be persuaded to follow a false cult, for example. He may love his Lord and yet join forces with those whose doctrines subtly undermine the centrality of Christ. He is a deserter taking shots at his own master, and he may not even be aware of his folly, as were the Galatians before Paul enlightened them with this letter.

Martin Luther's greatest discouragement in the Reformation was due to the ease with which Christians yielded to seducing spirits. He complained that after long labor to build up people in the faith some man will come along who has heard two sermons and read a few leaves in the Scriptures and by his eloquent persuasion lead them contrary to the authority of the Word. So frequently did this happen that Luther was convinced that the Germans may have been descended from the Galatians. He writes in his famous commentary on Galatians, "Some think that the Germans are descended of the Galatians, neither is this divination perhaps untrue, for the Germans are not much unlike to them in nature. And I myself also am constrained to wish to my countrymen more steadfastness and constancy, for in all things we do, at the first we be very hot, but when the heat of our affections is allayed, anon we become more slack, and with what rashness we begin things, with the same we give them over and utterly reject them."

To run alternately hot and cold is better than a state of lukewarm indifference, but it is still a dangerous and unstable way of life, and can lead true believers to desert the Gospel and follow after some perversion of it. It happened in Galatians, and has happened time and time again through history. It is not a hypothetical issue, therefore, but a very real one, and a very relevant one in our day of multiplying voices from the world of the cults and the occult.

An innocent child of God can be seduced into just about anything you can imagine. It is amazing that it is so, and that is why Paul was amazed at the Galatians, but it is true. Some studies show that the major target of the cults is young males from conservative Christian churches. Eric Linklater titled his autobiography *The Man Upon My Back*. It was himself, of course, and he was saying that he was his own worst enemy. This is so often the case, and that is why Paul will stress in this letter the need to crucify the self, and gain freedom in Christ from the self-centered and self-dominated life. When self is on the throne a man is his own worst enemy. He becomes the most obstinate obstacle in his way to becoming a victorious Christian.

Let us learn from the experience of the Galatians that true believers can be deceived into becoming deserters of the pure Gospel. Let's now look at Paul's treatment of-

II. THE DISTORTERS OF THE GOSPEL.

It is obvious that Paul feels that to fall away from the Gospel is bad, but that to pervert the Gospel is worse. As Jesus said, "Temptation must indeed come but woe unto them by whom they come." To fall away and be deceived is foolish and dangerous, but to be the cause of the deception is fatal and damnable. We see a distinction in levels of sin in the way Paul treats those who distort as over against those who desert. It is far worse to be a teacher of

heresy than to be a believer of it.

Many innocent but gullible people fall for all kinds of subtle error, but they will not be severely judged for their ignorance. Those who proclaimed the error, however, will suffer severe judgment, for their guilt is much greater. There is a great difference between being stupid and sinful. Paul says the Galatians have been stupid, but the Judaisers have been sinful by distorting the Gospel.

If a patient takes some medicine that causes a great reaction and they become sick because of it, the patient is not condemned for doing such a stupid thing. It is the doctor who prescribed the medicine who is responsible. He may not have known the consequences either, but he is the one accountable, and so it is with the Judaisers. Many of them loved Jesus, and many were, no doubt, superior to the Galatians, but they were more responsible for the consequences of their trying to add the law to the Gospel. Keep in mind that Paul is dealing strictly with the Gospel. He is not denouncing all who disagree with him as if he was the final authority on every issue.

Paul was a very gracious and flexible man who could see life from many perspectives. On issues where Christians differ he urged them to let every man be persuaded in his own mind. It is unfair to look at this passage and label Paul as narrow minded. He is only narrow on this basic issue of the Gospel. He knows that it is the foundation, and if that is not solid, it is vain to build anything at all. Paul is not opposed to variety in the structure, for he clearly teaches that there are many different gifts in the church, and there will be a great variety of labors, services, and methods of building the church.

If Paul was narrow, it was at the point where all believers must be narrow, and that is on the issue of the Gospel. Either we are saved by the sacrifice of Christ for us, and by means of faith in His

sacrifice, or we are saved by some other means such as obedience to the law. The first is good news, and all alternatives are other gospels which are not good news at all. It is no vice to be narrow on an issue like this. It is a very definite vice not to be narrow. What kind of a doctor will he be who would take all of his patients over to a medicine cabinet and say to them, "Take any of the pills you like. They are all good for something." Such a man would be a failure as a doctor, and so is the man who says that all religions have some good, and so choose any you like. What he says maybe just as true as the statement of the doctor, but what you need is not some good.

You need a very specific good. You need medicine to cure your particular problem. You need a means whereby your sin can be forgiven so that you can have fellowship with God. In other words, you need a Savior. Only the man who offers you what meets your real need is a good and virtuous man, and to be that he must be narrow. He must give you the specific medicine you need, and he must preach to you the Gospel of salvation by grace. Narrowness is the greatest of virtues when there is only one Way, and one cure. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father but by me." Paul is blessedly narrow on this issue, and all of us must be so to be truly virtuous people striving to do good to all men.

I stress this point because it is too easy to feel it is a virtue to be narrow on everything, and this is just not so. Billy Graham wrote an article many years ago on what ten years had taught him. He wrote, "Ten years ago my concept of the church tended to be narrow and provincial, but after a decade of intimate contact with Christians the world over I am now aware that the family of God contains people of various ethnological, cultural, and class, and denominational differences. In groups in which my ignorant piousness I formerly frowned upon I have found men so dedicated and so in love with the truth that I have felt unworthy to be in their

presence."

Paul, the world traveler, learned this truth much more quickly than did Graham, for he was called to minister to the Gentiles of the world. The point is, let us not hear Paul condemning all who disagree with him, but let us hear him denouncing those who distort the Gospel. What Paul is doing is an example of the paradox of a very virtuous narrowness. There is also the vicious vice of narrowness, and we distort Paul's words ourselves if we use this passage to justify our condemnation of those who differ with us.

Now let us look briefly at just exactly what these who distorted the Gospel were doing. In Acts 15:1 we have a clear description of the message of the Judaisers. "But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" The distortion was not a denial of the cross, but an addition to the cross. It was a Gospel of faith in Christ plus obedience to the law. They were obviously sincere for they wanted people to be saved, and they were convinced they had a better way. Like most who preach error, they no doubt felt superior to those who were trusting Christ alone for their salvation. Luther quoted a German proverb, "In God's name beginneth all mischief." This was the spirit that Paul fought with all the forces of his authority, for it was a distortion of the Gospel, and a denial of the cross as an all sufficient saving work.

It is like a disease to be cursed says Paul. They want you to be circumcised to be saved, but in reality the way to be saved is to cut them off and trust in Christ alone. If you cut yourself off to be saved, you are cutting yourself off also from the grace of Christ. May God cut off these who distort the Gospel is the cry of Paul, and may He bring you deserters of the Gospel back to a trust in Christ alone for assurance of salvation. John Morley said, "Every man of us has all the centuries in him." All the folly of believers in the past

is still present and still possible. Each of us can be enemies of ourselves yet today, and we always are until Christ alone is central in our faith, and Lord of our life.

9. PLEASING TO GOD Based on Gal. 1:10

Probably the most magnificent estate in the Western World is the California ranch of William Randolph Hearst. It is not a mere matter of film like the Ponderosa, but it is a matter of fact. It covers a quarter of a million acres of land, and stretches for 50 miles along the coast of the ocean. Uncounted millions have been spent to purchase castles; ship them to America; erect them, and furnish them. Paintings of the most famous artists hang on the walls.

Dale Carnegie said his collection of wild animals makes Barnum's Circus look like a side show. Herds of zebras, buffalo, giraffes, and kangaroos roam over the hills, and thousands of exotic birds fly among the trees. Lions and tigers roam in his private zoo. With the 30 million he inherited from his father, plus the millions more he has earned by his own energetic labors, he has been able to do many extravagant things. Naturally such a man as this was well known, but the fact is, millions never heard of him until his daughter was kidnapped. That crisis thrust him into the public mind, and details of his life then became public property.

The point of this is that the same thing happened to Paul to make him the greatest of the Apostles, and one of the best known men in all of history. Like Hearst, Paul already had credentials that made him well known among a certain group of people, but crisis thrust him into the arena for the whole world to see. The attempt of those who opposed him to kidnap his churches, and turn them into

modified Jewish Synagogues is what produced the crisis. Paul fought back to save his churches, just as Hearst fought to save his daughter. The Judaizers were brain washing the Gentiles, and they were persuading them that they must be Jews first to be Christians. Paul wrote Galatians as an antidote to that poisonous thinking.

The point is that crisis and conflict made Paul write, and by his writing give us details of his own life and character that have made him a household name throughout history. Had there been no crisis Paul may have disappeared into obscurity. Conflict and trouble is what made Paul famous, for he fought the good fight, and he became victorious. There is just no way to be a hero and a conqueror if you never face a conflict or battle. Out of Paul's conflict came this Epistle, and it gives us so much biographical information about Paul. It is the closest thing we have to an autobiography, for in Galatians Paul has to defend himself in order to defend his Gospel. The result is a delightful treasure of personal history, and insight into his character and conversion.

The first thing I observe in chapter one is Paul's stress on his death to self. He says it in 2:20 that he is crucified with Christ, but he reveals the reality of it in his attitude long before he wrote that. Here in 1:10 he asks two questions which tell us clearly that one of the basic areas of conflict was all about. He is asking, "Am I seeking the favor of men or of God?" The obvious implication is that Paul's opponents have charged him with being a men pleaser. They were saying that Paul makes the Gospel easier for the Gentiles, but he does not care about the law of God. They are saying to the Galatians, "It is winning your favor that really matters to him, and he will drop the law of God if necessary to win your allegiance." Paul is an ego-maniac is what his enemies are saying. He is all things to all men alright, because he wants to please everybody regardless of how he abuses the law of God.

This was a very serious charge against Paul's character and motives, and you can see why it was necessary for Paul to defend himself. The circumstantial evidence gave the Judaizers a fairly strong case, and the uninformed could be easily led astray. The Judaizers accused Paul of inconsistency and compromise in order to please men. He preached circumcision when he was among the Jews, and he denounced it when he was among the Gentiles. For they wanted exemption from this Jewish custom. We see this was a major charge in Gal. 5:11 where Paul is defending himself by writing, "But if I, brethren still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?" Paul tells us that his enemies have accused him of preaching circumcision when it is to his advantage.

Paul is being called a false prophet who changes the Word of God to please men. If circumcision is repulsive to Gentiles, Paul just throws it out to win their approval. Paul is a "peace at any price" man say his accusers. Paul faced the same problems that all men of God have faced when they become widely used of God. Fame brings power, and because power can be so easily abused, it is presumed to be abused by opponents of the one who has it. Every great evangelist has been accused of pleasing men to make big money.

Paul had to face the same problem with the Thessalonians. He wrote in I Thess. 1:4-6, "But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who test our hearts. For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness, nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as Apostles of Christ." Paul bent over backwards, and even made tents on the side, so as to rob his enemies of a basis for criticism.

It is impossible to please everyone, of course, and so Paul choose it as his master motive to please God. There is no way to get away

from the paradoxical nature of life, however, when you get into the realm of trying to distinguish between pleasing God and pleasing men. The paradoxical nature of it makes it possible to use the evidence for or against you. Pleasing men can either please God, or displease Him. Pleasing God can either please men, or displease them. It gets as complex as the weather. The poet wrote-

People freezing long to burn up;
Burning up, they long to freeze.
No wonder weather's temperamental,
People are so hard to please.

Paul had to be something like the weather. He had to be something for everyone, and yet never pleasing to everyone. The very fact that Paul defends himself shows that he is trying to please the Galatians. He wants to satisfy their minds that the charges against him are false. In so doing he confesses that his past life was in fact basically an effort to please men. All of the versions I checked have Paul saying in the closing phrase of verse 10, "If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ." Knox has it, "If, after all these years I were still courting the favor of men..." Weymouth has it, "If I were still a man-pleaser."

No wonder Paul gets so personal in this Epistle. The Judaizers knew his past, and they knew he was a self-centered egotist as a young Pharisee. They knew he cared only for his own reputation, and his chief motive was to get ahead by pleasing men. It is no wonder that Paul makes so much of his counting all his prizes of his former life as so much garbage or dung compared to knowing Christ. Paul had a radical conversion of his nature. He use to be everything his enemies said he was, and Paul had to work hard in life, and in his writings, to overcome the record of his past. He was a man pleaser, and that reputation clung to him and haunted him as a Christian.

Paul says here, however, if I were still what I used to be, I would not be a servant of Christ. This is not to be misconstrued to mean that a servant of Christ does not please men. The fact is, Paul pleased millions, and he goes on doing so just because he was a faithful servant of Christ. The point here is, Paul is defending himself against the charge that he modifies the Word of God to fit the situation. He is charged with being the author of situation ethics where you mold the demands of God to fit the weaknesses of those you seek to reach. Paul says, if I was really like I use to be, I would not be a servant of Christ. I never would have left Judaism to be a Christian if self-glory was my motive for serving Christ, for he has made me hated and persecuted by Jews and Gentiles alike.

Paul just let the most severe words that ever flowed from his pen lash out at the Judaizers. He said, "Let them be accursed." He is being severe to both his foes and friends in this letter to demonstrate that pleasing men is not his motive. He cares not for anything but to please God. He will speak the truth as it is in Christ whatever the cost to himself, for pleasing God is all that matters to him now. Paul persecuted the Christians in order to win approval from his superiors, and gain social status, but he is not now fighting the Judaizers for the same reason. His motive is to defend the Gospel of Christ, and to please God whatever it does to his own reputation.

All through the New Testament we see Paul as a man of suffering. He was hated, stoned, imprisoned, and had to depend upon others for his support. He could have gone off on his own in the world, and he could have become a man of independent wealth and fame, but he gave up all that to be a servant of Christ, and this meant a cross, and a daily dying to self. This life of Paul was a necessity to reveal how real his conversion was. No one can say so literally as Paul when he said, "I am crucified with Christ." The paradox is that by not pleasing men, and pleasing Christ instead, Paul became more famous than he could have ever dreamed. He has pleased more men

than all of the Apostles put together.

St. Jerome said, "If it is possible to please both God and men as well, we should please men as well; but if we cannot please men without displeasing God, we should please God rather than men." When Peter and John were charged not to preach in the name of Christ they had to choose to obey men or God. To please their own rulers, or to please their Maker and Redeemer were their options. They chose to please God and suffer the displeasure of men. Both of them, however, urged Christians to live in peace with all men. We need to make it clear that it is no virtue to make men angry at you, and displease them, or be in conflict with them. It is only a virtue when doing the will of God is the cause for the conflict. When there is no conflict with God's will, the Christian is under obligation to please men, and to live peaceably with all men in so far as he can. Paul is famous for both his conflict with men, and his cooperation with men. Both are legitimate, for both can please God, and pleasing God is to be our goal.

Dr. A. J. Cronin was a practicing physician in a small Welsh community. He worked with a nurse who for 20 years gave of her life to serve the people. The doctor was somewhat disgusted at the small salary she received for her selfless labors. One night after a strenuous case he sat with her drinking a cup of tea. "Why don't you insist on an extra pound a week at least," he said to her. "God knows you're worth it." She smiled and replied, "Dr., if God knows I am worth it, that's all that matters." Dr. Cronin said in a flash, "I suddenly realized that her whole existence in its service and self-sacrifice was a dedication, a perpetual testimony to her belief in a Supreme Being. And in a flash of understanding I sensed the rich significance of her life and the comparative emptiness of my own."

Her master motive was to please God, but in so doing she did much to help and please men. If we dedicate our lives to be pleasing

to God, we will, like Paul, be constantly both pleasing and displeasing to men. We ought, therefore, not be moved by either of the criticism or the praise of men. We need to examine our lives daily to be sure we are pleasing to God, and make that our master motive. It is easier to please God than to please men, for what is good and right will always please God, but doing what is right, and doing your best, will never always please all men.

John Woolman in his journal records a conclusion he came to as a servant of Christ. "I saw at this time that, if I were honest to declare that which truth opened to me, I could not please all men." Herbert Swope wrote, "I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure which is: Try to please everybody." Men of wisdom, however, have learned to listen to those whom they do not please, and often they have found that they needed correction, for what displeased men was not pleasing to God either.

A. W. Tozer in his book The Divine Conquest writes, "The way it works in experience is something like this: The believing man is overwhelmed suddenly by a powerful feeling that only God matters; soon this works itself out into his mental life and conditions all his judgments and all his values. Now he finds himself free from slavery to man's opinions. A mighty desire to please only God lays hold of him. Soon he learns to love above all else the assurance that he is well pleasing to the Father in heaven."

**If I could heap up treasured store
From every foreign strand,
And all the prizes of success
Retain within my hand,
Unless my Father's smile I know,
I'm still a pauper here below.**

Author unknown

10. REVELATION FROM HEAVEN Based on Gal. 1:11-12

The third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, is most famous for being the author of the Declaration of Independence. Many have pronounced it a document inspired from heaven, and there is much reason to believe that it has the providence of God behind it. Jefferson, however, took his authority too seriously, and he decided to make his own version of the Gospels. The Jefferson Bible, as it is called, reveals the gospel according to man. Jefferson cut out all the parts he didn't like. He did not see how the supernatural could fit into his world-view, and so all mention of the supernatural was eliminated. He did not let the Word of God lift him to its level, but instead he cut the Word of God down to his level, and he created the Bible in his own image. His Bible ends at the tomb with no resurrection.

This is the very thing the Judaizers accused Paul of doing. They said that he has cut out the law and made a gospel according to man. Paul labors this point in his defense, and he makes it clear that his Gospel is not from man. Its origin is from God and not in his own mind or the minds of others. Man is exceedingly clever, but if a gospel has its origin in man, it is built on sand. It cannot be trusted to last. It will perish and leave all who trust in it to be left empty. Most all of the religions of the world have grown out of man's search for meaning. Many have developed beliefs that are worthy of admiration, but they have their origin in man rather than God. And nothing less than a word from God can be adequate to give us assurance.

Man is constantly seeking for origins. He wants to know the origin of the universe, and of man, and of beliefs. The assumption is

that if you can know the origin of something that you can know its purpose and value. There is truth to this, and so there is validity to man's quest for origins, but man is so prejudice that he usually decides before hand what he is going to prove. Many who set out to discover the origin of the universe really only want to prove that it didn't come from God. If you are determined to ignore the evidence you can make most any theory sound possible. It is like the man who set out to show that English is the oldest language of man, and that all others were derived from it. His theory to explain the origin of a famous Latin phrase went like this: "One day Caesar entered the senate chamber and Brutus asked him, 'How many sandwiches did you have for lunch Caesar?' And Caesar replied, 'Et two Brute.'"

Those of you who doubt the truth of this theory likely do so on the basis of history. The study of history is absolutely essential for those who wish to avoid the snares of false but clever explanations of origins. Paul knew this also, and that is why the longest section of this Epistle deals with history. He gives us a fairly detailed account of his own history and the history of his relationship to the other Apostles. All of this was essential for the establishing of his own authority and of the authority of the Gospel he preached. If the Judaizers could establish that the origin of his authority was in man, then they could force Paul to submit to that authority. Paul, however, shows that his authority is from God and instead of him being submissive he was used of God to rebuke Peter, who was the highest human authority in the church.

It may be hard for us to appreciate the distinction that Paul labors to establish. What difference does it make whether he Gospel came through men, or direct from God? So often people argue over distinctions that make no difference. Ogden Nash reveals the folly of those who love excessive distinctions.

**I give you now Professor Twist,
A conscientious scientist.
Trustees exclaimed he never bungles!
And sent him off to distant jungles.
Camped on a tropic riverside,
One day he missed his loving bride.
She had, the guide informed him later,
Been eaten by an alligator.
Professor twist could not but smile,
You mean, he said, a crocodile.**

There is a difference, but who can be persuaded that it was relevant to that situation? Paul, however, is dealing with a very relevant distinction. If his Gospel is not from heaven, then it cannot compete with the law of Moses, for he received it direct from God. Unless the Gospel has the same origin as the law, then the law must remain the standard of life for all believers. The Judaizers are convinced that this is the case, and that is why they remain loyal to the law and persuade others to do so as well.

Paul must establish that God has selected him just as He did the prophets of the Old Testament. He was to bring a new message to God's people. It was not a message he learned in school, but a message he received direct from God. God actually used Paul rather than one of the other Apostles who walked with Christ, and who sat under His teaching, to be the main expounder of the Gospel of grace. This does not mean that Paul did not learn anything from men. Obviously he learned much of the life of Christ from men. He would not have been so zealous in persecuting Christians if he did not know what they believed about Jesus being the Messiah.

In verse 12 Paul asserts that the Gospel he preached came by direct revelation. Jesus spoke to him directly just as he did to the 12. This was after the resurrection and the ascension. As far as we

know this was the last time Jesus broke into history to communicate with any person directly. Many have had visions of Jesus since then, but none has been given a unique message as was the case with Paul. John was caught up into heaven to receive the revelation of Jesus, but in Paul's case Jesus came to him in history.

Paul implies that his understanding of the Lord's Supper came to him by direct revelation and not through the accounts of men. In I Cor. 11:23 he writes, "For I receive from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread....." Paul has the distinction of being the only other author beside John who received direct revelation from Jesus. The others were inspired in their research and writing, but only John and Paul had this direct revelation and personal encounter with the ascended Christ.

What they experienced was what all believers will one day experience, for this very same word for revelation, which is apokalupsis is used to describe our encounter with Christ when He comes again. That will be a day of revelation for all of us. In I Peter 1:13 Peter writes, "Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Every believer will then experience what Paul experienced, and like John, we will see the King in His beauty, and we will be like Him when we see Him as He is.

This word for revelation means an uncovering. It is a revealing of what has been hidden. We live now in the age of the hiding of the glory of Christ. John could say, "We beheld His glory," but we must look to the second coming before we will behold the revelation of His glory. In I Peter 4:13, "We rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." The revelation of the second coming will not only be an uncovering of the hidden Christ, but it will be an uncovering

of the hidden values of the Christian faith. Peter tells Christians to rejoice in their trials, and in I Peter 1:7-8 he writes, "...So that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen Him you love Him, though you do not now see Him you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exulted joy."

Both the full glory of Christ and full salvation of man will be uncovered when Christ returns. The point is, both are now hidden and covered. We must depend upon the revelation others have had until we experience it for ourselves. Paul is saying that he has had just such a revelation. He has had a glimpse of the glory of Christ, and Christ has opened up to him the glory of the Gospel. What has been hidden for all the ages has been uncovered for Paul. The Galatians had to be persuaded of this to believe his Gospel over the authority of the law. Until Christ comes and we have a revelation of our own, we are dependent upon the revelation of Paul. This is especially so in those areas of conflict between law and grace.

If Paul's Gospel is not true, and we are all responsible for keeping the law, then most of us are sunk mighty deep. The only basis we have for not keeping the Old Testament laws is the new revelation we have, which is expounded primarily by Paul. The Judaizers could not accept the fading away of the law. The Jews were taught all their lives that the law of God was eternal. It was God's greatest gift to man, and the law was inseparable from God Himself. The Jewish Midrash has a parable to illustrate just how much God loved the law.

A king had an only daughter, and a noble from another kingdom came to marry her and take her back to his kingdom. The king said, "I cannot bear to part with my daughter. Yet I cannot say to you that you cannot take her away for she is thy wife. But

show me this kindness that wherever you go prepare me a chamber that I may dwell ever near my daughter." God said to Israel take my law, but wherever you journey make me a house where I may dwell and be ever near it. That is the kind of teaching that is not easily forgotten. The law in Judaism is God's final revelation, and that is why they could not then, nor now, accept any new revelation that goes beyond the law.

The law existed before creation in Jewish theology, and it would exist to eternity. To forsake it was to be cut off from God's people. The law was the bread and water of life the rabbis taught. It was the light of the world to the Jews. Then Jesus came and taught that he was the bread of heaven and that he was the light of the world. This is what Paul was teaching, but you can see why it would be hard for Jews to be open to this which was such a radical departure from what they had believed all their lives. The only way a Jew could depart from the law as the basis for his salvation was to believe that God has spoken a new revelation, and that is why Paul strives so hard to convince all concerned that the origin of his Gospel is not man but God.

Paul was a very unique man. God had to have a man who was trained in the theology of the Jews and who fully understood them to communicate that Jesus had fulfilled the law and made it obsolete. God needed a specialist to do this very difficult task. Paul was superior to the other Apostles in his training and in his ability to communicate. Jesus had much that he could not communicate to his disciples, but Paul was able to grasp the fuller revelation and pass it on to the believers in the churches. Paul became the mouthpiece of the ascended Christ. He was the instrument through whom Jesus uttered more completely the consequences of his coming into history.

Jesus came to break down the wall between Jew and Gentile, but he could not accomplish this in his own ministry. He used Paul to

accomplish this goal. Paul's life was an extension of the life of Jesus. No man was more qualified to be the representative of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles. Paul was used to do things that Jesus could not accomplish in his earthly life. He could do this because he received this revelation from heaven.

11. FROM THE WORST TO THE BEST Based on Gal. 1:13

Mary Marrow had just arrived in China as a missionary when the Boxer Rebellion broke out in 1900. The leaders of China blamed the missionaries for the problems of the land, and mobs began to violently persecute the Christians. They were dragged from their homes and forced to stomp on a cross or they were killed on the spot. Mary had come to China to serve these people and see Christ exalted through her life, and she is what she faced. She didn't even have a chance to learn the language. When she heard the angry mob approaching the mission compound she was frightened. She prayed that God would give her strength as so not to shame the other missionaries.

Suddenly she did a shocking thing, it was even a shock to her, for she ran out of the door and faced the mob. She cried out, "I am no good here! I speak such poor Chinese. So kill me. Save all those inside, for they have healed your sick, taught your children, and they love you. Tomorrow you will want them back again, and so kill me quickly." The soldiers were amazed at the courage of this girl, and they froze until their captain stirred them up. Then they attacked and killed her on the steps.

A memorial service was held in the states for Mary. She had gone out with such great dreams, but at such a bad time that she

died before she could do anything. Twenty years went by and Mary was almost forgotten. Then one day a well-known Chinese General by the name of General Fang came to the mission headquarters and told them this story. He had been one of those vengeful soldiers who killed Mary. For 20 years he had lived with her words echoing in his mind, and the vision of her courage painted on his eyes. He asked himself how she could have been so brave, and when he heard of the Bible he got a copy and read it. He was searching for the answer to Mary's courage. He became a Christian and joined the church, and he became well known all over China as the Christian General. He purchased Bibles for his soldiers and had classes for them. Wherever he and his army went in China the crops and the women were safe. Mary Marrow's life had not been in vain after all. She didn't even learn the language, but her life made an impact on masses because through her a man of violence became a man of peace.

This true story has several paradoxes. It illustrates first of all that sometimes God uses those who do the least to accomplish the most. Because this is so we need to be faithful with our little, for God in sovereignty may use it for great things. The second paradox is that quite often the worse people become the best people. Never get so disgusted with a zealous servant of the devil that you forget that they may become a choice servant of God. And intolerant, bigoted, violent man can become an apostle of love and peace. This is precisely what Paul tells us about himself.

Paul tells us in verses 13 and 14 that he was always a very religious man, and he was zealous in his commitment to Judaism. Paul becomes a great example of both the danger and value of being religious. Sometimes we tend to assume that being religious is good, but the facts of history tell us that religious people have written some of the bloodiest chapters of history because of their zeal without knowledge. Religion can actually be a great tool of the

devil. Jesus blasted the Pharisees for their zeal in traveling the world over to make one convert, but when they win him they make him more a child of hell than themselves.

Paul was one of those fanatical Pharisees who was literally working like the devil for the Lord. He violently persecuted Christians, and all the while was convinced he was doing it for the glory of God. Fanaticism always does evil with the conviction that it is good. Finley Dunne said, "A fanatic is a man that does what he thinks the Lord would do if he knew the facts in the case." William James said, "Fanaticism is only loyalty carried to a convulsive extreme." Nothing is so sure of its self as fanaticism. Jesus knew the fanatical zeal of the Jews, and He knew there would be men like Paul persecuting His church. He warned the disciples in John 16:2, "They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God."

Jesus fully understood the paradoxical nature of religious conviction. It can persecute the people of God and blaspheme the name of God, and all for the glory of God. There's not a crime known to man that has not been committed for the glory of God in the minds of those who do them. Paul only persecuted Christians because he was zealous to protect the law of God. He would not have been a great man in Judaism had he not been intolerant of what threatened the foundations of Judaism. It is important that we recognize that Paul was just like those who killed Christ. Jesus asked His Father to forgive them for they didn't know what they were doing. Paul also did not know what he was doing when he destroyed Christians. In I Tim. 1:13 he wrote, "I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him, but I receive mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief."

In his own mind Paul was convinced he was doing good when he was doing evil, and this does make a difference as to how God judges

a person. God looks at the motive and not just the outward action. Folly because of ignorance is a different category from willful evil. If your child buys you some bubble bath and you discover you are allergic to it and break out, you do not scold the child for the gift. But if a child knows you are allergic and slips in to add some to your bath water, then your anger at this deliberate mischief is justified, and some degree of wrath is legitimate.

We need to keep this distinction in mind, for God does, and it makes a world of difference in how we interpret Paul's life. As rotten as were the things that Paul did, he obtained mercy because he was convinced that what he did was right. We are not trying to whitewash Paul's past, for he did not do that himself. He was guilty of the sin of fanaticism and extremism. Whatever his thorn in the flesh was, his thorn in the soul was the memory of his zeal without knowledge. He was never free from the vision of Stephen having the life knocked from him as he held the garments of those who stoned him. Paul spent much time in prison, and he must have often relived the experience of his past when he threw many Christians in prison. Paul was ever conscience of his former folly, and he freely shared it. Here in verse 13 he says to the Galatians that you have heard of my former life. Practically everybody had, for Paul shared his personal testimony everywhere he went.

When Paul went to Jerusalem and to the temple the crowd heard of his presence and a riot was started. Paul's life was in danger because they wanted to kill Paul, and he fully understood their anger. When he stood up to defend himself he said this in Acts 22:3-4, "I am a Jew born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day." In other words, Paul understood their zeal in wanting to destroy him. He goes on to say, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women."

Paul gives even more details of his bloodthirsty zeal against the church when he defends himself before king Agrippa. This is his testimony in Acts 26:9-11: "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth and I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities." There is no doubt about it, Paul was a religious fanatic, and one of the most dangerous men the church has ever had to face. What a paradox! The man most responsible for establishing churches all over the world was the great destroyer of the church. Fanaticism always goes to extremes.

In the 19th century the immorality was wide spread and there was reaction against it. Lady Gough, the Emily Post of her day, gave this advise to respectable people: "The perfect hostess will see to it that the works of male and female authors be probably separated on her book shelves. Their proximity, unless they happen to be married, should not be tolerated." We can laugh at this extreme perspective, but you have to admit it was an extreme that began with a good motive to protect Christian morality. But it could so easily lead to the evil of persecuting those who did not comply, and this could make a capital offense out of a mere triviality.

History is filled with blood baths due to people who make their whims the will of God. Violators of the will of God they say should be destroyed, and so when their whims are violated they set out to destroy those who will not conform. This should make us extremely cautious to how we use the Old Testament as a basis for our actions today. Many times the church has appealed to God's command to destroy people in the Old Testament as a basis for persecuting non-conformists. Paul thought he was just like the heroes of old who

were destroying idolaters when he persecuted the Christians. When he became a Christian, however, he never again advocated violence in dealing with those who were enemies of the truth. Paul fought heresy with great zeal, but as a Christian leader he never held the garments of Christians while he watched them stone a heretic. He fought error with great zeal, but he never once implied that any should be imprisoned or harmed physically for their error.

Paul's attitude became the very attitude that makes America the land of religious liberty. True Christians do not approve of violence against those who do not believe. Christianity, however, has been perverted time and time again. One of the saddest records of history is of how Christians have gotten even with the Jews for killing Jesus. The cross was a sign of terror to the Jews all through the middle ages, for it represented hatred for them. During the Spanish Inquisition thousands of Jews were killed and their property taken over by the church.

Nowhere does Paul advocate violence as the answer to the problem of heresy. Paul's answer is the book of Galatians. It is the answer of argument, persuasion and discussion. These are the methods that are the basis for the Christian battle, and these are the methods that are the basis for our country having true religious liberty. Paul's conversion has a great deal to do with the religious freedom we have as Americans. Had he brought over into his Christian life the attitudes he had as a Jewish leader, Christianity would be like all other religions where persecution of those who differ is common.

The Koran, for example, gives us an idea of how Moslems are to deal with unbelief. "When you encounter the unbeliever, strike off their heads, until you have made a great slaughter among them. Verily, if God pleased, He could take vengeance on them without your assistance, but He commands you to fight His battles." Most

religions feel it is right to destroy those who do not believe, and whenever Christians have come to that same conclusion they have fallen to the sub-Christian level. Henry Buckle in History Of Civilization in England wrote, "It is an undoubted fact that an overwhelming majority of religious persecutors have been men of the purest intentions, of the most admirable and unsullied morals. Such men as these are not bad, they are only ignorant..." Paul admits that he was ignorant, but his conversion to Christ changed, not only his concept of the truth, but his concept of how truth is to be preserved. It is not by persecution but by persuasion and by a life that demonstrates it to be superior.

In contrast to other religions where vengeance is given into the hands of persecutors, listen to this series of advise from Paul to the Romans in chapter 12:14-21:

v. 14 "Blest those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them."

v. 17 "Repay no one evil for evil."

v. 19 "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God..."

v. 21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Paul was a good and godly man as a Jew, but his intolerance made him an instrument of evil. He was a good man at his worst, and many godly people have been followers of that unconverted fanatic. May God help us to listen to Paul and observe the change Christ made in him, so that we can be followers of him at his best. Paul never saved anybody as a fanatic destroyer of men, but no one has won more than Paul the Christ-like fighter for truth. Jesus changed Paul from the worst kind of religious person to the best kind of religious person. May God help us to be like Paul at his best.

12. THE TIMING OF CHRISTMAS Based on Gal. 4:1-7

Timing may not be everything, but it is plenty. At the dedication service of the Statue of Liberty a boy was to wave a flag indicating that Senator William Evarts had finished his speech. This way the signal for men high in the head of the statue to let go of a giant French flag, which in turn was the signal for the vessels in harbor to let loose with their whistles. Unfortunately, the Senator paused too long, and the boy thinking he was finished set all this commotion in motion. The Senator never did get to finish his speech. Wrong timing ruined it for him.

On the other hand, the graduating class of Harvard in 1949 became the most successful group of graduates in history. It was because of the longest, richest, and most wide spread peace time boom the modern world had ever seen. The 49'ers, because of the timing of their entering into the economy, became rich. One out of 5 became millionaires by 1974. They became the leaders of the upper branches of American enterprise. They became the chairmen and presidents of the largest companies and colleges.

The same thing happened to the class of 1915 at West Point, but for the opposite reason. Because of the timing of the two World Wars, this class was called the class the stars fell on. Many of them became generals, and one by the name of Eisenhower even became president of the United States. Timing really does matter. It is by precise timing that God works in history and in our lives to do wonders without miracles.

A pastor's wife back in the 70's was selected to be on the \$128,000 Question. It was a popular TV show in Canada. She and her husband needed money badly, and so they prayed for guidance. She got to the \$16,000 level, but they needed double that, so she agreed to come back the next day. Before the show the next day she

relaxed by walking through one of Toronto's malls. She picked up a book and leafed through it. She found a page that listed all the plays of Agatha Christie and their opening dates. This was the area her questions were in, and so she read the list through. That night her \$32,000 question was to list titles and opening dates of the plays of Agatha Christie. She did not know these answers before that day, but she had picked them up in the mall and was able to win \$32,000. She felt that God had given her what she needed, and she refused to continue out of greed to get more. She called it a miracle, but it really wasn't. It was a matter of perfect timing, and that is what we call providential.

The point of all this is, it is time for us to focus again on the birth of our Lord. It is time to focus on that incredible and incomprehensible miracle of the incarnation. The incarnation was a miracle, but so many of the events surrounding it were providential. That is, they were all a matter of precise timing. Paul makes timing an issue in Gal. 4:4 where he states, "But when the time has fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law. What we want to see is that though timing may not be everything to Christmas it is plenty, and a focus on the timing of Christmas events can be quite revealing.

The whole of history had to be coordinated to bring about this event with precise timing. Caesar had to give his order for a census at just the right time so as to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem at the time of her delivery. The angel Gabriel had to come to Mary at the right time. It was just 6 months after Elizabeth became pregnant with John the Baptist so she could have the consolation of another woman in her trying time. Her own conception had to be timed to fit the scheduled delivery when she was in Bethlehem.

It was the right time in history for Jesus to come. The whole world was prepared by Alexander the Great to carry the message of

Christ to all the world. He made Greek the common language of the world so that the Gospel could be carried to every land in that common language. Timing plays a role in the shepherds being in the field, and the wise men seeking for a star. Timing is the name of the game in the biblical events, and in the celebration of these events. Consider for example,

I. THE TIME OF THE YEAR FOR CHRISTMAS.

Dec. 25th was a time of celebration long before Jesus came. This was the time of the year when the sun began to return to the northern hemisphere, and the days began to get longer. Up to that point the darkness seemed to be winning over the light, and it was pushing the light back further and further. The sun was in retreat, and seemingly headed for defeat, but now there is a reverse process, and the sun is coming back. On the basis of this observation, the ancient Persians and the Romans selected Dec. 25th as a day of celebration for the victory of the sun. From a Christian point of view, not even looking at the birth of Christ, this fact of nature is a very positive one. If you enjoy sunlight and longer days, and all the life that spring will bring, and all the beauty of summer, then it makes sense that Dec. 25th is a valid cause for celebration.

The early Christians were not anti-sun. This was their holiday too, but they saw in it a chance to exalt the greater Son-the Son of God, who was the Creator of the sun of nature. They adopted this holiday as their day of celebration of the coming of the Son into history to bring light to a world in darkness. They made this pagan holiday a Christian holiday. There are many who lament that Christians have been following a pagan custom by celebrating Christmas. This criticism is true if Christians celebrate by abuse of their bodies in drunkenness. But just the fact that celebrate the birth of Christ at the same time as pagans have always celebrated the ascendancy of the sun is no basis for criticism.

This type of argument is folly. One just as well argue that all Christians should give the eating of breakfast because studies show that it was a pagan meal. The Mafia and prostitutes, and drug addicts all eat breakfast somewhere between 6 and 9 in the morning. Therefore, we are exhorted not to conform to the world, and so we ought to give up eating breakfast until closer to noon. This is obviously foolish reasoning, it is also folly to reject the celebration of the coming of Christ on Dec. 25th because the pagans celebrated that day also. It has always been a pagan holiday, and it always will be until Christ comes again. The Christian has the choice of adding Christian content to the day and the season, or of just ignoring it all together.

Making Christmas mandatory would be a legalistic effort rejected by the New Testament. No Christian is obligated to keep Christmas in any special way. It is no where even hinted at, let alone required in the Bible. Paul writes in Col. 2:16, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day." In Rom. 14:5 he writes again, "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers everyday alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."

If Christians want to ignore Dec. 25th, and make no big deal out of it, they are not in least out of God's will. But if they want to fill the day with Christian content, and put Christ in Christmas, that too is the Christian privilege. It is a matter of freedom and not a matter of law. If you want to celebrate the birth of Jesus on Dec. 25th, it is a matter of good timing, for it is nature's time to give light the growing power over darkness. There is no better time of the year to illustrate the coming of light into the world in Christ. In other words, the Word of God and the world of God are saying the same thing in harmony at this time, and so the timing of Christmas is providential.

It is a very weak argument to reject the Christmas celebration on Dec. 25th because of the pagan origin of that day being a holiday. Christians use the common names for the days of the week even though they have a pagan origin. Sunday is the day of the Sun. Monday is the day of the moon. Tuesday is the day of Triva, a child of Woden the supreme god. Wednesday is named after Woden. Thursday is for Thor another of his children. Friday is Woden's wife Frigg. Saturday is from Saturn. None of the days are named after anything Christian. All are pagan gods and goddesses. Our culture is a mixed bag of pagan and Christian influence.

The challenge of the Christian is not to try and weed out all the pagan influence, but to Christianize all that is pagan, and no where do we have a greater opportunity than at Christmas. This is a time of year for us to redeem the time, and pack it full with Christ honoring, and Christ exalting events. Proper timing of acts of love can have an impact in this season that they may never have any other time of the year. This is true around the world where there are radical differences from our culture. In Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries, they call Christmas Borodin, which means big day. This is the biggest holiday of their year. The timing is the best season of the year for people to celebrate. In the rainy season they can't travel much for all is mud, but Christmas comes in winter when the roads are dry and hard, and so there is more getting out and communication than any other time. It is also crucial for the poor because this is when their new crops come in, and without these they would have no money for celebrating.

The timing of Christmas enables this vast populace of the poor to have the most enjoyable celebration of their toilsome year. The timing of nature makes a world of difference all over the world. In our culture we tend to love a white Christmas because the snow covers up the bare and black soil, and it beautifies the dead earth which is devoid of vegetation. The whiteness and brightness of the

snow is symbolic of the light of the world who came to save and cleanse, and to make sinners white as snow. The point is, if you are ever going to celebrate the coming of Christ into this world, this is the season in which to do it, for nature and revelation are in harmony saying that the time is just right. The second aspect of timing we want to consider is-

II. THE TIMING OF HISTORY FOR CHRISTMAS.

God did not say, as we used to in playing hide and seek, "Here I come ready or not." He made sure the world was ready. The timing had to be just right or the whole plan of God could not have succeeded as it did, and the celebration of Christ's birth become a world wide event. We are not always ready for Christmas today, for there never seems to be enough time to do all we would like to do. Some just put off their shopping until the last minute. Someone defined a man as a creature who buys football tickets three months in advance, but does his Christmas shopping on Christmas Eve. We have all sorts of poor timing when it comes to Christmas, but the first Christmas was timed just right.

There were centuries of preparation for this event. Jesus did not come into history until He did, because it was not yet the fullness of time, and it was not yet right. God is a God of timing, and all had to be just right for the moment of the incarnation. At the 250th anniversary of Harvard the freshman class marched in a parade with a large banner that read, "The university has been waiting 250 years for us." The world had been waiting many more centuries for a Savior, and when He came He was like a sunrise after a long dark night. Dr. Henry Van Dyke pictured all the prophets focused on this event like the heads of flowers turned toward the dawn to catch the light of the rising sun.

The sun rises with perfect timing, and so also the Son of God

came into this dark world at just the right time. This Christmas gift was chosen, wrapped, and ready for delivery before the foundation of the world. It was no last minute thought. It was God's plan before He even created man, for He knew he would need a Savior, but he had to wait till the timing was right. Dr. Luke starts his second chapter with this historical fact. "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." All the details of the Christmas story revolve around the timing of this secular decree from the Roman Emperor. Had he not made that decree just when he did, Mary and Joseph would not have been in Bethlehem when Christ was born, and none of the prophecy concerning the Messiah's birth would have been fulfilled. The timing of secular history plays a major role in the sacred history of God's plan of salvation. Do not ever assume that the secular world is all under the control of Satan. God is ever at work in the secular whelm achieving His purpose.

It is fascinating to study the parallels of the life of Christ and that of this Caesar whose decree got his life started when God wanted it started in Bethlehem. Augustus was born Sept. 23, 63 B.C. just before sunrise, and his birthday became a popular holiday, just like the birthday of Jesus.

- 1. His father died when he was a boy, just as Joseph did when Jesus was a boy.**
- 2. At 12 he was mature and wise enough to have delivered a funeral oration for his grandmother Julia, the sister of Julius Caesar. Jesus was 12 when He was found in the temple interacting with the scholars of the day.**
- 3. Both had a great genealogy going back to the noble of the past.**
- 4. Both built empires that were world wide.**
- 5. Both had compassion on the poor. One of the reasons Augustus needed the taxes that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem was because of his massive feeding program for the poor.**

- 6. Like Jesus, he also had compassion for the sick. He took in many of the children of mentally ill patients, and he raised them with his own and gave them the same education.**
- 7. He pardoned many who sinned against him, and let his political enemies hold high office again.**
- 8. He fought for decency on the stage.**
- 9. He was so loved by the masses that some Italian cities voted to make their official year begin with the anniversary of his first visit to them. He received the title "Father of his country," and was to Rome what Washington was to us.**
- 10. Many celebrated his birthday over 2 days with festivities and gifts.**
- 11. He died on Aug. 19th, 14 A. D. when Jesus was about 10 years old. It is of interest that he died at 3 P. M., which was the same time of day that Jesus died.**

I am not trying to make anything of these parallels, as if there is some deep revelation here. I am just pointing out that the providence of God is far greater than what we see in sacred history alone. The Christmas story brings the secular world together with the sacred, and we get a glimpse of how God is at work in that secular whirl determining the timing of events so as to accomplish his purpose. Timing is a tool of God in all of history in both the secular and the sacred realm. The practical application of this truth is in becoming aware that God is not just interested in our spiritual life, but He is also interested in our secular life, and He can work in it to be a blessing to many.

We need to take timing seriously, and look for the ways we can do what is to be the greatest blessing. Nadine Kolmodin is the wife of one of our retired pastors. She left her purse in a shopping cart at a grocery store, and when she walked back to get it she had the pleasant surprise of finding another lady who had found it and turned it in. She was so grateful that she asked God to let her be

that kind of blessing to someone else.

The very next week she went shopping and found a cart where a woman's billfold had been left. She opened it, and found it full of cash. She knew this was her chance to be a great blessing. She knew how upset the owner would be when she discovered her loss. She sat in her car near the cart and waited. Many cars came by, but then a young mother with her toddler stopped and began looking from side to side. This was the one she knew was the right one. She got out and held up the billfold for the mother to see. When the mother saw it she sank into the seat with the relief of great tension. "Oh," she said, "It's all my Christmas money. I was desperate." Nadine told her that she had done the same thing last week and had prayed to be able to help another as she had been helped. "My prayer has been answered, and now you can thank Him too." Blinking back her tears she could hardly express her gratitude. With a Merry Christmas they parted, both of them grateful that they had been part of this story of love.

This is what Christmas is all about. Love, that like the love of God, is looking for the leading of God to be where they need to be at the right time to do what they need to do to be what they need to be. In these days before Christmas let our prayer be, "Lord, give me guidance and let me be a part of your providential leading in the many facettled ways you direct in the timing of Christmas.

13. CHRISTMAS AND THE CROSS Based on Gal. 4:1f

One of the great turning point days in the history of the Western world was June 18, 1815. Napoleon and Wellington faced each other on the battlefield for the first and last time. The history of

Europe, and possibly the whole world, hung in the balance. The weight began to shift in Napoleon's favor as many of Wellington's European troops deserted before the hardest fighting began. Toward the close of the day Wellington was seriously outnumbered. He looked at his watch and muttered, "Would to God that night or Bleucher would come." To his delight Bleucher did arrive with his troops, and his coming through the balance in Wellington's favor, and Napoleon was defeated. Historians ever since have speculated on what would have happened if Bleucher had not come.

This same speculation surrounds the coming of Jesus into the battlefield of history. What if He had never come? It would mean that we would live in a world with no Christmas, no cross, and no resurrection. It would be a world with no Savior. It would still be a pre-Christmas world if Jesus had not come. That was not a hopeless world, for people still had God's promise, but it was a dark world with no symbol of ultimate victory. We have this symbol and assurance of victory because we live in a post-Christmas world. We live in a world with a cross and a Savior. Without Christmas there would be no cross, for Jesus had to be born before He could die. It is because of Christmas that we have the cross and all that it means.

As birth precedes death, so Christmas must precede the cross and be the basis for it. One of the greatest gifts that comes to us from Christmas is the cross, and all of its benefits for time and eternity. Christmas marks His coming, and the cross marks His conquering. The two are so linked together that I will not be surprised if we learn in heaven that the timbers for the cross came from the very barn or cave where Jesus was born. The two timbers that formed the cross are themselves symbolic of these two great events in God's plan. The long timber plunged into the earth, yet pointing to heaven, represents the incarnation of the Son of God plunging from heaven's glory into earth's gloom to dwell with man. The cross bar pointing in both directions represents the death of

Jesus for the sins for the whole world. The birth and death; Christmas and the cross are as linked together as the two timbers that formed the cross. Both of these eternal events that transpired in time are needed to fulfill each other.

Christmas without the cross would not exist, for the birth of Jesus would not likely ever be thought of had He not died for the sin of the world. The cross, on the other hand, would just be another case of capital punishment had the one who died there not been the virgin born Son of God. Christmas and the cross need each other. The cross is the final proof of the reality of the incarnation. God really did become a man, and not just a fake or phantom man. He came all the way into manhood, even to the point where He could die. Only the creature dies and not the Creator, but the cross reveals that the Creator really did become a creature and experience death. The cross confirms the message of Christmas that God really did become a man. In doing so He became the hero that arrived on the battlefield just in time to save man and establish a kingdom of liberty that will have no end. Paul in Gal. 4 reveals some of the basic strategy that links Christmas and the cross in His plan of redemption, and makes them both days of victory. The first thing we see is-

I. THE TIMING OF HIS COMING. v. 4

In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son. When the time was ripe and just right God started the first Christmas. Jesus learned well from His father, for His strategy was the same with the cross. He could have let Himself be crucified at any time, but He kept saying His time was not yet come. Only when He could say that His time had come did He permit the crucifixion to take place. Christmas and the cross have this in common: They both took place at just the right time because timing is the key to victory. Almost everything you see to convey the joy of victory over evil follows this

pattern of right timing.

- 1. The cavalry comes just in time to save the wagon train or besieged fort.**
- 2. The hero arrived just in time to save the damsel in distress.**
- 3. Reinforcements come just in time to drive back and defeat the enemy.**
- 4. It is always just in time that the good guy foils the bad guys fool proof plan.**

Almost all of the victories of good over evil have to do with timing. God's providence in history is a matter of timing. Mrs. Willard Lovell of Berkeley, California accidentally locked herself out of her house, and she was very frustrated wondering how she could get in without breaking a window. Just then the mailman came with a letter for her. It was from her brother in Seattle who had stayed with her the previous week. In the letter he was returning the spare key she had let him use while staying there. In the fullness of time God sent what she needed.

Corrie Ten Boom in The Hiding Place tells of the night she was awakened by the German bombers. She heard her sister Betsie down in the kitchen. She got up and went down to have a cup of tea with her. They visited as they heard explosions near by, and when it finally became quiet they returned back to their bedroom. Corrie went to pat her pillow and let out a scream. Something sharp had cut her hand. Betsie came running and they took her back to the kitchen to bandage her hand. They also took the large ten-inch piece of jagged shrapnel from her pillow. Had Corrie not been awakened when she was, and had she not heard her sister and gone downstairs, the world would never have heard of her, and it would have lost one of its greatest female saints. At just the right time God came into her life.

Christmas and the cross represent the precise planning of God. He never jumps the gun, or goes off half-cocked as we do. We so often wish we could speed God up and get Him to do things according to our schedule, but God has the patience to wait and go into action just at the right time. Martin Luther once said what many of us have often felt: "If I were God, and the world had treated me as it has treated Him, I would have kicked the wretched thing to pieces long ago." Instead, after centuries of abuse and rejection, in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son and gave us Christmas. After a life of abuse and rejection Jesus at the right time laid down His life and gave us the cross. Christmas and the cross were both planned in eternity, but happened just when they did in time for the best impact on all of history. The world into which Jesus came was a world united as never before. The world had one language, which was Greek, and that is why the New Testament is written in Greek to reach the whole world. The world was under one government, which was Rome. The result was a world where travel was easier and safer than ever before. The Gospel could be carried to all nations where the Jews were scattered, and where they had established synagogues. It was just the right and best time for Christmas and the cross.

II. THE TAILORING OF HIS CAMPAIGN. v. 4

Jesus not only came at the right time, but He came with a tailor made campaign; one that just fit the situation. He came born of a woman under the law. Christmas was custom made to fit man's situation in bondage to the law. The cross was also custom made to fit man's situation as a lost sinner with no sacrifice able to atone for his sin. Christmas and the cross are tailor made to meet the specific needs of man. In both cases God uses the element of surprise. He gives us Christmas through a helpless baby, and He gives us the cross through a helpless condemned man. These are the two roles Jesus plays in these two major events of history. Nobody could ever

dream that God would accomplish His plan of salvation for man with such unconventional weapons. Earthquakes, tornados, fire and brimstone we would expect, but never a baby and a cross.

It is a good thing God does not have to get His plan confirmed by the Pentagon or any other body, for nobody would have considered it a wise strategy. It is alright to send spies out to infiltrate the ranks of the enemy, but it is too radical a risk to send the commander of the army to do so. But that was the strategy of God's campaign to infiltrate the ranks of man. He sent His Son to be reduced to the level of the weakness of a baby and actually become a man. To win the battle with the forces that held man in bondage God had to provide a sacrifice to atone for man's sin. It was the only way man could be set free and restored to the family of God. Only a man could offer the needed sacrifice, and so the only hope for man was a perfect man.

Had Jesus just dropped out of heaven as a full-grown man, He would not have been a real man. To be an authentic man in the same condition as the men He came to save He had to be born of a woman under the law. He had to come all the way into manhood. He could not just get His feet wet and take on the form of a man as He did in the Old Testament, and as angels have done in both Testaments. He had to be a real man so that He could experience the two universals of birth and death. Christmas and the cross are linked together because Jesus was born to die. Christmas is tailor made to produce a man fit to accomplish what was needed on the cross. At just the right time-Christmas; just the right person-the Christ child; just the right purpose-the cross. John R. Rice put it,

**Jesus, baby Jesus, there's a cross along the way,
Born to die for sinners, born for crucifixion day.
Christmas was the launching of His campaign that would march
Him to the cross with the assurance that He would be an adequate**

sacrifice for man's redemption.

Christmas and the cross identify Jesus with the masses of mankind who sense their need of a Savior. He could have been born in a palace and died in a golden bed, but such a plan would be tailor made only for royalty, and this was not God's plan, for a whole world of common lost sinners needed a redeemer. The campaign of Jesus is designed to motivate the masses of the oppressed to join His army and live in liberty and love. Christmas and the cross both carry the message of freedom from bondage, darkness and sin. Christmas and the cross are what they are because they are tailored made to fit the needs of mankind as a whole.

III. THE TRANSFERRING OF HIS CONQUEST v. 5

Not everything in the movies is consistent with biblical principles, but quit often we see the battle of good against evil. Those with contempt for man are confronted by those with respect for man. In the vast majority of cases the good guys win, and it is for the benefit, not just of themselves, but for many others. What Jesus accomplished was not just for Him self. He is already the eternal Son of God and the commander of the host of heaven. He cannot get a promotion and rise any higher. His whole campaign has nothing to do with self-glory. He came to conquer evil in order to transfer the blessings of His conquest to those who were victims of evil.

Scripture says, "To as many as received Him to them He gave the right to become children of God." Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, but He transfers to us the right to be God's sons. Females are included as God's sons just as males are included in the bride of Christ. To be a son means that you are no longer a slave in God's house, but you are part of the family of God. This is the great gift God gives to us through the combined conquest of Christmas and

the cross. They both convey the common message that God cared enough to give the very best. May God grant us the wisdom to get in on God's very best by receiving the Son and the salvation which He gave us on Christmas and at the cross.

14. THE MOTHER OF US ALL Based on Gal. 4:26

Mark Twain said as he read a mistaken account of his death in the newspaper that the report was highly exaggerated. This statement will hold true for much of what is going to be said from pulpits across the land about motherhood. It will be highly exaggerated because it will be unrealistic about the fact that mothers are really not un-fallen angels, but they are sinners like the rest of us. Fred Smith put it like this: "Many a minister on Mother's Day allows his emotions to run away with his ethics. Glittering generalities fall from his tongue which, weighed in the balances, are found to be wanting in truth. It is not required of any man that he become a liar for the sake of his mother on Mother's Day."

The facts allow us to choose either alternative of praising mothers or persecuting them. After all, if its the hand that rocks the cradle that rules the world, then mothers had better stop rocking the cradles and take hands off, for their rule is shaking the very foundations. Of course, it is unjust and highly exaggerated to suggest that mothers are the cause of the world's mess. This is no more valid than the reverse exaggeration that deifies motherhood. Motherhood, like every other human subject, stands under both the judgment and mercy of God. It is a source of both good and evil.

Mothers are the source of life, but also of death since it was Eve who sinned and brought death into the world upon all her children.

Mothers are the source of so many of our blessings, yet mothers in their ignorance can be a cause for their children to be perverted in many ways. Motherhood did not escape the fall. Listen to the account of king Ahaziah in II Chron. 22:3, "He also walked in the ways in the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

The mother of Salome compelled her to use her body in a dance to lure Herod into promising her the head of John the Baptist. Here are just two of the many examples of how mothers guide their sons and daughters into the pit of damnation. This did not end with Bible days. You can read daily of mothers neglecting their children, or abandoning them. The world is filled with evidence to smear the name of motherhood. Just one more example comes from Edmund Bergler in his book Money And Emotional Conflicts. He tells about the numerous problems in the world just because of inheritance in relation to parents and children. He writes, "Through the course of the years I have analyzed many neurotics with the 'inheritance complex.' They had mothers who acted as if their sons, daughters, sons and daughters-in-law had no life of their own but were born for the one purpose to please them, to cater to them, and to suit them exclusive of all others.... Said one such victims of his mother's emotional dictatorship, "I have either to postpone my life until my mother dies, or renounce my inheritance."

We could go on and on looking at negative realities, but we are not interested in a down with motherhood campaign. Our aim is to make it perfectly clear that all the bad things you can say about mothers will never alter the fact that we love them, praise them, honor them, and will continue to do so to the end of time. Is this sheer, blind, unreasoning fanaticism? Not at all. It is our awareness that is bad as they can be they are still the best there is. They have the potential for infinite good and love, and examples are numerous of their success. There are Hannahs who dedicate their Samuels

even before birth to God's service. There are Eunices who train up their Timothy's in the knowledge of God's word. God could find no better comparison than mothers when He sought to express His tender and compassionate nature. In Isa. 66:13 He says, "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you." No one calls forth more gratitude and poetry than mothers. Edgar Ellen Poe wrote to his mother:

In the heaven's above,
The angels, whispering to one another,
Can find, amid their burning terms of love,
None so devotional as that of mother.

No amount of negative evidence and change the positive evidence, and so we have in mothers a great paradox. In them we have a class of persons who are a part of this evil world, but who are lifted up and exalted above the world because they are the objects of great love.

There are thousands of stars that shine at night,
Thousands of flowers that make summer bright,
Thousands of dew-drops the morning greet,
Thousands of birds with voices sweet,
Thousands of bees in purple clover,
But only one mother the whole world over.

Jesus had only one literal mother, but He did not limit the concept of motherhood to Mary. He said that whoever does the will of God is His brother, sister and mother. How often do Christian mothers ever think of themselves as mothers of Christ? It sounds fantastic doesn't it? Jesus makes the whole of the body of believers, one big family. Now in our text Paul goes a step further and introduces an even broader concept of motherhood. Paul says that the Jerusalem above is the mother of us all. By all, of course, he

means all believers, or all who are of the seed of Abraham. Here is a mother we are hardly aware of, and yet it is a biblical truth of great value. The Fatherhood of God is clear and well known, and that we also have a spiritual mother as the family of God is an obscure idea, for it is ignored and undeveloped in our thinking.

We need both a mother and father for our physical life, but we never consider that we need both also for our spiritual life. If God is our Father, as believers, who then is our mother? Who is this Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all? It is none other than Christ's own bride the Church. The New Testament is clear on this that the Jerusalem above is the symbol of the Church. In Heb. 12:22 we read, "But you have come to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gatherings." The Christian on earth is already a citizen of that heavenly city. Paul says in Phil. 3:20, "Our common wealth is in heaven." Much of the church is already in heaven with Christ the head reigning with Him over the universal kingdom from the throne in the New Jerusalem. We who are here below are equally apart of this heavenly Jerusalem.

As Jerusalem was the center of Judaism, so it is the center of the church, which is the New Israel. That is where our king reigns, and from which we receive our orders as the militant church. This Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all, is the whole body of Christ on earth and in heaven. This is almost universally acknowledged. Listen to the two great reformers. Luther said, "Wherefore, Jerusalem, our free mother, is the church itself, the spouse of Christ, of whom we all are gendered." Calvin said, "To the church under God, we owe it that we are 'born again'... and from her we obtain the milk and the food by which we are afterward nourished."

This extremely complicated allegorical argument of Paul is filled

with fascinating theological implications, but for us now we are only going to concentrate on his statement that the church is the mother of us all. The Bible says that we must be born from above, but we never stop to consider the mother involved in this birth. We never consider that the church is the womb in which the seed of the Holy Spirit becomes fertile and brings forth new life. A child of God can only be born through the womb of the church. The bride of Christ is the mother of us all in that no person can enter the kingdom of God apart from the church. She is the instrument by which the new birth is made possible.

The Holy Spirit impregnated the church at Pentecost, and immediately she gave birth to 3000 children of God. This fantastic fertility and fruitfulness is what Paul is getting at in verse 27. The church is compared to Sarah who was barren, but who by God's grace gave birth to a son. So the line of Abraham through Isaac was to be very fruitful, and even Gentiles by the millions would be born into that family line by the Spirit. All Christians are fruit of the womb of Sarah, who is compared with the church. We see the perfect continuity of the people of God in the Old and New Testaments. The Jerusalem above is the new and the true Israel. The Jews who have not accepted Christ have denied their heritage, for only those in Christ are of the seed of Abraham.

Symbolism is confusing but fascinating, for if the church is mother of us all and we are the church, we are all a part of the concept of motherhood. All of us as Christians are potential mothers, and we can give birth to new life when we are filled with the Spirit. When the church is out of fellowship with God there is no fruitfulness, and new birth do not take place. The success of the church depends upon good motherhood where we give birth and take good care of new children in the kingdom. Honesty compels us to be just as clear on this mother as with our physical mother. The conclusion will also be the same that the church, like mothers, has

both good and bad points. But Jesus has no other plan of salvation but that which the church offers to the world.

Everything bad the world can say about the church is usually true, but there is no substitute. As a manuscript from the Middle Ages put it, "The church is something like Noah's Ark. If it weren't for the storm outside you couldn't stand the smell inside." The stench of self-righteousness, pride and hypocrisy, just to name a few of the odors, are abominable to the nostrils of God. The pettiness and inconsistency of believers is a burden to the saints themselves, but the fact remains, there is no alternative. She is the one mother that God uses to bring new people into the kingdom. To seek elsewhere for an answer to man's greatest needs is like jumping off the arch because you don't like the way the animals are behaving. You stick with the Ark or you drown. There is no other choice. There is no other hope of salvation.

Emerson said, "If I should go out of church whenever I hear a false sentiment I could never stay there 5 minutes. But why come out? The street is as false as the church." The church is under attack from without and from within. The evidence against the church is just as valid as that against motherhood, but it is folly to reject motherhood, for there is no other way. We have only one choice, and that is to love and honor the church, and to labor to bring her up to the ideal. Each of us are a part of this mother, and each of us is responsible to make her what God wants her to be. Christ died for the church, not because she was worthy, but because He loved her. We are to live for her and fight for her, not because she is worthy, but also because we love her and her husband, the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of its imperfections do not change the fact that it is the only body on earth, which represents heaven. It is the only group in time with a message from eternity. The Ark was the only vessel of

salvation in the flood. If you didn't like the wind blowing through the poorly fitted windows, or the leaks here and there in the side, you could gripe, but you had to stick with the Ark or perish. We can complain about the false and follies of the church, but if this is all we do, and do not also defend, praise and serve her, we will drown in the sea of sin with no other vessel to rescue us. On this day when we honor our physical mothers in spite of all their negatives realties, let us not neglect to love and praise the body and bride of Christ, which is the church, the heavenly Jerusalem, the mother of us all.

15. THANK GOD FOR AMERICA Based on Gal. 5:1-12

Governments often fear Christians because they have a loyalty to God which they put above their loyalty to government, and this limits their power to control. Jesus started this by His famous response, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars and unto God the things that are God's." That was the beginning of the Christian dual loyalty to God and government, with the duty to God taking first priority. And so when the Apostles were told by the authorities that they could not preach the Gospel Peter and John said to them in Acts 4, "We must obey God rather than men." This has become a basic Christian value system. The freedom to obey God is the number one priority of Christians in relationship to their government.

Whenever a government says that you cannot obey God because it is against our laws, the Christian church has said, "You have just become an idol demanding a loyalty that belongs to God alone, and we must resist." This is the principle behind the history of our nations fight for freedom. It has always been a fight to be free to obey God and be one nation under God. It has been a fight against

those who say we are a nation over God, and we demand supreme loyalty. Long before the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War, this was the battle Americans were fighting.

Freedom is the very essence of the Christian life. If you are not free to obey Christ and live in harmony with His teachings, you cannot truly be a Christian. Therefore, the Christian is obligated to resist all attempts to limit that freedom. Paul states it clearly in Gal. 5:1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Paul was concerned about Christians being limited by the Old Testament law, but the principle applies to any form of limitation to religious liberty.

This is how the early Americans felt about the King of England. They had established a democracy and loved the liberty of self-rule. For them to go back under the bondage of a monarchy would be like the Israelites going back under the bondage to Egypt after being set free. The pastors of the early Americans were preaching freedom, and when Charles II of England heard that he tried to put a stop to it by demanding that only Episcopal clergy be allowed to form churches, and that only those church members be allowed to vote. The King was going to get control of the church so that the state could dominate it and use it for its ends. This is the goal of all governments in lands where the separation of church and state is not guaranteed by the Constitution, as is the case in the U. S. If the state can control the church they can eliminate the risks of religious liberty to their power.

When the Colonists refused to obey the King, he demanded that they give up their charter and submit to the King's authority. The Puritan leader Increase Mather preached that it would be a sin to relinquish their freedom to the King, for it had been won by the sacrifice of faithful men. The people voted not to submit, and the

King was determined to force submission by sending troops. He died before he did, but he started a strategy to undermine the colonies fight for freedom. He sent Sir Edmund Andros to work at making the Episcopal Church a dominant force in the colonies, for it was state controlled.

He forced all shipping to be done by British ships, and so all trade had to be with England only. The Americans said that this was an abuse of power, for the King is to serve the people and oppress them. II Sam. 23:3 says, "He that rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." The King of England was not just, but had become a tyrant trying to rob Americans of liberties they had already won. Christians recognized that revolution is a last resort, and so for decades they resisted such action. The King of England got into other wars in Europe and let up the pressure, and so it was sort of a stalemate until George III came to power in 1760.

His ego demanded total submission, and so he took it as his cause to crush the independent spirit of the Colonies. He more than doubled the size of the British army in the Colonies to 7500 men, and then made the Colonies pay for them by increasing taxes. The tax collectors paid themselves such high salaries that there was nothing left for the cost of the troops. All the taxes went to pay for the tax collectors. This was the same problem that made tax collectors a hated breed in the New Testament. New taxes had to be leveled until the people developed a very ugly mood. It was becoming pure robbery.

The clergy preached many sermons on the injustice of it all, but King George, like Pharaoh, had a hardened heart. Americans were being taxed by a government in which they had no voice. They preached that the King had become a tyrant, and they had no more obligation to submit to him than to a pirate or highwayman. He forfeited his right to be obeyed by becoming an enemy of the people.

They had the right to resist him as any other invader. It was a matter of self-defense.

A showdown with the King was inevitable. The persistent spirit of liberty had to be rooted out and so King George threatened more, and American preachers found more biblical basis for rejecting his authority. On New Year's Day of 1773 the men of Marlborough made this public declaration: "Death is more eligible than slavery. A free-born people are not required by the religion of Jesus Christ to submit to tyranny, but make use of such power as God has given them to recover and support their laws and liberties. We implore the Ruler above the skies, that He would bare His arm in defense of His church and people..."

Peter Marshall in The Light And Glory, dealing with the history of this period, says that even crown-appointed governors, faithful to the King, wrote back to England saying, "If you ask an American, who is his master? He will tell you he has none, nor any governor but Jesus Christ." The cry was going up and down the link of American, "No King but King Jesus." I never realized it before, but the fight for liberty in America was a fight for religious liberty. It was a fight for the freedom to obey God rather than man. This was the key theme that united the Colonies. You might be thinking that this sounds more like a history lesson than a sermon, but I am trying to communicate that the history of our fight for freedom is a sermon. It is a sermon on the providence of God, and a sermon on the priority of obeying God above all other authority. It is also a sermon on the power of people who are united to win a victory for God established values.

History is His-story, and so it is full of sermons. History shows us how injustice cuts its own throat. The British tax laws were forcing many American tea companies into bankruptcy, and so you had the famous Boston Tea Party with Americans tossing tea into the

bay. The King demanded that the culprits be prosecuted, but none could be found. So he punished all of Boston by closing her ports to all commerce in 1774. This was to be a warning to all of the colonies that said, "Don't mess with us!" This act of tyranny had the opposite effect. It united the Colonies as nothing before. This act ruined Boston financially, for it was the most prosperous port in America. Out rage swept across the Colonies and every city began to send provisions to Boston. George Washington himself sent 50 pounds, which would be near 5000 dollars in value today.

William Prescott sent a message to Boston along with supplies and he used our text in his message. He wrote, "We heartily sympathize with you, and are always ready to do all in our power for your support, comfort and relief, knowing that Providence has placed you where you must stand the first shock. We consider that we are all embarked in the same boat and must sink or swim together.....Let us all be of one heart, and stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free."

This was the sentiment that King George had provoked in the Colonies. Jesus said that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, and this was the major problem in the Colonies. They were not united states, but they were divided by endless varieties of opinions. But the Boston Tea Party and its consequences united them and made them realize they had to swim together or sink. Patrick Henry at the dawn of 1775 said in the Virginia House, "There is no longer room for hope. If we wish to be free, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us.....We shall fight alone. God presides over the destinies of nations, and will raise up friends for us. The battle is not for the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave.....Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, almighty God! I know not what course others might take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

The love of God-given liberty united the people, and that alone made them adequate for the battle ahead. If they had lack this unity, they never would have had a chance, for all the odds were against them. King George had a well- trained army of 50 thousand men, and the best navy in the world. The Americans had no navy at all, and they could only muster a little over 10 thousand for the army, and they were poorly trained. It was a David and Goliath conflict, but with a David who was nowhere near as good with a sling as the David of the Bible. The British were disciplined and well organized. The Americans were not, for they often just walked away from the battle and went home when they felt like it.

The war would have been over by lunchtime had the Americans fought by the British rules of war. Had they lined up across from the line of red coats they would have been demolished in no time. But the Americans had learned from the Indians the way to fight a superior force. They would hide behind trees and rocks and fire as individuals at any enemy fool enough to be out in the open, which was just where the British were. Americans owe a lot to the Indians who taught them many lessons in survival.

The British won 17 major battles, and the Americans won 22. But it cost many thousands of lives, and a great deal of money. Freedom is costly and that is why we need to celebrate the 4th of July. It is a parallel to our celebration to communion. We celebrate communion to remember the price paid for our freedom from the bondage to sin and its consequences. We celebrate the 4th of July to remember the cost of our freedom from bondage to tyranny and unjust rule. Freedom is the foundation for most all of our great holidays and celebrations. Christmas is our celebration of freedom from isolation from God. God came into history and made it clear that we are not alone. God is with us in Christ our Emmanuel. Easter is our celebration of freedom from the power of death. Jesus liberated us from this bondage and gave us eternal life.

We do not think of the 4th of July as a Christian holiday and celebration. It is more secular in nature. That is why it is a blessing that is sometimes falls on Sunday, for then we have the opportunity to point out the Christian impact on the whole history of our fight for freedom. There is danger in patriotism becoming a form of idolatry, but it is also possible to go the other way and fail to see the Christian duty to be patriotic. Christians have played a major role in the patriotism of America, and we need to see it and be grateful for it, and then carry on that balance of love for God and love of country.

My Country Tis Of Thee was written by the Baptist pastor Samuel Francis Smith in 1832. The Pledge of Alliance was written by another Baptist pastor, Francis Bellamy in 1892. John Witherspoon, the Presbyterian pastor, was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. His Colony of New Jersey had elected him to the Continental Congress just a few days before they voted on the Declaration. Witherspoon represented the churches perspective on this momentous decision. He had been the President of Princeton where many of the leaders of the Colonies were educated, such as James Madison, who joined Thomas Jefferson in making religious freedom a reality in Virginia, and who went on to become the 4th President of the United States.

Witherspoon had an impact on the lives of many of the early leaders of America, and one of them was John Adams the second President of the United States. He was chosen by Congress to draft the proclamation for days of thanksgiving and other special occasions, for he would include in them the belief that divine providence was guiding this nation, and that the preservation of our religious heritage was crucial to success. John Witherspoon wrote the Proclamation that George Washington gave after his great victory at Yorktown. It went like this: "Whereas, it hath pleased Almighty God, Father of mercies, remarkably to assist and support

the United States of America in their important struggle for liberty, against the long continued efforts of a powerful nation: It is the duty of all ranks to observe and thankfully acknowledge the interpositions of his Providence in their behalf."

Witherspoon had a great impact on Washington, for they spent a lot of time together, and Washington became a firm believer that our nation could never remain strong and moral without the religious influence of the churches. Witherspoon led other pastors into politics, but he was very strong in his conviction that politics had no place in the pulpit. He never used his sermons to promote political convictions. He felt this would be an abuse of his position. Only once did he break his own rule and bring politics into his message, and that was in 1776 when he defended the war for independence.

He preached, "At this season it is not only lawful but necessary, and I willingly embrace the opportunity of declaring my opinion without any hesitation, that the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty and of human nature. So far as we have hitherto proceeded, I am satisfied that the confederacy of the Colonies has not been the effect of pride, resentment or sedition, but of a deep and general conviction that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently in a great measure the temporal and eternal happiness of us and our posterity, depended on the issue."

It was deep religious conviction that united the Americans in their fight. Without this unity there would not have been much chance of their succeeding. Christianity and liberty go hand and hand, and they are an unbeatable pair. The practical lesson for us is to recognize that unity in Christ and in Christian freedom is still the winning combination that will lead to victory in any battle we face. Get Christians united and you will have a force that the gates of hell cannot hold back. Unity is also the key to the good life when the

battles are over. Psa. 133:1 says, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity." After the war was over this was a major struggle to achieve. A common enemy had united them, but when that enemy was gone they began to experience division. They were like the church of Corinth where they were saying, "I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Cephus, or I am of Christ." The Americans were saying, "I am of Virginia; I am of New Jersey, or I am of Rhode Island, etc." Every colony wanted to be independent and not united.

North Carolina and Tennessee declared themselves a separate state and called themselves Frankland, and then Franklin in honor of Benjamin Franklin. The government of North Carolina sent troops to force them to cease this rebellion. Then Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys settled in parts of three states: Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and they set themselves up as a separate country, and they did not join the U.S. until 1792.

Virginia and Maryland took steps to divide the whole country into 3 or 4 different countries. But fortunately men like James Madison got that plan derailed, and a national convention was called to deal with forming the United States. James Madison was a scrawny little bookworm and not a leader type, and so he backed Washington to be the President of the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. Washington was one of the biggest men of that time. The average American man was short and fat. He was about 5 feet tall, but Washington was a towering 6-foot. He would not have been impressive today, but then he was a giant of a man. He did not know much about government, but Madison knew almost everything, and so this potent pair of brains and brawn led the fight for unity.

The divisions of states were unbelievable. Everybody thought the best idea was different from everybody else's. Two were even convinced that the best hope for America was to have a king. Five

delegates thought the rich people should run the country. It seemed like a hopeless chaotic mess that could not be unraveled. Some delegates just walked out, and others threatened to do so if they did not get their way. To make a long story short, the only way to satisfy everyone enough to get a national government started was to make it extremely complicated. The United States has one of the most complicated governments in the world. The reason it had to be formed with so many checks and balances was so that it could never rob people of the freedom that had been so dearly won.

It had to have a Senate where every state got equal representation to satisfy the little states. It had to have a House of Representatives where every state got represented according to population in order to satisfy the larger states. It had to have a system of electors of equal number to the Senators and Representatives to elect the President. Benjamin Franklin came up with this crazy idea, and because it was terribly complicated the Convention accepted it. We can't look at all the complex issues that had to be solved to form a national government. Even when it was all done most did not like it. It was just the best they could do and they were united in this.

Unity called for complexity so that no group could dominate other groups. The weak and the minorities had to be protected from the strong and the majorities. Our nation and our Constitution are great because built into them is the basic value that all people are created equal, and all have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This conviction about freedom is the unifying principle that makes an American an American. Any one who feels there are people who do not have an equal right to freedom is un-American. They are also un-Christian in that it was Christian conviction that led to this kind of freedom being guaranteed by our Constitution. Christian leaders made sure the Bill of Rights would forever prevent our government from interference in the religious liberty of its

citizens.

Christians can celebrate the 4th of July as a sacred day of thanksgiving, for it was the Declaration of Independence that led to the Constitution and the forming of the United States with all of its freedoms and religious liberty. Every Christian who knows the way God providently led this nation needs to say often, "Thank God for America."

16. CHURCH AND STATE Based on Gal. 5:1-15

Until every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, the abuse of power will be a major cause of human suffering. When the country of Chad in Africa became independent in 1960 the Christian missionaries were delighted that the first President was a Baptist. Tambolboye was converted by Baptist missionaries and taught in a Baptist school, and now he is a political leader of the land. It was a dream come true, but the dream soon became a nightmare. He established dictatorial powers and imprisoned his army commander. He began a systematic persecution of the Baptist. He began to force his people to restore the old pagan rights of sacrifice to ancestral spirits. He revived the secret ceremonies of flogging, facial scaring and drugs. The Baptist refused to cooperate, and so their homes were ransacked and their lives threatened. Christian children were taken away to concentration camps. One pastor who refused to let his child go was shot.

Many of the Baptist missionaries were arrested and expelled. All Baptist churches and schools were closed. Other Christians were left alone, but the Baptists were persecuted. Why? Tambolboye as a young man had been a Baptist, and as a young man he was

disciplined for some unchristian behavior. Now he was in a position of great power, and he was using his power to get revenge. You might say he was a devil in disguise. That could very well be, but it could also be that he was indeed a Christian. He organized a state church called The Evangelical Church of Chad. He was not only a professing Christian, but he was also an evangelical.

He made two pastors the two top officials in his government, and they began to force all Christians to conform to the state church. Many died resisting. Pastors were tortured and had their fingers broken and some were even buried alive. It was a horrible time, but finally in 1975 an army officer fed up with the violence stormed the presidential palace and killed the first Christian President of Chad. You may think it borders on blasphemy to even call such a monster a Christian, but let me remind you that Christians all through history have believed and practiced just what he did. They have believed it is right for Christians in political power to use force to coerce other Christians into conformity with their convictions. It was even considered right to kill them if they would not comply.

It is true that the first Christians were persecuted by the Jews, and Paul was one of the worst. He would use his authority to arrest and kill Christians, and he was committed to use force to drive Christians off the face of the earth. It is true that the non-Christian Romans were the next great persecutors of the church, and in the first 3 centuries they wrote some of the bloodiest chapters of church history. But the fact is, the majority of the persecution of Christians in history has been done by other Christians, who had political power, and who abused that power by using force to make other Christians conform.

We don't have time to go through history to illustrate this, but if you have even a general knowledge of Church history you will be aware that the official Catholic position has always been this: When

the Catholic church is in control of political power in a state, that power should be used to force the citizens to conform to Catholic doctrine. It is not only right, it is an obligation of the state to kill those who refuse to conform, but remain heretics. If you know history, you know that they practice what they preach, and many thousands of Christians died because other Christians said they had no right to be different from the Christians in control of state power.

Surprisingly the Protestant Reformation did not change this, and Luther and Calvin followed the Catholic conviction. When the church had power to coerce others into conformity, it was to use that power. The result is that when Protestants gained power in the state they got even with the Catholics. Now it was their turn, and they persecuted the Catholics. They imprisoned and killed them for not conforming to the Protestants. Luther spurred on state troops to kill thousands of Anabaptists for their brand of Christianity. Calvin even had a fellow theologian, by the name of Servetus, burned at the stake because of theological differences. The reformers believed that the state should punish people for wrong religious beliefs, and anything was wrong that was not their belief.

When we come to the history of England it was more of the same. It seemed like every Christian who got into power felt it was his or her calling to destroy other Christians who would not conform to their convictions. We all think of Henry VIII and his poor beheaded wives, but seldom does anyone realize that his real pleasure beheading Catholic and Anabaptist leaders. He was the head of the Church of England. It was the state church, and so the power of the state was used to force all into conformity with the religious beliefs of those in power. In the mid 1500's the Puritan movement began to cleanse the Church of England and to purify it of all its Catholic traditions. It was a powerful back to the Bible movement, and it took the church in the right direction. But what was their view of religious freedom? It was the same old thing. If other Christians

would not conform they were to be imprisoned, banished or killed.

It seemed like Christians were doomed to be their own worst enemies, and to go on perpetually fulfilling Paul's warning in verse 15: "If you keep on biting and devouring each other watch out, or you will be destroyed by each other." From the New Testament church up to the late 1500's the conviction and practice of the majority of Christians had been to use force to make other Christians bow to their ideas of what was right. Then something happened that changed the course of history and led to you and I having the privilege of living in a land where no leader of our government can lift a finger to force us to conform to any religious belief or practice. None can punish us when we refuse any conformity to another's religious belief. Something happened that led to Christians finally having the liberty of not needing to conform to other Christians who happened to be in positions of power. A Catholic, a Jew or a Protestant can be President of the United States, but he has no power to compel any American to conform to his beliefs.

What happened to bring this unique religious liberty into the world? It was the idea of the separation of the church and state. Robert Browne, the well educated Anabaptist announced in London in the 1570's that Scripture alone should be followed in matters of faith and Christian living, and that the church should be independent of government control. This was heresy, and he had to flee Holland, but his idea spread. John Smyth was a pastor in the Church of England, and he studied this idea and concluded that it was right. He withdrew from the Church of England and formed his own independent church. Two of his members became very famous in American history. William Brewster and William Bradford who became leaders of the Pilgrims who came over on the Mayflower. They settled in Plymouth and developed democracy that influenced the history of our country.

John Smyth was forced to flee to Holland by King James in 1603, but by 1611 some of his followers under the leadership of Thomas Helwys came back to England. On the edge of London they founded the first Baptist church on English soil. King James hated Baptists, but the Bible named after him as the King James Version was published that very year of 1611. By means of it the Baptists were able to convince many that the King was not to have authority over the church. The church was separate from the state, and only God's Word can be the authority for the church. The state has no business trying to regulate or control the people of God.

John Smyth wrote this before he died in 1612: "The magistrate, by virtue of his office, is not to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, nor to compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine, but to leave the Christian religion to the free conscience of every one, and to meddle only with political matters." This was the beginning of that which made Baptists the most unique group of Christians in history up to that point. They became the only Christians in history who both preached and practiced religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

Roger Williams was the young Englishman who was captivated by this new idea. He became the tool God used to make America the only nation in history to grant full religious freedom. As Americans we love our nation and so we seldom look at its negative side. But the facts are that America began with Christians acting just like most all the Christians of history. They felt that religious freedom was a form of evil. They felt they had a right to force all other Christians to believe the same and worship the same. They felt it was an obligation to arrest, banish or kill them if they would not conform.

If you think the early Christians of America like the idea of freedom of worship, you are wrong. They despised the idea. When Roger Williams came to the colonies with this Baptist nonsense of

religious liberty he was immediately hated by the Puritan leaders of Massachusetts. They believed the Bible to be the Word of God, and they loved this land, and they were brothers in Christ, but they held to the same old thinking that those in power had the right and obligation to use that power to force others to conform. Williams made a lot of enemies by preaching the idea of separation of church and state. He declared that the Puritans had no right to arrest and imprison people who differed from them.

John Cotton was the most brilliant and prominent minister in Massachusetts. He knew Roger Williams in England, and they were brothers in Christ. But now in this new land they became bitter opponents. Cotton was the defender of the Puritans controlling the church and state. He and Roger Williams debated this issue in letters for years, and we have all this debate on record. John Cotton was a godly Christian pastor, but he could not be persuaded that God ever intended men to have religious liberty. He was absolutely convinced that Christians should persecute and kill those who would not conform to the truth, as he and other Puritans understood it.

Roger Williams would not conform and give up the idea of separation of church and state, and so Cotton and all the other pastors brought him to the General Court in 1635 and banished him from the colony. This only made Roger Williams all the more convinced of the evil of linking the church and state. It was evil that he as a child of God was banished because other children of God did not like his ideas, and they had the civil power to kick him out and shut him up. Williams could look at Gal. 5:1, which reads, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." He decided he would be stubborn and fight for his conviction, and for the freedom of all men to hold to their conviction.

He fled from Massachusetts and founded his own colony of

Rhode Island with Providence as its capital, for only by the providence of God did he survive and have the strength to found this colony. That small colony in this land of ours was the only place on our planet where there was complete and total religious liberty. The government did not try to control people's religious faith or form of worship. That was the only government ever controlled by Christians who did not use their power to make other Christians conform to their convictions. Roger also founded there the First Baptist Church in America, and that was the start of the Baptist movement that slowly but surely influenced the whole of our nation to come to the recognition of the value of separation of church and state. It was a long hard battle, and many Baptists had to suffer terrible persecution, but one by one the colonies began to grant religious liberty.

When the Constitution was adopted the Baptist sent a delegation to Madison and Washington to talk about the need for religious liberty and protection from a strong central government. They knew history and knew that noble intentions of even good and godly men are not enough. Man's nature is corrupt, and he needs to be controlled by power outside himself. John Leland, the Baptist champion of freedom wrote, "Experience has informed us that the fondness of magistrates to foster Christianity has done it more harm than all the persecutions ever did."

The Baptists wanted assurance that American leaders would not abuse their power and interfere with the church. Washington urged congress to consider the Baptist concern, and the end result was the First Amendment to the Constitution. It says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." By this sentence every American has a guarantee of religious liberty, for this sentence builds a wall of separation between the church and the state. We have what Christians all through history never had, and that is the freedom to believe what

we are convinced is true regardless of what any other group of Christians believes, and regardless of what any government official believes. By means of the separation of church and state American Christians became the first fully free Christians in history.

Many of the Christian groups that enjoyed power under the old system still strive to regain that power. Any time you hear of a Christian who preaches against the separation of church and state, you will find if you check out his background that he likely comes out of a church that once persecuted other Christians and forced them into conformity. In churches where people are made Christian by the authority of the church you will find the strong desire to control the state. The Catholic Church makes Christians by baptism. It is not a free choice of the individual, but a matter of authority. This kind of theology leads to the view that if we can only control the state we can make more Christians. Politics is always more important to those Christian groups who hope to use it to force others to conform to their views.

The Baptist Joint Committee On Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. exists to watch for and fight any attempt of a Christian group to gain the power to force any religious conviction on any other person in America. Let us not be deceived, for the issue is not the good guys against the bad guys on this matter. It is not Christians against anti-Christian forces. The fight for religious liberty has always been, and will always be, a fight for Christians to be free from the power of other Christians to force them into conformity. Atheists don't care much what you believe as long as you don't try to cram it down their throat. It is Christians who want to make others believe as they do.

It is one of those traits of fallen human nature that does not go away when people become Christians. It is like lust, and no matter how good a Christian you are, you are still tempted to lust. And so also, no matter how good a Christian you are, you are tempted to

abuse power. The separation of church and state is mandatory by the first amendment because no body can be trusted to keep them separate by good intentions alone. It has to be the law of the land, or even the best of people can be a problem.

When John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes and John Crandall came into Massachusetts in 1651 they stayed in a home not far from Boston. There they began to share their Baptist faith to a handful of people. Two constables came while John Clarke was speaking and arrested the 3 of them and took them to Boston. When they asked what law that had broken they were informed that denying the value of infant baptism was a capital offense. The Governor, John Endecott, came and told them they had violated the law of the state and were worthy of death, but they would be find instead and made to leave the colony. One of them was beaten first.

Persecutions of the Baptists were not done by unbelievers, but were done by those among the finest, most intelligent and committed of Christians. That is why they in mercy did not kill these helpless men. Had they not been Christians they might have done so. All of the Christian leaders agreed that it was right to kill those who taught error, and error was whatever was not in agreement with their understanding. Had the Baptists not won their battle for religious liberty the prisons of this land would be filled, not with criminals only, but with Christians who did not believe that infant baptism was the key to salvation. America would not be the land of the free if there was no separation of church and state.

Separation does not mean that the church and state do not cooperate for the common good of the people. When they can influence each other for the common good that is fine as long as there is mutual agreement, and one does not interfere with the other. Influence is okay, but interference is not. The wall that separates me from my neighbor is for our mutual privacy and independence, but

we are free to cooperate in any way that is mutually beneficial. The wall is for protection against abuse and not to prevent mutually beneficial goals. The wall that separates men's and women's rooms is also for mutual privacy and protection, but it does not mean that men and women cannot cooperate in all ways that are mutually beneficial.

Separation does not mean that Christian people are not to participate in the state. Most of our Presidents were church going people, and most politicians are. The church and the state are often the same people, but their powers are separated. As church leaders they have no power in the state, and as state leaders they have no power in the church. They are separated, but they cannot help but influence their roles in each area. Separation does not mean that religious conviction cannot become a part of state policy. It was the religious conviction about the depravity of man that led to a Constitution that kept a careful balance of power to prevent tyranny. Religious convictions should influence state policy. Chuck Colson says that religious convictions in political arenas are the only hope because politics without religion has no answer to man's problems. Christians need to be in politics and be making a major difference in political direction, but none of this involves making laws, which establish religion or prohibit its free exercise.

What separation does mean is that all true religious faith is a matter of free choice, and so no state power can ever be rightly used to enforce faith or any religious conviction. Force is proper to compel obedience to laws, but there can be no laws that force a religious conviction on anyone. You might object that, "Thou shalt not murder," is a religious conviction. But this is not a religious law, for it is a universal natural and civil law. Even non-believers and atheists do not want to be murdered. Secular people as well as religious people want this law enforced, and so when a law is universal it is not merely a religious conviction, and so it is a matter

for the state to enforce.

Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy is not universal and secular. It is a religious law, and so the state cannot make any laws that compel anyone to obey it, or which prohibits anyone from obeying it. That is why there can be no state sponsored prayers in public schools. The public school is state operated, and so it cannot compel any student to do anything that is religious. Prayer is religious, and the state has no power to control anything that is religious, for that is the realm of the church. However, any person has the right to pray anywhere at any time without interference from the state. Students can pray in public schools anytime they want, and it is against the law to stop them. What is forbidden is for the state to try and make anyone pray. That is what the separation of church and state is all about.

Separation means that people in America are protected from state sponsored indoctrination on religious subjects. Many Christians believe the state should indoctrinate youth on religious subjects. What they mean is what they have meant all through history, and that is, let us use state power to get out convictions imposed on others. If you child had a Jewish public school teacher who taught them that Jesus was just a Jewish Rabbi, and not the Son of God, you would be terribly upset. If he or she was a Mormon or Buddhist teaching your child some of their religious ideas, you would be horrified. But you are protected from this kind of thing because state employees cannot indoctrinate your children in religion.

Many Christians would love it if they had the right to indoctrinate all the public school children in the Christian faith. But why should the Jewish parents be less upset if their children come home and say they are being taught that Jesus is the Messiah? Yes it is true, but it is not the state that is to teach that. If the church wants to use the state to teach that, the church wants to destroy that which makes

America the land of liberty that it is. Destroy the wall of separation between church and state and you plunge our nation back into the Middle Ages, and you lose what it took centuries to achieve. Christians do not see with historical eyes, but only with self-centered eyes when they want to break down the wall of separation and use the state to help them achieve their religious goals.

Baptists fear such people, for no matter how godly and how much they love the Lord and His Word, Christians who gain state power to enforce their convictions are always the most dangerous people on earth for other Christians who have differing ideas. That is why Baptists fought for the First Amendment wall of separation. Christians with state power have always been primary cause of suffering in the body of Christ. We have a land where we are protected from such Christians. The result is that we have escaped the enormous suffering that millions of Christians have had to endure at the hands of brothers in Christ.

I shudder to think what I would do if I had the political power to force everybody in America to conform to my religious convictions. I do not doubt that I abuse that power, and like most Christians of the past bring suffering upon those who refused to cooperate. Thank God that I cannot get such power, nor can any other Christian in America, and because of this we are the freest Christians who have ever lived.

Hitler was an anti-Christ, but remember that all the suffering he caused for Jews and Christians was not just because he was evil. It took the cooperation of millions of Christians to get him the power he needed to do his evil. Hitler needed a church that would be one with the state, and be an obedient tool of the state. It was part of German history that the state and church be linked, and that state power be used to enforce religious convictions. Luther and Calvin both supported this link. The idea of a free church was not a part of

German thinking. When Hitler wanted all the churches to be united, many Christian leaders saw the chance for unity and power for the church in Germany. They went along with Hitler and formed the German Evangelical Church. The motive of Christian leaders was power for the church. They wanted power to make Germany more Christian.

The use of political force to bring people into subjection was a part of the Christian heritage of Luther and Calvin. Hitler wanted to help the church, and his willingness to use power to do this did not bother Christians who felt this was legitimate when you are trying to promote the truth of God. Being anti-Semitic and killing Jews was not Christian, but it was for the sake of Christian and national purity, and so Christians went along. If Christians kill other Christians for the sake of power, why not kill Jews for the same reason? We are aghast that Christians could cooperate in such terrible evil, and yet these are the facts of life.

If it was not for the First Amendment in the Constitution there is no reason to believe that Christians would not be arresting and killing Jews in America, or if not Jews, then those of some other faith or religion. There is not a Christian alive who can say he would not abuse power if he had the power to force others into conformity. We are only safe from the oppression of other Christians because of the wall of separation. If that wall falls nobody is safe in their religious convictions. Everything that is most precious about America is protected by the wall of separation. Thank God for the separation of church and state.

17. SENSITIVE TO THE SPIRIT Based on Gal. 5:13-26

George Burns said, "There will always be a battle between the sexes because men and women want different things. Men want women and women want men." This is, of course, what God intended, but like all good things that are carried to excess this too becomes an area of life where the sinful nature of man thrives. Sexual immorality is the first fruit of the flesh that Paul refers to, just as love is the first fruit of the Spirit.

This means that one of the first signs that you are not being led of the Spirit, but are being led by your sinful nature, is the desire to be sexually immoral. Since everyone is so tempted at some point in life, this confirms Paul's point of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. Now this has a direct bearing on the work place. The one thing I learned in my years of secular work is that sex and work go together like love and worship. On Sunday we focus on agape love and worship, and then on Monday we enter a world of work where the focus is on sex. It is no wonder we have a hard time bridging this gap and trying to relate the one to the other.

In the plants I worked in where a secretary came out of the office into the plant, the men would whistle and then have crude discussions about anatomy. You didn't learn anything about love, but you could pick up some ideas about sex, because that is the theme of the work place. If that was true 30 years ago, I cannot imagine what it is now. Sexual harassment laws have no doubt curbed some of the sexuality, but there is no way it can eliminate it. In the place where I worked men sometimes had pinups by their machines, or in their lockers, and the flirting that went on was a major factor in that environment.

In my counseling over the years I have noted that most of the Christians I am aware of who have had affairs have done so because of their relationships in the work place. Many a Christian marriage has been killed by the work place morality that exalts sex over love.

Surveys reveal that working wives have twice as many affairs as do non-working wives. It is not entirely due to a immoral focus on sex. There are natural factors that add to the danger of the work place. Work and sex are linked by the fact that they both begin about the same time in life. Young people are getting their first serious jobs at the same time they are going through puberty, or when they are at the peak of their sex drive.

I didn't have to read about this to know it, for I worked with a gang of teenagers in a theatre for several years, and I know how the theme of sex is never far away if it is not dominating the environment. Then there is the factor that people who work together often develop a greater intimacy than people who get married. People who get married often cease to talk, and they lose a sense of a growing intimacy. But people who work together keep on talking and learning about each other, and sometimes even about their mates. They have more time to talk at work often than mates do at home. The result is people develop the inevitable feeling of desire, and the work place becomes a breeding ground for the lust of the flesh. People at work often spend hours a day in romantic flirting. This is the very thing that mates are to do, but they don't do because they are too tired after a day of work and flirting.

The work place is a dangerous place, not just because of industrial accidents, but because of its predominant emphasis on sex in contrast to love. If the Christian is going to have any impact in his work for the cause of Christ, he or she has to somehow bring the love of Sunday back to that Monday environment, and help people to see that love is not a mere hot house flower too weak to survive in the world of the work place. Christians bring some of the lust of the work place back to the church, but it is suppressed. You don't walk in and find men telling off-colored jokes, and you don't see them poking one another and saying, "Did you see the legs on that gal in the first pew." Lust is always latent in our lives, and can surface

even in a sacred setting, but we suppress it and say, "Get thee behind me Satan."

But I wonder if we do not then do the same thing at work in reverse. We suppress the issue of agape love, and then unconsciously say, "Get thee behind me Lord." Where lust is king it is as embarrassing for us to talk of love as it is to talk of lust where love is king. So we compartmentalize life, and on Sunday we worship and love, and on Monday through Friday we work and lust. It is sort of the best of both worlds. The only problem with this is that it misses the whole point of Sunday's worship and love. It is meant by God to so fill us with the love of Christ that we want to go into the world and bring to it the fruits of the Spirit that men might see there is more to life than the fruit of the flesh. The work place is our world that Jesus wants us to reach. It is our mission field where we can plant the kingdom of God.

If we could only see this, we could see that whatever we do can be our calling, for it can be a key way by which God can use us to open the door to the kingdom for people who may never see the inside of a church. There, you are on a mission field just as real as the missionaries we send overseas. You work with these people, and they are just as loved by God, and just as died for by Christ as anyone who has ever lived. But they are in bondage to the lust of the flesh, and all the evils that Paul lists here as acts of the sinful nature. We are fighting against these forces constantly says Paul, and the only way we can win this conflict is to be led of the spirit, and to produce the fruit of the spirit.

Let's face it, this is a David against Goliath conflict. Work and sex gets 8 hours a day 5 days a week, and worship and love gets one or two hours a week. It is not just the kids who face these odds. Many watch dozens of hour of secular TV for every hour they are in Sunday School. No wonder they know more about Hollywood stars

and cartoon characters than they do about biblical characters. But the adults have the same unfair odds, and they are swamped with secular sex all week, and then they get a smattering of sacred love on Sunday. The only hope for the Christian underdog in this lopsided battle is to do what David did against Goliath. He came up with a special weapon that was superior to the armor of Goliath. He took his sling and five smooth stones, and one stone did the job and the underdog won.

In a very real sense Paul is saying that the fruit of the Spirit is to us what those stones were to David. And maybe in any particular conflict one of them also will do the job and give us the victory. The fruit of the Spirit are our 9 stones that enable us to counteract the sinful nature. There are more of them than Paul lists here, and so the list is long. If we are going to see Christ transform our daily work, we need to be a people who cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, and not just on Sunday, but Monday through Friday in the work place.

You need to carry these fruits into the workplace and let the world see they are not antiques preserved in the museum of the church to be gently touched on Sunday. But rather, they are hardy life changing fruits that can enter the atmosphere of the workplace, and beautify it and be relevant to daily human need. The world needs a demonstration that the fruits of the Spirit are superior to the fruits of the flesh, and if they never see it, why should they find anything appealing about being a Christian?

We need to exhibit these fruits for our own sake as well, for they are the weapons that keep us from being engulfed by the acts of the sinful nature. Many of these acts that Paul lists are just as appealing to the Christian as they are to the worldly person. They are counterfeits of the fruits of the Spirit, and many fall for Satan's deception and think that an affair will bring love, joy, and peace. The only way a Christian can stand and have a clear witness for

Christ is to have a clear grasp of the distinction between what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit. Only the Christian sensitive to the Spirit's leading, and consciously aware of the values of the fruit of the Spirit in the workplace, will be able to have an impact for Christ at work.

We do not have time to look at how each of the 9 can be applied, but as we look at the first 2 we can get an idea of just how precious and powerful they could be if we would let the Holy Spirit use us to display them in our daily work. First lets look at-

I. THE FRUIT OF LOVE.

The first thing we need to do is break down the wall between the sacred and the secular. We have a hard time transferring the love of Sunday to the workplace on Monday because it almost seems sacrilegious to take the treasures of Christian love into the pagan temple of the workplace. It is this compartmentalizing of life that makes it so hard to be a Christian witness.

The fact is, Jesus never had any such wall in His life. He ate with publicans and sinners. These were the cut-throat business men of the day. Jerusalem had about 80,000 people in it, and that meant a lot of people who could be conned out of their money. The religious racketeers got them in the temple exchange, and the publicans got them by overtaxing them, and then in their despair the prostitutes could offer them some comfort for their remaining shekels. My point is, life was not different in the basics than it is from now. The masses of working people were victims of one injustice after another, and sinful indulgence of the flesh seem to be their only hope for some joy and pleasure in life.

Yet we see that Jesus did not avoid these kinds of people where the atmosphere had to be one of foul talk and sensuality. We never

get a hint that Jesus was embarrassed to talk to a woman who was married to 5 husbands, and who was now living with a man out of wedlock. Here was a woman sold out to sensuality and the flesh, and yet Jesus does not withdraw, but confronts her with love. He never ran for cover either when they brought the woman taken in the very act of adultery. He faced the very things that you face at work with all of the lust, folly, and people damaging their lives and others in a futile quest for happiness by means of sin. He faced it as a friend of sinners offering forgiveness and pointing to a higher path where people could find what they were seeking for in love.

Jesus loved these people who were slaves of the flesh, and whose two main idols were money and sex. Yet from these ranks of the publicans and prostitutes Jesus won a great following by the power of love. We need to get the idea out of our heads that Jesus does not know or understand the atmosphere where we work. He knew it better than you long before you were born. There is no chance of shocking Jesus, and we are being foolish if we think we are protecting Jesus from the world by keeping Him in church, and trying to ignore Him through the week. He has been there, and He knows the heart of man and the depths to which His foul flesh can go.

In fact, Jesus put all men into the same category. He did not have the system of segregation that we do. The good guys and the bad guys are how we classify people. He said nobody is good but God, and so He put all in the category of bad guys. But then He loved the bad guys, for they are all the same, and they all need to be set free by love.

Jesus did not hesitate to associate with sinful people, and reveal that happiness is attainable without following the sinful nature. Jesus demonstrated the power of the fruit of the Spirit. He was loving and joyful, and He had peace with Himself, with God, and with man.

He was cool and kind, and always in self-control in the midst of sinful human beings. Jesus knows what its like to be in the workplace, and He know it is a giant force for the flesh, but He also knows it can be an arena for victory if we throw fruit at it. Not stones, but fruit, and the fruit of the Spirit; especially love.

Jesus took an interest in people as individuals. He listened to their needs, and He was sensitive to their problems. He healed their children and their servants. He helped His disciples caught fish when their job was boring and fruitless. He even helped Peter pay his taxes in tough times, and He healed his mother-in-law. He helped people who were captives of Satan to break free and become honest citizens. Jesus teaches us that love listens. Listens to people because listening is often the key to helping people find love.

The Christian who is sensitive to the Spirit will strive to exhibit the fruit of love in the workplace by becoming a person who listens. Can people come and share their burdens with you without being judged and condemned? If worldly people feel you are never interested in listening, you will have a hard time convincing them that Christian love is of any value to them.

We are such a nation of talkers, but so few people are into listening-real listening. A young psychiatrist who was always exhausted at the end of the day said to his older partner, "How can you listen to your patients all day and still be so fresh and unfatigued?" The senior just smiled and said, "Who listens?" That is a good question, and the answer is only those who are concerned about exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, for almost all them involved listening to some degree. It is work to listen, however, and the sinful nature is more concerned about using others for self rather than being used in the service of others. It takes a conscious effort to suppress selfish ambition for the sake of ministering in others in love.

We listen, but so often just as a polite basis to launch our own appeal for attention. An unknown poet put it-

**I lend a sympathetic ear to other people's woe,
However dull it is to hear the real or fancied throe.
I pay attention to every gloomy line, attention undiminished.
Because I plan to start on mine the moment he is finished.**

We have all been guilty of such half-hearted listening, and even this does some good, but real loving listening at work can change people's lives.

Leo Buscoglia in his *Bus 9 To Paradise* tells of the stewardess who came to him and told of her cheating husband and her disturbed child, and of her feelings of depression, helplessness, and fear of not being able to cope. After a while she gave a sigh of relief and said, "Oh Dr. Buscoglia, you've helped me so much." He hadn't said a word. All he did was listen with love, and with no judging or even advice, and this was a service that uplifted and strengthened another for the battle of life.

He is one of the most popular authors on love with his books like *Love, Loving Each Other*, and *Living, Loving and Learning*. In his latest book he gives some ideas that are just perfect for the Christian in the workplace. He took one of his own personal frustrations for example, which is the case of the missing socks. Like many of us, he has quite a pile of single blue, green, and black socks. He can't throw them out because he does not know if the mate to any of them will mysteriously reappear just as it disappeared. He has checked his machine for teeth and escape hatches, and special tubes for siphoning off socks, but to no avail.

He has sought to solve this mystery and even gone so far as to consider the theory of reincarnation. That would mean it is a

punishment for his former life of being a foot mugger who stole footwear to satisfy some fiendish fetish. Now he is paying for it. He has no answer to this frustration, but what he discovered was that most problems in life are less frustrating when they are known to be common. Love, he says, can be shown in very practical ways by helping other people know that their frustrations with life are the common lot of other people as well. This can be a very loving act of friendship that relieves a lot of life's stress.

To be this kind of person at work is to take the Sunday into Monday, for one of the versions of Scripture that we stress is I Cor. 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." We need to identify with the sinner even as Jesus did. He was tempted in all points like as we are, but he was without sin. Let the people you work with know that Christians do have all the same problems, frustrations, and temptations, but they also have a solution in Christ. Then demonstrate that solution that they might have hope of doing the same by faith in Christ. The point of what I am saying is that love fits into the workplace. It is the only thing there is superior to the forces of the flesh, and if people never see it, they will never believe there is a higher way.

Love cares about lost people finding the right way in Christ. The job then becomes a place of Christian service as a mission to a lost world. How can you serve at work? I don't know for you, but creative people who are sensitive to the Spirit find ways. Pierre Odier wrote the history of Alcatraz Island called The Rock. He spent a week on the Rock with his students trying to get a feeling of such ultimate confinement. No contact with others was allowed. All communication with the outside world was forbidden. In this hellish place love still found a way, and one guard risked his job by slipping candy bars to the prisoners on a regular basis. No one ever discovered the identity of this man who was the only person who ever communicated that he cared for these men. Do people where we

work know that we care about them as people?

Christians are often too judgmental to love. We are so busy calculating how awful people are that we don't have room in our mind for loving. A secretary was sent out to buy her boss's wife a Valentine card. She complained to other workers, "If my husband couldn't take the time to personally buy me a card, I'd kill him." Instead of rejoicing in her chance to serve him and his wife, and possibly be a tool for their love to quickened into flame, she was burdening herself and forming a cloud of gloom on the atmosphere of her workplace.

Jesus did not come into the world to judge it and condemn it, but to love and serve it. If we are going to let Him change our daily work, we must let the fruit of His love grow in every way possible in that setting where there is no end to things to condemn and complain about. Next we look at-

II. THE FRUIT OF JOY.

There are few blessings of greater impact on daily life than a job which is a source of joy. The first American to win a Nobel Prize was Dr. Michelson of California. He worked for years to develop a way to accurately measure the speed of light. On his 74th birthday his friends expected him to retire, but instead he announced a new project to find ways to be even more accurate in measuring light. When they asked him why he wanted to go on working he said with a twinkle in his eye, "Because the job is so much fun." There are people who make a good living just by having fun because their work is fun. Edison who worked such long hours in his lab was asked why he did it, and he replied, "I never worked a day in my life. It was all play."

This is ideal work, and it will be the kind of work all Christians

will have in eternity. This was what work was for God in creation. It was a joy and a pleasure, and He never said at the end of a day, "I'm glad that is over." He always said, "That is good." Joy in work is the ideal, but in the real world of millions work is not a joy. Millions of people hate their jobs and despise the work they do. I have been miserable in many of the jobs I have had. I have had jobs where I became terribly dirty and fatigued, but I never hated a job, because I was always grateful to have a job. But I knew they were all temporary because I was heading for something greater. I would not claim that I could have been happy for 40 years pulling toe nails off pigs, or cleaning printing presses.

All I can say is that I was happy doing those things for a limited time. I did a good job at each one and I enjoyed it because each was a challenge to see if I could do it well. There was fun and pleasure in doing a job well, even if it was a lousy job. I don't ever remember thinking about it in those years of secular work, but now that I reflect on it I can see how joy is a key element in your happiness at work, and in your witness being effective at work.

Paul wrote in Col. 3:23, "Whatsoever your task, do it heartily, as serving the Lord and not men." Lensky the great commentator paraphrases it, "Throw your soul into the work as if your one employer were the Lord!" The Living Bible has it, "Work hard and cheerfully at all you do, just as though you were working for the Lord and not merely for your masters." Now if we take this verse seriously it means every Christian is in full time ministry working for the Lord. It means every job is a vocation, or a calling, and one in which there is a task to accomplish that can serve the cause of Christ.

If Christians could grasp this and really believe this it would transform every job the Christian has, and they could do that job with joy, for they would be fulfilling a sacred task in their secular

toil. One of the major reasons why so many jobs are not satisfying to Christians is because they seem so secular and of no real value to the kingdom of God. There is little joy connected with them, even if done on a level of excellence, because they do not seem to have any ultimate value.

Dr. Carl Lundquist, when he was president of Bethel, said this about so-called secular work: "The dichotomy is man-made that insists there is some work called sacred, in which God is especially interested, and some work called secular, in which God has little or no interest. This simply is not true. To the Christian, all work is sacred. God is concerned not only about what a man does when he serves on a board of deacons, or sings in the choir, or teaches a Sunday School Class, or preaches a sermon. He is equally concerned about what he does when he sells an automobile, or works on an assembly line, or coaches a football team, or hooks up a plumbing installation. If God could be interested in the work of Roman slaves, to whom Paul sent this advice, he certainly is interested in the work we do from 8 a. m. Monday morning until 5 p. m. Friday afternoon."

If there is joy in serving Jesus, and your daily work can be just that, then there can and ought to be joy in your daily work. Christ can transform your daily work by helping you to see how you can do it in such a way that you produce this fruit of the Spirit, which is joy. Murillo painted the famous scene called "The Miracle of San Diego." A door opens and two noblemen and a priest enter a kitchen and are amazed to find all the kitchen maids are angels. One is handling a water pot and another meat, and a third a basket of vegetables, while a fourth is feeding the fire. The message of the artist is that even the lowliest tasks of service are sacred. This was the point of Jesus when He said, "The greatest among you will be the servant of all."

If your job is of service to anyone, it is a job worthy of being classed as sacred, for Jesus came to serve, and any job that serves is a

job for Him. John Newton, author of Amazing Grace, said that if two angels were sent from heaven, one to lead an empire and the other to sweep a street, they would feel no inclination to change employment. Both would be equally engaged in a God given task of service, and they could do their job heartily as unto the Lord.

If we can be sensitive to the Spirit, and see how our job is a mission and a service for Christ, we could do it with greater joy and love. It is a jungle out there, but it is a jungle where love can confront lust and win, and where joy can encounter cruelty and critics and come out on top. It is a competitive world, and the evils of the workplace are a giant of an opponent, but we have an answer, and it is to throw fruit at it-the fruit of love and joy. We can do this everyday we go to work if we will just be sensitive to the Spirit.

18. BURDEN BEARING Based on Gal. 6:1-10

In South Dakota a man by the name of August had a clothing store he was going to close up. His was not one of those perpetual year around closing sales. He was actually intending to go out of business by July. So he hung a sign in his window which read, The First Of July Is The Last Of August. Those who did not know the owners name would think the sign was expressing a meaningless and hopelessly unexplainable contradiction, but for those who knew his name, the sign conveyed a clear and clever message.

So often an apparent contradiction has a very simple explanation. This is the case with the many Biblical paradoxes. Paul has one here in the last chapter of Galatians that certainly seems on the surface, to be a flat contradiction. In verse 2 he says, "Bear one another's burdens," and then in verse 5 he says, "Each man will have to bear

his own burden." Certainly in three verses Paul had not forgotten what he wrote. But if he did it on purpose, which is obvious, how can it be that we are to carry one another's burdens, and at the same time each be stuck with our own load?

One might just as well say, that to be wise we must become fools, or, to be strong we must become weak. As a matter of fact, Paul said both of those paradoxes as well. Was Paul a master at double talk, or was he gifted with the ability to see life from a wider and wiser perspective than most men? The latter is the obvious answer. Paul's apparently conspicuous contradictions, and puzzling paradoxes, are the result of his God-given ability to see the whole of life, and not just some of its parts in isolation. This ability was essential for one who represented so authoritatively Him who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. What can be more paradoxical than an A which is also a Z, or beginning which is also an end. This can only be possible if we are referring to one who is eternal and omnipresent, and who, therefore, fills all of reality at the same time. This, of course, is precisely the case with God.

Since God's very nature is paradoxical, because it is so all encompassing, it follows that it ought not to be surprising to find that His revelation partakes of His nature. The Bible is filled with paradoxes just because it sees life as a whole, and not just in fragments, as is the case with all merely human philosophy. To conquer we must surrender; to live we must die; to be exalted we must be humble; to get we must give. God hates the sinner, yet loves the sinner enough to give His Son for them. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Yet, those who drink of the water of life shall thirst no more. In the last days there shall come those forbidding to marry. Yet, in the last days they shall marry and be given in marriage.

On and on goes the list of Biblical paradoxes, each of them with a

valuable lesson to broaden our minds and enlarge our vision of reality. We want to focus our attention on this one before us, which deals with burdens. The thing to be aware of is the truth conveyed by paradox, which is, opposite things can be true of the same thing. A river can be narrow and wide; crooked and straight. From one perspective you may see it go straight for miles, and then begin to wind for miles.

The word burden has more than one meaning, and depending upon how you are using it, it can refer to a curse or a blessing. There are burdens in life that no one can consider good. They are evil, and are crushing burdens. William G. Clark referred to such when he wrote,

**Oh, there are moments for us here, when seeing
Life's any qualities, and woe, and care,
The burdens laid upon our mortal being
Seems heavier than the human heart can bear.**

The Bible urges us to get rid of these kinds of burdens, for they are anxieties and cares that are beyond our control. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The burdens of weary, overworked, and frustrated lives are to be gotten rid of, and refreshment, and rest are to be found in Christ. "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you." This is certainly one way to look at the matter of burdens, but God forbid that we think it is the whole truth about burdens.

What of the Bible's clear demands that we take on burdens? Take up the cross and follow me; take my yoke upon you and learn of me. All the commands of Jesus, and especially the great commission are commands to take up a burden. Paul adds to this the burdens we are to bear for one another in fulfilling the law of Christ. Here is a

burden that is among the loftiest loads we can lift, for to do so fulfills the highest law of all, which is the law of Christ, which is the law of love.

There is a story concerning a king who once placed a heavy stone in the middle of the road, and then hid to see who would remove it. Men of various classes came by, and worked their way around it. Some of them loudly blaming the king for not keeping the highways clear. They all dodged their duty of getting rid of it. At last, a peasant on his way to town with a load of vegetables to sell saw the obstacle, laid down his own burden, and took on the burden of pushing the bolder off the road. As he did, he saw a purse that had been placed under it. He examined it, and found it full of gold, and with a note saying that it was for the one who removed the stone.

Burdens can be a blessing when they are matters of helping others deal with their burdens. The peasant fulfilled the will of the king by bearing a burden, and we fulfill the will of our Lord when we bear one another's burdens. So we see there is more than one way to look at a burden.

There are the solitary burdens that we must bear alone; the social burdens that we share, and the senseless burdens that we are to cast upon the Lord. Paul could have kept things simple and uncomplicated by just referring to one kind of burden, but he doesn't do that. He speaks of both the solitary and the social burden in the same context. He links together our obligation to others, and our personal responsibility. Paul is primarily concerned with believers, and the bearing of one another's burdens within the community of faith. The total context, however, is much broader. In fact, in verse 10 Paul makes it clear that all men are included in our social responsibility. He writes, "As we have opportunity let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

There are no boundaries to Christian burden bearing. Any good

done for any person can be a fulfillment of this Biblical command, for it is a comprehensive statement, as broad as the love of God. Within that general attitude of good will to all, is a specific emphasis on fellow believers. This is similar to the statement that Jesus is the Savior of all men, but especially of those who believe. The love and atonement of Christ is universal and comprehensive, but only those who believe in Christ, and receive him as Savior, benefit by being redeemed. There is always both the all, and the few, in Christian relationships. The comprehensive potential, and the limited actual.

As we study this chapter we want to keep in mind the total scope of our obligation as far as burden-bearing goes. We have seen there are some burdens we ought not to bear at all, but in this chapter we see three kinds of burdens we are obligated to bear. They are, personal responsibility; social responsibility within the church, and social responsibility to those outside the church.

6:1 Paul begins by writing, "Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault." Here is the first person who needs a hand with a burden. It is the brother in Christ who has been overtaken by sin. It is not just a fault as the KJV has it, but a serious trespass. Sin like a leaping lion as overtaking him in the jungle of life, and has pulled him from the path of purity into the vines of vice, or the cave of corruption, there to devour him, and to render him useless as a servant of God. There is more of this that takes place than we realize. It is not a rare isolated incident. Peter warned that Satan like a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour, but here is a brother who did not heed the warning.

Paul was not blind, for he knows a Christian brother or sister can be overtaken by some sin. Like John the beloved Apostle, he knows if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves. John made provision for the Christians in sin, and said, if we confess it Jesus is faithful to forgive it. Paul gets into the social aspect of sin. Sometimes sin is not

just a private matter you can confess and be done with it. Sometimes it has social implications, and becomes a public matter, and a heavy burden. There is blame and shame, and a need for more than God's forgiveness. There is also a need for the acceptance of the body. The world is full of people who know God loves them, and has forgiven them, but who are cut off from the fellowship of the church, because the body paid no attention to what Paul is saying here. We are social beings, and if we don't get social acceptance and restoration to fellowship, we are like branches cut off from the tree, and we wither and bear no fruit.

I remember a silly story I use to tell as a teen. It is about a farmer who was throwing purple powder on his field, and when he was asked what he was doing by a neighbor he said, "I'm throwing this lion powder on my land. It is suppose to keep lions away." The neighbor protested, "But there ain't any lions within a thousand miles from here." He responded, "I know, and its a good thing too, cause I bet this stuff don't work." Silly, but no more so than the Christian who knows he can't face Satan alone on his own ground, and yet, who sprinkles his life with the purple powder of self reliance, and walks right into the lion's jaws.

You know, as well as I do that the reason so many are being devoured by the lion of lust in our day is because they park in his den. Even as a child of God you never know what you might do if the circumstances are right. Therefore, do not be a fool, but stay away from the lion's den. Every man has his Achilles heel, and Satan throws a pretty good spear, so stay out of range. But some will not listen, and will go down, and this is the man Paul is concerned about here. He addresses those he expects to act on the matter as, "Ye which are spiritual." That which is to characterize them is a compassion and a concern for a fallen brother. Some would think the spiritual ones should be the ones raking him over the coals of condemnation. There are those who feel they are spiritual who like

to show their contempt for the fallen, and they add more mud to the mess that already is. The obligation of the truly spiritual is neither to condemn or condone the sinner, but to act in a practical way to offset the victory of sin, and restore the victim.

Every soldier counts in the army of Christ, and none are to be left lying helpless and wounded on the battlefield. One of the obvious influences of Christianity on the American culture is the high value we place on the individual life. We go all out at home or in battle to rescue and save one lost child, or one wounded soldier. This in contrast to what a Dr. Pearson told us at a Civil Air Patrol meeting. He was in China during World War II. The Chinese army did not have any medics, because it was too expensive, so if a man was wounded and could not go on, they removed his uniform and left him. They would go on to the next village where the first man they found to fit the uniform was drafted. The life of an individual wasn't worth a penny. Not so in our culture, and not so even more in the Christian battle. No soldier of the cross ever ought to ever be given into the hands of the enemy, but be restored to the company of the faithful.

Those who are quick to condemn, not only give aid and comfort to the enemy, but make it hard for the wounded brother to get back to his own lines. To carry out the analogy, it is like a wounded soldier in no mans land trying to get back to his company, but his own men are raking the area with machine gun fire. Just as some Americans die at the hands of their own men because of error, so the church, if it does not follow Paul's pattern, can drive men out of the church. The number of people who no longer go to church, because of self-righteous condemnation, is legion. Many churches and individuals have failed to be channels of the mercy and forgiveness of Christ, because they refused to bear the burden of a fallen brethren. They left him with the whole load until it broke the back of his faith, and he fell crushed, never to rise again. As terrible as it is for what

the Chinese did, it is even worse for Christians to do the same on the spiritual level.

To bear this burden is not easy. To share his guilt and shame for deserting the captain of his faith is hard. No one likes to be identified with a deserter, but this is a burden we can only escape by ourselves being deserters of our Lord's orders. This is not a burden we can cast on the Lord, for it is a part of our obligation to a brother in Christ. If we lift it, we will discover it is one of those burdens that is a blessing. "My yolk is easy and burden is light," said Jesus. This is it, the bearing of one another's burden, and so fulfilling the law of Christ. The saint of India, Sundar Singh once crossed the mountains of Tibet during a heavy snowstorm. He was joined by a stranger, and they were companions in misfortune. The cold was so intense they feared they would not make it. They found a man who had fallen off the path to a ledge below. He was unconscious and Sundar asked his companion to help him rescue the man. He said it would be foolish to try and he went off on his own. At the risk of his life Sundar got to the man, and struggled back to the path carrying him. He later found his former companion frozen, but he was able to stay alive because his extra exertion of carrying the body. He was able to reach a village and survive because he was willing to carry a burden.

Why should children bear the burden of picking up clothes, making the bed, etc., if mom will bear that burden for them? The most irresponsible people in the world are created when someone else bears all of their burdens. Young women make poor housewives when they are not taught to bear the burdens of running a household. It is a curse to escape such burdens, for it is burden bearing that makes people responsible citizens. There are burdens you want others to help you bear, but there are many that you need to bear alone to become the kind of person God wants you to be.

James Gilkey tells of watching workman on the street of New

York city carrying a long awkward plank. The wind kept blowing it, and as it would swing back and forth, he would lose his stride and weave back and forth. Another man came up behind and saw his problem, and without a word he eased his shoulder under the back end of the plank. The workman was ignorant of what was happening. He steadied his step, and quickened his pace, and quickly arrived at his destination. His undetected helper slipped from under the load, and continued on his way. The workman never even knew he had been helped with his burden. Our Lord does this for us, and we receive a helping hand we never even see. We can do this type of lifting as well, and give a silent and secret lift to those with burdens. However we do it, we should all be in the business of burden bearing.

19. DOING GOOD based on Gal. 6:1-10

In the spring of 1897, Thomas Hanna, a 25 year old Baptist pastor fell out of his carriage and landed on his head. When he woke up he was in a state of total amnesia. Dr. Boris Sidis and his assistant Dr. Goodhart had to teach him to talk, to eat, and to go to the bathroom as if he were a child. They took him to the theater, to the zoo, and to dinner with his family. For two months they labored to jog his memory by recreating scenes from his pre-accident life. One day Hanna experienced a moment of crisis, and the past and the present came together, and his memory was restored. He recovered completely and Dr. Sidis became quit famous for his success with this patient.

The element of surprise in this true story is that Dr. Sidis was one of the most famous atheists of his day. He was a genius who qualified to get into Harvard at age 9. I have read his biography, and can

testify that he had one of the most amazing brains in American history. He wasted most of it, but the point is, as an atheist he did good for a Christian pastor, and on a mental level he saved his life, and he made it possible for him to go on to save lives for eternity.

God can use some of the most unlikely instruments for good in this world. In Paul's life there were Roman soldiers that God used to do good for Him. These pagans help Paul accomplish his ministry for God. Atheists do good; pagans do good, and anybody can be an instrument for doing good in this world. It is not limited to Christians, for they do not have a monopoly on doing good. Doing good is universally accepted and encouraged. The result is that the Christian often feels that doing good is such an anemic idea. Anybody can do good, and even non-Christians can get so good at it that they get labeled do-gooders. So with this negative label plus the universal possibility of doing good, the Christian tends to write it off as superficial and inconsequential.

The result is that Christians often miss the chance to communicate with the world on that level where all people understand the language of doing good. The Christian often gets deceived into thinking that the Christian approach to people has to be more name brand, and not so generic. We have to do the spectacular and unusual. We are like the sports team that thinks that the only way to win is to be clever and tricky. But the fact is, no team ever becomes great without getting back to the basics. What Paul is saying in our text is that doing good is the ABC foundation for living the successful Christian life.

Paul says there are two kinds of seeds we sow in life. There are the seeds of self-indulgence which please the sinful nature, and there are the seeds of doing good to others which please the Spirit. Doing good then is not a mere side-line in the Christian life. It is a basic principle of Christian living. That is why Paul is stressing that

Christians must not get weary in well doing. It is the only hope for a harvest, and so he urges them to do good to all men whenever they have opportunity, and especially to a family of believers. The only way you can please God is by doing good, and the only way you can please anyone else is by doing good. All relationships in life revolve around doing good for one another. If you are not doing good, you are not building any relationship you have.

When we say that you have to work at marriage, it simply means that you have to work at doing good for one another. The same is true for friendships, and working relationships. All relationships are dependant upon a mutual doing good for one another. A relationship where no good is being done is a decaying an dying relationship. Show me a person for whom you do no good, and I'll show you a person you do not love very much, for love on any level can only exist when doing good is part of the relationship. God so loved the world that He gave His Son. Had God not done good for the world it would be hard to define, or even to detect His love. Love is only real when it is exhibited in the doing of good.

Love is not just something you feel. Love is something you do. If you do not do some good for another, it is not possible to give any meaning to the statement that you love them. Love has no content without doing good. Loving relationships are only kept alive by doing good. If you do not maintain a relationship by the doing of good, it will soon look like your yard if you never mow it, or your hair if you never comb it. You cannot just have good feelings about your yard or hair to keep them looking nice. You have to do something, and so it is with relationships. They only remain beautiful to the degree that you do some good.

You can get a battery that is maintenance free, at least for some time, but there is no such thing as a maintenance free relationship. The idea of a maintenance free battery is so you don't have to relate

to it at all. You can neglect it, and forget it, and not have to bother with it. Maintenance free means a non-relationship. A relationship is not an event, it is a work of art that calls for continuous creation by adding to it the new life that comes by doing good. This principle applies to all relationships, and so this text could take us in all kinds of directions, but our focus for this message is on our relationships in the work place.

The first thing we need to do is to honestly recognize that it can be a complex matter to figure out what doing good to all men means. Doing good to a fellow employee by covering for them may be good for them, but bad for the company. Doing good for one may lead to envy and jealousy in another. It is not always easy to know what doing good means. The best choice for doing good is not always evident. For example, here is the dilemma of one worker: "Suppose your company needs parts, and you are responsible for placing the order by Thursday of this week. They can be purchased from a local firm, or for 38% less from a Latin American supplier. Buying Latin American would mean better profits for your stockholders and lower expenses for the firm. However, the local company may be facing layoffs and need the work. But the Latin American might need work, too, and while laid-off American workers get unemployment checks, unemployed Latin Americans are often reduced to levels of extreme poverty. The decision is troublesome and the answers aren't clear cut."

The complexities are endless. Do you hire the person is less qualified, but who is most in need of a job? Do you work harder to make up for a lazy employee, so they don't lose their job? There are no end to questionable matters about what doing good means, and how can we know the results of doing good? A psychiatrist helped a man get over his inferiority complex, and the next day he was fired for arguing with a cop. We can get so confused by a thousand and one questions about doing good that we experience the paralysis of

analysis, and just decide to forget it.

This is the very thing Paul is warning us not to do. Do not get weary in well doing. It can be tiring, and the pay off is not always evident, and so we tend to give up and try another approach, like waiting to see what will happen if we do nothing. Paul says don't do this, and don't give up. You cannot fail in doing good, for regardless of the results you are doing what pleases God, and this will always lead to a harvest of reward for you. Did Jesus fail when people walked away from Him? Did He fail when He healed 10 lepers and only one came back to thank Him? That is not much of a statistic to brag about-a 10% response for doing good.

It can be discouraging if you measure life by statistics. That is the popular formula for success. It is all a mathematical calculation. If a man hits 320, he is more successful than the man who hits only 228. If you get down the slope at the Olympics a hundredth of a second faster than anyone else, you are more successful than they are. If you type 110 words a minute, you are more successful than one who only types 90. If you sell a million dollars worth of insurance, you are more successful than the one who sells only 500,000. Life is so simple when you measure by the mathematical formula for success. But this whole scheme come apart at the seams when you begin to ask questions that are not measurable by math.

What is the man who sells 500,000 of insurance is a better father, husband, friend, and citizen, then the one who sells the million? This really throws a monkey wrench into the machinery. There is no way to calculate the value of love, joy, peace, and any of the fruits of the spirit. Paul says that these are the elements of true success in life, and they are the elements of true success in the work place. Jesus did good to all men, but not all men responded positively. Some even sought to kill Him, and eventually they succeeded. "For which of my good works do you stone me?" Jesus said on one occasion. Doing

good does not always succeed, but it never fails. It always pleases God, and it always makes you a success in His sight, even if it does not always get a positive response from people.

Paul got into much trouble by trying to do good to all men. The Jews hated him for doing good to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles hated him for trying to please the Jews by conforming to some of the Jewish traditions. Paul had an awful time in doing good to all men. He knows how wearisome it can be, and how tempting it is to throw in the towel. But this man, who suffered so much for doing good, urges on us this principle of Christian living-do good to all men. It is the key to your success in the Christian life. It is your key to being a successful Christian in the workplace.

Paul says, as we have opportunity let us do good to all men. We do not have opportunity to do good to most of the human race, but we work with people 8 hours a day, and there is nobody in our life who provides more opportunity for doing good than those with whom we work. The possibilities for applying this biblical principle are endless. Like the Good Samaritan, we have opportunity from time to time to do good to total strangers, but everyday we have a chance to do good to people at work.

God made Adam and Eve directly, but after that He never made another living person without the help of man. Not even His own Son was made without a woman. God's plan is that He will use people to accomplish His purpose in history. In His providence He opens doors of opportunity for His people to do good, and the degree to which they enter these doors is the degree to which they succeed in being fellow workers with God to change lives and history. It does not make any difference if you work with Jews or Arabs, Blacks or Asians, Catholics or Unitarians, for you are to do good to all men. Do not use the excuse that your job is different, and that the people you work with are different. They are people, and so they fit Paul's

category of doing good to all people.

Jesus did good to the thief on the cross, and promised him that he would be with Him in paradise. You do not have to find people who are worthy of your efforts at being good. You do not have to check their credentials to see if they qualify, for there are not requirements to qualify. If they are people, they qualify, and you are authorized to do good to them.

This does not mean there is no need for discernment as to what form of good you will do. There is cooperation that is unwise. Like Michael Devlin who was attacked by two thugs. He fought like a tiger, but they beat him up, broke his glasses and his nose, and tore his wallet out of his pocket. It contained only three dollars, and they were angry. One of them said, "Are you crazy? You put up a fight like that for three lousy bucks?" Devlin said, "I'm sorry, I thought you were after the two hundred in my socks." There is such a thing as too much cooperation. Doing good does not mean to cooperate with those doing evil. We are to overcome evil with good, but we are not to cooperate with evil thinking that is good.

This is not to say that you do not do good to the godless and worldly people in your environment. Christians often feel they should not do anything to encourage the people who are godless in their lifestyle. This is to miss the whole point of doing good to all men. Jesus said that it is the sick who need the doctor, and that is why He did good to people who are out of God's will. They were worldly and unethical, but Jesus did good to them because He loved them.

In Graham Green's novel *The Heart Of The Matter*, a British government worker was stationed in a hot dirty town on the West coast of Africa. Someone asked him why he did not request a transfer to get out of such a place, and he responded, "Here you can love

people nearly the way God loves them, knowing the worst about them." That fits the workplace better than it does the church. We see people at their worst at work. They show their value system, and the godless aspects of their life. That is where we can love people like God loves them. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. He did good for us while we were godless and unworthy, and that is when we need to do good to all men. It is when they do not deserve it, and when our only motive could be to please God.

Doing good means meeting needs of people. Everybody needs help and encouragement, and the Christian is to strive to be that kind of resource, even for the non-Christian. Why should you be this to the non-Christian? Because it is a language they can understand, and it is the only good reason they will see for wondering whether the Christian life is for them. The best witness any Christian can be to a non-Christian is by doing them some good. If this basic biblical truth is going to transform our daily work, we need to focus on two key words that convey the essence of this text. The two words are priority and persistence. In other words, we need to make the doing of good to all men our short range priority, and our long range goal that we persist toward no matter how hard the struggle. Let's consider first-

I. OUR PRIORITY.

The number one objective of our daily work is that in the doing of it we do good to all who are involved in the workplace with us. This is the language of love that is universal, and which is the cement that holds any relationship together. A day at work in which you have done nobody any good is a day lost for pleasing God. We need to face our daily work with this goal in mind as a priority. We must find a way to serve God in our work. There has to be a way we can be a blessing to others. One of the key ingredients the Christian is to strive to add to the workplace is meaning. A lot of jobs can be boring

and routine. They seem to have little significance in the total scheme of things. The Christian priority is to do all men good in that setting by seeking ways to tie it in to the greater picture of life.

Dostoyevski, the great Russian novelist, said that the irrational character of work was the great curse of man, and if you wanted to utterly crush a man just give him meaningless work. Hitler proved this true. His Jewish prisoners were able to survive disease infected barracks with little food and back breaking work. Daily he marched them to a large factory where tons of human waste and garbage were distilled into alcohol. It was a nauseating atmosphere, and on top of it, they were helping Hitler fuel his cruel war machine.

When the allies bombed that factory, the next day the prisoners were ordered to shovel sand into carts at one end of the destroyed building and carry it to the other end and dump it. The next day they had to move the pile back to the other end. Day after day they took the pile back and forth. One by one they began to break. They would cry uncontrollably, and some who survived three years in the camp ran toward the electrified fence and were electrocuted. Dozens went mad and were shot by the guards. Charles Colson, who describes this in detail in his book *Kingdoms In Conflict* says, the lesson is clear. Men will cling to life with dogged resolve as long as their work is meaningful. Even if their work supports their hated captors. But purposeless labor soon snaps the mind. He learned this in prison, and one of the reasons he devotes so much of his life to minister to people in prison is because he had made it a priority of his life to do good to these people by helping them see that their lives can still be meaningful in prison. He has done good to masses by adding meaning to their existence.

This is a challenge for all of us in the workplace. How can we help people feel good about their place in life, and their job? Our own spirit about our job can make a great difference in how we

encourage others. You might still question if this is really a Christian priority in life, but let me show you again from the Word. Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." The kingdom of God is the rule or reign of God in your life. If God rules in your life, you will be doing what pleases Him, and Paul's whole point here is that what pleases God is doing good unto all men. This means the doing good to all men is seeking first the kingdom of God. This means the helping of people feel good about their life and work is seeking the kingdom of God in the workplace. It all ties together, and makes doing good to your fellow employee a priority in the Christian life.

The idea that we seek first the kingdom of God only at church, and on Sunday, is to make the kingdom of God irrelevant to most of life. Keep religion in its place is what many like to say, but they forget that if God is real He is Lord of every place, and there is no place where He is not, and where He does not want to rule. Wyn Sutphia in his book Thine The Glory writes,

"So many men employ the witchery of words in order to confuse.

**They draw up a dividing line between the sacred and the secular
and call them different.**

**"Don't dirty faith," they say, "By rubbing it in life.
No, keep it to the incensed altar and the lily bower
lest it smell of man's mortality."**

It is a subtle trickery.

**You see: the sacred-and-profane,
The spiritual-and-the worldly,
The religious-and-material.**

**Life splits into, and God
Becomes a half-a-God who only
Rules the half of life!**

Religion is confined to church and cloister:

**When "the worship's over, God returns
to Heaven,
and stays there until next Sunday
at eleven."**

We need to reject this nonsense, not only in thought, but by action, and see that our doing good to all in the workplace is seeking first the kingdom of God. It is a false dichotomy to think God is more pleased with our worship than our work. Paul says that if we are doing good we are pleasing the Spirit. There is more evidence to suggest the idea that God is more delighted with you when you encourage a fellow worker than He is when you sing a hymn. The song is more for your benefit, but the doing of good is for God, for others, and for you. The point is not to put down worship, but to exalt work, and all its possibilities, as a place for pleasing God, and doing His will in the world. It needs to be a priority in our lives if we are going to be successful Christians.

Sometimes life brings marvelous opportunities to do good to others. Paul Wittgenstein was a concert pianist, and the worse thing that can happen did happen to him. He lost his right arm in World War I. But in 1931 Ravel's Concerto in D for the left hand was written, and other composers followed with music for the left hand. This made it possible for Paul to have a repertoire for his concerts throughout Europe. What an amazing encouragement. They couldn't give him a hand, but they gave him what he needed to use his one hand for employment of his gift. We can't expect to be a part

of wonderful things like this everyday, but everybody needs a hand or encouragement, and this we can do everyday as we seek to let Christ transform our daily work by doing good to all men.

We don't have time to pursue the word persistent. All we need to say is what Paul says here-don't get weary. This doing of good is not merely an event. It is a lifestyle you persist in regardless of the response, because you do it to please God. Jesus is our example. He set His face steadfastly to go to the cross. Nothing could stop Him from doing good to all men by dying for the sins of the world. We also are to let nothing stop us from making it a part of our lifestyle of doing good to all men.

20 A BLESSING TO AVOID Based on Gal. 6:1-10

Doing your best could be the worst thing you could do. That sounds like a contradiction, but it can be explained so that it makes sense as a paradox. A paradox is a statement, which at first sight seems absurd, and contrary to common sense, but which can be explained so as to be well grounded and true in fact. It is not hard to figure out the paradox in the statement that the new cars are wider, longer, lower, and higher. That they are lower in relation to the ground, and higher in relation to your bank account is easy to see. Many paradoxes are not so obvious. Some of the beatitudes of Jesus, for example are paradoxes. Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those who mourn, and blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. These need some deeper thinking before the clouds of obscurity will clear away, and let the light of truth shine through.

So it is with the statement, doing your best can be the worst thing

you can do. It is contrary to a normal pattern of thinking, but all it takes is one illustration to turn it into a paradoxical statement of truth. A minister of a large church had his assistant preach the sermon on Sunday morning. He wanted to slip away to play golf. He drove the ball with terrific accuracy, and everything he did seem to go perfect, and he finished the 18 holes with a remarkable 68. It was the first time he ever broke 100. He was overjoyed and elated until it struck him, he would never be able to tell anyone about it because of the circumstances. Had he played an average game, there would be nothing to tell, but he had gone and done his very best, and now he couldn't share his excitement. Doing his best under those circumstances proved to be the worst thing he could do. His great pleasure paradoxically became his punishment.

Doing your best at any act of evil is always the worst thing you can do. The thing to notice about the nature of paradox is that it keeps you aware of the complexity of reality. It keeps you aware of the danger of oversimplification. We tend to take a legitimate aspect of reality and make it the whole. Paradox forces us to keep an open mind, and seek to reconcile contradictory aspects of life. The Christian who cannot accept paradox as part of reality will often be distressed, because life refuses to conform to the logic of what he feels ought to be. Everything can make sense, however, to one who is willing to see the paradoxical nature of reality.

A blessed curse sounds like nonsense, but a little thought can make it a precious truth. The Scripture says, "Cursed is every man who is hung upon a tree." Jesus was hung upon a tree, and crucified for our sin. His curse became the means by which all of our sins are forgiven. Who can think of a curse that ever led to greater blessings? It was indeed a blessed curse, and no longer a statement of nonsense. I emphasize the reality of paradox because Paul is so paradoxical in this passage of Gal. 6. The paradox we want to consider concerns a blessing we are to avoid. It sounds unreasonable to even suggest that

we should try and avoid one of God's blessings, but that is exactly what God's expects us to do, and exactly what we want to do when we understand the meaning of the paradox.

No one will doubt that guilt is one of the heaviest burdens a man can bear, and no one will doubt that forgiveness is one of the most precious of all blessings. Yet, as blessed as it is to be lifted, it is more blessed never to have fallen. The blessing we are to avoid, therefore, is the blessing of being the one who is restored through forgiveness. While helping the fallen experience this blessing, we are to be careful to avoid it ourselves. It is a blessing that can only come through first disobeying God. To be eligible for forgiveness we must first sin, and, therefore, this is a blessing we are to avoid.

A Sunday School teacher asked her class what is the first thing we must do to obtain forgiveness of sin? A little boy spoke up and said, "Sin!" It was not the expected answer, but a correct one, and because the only way to obtain this goal is by the route of evil, it is a way we are not to travel. It is a blessing we are never to choose, but one we are to receive only because of necessity due to the fact that we have fallen.

In this first verse Paul is just as concerned that the non-fallen Christian helper escape the necessity of this blessing, as he is that the fallen brother find it. It is wonderful that the fallen brother can be restored and forgiven. Yet, it would be a tragedy if another in helping him bear his load fell himself, and needed to travel the same path. Forgiveness is the only road to travel when one is in the valley of sin, and it is a great blessing, but it is a curse to fall into that valley in the first place, and so it is a blessing to be avoided. Any blessing that requires you to sin before receiving it, is a blessing to avoid. This is why Paul limits the task of restoring the fallen to the spiritual, that is to those who have developed the maturity necessary to do the job without risking themselves.

Anyone who has tackled a difficult job with inadequate tools knows the problem you can get into, and the mess you can make. The tool one must have to effectively restore a fallen brother is the tool of meekness, or gentleness. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and that is why Paul calls upon those who are spiritual to handle this delicate matter. To be spiritual simply means to be one who exhibits the fruits of the Spirit. If one does not have this fruit, he should not attempt the job of restoration. The result could be something like trying to fix a piece of broken china with a hammer. Christians need to leave delicate jobs to those whose inner tool chest has in it, not the sharp saw of severity, and the hard hammer of harshness, but the smooth sander of sympathy, and the mild mallet of meekness.

The word restore is the Greek word for setting a dislocated bone. Part of the body of Christ is dislocated when a Christian falls into sin. There is bound to be some pain in getting him restored, but the proper treatment can eliminate unnecessary pain. The proper treatment that Paul calls for is gentleness. Calvin wrote, "We are here taught to correct the faults of brethren in a mild manner, and to consider no rebukes as partaking a religious and Christian character which do not breathe the spirit of meekness." Not all can lift a fallen brother by meekness, and so they should keep their hands off.

To try and restore a brother in the attitude of arrogant superiority is to fall into the category of those Paul mentions in verse 3 who think themselves to be something when they are nothing. Here is another paradox: To be something we must recognize we are nothing. John Wesley recognized he was nothing apart from Christ, and he really became something. He lifted gamblers, drunkards, and rough sinners from all walks of life by the power of gentleness. G. W. Langford wrote-

**Speak gently! Tis a little thing
Dropped in the heart's deep well;**

**The good, the joy that it may bring
Eternity shall tell.**

If you don't have the tools, leave the task of restoring to those who can do it in the spirit of meekness. A Christian doing good in the wrong way can do more harm than good. The Christian who has the right tools, however, ought not to be deceived into thinking he is immune to danger. There is always a risk involved in bending over a pit to lift another out. It is possible for the helper to end up in the pit. Paul, therefore, gives a warning even to those who are spiritual. It is a blessing to know they can be restored if they fall, but it is a blessing they are to avoid.

I think it is extremely important that we see Paul's attitude concerning the Christian and sin. Paul feels that no one is ever so mature, and so spiritual, that they can afford to be careless. Paul assumes that the finest Christians can fall if they are not cautious. To think that a wonderful Christian cannot fall into serious sin is to be ignorant concerning spiritual warfare. Some people blame emotionalism for the fact that Christians fall into sin. They feel that many conversions are only a momentary experience of excitement that do not last. Others feel the problem lies with those churches which stress conversion as a process of education. These, they say, are not truly born again, and have only a head knowledge, and that is why they fall to the temptation. Both are right, and there are many illustrations to prove their point, but both are wrong in thinking they can explain, by their view, why Christians sin.

The method by which one comes to Christ is not the determining factor at all. The important thing is what one thinks of himself after he does accept Christ. If he thinks he is now safe from the enemy of his soul, and has arrived, he is in serious trouble. His deception at this point will leave him wide open to enemy attack. If he realizes the battle has just begun, and that now, more than ever, he needs the

whole armor of God, and much caution, then he is likely to stand, and be a good soldier of Christ. It is pride that leads the Christian to fall, for the proud Christian no longer fears his own weakness. He feels he does not need to be careful in the way he walks. It is the humble Christian who will stand, for he is fully aware of his weakness, and the danger of falling.

Paul makes it clear that the most mature Christian must be aware that the tendency to sin is still in them, and that a proud and careless attitude can lead them into the very pit they hope to lift others out of. An honest Christian is one who is able to say, I am capable of committing that very sin that ensnared my brother. Therefore, I must avoid certain circumstances. Consider thyself is what Paul says. Keep and attentive eye on yourself is another version. Help another with an attitude of pride, thinking you are superior because you did not fall, and you could very well be the next one there pulling out of the pit.

History is full of spiritual persons who are naive at this point. The Bible does not give useless warnings, and so we need to take them seriously. In I Cor. 10:12 Paul says, "Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." David was a man after God's own heart, but he fell. Peter was the leader of the Apostles, but he fell. You can go through the list of Bible heroes, and the same can be said for just about all of them. The wise Christian agrees with the ancient saying, "Know thyself." To be ignorant of what you are capable of doing is to be blind, and not having an honest knowledge of yourself, and this will lead you to ignore the warnings that would help you to escape when the battle is more than you can handle.

**Tis one of human nature's laws,
To see ourselves without our flaws.**

This is one law we are to break, and not submit to being blinded

by our nature which loves to be deceived about our defects. If we are not honest with ourselves, we will fail to see ourselves in the mirror of God's Word. We will be like the dog who always went wild when he saw his reflection in the mirror. He thought it was another dog, and he was ready for a fight. If we think all the warnings of Scripture are directed to someone else, we are as foolish as that dog. The heart is deceitful above all things, and we need to see that refers to our heart, and not just the heart of others. Fenelon said, "As light increases we see ourselves to be worse than we thought." The purpose of seeing yourself as you are is not to give you a guilt complex, but to show you just how weak you are without the Lord's help. It is to keep you alert, knowing that a sudden attack can take you by surprise and leave you wounded.

Look to yourself says Paul; know yourself; know your own weakness and tendency to sin, and you will be more useful in gaining back the fallen brother, for your caution and stability will increase his security, and give him an example to follow in the future. This is doing for a brother what Jesus did for us all. Had He not stopped to lift us, and had He not faced all temptations and remained sinless, we would have no hope, and no security, and no basis for forgiveness.

Nietzsche thought this was the way to produce a world of weaklings. The strong ought not to stoop to help the weak, he said. This puts them all on the dead level of mediocrity. The strong are to move on higher, and step on the weak to do it. This is the only road to the super race. Hitler and Stalin both put this philosophy into practice, and history has recorded the tragic results. One of the paradoxes of history is that power and both will be better prepared to not experience the blessing we are to avoid.

21. WHEN SOMETHING IS NOTHING Based on Gal. 6:3

Some people, probably most people, and maybe all people have to learn how to be humble the hard way, and that is the humpty dumpty way of having a great fall. This was the case with Max Eastman. A film was being made on the life of Christ, and he happened to meet the well known woman photographer working on that film, who was Alice Baughton. Shortly after this meeting he received a note asking if he would consent to pose with Walter Hampden, the man playing the role of Christ, in one of the miracle scenes. He was so proud of getting such an offer after just a casual meeting, that he could not help but brag. A thing like that couldn't just happen, he must have something on the ball. He said to his mother who was visiting at the time, "See what it is to be a beauty. I just knock them cold at the first sight." When he returned from the studio, however, his glow had turned to gloom. "What did you pose for?" Was the eager question of the family. Meekly he replied, "The corpse of Lazarus."

Lazarus was certainly not an unimportant role to play, even as a corpse, but it hardly justified his boast of superior beauty. Had he not opened his mouth, there could only be merit in getting any part at all, but he did, and proved the saying true, "An ounce of vanity spoils a hundred weight of merit." He thought too highly of himself. He was like the man whose wife said to him as they left the party, "Has anyone ever told you how marvelous you are?" "No, I don't believe they have," he said. "Well then," she continued, "Where in the world did you ever get the idea?"

The idea comes natural, for the one thing most all people have in common is their loyal love of themselves. E. W. Howe said, "When a man tries himself, the verdict is usually in his favor." Subconsciously, if not consciously, all men tend to make themselves the center of the universe. Each of us is, to a lesser or greater degree,

an I specialist. I read of a printing company that had to postpone the publication of a Bishop's autobiography because they ran out of capital I's. Pope wrote in his essay on man-

**Ask for what end the heavenly bodies shine,
Earth for whose use, -Pride answers,-Tis for mine;
For me kind nature wakes her genial power,
Suckles each herb, and spreads out every flower;
Seas role to waft me, suns to light me rise;
My foot stool earth, my canopy the skies.**

There is a touch of truth even in this self-centeredness, for man alone was made by God with the capacity to appreciate and enjoy the order and beauty of His creation, and man was given dominion over creation. But man fell, like Satan, because of pride, and is now, as Pascal put it, both the glory and the scum of the universe. He still has some basis for pride, but so much more for humility and shame. Abraham Lincoln's favorite hymn by William Knox put it this way-

**Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift-flitting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passeth from life to his rest in the grave.**

Man is in a strange predicament, caught between his own dignity and depravity; his own worth, and his wickedness. The result is another great paradox of life. Man's self-love is both an evil and a good. It is both an essential for a happy life in God's will, and the main cause for most evil that is out of God's will. Paul in this great chapter on paradoxes deals with both sides of pride.

In verse 3, he deals with that kind of pride which makes a man think himself to be something when he is nothing. In verse 4, he deals with that kind of pride which is an honest recognition of one's

worth before God. The border line between these two is so close, and so poorly defined, that one can every easily slip over into exhibiting evil pride when he thinks he is being rightfully humble. This makes pride a very dangerous area that Satan takes advantage of. Ruskin said, "In general pride is at the bottom of all great mistakes!" This is true of sin as well.

The Old Testament says so much about the evil and folly of pride we cannot even begin to cover it. The New Testament is sufficient to establish it as one of the worse evils of the human heart. Jesus lists it as one of the major evils that proceed from the heart in Mark 7:22. Paul lists it among the dominating depravities of the pagan world in Rom. 1:30. He also lists it as one of the characteristics of men in the last days. He writes in II Tim. 3:2, "For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy." Both Peter and James write that, "God resisteth the proud but gives grace to the humble." Christians are urged to avoid pride, and all her ugly sisters like conceit, arrogance, and haughtiness. Paul says in Rom. 12:16, "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited."

Pride among Christian is the greatest cause for lack of harmony, and in our text Paul says, the brother or sister in Christ who is proud, and thinks they are something when they are nothing, deceives themselves. They do not fool anyone else, but they are themselves blind to the fact that they are the problem, and are being dupes of the devil to hinder the work of Christ. Paul says, something can become nothing, or somebody can become nobody. Something becomes nothing when it fails to fulfill the purpose for which it exists. For example, you have all had an experience like this. Suppose my son and I were walking along the road, and he picks up a broken piece of metal, and asks me what it is. I look at it, and see that it is from a machine of some kind, and is no longer able to serve the

function for which it was made, like a burned out fuse for example. I therefore, say to him, "It is nothing, throw it away." Now we both know it is something, for it exists, or he wouldn't have asked the question, but by calling it nothing I meant it is worthless in fulfilling its purpose, and so has no value whatever.

Jesus said, "When salt loses its power to be salty it is good for nothing." It is still something, but as far as usefulness goes, it is nothing. Something is nothing when it can no longer function for the purpose of which it exists. You've all heard of the two boys who were bragging, and the one son said, "My father is a doctor, I can be sick for nothing." The other one responded, "Well, my father is a minister, and I can be good for nothing." Paul is saying, that it is literally possible for a Christian to be good for nothing. If a Christian thinks he is too good to help another Christian lift their burden, he has allowed pride to render him useless in fulfilling the law of Christ, and so at that point he is nothing. He is still something, or there would be no point of warning him of his danger, but he is salt without flavor, and if he does not lose his sinful pride, he will lose his usefulness as a Christian.

A Christian who cannot enter into the bearing of one another's burdens because of pride is not able to fulfill a basic purpose in the Christian life. He is about as valuable as a burned out fuse. Paul is simply spelling out in a practical way the teaching of I Cor. 13. He wrote there, that if he had the tongues of angels, and the gift of prophecy, and great knowledge and wisdom, and faith to remove mountains, and did not have love, he would be nothing. It is hard to believe that so much somethings can equal absolutely nothing, but this is what Paul clearly teaches. Without love a Christian can be nothing, in the sense that he would be useless for the cause of Christ. This is why pride is such a great danger to the believer, for it can render him useless. In Psa. 62:9 David says, "...men of high estate are a delusion, in the balances they go up; they are altogether lighter

than a breath." Paul goes even further, and says they are not only lighter than air, they are nothing, but either way, the two testaments agree, pride can make a man weightless, and unable to exert even an ounce of weight on the scale for good.

The tragedy is that this is not just a hypothetical possibility, but is an actual reality. This was the case with the lukewarm majority in the church of Laodicea. In Rev. 3:17 Jesus says to these Christians who are neither hot nor cold, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and blind and naked." They thought they were something when they were nothing. They deceived themselves into thinking they needed nothing, but in reality, they needed everything. Paul gives another example of this deception of pride in I Tim. 6:3-4. "If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, and knows nothing." Here is a man who thinks he is so wise he can go beyond the words of Christ. He thinks he knows something, but Paul says, what he knows is nothing.

Here is the paradox that runs all through the Bible. He who exalts himself shall be brought low. The Tower of Babel is the great symbol of human pride. When man seeks to climb to the sky, he ends groveling in the dirt. When he seeks to go to heaven by self-exaltation, he lands in hell. When he thinks himself to be something, he is nothing. This passage is extremely relevant to all of us. Obedience is vital to our very existence as useful Christians. Bearing one another's burdens is not just a suggestion, it is a demand-do it or else. Here is a law in the midst of grace. A Christian who is not fulfilling the law of Christ is not fulfilling the purpose for which he exists.

This can be hard, and especially when the burden is the result of

sin. These are the worst, for it is easy to get your hands dirty, and even your soul, if you are not careful, as Paul warns. Paul knew some Christians would be hesitant on this matter, and would not want to risk spotting their lily white hands in pulling a fallen brother out of the pit. He made his bed, let him lie in it, would be their attitude. After all says the proud Christian, "I am something. I am a leader in the church. I have a reputation of respectability in the community. I can't get involved in helping some fool brother who has gotten himself in a mess. What will people think of me? They might think I approve of his sin, or that I help because I am guilty of the same. I just can't risk the association and spoil my reputation."

This proud man's case is clear, and his concern for his self-image is natural, but the Christian who wants to be used of God cannot afford to be natural, for the paradox is, his very caution is his greatest folly. In saving his reputation with men, he loses the favor of God. He remain something before men, but he becomes nothing before God. Paul wants us to see this folly, and never allow pride to keep us from our duty to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. A Christian who cannot risk his reputation to rescue another Christian from the grasp of the enemy is as good as a partner of the enemy, and so of no value in the cause of Christ. Another paradoxical consequence of this is that when a Christian becomes nothing because of pride, and is lighter than air, and has no weight at all in the scale for good, he makes a heavy impact on the scale for evil. When the love of Christ is absent in a follower of Christ he becomes a useful tool in the hands of Satan.

Alexander Maclaren said, "Depend upon it, heresy has less power to arrest the progress of the church than the selfish lives of Christian professors." Nothing is so heavy, and such a drag on the church, as lighter than air Christians, whose pride makes them useless for good. These lighter than air Christians are paradoxically the heaviest burden the church has to bear. God forbid that we be among these

spiritual naughts by being proud, loveless, and unconcerned about the burdens of others. Let us also be aware of the subtlety of pride. It is a two edged sword which cuts both ways. It hides on both sides of the narrow way, and we can fall into its snare in the very act of backing away.

For example, what is our attitude to those whom Paul calls nothing? What of the proud loveless brother? Does he not immediately become one of the fallen brothers who needs the help of the spirit-led believer in order to be restored. In other words, this something which has become nothing can also be restored back to something, and become useful again in the cause of Christ. His pride which kept him away from the pit lest he be stained, has plunged him into even a muckier pit yet, up to his neck. He has fallen lower than the brother he refused to help, but now he needs a hand, and if we refuse him because he is unworthy of our help, we are only copying his folly, and we will fall into the pit ourselves.

It is no advance on the Pharisee who said, "I thank God I am not as other men, even this Publican," to say, "I thank God I am not as other men, even this Pharisee." A Sunday School teacher after teaching the lesson of the proud Pharisee said, "Let's bow now and thank God we are not like this Pharisee." Pride is subtle, and it can get you coming or going. It is present everywhere, and at all times. One Puritan lamented that ridding ourselves of pride is like peeling an onion, for every skin taken off there is another beneath. The first step to victory over pride is to be aware that it is a clever foe, and the battle will never cease while we are in the flesh. Second, we must overcome evil with good. We must learn how to harness this inescapable characteristic of human life for good. We need to use this which can make us nothing before God, to make us something of which we can be proud, and which God can use for the purpose for which He made us. He made us to be something, and we cannot let pride lead us to be nothing.

22. PRAISEWORTHY PRIDE Based on Gal. 6:4

One of the most common paradoxes of history is the paradox of succeeding through failure. Jesus failed to turn Israel from her sins, and they crucified Him, but He thereby succeeded in paying the penalty for their sin, and also for the sins of the world. By descending into the valley of failure, He arrived at the peak of success. The cross became both the low point, and the high point of history. There are numerous illustrations of this paradox. A contemporary example comes from the experience of Dr. Paul Tournier, the well known Christian physician of Switzerland, whose many books are very popular in America.

In his book *The Adventure Of Living*, he tells of a lecture he gave at a University. He felt from the beginning of the lecture that he was not going to make contact with his audience. He clung to his notes, and laboriously recited with growing nervousness. When he finished, he saw his friends slipping away to spare both he and themselves the embarrassment of meeting. On the way home in the car his wife burst into tears because the humiliation was so great. It was the most miserable lecture he had ever given. The next day a professor of philosophy called him on the phone. He said he had listened to a large numbers of lectures in his life, and had never heard one as bad as Dr. Tournier's. The very dullness of it, however, intrigued him, and he wanted to meet Dr. Tournier. This was the beginning of wonderful friendship that resulted in this professor receiving Christ as his Savior. Dr. Tournier said, this was the source of more lasting joy to him than if he had delivered a brilliant lecture. It was his impressive failure that opened the door to the thrilling success of winning a man for Christ. Praise God that He can use even our failure for His glory.

Let us not, however, strive to fail, and seek to be nothing in the hope that God will use it to make us successful and something. The Christian never deliberately aims for anything but the best. Success is always to be his goal. Set your affections on things above; press on toward the mark for the prize; run to win; fight the good fight for victory; whatever you do, do it as unto the Lord, give of your best to the Master, and no less. The Christian never chooses to run poorly, but strives always for excellence.

The result of this, of course, will be that Christians will arrive at the goal of success by the normal route of fulfilling the requirements for success. It is then that they face the danger of failure, and can become an example of the paradox of failing through success. If they let success go their head, and become proud and boastful, they cease to be useful instruments for the glory of God, and so they fail in their highest goal. This is what Paul was warning against in verse 3. The Christian who does not fall, but has by persistence in good habits, and development of self-control, resisted temptation, can still fail if he allows pride to make him think he is really something, even too good to help the fallen brother.

Many Christians, seeing the danger of pride in success, fall into the opposite danger of a false humility, nothing is more superficial and unspiritual than when one who has done an excellent thing pretends that it is really nothing at all. This is not humility but sheer falsehood, or deception. A Christian who excels in some aspect of life cannot honestly pretend that he is a dud. If a Christian boy holds the world's record for the 100 yard dash he would appear silly if he pretended to think he was not very fast. Karl Olsson writes, "How many excellently cooked dinners have been dismissed by humble housewives as nulities, a mere hogwash-because these estimable ladies thought it sinful to admit that they were the best chicken roasters in 7 counties, which, in effect, they knew themselves to be."

Christians can even come to the point where they are proud of their humility, and get great satisfaction in pretending to be nothing, and incapable of anything praiseworthy. This pretense at failure only succeeds in making them failures while they are succeeding. This kind of humility is only a more subtle form of pride.

**I am that voice which is the faint
First, far-off sin within the saint,
When of his humbleness he first
Takes thought, and I become that thirst
Which makes him drunken with his own
Humbleness, and so casts him down
From the last painful stair that waits
His triumphing feet at heaven's gates.**

In other words, false humility will cause the Christian to fall just as sure as false pride. Both extremes are foolish and dangerous, for neither of them is honest, and neither is based on a realistic evaluation of one's self in relation to God.

It was sheer madness for Nietzsche, in great pride, to say, "It is only since I have come that a new hope has dawned on earth." But Madam DuDeffond did not lessen the madness when she wrote, "I hear nothings, I speak nothings, I take interest in nothing, and from nothing to nothing I travel gently down the dull way which leads to becoming nothing." This is not humility, but pure pessimism and despair which is totally unfit as a Christian attitude. The Christian alternative to self-deification is not self-damnation, but self-dedication. God does not want your self deified or damned, He wants it dedicated. Paul says, you are deceived if you think you are something when you are nothing, but you are equally deceived if you think you are nothing when you are something. Paul is not trying to get Christians to think of themselves as nothing, for that is an evil. It is unworthy of a child of God, who has been redeemed by the

precious blood of Christ and given eternal life. So both pride and humility can be dangerous, but both are still needed for the balanced Christian life.

Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish theologian, stood on a hilltop overlooking the sea one summer evening, and he had this experience. "As I stood there alone and forsaken and the might of the sea and the war of the elements brought my own nothingness to mind, and on the other hand the secure flight of the birds brought to mind the words of Christ, 'Not a sparrow falls to the ground without the will of your heavenly Father,' I felt all at once how great and how small I was, and the two great powers, pride and humility, joined hands and became friends." This is the Biblical solution of the problem: A reconciliation of pride and humility, so that together as friends they can do what neither can do alone. Pride alone is a great evil, but mixed with humility it becomes a praise worthy pride. This is the kind of pride that keeps one from the sin of false humility.

Abraham Lincoln said, "I desire to so conduct the affairs of this administration that, when I come to lay down the reins of power, if I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, the one down inside me." Lincoln wanted to be right within himself. He preferred the approval of the still small voice within, rather than the cheers of the crowd. Lincoln may not have studied Paul's advice here in Gal. 6:4, but he was following it, and that is why Lincoln was such a great, yet humble man, of whom so many have been proud. The key to a humble, or praiseworthy, pride says Paul is self-examination. The amplified version reads, "But let every person carefully scrutinize and examine and test his own conduct and his own work. He can then have the personal satisfaction and joy of doing something commendable (in itself alone) without (resorting to) boastful comparison with his neighbor."

A legitimate pride is a completely personal matter, and does not

depend upon anyone else. It is a matter of personal satisfaction in accomplishing something that is praiseworthy. False pride is dangerous for the paradoxical reason that it is not self-centered enough. False pride does not examine the self for intrinsic worth and value, but is all the time comparing the self with others. False pride finds the false, defects, and sins in others, and then by comparison exalts the self. All their boasting depends upon the falls of others, rather than any intrinsic value in themselves. If you boast because you did not fall like this brother, your goodness is only comparative, and comparative goodness is not Christian goodness. God will never judge anyone by comparison. Anybody can find someone worse than themselves, and deceive themselves into thinking they are good in comparison. This is foolish pride, and many live on a very low level just because they are proud that it is higher than others on a lower level.

Paul says, do not think you are something when you are nothing, just because, even as nothing you have not fallen as low as another. Stop this business of comparing, and get into the business of self-examination. Washington Allston said, "The only competition worthy of a wise man is with himself." This is Paul's idea here. We are not running well just because we are ahead of the cripples. Our competition is to be with ourselves, and not the slowest runner we can find. Examine your own work says Paul. How does it rate in itself, regardless of what anyone else has or has not done. Paul says in Rom. 14:12, "Each of us shall give account of himself to God." It is not a comparative account. It is not, how did you do compared to so and so, but what did you do compared to what you knew you ought to do? How does your action measure up to your knowledge?

If you examine yourself, and are honest, you will likely have a great deal to be humble about. If you really are running at full speed, and are pressing on toward the mark, your reason for boasting will be legitimate, for it will be based on yourself alone, and

not on the slower speed of a neighbor, or brother in Christ. Paul, like Lincoln, was concerned about living with himself, and Paul could boast publicly before the Jewish council in Acts 23:1, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscious up to this day." In II Cor. 1:12 he writes, "For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity..." We could give many other examples of Paul's boasting in himself, because of this clear conscience, and self-respect. Paul had a praiseworthy pride because of his honest testing of his character and conduct against the standard of Christ, and not that of the world, or other Christians. Be followers of me as I am of Christ, Paul could say.

Paul was proud to be a Christian, and a child of God, and a servant of Christ. He was not ashamed of the cross or the Gospel, but he was proud of it, and gloried in the cross. Yet, he never forgot he was unworthy, and was only allowed to do so because of the grace of God. He called himself the least of all saints, but because of God's grace, he could also call himself one of the greatest Apostles. Paul, like his Master, was both humble and proud. Jesus did not hesitate to proclaim publicly His wisdom and knowledge, yet none was so humble as Jesus. Praiseworthy pride, and healthful humility were fast friends in the makeup of their personalities.

They could have the highest self-respect, because themselves were in harmony with God's objective revelation. They did not go by comparison with others, but by their own personal relationship to God. Jesus, even as the Son of God, had a human nature. He had personal responsibility He had to bear. He had a load to bear that none could help Him bear, and Jesus had to examine His own work, and have rejoicing in His fulfillment of His Father's will. He could say at the end, "It is finished." He did the work He was sent to do. Paul could also say at the end that he had fought a good fight, and ran a good race. This sense of personal satisfaction of a job well

done, and a life well lived, is to be the precious blessing of every child of God. Arthur Clough wrote,

**He who would climb and soar aloft
Must needs keep ever at his side
The tonic of a wholesome pride.**

Yes, even pride, that can be the rag of rottenness, can also, by the grace of God be woven into the robe of righteousness, and become praiseworthy pride.

