

# SLOW PAUL: THINKING THROUGH GALATIANS

## Introduction

When we set out to study *Galatians* we may be deterred by one or more awkward features of the letter. One is the difficulty of reaching satisfactory agreement about the dating and sequence of the events described or alluded to in chs 1-2. Another is the sustained analogy between the children of Abraham and the Christian faith in chs 3-4. There is the general one, not confined to *Galatians*, of the irrelevance to most of us of squabbles over circumcision and Jewish law. Then there is the polemical and dismissive tone of much of Paul's language.

Faced with all this, we might be tempted to dip out of a sustained study of the letter and to confine ourselves to quoting a few key verses to support e.g. studies in *Romans* or *Acts*. But not only would we miss out on some wonderful teaching on Christ's death for sins, justification by faith and freedom in the Spirit, but we could fail to catch the passion of Paul for the essential gospel of Christ. This gospel, which came to him so powerfully in the person of the risen Jesus, was the mainspring of his ministry among Jews and Gentiles alike.

Scholars are not able to reach agreement e.g. on the dating of *Galatians* nor on how it dovetails into *Acts*, which suggests that (rather like the Synoptic question) we don't need to have a watertight solution to all the problems. It seems to be one of the earliest letters written by Paul, possibly even the first. What is beyond doubt is that Paul is tackling a fundamental heresy that tends to afflict the church in every age, which is that you need to add something to the grace of God in order to find freedom in Christ. In his case, it was Christ plus circumcision, Christ plus adherence to the law of Moses, Christ plus Jewish cultural conformity. In ours, it may be Christ plus religious observance, Christ plus moral improvement, Christ plus spiritual experience.

A selection of helpful works: John Stott *Only One Way: the Message of Galatians* (IVP 1968); G. Walter Hansen *Galatians* (IVP New Testament Commentary series 1994); Moisés Silva *Galatians* (IVP New Bible Commentary 4<sup>th</sup> ed 1994); Tom Wright *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (SPCK 2002); David Wenham *Paul and Jesus: the true story* (SPCK 2002); Timothy Keller *Galatians for you* (The Good Book Company 2013).

The unadorned text of Paul's letter to the Galatians (in the *New International Version*, revised 2011) is printed above each section for convenient reference. Verse numbers are given, but where the original division is irrational verses have been run together. The headings are newly coined to preserve the flow of this direct, indignant and at times emotional, or even desperate, appeal to a bunch of Christian churches that were going through a severe crisis of identity and faith.

**1:1-2** <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – <sup>2</sup>and all the brothers and sisters with me, to the churches in Galatia:

## Straight to the point

[1:1] This is from Paul the Apostle and I can't believe what I'm hearing.

I'm not just some fellow spinning a few ideas of his own, or representing an organisation you've never heard of. This isn't a postcard from your aunt Agatha at the seaside, or a reminder that you haven't sent in your income tax form. If it was an official dispatch bearing the imperial seal, you'd certainly jump to attention. Well, I happen to represent someone even bigger than the reigning Caesar. I've got a message for you from the King of the universe; his name's Jesus, he's the chosen One of the Most High God, and when they thought he was dead and buried he walked straight out of a sealed rock-tomb because God said, 'Up you get, Son, I want you on

my throne next to me.' I know Jesus is Lord, because I've met him, and he's appointed me as his servant and his witness.

[1:2] Neither is this a hastily scrawled note to a couple of Christians who happen to have gone off the rails. It's a wake-up call to every single church in Galatia, including those that have started up since my ministry among you. And for that matter, to every church throughout the rest of time which has forgotten how it got there and what it's there for.

I've got lots of brothers and sisters crowding round me and asking to be remembered to you, but there isn't time to mention them by name. I'm going to get straight to the point.

*1:3-5<sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **It's all grace**

[1:3] Look – nothing's changed with God our heavenly Father. It's all grace. His love for each and every one of us streams out as steadily as the sun. It's always been unconditional and free as air. We're in a new relationship with him because we've accepted Jesus as Lord of our lives. We're his friends. There's nothing to worry about – on his side. [1:4] The proof of this, of course, is that our Lord Jesus incredibly volunteered himself to be pinned to the horns of the altar, as the divine sacrifice for human sin. He stood in there for us. We're not talking religion here, we're talking life-or-death intervention. This beautiful, God-given world has got itself corrupted into an instrument of evil, to blind us heart and mind to the true wonder of God's goodness. We blithely surrendered ourselves to our mortal enemy, but God had other ideas, and he came to the rescue himself. [1:5] We're going to spend eternity singing his praises for this. Yes, it's gloriously and unbelievably true!

*1:6-7<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel –<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.*

### **All a mistake?**

[1:6-7] So how come you've changed your minds? Five minutes ago you were dancing in the streets because you'd heard the unmistakable voice of God forgiving you and inviting you into his kingdom free, gratis and for nothing. You'd accepted Christ as your Saviour and it was the greatest news you could ever hear. Now you're convinced that it was all a mistake! And all because some smooth-talking cowboys have turned up in your midst and thrown you into confusion with their twisted view of God's way of salvation. I ask you – is this the good news we were talking about? No, it definitely is not!!

*1:8-9<sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!<sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*

### **The good news hasn't changed**

[1:8] Just suppose Barnabas and I came back tomorrow and held a big public meeting in your synagogue or market-place and said, 'Sorry folks, but last time we didn't get it quite right about Jesus; so we're here to give you the authorised version.' You would be quite right in seeing us straight out of town. Suppose there was then a thunderclap and the angel Gabriel appeared in a cloud of glory and proclaimed, 'No, Paul and friends really did get it wrong first time, so you

must listen to this new and revised gospel.' You would rightly be justified in telling him to get lost too. But *an archangel*? Yes. There is no second edition. We got it right first time.

[1:9] Let me repeat what I said just now and what I've consistently maintained all along: the good news hasn't changed one bit. It is exactly as we delivered it to you from the beginning. Would we have crossed great mountain ranges and got driven out of town after town and been practically stoned to death then gone back to the same places and left reliable witnesses to what we'd been saying, if we weren't sure of the truth of what we were telling you? Anyone who gives you a different version isn't just sad or deluded, they're risking the severe displeasure of God himself. That's how serious it is.

**1:10** <sup>10</sup> *Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

### **I live to serve the King**

[1:10] You may think this is just a war of words on a human level, but it's really like people trying to tell God himself that he's wrong. And if you think I'm taking up cudgels when I ought to be making conciliatory noises, let me tell you that soft-soaping other people isn't part of my strategy. There's only one person I'm trying to please, and that's not myself or any other human being, it's the Lord Jesus. If I were worried about how popular I am, I wouldn't be in this job. I live to serve the King, and only the King.

**1:11-12** <sup>11</sup> *I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin.* <sup>12</sup> *I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*

### **Straight from God himself**

[1:11] My dear fellow-believers, let me say this as plainly and as directly as I can: the message of God's grace I've been bringing to you isn't something produced by a committee or arrived at through human philosophy. It's straight from God himself. [1:12] I didn't get it by attending a course of lectures or researching for a doctorate. I got it because Jesus the one and only Messiah personally gave it to me. My teacher is Jesus. Is that so bizarre? He's been opening the eyes of the blind ever since he started. I was blind, but now I see. He shone his light into my heart and showed me the glory of his love. Otherwise I would have been a million miles away from seeing the truth.

**1:13-14** <sup>13</sup> *For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.* <sup>14</sup> *I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*

### **Active hate campaign**

[1:13] You know all about me. You realise, I hope, that I was once 100 per cent committed to traditional Judaism. This didn't mean that I locked myself in my study and read learned commentaries all day. I wish I had! In fact I pursued a deliberate and active hate campaign against what I now realise was God's own gathered people, his new-born church; I was fully committed to stamping it out and reducing it to a heap of smoking ruins, like some barbarian invader trashing a gentle, peace-filled land.

[1:14] I was a religious activist. For me, being a scholar in the scriptures demanded my total opposition to all that was false. My age-group produced some exceptionally promising rabbinical experts, but I have to say (without any satisfaction) that I outstripped most of them, mainly I suppose because I was totally immersed in the thought-forms I had inherited from my forefathers, and I loved them passionately. Looking back twenty years, I can see so clearly that I

was a terrorist extremist carrying out (in my own mind) the inexorable will of the One True God.

**1:15-17** <sup>15</sup> But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. <sup>17</sup> I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

### **Official seal of blessing?**

[1:15] And all along this same God was waiting for his moment to bring me to my knees. His plan for me had started before I was even a glint in my parents' eyes. He picked me out, not because (as I fondly used to think) I was born into the right family or inherited the greatest qualities of my ancestors, but simply and solely because he chose in love to call me to carry out his will. [1:16] Which, like a sad, blind fool, I got completely wrong – until I met Jesus. This wasn't some flash-in-the-pan religious experience, it was utterly transforming, Christ and I becoming one with each other. The scales had literally fallen from my eyes. I now knew beyond any doubt that I had to serve him, not by bringing death and destruction upon his people, but by going to far-distant lands to tell folk without any Jewish background all about the wonders of his death and resurrection.

The natural thing would have been at this point to go straight to my family and tell them what had happened, [1:17] then to go up to Jerusalem and explain everything carefully to the people who after all had been Christ's followers from the very beginning and whose apostolic fellowship I was now seeking to join. Then at least I would have received their official seal of blessing. Actually I went off into the great empty spaces of Arabia to spend time with the Lord and get myself thoroughly sorted out. Then I came back to Damascus and started preaching Christ as the Son of God.

**1:18-20** <sup>18</sup> Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> I assure you before God that what I am writing to you is no lie.

### **From the horse's mouth**

[1:18] I hope you get the point: if anyone says I was nobbled by the Christian mafia before I ever set out from Jerusalem, they are off their heads! (How could this idea ever have gained currency?) It wasn't until at least eighteen months later that things got too hot for me in Damascus and I decided to retrace my steps to Jerusalem, which I had originally left with very different intentions. The idea was to interview Simon Peter and find out more about the Lord's earthly life and teaching. I stayed with Peter for a brief fortnight, [1:19] but I never had any meeting with James or John or any others of the Twelve to get my 'gospel to the Gentiles' officially rubber-stamped. I did go and see the Lord's own brother James, who like me had been met by the risen Jesus and got his whole life turned around. [1:20] There have been so many wild stories flying around but this is from the horse's mouth; I'm writing this in the presence of God and I know what I'm telling you is the truth.

**1:21-24** <sup>21</sup> Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' <sup>24</sup> And they praised God because of me.

## **Another story going the rounds**

[1:21] After this hectic fortnight I left Jerusalem and went up to the far north and my home stamping-ground of Tarsus in Cilicia; later I was in Antioch in Syria. [1:22] This puts paid to another story that's been going the rounds, that I got a thorough going-over from the churches in Judea which were full of Jerusalem Christians escaping from my persecution. This is complete nonsense. I was smuggled down to Caesarea in heavy disguise because the Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem had their people looking out for me, then I took ship for Tarsus. None of the Judean Christians so much as caught sight of me, and if they had, they wouldn't have recognised me. Otherwise they might have joined in the manhunt! [1:23] But the rumour had got around, naturally – this monster who had gone into their synagogues and even their homes, hauled them off to prison, had them savagely beaten up and in some cases sentenced them to death, and who had been determined to eradicate every trace of the Jesus-Messiah heresy – why, he was now telling everyone that Jesus really was the Messiah and they should put their trust in him for salvation! [1:24] By the time I was safely back in Cilicia (I only heard this later, of course), the church bells were ringing out all over Judea. 'God is so great! His love has conquered! Even Saul has become a trophy of his grace!' They'd never said that before where I was concerned. Peace had been declared.

Let me summarise. My gospel has always been the same, and it's identical to the gospel preached by the original apostles of Christ and believed in by all the churches. Jesus is Lord, forgiveness is free, the Spirit is for everyone. But I didn't come to this conclusion because I was indoctrinated by the Jerusalem leaders. There simply wasn't time, and anyway I was proclaiming this gospel as soon as I got back from Arabia. So what's all this about my being nobbled by the circumcision party and watering down my gospel and not being sure of what I was trying to tell people? Have you got the right man?

*2:1-2 <sup>1</sup>Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. <sup>2</sup>I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.*

## **Was I really doing God's will?**

[2:1] The big confrontation happened a full thirteen years after my conversion. Barnabas and I had gone up once again to Jerusalem (we'd been before with the famine relief a couple of years earlier), this time taking Titus along with us as a young trainee. [2:2] I had had one of those unmistakable pieces of guidance that the Lord sometimes gives; you become convinced that you've got to do a particular thing, and you know for a certainty it's from him.

It wasn't that I was agonising over my basic message, about opening up the whole thing to non-Jews, and the 'no need to be circumcised' bit – this was definitely from God and not a figment of my own imagination. But supposing the big cheeses at Jerusalem were taking a different line and I was perceived as going out on a limb all by myself? Well, suggests the Lord, why not go and have a confidential interview with the obvious people, Peter, John and James, and check out with them whether you are all saying the same thing and acting as a team – otherwise your whole effort might just be a colossal waste of time – rather like sprinting off on a relay race and leaving the baton behind!

**2:3-5** <sup>3</sup> Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. <sup>5</sup> We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

### **Temptation to compromise**

[2:3] Just a word about Titus, who as I said had accompanied us from Antioch. He was a Gentile convert, and I rather dreaded the prospect of facing acute pressure from the apostles to have him circumcised. (There might arise circumstances in which this is strategically wise, but this wasn't one of them.) So I raised the question – and got the unequivocal reply: no problem! Phew – relief all round, especially from Titus. [2:4] But then guess what happened. We arrived for round two of the negotiations, and who should be there at this PRIVATE meeting but several stern-faced members of the heavy brigade, posing as converted Christians, and insisting that Titus should be circumcised after all, otherwise he couldn't call himself a full believer. Goodness knows how they got there – I hadn't been consulted, but I noticed James was looking a bit sheepish, and I suspect he hadn't been given the option. They kept the clipboards out of sight, but that's what they were there for – as spiritual health and safety inspectors, to check out this dangerous 'freedom from the law' which we were proclaiming for all who unite themselves to Christ by faith, and then to shackle us to the full rigour of the Mosaic requirements plus a whole lot of traditions on top of that.

[2:5] The temptation for us was to compromise, just this once, to keep the peace. But that would have sold the pass. So we stood firm and wouldn't give way on a single point. Otherwise, dear Galatians, the pure, liberating, healing stream of the gospel would have been turned off at its source, and you would have been forced to drink pollution and lies.

**2:6-10** <sup>6</sup> As for those who were held in high esteem – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favouritism – they added nothing to my message. <sup>7</sup> On the contrary, they recognised that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. <sup>8</sup> For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. <sup>9</sup> James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognised the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

### **Relief all round**

[2:6] The reaction of the others said it all. The fact that they were the original apostles of the Lord and everyone looked up to them held no sway with me; a person's impressiveness or importance matters absolutely nothing to God. However great their reputation in Jerusalem, I wasn't looking to them to authorise my position. But the fact is, they didn't take me aside and try to bend me – [2:7] it was quite the opposite – they acknowledged that I had been appointed by the Lord to spearhead the mission to rank outsiders who should never be required to receive a physical mark in their flesh to show that they were insiders. Meanwhile Peter would spearhead the work among Jews who already wear the badge of faith but haven't yet got the faith to go with the badge.

[2:8] This wasn't a human arrangement – we are both utterly dependent on the Lord's moving and enabling, Peter as the apostle to the Jews and I as the apostle to the Gentiles. [2:9] They were fully aware that what had happened to me was all due to the Lord's goodness and mercy and nothing to do with any qualities I might or might not have had. So these rocklike

characters, founder-members of the church of God, James the Lord's brother, Cephas (you know that's the Aramaic name the Lord gave Peter) and John, gave Barnabas and me big bear-hugs, called us brothers and fellow-workers, and formally ratified the agreement that we should pioneer the work among the nations while they were responsible for the mission to the Jews. [2:10] The one practical point they insisted upon was that we should continue to collect money for the needy Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, in view of the ongoing famine conditions, to which of course I had already committed myself one hundred-per-cent. Relief all round!

**2:11-13** <sup>11</sup> *When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.* <sup>12</sup> *For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.* <sup>13</sup> *The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.*

### Major bust-up

[2:11] Unfortunately that wasn't the end of the story. The badgers hadn't finished their undermining activities. So now I'm supposed to be a second-rate apostle, whose authority derives entirely from the Jerusalem church leaders! I'm supposed to be Peter's poodle! Well, let me tell you what happened next. Cephas and I had a major bust-up. I publicly accused him of being totally inconsistent, which he clearly was being. I'm going to tell you about this because it brings all the issues I've been talking about into sharp focus.

[2:12] Cephas and I got on well in Jerusalem, as I've been describing. So he pays me a return visit here at Antioch. We in the Antioch church practise full table fellowship with fellow-Christians who are non-Jews, so Cephas goes along with this and things go swimmingly. I really thought we'd settled all those ceremonial law fetishes for good. Imagine my horror when once again the legalising mafia turn up, claiming they've been sent by James, and proceed to lecture Cephas for deserting the cause. Result: Cephas won't eat with the local church folk any longer, mumbling something about not wanting to upset the apple cart where matters at Jerusalem were concerned. The fact of the matter is that he was terrified of not having the good opinion of the circumcision brigade.

[2:13] The effect was catastrophic. Separate tables were set up for Jews and Gentiles. Everybody had to decide where they were going to eat, so of course the Jews sat with the Jews – and this included Barnabas of all people. I couldn't believe he really subscribed to that stuff, given the stand he'd previously taken with me about Gentiles coming in as full members of the kingdom of God. It was almost as if he and all the others were taking part in some artificial playacting, as you might if you'd had an unannounced inspection from Head Office, and you went along with it knowing everything would revert to normal as soon as they were gone. But this was for real. The old underlying attitudes were surfacing once again. Everything we had been working so hard for was going up in smoke. Huge crisis!

**2:14-16** <sup>14</sup> *When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'* <sup>15</sup> *We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles* <sup>16</sup> *know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our*

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<sup>1</sup> Since the original Greek text doesn't have inverted commas, it is not clear whether verses 15-21 are part of Paul's outburst to Cephas, or whether they are his explanation of the issue to his Galatian readers. NIV keeps the inverted commas through to v21; NRSV and ESV end them after v14, which is the line we adopt here. Moisés Silva calls 15-21 'the arena where some of the most fundamental questions of Pauline theology have to be fought.'

*faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.*

### **What the law is there for**

[2:14] It was like watching a group of friends veering off the marked path and heading towards the cliff edge. I had to do something to warn them. Instead of walking in the clear daylight of the gospel of Christ, they were stumbling around in a complete fog. So I chose a moment when everybody had sat down for the meal, then I launched into Peter, making sure everyone could hear me. 'Look,' I said, 'you have just been eating with Gentiles and showing quite clearly that whoever we are, Jews or Gentiles, we're all in the same boat. And that's great! It's gospel truth put into practice! But now you're going back on all that and insisting that Gentiles act like Jews and observe all the rules from which the gospel has liberated them. How can you possibly justify this U-turn?'

[2:15] I forget exactly how I went on, but the point I was making was this. I yield to no-one in my pride and sense of privilege in being born a Jew. I thank God every day that I didn't come from a background of moral confusion and spiritual ignorance like the large majority of humankind. [2:16] But my eyes had to be opened – literally – to the key truth which I and every fellow-Jew should have known all along, that if you want to be found acceptable in God's sight, fulfilling every detail of the moral and ceremonial law isn't the way you are going to do it. No human being on earth can live permanently on the mountain-top of perfect obedience to the will of God. There has got to be another way, and we now know what that is – it's through faith in Jesus Christ. So, my dear friends and all you rabbinical experts who are sitting in judgment on us, that's why some of us here (including Cephas and Barnabas) have burnt our Judaistic boats and put all our hope for time and eternity in Jesus, God's own Son, Jewish Messiah!

The law wasn't ever meant to offer a way to win God's favour or get us a ticket into his presence. As soon as we take the path of the law to get our name cleared, we in effect ask God to judge us on our performance. And the God who is love, and who asks simply that we should respond in love, why, he sees straight through us! Our best efforts leave us begging for mercy. This is shown unambiguously in that well-known penitential Psalm I love to quote, 'Please, Lord, save me from having to come before your judgment throne! There isn't a single person on earth whose life is flawless in your sight.' I know now what I should have known all along, that the law is there to show us the right path precisely because we wander off it so often.

**2:17-18** <sup>17</sup> 'But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! <sup>18</sup> If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a law-breaker.

### **Contravening God's purpose**

[2:17] 'Aha!' you will be told, 'here you are, well-brought-up Jews, associating with Gentile outsiders and moving the goalposts of the law by accommodating to those people's godless ways. Doesn't that make your Christ himself hopelessly contaminated? Why, instead of dealing with sin as you claim he does, he is really aiding and abetting its cause!' These critics are twisting the glorious gospel into something tainted and evil, just like the grumblemongers the Lord Jesus himself had to deal with. When he ate with crooks and prostitutes, and told all those stories about being lost and found, he wasn't compromising with sin, he was going alongside them in order to rescue them! How could I possibly be teaching that Christ leads us into sin, when he died and came back to life to save us from it?

[2:18] Think of it like this. We, all of us, Jews and Gentiles together, are reconstructing God's house of holiness, his dwelling-place on earth. We have cleared away the previous building, the temple built out of the law, because it kept collapsing despite our best efforts. Now we are building (or being built as) a living temple for God through the Spirit. But just suppose we creep back and start piling up the old rubble all over again, trying to revive the old discredited edifice – won't the architect go ballistic? We are directly contravening his purpose.

The real sin isn't a failure to live up to God's law – by that criterion we would all be total losers. The real sin is the unbelief and pride which rejects God's design for salvation and replaces it with our own; which says in effect, 'All this Jesus Messiah stuff is a waste of time; I'm going back to my old religious traditions based on Moses' law.'

**2:19-21** <sup>19</sup> 'For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!'

### **The power of the cross**

[2:19] Look – I used to think like that. My whole life was based on zealous performance of God's will as found in scripture. God and I were getting along famously – until I realised that instead of being a shining example of love (the whole point of the ancient code) I was actually murdering people. I thought I was doing God's will and I was really doing the opposite. Do you see? The written code which I thought was bringing me life was slowly and surely killing me as well as everyone else. I had to think the unthinkable, which was to admit that I was wrong. This was the only way I could even begin to do God's will and live for him.

When Jesus died on that cross, I died with him. Sin executed me as surely as it executed him.

[2:20] Then and only then I came alive again – but it wasn't the old me any longer. It was a new person, called Christ-in-me. That's who I am now. Yes, I've got to cope with all the business of living as a human being, with its duties and pleasures and hardships and temptations, but I don't take orders from the old Saul any longer – I take orders from the Son of God whom I trust with every fibre of my being. Why? Because he loved me enough to give up his own life so that I should live.

[2:21] So I have a choice. I can serve either the God of law, who demands sinless perfection, or the God of grace, who deals with sin by forgiving it in the person of his Son. If I serve the God of law, grace becomes irrelevant, because I think I can do it all by myself, thank you very much. If I serve the God of grace, I look to the power of the cross to do what I can't possibly do. Otherwise I make a nonsense of everything Christ went through for me.

You can guess which God I've chosen to serve.

**3:1-2** <sup>1</sup> You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup> I would like to learn just one thing from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?

### **It made sense to you**

[3:1] That's why I'm so surprised, shocked, even. When I and my colleagues journeyed through your region not so many months ago, everywhere we went we met sensible, intelligent, rational people. Now you all appear to have become mindless imbeciles. I can only conclude that some master hypnotist has been in your midst, exercising his strange arts of fascination and hopelessly befuddling your wits. Look into my eyes. Was I hypnotising you when I spoke so

graphically of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on that Roman cross? Was I exercising some fatal influence by my spellbinding oratory? I hope you realise I have consistently abjured the use of philosophical jargon and other techniques taught by human wisdom. I – just – talked – about – Jesus – dying – for – you.

[3:2] And you believed me. You stood there and listened, and it made sense to you. And then what happened? I invited you to receive the Holy Spirit. And you did. Don't you remember? This has been the classic pattern ever since the day of Pentecost, in fact since the beginning of the Lord's ministry. 'Repent and believe the good news, and you will receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.' Nothing about keeping the commandments, or attending worship more often, or saying your prayers more faithfully, or trying to be nice to everybody, or going through a painful initiation ceremony. (The law has its God-given function, as I shall explain later, but as far as getting right with God is concerned, it has become irrelevant.) Didn't I tell you then as plainly as I'm telling you now: for the sinner, Moses is bad news, but Christ is good news?

**3:3-5** <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Have you experienced so much in vain – if it really was in vain? <sup>5</sup> So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

### **The living touch of God**

[3:3] This may have blown your minds, but it didn't addle your brains. In fact it made you think more clearly than you'd ever thought before. So why are you now behaving like complete lunatics? You're like swimmers who have dived confidently and joyfully into the living stream of the Spirit, only to clamber out again and totter over to the stagnant pond of 'the way we always used to worship'. Is that where you want to end up?

[3:4] I know you went through plenty of opposition, not only from your worldly acquaintances (you'd expect that) but also from your Jewish friends and neighbours; but you knew it was worth all the derision and name-calling, the social ostracism, even the physical scars you acquired for the sake of Christ. Is all that going to count for nothing? You were so brave – I can't believe you've turned into such cowards overnight! [3:5] Then again, you experienced the living and personal touch of God himself, the God who (as he always does and always will) set you dancing by his Spirit and answered your prayers so miraculously, equipping you for the new life of his kingdom. It was Christ himself moving among you, opening blind eyes, healing the lame, setting prisoners free; it was Galilee all over again, happening in your streets and homes. Now tell me this: was all this as a result of some kind of 'back to Sinai' campaign? Or was it because you heard Christ's call to follow him, and you did just that?

**3:6-9** <sup>6</sup> So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' <sup>7</sup> Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' <sup>9</sup> So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

### **Abraham heard the gospel**

[3:6] Let's look at that well-known passage in Genesis where Abraham in bitterness of soul goes to God and says, 'You've promised blessing to my descendants, but you haven't taken the elementary first step of giving me a son and heir.' And God takes him outside the tent and says, 'See all those stars? Ever tried to count them? That's your offspring.' So does Abraham think, 'Another cruel jest from the Great Cosmic Sadist?' No, he tells God: 'If you said that, you'll stick

by it.' And up in the heavenly record office an angel takes the book of Abraham's life, and engraves one word on the front cover: 'Perfect.'

[3:7] These guys are telling you, 'You need to be proper children of Abraham if you are to find salvation.' Well, who are the true children of Abraham? The people who trust God as he did. You say it's impossible, it couldn't be that simple. Non-Jews can't become Jews just by an act of faith. But they can! [3:8] This Genesis story isn't some kind of fairy tale – it's given to us by a divine Author who foresaw that one day far in the future complete outsiders from all over the world would come flocking into the kingdom of God and sit down at the family meal with Abraham and everyone else. What right do they have to be there? Simply because, like Abraham, they believed God's word and staked their lives on his promise.

[3:9] That story about God's promise to Abraham (that the blessing wasn't just for him or the Jews but for a whole planetful of people to come) is a kind of trailer for the gospel. It's telling us all these thousands of years later that the offer of eternal life didn't stop at one man of faith, it's a snowball travelling on and growing bigger with every subsequent believer to the end of time. Yes, Abraham heard the gospel just as you've heard it! So why, why, why are you allowing these legalists to airbrush faith in Jesus Christ out of the picture?

**3:10-12** <sup>10</sup> For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.' <sup>11</sup> Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because 'the righteous will live by faith.' <sup>12</sup> The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, 'The person who does these things will live by them.'

### **Failing the law test**

[3:10] 'But what's so wrong with telling people that they can believe in Christ but they've still got to keep the law of Moses?' This is precisely the point at issue. Once you make acceptance with God conditional upon obedience to the law, you change the whole atmosphere. You find that instead of enjoying the exuberant joy of the kingdom feast, you're eating it with the sword of Damocles suspended by a single hair above your head. Let me turn you to that key Pentateuchal passage, where Moses warns the Israelites of their solemn responsibility to choose between God's 'blessing' and his 'curse'. He ends his list of 'curses' with this one: 'Let condemnation rest upon anyone who does not continue faithfully to perform all the words written in this book of the law.' This isn't good news, it's exactly the opposite!

[3:11] You may glance casually down the list of examples and think, 'I can keep all these, in fact my conscience is completely clear – so what's the big deal?' I used to think that way. Then I came across another text that showed me the true situation we are all in before God. I had always read it like this: 'The righteous person (i.e. the one who obeys the law) shall live by trusting me (i.e. God).' That makes faith merely a continuation of obedience. I was complacent enough to think that I was that righteous, obedient person, so all I needed to do was to carry on in that faith. Then the moment of truth came, when I realised that I wasn't keeping at least one of the Ten Commandments and probably a lot of the others as well. I was brought face to face with the curse! So, chastened and convicted Pharisee that I now was, I read that same text with new eyes: 'The person who is righteous by faith in me will live.'

[3:12] 'Well,' you are probably saying, 'I know that text from Habakkuk too, and it doesn't mean what you think it does. It means that when the righteous person's under pressure, they shouldn't abandon their faith in what they've always been taught, but persevere in keeping the law and staying righteous.' All very well – but what if you haven't kept the law and indeed find you can't however hard you try? Go back to Moses and see him talking about the way Israel

should be completely different from the nations of Egypt and Canaan. 'You are not to conform to their cultural patterns– you must shape your lives under my Lordship, because you belong to me. How? By keeping your feet firmly on the high road of holiness, obeying all my requirements, doing my will in its entirety. Those who stick to my rules will find the way to life.' But what if they don't? What if they can't? As indeed their whole history shows that they haven't, and for that matter these legal experts of yours haven't either.

Law and faith are diametrically opposed. Law says, stay on the high road and you'll get through. Faith cries, I'm down in the ditch and only God can get me out. Acceptance with God isn't according to how well you've performed in the law examination – it's whether you've trusted him to save you, because you've comprehensively failed to reach the passmark.

**3:13-14** <sup>13</sup> *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.'* <sup>14</sup> *He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

### **The curse on a crucified man**

[3:13] If you have ever visited a slave-market, you will vividly remember those wretched creatures with placards round their necks, 'For sale to the highest bidder.' They've lost their freedom and they are doomed to belong to some cruel master or mistress until they die. Well, you and I are like those slaves. We've failed to keep the holy law of God and we've been sold to the cruellest of all masters, which is sin. The placard hangs from our necks like some dreadful sentence of condemnation – the 'curse' I was talking about that falls upon anyone who breaks God's law, the doom that ends in death.

But something has happened to change the whole situation. Christ has bought us our freedom! How? By giving his life on the hill outside Jerusalem. He who was the only human being ever to keep the law of God in its entirety stepped up to the place of exchange, took the placards off our necks and hung them around his own. He took the full force of the deadly curse upon himself. He sold himself voluntarily into the dominion of sin so that we should gain our release.

You think I'm imagining all this? There it is as plain as anything, in the law of Moses: 'If someone commits a crime punishable by death, and is hung on a tree, you've got to take his body down by sunset, otherwise the land itself will be defiled – because a person who is hung on a tree is under the condemnation of God.' There it is – the curse on a crucified man! And he took it in our place.

[3:14] All this has really happened. If anyone says 'Let's go back to Moses,' take them back to this text. And if anyone says, 'Back to Abraham,' point them to the promise that says 'Every nation in the world is going to find blessing through your descendant' (I'll explain in a moment why it's 'descendant' and not 'descendants'.) Who is that descendant? The Messiah who is Jesus. Who are those nations? Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, Africans, Scythians, Galatians, and many more you've never heard of. Ever since the day of Pentecost the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, promised so long ago, has been available to anyone who asks for him, no matter who they are or aren't, no matter what they've done or not done. The curse of failure and rejection has become the blessing of acceptance and enabling. Christ became a loser so that we should be winners.

You can't put the clock back. History changed for ever in those fifty days in Jerusalem. First Calvary and the empty tomb, then Pentecost. It's not Moses and law-servitude any longer; it's Christ and faith-freedom.

**3:15-18** <sup>15</sup> Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. <sup>16</sup> The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say 'and to seeds', meaning many people, but 'and to your seed', meaning one person, who is Christ. <sup>17</sup> What I mean is this: the law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. <sup>18</sup> For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

### **Signed and sealed**

[3:15] Look – I'm not attacking you, because you are my brothers and sisters in Christ – please don't get me wrong on this. It's your false teachers I'm out to nail. If they insist on putting the clock back, let me ask them this: have they put it back far enough? Let's talk about covenants. A covenant is a kind of glorified will; everyone knows on the purely human level that once you've ratified a will, once it's been signed and sealed by all parties involved, it's sacrosanct. No-one is allowed to tamper with it, or cross things out here or add them there. Now apply this to God's covenant with Abraham. (You may remember me making a similar point in my sermon at Pisidian Antioch.) God solemnly promised him that his true-born offspring would inherit the land.

[3:16] If you look at the precise wording of this promise, the word for 'offspring', which ultimately signifies a multitude of nations, is actually singular ('descendant' rather than 'descendants'). This isn't just a footnote for linguistic geeks. What we have here is a Messianic promise, because the Father is going to give the Son the nations of the earth for his possession. Scripture (and God) has one key Person continually in mind. Your brilliant teachers seem to have forgotten all about the One who is to come, the true heir of the promises, in whom we too inherit all the promises given to Abraham. Now we can return to the point about covenants.

[3:17] These teachers of yours make an apparently weighty objection, that Moses comes after Abraham so God obviously meant the second covenant to be an updated version of the first. This is like saying 'The original will is still in force, but we've slipped in a few dozen extra clauses which don't change it in the slightest.' Moses comes many centuries (traditionally 430 years) after Abraham, which is odd if the Abrahamic covenant is incomplete and needs revising. As far as God was concerned, the covenant with Abraham is signed, sealed and delivered, and no-one is ever going to change that.

[3:18] The fact is, Abraham and Moses are entrusted with different aspects of God's salvation scheme and it is important not to get them muddled. Abraham receives the inheritance as a promise, to be received by faith. He doesn't receive it because he's led a perfectly law-abiding life. If you can't have righteousness until you've completed all the tick-boxes of the law code, faith goes out of the window. The whole point of Abraham's story is that God isn't saying, 'Wait until your life has shown that you're worthy of my inheritance,' he's saying, 'I have already given you the inheritance because you've believed my promise.' God's acceptance is a completely free gift which has nothing to do with the performance of the law.

**3:19-20** <sup>19</sup> Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. <sup>20</sup> A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

### **The law tells us that sin kills**

[3:19] 'So, Paul, could you please explain why Moses gives us this apparently pointless Sinai law code?' You're not going to like the answer to this. The strategic purpose of Moses' law is not to give you life, it's to tell you you're dead. Sin kills; but we persist in thinking that if we try just a little harder, we can come alive again through our own religious efforts. God's plan is that Christ alone can give us life. All the promises of inheriting the good life are given through Christ, 'the offspring'. Until he comes, there is nothing you can do except hang on in faith. Our brother Stephen told me this – the last words of his incredible sermon were, 'God sent you his law by the hands of angels and you haven't kept it', which cut my heart to ribbons and made me determined to shut him up for good. But you can't shut God's word up so easily, and it brought me to Christ.

While we're on this, there's another curious piece of teaching going the rounds which I want to expose for the sham it is. The gist is that the law at Sinai was given by means of angelic messengers, who acted as mediators or go-betweens to bring God's laws to humans. Therefore if you want to get to God, you have to keep the law and the angels will make sure you find God. You have to be very self-disciplined, mind you, and observe all kinds of do's and don'ts, because the angels are very strict – but we (your spiritual gurus) will tell you what's allowed and what isn't. This is a blatant distortion of the real truth, which actually proves the opposite. [3:20] OK, let's suppose Moses got his laws, not direct from God, but through angelic intermediaries. That shows the difference between law and faith. Faith deals direct with God. Faith doesn't need angels to check every detail of our lives to make sure we're kosher. The whole principle of faith is that God is the only God around, and his promises come direct from him, so if you believe his promises you are dealing directly with him and don't need to go through anyone else. God is his own mediator (this is the glory of the Incarnation). That's how the whole world, non-Jews as well as Jews, can find the truth and be saved.

**3:21-22** <sup>21</sup> *Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.* <sup>22</sup> *But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.*

### **Abraham good, Moses bad?**

[3:21] 'Ah! So, Paul, what you're telling us is that the promises of God to Abraham, and the law given by Moses all those years later, are totally opposed to each other. Abraham good, Moses bad – is that it?' Absolutely no way. The law of Moses is God's good and holy law. It is his word. How can God's word in his law contradict God's word in his promises? It's just that we misinterpret what it's there for. We think, 'The law of Moses is God's medicine, so the more we take of it, and the more faithfully we take it, the healthier we will be.' The only problem is, you don't give medicine to lifeless corpses. You bury them.

[3:22] We are born dead. As sin killed Adam, so it has killed every subsequent member of our race. We don't need medicine, we need resurrection, if we're going to live in God's sight. The law of God, his holy pattern for our lives, can't restore life to a corpse, it can only hammer the nails into the lid of the coffin. Then and only then will the dead person (I'm talking in spiritual terms, of course) realise their dire situation and call out from the depths of the grave for a Saviour. Now the miracle can take place. A new law takes over. The dead person stops trusting in their own ability to resurrect themselves, and clings simply and solely to the promise of life given for free in Jesus Christ. And because that promise is utterly sure and reliable, it delivers every time. Life happens!

**3:23-25** <sup>23</sup> Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

### **Release!**

[3:23] Let's change the analogy slightly. We're all like prisoners in maximum security cells. (I'm deliberately painting the picture in the darkest possible hues so that the solution appears in the brightest colours.) The guardians of the law patrol the corridors and watch our every move – nothing escapes their vigilance and the slightest transgression gets due punishment. Then one day, in God's good time, Faith visits the prison (or may have been there all the time, waiting for the right moment) and flings all the cell doors wide open. It's like the revelation of a new world – we can walk out free whenever we like!

[3:24-25] Or we're like children growing up under the instruction of a strict tutor. Adolescence seems to go on for ever, but freedom (the true freedom that is in Christ) lies at the end of it. The whole point of the training in the law is that we should stop trusting ourselves for salvation and look to Christ alone for our deliverance and goodness. Then we come of age: we're released from the tutor's supervision, to travel the road of the Spirit in the company of faith.

**3:26-29** <sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

### **New clothes**

[3:26] So don't let anyone tell you that you're not a proper son or daughter of God, if you simply put your trust in Jesus as Lord. There is no other qualification! Faith in Christ is the name of the game, as far as God is concerned. [3:27] Look at it like this. When you get up in the morning, what are the first things you do? You get washed and dressed. And the clothes you put on reflect the person you are going to be today. The same is true of anyone who believes and is baptised. You get washed – your sins are cleansed away and you're a forgiven person. And as part of the same operation, you dress yourself in Christ, you put on the shining new clothes that befit the life you have now begun to lead.

[3:28] Notice what's happened to the old clothes you used to wear. In the world's societies there are different forms of dress appropriate to the group you belong to. You would put on the outfit that marked you out as being either a Jew or a Gentile, either a slave or a free citizen, either male or female. I'm not saying that's wrong, or that Christians should all adopt some kind of revolutionary uniform that marks them out instantly as a different class of people. The uniform, the revolution, is internal. What unites all Christian believers everywhere is the new relationship they have with the Lord Jesus. This means we don't ask each other what kind of Christian we are or what group we belong to, nor do we look down on others as having an inferior status. We all belong to God's family because we are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ by faith.

[3:29] I hope that's both reassuring and humbling. It's a privilege we haven't deserved in the slightest. And I'll tell you one more thing – belonging to Christ puts you on an equal footing with every descendant of Abraham there's ever been. You are going to inherit all the blessings promised to that one man all those years ago. At the risk of repeating myself, I'll say it again: you don't earn family membership with Abraham by chalking up impressive religious achievements, you receive it as a pure gift willed to you by God himself.

**4:1-5** <sup>1</sup> What I am saying is that as long as an heir is under age, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. <sup>2</sup> The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. <sup>3</sup> So also, when we were under age, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

### **Family analogy**

[4:1-2] Let's continue with this family analogy. Here is a royal household, in which there is a young boy who is destined to become crown prince and then king. He is going to inherit the whole kingdom – yet as long as he is under age, his status is little better than that of the most menial servant in his establishment. (I'm not demeaning the role of the servant; in fact the Lord of the universe himself took precisely this role.) The young lad has to be subject to guardians and palace officials who regulate every moment of his life. The moment he is anticipating is the glorious day when his father, who has always known exactly the right time, declares his purpose complete and celebrates the full status of the boy as his son and heir.

[4:3] Remember when you were in primary school, just learning to read and write? You had to copy the letters of the alphabet and write them exactly in the lines drawn for you by the teacher. You did elementary sums by chanting '1 and 1 makes 2,' and so on. Your thinking was bounded by the framework within which you were being brought up. I'm not saying this was wrong, just trying to show you how (in the case of us Jews) our religious and moral thinking was exactly prescribed for us by the multitude of 'do's and don't's' of the Mosaic code, or (for those brought up in pagan ways of thinking) by the traditional ways your ancestors always did things.

### **Waiting for the right moment**

Compared to the freedom you now have in Christ, you were like slaves shuffling along in a chain gang, manacled hand and foot. Step out of line for an instant and you'd be gruffly ordered back or chastised for your insubordination. This is the only way the world knows how to cope with rebellious human nature: make yet more rules and coerce people into behaving as you want them to (but give them enough carrots to make them think they're having a good time). Of course this has its valuable side, in training the young to become good obedient citizens, and its finest and loftiest expression was the law of Moses which God was using as 'elementary school' to train a whole nation in his ways. But at its worst it was anarchy just about held in check by a thin veneer of civilisation (and not always held in check either).

[4:4] This was never intended to be the final answer, just as childhood, important as it is in itself, is designed to lead up to adulthood. God was waiting for the right moment when the human race would graduate into full maturity and responsibility – when he would send his own Son to be born as a completely ordinary human being, to be trained up through the primary and secondary schooling of traditional family upbringing and Pentateuchal law-code. [4:5] How was he going to set all these children, these muddle-headed and resistant offspring of Adam and Eve, free from their bondage to slavery? Why, he was going to stand in there for them. He was going to fulfil the law in their place and take upon himself the curse and condemnation of their disobedience, and at one stroke turn them into full sons and daughters of his own Father. If it meant having to endure the worst they could do to him and lay down his life as a final sacrifice on their behalf, he was prepared to pay that price. Then and only then could we join him in the freedom of God's family.

**4:6-7** <sup>6</sup> Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

### **God's children from the inside**

[4:6] I can't put it any clearer than this. Through the work of Christ, each one of you has become a true-born son or daughter of God. The moment this happened – and I'm not saying we necessarily know from our side of things exactly when this was, but God knows from his side – the precise moment of divine 'adoption' was when God sent the Spirit of his Son Jesus into you to become Lord of your life. You remember that Jesus prayed to God as his 'Abba', his Father. He would sometimes say it at the top of his voice, not because he thought his Father was deaf, but because the emotion he was feeling (maybe desperation, or relief, or just heartfelt love) gave birth to powerful physical expression. Well, that very same Spirit now lives within you and communicates energetically with the Father in prayer, adoration, longing, contrition, whatever.

[4:7] Do you see how different this is from the way we used to try to fulfil the law of Moses (or, if you're not a Jew, the requirements of basic human decency)? We used to take our orders from the outside, as if from some demanding taskmaster against which we instinctively rebelled. We were doubly slaves – to the external constraints of religion and morality, and to the internal instincts of our godless human nature. But now everything's changed: we're God's children from the inside! It's rather like a dumb person who hadn't previously been able to communicate with his or her parents suddenly breaking out with a glorious, full-throated 'Mummy! Daddy!' I'm sure you know what I'm talking about.

Let's just think about this 'inheritance' promise. Before you came to know Christ, the legacy you had from the past was a human nature that couldn't obey or even tolerate the demands of God; and a corresponding legacy was coming to you in the future of God's judgment and final rejection. Now all that's been torn up, and a new inheritance document is in force: you rightfully enter into Christ's own past (as Son of God from eternity, with a life-record devoid of any taint of sin), and Christ's glorious future of full communion and triumphant kingship. Is this purely human arrogance, claiming things we should never aspire to? Or is it the Spirit within us assuring and reassuring us – 'You really do belong to me and nothing can ever change that'?

**4:8-10** <sup>8</sup> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? <sup>10</sup> You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup> I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

### **Going back to kindergarten**

[4:8] Let me return to the parallel I was drawing with adults wanting to go back to kindergarten. I expect you remember those long-ago days when you stood in awe of your first teachers and were scared of stepping out of line or arousing their often irrational bursts of temper. They were so big and godlike! You were so desperately eager to be in their good books and earn top marks. Your relationship with them wasn't on the level of friendship, it was more like the relationship of a newly-hired employee with their boss, or a young puppy with its human owner. Now you've grown up you can see them for the little tin gods, the flawed characters they really were.

[4:9-10] If you apply this to the time before and after you came to faith in Christ, you must surely see how your relationship with God used to be very different. You hardly knew him; he may have been a rather distant Father-figure perhaps, but certainly not an intimate friend. Your dealings with him were characterised by slavish obedience and downright superstition. How things have changed! You now know him as the God of Jesus, the Servant-King who has brought you help and wholeness, and who knows you better than you know yourself, because he loves you and has welcomed you into his kingdom. He wants to be with you even more than you want to be with him.

So why on earth do you want to go back to that infantile kindergarten relationship again? Your teachers weren't really concerned about you as a person, they never understood your moods and inner longings, all they wanted was to keep you in your place so that they could strut their stuff and keep in their own boss's good books. They didn't have any real power or authority – it was all a rather pathetic show. If you didn't turn up on time, or wore the wrong clothes for the occasion, or acted 'out of your year', they came down on you like a ton of bricks. You can laugh – but that's exactly what you are trying to return to! All that paraphernalia of festival days and phases of the moon and seasons of self-denial and 'the year of this or that' – why, you've left all that behind. You've graduated from school. You're responsible adults.

[4:11] I feel like a personal tutor in music or art who has spent long hours with each of my pupils, laying myself out for them, initiating them into a kinds of wonderful secrets, shaping them into mature and creative artistes, only to find that they've get fed up with all that and have gone back to being novices again. Has it all been a waste of time, the miles I've travelled to bring you the gospel of Christ, the sleepless nights I've experienced, the physical hardships and downright exhaustion? Tell me – was it all pointless?

**4:12-15** <sup>12</sup> *I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong.* <sup>13</sup> *As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you,* <sup>14</sup> *and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.* <sup>15</sup> *Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.*

### **Ecstatic welcome**

[4:12-14] Please try to see my point of view. I've always tried to see yours. We've had such a brilliant relationship. It wasn't you who blackened my reputation and beat me up and tried to get rid of me once for all. Remember that first time when I arrived ill and exhausted and looking a terrible sight – not a very beautiful advertisement for the gospel of Christ – but you listened all the same. You could have treated me as a harmless lunatic, or hissed me off the stage, but not a bit of it. I might have been the angel Gabriel or even Jesus Christ himself, so rapt and awestruck you were when I spoke. It was nothing to do with me – it must have been the Holy Spirit's power coming on us all. [4:15] Don't you remember what an ecstatic welcome you gave me and how my message seemed to you the best news in the whole world? Is all that just water under the bridge? Why, you had become such Paul junkies that I reckon if I'd asked you whether someone would be willing to exchange their eyesight for mine, you'd all have instantly gouged your eyes out of their sockets and passed them over to me. No, of course I'm just joking. But what's happened to change all that?

**4:16-20** <sup>16</sup> *Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?* <sup>17</sup> *Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them.* <sup>18</sup> *It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you.* <sup>19</sup> *My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,* <sup>20</sup> *how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!*

### **Disappointed lover**

[4:16] Well, of course, these guys are telling you that it was all just a transient emotional experience, and worse still, that I am still the same evil Saul who hates Christians and wants to get them into his power. Look – the only power I have is the truth. I tell it how it is. If that offends you or turns you off, so be it. If I'm unpopular because I tell you you're under the power of sin and you need the Lord Jesus Christ, that's no big deal. But to say that I'm trying to exploit you and haven't got your best interests at heart – I'm speechless! [4:17] It's they who are cosyng up to you and pretending to care for your souls, when what they're really doing is to stuff you back in prison and exclude you from all the blessings of the gospel. They are passionate to make you their devoted converts and disciples. [4:18] Now I'm not saying that's wrong in itself, when the cause you're passionate about is a good one – I'm passionate about Jesus being the true way to God and this comes out every time I get on my feet and talk about it. But my business is not to generate a passing emotional fervour which lasts as long as I'm there and then as soon as my back's turned you revert to your old ways. I preach for permanent transformation.

[4:19] I know men can't get pregnant, but I really feel as if I was going through the pains of childbirth all over again with you. Yes, bringing you through into the kingdom was a labour in itself, but it's just as painful getting you to the point where you're taking shape as mature disciples of Christ, able to stand on your own feet and cope with false doctrine and clever arguments; in short, where the character and wisdom of Jesus himself is being reproduced in you. [4:20] My dear, dear children, I so wish I could be magicked into your presence this very moment and speak to you ever so gently and lovingly. I'm sorry if this letter seems like the rantings of an angry and disappointed lover, but that's what I am. I really don't know what's gone wrong with you. I'm at my wits' end to know how to make you see sense.

**4:21-23** <sup>21</sup> *Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?* <sup>22</sup> *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.* <sup>23</sup> *His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.*

### **Going back to Genesis: Abraham's children**

[4:21] As far as I can work it out from what I'm being told, you folks in Galatia are having your faith assailed simultaneously from two sides – by the 'law' river police and the 'liberty' pleasure cruisers. (These are two classic distortions of the gospel that we're coming up against in other churches as well.) I'm going to tackle the 'law' question first. Please listen carefully.

OK, so there is a fair-sized group of you who feel that they ought to go back to the Pentateuch and take their orders from Moses. I am entirely happy with that, as long as you realise what Moses (by which I mean God's holy word) is actually teaching. [4:22-23] Turn to the book of Genesis again. Abraham's wife Sarah has come to the conclusion that it is God's will for her not to have any children; she is after all in her late seventies, so give her credit for having kept on hoping for so long. So how is Abraham going to have offspring like the stars of the sky for multitude? Well, as you know the patriarchal family system allowed for concubines, slave

women who might bear children to the master of the household. This had its problems, as we shall see in a moment, but at least it meant that if the wife was infertile the family line could continue by other means.

So Abraham teams up with Sarah's personal servant Hagar and the result is Ishmael. I won't go into the tensions this generates, but a few years later the famous miracle happens and Sarah is safely delivered of Isaac. So now there are two male heirs for Abraham, one born from a slave-woman and the other from his free-born wife. Ishmael is the result of human planning and effort; Isaac is the result of God's promise and divine blessing.

**4:24-25** <sup>24</sup> *These things are being taken figuratively: the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: this is Hagar.* <sup>25</sup> *Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.*

### **Sinai and Jerusalem**

[4:24] Now as you know, scripture can contain meanings that relate to contexts other than the immediate one. A simple story on one level (though this is anything but a simple story!) can be an allegory, or alternative presentation, of a far deeper spiritual truth. We're not just dealing with an obscure family tiff which might merit a small paragraph in the tabloids. We're watching God sketching out his blueprint for the human race. Let me explain.

I'm sure you've been taught about the Old and New covenants. Covenants aren't only a carefully drawn up form of words, they are personal promises made by both sides which determine how a relationship is going to continue. When Moses went up Mount Sinai, he brought down a comprehensive set of requirements for his people, explaining how they were to love God as their primary allegiance, and to love each other rather than follow their own selfish whims. Let's call this the duty to love. Now Hagar's love for her mistress Sarah is like that. It's a dutiful, obedient love; but it's essentially a slavish kind of love, because if she is disobedient, she gets thrown out.

[4:25] We'll come to the other kind of love in a moment, but I want you to understand where this analogy is heading. Sinai is a mountain on the tip of the Arabian peninsular; it has a geographical location in a particular country, and it links with Hagar in a very obvious way in that Hagar's son Ishmael becomes the father of the Arab nation. Now you would expect the logic of this to develop as follows: 'Sinai is the mountain that corresponds to slavery to the law, but Mount Sion (Jerusalem) is the mountain where we find the true freedom to worship God. So we should all be true-born Jews with Jerusalem as the centre of our faith.'

However, I've been thinking about this long and hard. If Abraham's faith is to become a world faith, it can't be confined to a single national identity or geographical location. In fact, we need to realise that the earthly Jerusalem is as much a symbol of slavery as Sinai, because its land and its people are in servitude to the law. Don't try to second-guess God. He has said all along that Jerusalem needs to be set free, and is going to be set free, by a Deliverer or Redeemer who is going to come from there and bring in a new covenant.

**4:26-28** <sup>26</sup> *But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.* <sup>27</sup> *For it is written: 'Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; break forth and cry aloud, you who were never in labour; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.'* <sup>28</sup> *Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.*

## Children of God's grace

[4:26] Yes, Jerusalem is going to be the centre of faith in God for the whole world, but this isn't any Jerusalem you can find on a map or link with a particular historical nation – it's a heavenly Jerusalem, a new Sion, the centre of the kingdom of God and his Christ, which is liberated from sin and sorrow and failure and which is the true mother-city of us all, whether Jews or Gentiles.

[4:27] This is the whole point of all those wonderful passages in Isaiah, which contrast the present broken, humiliated, barren Jerusalem with the city she is going to be – restored, glorious and wonderfully fertile. Take a look at the whole section that starts just after the shameful death of the Servant-Redeemer. 'There's no cause for weeping here, rather singing and rejoicing! You thought God had closed up your womb for ever and had condemned you to perpetual barrenness, yet now you can shout for joy at the top of your voice. You're going to bring forth more children than all those families you used to envy for their normality, husband and wife happily producing offspring while you stayed lonely and rejected and childless.'

[4:28] This is the other covenant I was talking about, the promise of a new relationship with God entirely. No longer a dutiful love, but one given freely and unreservedly out of deep gratitude for his promise. Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah out of God's grace; he came from nowhere, the child of God's word, born from above. That's exactly what you are. Children of faith in God's promise.

**4:29-31** <sup>29</sup> *At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.* <sup>30</sup> *But what does Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.'* <sup>31</sup> *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.*

## Earth-born and heaven-born

[4:29] 'So why do we get such stick from people who claim to be the true heirs of God's promises?' Well, this is always going to happen. The earth-born will regularly make trouble for the heaven-born. Abraham's own family wasn't exactly a bed of roses. Ishmael is already a teenager when Isaac is born, so he thinks, 'What's all this fuss about? I'm the one who's going to get the inheritance!' and he openly mocks this toddler whose parents are in the Genesis book of records for being the oldest couple ever to have children (he hadn't read chapter five) and are obviously going senile. [4:30] Sarah overhears this going on and temporarily loses her sense of humour. She goes to Abraham and says, 'You've got to get rid of them! I'm not having this slave-girl and her upstart son living under our roof for a day longer. There is no way Ishmael is going to share the inheritance with Isaac.' And Abraham retorts, 'It was you who suggested I should get Hagar pregnant!' and the thing becomes a real source of tension between them, until God steps in as usual and calms them all down. Yes, he tells Abraham, you are to listen to Sarah. They've got to go. The family of nations I told you about is coming through Isaac, the child of promise. Theology is more important than biology. I'll look after Hagar and her lad because they've got a great future – I haven't forgotten they're your descendants too.

[4:31] This is such a key story. It underlines the difference between the slave-covenant and the free, the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly. The true inheritors are not the flesh-born but the Spirit-born. That's us, all these hundreds of years later. Jews, Gentiles, whoever we are – it's not natural descent that counts, it's God-descent. We are Isaac people, not Ishmael people; Sarah's offspring, not Hagar's; children of the Word, not of the world. But don't be surprised if some people can't see this and go all out to make life difficult for you.

**5:1-4** *<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup>Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup>You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*

### **A deadly trap**

[5:1] I'm going to put it as clearly as I possibly can: do what these people tell you, and you walk into a deadly trap. The whole point of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection was to fling open the prison door and set us free. We aren't slaves any more, condemned to perpetual labour under the crippling demands of that harsh taskmaster, the holy law of God. I'm not saying the law's intention was to reduce us to abject servitude – quite the opposite. The law of Moses sets out the charter of freedom, it shows us the way to the promised land; but the same powerful searchlight that illuminates the high road of holiness also reveals the murkiness of our souls and the futility of religious self-effort.

Put your foot down once and for all. Tell these people you refuse to budge. You are simply not ever going to go back to the waterless pit, the hopeless captivity of ritualism and perfectionism. Oh yes, when I was Saul of Tarsus I was rooting for the old system more eagerly than anyone else. I used to come down like a ton of bricks on the slightest departure from Mosaic absolutism. I was the most pharisaic Pharisee of them all. It turned me into a bloodthirsty monster. But now I'm Paul the apostle, because I've met the Lord Jesus Christ and become his free and willing bond-slave.

[5:2] I tell you again as directly as I know how (and I'm talking particularly to you non-Jews who have embraced the Christian faith and are wondering how 'Jewish' you've got to be; at the same time this may speak to people way into the future who are confused about how churchy and religious you've got to be if you're a true follower of Christ): if you add circumcision to the simple rite of baptism, you strip baptism of all its meaning. You lose all the benefits brought you by the life, death, resurrection and Spirit of Jesus Christ.

### **Jesus has replaced the whole system**

[5:3] Can't you see? Circumcision isn't just an (admittedly self-denying) operation, it's a symbol of something far deeper. It's a commitment to keeping the whole law in its entirety. It sends you back to Temple and sacrifice, covenant and curse, ritual and self-righteousness. Jesus has replaced all that. He has dismantled the old system, rendered it null and void. [5:4] If you try to resurrect it, you effectively sign yourself off Christ and all he has done for you. If you try to earn God's favour by showing him what a good and obedient person you are, you become like a young eagle chick who, instead of snuggling down between the broad wings of its loving and infinitely patient parent and being carried upwards by a strength far greater than its own, elects to tumble off and start flying by its own puny efforts. Result? Utter disaster.

**5:5-6** *<sup>5</sup>For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

### **The hope that keeps me going**

[5:5] What is so different about us who have placed our total reliance in Christ? In one word: the Spirit. As I said earlier, I'm not myself any longer, I'm a new person, Christ-in-me. Now of course the old me is still around, and it will give me trouble till the day I die. But meanwhile I have this wonderful ally, the Holy Spirit, fighting on my side. And one day, one day, I'll be

completely free not only from the taint and fascination of sin, but from its very presence. I'll be like Christ himself. This is the hope that keeps me going, and it's driven not by external conformity to a religious system, but totally and utterly by faith.

[5:6] My power comes from Christ Jesus himself. He lives in me and I live in him. As I trust him day by day and moment by moment, his love flows through me and works itself out in everything I do and with every person I meet. How ludicrous, then, to suppose that being a circumcised Jew, or an uncircumcised Gentile for that matter, makes any difference to the way God sees me or the way I behave in daily life? He's not bothered by whether I've got a certain mark on my body (or am on the electoral roll of such-and-such a church) – only by whether his Spirit is working in me and through me.

**5:7-10** <sup>7</sup> *You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?* <sup>8</sup> *That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.* <sup>9</sup> *'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.'* <sup>10</sup> *I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty.*

### **A marathon not a sprint**

[5:7] The Christian life isn't a ten-second sprint – it's a cross-country marathon. You folk in Galatia were running an admirable race, but now someone seems to have cut in on you and deliberately slowed you down or even tripped you up. You've veered off the proper course and now you're ploughing through a swamp of lies and false teaching. [5:8] Do you really think this 'back to Moses' stuff is from God? It may be attractively and cleverly presented, but it's not the authentic voice of the gospel of Christ you've been hearing from me. That's the true calling of God, to follow his Son. Anything else is a snare and a delusion.

[5:9] Go round to your local bakers and ask them: how much yeast does it take to leaven a whole batch of loaves? Answer: not much at all. You may not be able to see it working, but there it is, steadily impregnating the entire lump of dough. That's how false teaching operates; just a little bit of 'Christ plus this or that,' and before you know it the whole church is riddled with legalistic nonsense or fanatical claptrap. [5:10] Actually I'm pretty sure you're intelligent enough to see through all this charade. The same Master whom you've invited to be Lord of your lives has been reassuring me that you're not going to be shifted out of your basic convictions. You're just going through a temporary disturbance; one day soon the fellow who's been upsetting you (I don't care whether he's a Regius Professor of Divinity or Doctor of Philosophy or whatever) is going to be unmasked for the charlatan he is. Beyond that, of course, he is going to be answerable at the judgment seat of Christ for what he's been teaching. I wouldn't like to be in his shoes.

**5:11-12** <sup>11</sup> *Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offence of the cross has been abolished.* <sup>12</sup> *As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!*

### **Strong feelings**

[5:11] Oh yes, I used to trumpet all this Pharisaical stuff about how uncircumcised Gentiles would never make it into the kingdom of God and how wearing the Jewish badge was the proudest achievement of anyone on earth – and I was lauded to the skies! Now I'm hounded out of synagogues and cities when I start preaching. How could I possibly still be spinning that legalistic line? My dear friends in Christ, worldly-minded people (be they ever so 'religious') will never endure the plain statement of the cross. At the very least, it embarrasses them; at worst, it makes them so furious that they are prepared to murder the speaker. If I had been

preaching circumcision at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, do you think they would have been so determined to get rid of me?

[5:12] These people have been causing you confusion and turmoil. I don't know who they are, this circumcision brigade, but I'm tempted to harbour a secret wish that they would finish the job properly and chop off their entire apparatus. Not very politically correct, I know, but that's how strongly I feel about the whole business!

**5:13-15** <sup>13</sup> *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* <sup>14</sup> *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'* <sup>15</sup> *If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

### **Charter of liberty**

[5:13] But as soon as you think you've cracked that one, along comes a completely different band of brothers trumpeting the 'anything goes' gospel. I have actually been accused of teaching that Christ has abolished the need to live a moral life, so Christians can swan around doing whatever they like. These people are as wrong-headed as the legalistic mafia, and I want to take time to demolish their insidious teaching too.

As I was saying earlier, God has issued his charter of liberty, a charter he's never going to annul or revoke. His call has come to each one of you personally, to walk out of the prison of failure and guilt before the demands of the law, and to breathe the free air of his favour, forgiveness and friendship. Now this has implications for the way you're going to behave to other people. Our freedom in Christ doesn't mean, couldn't possibly mean, that we can all obey the promptings of the lower nature and be as greedy, lustful, dishonest and selfish as we like. On the contrary, it means that we start loving other people with the kind of love that doesn't try to dominate or manipulate them, but which puts ourselves at their service. This is the servant-love of Jesus himself.

### **The heart of the law**

[5:14] The reality is, far from tearing up the Old Testament law, we penetrate to its very heart. As our Lord taught us time and again, loving your neighbour as much as you love yourself is the gold standard of God's requirement. The ancient scriptures are full of practical examples of how we should consider the needs of others to be equally as important as our own needs, if not more so. This applies not just to members of our own families or those who live next-door to us, but to other citizens, to women, to foreigners, to slaves, to birds and animals, even (would you believe it) to our enemies.

[5:15] It stands to reason, doesn't it? If you let the law of the jungle operate, and spend the whole time snapping at one another and biting each other's heads off, you'll all end as chewed-up bits of meat. I'm not joking – I've seen this happen in churches; I've seen fellowships disintegrate into feuding parties with warlords leading their followers into battle; I've listened to professedly devout believers shredding each other's characters in innuendo and gossip; I've known cases where two church members haven't forgiven each other for years. My friends, I plead with you: don't let any of this be true of you. Live out the love of Christ in your fellowship and in your dealings with the world outside. Surprise everybody (including yourselves!) with the extent to which you disregard your own preferences and plans in favour of the pressing needs of others.

**5:16-18** <sup>16</sup> So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

### **How to dethrone the 'I' principle**

[5:16] Let me repeat the precious secret, the beating heart at the centre of the Christian faith: Jesus lives in each and all of us by his personal, ever-present Spirit. He is with us in our waking, sleeping, eating, working, playing, travelling lives. His purpose, his work is to make sure that we never ever again take orders from the ego-lord that used to dominate our thinking and to make 'I want it and I want it now' the mainspring of our existence.

There's a new psychology at work here, because we are new people. In the old psychology, before we came to be in Christ, the only things that held our basic impulses in check were external factors such as social convention and conformity, the fear of punishment, a basic common decency, and (in varying degrees) a kind of 'higher nature' or sense of conscience left over from our original creation in the image of God. But that didn't dethrone the 'I' principle, it merely meant we found more subtle ways of satisfying our 'lower nature'.

[5:17] That self-interested, self-centred character is still there with us; but it's who we used to be, not who we are now. We have a Jesus personality which has changed everything. Before we came to know him, we were on our own in the battle between our 'higher' and our 'lower' natures, and (let's face it) the lower won more often than we would care to admit. I'll go into detail on that in a moment. But now we've got a Jesus-nature who counters the self-life at every point. Don't imagine for one moment that the old self has disappeared; it's still there and certainly doesn't want to knuckle under to God's will any more than it used to. This may help explain why we still experience a tension between what we know is right and what we feel like doing. But the big difference now is that we have a Master in our very hearts who is not prepared to let us give way to the imperious pride or passion that used to rule our thinking and behaviour.

### **Taking directions from him**

[5:18] The other big difference is that we have changed our allegiance from a System to a Person. (If you haven't a clue what I'm talking about, you haven't been following the argument of this letter.) We take our directions, not from a written code or a set of rules, but from the Spirit of Jesus. I'm not saying that self-discipline isn't required any longer; it's just that the motive power for a permanent character change comes not from some manual or coursebook but from a Friend. We are different people because we love him first and foremost. We don't trust ourselves any more, we trust him. Consequently we evaluate ourselves, not by anxiously looking to law or tradition for its approval, but by leaving all that to the Lord who knows and understands and loves us perfectly.

**5:19-21** <sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

### **Forms of selfish behaviour**

[5:19] What is my evidence for this 'I' principle, do I hear you ask? I should have thought it's perfectly obvious. Every day we see around us, or hear at second hand, examples of impulsive

or deliberately selfish behaviour that stem from a human nature which is determined to run the show without God.

I'll start with sexual mores, not because they're worse than other sins, but because they're the clearest expression of a God-given, holy instinct going wrong. This happens whenever people enjoy the pleasures of married love without being married to one another, or use portrayals or descriptions of sex for their own gratification, or set up lust as their guiding principle. This is really idolatry under another name, because it deifies human beauty and makes us say 'I must have that one.'

[5:20-21] Of course, there are more sinister forms of idolatry, such as witchcraft or spiritism, where people dabble with spiritual forces they can't actually control. Or they allow themselves to be taken over by narcotic substances that promise innocent pleasure or relaxation but end up dominating their lives.

So far, the majority of us might justifiably claim that we haven't partaken in these malpractices nor have we any intention of doing so. But there's another group of behavioural traits that are much more insidious and occur frequently in 'decent' society and even, I have to say, in churches. I'm talking about personal feuds and hate-wars between individuals or groups. These may arise from personal envy or jealousy, or from a mindless party-spirit that refuses to see any good in the other side and resorts to dishonourable means of doing down their opponents. Tempers flare, barbed words are exchanged and resentments simmer. Where this happens among religious groups, it's all too common for them to resort to unbalanced theologies to justify their position. I've said quite a lot about that already!

### **Old habits die hard**

I could go on with grosser forms of behaviour such as drunken parties and 'going out to get yourself smashed', but you know the sort of thing I mean. All this stems from my making my own will or whim the ruling principle of my life, and having no time for the real things of God. I need hardly repeat, what I regularly said when I preached to you, that those who adopt these controlling lifestyles have absolutely no future as far as the kingdom of heaven is concerned. I'm not saying that they are outside the reach of the grace of God – complete no-hopers can be wonderfully and dramatically converted, as I know from personal experience – but old habits die hard, and there needs to be a deep work of the Holy Spirit if lives are to be radically changed.

**5:22a** <sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,*

### **God's rainbow people**

[5:22] Which brings me back to the positive aspect of this teaching about who we were without Christ and who we are with Christ. By ourselves we could never produce a steady harvest of goodness. With the Spirit of Jesus to help us, though, working to transform our character from within, blending his own life with ours, we can develop qualities that reflect the nature of God our Creator, in whose image we were originally made. I'll put this in the form of a wish-list for myself, otherwise it might start masquerading as yet another list of rules, when in fact it's a little snapshot album of God's rainbow people. Well, it's actually a composite portrait of Christ Jesus himself, in all his beauty and fulfilled humanity.

His love – not just rubbing along with others, but actively seeking their welfare, counting the most unlikely (and not very lovable) people my friends, willing to put myself at a disadvantage

if only their needs can be provided for. And, of course, a love for Christ himself and a steady flow of gratitude for what he has done for me and how compassionate he has been towards me.

His joyfulness – not a forced cheerfulness which pretends that everything in the garden’s lovely when it plainly isn’t, but a resilient hopefulness and good humour which makes light of my personal troubles and radiates a settled confidence in a Lord whose presence is the best thing I could want or need, and who’s got wonderful things in store for me, if his promises are to be believed. Jesus himself had this joy in his Father.

His peace – not a bland detachment from the realities of life, but a refusal to get rattled by awkward people or situations, because I know I can pass all my anxieties over to him; there’s nothing to be afraid of, because he knows what he’s doing where I’m concerned, and I can trust him to the end of the road.

Meditating on this first little group of qualities, I’ve just got to keep reminding myself that it’s not I who have to stick this fruit on my barren branches – it’s the Lord of the orchard himself, who is a true professional at this kind of thing and who is doing it for his own pleasure and glory.

**5:22b** *forbearance, kindness, goodness,*

His patience – I tend to get so irritated if people aren’t behaving exactly as I would wish, or if things aren’t working properly; yet Jesus himself was endlessly tolerant with individuals (even if he was exasperated by their unbelief or hypocrisy); he wasn’t narrow-minded or mean-spirited, but had all the time in the world for each one.

His kindness – I tend to be very particular about who I like and who I’m prepared to put myself out for, but Jesus once again was so different: he would make himself available to absolutely anyone, even if their moral or physical state was offensive to him. His readiness to forgive his enemies was a case in point. I tend to retaliate against those who make life difficult for me, but the Christ-attitude is to keep loving them and doing active good to them.

His integrity – Jesus was good through and through; he was no plaster saint, and there was an earthiness about him that compelled respect, but the one thing you couldn’t accuse him of was inconsistency or double standards. His whole life was laid out for his Father to see and for others to benefit, unlike mine which basically consists in getting away with what I can, and being principally concerned about what people think of me.

Once again, this second group of attributes makes me realise even more clearly how I need to depend upon his Spirit and not think I can achieve this on my own, if I’m to be even remotely like him. At the same time, I know he’s working on me and he won’t leave the job half-done.

**5:22c-23** *faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

His reliability – too often I say one thing and do another, or promise something I fail to deliver. I’d so like to be someone on whom people feel they can rely one hundred-per-cent, with that rock-steadiness which can help others through difficult times in their lives; Jesus was like this, even though sometimes he didn’t always do or say what others expected.

[5:23] His humility – there wasn’t the slightest trace of arrogance or self-importance in Jesus, which is amazing considering who he really was. I tend to bristle when my personal rights are being infringed or I’m not given the respect I feel I deserve, but Jesus took an incredible amount of flak without trying to retaliate or justify himself.

His self-control – this is something I conspicuously lack, whether it's in my thoughts about other people or my use of strong language or my self-indulgence in matters of food and drink and so on. Jesus rationed himself to a moderate lifestyle which, while not actually ascetic, was disciplined and used to physical hardship. The Spirit may have to wrestle very hard with those of us who are used to a comfortable level of income, health and security; there's nothing wrong in these things, of course, but they can make us flabby and complacent.

These three very practical qualities complete the list, but they're not exhaustive and there are plenty of other 'fruits' I could mention that Christ wants to produce in my life. Once again please don't think I'm simply trying to issue a check-list, or 'nine ways you can please God today.' They are examples of character traits that I will naturally manifest if Jesus is living out his life in me day by day. Another point is that whereas in the earlier list describing the self-life, governments have to pass laws to restrain the more antisocial tendencies, in this second list there's no law on earth that bans you from being like this.

**5:24** <sup>24</sup> *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

### **King Sin on the cross**

[5:24] So – the big question – how do I stop being a 'me first' person and start living for Christ and others? Well, if you ask a big question, you risk getting a big answer, and the answer to this one is 'The Cross'. The Lord Jesus Christ didn't mince his words about this and neither shall I. The Cross isn't just a convenient way for me to be forgiven without my having to pay the price for my sins. Something happened to godless, selfish human nature during those six hours of screaming agony, and that something was death by crucifixion. It wasn't just 'the King of the Jews' dying under the noonday darkness, it was King Sin itself. Great iron spikes were driven through the world's lust and greed and pride and self-will. Jesus, of course, had lived a human life free of all these horrors, but there on Golgotha he identified himself with them and permitted his God to deal them his own death-blow.

At its simplest it is something like this. The vertical part of the Cross is shaped like the letter 'I'. Hammer a horizontal piece against it and you 'cross out' the 'I'. Are you facing a 'must have' situation right now? Something that's too strong for you to resist, something that turns you to helpless jelly? Don't try to deal with it yourself. Bring it to Christ who has already dealt with it. Thank him for dying not only for your sin, but with your sin. Leave it with him. Then walk away, free to live in the new power of the Spirit.

**5:25-26** <sup>25</sup> *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* <sup>26</sup> *Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

### **Practising his presence**

[5:25] Yes, hard on the heels of Calvary come the empty tomb and Pentecost. We've finished with the old way of living, trying to achieve spiritual victory through sheer willpower and determination. Dead bodies can't will themselves into life again. Even Jesus, victor over sin and death, had to wait for the moment when his Father would send his resurrecting Spirit and raise him to a new life entirely. Then it can start happening to people like you and me, and we're only the most recent examples. Thanks to those seven weeks of world-shaking history, ordinary people anywhere can walk around their towns and villages possessed by an eternal life-Spirit. They, we, can bring Christ into our homes and streets and places of work; into our families and friendships; into our politics and philosophising, our laughter and our weeping, our pleasure and our pain. Wherever we are, there he is by our side. All we have to do, each new day, is to practise his presence – and leave the rest to him.

[5:26] This changes the whole atmosphere, inside and outside our church. There's no need any more for empty posturing, for that desperate search for recognition and approval. We don't have to justify ourselves by putting others down, or by challenging them to prove that they're better than we are. We're free from that nagging suspicion that God is blessing other people more than he's blessing us. If Christ has room for me in his kingdom, he's got room for plenty of other unsatisfactory characters – we're all sinners in the process of becoming saints.

**6:1** <sup>1</sup> *Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.*

### **Jesus' restorative work**

[6:1] I'll illustrate this with a few examples from everyday life in the church. You are the church, wherever you go in the world. People are going to go wrong, whether they're Christians or not. What does having the Holy Spirit mean in our week in, week out existence? It means that we can do the healing work of Jesus for others who need it. In his life on earth he brought serenity to deeply disturbed individuals, sorted out those with hopelessly promiscuous lifestyles, gave physical healing to people beyond human help, spent huge amounts of time with the flotsam and jetsam of society. We can continue his restoring, strengthening and encouraging work today.

But don't forget that among the fruits in the Spirit's orchard we find gentleness and humility. We can't go breezing into people's personal lives like a doctor on a five-minute visit. Good relationships matter so much, and we must be sensitive when treading on another's private territory. We also need to remember that we are fallible human beings ourselves. It's all too easy to drop our guard and be drawn into unhelpful relationships, particular if the other person is vulnerable or over-dependent. Spend as much time praying for yourself as you do for others – didn't the Lord Jesus tell us to 'watch' as well as 'pray'?

**6:2-5** <sup>2</sup> *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.* <sup>3</sup> *If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.* <sup>4</sup> *Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else,* <sup>5</sup> *for each one should carry their own load.*

### **Super-saints?**

[6:2] Please don't ever think that I'm rubbishing the God-given, holy law. The people who are doing that are those who pay it lip-service and won't let it reach deep down into their thinking and behaviour. The law was never given to us so that we could tick off its requirements or score spiritual marks with God. It was (as I've tried to show) designed to bring us to the feet of Christ who alone kept it in every wonderful detail.

Yet there's a paradox here. In our dealings with other people we're going to meet huge needs and intractable problems. We're going to come across people shuffling along like gang-slaves in a quarry, loaded with chains or staggering under enormous loads. And God is going to say as clearly as anything, 'Help this person. Get under their load with them. Be their friend.' That is what 'loving one another' is all about. If we're going to continue the work of Jesus in this sin-twisted world, we'll need to be available to people, day in, day out.

[6:3] It's not because we're super-saints, don't ever begin to think that. Once you start seeing yourself as someone God has specially anointed, you've become the fool of the devil who longs to have every Christian walking around in a fantasy world of which, secretly, they are the sun, moon and stars. No – the paradox is that even when we're being most used by God to bring

blessing to others, there are limits to what we can do. We are not ultimately responsible for a single other human being. The one person we're responsible for is ourselves.

### **You can't be somebody else**

[6:4-5] Don't go around trying to do everybody's job for them. Get your particular work from God and stay with it. Do it as best you can. Be utterly rigorous with yourself and set yourself the highest possible standards. Test yourself to destruction. But remember that the one question the Lord needs you to ask is, 'Am I doing what you want me to do today?' You can't be somebody else.

When the great Day of prizegiving finally comes, and everybody gets their 'Well done, good and faithful servant' from the Lord, he's not going to ask you why you didn't win thousands of people for Christ like X, or pastor a huge church like Y, or help all those homeless refugees like Z. He's going to thank you for doing what he gave you to do. And heaven knows that's quite enough! It will have stretched you beyond your limits and demanded the utmost from you. But it will have been your work, your special work for the Lord. And it will set you dancing for eternity, because you will discover how he used even your most abject failures to bring glory to himself.

**6:6** <sup>6</sup> *Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.*

### **Teachers and taught**

[6:6] While it occurs to me, could I ask you to be particularly generous towards those who teach you the word of God. You may be thinking as a result of what I've just said, 'Oh, my pastor or my course-leader doesn't need rewards in this life, they are going to be rewarded by Christ at the Last Day.' Well, that is undoubtedly so, but it doesn't mean you can't give them the odd practical bonus in this life. Give them something for their children; send them on a little holiday; drop a food hamper on their doorstep. If someone's coming round to spend an hour reading the Bible with you, offer them something decent to eat and drink. They are helping to feed your souls; you can at least contribute to keeping their soul and body together. Just a thought.

**6:7-8** <sup>7</sup> *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.* <sup>8</sup> *Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

### **Thumbing your nose at God**

[6:7] I'm now going to get really tough with you, because some of you are living in a fools' paradise. You are regular churchgoing Christians, but you are secretly thinking, 'Oh, I'm justified by faith and I can get forgiveness whenever I like, so it doesn't matter if I slip the leash occasionally and indulge the old nature in this way or that.' Well, you are effectively thumbing your nose at God, and that's something nobody does with impunity. You may think you can get away with the odd peccadillo here and there, a minor dishonesty today, a harmless flirtation tomorrow – but you're laying a trail of sulphur up to your own front door.

[6:8] Let me put it in simple gardening terms. If you want a particular crop to come up in your patch of ground, you get some seeds, plant them and water them, and in due course up comes the harvest of fruit or veg or whatever. It's the way nature works, and thank God for it! But it's the way eternal things work, too. Here's someone with two allotments of land: one is good soil which regularly gives them healthy, nourishing food, and the other is nasty blighted earth

which can only produce poison ivy and other things which won't do you any good at all. Suppose you neglect the good land and cultivate the bad – what do you think is going to happen? You're going to get ill and probably die.

That's exactly what happens with the old and new natures I was talking about earlier. Cultivate the old sinful nature, plant the seeds of lust, deceit, self-assertion, violence, whatever, and with a dreadful inevitability up will come a crop of death and destruction. Cultivate the new nature by giving the Lord Jesus his way in your life, and up will come a harvest of Spirit fruit which will never rot or perish but will bring eternal blessing to you and countless others. The choice is yours. Don't play with fire. Wake up!

**6:9-10** <sup>9</sup> *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* <sup>10</sup> *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

### **Seize the day for Christ**

[6:9] Harvesting takes time and patience. You may have been labouring away for years and not seeing all that much come up in your patch of Christian ground. You may think you aren't very different from what you used to be – the same old temptations, the same old love of self; your life hasn't changed much and you haven't changed anybody else's, really. Well, please don't get depressed or throw in the towel. Just as you can't see the seeds working away under the surface, but you know they're there, so you may not detect much evidence of God's working in and through you – but he's working just the same. One day, one glorious day, you'll see it all. You may even see some of it in this life. Leave all that to God. He's got his moment, and he's never late.

[6:10] What I'm trying to say is, seize the day for Christ. It will give you far more pleasure than seizing the day for yourself. Take every opportunity offered you for doing good in the world for his sake. There's enough need around you to occupy two or three lifetimes. Does this mean spending all your time on church work? That's a tricky one. I would say your priority should be to help out the members of your faith-family. If the church is doing its proper work in the world, then you'll be helping people outside the church as well. 'Charity begins at home' doesn't mean you put yourself first (as is sometimes thought), it means that your own people have first call on your time and attention. Everybody has to sort out their priorities, and a lot depends on the time you have available for voluntary activities. I hope this helps.

**6:11-13** <sup>11</sup> *See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!* <sup>12</sup> *Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.* <sup>13</sup> *Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh.*

### **Practising what you preach**

[6:11] NOW I'VE GRABBED THE PEN OFF MY FAITHFUL SCRIBE AND WRITTEN THIS IN REALLY BIG LETTERS SO YOU CAN SEE THAT IT'S ME, PAUL, DICTATING ALL THIS AND NOT SOMEONE POSING AS ME. [6:12] The real posers are the circumcision press-gang. It would cause them severe loss of face if they couldn't wave your scalps (or your foreskins) as trophies of their religious superiority. Their personal pride would be in tatters if, like me, they found themselves being hounded out of every city and village because they were teaching salvation through the cross of Christ alone.

[6:13] You see, the difference between us isn't a couple of theological footnotes, it's whether you're saved by keeping the law or by believing in Jesus Christ. Let me ask those who wear the

club badge of God's oh-so-exclusive people – do you yourself keep the club rules? Is your personal conduct above criticism? I used to think mine was, until I met Christ. And if you admit, as you can hardly fail to do, that you don't practise what you preach, how can you insist that other people join you in your hypocritical façade of spirituality? You're so obsessed with outward appearances, so concerned about what other people think of you, that it has become a matter of personal pride for you to force your crippling doctrines on people who have begun to taste the glorious freedom Christ has given them.

**6:14-16** <sup>14</sup> *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* <sup>15</sup> *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.* <sup>16</sup> *Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule – to the Israel of God.*

### **Only one obsession**

[6:14] I've got only one obsession, and that is Christ crucified. I left my pride in the dust of that Damascus road, when I met my Lord and began to understand who he really was and what he had done for all of us. From then on the cross has been my glory and my celebration. The world's glittering prizes, the adulation of my peers, the honours of learning and scholarship, all these are nothing compared to knowing the risen Christ. In fact I've left them in the grave with his broken body, dead and buried together with Saul the Pharisee and everything I used to be.

[6:15] It simply doesn't matter one tiny bit whether someone is circumcised or uncircumcised, or what church they go to or what courses they've attended or what speakers they've heard. All that matters is to be a new person in Christ. Once you are united with him by the water of faith and the life of the Spirit, a whole new world has opened up because you and I are part of God's new creation, and we can never, never go back to the world we used to know without denying the people we have become.

### **We've known the mercy of the King**

[6:16] Once you have set your thinking by this kingdom principle, you walk through life with a serenity and an assurance and a gladness that nothing can undermine or destroy. Oh yes, the world, the devil and the flesh are going to throw everything at us, but we've known the mercy of the King and we've heard his call. It's the call that came all those years ago to Abraham and Moses and David and all our ancestors, the call to belong to a worldwide family of faith, with one Father and one mission, that the whole earth should come to know him as he truly is. If you want to call this family by the old name of Israel, that's all well and good, as long as you don't narrow its membership to those who satisfy *your* criteria, or conform to *your* religious requirements. It's God who makes the rules about who belongs to him, and he's propped the door open with an old gravestone no-one is ever going to shift.

**6:17** <sup>17</sup> *From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.*

### **Reckoning with the King**

[6:17] Here's a final warning for the troublemakers. If you mess with me, you mess with Christ. You can make life very difficult for me, you can beat me up, torture me, crucify me even – in fact your sort have already done quite a bit of this, as the scars on my body testify – but what you're really doing is to drive gaping great wounds into the body of Jesus. I myself was a leading member of the 'Let's get Jesus' mafia, so I know what I'm talking about. Now I'm the one taking the punishment – but it's not me you're going to have to reckon with, it's the King himself.

**6:18** <sup>18</sup> *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.*

### **Final message**

[6:18] And my final message for you, my brothers and sisters in the Galatian churches? Just one word: grace. God loves you unconditionally. You are Christ's own special people. I'm sorry if I've given you a hard time, but I so desperately want you not to miss out on everything the Lord Jesus has won for you and for all of us. I want you to have that deep-down peace that comes from your spirit being one with his Spirit. Stay close to him and receive all he has for you. His word is true. Yes, it really is. I'll finish there.

## **THINKING THROUGH GALATIANS: REFERENCES**

*Underlined: direct quotation. \*Probable allusion. References are listed in biblical order.*

**1:1-2** *On my throne next to me* Ps 2:6-7, Acts 13:33. *His witness* Acts 26:15-16. *My ministry among you* Acts 13:13-14:28.

**1:3-5** *The horns of the altar* Ps 118:27. *Sacrifice for human sin* Lev 17:11, Mt 20:28, Heb 9:22.

**1:8-10** *Out of town after town* Acts 14:6, 2 Tim 3:11. *Stoned to death* Acts 14:19, 2 Cor 11:25. *To the same places* Acts 14:21. *To what we'd been saying* Acts 14:23, 2 Tim 2:2, 1 Cor 15:1-2.

**1:10** *It's the Lord Jesus* 1 Thess 2:4, 2 Tim 2:4, Col 1:10.

**1:11-12** *Now I see* Jn 9:25, Acts 22:13. *Light into my heart* 2 Cor 4:6.

**1:13-14** *The One True God* Acts 8:3, Acts 26:4, Phil 3:6.

**1:15-17** *In my parents' eyes* Jer 1:5. *One with each other* Gal 2:20. *From my eyes* Acts 9:18. *Death and resurrection* Acts 9:15, 13:2. *As the Son of God* Acts 9:20.

**1:18-20** *Too hot for me in Damascus* Acts 9:23-25. *Jerusalem* Acts 9:26ff. *Life turned around* Jn 7:5, 1 Cor 15:7, Jas 2:1.

**1:21-24** *I left Jerusalem* Acts 9:30. *Escaping from my persecution* Acts 8:1, 4. *Looking out for me* Acts 9:29-30. *Jesus-Messiah heresy* Acts 22:4-5, 19-20, Acts 26: 10-11. *Peace had been declared* Acts 9:31. *Spirit is for everyone* 1 Cor 12:3, Acts 13:38, Acts 11:17. *Back from Arabia* Acts 9:20.

**2:1-2** *Couple of years earlier* Acts 11:27-30:5

**2:3-5** *Strategically wise* Acts 16:3. *On top of that* Mk 7:13, Acts 15:10.

**2:6-10** *Nothing to God* 1 Sam 16:7, Acts 10:34. *The Lord gave Peter* Jn 1:42. *Famine conditions* Acts 11:29.

**2:11-13** *Members of the kingdom of God* Acts 14:27.

**2:14-16** *Psalm I love to quote* Ps 143, Rom 3:20. *Flawless in your sight* Ps 143:2, Ps 130:3, Job 14:3-4, Acts 13:38-39. *We wander off it so often* Rom 7:7, 13, 1 Tim 1:8-11.

**2:17-18** *In order to rescue them* Lk 15:1-2, Lk 19:7, 10. *To save us from it* Rom 3:8, 6:1, 15. *Through the Spirit* Jn 2:21, 1 Cor 3:16-17, 2 Cor 6:16, Eph 2:22.

**2:19-21** *Murdering people* Acts 22:3-4. *Doing God's will* Acts 26:9. *Christ-in-me* 2 Cor 5:17. *So that I should live* Isa 53:6, 12.

**3:1-2** *Not so many months ago* Acts 13:13-14:23. *On that Roman cross* Acts 13:28-29. *Taught by human wisdom* 1 Cor 1:17, 2:1-4, 2 Cor 10:10. *Jesus dying for you* 1 Cor 2:2, Gal 6:14. *You believed me* Acts 14:1. *Day of Pentecost* Acts 2:38. *The Lord's ministry* Mt 3:11, Mk 1:15. *Explain later* Gal 3:19ff. *Become irrelevant* Rom 10:4. *Christ is good news* Acts 13:38-39.

**3:3-5** *For the sake of Christ* Acts 14:22. *Setting prisoners free* Lk 4:18-19. *You did just that* Mt 4:19-20, Eph 1:13.

**3:6-9** *Passage in Genesis* Gen 15:1-6. *Perfect* Gen 15:6, Rom 4:20-22. *To find salvation* Lk 3:8, 19:9, Jn 8:33, 39. *Abraham and everyone else* Mt 8:11. *Lives on his promise* Rom 4:16. *Planetful of people to come* Gen 12:3, 18:18.

**3:10-12** *That key Pentateuchal passage* Dt 27. *This book of the law* Dt 27:26, 28:15. *I used to think that way* Phil 3:6, Acts 23:1, 24:16. *Another text* Hab 2:4, Rom 1:17, Heb 10:38. *Ten Commandments* Rom 7:7-8. *Go back to Moses* Lev 18:1-5. *Cultural patterns* Rom 12:2. *The way to life* Lev 18:5. *Experts haven't either* Gal 6:13, Lk 16:14-15, Jn 7:19.

**3:13-14** Which is sin Rom 7:14, Isa 52:3. Ends in death Gal 3:10, Ezek 18:20, Gen 2:17. Condemnation of God Dt 21:23. Crucified man 1 Pet 2:24, Isa 53:4. Through your descendant Gen 12:7. Explain in a moment Gal 3:16. You've never heard of Col 3:11, Rev 7:9. Promised so long ago Joel 2:28, Isa 44:3, Ezek 36:26-27.

**3:15-18** At Pisidian Antioch Acts 13:26, 32. Would inherit the land Gen 17:7-9 LXX. For his possession Ps 2:7-8. Heir of the promises Gen 3:15. Traditionally 430 years Exod 12:40. Received by faith Rom 4:3. Out of the window Rom 4:13-14. Believed my promise Jn 5:24, Heb 10:23, 11:11.

**3:19-20** Hang on in faith Heb 11:39-40. Stephen told me this Acts 7:53. God's laws to humans Acts 7:53, Heb 2:2, Dt 33:2. And what isn't Col 2:16-18. And be saved 1 Tim 2:5, Job 33:23-30, Ps 49:7-8, 15, Hos 13:14 with 1 Cor 15:55.

**3:21-22** Good and holy law Rom 7:12, 12. Member of our race Rom 5:12. Lid of the coffin Jn 7:19. New law takes over Rom 8:2.

**3:23-25** Look to Christ alone Mt 5:17, Rom 10:4.

**3:26-29** Now begun to lead Rom 13:14. Jesus Christ by faith Rom 15:7, Heb 2:11-13. Repeating myself Gal 3:18.

**4:1-5** In his establishment Lk 15:19. Precisely this role Phil 2:7, Eph 4:10. Train a whole nation Dt 6:6. To pay that price Heb 2:9-18.

**4:6-7** Lord of your life Rom 8:15. Abba his Father Mk 14:36. Godless human nature Rom 7:5-6, Eph 2:3. From the inside Rom 8:1-4, Jer 31:31-34, Heb 8:15-16. Final rejection Rom 5:9. Can ever change that Rom 8:16-17, 38-39.

**4:8-11** Want to be with him 1 Cor 8:3, 1 Jn 4:8. Left all that behind Rom 14:5, Col 2:16. Downright exhaustion 2 Tim 3:11, Col 1:29, 2 Cor 11:27.

**4:12-15** Rid of me once for all Acts 14:5, 19. Coming on us all 1 Th 1:5.

**4:16-20** I'm speechless Eph 4:15. Talk about it 2 Cor 5:13-14. Reproduced in you Eph 4:13-15. Make you see sense 1 Th 3:5.

**4:21-23** Law question first Gal 4:21-5:12. Book of Genesis again Gen 16. Like the stars of the sky Gen 15:5. The result is Ishmael Gen 16:15. Safely delivered of Isaac Gen 21:1-2.

**4:24-25** Old and New covenants Jer 31:31-34. The Arab nation Gen 21:18. Centre of our faith Jn 4:21-24. Geographical location Isa 49:6. Second-guess God Rom 11:33-34, Isa 45:11. Bring in a new covenant Rom 11:26-27, Isa 40:2, 52:2, 59:20, Jer 33:15.

**4:26-28** A new Sion Ezek 40:1-2. Sorrow and failure Isa 60, Heb 12:22, Rev 3:12, 21:2. Jews or Gentiles Isa 66:7-13. Rejected and childless Isa 54:1. Born from above Jn 1:12, 3:6, 6:63. Faith in God's promise Rom 9:7-8, Heb 11:11.

**4:29-31** Trouble for the heaven-born Jn 15:19. Bed of roses Gen 21:8-21. Inheritance with Isaac Gen 21:10. Get Hagar pregnant Gen 16:2. Your descendants too Gen 21:13. God-descent Jn 3:3, 6:63, 1 Jn 4:6. Not Ishmael people Rom 9:7-8. Not of the world Jn 17:14.

**5:1-4** Waterless pit Zech 9:11. Pharisee of them all Phil 3:4-6. Spirit of Jesus Christ Phil 3:3-9. Null and void Jn 2:19, Jn 19:30, Eph 2:15, Heb 8:6, 13. Young eagle chick Exod 19:4, Dt 32:11, Dt 33:12.

**5:5-6** Said earlier Gal 2:20. Wonderful ally Jn 14:16. Like Christ himself 1 Jn 3:2, Col 3:4. Keeps me going Rom 8:23. Christ Jesus himself Phil 4: 13.

**5:7-10** Not much at all Mt 13:33, 1 Cor 5:6. What he's been teaching Mt 12:36-37.

**5:11-12** The plain statement of the cross Acts 2:36-37, 1 Cor 2:2, 1 Pet 2:8. Murder the speaker Acts 7:54. To get rid of me Acts 13:50, 14:5, 19, 2 Tim 3:11.

**5:13-15** Doing whatever they like Mt 5:17, Rom 3:31, 6:1. Servant-love of Jesus himself Jn 13:14. Penetrate to its very heart Rom 13:10. Taught us time and again Mt 22:37-38, Lk 10:27-28. God's requirement Lev 19:18. To our enemies Exod 23:4-5, Prov 25:21-22, 2 Ki 6:22. With the world outside 1 Cor 13, Gal 6:10.

**5:16-18** Travelling lives Col 1:27. In the image of God Rom 7:22. What we feel like doing Rom 7:23. Thinking and behaviour Rom 8:5-7. We trust him Phil 3:3.

**5:19-21** Idolatry under another name Col 3:5. Old habits die hard Jer 13:23.

**5:22a** Needs can be provided for 2 Cor 5:14-15. He has been towards me Rom 5:5. Promises are to be believed Rom 15:13. Joy in his Father Lk 10:21, Heb 1:9. End of the road Isa 26:3. Pleasure and glory Isa 43:7, Phil 2:13.

**5:22b** A case in point Lk 23:34. Active good to them Rom 12:20. Leave the job half-done Phil 1:6, 1 Thess 5:24.

**5:22c-23** *What others expected* Mk 3:33, Jn 11:6. *Who he really was* Mt 21:5. *Or justify himself* 1 Pet 2:23. *Not actually ascetic* Mt 11:19. *Used to physical hardship* Lk 9:58. *Flabby and complacent* Phil 4:12, 1 Cor 9:27. *From being like this* 1 Pet 3:13.

**5:24** *Didn't mince his words* Lk 14:27.

**5:25-26** *A new life entirely* Rom 1:4. *Becoming saints* Rom 6:22.

**6:1** *Encouraging work today* Rom 12:3-10. *Gentleness and humility* 1 Th 2:6-8, 2 Tim 2:24-25. *Watch as well as pray* Mt 26:41.

**6:2-5** *As I've tried to show* Gal 3:22. *Loving one another* Jas 2:15-16, 1 Jn 3:16-18. *Day in, day out* Job 2:13. *Responsible for is ourselves* Song 1:6b, 1 Cor 9:27. *Good and faithful servant* Mt 25:21. *Glory to himself* 2 Cor 10:13-18.

**6:6** *To eat and drink* 1 Cor 9:11, Rom 15:27, Acts 20:20.

**6:7-8** *Old and new natures* Gal 5:17. *Death and destruction* Jas 1:13-15. *Harvest of Spirit-fruit* Hos 10:12, Gal 5:22-23.

**6:9-10** *Seize the day for Christ* Eph 5:16, Col 4:5.

**6:11-13** *Someone posing as me* 2 Thess 2:2. *Keep the club rules* Rom 2:21-23, Acts 7:53. *Outward appearances* Mt 6:1, Lk 16:15. *Used to think mine was* Phil 3:6b.

**6:14-16** *Christ crucified* 1 Cor 2:2. *Knowing the risen Christ* Phil 3:8. *Everything I used to be* Gal 2:20. *New person in Christ* 2 Cor 5:17. *Life of the Spirit* Jn 3:5. *Mercy of the King* 1 Tim 1:12-17. *Who belongs to him* 2 Tim 2:19.

**6:17** *Wounds into the body of Jesus* 2 Cor 1:5, 11:23-24, Col 1:24.

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