

Studies in Galatians (20/22)

The Law of Christ.*Galatians 6:1-3, R.V.***A Few Preliminary Explanations.**

Hasty readers of the Epistle to the Galatians might think that there is a division in it, and that the latter part treats of practical, spiritual life, while the first part is devoted to theoretical doctrines. Such a conclusion would be a great error. No part of the Bible is theory; it is all fact. There is no part of the Bible that is not spiritual and practical. Moreover, it is all doctrine. *Doctrine* means *teaching*. Christ's talk to the multitudes on the mount is called doctrine, because "He opened His mouth and taught them." Some people express a sort of contempt for doctrine; they speak slightingly of it, as tho it belonged to the realm of abstruse theology, and not to practical, every day life. Such ones unconsciously do dishonor to the preaching of Christ, which was nothing else but doctrine. That is to say, He always taught the people.

Sermonizing Not Doctrine.

That which leads people into this error is a wrong use of the words. That which they call "doctrine," and which they speak of as impractical, is not doctrine, but *sermonizing*. That is impractical, and has no place in the Gospel. No preacher of the Gospel ever "delivers a sermon." If he does, it is because he chooses for a time to do something else besides preach the Gospel. Christ never delivered a sermon. Instead of that, He gave the people doctrine; that is to say, He taught them. He was "a Teacher sent from God." So the Gospel is all doctrine; it is instruction in the life of Christ.

An Abuse.

People quite generally misuse the Epistle to the Galatians. They treat it as tho it were a purely argumentative book. They use it merely to draw arguments from, with which to establish some theory, or to demolish another's theory. Worse still, they even go to it to find authority for attacks upon the law of God, which is the law of Christ, since Christ is God, and the Father and the Son are one in all things. It is rare to find any one, even a real preacher of the Gospel, going to this Epistle for material for Gospel teaching. If they do, they use only the last portion of the fifth chapter, and a portion of the sixth. The rest they ignore, with the virtuous feeling that they can not waste time in disputes about the law. As tho the apostle Paul ever wasted time in such a thing! As tho it were a waste of time to preach that which the greatest of apostles took such pains to write under the inspiration of the Holy

Ghost! As tho the apostle himself ever spent time after his conversion doing anything else but preach and write the Gospel!

The Gospel in Galatians.

Recall the beginning of the Epistle. Remember that it was written to reclaim those who were departing from the Gospel of Christ, and from God, into a pretended Gospel, which led to perdition. It was written that "the truth of the Gospel" might remain with us. Surely, then, it is a grave impeachment of the Spirit that guided Paul, to imply that he devoted the greater portion of the Epistle to something that is not practical Gospel. It is all Gospel, and nothing but Gospel.

The Law in the Gospel.

And yet the Epistle does deal largely with the law. In fact, it deals with nothing else; for the real law of God, the law of liberty, is the life of Christ, "who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." Acts 10:38. The law is righteousness, and righteousness is life. Disobedience to the law is death. "All have sinned," and are therefore under the curse of the law; but "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." He received, so to speak, all the broken, ragged edges of the law in Himself, in order that through the creative power of His life, the law might come to us in its perfection, for the purpose for which it was designed, for it "was ordained to life." Romans 7:10. Out of Christ, the law is a terror, a yoke of bondage, a ministration of death, because out of Him it is not kept; in Christ it is "not grievous," but is peace and life, because in Him we are made to walk in the good works which God Himself has wrought for us.

The Law of Peace and Love.

"Great peace have they which love Thy law; and nothing shall offend them." Ps. 119:165. "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." Isa. 48:18. "The law is spiritual," and "to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Rom. 7:14; 8:6. Those who through the Gospel keep the law are kept in perfect peace, because it is in the Gospel of peace that the righteousness of God—the law—is revealed. Rom. 1:16, 17. Such ones are not "desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another." "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." It is only where men, by departing from the Gospel of Christ, transgress the law, that they bite and devour one another, and are consumed of one another. The fruit of the Spirit, against which there is no law, because it is the perfection of the law, is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." The Epistle to the Galatians

was written for the purpose of restoring this Spirit in its readers. How natural, then, and how perfectly in harmony with the whole Epistle, are the opening words of the sixth chapter, which constitute our present lesson:—

“Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in a spirit of meekness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man thinketh himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.” Gal. 6:1-3, R.V.

The Gospel Means Restoration.

The work of the Gospel is to restore. “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” Matt. 18:11-14.

Save the One.

Note the fact that the Lord represents His work by the case of the shepherd who seeks after the *one* sheep that has gone astray. The work of the Gospel is an individual work. Even tho under the preaching of the Gospel thousands accept it in one day, as the result of one discourse, it is because of its effect on each individual heart. When the preacher, in speaking to thousands, addresses each one individually, then he is doing the work of Christ. So if a man be overtaken in a fault, restore such an *one*, in the spirit of meekness. No man’s time is so precious that it is wasted when devoted to the salvation of one single person. Some of the most important and glorious truths that we have on record as uttered by Christ, were addressed to only one listener. He who looks after and cares for the single lambs of the flock, is a good shepherd.

Salvation Is from Sin.

A fault, a trespass, is a sin. “Sin is the transgression of the law.” If any man be overpowered by temptation, and fall into sin, restore him, that is, bring him back into harmony with the law, and thus fulfil the law of Christ. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” 1 Tim. 1:15. This He does by taking on Himself the sin, “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” He bears the curse, that the blessing may come to us. He was made to be sin, “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Cor. 5:21. His name is Jesus, Saviour, because the work of His life is to save men from their sins. Those who are workers with Him must be devoted to the same thing. “Do we then make void the law through faith? God

forbid; yea, we establish the law." Rom. 3:31. The work of the Gospel minister is not to teach people that the law is abolished, but to bring them into harmony with it.

The Ministry of Reconciliation.

The law of God is love. "His commandments are not grievous." Therefore there can be nothing of harshness in the work of reclaiming an erring one. "If thy brother sin, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." Matt. 18:15, R.V., margin. The object of showing a brother his faults is to gain him, to restore him, not to condemn him. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, but only as the Comforter. Whoever attempts this delicate work is to go in the spirit of meekness, which is the Spirit of Christ, who is meek and lowly in heart. He is to go simply as Christ's representative, as the agent whom the Spirit of Christ uses. The words that he speaks are to be Christ's words, and not his own. It is to be Christ that goes, and nobody else. Then, whatever be the result, the work will have been done right. But let us beware of putting ourselves in Christ's place. We are not to do something, and then comfort ourselves or defend ourselves with the statement that we have done as He would have done. The work is God's work, and He must be allowed to do it in us.

Not Imputing unto Men their Trespasses.

Let us not forget the law of Christ. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." That is, we are to restore the erring by bearing their burdens, even as Christ bears the sins of the world. Let us look at this closely. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and hath placed in us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as tho God were entreating by us." 2 Cor. 5:19, 20, R.V., margin. God does not impute to men their trespasses; He takes them on Himself. Christ was in all things made like His brethren, "that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Heb. 2:17. He puts Himself absolutely in the sinner's place, to the extent of taking all the sinner's guilt on Himself. This is the way He reconciles. He calls us to look at Him, in the like situation with us, weak and tempted as we are. Thus He establishes a bond of sympathy, and having gained our confidence by not putting Himself above us, and looking on us with contempt, He shows us the way of salvation.

Salvation in Confession of Sin.

The greatest part, therefore, of the work of saving souls is to show ourselves one with them. That is to say, it is in the confession of our own faults, that we save others. The man who feels himself without sin is not the man to restore the sinful. He who goes to one who is overtaken in any trespass, and says: "How in the world could you ever do such a thing? I

never did a thing like that in my life, and I can't see how anybody with any sense of self-respect could do so," might far better stay at home. God chose one Pharisee, and only one, to be an apostle, but he was not sent forth until he could acknowledge himself to be the chief of sinners. It is humiliating to confess sin. That is true, but the way of salvation is the way of the cross. It is only by the cross that Christ could be the Saviour of sinners. Therefore if we could share His joy, we must endure the cross, despising the shame. Remember this fact: It is only by confessing our own sins that we can save others from their sins; but whosoever confesses his own sins finds cleansing; thus we see that, while salvation is an individual matter, it has to do with more than one individual; our salvation is bound up with that of others. If we confess our sins, we shall be saved, and shall be the means of saving some one else.

Self-abasement.

"If a man thinketh himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." Mark those words, "when he is nothing." It does not say that we should not think ourselves to be something until we are something. No; it is a statement of the fact that we are nothing. Not merely a single individual, but all nations, are nothing before the Lord. If we ever at any time think ourselves to be something, we deceive ourselves. And we often do deceive ourselves, and thus mar the work of the Lord. Remember the law of Christ. Altho He was everything; He emptied Himself. He obliterated Himself, that the work of God might be done. "The servant is not greater than his lord." God alone is great; "every man at his best state is altogether vanity." God alone is true, but every man a liar. When we acknowledge this, and live in consciousness of it, then we are where the Spirit of God can fill us, and then God can work through us. The "man of sin" is he that exalteth himself. 2 Thess. 2:3, 4. The child of God is the one who humbles himself. Instead of fighting against God's law, by maintaining that we are right, let us acknowledge that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good" (Rom. 7:12), that so we may find mercy, and salvation from our sins, and be made a blessing to others.

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The Signs of the Times, Vol. 25, No. 18 (May 3, 1899), p. 292-293.