

**Extracts of the The Interpretation Commentary on Galatians
by Charles Cousar (compiled by Alan Maker)**

Introduction

The theological excitement of Galatians lies in the radical interpretation Paul makes of the meaning of God's grace. It is more than a doctrine; it is an experience. At the same time it is **the** doctrine which undergirds all Paul fights for in this letter. The agitators who come into the Galatian congregation are not opposed to the idea that God is gracious. It is just that grace is only part of the story. Faith, the human response to grace, begins a process which circumcision completes.

The attraction of the (agitators') position was probably threefold:

1. Circumcision provided a measure of security, a visible sign that the one circumcised truly was a member of God's family. For a male Gentile who entered a religious community which traced its origins back to Abraham, this was not an inconsequential matter.
2. Circumcision as presented to the Galatians was a symbolic act intended to lead to full maturity. The removal of a piece of flesh by a surgical procedure signified the mastery over the power of the flesh and thus a moving on toward perfection.
3. Circumcision seemed to be a step to take to fulfill the Old Testament commandments. It was a clearly defined requirement of the divine law (Gen. 17:9-14)

p. 8-9

(Paul) perceives how completely his readers have misunderstood the heart of the Christian faith. They are working at the wrong end of the relationship with God – what **they** can do to ensure inclusion in God's family; what **they** can do to cope with the power of the flesh; what **they** can do to fulfill the law. The answer lies at the other end – what **God** has done in Christ and how he has done it. "Grace", a word occurring at six key points in the letter, is not a "thing", even a "thing" God gives. Rather it describes the manner in which God gives himself, the personal relationship he establishes with his people. The word depicts the unmerited and unconditional way in which God has made and continues to make his move toward sinful humanity.

p. 9

Circumcision has its religious and secular counterparts in the various ways in which we "supplement" God's free gift of himself, and prescribe for ourselves (and others) a particular accompaniment which becomes a "must". A piety which turns into anxiety about one's own (or another's spiritual health) and searches for unforgiven sins has forgotten what God has done in Christ and how he has done it.

p. 10

There are 3 prominent points at which Paul's understanding of grace comes to expression in Galatians:

1. The issue of circumcision can be put another way. Do Gentiles have to become Jews in order to become full-fledged Christians? Paul's answer is an unequivocal "NO". The very nature of grace eliminates special categories. It provides for a community based on something other than ethnic, social, or sexual distinctions. (3:28)
2. What is the appropriate human response to grace? It is, of course, faith – the sometimes quiet, sometimes reckless confidence in the goodness and faithfulness of God. Such confidence is rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ as the supreme expression of God's grace. This means that faith is not a way for humans "to get God on their side". He is already **for** them. In faith, they change, not he.
3. A grace that evokes faith leads to love. This is the progression within Galatians. First Paul establishes the authority of the Gospel of grace; then he sets faith over against "works of the law"; and finally he affirms that the proper exercise of the life of faith (freedom) is loving service to one's neighbour. This stress on God's spontaneous and lavish self-giving, is not to be confused with

permissiveness or maudlin sentimentality. The God who gives himself is the God who is not to be mocked (6:7) and the love which fulfills the law is the love active amongst dissension, pride, and envy (5:14-15; 26). It takes shape in the restoration of the fallen and never wearies of doing good to all. (6:1, 9-10)

p 10-11

Galatians 1:1-5

The elaborated greeting provides the theological starting point for Paul's thinking in this letter... Jesus Christ is identified as the "one who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of God our Father" (1-4) The reason Paul so vehemently attacks the agitators who operate in the Galatian communities with their message of circumcision lies in his conviction that there is no salvation except in the crucified Christ. The legalist, whether of the 1st century or the 20th, errs precisely in presupposing, consciously or not, that the death of Christ is insufficient and must be supplemented.

Christ's death has an expiatory character, and that means, to change the metaphor, freedom from the dismal shadow which yesterday so often casts on today.

p. 16

Jacques Ellul comments: "Thus the past lives, not in the hell of my own conscience, but in the holiness of God." (The Ethics of Freedom, p. 140)

p. 17

The feeling of being trapped, of being a pawn in the hands of a despotic chess player, of being caught by a power, whether experienced as an internal compulsion or an external force, is not strange. Such enslavement prohibits a facing, much less coping with, the moral dilemma of present and future. It assures the repetition of yesterday's cycle. Its deterministic patterns can only be broken when a more potent authority steps in to deliver those who are hopelessly caught on a vicious treadmill. The death of Christ, Paul says, performs just this rescue operation and sets the liberated in the service of a new Lord. Not only is the past dealt with but Christians are now under a control which empowers them for the present and future. (1:3)

p. 18

In light of the controversy Paul addresses, it is important that he make clear that Christ's death was neither an accident nor a tragedy in the line of the martyr's sacrifice; it had to do with a larger divine plan. The gospel had been announced beforehand to Abraham (3:8); only "when the time had fully come" did God send forth his Son (4:4) Paul's own relationship with God began long before his birth (1:15). God had a purpose in the events of Good Friday to bring about the planned deliverance. To suggest, then, as the agitators at Galatia were doing that Christ's death was insufficient and needed to be supplemented with further rites and rules was to advocate a position contrary to the will of God.

p. 18

When believers are abandoning the gospel for a perversion of the truth, the situation leaves him little for which to be thankful (St. Paul expresses no gratitude for the Galatians). There is no reason to pretend things are better than they are. The issue is frankly grave.

p. 19

Galatians 1:6-10

The apparent success of the agitators, as Paul sees it, poses a threat not to his personal position or reputation, but to the message of grace.

p. 19

From the time of the New Testament onward the problem of authority has been a serious one in the life of the church. On what basis are decisions made and directions determined? Who calls the shots, and from where does one derive the right and power to call them?

The thorniest and at the same time most practical issue is not that of church polity – whether the church should be governed by bishops, a pope, elders, or the people – but the source to which the church goes to find solutions to settle disputes. Do the exigencies of the moment (“How are we going to pay for this?”), or internal needs (But this will upset a lot of people!) or age-old traditions (“We’ve always done it this way!”) in the final analysis make the decisions and resolve the conflicts? The usual answer to the question of authority for those sensitive to theology of course is “church” or “Scripture”. For Paul each has its appropriate place, but he points beyond each to a more antecedent authority (1:6-10).

The apostle expresses his consternation that some of the Galatian Christians (most of whom were Gentiles) have accepted the teaching of other preachers and have been persuaded that it is necessary to become a Jew in order to be a real Christian, that is, they have accepted the argument that circumcision is essential to salvation. There is no hint that they openly opposed the preaching of Christ; they thought that the preaching of Christ alone was insufficient.

Antecedent even to the church and the Scripture, then, is the authority of the one Gospel, which becomes the norm against which all theologies and other religious expressions are measured.

(all above p. 20)

Neither democratic process nor due deliberation of Church councils or courts decide whether the gospel has authority and what its content is to be. It comes from Christ and it is about Christ (cf Rom 1:3)

There are obviously those occasions, as in the situation in Galatia, the gospel becomes domesticated. By the pervasive character of the culture, the political climate, the idiosyncracies of place or preacher, the gospel is taken over and transformed into an ideology. In the face of such occasions Paul’s word here is apt. It is **Christ’s** gospel, not capitalism’s gospel, or the third world’s gospel, or Rev. Smith’s gospel. And yet, the gospel of which Paul speaks is not a series of fixed formulas to be translated precisely from the Greek into various languages and mechanically repeated time and again. Its implications and often its expression of necessity vary from culture to culture, political climate to political climate, place to place, and preacher to preacher. The good news needed to be heard by a capitalistic society may differ in its concreteness from the good news needed by the third world community.

The fundamental character of the gospel is **grace**. This was the issue in Galatia and remains so today – in simple terms, God’s loving disposition and action in Christ toward his creation which had (and has) put itself in the grips of his enemy. The preaching of Christ’s gospel will inevitably convey God’s grace, not in an abstract or theoretical fashion, but in terms of the particular human situation. It may include judgment as well as mercy, imperative as well as indicative, and appropriately so, if arising from or leading to the word that God is **for** us. If there is a test to be applied to preaching, it is this: Does it declare Jesus Christ as the unqualified liberator – from religious legalism or secular cynicism, from paralyzing apathy or frantic anxiety, from being oppressed or being the oppressor, from cowardly fear or brash self-reliance.

(p. 20)

The gospel is more than a set of propositions about Christ, his death and resurrection (though obviously it can and must be so stated); **it is a divine activity by means of which people are drawn into the realm of God’s grace**. It is then a force effective in its own right which functions within history transforming persons, drawing them into the sway of grace. As authority, it functions not so much by setting boundaries and determining limits beyond which subjects cannot go (so most of the authorities familiar to us) as it does to effect change, to re-create, to fortify subjects for mission.

The authority of the gospel is different from the authority of a church’s doctrinal statement or an officially approved position paper to which appeals concerning theology or ethics might be made. Such statements or position papers contain a legitimacy based on agreed-upon principles and processes, and interpretations are made by appropriate persons. What authority the statements have derives from the body which approves them. The gospel, however, has a divine source; its authority is dynamic. In it an energy is released to change the plight of people and circumstances. Destructive patterns of life are broken and new ones established. “It is the power of God for salvation.” (Rom. 1:16)

P. 22-3

Those who preach (or teach) are singled out as being subject to the authority of the gospel. Paul pronounces two curses. In the former he declares himself or any heavenly messenger accursed if either departs in his preaching from the gospel already preached. In the latter, he puts the agitators at Galatia under a curse if they abandon the gospel previously received by the Galatians. Nowhere does St. Paul suggest that the community should be subordinated to him or that he needs to be revered in their eyes. It is not from him they are departing when they accept the agitator’s teaching. He in fact is responsible to the same authority as that of the community – the gospel of Christ.

The preacher, to be sure, assumes an awesome responsibility in daring to proclaim the gospel, but he or she need not suppose that the task week after week is to come up with a new gimmick to charm the congregation and somehow to be “more effective”. If anything is to be genuinely effected, it will be through the preaching of the gospel. The task is to expose those numerous situations in human life and culture where God calls persons “from the present evil age” to the dominion of grace. Likewise the congregation need not fear a clerical tyranny. The absolute power of the gospel ultimately subdues any efforts to domesticate it or control it. Like the wine Jesus spoke of, it will in time burst the old wineskins. It may even transform that preacher who seeks to lord it over the congregation. In the final analysis, the preacher does not authenticate the gospel; the gospel authenticates the preacher.

P. 23-4

“Am I now seeking the favour of men or of God?” It is a striking question to raise in a context where the issue is authority. Paul’s answer is a reasoned deduction: “If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.” The human obligation to honour God and serve Christ is at the heart of the issue of authority and is reminiscent of Jesus’ words in Matt. 20:25-28. All positions of leadership are in danger of becoming power bases where people satisfy their own needs, manipulate and even oppress others, and make certain that decisions turn out “our” way (never mind about God’s way). In ecclesiastical circles the gospel may even be cleverly or unconsciously used to keep recalcitrants in line.

p.24

Galatians 1:11-24

Paul does not fight to open the circle of the Twelve and get himself admitted. He never provides a precise definition of an apostle, nor does he question the status of others so recognized. Even though he abruptly confronts Peter at Antioch, he does not initiate a campaign to oust Peter from his role as an apostle. The office *per se* is not the issue, nor is who is or who is not an apostle. The point Paul argues in Galatians is that any and all power derives from the one gospel; or to put it in the categories of JH Schutz’s excellent study, Paul is not interested in legitimacy but authority (Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority).

Paul speaks of the function of an apostle not in terms of guaranteeing the transmission and correct interpretation of the church’s doctrine from one generation to another, but in terms of preaching the gospel. That function remains. What is affirmed about the priority of the gospel over the apostle can be affirmed in terms of the one who preaches or teaches. His or her authority (in distinction from

legitimacy) is obtained neither from congregation nor ecclesiastical court but from the call of God through the gospel.

p.26

Paul's own life manifests the power of the gospel. At the heart of his apostleship lies the action of the message which transforms him from the zealous Pharisee who persecutes the church to the preacher to the Gentiles. He takes no credit for the change; his mention of it indicates no egotistical mania. It is the work of God's grace.

p. 27

Though the word "revelation" in Paul can refer to a particular disclosure made to an individual in a mystical or charismatic sense (1 Cor 14:6; 26; 30; 2 Cor 12:1,7), it can also describe the unveiling of a reality hidden from the world but made known to others by the activity of the Spirit (1 Cor2:6ff; Rom 16:25; Eph 3:3, 5) In such cases the revelation has to do with some facet of God's redemptive purpose. It is in this latter sense Paul intends the word here. There is no hint that in the revelation he receives information that no one else has.

Paul does not thoroughly equate "gospel" with the tradition containing the historical and interpretative statement about Christ's death and resurrection. One can hear the recitation of the tradition and not be gripped by the gospel. The gospel, as we have seen, is primarily a divine power whereby God changes people and situations. Of course it has content, and that content can be expressed in terms of the tradition, as in 1 Cor 15:3ff, but the tradition does not exhaust the meaning of "gospel". When Paul says: "I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ", he is speaking of "gospel", not merely information about Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly he knew something about the death and resurrection of Jesus before his Damascus Road experience else he would not have bothered to persecute the church.

p. 28

Paul's secondary concern in Galatian's is **how** the gospel was received (by tradition or immediate revelation); his primary concern is **from whom** it came (from other humans or God). If he believes, as he clearly does, that the gospel authenticates his activity and authority as an apostle, it is not surprising that the divine source of the gospel should be a repeated emphasis in his argument.

p. 29

Galatians 1:15-16

What happened on the Damascus Road was a unique experience, Paul's own, and we need to be wary of taking it as a model conversion after which all others should be patterned.

p. 30

Paul testifies that he made remarkable advances in his religious development, was blameless as regards righteousness under the law, and out of deep conviction persecuted the church which he felt was blasphemous. There is no hint (except in a strained exegesis of Rom 7:7-25) that Paul had a tortured conscience and a troubled soul which Christ then replaced with peace of mind and eternal security.

The same fallacy of reading into Paul the experience of another has also shaped some pietistic interpretations. The change from a life of irresponsibility or waywardness to moral zeal and stability, which may have been the experience of the interpreter, becomes the pattern of Paul's change (as if he had been the prodigal son coming home from the bars and brothels of the far country.

p. 31

We need to be wary of psychologizing Paul's experience, that is of interpreting the incident itself or its dramatic sequel in terms of the insights of modern psychology or psychiatry.

p. 31-2

What can be said of this experience?

1. It represents a critical moment in the history of God's working in Paul's life. He refers to the incident in his letters not by referring to the outward details (the light, the voice, his companions), nor by what he felt at the time (elation, relief, security) but by what God was doing in his life.. What occurred was an event which from Paul's theological way of evaluating it was a crucial step in God's long-term activity with him. It was not his decision to become an apostle, a preacher among the Gentiles; it was God's decision. It was God's voice which called him, God's hand which grasped him, God's grace which opened his eyes to see his Son.

But what does it really mean to live as one so called and grasped? Two things at least are worth noting. First it means life has direction and purpose. Events which seem random and fortuitous are ultimately oriented toward a goal and thus make sense. They are pieces in a puzzle which in turn fit together with numberless other puzzles to comprise a huge mosaic. Certainly this is an affirmation of faith and not a statement which can be verified by scientific or historical procedure. Neither the small puzzle nor the large mosaic can be seen from our vantage point in time and history. Likewise, this affirmation of faith is not to be used as an easy explanation of human tragedy and pain, to cheer up a sufferer, or to silence the cries of the grieving. For many there remain moments which often stretch into long periods where life seems rude, senseless, and indiscriminate; and the casual detached counsel of "Christian friends" sounds no better than the words of Job's comforters. (Often it is the friends' way of protecting themselves against pain. But that is not the whole story. The God who calls us and grasps us is the Father of Jesus Christ, both crucified and risen. He was neither casual nor detached on Good Friday. Human sufferings, then, can be faced in the light of Easter toward Jesus moved in the time of his great suffering.

The reality of being called and grasped provides enormous support for getting about one's task. In moments of crisis people have the remarkable capacity to second-guess themselves. "Should I have taken this option? What if I had done differently? Doubting one's course of action seems inevitable at one time or another. Choices have to be made, many clouded by uncertainty and confusion. But self-doubts become paralyzing, particularly in the face of possible failure. The solution lies not in dogged self-reliance ("I can master this situation.") or in resigned compliance ("Somehow I'll muddle through"), but in the conviction one is called, called in the first place not to be a salesperson or a surgeon or a soldier but to be a Christian (and that means, as it did for Paul, of course a Christian witness). The decision as to what one is ultimately about in life, that is, being a Christian, is not one's own to be fretted over, it is God's decision. That takes a burden off and opens up incredible resources for coping with life and its problems (Phil 4:19). It enables one to be amazingly optimistic in dark hours, even light-hearted about momentous tasks, certainly with a sense of humour about oneself.

It is more accurate to describe what happened on the Damascus Road with a broader term like "call" (including both conversion and commission) rather than with the more usual "conversion".

p. 32-34

What does it mean concretely and practically to be a Christian? The classic answer, Barth suggests (in Church Dogmatics) is to point to the benefits of Christ. The Christian is a recipient of grace and thus experiences the reconciliation, forgiveness, joy, peace, and hope to be found in Christ. Many hymns sung in our churches enumerate the benefits for us; the benefits have certainly been popular themes for sermons. The trouble with the classic answer is that it is fraught with the temptation to assume that the enjoyment of God's gifts constitutes the only relevant and important reality to which God calls people. *My* salvation, *my* peace of mind, *my* assurance of God's blessing (or perhaps in other circles, *my* self-actualization, the fulfillment of *my* potential as a person, doing *my* thing) become exclusive concerns.

Christ, the Lord, at whose disposal Christians put themselves, becomes a genie to supply at a beck and call personal blessings.

A more biblical answer to the question, What does it mean to be a Christian? Is, Barth argues, in terms of the task of being a Christian witness, that is, in being one who in word and deed points to God and what he is doing in relation to the world. Rather than a preoccupation of the good gifts God bestows on the individual Christian, the primary centre around which life is oriented is the spoken word and the service of love rendered the world.

p. 34-5

Though Paul aggressively counters those who insist that Gentiles must become Jews in order to be complete Christians, he himself never ceases to be a Jew.

p. 35

To be grasped by Christ is to discover a whole new world where standards of success once dearly held no longer matter, where criteria for decisions are radically altered, where people are viewed in a different light. (II Cor. 5:14-17)

p. 36

Paul's conviction was abruptly reversed, however, and he found himself engaged in a mission not merely to the nominally religious Jews but to Gentiles who stood completely outside the pale of the Law. The dialogue in the Acts account (9:4-6) calls attention to this new perspective. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." The Lord is identified as Jesus, and Jesus is described as the one who has bound himself to this contemptible community Paul is seeking to eliminate. This identification throws a different light on the people of God. God is the one who justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5) and his people are none other than the ungodly whom he justifies.

p. 36

Despite the many sermons on race relations and the activity of numerous councils on human relations, the term "Christian" is still used in today's world to exclude, to segregate, to separate people, like a wall to keep out undesirables. As in the Galatian letter the issue is theological the message of justification by faith has become justification by being "our kind of people". Thus the universalism Paul struggled for remains today a major challenge to the church.

p. 37

Galatians 2:1-10

The unity of the church is built on one gospel of grace. This means, then that the common tie drawing Christians together is not to be discovered in mere agreement about doctrinal matters or in joint ethnic heritage or in a national bond or in social homogeneity. These are matters to which people are naturally attracted and often determine the constituency of a church or congregation in North America, if not in the West generally. The question is, however, is whether these attractions usurp the functions of the gospel as the essential bond of the church and end up as exclusive rather than inclusive ties. Rather than a unity, what tends to develop is a uniformity of perceptions, morals, styles of life; and those who fail to conform move on or drop out.

p. 41

A passion for the singularity of the message, when the message is one of grace and forgiveness, issues in an open church in which freedom is not destroyed either by the pressure of conformity or by the contending force of pluralism. It is, to use Moltmann's phrase, "an evangelical unity", not an ethical, social or legal one. (cf Moltmann – The Church in the Power of the Spirit, p. 343)

p. 42

One Gospel of grace pushes Christians towards a visible unity. To be one in Christ means constantly to be alert to those experiences in life and history when the gospel leads to a visible unity between individuals, groups, and Churches. Sometimes it happens as a serendipitous moment, the by-product of a common venture. But more often, as with Paul, unity comes only after a long and frank conversation in which there is a risk of disagreement. It emerges as two parties struggle persistently to resolve a complex problem or they dare to confront "false brethren" who want unity based on faulty premises or no unity at all.

p. 43

Christian unity is not to be confused with mere tolerance or the absence of strife. Like love, it longs for expression in some tangible way, the participation of one partner in the life of the other. Common worship experiences and educational ventures, joint mission projects, the sharing of loaf and cup may not be sufficient, but at least they represent occasions where the celebration of the gospel in word and deed can be a unifying bond and congregations can move a step or two beyond their separateness.

p. 44

2:11-21

Contemporary "works of the law": may be defined as attitudes or activities which function in such a way as to usurp the grace of God; dispositions, whether religious or not, which aim to accomplish what the death of Christ accomplished. Illustrative are those individuals who set out to carve their own niches in life and who feel by their personal achievements they can effect a personal relationship with God and inner peace for themselves.

p. 53

In contrast to "works of the law" Paul sets "faith in Christ", or is it the "faith of Christ. The RSV together with the vast majority of recent translations reads the former; the KJV, almost alone gives the latter. A very plausible and persuasive case, however, can be made for taking "Christ" which in the Greek appears in the genitive case, to be the subject ("Christ's faith" or "Christ's faithfulness") rather than the object ("faith in Christ") of faith. In the instance of the subjective genitive (KJV), what Paul would be contrasting with "works of the law" is not another human reaction, that is, believing in Christ, but an action of Christ himself, his unflinching faithfulness to the will of God, his obedience unto death even in the face of Godforsakenness. This is supported by the Old Testament concept of faith, which carries a heavy stress on fidelity, loyalty, and faithfulness.

p. 53

Three dangers:

1. Faith is never intended to be a possession people can have to guarantee their status, like a membership card or even a birth certificate. It is God's gift that must be constantly reappropriated.
2. The temptation must be resisted to turn faith into a work. The line is thin but terribly important which separates faith as a necessary response to God's grace from faith as a precondition to grace. Paul regularly uses the preposition *dia* with the genitive case to mean **through** faith; he never uses *dia* with the accusative with the accusative case which would mean **on account of faith**. Efforts which seek to refute the doctrine of universalism by insisting on the necessity of believing in Christ often run the risk of making faith, like circumcision, something persons perform in order to activate God's otherwise latent justification. But grace with strings attached is no grace at all.

True faith has about it the character of humility, the acknowledgment that one cannot perform deeds which in any way contribute to one's salvation. To be justified by Christ is to be freed from the burden of self-righteousness. Faith is not a reliance on one's accomplishments or *one's lack of accomplishments*, but a trust in the accomplishments of God.

Faith in Christ is the offering of a glad word of thanksgiving for God's goodness focused in the gift of his Son. It is the standing ovation we give when we have caught only a fleeting glimpse of been thoroughly gripped by the drama of Good Friday and Easter. Faith becomes obedience – not the superficial adherence to the demands of the law, but conformity to the prime figure in the drama, following him about as he moves amongst the mass of humanity declaring good news to the poor and release to the captives, binding the broken-hearted, giving garlands instead of ashes, and above all announcing the year of the Lord's favour.

“What is true faith?” one reciting the (Heidelberg) Catechism replies:

It is not only a certain knowledge by which *I accept* as true all that God has revealed *to us* in his Word, but also a wholehearted trust in which the Holy Spirit creates *in me* through the gospel, that *not only to others but to me also* God has given the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of sheer grace solely for the sake of Christ's saving work. (italics the author's)

p. 54-6

Galatians 2:15-21

Paul's statements on justification arise out of his reflection on and defense of the Gentile's entrance into the church, not out of his reflection on the question of how personal guilt is alleviated.

The essential question was, How can I, a sinful person, find acceptance in the eyes of a holy and righteous God? The answer came from Paul and particularly from the way Paul understood Habakkuk's words: He who through faith is righteous shall live.” The gracious character of God's deed in Christ, with the realization that this was “for me”, produced an experience of peace and joy. To be sure, Luther did not imagine he was the only soul whom God had justified through faith, but in effect all the rest were simply cases other cases like his own. They, too, experienced the foolishness of their self-righteousness and heard the divine words of pardon – but for themselves alone. It is unnecessary to review the whole history of the doctrine since the sixteenth century, but certainly one tendency in Protestantism (and the few exceptions prove the rule) has to become preoccupied with the individual experience of grace and to articulate the doctrine of justification (and also sanctification) biographically and psychologically.

p. 56-7

Acceptance of God's “not guilty” verdict means acceptance of people with a different history, a different story to tell. God's judgment is corporate (“for us”) and only in that context can it be personal (“for me”). His justifying grace may then appear offensive not only in that it totally disregards human merit but also in that it breaks down otherwise acceptable barriers and brings together radically disparate folks. Such solidarity is not always easy to take. Jonah becomes angry at God's grace in sparing the Ninevites; the elder son refuses to join the celebration when his prodigal brother returns home; the Pharisee thanks God that he is not like Publican.

Repeated reminders of the corporate and social are essential in the modern context where individuals are always on the search for their true individuality. The modern emphasis on individuality results not from a frontier mentality but from coping with a fragmented society. An individual relates to various institutions – home, place of work, church, school, union hall, country club – yet rarely do the institutions have any immediate relationship to each other. How is he or she to get it all together so that life can become more than a collection of bits and pieces? Certainly the Christian faith insists that personal integration never happens as a solo performance.

More attention needs to be paid to the connection between justification and sanctification in Paul. Often the two have been neatly separated. Justification describes the first stage of salvation, the right relationship to God in which sinful people are initially placed. Sanctification describes the moral and spiritual growth of believers once they are set in the new relationship.

Dying with Christ in this context is not then primarily a reference to baptism, but is rather a description of what it means to live out of and for this new Lord to whom believers are subject. To be sure, the phrase “Christ lives in me” implies a risen figure, but one the nailprints and wounds very much in evidence. There is no cause for triumphalism and religious flag-waving. Christian existence remains existence “in the flesh”, in the human realm where pain, suffering, injustice and oppression still must be endured and vigorously fought against. At the same time, it is existence “by faith” – taking the leap, rejecting all false offers of security, risking the confession that life can be found in death, and trusting “the one who loved me and gave himself for me”. Being crucified with Christ is not a temporary stage to be quickly passed through in the journey toward a blissful life without pain, anguish and struggle. It remains the daily experience of the community justified and ordered by the power of God.

Entrance into Abraham's family comes by hearing and believing, not by birth. But then Paul completely reorients the issue by asserting that salvation is more than simply getting one's name on the list. It has to do

with living one's life under the reign of God and of coping with the tension between existence “in the flesh” and existence “by faith”.

The righteousness of God – given, received, and lived out – is not just a personal but a corporate reality. It involves participation in a community of people who risk their own security by being *for* others whose histories may be radically different, who culturally, ethnically, economically, politically, and/or socially live on the other side of the track.

The divine acquittal is received not by faith which may some day lead to a social concern (or may not) but by faith which **is** social concern, or to use Paul's words, **faith working through love.** (5:6)

p. 56-62

Galatians 3:1-5:12

Because the fundamental nature of the gospel is grace, no adjustments or stipulations which suggest it might be conditional can be tolerated. The matter of the Gentiles' reception into full participation in the people of God is not one of strategy or politics; it is theological. It concerns the nature of God's actions in the world and what it means to be related to him and to live in that relationship with him from day to day. (This is a clear picture of the church's stance under apartheid – it was never a political issue, but a theological one – my comment).

Galatians 3:1-5

The Spirit is God's vital presence, his lively power in the church and in the world. Four aspects of the Spirit's appearance and activity emerge from the series of questions Paul poses:

1. God's spirit had worked to bring about changes in the lives of individuals and to create a community of faith and support. He had become an energizing reality in their midst. These words of Paul are instructive, especially in a day when the search for meaning in life is often expressed in terms of a search for the Holy Spirit and the gifts connected with the Spirit. Individuals long for something more real than what can be found in a frantic, impersonal, and materialistic world. The very word “Spirit” becomes an attraction by suggesting an animating force, a reality giving ardour, vitality, and warmth of feeling. The quest, however, sincere is open to distortion. For many reasons – perhaps the intensity of the search or the strangeness of “spiritual” language – God's freedom is often neglected in the pursuit of human freedom. In some case, a particular ritual or set of phrases become the ingredient essential in invoking the Spirit; in other cases, the absence of order or form is the key, an enforced spontaneity. What we learn from Paul's reflection of the experience of the Galatians, however, is that nothing – neither liturgical form nor the lack of it – assures the coming of the Spirit to a group or individuals.

2. One expects to find the blatant sins he later lists as examples of the works of the flesh (5:19-21) but to categorize a religious rite like circumcision with things like immorality, impurity, licentiousness and drunkenness is astounding. It points to a fact which the church in its history has continually rediscovered, namely that the more sinister enemies of the faith are not always the obviously irreligious practices of the world but often the potent forces of morality and religion which operate within. The latter tend to undermine the gospel by a preoccupation with the particular form an obedient response ought to take. Rigid lines are drawn between those who do and those who do not, with the result that the law again becomes a dividing wall. The Spirit is the power of the new age and the source of vitality and mighty works.

3. The closest Paul comes to suggesting a test for ascertaining the presence of the Spirit is whether or not one is led to the basic confession, "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3) and to the manifestation of his fruit. (5:22-23). Ernest Kasemann has these words about the need for the liveliness of the Spirit:

Christianity cannot entirely do without enthusiasm. That does not simply mean that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is an essential part of theology and that without the reality of that Spirit revelation and church decay. It also means that a Christianity in which there are no signs and mighty works, no visible charismata, in which the "God is really among you" of 1 Cor 14:25 is no longer heard from pagans in answer to its preaching, its actions, and its suffering, becomes empty, doctrinaire, and a form of ideology... No matter what danger might have brought to the church, the final defeat of enthusiasm has always signalized the sleeping church, even the busiest one. Enthusiasm is indispensable where the priesthood of all believers is to be awakened and the community represented and enlivened by the laity. There is no Christian freedom without a dose of enthusiasm (Jesus Means Freedom, pp. 51, 54)

4. "Ordinary" Christians are from time to time overawed and even intimidated by the apparent spirituality of fellow-believers. They suppose some have been more abundantly endowed by, or have a special aptitude for, the Spirit setting them apart from the rank and file of the church's membership. Paul's words are reassuring. He is opposed to any notion of a cast system within the church, any idea of cultivating elitist groups. Gifts will vary, personal experiences will differ, but all who respond in faith have already benefited from the Spirit's activity (though they may not express it in just that way) and are continually being addressed by the same Spirit when confronted by the comforts and demands of the gospel.

(p. 65-70)

Galatians 3:6-14

What is the "curse of the law"? On whom does it fall and why? Verse 10 says that it falls on those who rely on their own fulfillment of the law's demands and on those who fail to keep the whole law (so the quote from Deuteronomy 27:26). This, one way or another, includes the whole of Judaism. But Gentiles are not exempt either, because they are aliens to the law, strangers to the covenants of Israel and without circumcision. The law by its exclusiveness "curses" Gentiles, unless they are prepared to become proselytes. The "us" therefore whom Christ redeemed embraces both Jews and Gentiles.

p. 77

Galatians 3:15-29

The law can no longer be a wedge to divide people. For first century Judaism the split came not so much between Jews who were morally superior because they kept the law and other Jews who were less zealous or indifferent to it completely. The law was a prerogative given to all Jews; it

was a national as well as religious symbol. The coming of Christ, however, involves a redefinition of the people of God. The new unity discovered in fellowship with him replaces the old lines of demarcation which included some and excluded others.

p. 80

The law functions, like blinders on a horse, to point Israel in one direction – to the advent of the new age and the fulfillment of the promise.

p. 81

The command to love does not replace the law, as if the law having been summarized were no longer necessary. Love does not always tell one exactly how to respond or what to say in the many ambiguous situations people face daily. Neither does the law; but in numerous cases passages like the ten commandments when read in the light of Christ give positive definition to the loving will of God. They help to prevent love from becoming soft sentimentality or merely an abstract principle. The church still needs the law to throw light on the human situation and love to keep that law from being rigidly interpreted.

p. 82-83

Galatians 3:26-29

Christ's coming was an eschatological event. It was world-changing; it inaugurated the last times. Though not every individual has been aware of that event and its implications, the event is nevertheless true and impinges on the lives of all. Christ's lordship is not a potentiality which is actualized when individuals are baptized; it is a reality which people either obey or disobey (by following some other lord). Baptism, then, is the occasion when the believer by God's grace is drawn into that lordship with other believers and so "puts on Christ". It is a time for celebrating what God's grace has done for the individual, not for celebrating that Jesus has finally become Lord. The stress Paul puts on the once-for-allness of the coming of Christ has helped to remind the church that it is not a mystery cult (like so many ancient religions) nor is its faith purely mysticism. It is rooted in an event in history which changed the course of that history.

Circumcision implied division between Jew and non-Jew and between male and female. Baptism into Christ means unity.

If Paul himself is taken as a model, one must say that the difference between the categories remains. He continues to reflect a Jewish self-consciousness 2:15; 2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5; Rom 11:14), to treat Jews and Gentiles as ethnic units (cf Rom 9 – 11), to address slaves, slave-owners, men and women as distinct groups. In the light of this the unity he declares is not one, in the first instance, in which ethnic, social, and sexual differences vanish, but one in which the barriers, the hostility, the chauvinism, and the sense of superiority and inferiority between respective categories are destroyed. Being in Christ does not do away with Jew or Greek, male or female, even slave or free, but it makes these differences before God irrelevant.

p. 84-86

Galatians 4:1-11

Calvin says it simply: "By putting the chain on himself, (Christ) takes them off the or other." (Commentaries: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, p. 74)

God's humanizing presence in

... the stable where for once in our lives,

Everything became a You and nothing was an It.

(WH Auden, For the Time Being)

Slaves become children, no more and no less. They are not stripped of their weaknesses and turned into spiritual giants so that they can chat with God on his level. Nor are they strangers at a gathering wandering about aimlessly because no one knows or cares about them. Paul stresses the ready access to the Father, the open door, the listening ear. It is somewhat striking to find here and elsewhere the phrase “Abba, Father”. (cf Mark 14:26; Rom 8:15), which continues untranslated the Aramaic term “Abba” alongside its Greek equivalent. The early church obviously found something special in this intimate for God and preserved it in its original form. Jesus had used it in his time of great supplication and it may well lie behind the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:2; Matt 6:9). Not only did he as the unique Son face God with such intimacy, he intended his followers to do likewise. His Spirit makes it happen, overcoming the timidity of the newly adopted children and enabling them to pray in this unprecedented way.

The Holy Spirit is not to be thought of, then, as the obscure or even frightening member of the Godhead. He is, in the words of the Nicene Creed, “the Lord and Giver of Life”. He makes God real and alive to his people by unstopping their ears so they may hear and opening their mouths so they may pray. What may otherwise degenerate into meaningless doctrine is animated so that one is drawn beyond a theory of adoption actually to say, “Abba, Father” A whole new world of family relations, of freedom, of joyful obedience, of lively worship is opened up because “God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts”.

p. 95-96

Galatians 4:21-5:1

Paul’s understanding of freedom is much more radical and realistic than merely the possibility of choice.

Paul does not speak in Galatians of independence or autonomy. The coup d’etat of the old age which Christ achieves, in fact, involves the establishment of a new regime of loyalty and dependency. Citizens are not free to determine their own destiny, but are claimed for service by the living, loving God which immediately sets them in the fight against all dehumanizing tyrannies.

Freedom comes to Christians as a reality into which then they are called (cf 5:13) and in which they participate. It is not an innate quality or state of being which the individual discovers or recovers by sorting out past experiences or relationships. It is a gift bestowed as a result of Good Friday and Easter, which accordingly involves the recipient in a concern for the total well-being of others.

Paul regards freedom not as a retreat into the self but liberation of the self from without. Christ who frees humanity refuses to withdraw from life, takes on the cross and sin of others, and suffers the consequences of his involvement. Christians take their cue from Christ so that self-mastery gives way to obedience and submission of the self to God. Therein lies the liberty.

Accepting the liberating work of Christ means rejecting any other off that might promise ultimate freedom or security. This is why Paul urges his readers not to “submit again to a yoke of slavery” and warns them (5:2-4) about alternatives to the freedom of Christ. Not so much circumcision but larger defence budgets, expanded government programmes, and the latest self-help books become today the basis or false hopes.

The person who trusts the faithfulness of God is then in a position to take risks about everything else in life when the risks are valid expressions of Christian freedom not obviously foolhardy risks which only indicate boredom or the need for attention.

Because the life of faith is, at least from the human vantage point, an insecure life, Christian freedom should never be viewed as a privilege granted to a select few, a superior status for the elite. It is, in fact, an obligation entailing enormous responsibility.

The point is that the life of freedom can be uncomfortable, ambivalent, and even perilous. On the one hand, the burdens of others must be borne in love; on the other hand, free people must account for

their own life and conduct (a paradox developed in 6:1-5) To experience the liberation of Christ is hardly the occasion for arrogant boasting.

Galatians 5:2-12

The notion of waiting connotes to most people of the West simply wasted time, minutes lost when the telephone lines are busy or longer periods spent impatiently because a friend is late for an appointment. One imagines all the things one might be accomplishing. Paul’s point is that the truly worthwhile accomplishments, however, are God’s. His hoped for righteousness cannot be forced by human achievements as if it were only the accumulation of so many kindly deeds.

Those who have received the Spirit and who wait do so by sharing in the travail of a world looking for liberty and fulfillment. Here in Galatians Paul speaks of faith, striking the note of receptivity – but “faith working through love”. Not under the delusion that their deeds win God’s acceptance or coerce his plan for universal justice. Christians nevertheless prepare for the coming righteousness with deeds of various sorts (as mentioned in 5:13-14; 22-23; 25-26; 6:1-2, 6-10). The same Spirit who enables them to wait patiently also creates in them a restlessness with things as they are, a longing for the ‘not yet’ of God’s plan for the world. In the words of the beatitude they hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6).

To speak of hope, then, is to speak of the thin line, as one has put it, between presumptuousness that cannot wait and despair that can only wait. It is a reliance on the promise of God that “he who began a good work will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6), thus making the Christian life neither a precipitous effort to change the world nor unconcerned idleness.

God has freely acted in Christ to save sinful humanity, an action totally unmerited and without parallel. The only appropriate response is acceptance, trust in God, complete reliance on his faithfulness. Yet if the response to such an amazing gift is genuine, faith cannot remain quiescent. The one believes becomes aware of a community of believers and his faith is characterized by a concern for others, especially for those with a different history from their own. It is not against Paul but against a purely passive faith or a faith that had degenerated into credence that the Epistle of James was written with its jarring words that “faith apart from works is dead”.

“In Christ”, where divine love is so profoundly experienced, believers find themselves to be vehicles bearing that same love to others.

Contrary to all rational explanations and external proofs, God makes this event of failure (the crucifixion) to be the occasion for saving his people. That Jesus was raised from the dead does not remove the element of scandal connected with the crucifixion; it only confirms it. Consequently, in his own preaching and teaching Paul is careful not to dilute the Christian message in order to make it more intelligible or palatable to his audience and so rob it of its redemptive power.

In the Galatian context there is “an irreconcilable conflict between the cross, which was the revelation of salvation and was valid for all, even the Gentiles, and circumcision which was the sign of Jewish exclusiveness” (Ragnar Bring, Commentary on Galatians, p. 242)

The Lord of the New Testament can be met *only* as the crucified Christ. He comes as the despised, rejected, weak, slain Messiah of Good Friday so that we either accept him as he is or altogether miss him. As such, of course, he contradicts the presuppositions people hold about what a deliverer should be and do. Helplessness, shame, and failure are no more a part of our religious expectations than they were of first century Judaism. What is more, responding to such a Lord implies not only coping with an historical figure of the past but with a continuing presence whose power is made known in weakness (1 Cor 12:7-10) and who still chooses the foolish to confound the wise (! Cor 1:26-31) He remains an affront to systems, whether religious, social, or political, which seek in some way to fit him into their existing power structure or to adjust his teaching so that it suits the prevailing ideology. But to accommodate the Gospel of crucified Christ in this way is to remove the stumbling block – and the power – of the cross.

Galatians 5:13-6:18

Freedom is not a commodity obtained and stored away for a rainy day; it is a gift which increases its value in the using and can be lost through misuse.

Galatians 5:13-15

Already (Paul) has established freedom as a given, a divine deed effected when Christ changes place with humanity, taking the curse and granting the blessing (3:13-14). What is a given becomes also “an unsuspected adventure”, a movement beyond securities, comfort, and protection to the risks of love and the demands of service. Clearly there is joy to the journey. It “is not the happy fluttering of a butterfly from one attractive flower to another” (Ellul). It is not an eternal high with its constant jubilation and triumph. For these initial readers freedom has to do with overcoming community strife, with nurturing gifts of patience, gentleness and self-control and with bearing one another’s burdens.

One can live a decent life, refrain from destructive conduct, take up the cause of justice for others, even fight for the poor and oppressed without Christian freedom. The acts and behaviour discussed in Paul and other New Testament writers can be performed on the basis of idealism, or in the belief that human nature is essentially good and needs only a slight push to improve itself. Extravagant deeds to better the conditions of the community, deeds that are astounding in the level of the sacrifice involved, can be done out of a sense of guilt or to achieve a particular political or social goal. When such actions do in fact make life more human and promote the cause of justice and peace, they are to be applauded and supported whatever the basis of the action (if one can even discern that). Certainly, it is not the business of the church or any individual to measure morality and assess benevolent deeds to determine whether or not they are done in freedom.

What then is distinctive, even though it may not be perceivable, about the activity of the free community or free individual?

- a) The deeds done in Christian freedom are not coerced or done to satisfy a legal demand. They are not pre-formed by a commandment or moral prescription so that the doers are obliged to keep their attention glued on what it is they are to do and away from the recipients of the deeds. Christ frees persons *from* such a law and *for* needy neighbours.
- b) Free people are not determined in their actions by what sort of response their actions may or may not evoke. They are not miffed when a “thank you” is not immediately received for a contribution made or an important bill passed.

Free people are not deceived by over-valuing their moral decisions and their contributions to others as if their freedom depended on what they do. They know that freedom is a gift given, that to act freely is a sign of grace received, and consequently they do not have to be caught up in continually taking stock to see if enough money has been pledged or enough service rendered. How much is “enough”? The characteristically Christian style of life emerges not so much in what is done as in the fact that what is done expresses the freedom given by God, whose call is to selfless, serving love.

If freedom is the basis of Christian ethics then *loving service is the proper exercise of freedom*.

Paul describes Christian freedom as a change of masters” “you who were once slaves of sin ... have become slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:15-23). Such a statement cuts across the grains of any notion of freedom as autonomy and independence, yet it is indispensable for understanding God’s action in liberating his people. It is not that God gives something (freedom) in order to take it back (be servants). Freedom has movement; it goes somewhere. It can lead to freedom for others or bondage.

If I in love really become a servant to my neighbour, then I am delivered from the temptation of paternalism, of constantly being the wiser, richer partner who always knows what is best for my

needy friend. I am at my neighbour’s disposal and in serving him discover afresh the freedom God has given us both. He does something for me by providing me the occasion to look beyond my own problems, to be rid of my selfish preoccupations, and to find a liberating relationship. Must I then do everything he asks me to do, even if what he asks me to do seems destructive to him? No, because Paul qualifies his command: “*through love* be servants of one another”. Elsewhere Paul describes love as that which “rejoices in the right”. (1 Cor 13:6); “it does no wrong to a neighbour”. (Rom 13:10) I may on occasion have to oppose him, to challenge his ideas and commitments. He may in turn reject me, because he takes exception to the way our God liberates people so indiscriminately. Of course, I must be careful not to give needless offense, not to take again the paternalistic mantle and be condescending, as if I were his master and he my servant. Love, however, must never shrink from conflict, lest it degenerate into mere sentimentality.

Love is not one virtue amongst a list of virtues, but the sum and substance of what it means to be a Christian. In dying with Christ and the subsequent new life, persons discover that they recipients of God’s love, and faith essentially means surrendering to this love (2:20; Rom 5:5, 8) As sinners are placed “in Christ”, they are remade by love so that they are no longer characterized by self-interest: “For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” (2 Cor.5:14-15)

Decisions are made in terms of very specific contexts, causing a response sometimes to be Yes and other times No, even to the same request. I am not called to love “generally”, but only particularly, and that means *this* man or *this* woman with his or her needs, pains, and interests. Paul’s counsel on the issue of eating food offered to idols provides a good example. Having determined that there is nothing inherently wrong with the meat, his decision may be to eat or not to eat, depending on the conscience of the neighbour, “For whom Christ died” (1 Cor 8:11). Paul does not set out abstract principles which, if applied, may produce consistency but directs his readers to an actual human being with unique circumstances. From each new individual and context Christians learn what precisely it is that love requires.

Paul presumes a relationship between individuals. But suppose the one in need whom I am called to love is mired in a hopeless situation or oppression or poverty or exploitation. It is not Christian love if I ignore the social, economic, or political forces which have created the conditions under which this one lives and offer only palliatives or perhaps only spiritual support. In such an instance love demands justice, and acts of love are transposed into efforts to bring relief from a form or forms of tyranny. Paul’s immediate concern is with the personal relationship of the Galatian Christians, but the force of his command to serve one another in love carries broad implications for Christians’ involvement in the cause of justice for all.

Galatians 5:16-26

Persons freed by Jesus Christ are given the vocation to love one another. Paul does not hesitate to state this calling in the form of a command, an all-encompassing command without loopholes. There may be contexts in which it is difficult to determine exactly what love demand, but there are no occasions where the command can be set aside, no conditions under which Christians are obliged to do something less. The Spirit dwells within Christians and, when allowed, produces the very love which has been commanded (5:22). It is not a mechanical action, mind you, but one in which the dynamic and direction are God’s, so that in reality God makes possible the very life he demands. The results of the Spirit’s presence fulfill Leviticus 19:18.

The RSV translation of verse 16 is a bit misleading. It treats the verbs in the verse as if they were both imperatives, parallel to one another (Walk by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh). The latter clause, however, is an emphatic future negative, conditional on the previous

clause. Paul is saying, “Walk by the Spirit and *then* you will never gratify the desires of the flesh.” (cf NEB & JB).

What Paul means by the flesh (sarx) needs a certain bit of translation for contemporary Christians. He is not saying that material things are inherently evil, nor is he implying that human feelings, physical desires, or sensual pleasures are themselves to be avoided or suppressed. What makes the flesh so destructive is that it can become the norm by which people’s lives are lived. This world with its measures of success and its rewards for hard work, absorbs all their interests and demands their full attention. There is no openness to God’s activity, to the presence of the Spirit, to the life of the new age. The sum of things consists of what can be seen, handled, tasted – or bought.

To walk by the Spirit entails a genuine decision, but not a decision involving a strong effort of the will to overcome enormous obstacles in order to get something accomplished. Rather Christians are called to entrust themselves to the Spirit, to God’s activity, and simply to follow his guidance. It is not a reluctant Spirit who has to be persuaded or persistently begged to make available to us God’s new world. The Spirit is, as it were, eager to function with power in the church and in individuals to produce his “fruit” and only needs to be allowed the opportunity.

Paul has not established a dualistic view of the world in which two equal forces are locked in a struggle with the final outcome still in doubt. The struggle Paul depicts here (as well as in many other places in his letters) is in line with his view that the present evil age from which Christ has delivered his people still must be reckoned with. Its rulers, however, are doomed to pass away (1 Cor 2:6; 7:31) and cannot thwart God’s purposes (Rom 8:38). Sometimes the conflict grows fierce, but the ultimate conclusion is not uncertain (1 Cor 15:24). In the modern world where so many conflicting claims are made on the lives of individuals and institutions, when one constantly contends with the reality of living “in the flesh” yet does not want to be controlled by the flesh, it is a salutary reminder that in the final analysis the flesh is no match for the Spirit.

The list (fruits of the Spirit) serves an important function. If there are those in the Galatian congregations who have been carried away by their ecstatic experiences of the Spirit and have become the occasion for controversy, this list calls them back to earth and to the fundamental activity of God in human lives. It contains, beyond the gift of love, a striking number of terms which have about them the mark of restraint and steadiness over against exuberance and self-assertion. For example, there is “patience”, the quality of being long-suffering toward those whose conduct may be calculated to provoke anger; “faithfulness”, reliability in a world where one may often be the victim of another’s unreliability; there is “gentleness” or “meekness”, the avoidance of unnecessary anger or sudden brusqueness or self-assertion; and there is “self-control”, the discipline of one’s impulses and desires. The composite reminds those who tend toward an unbridled religious fervor or whose understanding of freedom partakes of a Dionysian spirit, that, while love embraces joy, it must also cope with the ordinary and the ugly, with the arrogant and the ill-tempered.

There may be no fool-proof method of documenting the Spirit’s presence in human life, but we can follow his tracks by seeing evidences of love. If one’s so-called “Spirit-led” activity ends in needless enmity, strife, jealousy, and dissension, then it is a safe bet that the Spirit had nothing to do with it.

p. 133-140

Galatians 6:1-10

Church discipline is always liable to abuse, and Paul seems aware of this as he presents the example. First, the task is not that of punishment but restoration. The main verb in Verse 1 connotes a remedial action: to return one to an original state, to reconstruct something which has broken down. There is no hint of retribution or punitive action. Christians are not urged to set up

a tribunal to see that the guilty party pays for his or her sins. Secondly, the restoration is to take place “in a spirit of gentleness”, or, as several modern translations read, “very gently”. The tenderness and care needed in restoration come from the one most offended, God, who does not leave Christians on their own in the task but promises to be present in the healing process.

Thirdly, self-satisfaction and complacency produce a patronizing arrogance, where one is only too ready to call attention to the faults of others but blind to his own. “Thank God I am not like the publican!” To avoid self delusion, each is to “test his own work” and refrain from focusing on the problems of the neighbour. Paul evidently feels confident that any accurate self-assessment will indicate that one’s own work is plagued with sin and can hardly provide sufficient cause for boasting.

The very idea of restoring one “caught in any kind of wrong-doing” sounds a bit strange to modern ears. The current mood is more one of live-and-let-live, of staying out of other people’s business, of avoiding friends who seem constantly to want to take care of us. There have been too many in the past who have been only too eager to put us right when we have gone astray. But Paul describes the restoration as bearing burdens: sharing the pain of failure, assuming a portion of the guilt and judgement, particularly in the process of making amends. Christians become so involved in the situation of the neighbour that they must take care not to be tempted themselves. But this mutuality only happens when those who help are aware of themselves, their own needs and weaknesses, and have not forgotten their own accountability. This description of church discipline is a far cry from the inquisitions of yesteryear or the sharp condemnations of moral magistrates or even the disapproving glares of the self-righteous. The image “body of Christ” connotes this profound mutuality where members have “the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured all rejoice together” (1 Cor 12:25-26)

p 141-147

Galatians 6:11-18

Paul significantly uses the perfect tense of the Greek verb “crucify”, indicating that this world about which he speaks is not entirely over and gone. He still has to contend with it and live his life in a “crucified” relation to it (cf 2:19-20). He meets it when he shops in the marketplace and travels the roads of Asia Minor and Greece. He sees its effects in the faces of beggars and in the conniving of the prosperous. Its pleasures and pains are never far away.

First, there is the tension of living in the world with its carefully worked out authorities, standards, and schemes and yet as those who answer an alien authority, recognize contrary standards, and follow a plan that leads against the stream. Living lives of freedom from the world and daring to serve neighbours in need can only bring Christians into conflict and affliction. There is, even for “ordinary” Christians, no way to avoid the acute pressures. They may come as sharp confrontations with the world, or as a slight but steady tension, or as opposition which only flares up from time to time. Of course as long as they remain merely religious, Christians can stay on good terms with the world. The world tolerates and even values much of what is represented by religion, its rites and its forms. The opponents of Paul in Galatia found that fostering a ritual like circumcision would enable them to avoid persecution. But being crucified to the world is not synonymous with being religious. It connotes subjection to a different authority, “our Lord Jesus Christ”, by whose cross this new relation to the world has come about.

This conflict with the world is not something Christians seek as if it will prove their faithfulness. It is not to be confused with masochism, or its more heroic form, “the lust for martyrdom”. Those who hunt for fights in order to be able to suffer for Christ’s sake only expose their own sickness, not their dedication. Neither is it to be misconstrued as a principle of mortification, whereby one looks around for something to sacrifice for the faith as if asceticism were the essence of Christianity. The conflicts with the world will indeed come. One need not search for

them like Easter eggs hidden behind rocks and among bushes. The only question is whether Christians, like the Galatian agitators, having met opposition, then flee and take refuge in compromise or even capitulation, or whether they face it honestly.

Second, Christians, though participants in Christ's death, at the same time are still subject to temptation. Though crucified to the world, they are not immune to doubts and fears, to the anguish of uncertainty, to questioning their own commitments. If there are not intellectual doubts about this or that item of the faith, then there are the practical doubts because God seems distant or prayer useless or despair overwhelming. In the final analysis, can God be trusted? Is grace really sufficient for all human needs? Could the world's standards and systems be right after all? Living in a "crucified" relation to the world in no way prevents or even lessens these haunting, human questions. But Christian existence does not finally end in uncertainty or despair. Paul even in this context describes it with a note of joy "Far be it for me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (6:14)

Three comments need to be made about such positive boasting.

Firstly, Paul can speak confidently of the Cross because he sees it in the light of Easter. This one with whom he is united in death he knows as the victor over death, the servant, who is "our Lord Jesus Christ". In the letter to the Galatians very little is said about the resurrection: it is explicitly mentioned only in the first verse. But it is assumed throughout. Secondly, without denying the perplexities during his time of affliction and even acknowledging on one occasion that he was so unbearably crushed that he despaired of life itself, Paul finds meaning in suffering. It becomes an occasion for experiencing the transcendent power of God "who raises the dead" (2 Cor 8:1-10; cf 4:7-12; Rom 5:3). Finally, Paul's understanding of the cross not only creates a positive attitude towards his own trials and tribulations but also enables him to identify with suffering humanity. In a passage like 2 Cor 1:3-7 he can draw a direct connection between Christ's afflictions and comfort, his own afflictions and comfort found in Christ, and solidarity with the affliction of others, which makes possible comfort also for them.

Instead of a world where sin roams freely and law is a custodian, there comes a dominion where Christ rules as Lord, where the Spirit functions to keep life human, where freedom replaces bondage. To participate in the death and resurrection of Christ is to be brought into this new creation, where one can "walk by this rule" (6:16). Christian existence means living in the midst of the old world (as we have seen in connection with 6:14) but as a member of this radically new order, as God's *avant-garde*.

In the Ephesian and Colossian letters another expression is used for God's new order – *kaine anthropos*, best translated as a "new humanity" (Eph 2:15, and in baptism converts "put off" the old humanity and "put on" the new (Eph 4:22-3; Col 3:9-10) as in Galatians they "put on" Christ (3:27)

The point is that the new creation must be understood christologically. In the Galatian context that means directing one's life not by the law but by the crucified and risen Lord. Christians are rare birds in that an existence interpreted this way will at times appear just as foolish and just as much of a stumbling block as the cross itself. To some of the world's citizens they will seem too passive and patient, to others too meddling and aggressive. When the prevailing mood is uncritical optimism, they will likely be pessimistic; when discouragement and gloom abound, they may sound optimistic. They perceive, for example, the Christ with whom they are united has a special affection for the poor and the oppressed. and consequently they are obliged to meet him among the poor and the oppressed (cf Matt 25:31-46; Isaiah 58:1-9). This will undoubtedly be a strange place to be. Christians simply take their cues from the one who was "for others", whose life and death lead them repeatedly to use the phrase "for us".

The new creation is a corporate reality, a community whose members are characterized by their accepting attitudes and actions toward each other. 2 Cor 5:16-17, written to a congregation

whose partisanship was a serious problem, spells out this feature even more pointedly. "With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man; even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so no longer. When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone and a new order has already begun". (NEB) Living in the new creation involves finding a way of regarding people differently than in the old order, where race, nationality, economics and the like provide categories by which individuals and groups are valued. It means no longer "using" people as an occasion for selfish boasting. Instead, they become recipients of a service offered in love, neighbours to be cared for, those for whom God's mercy is freely given.

P. 148-156