

New Creation Teaching Ministry
Galatians Weeks 8 & 9
Galatians 4:21-31

The Structure of the Allegory

(1) Paul makes it clear that he is speaking allegorically (Gal. 4:24).

- It is possible that this was in response to the argument of the troublesome teachers among the Galatian churches, who may have used the fact that there were two sons born of Abraham to suggest that Paul was inferior (i.e. he was like Ishmael...See F F Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 218f.).
 - In rabbinical interpretation, the message would have been Isaac = Jews; Ishmael = Gentiles; Jews = child of free woman and Gentiles = child of slave woman; Jews = liberated by knowledge of Torah and Gentiles = in bondage to sin; Jews = people of covenant and Gentiles receive mercies (like Ishmael) but stand in no covenant relation to God. Paul turns this entirely on its head.
 - This curious passage, then, may in fact be the heart of the matter from Paul's opponents' point of view.
- Allegory is a technique for conveying meaning, using stories or figures to convey truth beyond themselves. An allegory = 'a story, play, poem, picture, etc in which the characters represent moral or spiritual ideas or messages' (Chambers Dictionary).
 - We see Jesus using allegory in some of his parables, and this becomes clear particularly where we see the parable interpreted by Jesus himself (e.g. the sower and the seed).

(2) Behind the entire allegory in this passage (in all its various parts) is this: there is a fundamental and irreconcilable difference between that which comes by promise and that which comes by works of the law (i.e. through the flesh).

- There is an irreconcilable difference between these two positions, and this point has been made in various ways throughout the letter, and will be again (e.g. Fruit of the Spirit vs Deeds of the Flesh).
- This ties in with the dualities that appear in many places in Paul's thinking (e.g. Flesh and Spirit; Darkness and Light; Adam and Christ; Law and Grace; Sin and Grace; Condemnation and Justification; etc.)
- In Particular, the hinge here is that there are two **covenants**. Paul speaks of two mountains, two women, two offspring, and two cities, but all of this hinges on their being *two covenants*. One is therefore linked to Promise, and the other to the Flesh.

(3) Here, Paul's allegory is based on real persons, places and events.

- Hagar and Sarah (Sarai); Ishmael and Isaac; Mt. Sinai (Mosaic covenant) = Jerusalem of Paul's day compared to Jerusalem above (free).

(4) The story may be familiar to us, but needs to be recounted (at least briefly) for us to understand the connections

- The story of Abraham and Hagar's union and the birth of Ishmael, is found in Genesis 16. At a later point, Ishmael and Hagar are sent out of the household, after the birth of Isaac, the record of which can be found in Genesis 21.

- The plan to generate an heir through Hagar had come from Sarai (as she was then called) and similar such arrangements have been attested to in the ANE (see Walton, *Genesis*, p. 445f.)
 - This arrangement was only possible because of Hagar's status as a handmaid to Sarai (i.e. a female slave; albeit she was treated as a 'wife' after this according to Gen. 16:3).
 - § Paul passes no judgement on the arrangement, nor on Sarai's actions (she treated her harshly, see Gen. 16:5; but for her part, Hagar despised Sarah, see Gen. 16:4 cf. 21:9), but simply reports the events, so well known to the people of Israel.
 - Paul's logic is that because the son from through her womb came from a slave, the son was also a slave. By contrast, the son born of Sarai (Sarah) would be free, since she was free.
- The Genesis narrative makes it clear that Ishmael received promises from God and certain prophecies were made about him and his descendants (e.g. Gen. 16:10-13; 21:13, 18, 20), but he was not the promised child through whom the covenant would be fulfilled (Gen 21:12 cf. 17:19, 21; Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18).
 - Indeed, the Promised son would not simply promised in the face of Abraham's age, but Sarah's barrenness (see Gen. 17:15-22). At every turn the circumstances would confirm that the covenant promises would be fulfilled by the Lord, not by any human efforts.

(5) But also here, in the allegory, Paul uses another set of relationships: the mountains of Sinai and Jerusalem (the city set on a on a hill therefore always envisaged a mountain = Mt. Zion)

- We have seen the repeated emphasis on the enslavement of the Law earlier in the letter (e.g. Gal. 3:22, 23, 24; 4:1, 3, 7 etc. cf. 5:1), and here Paul equates the existing Jerusalem of his day, with Mt Sinai, which is the equivalent of being from Hagar's line, as children of slavery, born according to the flesh.
- At each point the converse is implied with the children of Promise. These have no earthly city, and therefore belong to "Jerusalem above". They are pilgrims and wanderers on the earth.
- However, what is of central importance is that this whole mass of images is actually describing *two covenants*.

The New Covenant Supersedes the Old

(1) The very structure of our Bibles tells us that there is a New Covenant.

- The New was prepared for by the Old, and comes out of it, but is not identical with it.
- Both readings (from Galatians and Hebrews) emphasise the newness and finality of the New Covenant.
 - Both situations were dealing with *reversionism* (though in different ways).
 - Both emphasise the finality of the work of Christ for the establishment of a new situation (in Hebrews, see, for example Heb. 7:22; 8:6ff.; 9:15ff.; 10:15ff.; 12:24; etc.)

- Both situations see the outcome of the New Covenant as love, and any reversionist tendency will not issue in love (see, for example, Heb. 13:1 cf. Gal. 5:1 in their contexts).
- (2) The old covenant (i.e. that formed with the people of Israel, with Moses as the mediator on Mt Sinai) served its purpose (this is the argument of Gal. 3), but did not replace the covenant with Abraham, i.e. the covenant based on Promise.
- The New Covenant is the final revelation of the character of the God of Promise, and the promises of God bound up in the covenant with Abraham are all explicated and confirmed in the New Covenant,
 - Not least, the self-rendering of God the covenant maker (who himself passed through the cut animals in Gen. 15).
 - In the New Covenant the promises to the nations are fulfilled especially as seen in the giving of the Holy Spirit to the nations who believe (as in Gal. 3:14).
- (3) The Old Covenant is mostly shown to be insufficient by what it could not do, such as the final cleansing of sin, the opening up of the promises to all the nations, the gift of the Spirit etc. Most of all, it was insufficient because it had not been inaugurated by the Son in his own blood.
- This **is** the new covenant in my blood Luke 22:20:. Covenant of freedom from sin and the knowledge of God (the following chapter is going to tell us more about that freedom), as in Jer. 31:31ff.
 - But now that the New Covenant **had** been inaugurated and the nations were the object of the covenant grace.
 - Now the covenant had been opened up to the ends of the earth (as had been promised to Abraham). The national covenant with Israel, under Moses, was necessary, as the husk to the kernel of the seed, but now it had served its purpose.
 - In Christ we have come to a new mountain, where God the consuming fire, has consumed our sin!
 - The outcome of that process is the gift of the Spirit for all mankind (cf. Gal. 3:14 and 3:26-29) that we may live in the love that we have received (Heb. 13:1ff. cf. Gal. 5:1ff.)

Galatians 5:1-12

Set Free for Freedom

- (1) The very point of the letter is expressed in Gal. 5:1.
- The freedom is the freedom of sonship, according to promise, by grace alone. The yoke of slavery is being subject to the Law, as under the covenant at Sinai (as expounded in the preceding allegory).
 - The issue is circumcision (see more below), but the matter is finally by what means are we justified, by law or by grace?
 - Gal. 5:4 equates falling from grace with seeking to be justified by the law.

- Gal. 5:5 tells us that by the Spirit we await the hope of righteousness (i.e. we walk by faith and not by sight, and so wait for the full revelation of the righteousness that has been granted to us in Christ).
 - The only thing that matters is ‘faith working through love’, not the keeping of the law of circumcision...for love is the fulfilment of the Law.
- (2) The matter is an important one, and Paul suggests that the Galatians should take serious account of those who have troubled them and not give them room to teach their law-based ‘gospel’. They should not be given air play in the Galatian churches (Gal. 5:7-12)

Bible Readings = Galatians 5:13-21

The Positive Nature of Liberty

(1) Paul makes it clear that the matter of Christian liberty is really at the heart of his concern for the Galatian believers (Gal. 5:1).

- This liberty has a negative and positive aspect to it. See the parallel between Gal. 5:1a and 5:13a
 - We continue in the freedom for which we have been set free by not doing certain things and by doing other things.
- ‘Negatively’ we do not allow ourselves to come under the Law again as a means of establishing, maintaining or securing our righteousness.
 - We will revisit the matter of circumcision...the presenting issue for the Galatian believers. For now we note that the matter is simply reduced to this: is our relationship with God dependent on the law or on grace?
 - § To receive circumcision, in their circumstances and for the reasons suggested by the false teachers who had come to them from Jerusalem, would be to jettison the gospel completely. It would be the same as saying that there is another means of righteousness apart from, or in addition to, Christ. This is unthinkable: see Gal. 2:21.
- Positively, however, the life of liberty is the life of love. Gal. 5:13f.
 - This is the life for which we were created by God the Father, who is love. The Spirit has come, shedding the love of the Father into our hearts (Rom. 5:5), and the Son has come in obedience to the Father, to love us by becoming the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10f.)
 - This love is not *undefined* love. God has defined the nature of his love for us, in the action of the Cross. (This, and this alone is love...what the world calls ‘love’ is not that, though everyone thinks they knows what love is!)

(2) Through the grace of adoption, we are the sons of God (Gal. 4:1-6), this means we have the family likeness in us: the character of the Father revealed in us.

- This is the line that John takes: we love because we are born of God (e.g. 1 John 4:19)
- This means that love is the natural state of created humanity...and though it is not the state of fallen humanity, it is the state for which we have been created.
 - Redemption by Love is for love... “it is for freedom that Christ set us free” is another way of saying “it is for love that Christ has loved us”. By

grace, as we are born of the Spirit and find the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, so love is our home.

§ This is why we feel it so deeply when we love not!

(3) The Law, given on Mt Sinai, is the expression of love in two ways, love to God and love to one's neighbour. Thus, love is the summary of the law, and the hinge on which the whole of salvation history turns.

- See Matt. 22:36f compared with Rom. 13:8ff.; cf. this passage in Galatians 5.
- All sin is ultimately the sin against love. The history of the entire race is really the history of how we have loved (or not!) and God's love for us who have not loved him.
 - Sin is bondage, love is freedom

The Flesh and the Spirit

(1) Galatians 5:17 tells us of the great battle in which we are caught up.

- Not 'our flesh' and 'our spirit', but Flesh and Spirit!
 - We are the subject of great warring forces, and we are led by one or the other!
 - § We are either in the Flesh or in the Spirit (as a natural person or a redeemed person); i.e. these are realms of existence. In Christ we were in the one, and are now in the other (see Rom. 8:9 cf. John 3:6)
 - In the Flesh, we were led by the desires of the flesh...without thinking about it and unable to choose differently. Will was bound in sin, and we could not submit to the law of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7).
- We have to be set free in a new exodus. We cannot set ourselves free...hence all the language about slavery, bondage etc. in the New Testament.

(2) In that place, in the Flesh, we were subject to all sorts of bondage and under terrible powers of darkness, though we did not realise it at the time! In the Flesh we did the deeds of the flesh...belong to our own sinful nature. We 'walked according the Flesh'

- The deeds of the flesh are all terrible...but at the bottom line they are all denials of love. They are humanity turned in upon itself, and in its selfishness destroying itself, as it lives under the wrath of God in that place.

(3) So what has this got to do with Galatians' "gospel" from the false teachers?

- The gospel that they brought came from the Flesh! It belongs to that realm as it places the power within humanity to save itself by its works. It appeals to the ego action of the Flesh and gives us a so-called righteousness in which to boast.
 - And as the Galatians were hearing that message and started walking according to it, they started to experience in their own lives the deeds of the Flesh!
 - They were actually not *of* the Flesh (but the Spirit!), but as they gave a hearing to that word, they started walking as though they were in the Flesh.

§ Compare with Gal. 3:1ff.

§ The liberty of love is preserved in the gospel we hear!

(4) But, given that we do hear the word of grace, we are in and by that grace freed to love. It frees us to love, because it tells us that we have been loved, and removes the burden of guilt and sin that would prevent us from loving God, and then others.

- It frees us from the drag of self-justification and liberates us into forgiveness.
 - Ephesians 4:25-5:2; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Cor. 13.
- To walk by the Spirit means to hear and live in the word of grace, and thus to love. As we walk by the Spirit we do not fulfil the desires of the flesh.

Galatians 5:22-26

The Way of a Man is Not in Himself

(1) The first observation related to this passage is that human beings were never created to be self-directing entities. We were created to be contingent upon God, filled with the Spirit of God, hearing the Word of God.

- We do not have any independent existence, even on a physical level. We cannot sustain ourselves in any way.
- Jer. 10:23 is principal: no man can know or determine his own path. Every person must be hearing, or doing, according the direction that he is given, but this does not arise within himself.
 - This is in contrast with the modern notion of Man as a self-directing, self-defining, and self-determining creature.
- In other words, we must all ‘walk’ according to someone/something outside of ourselves. We are created in order to be mastered!

(2) Here, Paul indicates that there are two contrasting powers by which we may walk: Flesh and Spirit (Gal. 5:17)

- Remind ourselves of what these stand for in other Pauline contrasts such as darkness and light; condemnation and justification; law and grace; sin and Spirit; old Adam and last Adam; death and life; etc.
- Ultimately: according to the prince of power of the air, or according to the will and word of the Father (see Eph. 2:1 ff.) God has works that *he* has planned for us to do.

(3) We see the action of this very clearly in the life of our Lord, who walked according to the Spirit, to do things that his Father desired.

- Note the contrast in John 8:31-44
 - Compare with John 5:19, 30
 - Contrast with the desire of the evil one to get Jesus to worship him in Matt. 4:8ff.
- Jesus is the freest man who has ever lived because he walked fully by the Spirit, in utter dependence on God for his life, direction, ministry, teaching, power, word and works.
- His humanity is true humanity, as he is the only one who has walked fully according to the Spirit, and never according to the Flesh.

(4) So we see in the Son, the full fruit of the Spirit, i.e. the full character of the Father!

- We are not going to define and discuss all the elements of love, joy, peace, patience etc. Suffice to say that we can take love as the head and source of them all.
 - Compare with 1 Cor. 13. Love is patient, love is kind...etc.
- Simplest way to understand the fruit is to look at Christ. So he is patient, kind, good, faithful etc. All we have, we have from union with him.
 - My peace I leave with you. My joy I give to you. Etc.
 - John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing

Participation, not Simply Imitation

(1) In speaking in this way we are saying that the fruit of the Spirit comes from our participation in Christ, not primarily from our imitation of him. God's love is not detachable from God himself. We cannot live in love without being united to him in love.

- And here we come to a crucial point (literally!). In order to have the fruit of the Spirit, we have to be united to the Spirit on the one hand and severed from the Flesh on the other.
- This is why the fruit of the Spirit (and do not miss the simple point that this is the fruit *of the Spirit*, not our own fruit! It is the *Spirit's* harvest in our lives, not ours!) cannot be discussed as independent 'virtues' without talking about our relation to Christ and his cross.
 - See Gal. 5:24 cf. 6:14; 2:19ff.
- Now we can only see that this is so *by the Spirit*: compare Gal. 5:25a 'since, seeing that...we live by the Spirit...let us also...'
 - What does it mean to 'live by the Spirit'? It means to be brought to life through the Spirit. Why? Because we were 'dead' (in transgression and sin) and needed to be 'raised'! How? By hearing the word of the gospel that our sins have been judged.
 - Peter speaks of the Spirit preaching the gospel to us (1 Peter 1:12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things compare with John 16:7-15; Acts 2:33; 4:31; etc.

(2) So the Spirit brings to us the realisation of who Christ is and what has happened in his death: that we have been crucified with him, judged in him, buried and raised with him.

- So we hear with faith, and by one Spirit we are baptised into Christ. We have 'put on Christ' Gal. 5:26-27 in that act of believing (and this not of ourselves, but from the grace of God!).
- And so we have been united to the Vine by faith, and fruit of the Spirit begins to flow.
 - Very first evidence of it: you love God, when you hated him. You want to be with him, in the fellowship of his word, singing his praise, being with his people! This is not of your own flesh and certainly not of *the* Flesh.
 - Compare with John 3:6f. and then John 8:42

(3) Thus, walking by the Spirit is now our home. Walking according the Flesh is now foreign to us. Indeed, we do not want it, and do not desire it, however much we may

stumble and fall into patterns which are more informed by the Flesh than the Spirit. We recognise that 'it is not me, but sin within me' (Rom. 7:20).

- Walking according to the Spirit means, then:
 - We walk according to the word of the gospel of Christ, by faith and not by sight.
 - Recognising that we have no power within ourselves either to desist from doing wrong or to do what is right...**But** we are *never asked to do anything of ourselves*.
 - The converse of this, by the way, is embedded in Gal. 5:26! Boasting and challenging one another. 'Challenging' is used only here and is also translated 'competing' or 'provoking'. In Greek culture it was used as a law term: summoning one another to court, tribunal to explain one's actions; putting slaves to torture...i.e. to either punish them or interrogate them; or to challenge someone to combat.
 - Both boasting and challenging are throwing a person back on themselves, comparing and contrasting one with another, thereby emphasising either one's own glories or another's deficiencies. God does not treat us this way in Christ!
 - And doing those deeds of love that the Spirit commands. Personal (e.g. Barnabas and others in Acts 4:36ff. cf. 5:4) and corporate (e.g. 2 Cor. 8 cf. Gal. 2:9-10)
- In all this, we give preference to one another in honour, as Christ has with us.

Galatians 6:1-10

Bearing One Another, and Bearing One's Own Burden

(1) Gal. 5:26 carries on directly into Gal. 6:1. At first appearance it seems as though Paul's comments in the early verses of chapter 6 are contradictory. He speaks of bearing one another (Gal. 6:2) and also of bearing one's own things (Gal. 6:5).

- The context is the answer.
 - In the wider context the problem is what emerges in our lives when we are walking according to the Flesh e.g. Gal. 5:26, cf. 5:15; 5:20. To walk 'flesh way' means that we walk comparatively...comparing ourselves among ourselves, ranking ourselves against others, and judging others on the ranks we give them, according to how well they have performed in our eyes and according to our standards. In such a state we think highly of ourselves and judgementally of others (cf. Gal. 6:3).
 - In the immediate context the statement of Gal. 6:5 has to do with one's own personal calling (as in Gal. 6:4). Each has his or own path to walk and calling to follow in Christ, and we examine our work and walk before him...cf. John 21:23. Question is not whether our brother or sister is walking in the Spirit etc., but am I? Not do they love me, but do I love them?

(2) So, in contrast to comparative, envious, judgmental, hard and critical actions the calling is to bear the burdens of our brothers. This is not just, or even, practical burdens, but the burden of dealing with our brother's sins. Gal. 6:1 and 6:2 are related.

- 'Therefore a Christian must have broad shoulders and husky bones to carry the flesh, that is, the weakness, of other believers.' Luther.
- Even in cases of discipline for an arrogant offence with a haughty attitude (e.g. the man in 1 Cor 5, living in an incestuous relationship), the object is not destruction, but restoration.

(3) So what may need to be borne, and by whom or from whom?

- Answer = any trespass, from any man. None immune from the potential to walk by the Flesh.
 - Caught? May mean ensnared or uncovered in it (Bruce)
- In other words, we may be in the situation where we have to bear the burdens of another, who has been caught in sin, so that they may be restored to fellowship. This means gentleness, humility and gracious action in love.
 - E.g. Prov. 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences; 12:16 The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult; 17:9 Whoever covers an offences seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends cf. 1 Pet. 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins; James 5:19-20 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins ;
 - And we have to acknowledge that we have failed in this from time to time. See also the (negative) example of Moses in Numb. 20:1 ff.
 - Luther 'In this life, the saints not only live in the flesh but even, by some urging or other from the devil, gratify the desires of the flesh; that is they fall into impatience, envy, wrath, error, doubt, unbelief, etc. For Satan is continually attacking both the purity of doctrine...and the integrity of life...For this reason Paul teaches us how to deal with those who have fallen in this way, namely, that those who are strong should restore them in a gentle spirit' (LW27 p. 109)...run to him, and extend your hand to him in his fallen state. Comfort him with sweet words and embrace him in your motherly arms (p. 111).

The Principle of Burden Bearing

(1) The idea of burden bearing does not begin with Paul in Gal. 6! It goes all the way back to the character of God himself.

- Some examples: Ex. 19:4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself; Deut. 1:30-31 The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, ³¹ and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.; 32:11-13 Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, ¹² the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him. ¹³ He made him ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field, and he suckled him with honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.; Ps. 55:22; 68:18-19 You ascended on high, leading a host

of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there. ¹⁹ Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation. Selah;; Is. 40:11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.; 46:3-4 "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴ even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. ⁵ "To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? ⁶ Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! ⁷ They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble. ⁸ "Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, ⁹ remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me; Hos. 11:3-4 The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. ³ Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴ I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them

- All of this is not just a bearing *with*, but a **merciful bearing up**, and *bearing through*, in the face of sin. The people whom he bears rebel against him at every turn, and yet he bears them...and their sins!
 - See also the High Priest's vestments, and the jeweled breastplate of the tribes of Israel...bearing them into the presence of God.

(2) In bearing one another's burdens in this way, we fulfil the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)

- Law of Christ is no doubt the Law of Love (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8f. cf. Jn. 13:34; 15:12; James 2:8 cf. Matt. 22:34ff.
- But in this context, also possible to see that the Law of Christ = he is the burden bearer. This is the 'law' under which he lived. It is *his* law...not simply a law that comes from him. His whole life was burden bearing. Matt. 11:29; 1 Cor. 13:7.
- And most fully it is see in the bearing of us and our sin up into the Cross. Psalm 38:4 'my iniquities have gone over my head, like a burden they are too heavy for me'.
 - E.g. 1 Pet. 2:24 the cross: compare with the scapegoat of Lev. 16:22; Is. 53:4-6; John 1:29.

(3) Jesus did not come to please himself, but to serve his Father, and in so doing to serve us.

- Mark 10:35-45

(4) But this is not simply the temporary taking of the burden of sin, guilt, condemnation etc., but it is the bearing away of it completely for all time.

- Ps. 103:12; Is. 43:25; Jer. 31:34; 50:20 cf. Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; etc.
- So God relates to us now in Christ fully as our Father, who continues to bear our burdens day by day.

Sowing and Reaping

(1) The whole of life is sowing, and (eventually) reaping (Gal. 6:7-10).

- Sowing to the Spirit = walking by the Spirit (and so with the Flesh)
- Burden bearing is sowing to the Spirit, as are other things

- e.g. giving to teachers (Gal. 6:6 cf. 1 Cor. 9:9-14; 1 Tim. 5:17; cf. the attitude towards the Levite priests in the Old Testament e.g. Deut. 12:19)
- Doing good to all people, but especially those of the household of faith cf. Luke 6:35; 1 Thess. 5:15; Heb. 13:16; etc.

(2) But only possible if we have been freed from the Flesh, in order to live in the freedom of the Spirit!

Some relevant P. T. Forsyth quotes.

'Faith is the very highest form of our dependence on God. We never outgrow it. We refine it, but we never transcend it....It is a matter of faith that we are God's children; there is plenty of experience in us against it.'¹

'We do not receive a new will, a new nature, from God, and then go on of ourselves, having got all that He can give. We are compelled by our cleaving sin to press on into close and permanent communion....We end with the same forgiving grace as started us.'²

'There are times when we lie becalmed, times when we have to tack, times when the current carries us astern, times when we buffeted out of the straight course—when it is much if we only can keep at sea and not go to pieces on the rocks. Ignorance misleads us. Our charts fail us. Our crew mutinies or passions take command, for a time. But, on the whole, we are on the living way. The master passion and the bias of the soul is Christ. The ruling will is the will of God...God does not judge us in pieces. He sees our life steadily, and sees it whole. The ship may be battered, but it comes to port, even though scarcely saved.'³

Galatians 6:11-18

Revising the Context

(1) All the way along, we have had to bear in mind the context of the letter: certain men having come down from the Jerusalem church, teaching the Galatian converts that they must hold to the Old Testament laws (particularly regarding the 'boundary markers' of circumcision, food laws and Sabbath) in order to be 'real' converts.

- Theirs was not a straight *denial* of the work of the Cross, but an *annulling* of it. They annulled the work of God's grace by adding to the finished work of God in the Cross. Cf. Gal. 2:21

(2) The main focus of attention is the matter of circumcision, and a glance down the last two chapters of Galatians shows how Paul is focussing the weight of his argument upon the matter as he comes to the end of the letter (e.g. Gal. 5:2, 3, 6, 11; 6:12, 13, 15).

(3) Given the Old Testament importance of circumcision, Paul makes some astounding statements

- E.g. Gen. 17:9-14; Ex. 4:24-26; 12:43ff; Josh. 5:1-10 cf. Gal. 5:6; 6:15 (compare with Rom. 2:28f.; 1 Cor. 7:18).
- It seems, then, on first glance, that the Judaisers had a powerful argument and that Scripture was on their side against Paul.

¹Forsyth, P. T. (1957). *Christian Perfection*. In *God the Holy Father* (p. 101). Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press.

²Forsyth, P. T. (1957). *Christian Perfection*. In *God the Holy Father* (p. 103). Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press.

³Forsyth, P. T. (1957). *God the Holy Father*. (p. 136). London: Independent Press.

The Meaning of Circumcision

(1) What did circumcision mean?

- It was a *gift* of God to Abraham, as a *sign* of the covenant he had made with him. The actual giving of the covenant preceded the sign. He received the promise of God, believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, *while yet uncircumcised*. The sign did not add to that promise, nor did it secure it, but it was a sign that it had been given.
- Therefore circumcision acted as a sign to Abraham and through him to his decedents, and thus to the whole of Israel, that they were the *people of promise*. Their whole of their life was meant to be lived by faith in the promises of God.
- These promises were not just those given to Abraham, but these in turn looked back to the great promise of the Seed who would come (Gen. 3:15). No accident, therefore that it was *circumcision*, (as opposed to a tattoo, or nick in the ear or removal or piercing in the nose, for example), as it involved the very organ of generation through which, by means of union with the woman, the Seed would come from her womb.
- And, moreover, it was to be *given to children* (males, eight days old). The whole nation stood in this covenant relation to God, from the least to the greatest, and the sign was received passively (i.e. not because they had attained anything, as in other cultures where circumcision was practiced as a right of passage having attained manhood, and entering into one's inheritance and identity; or sometimes as a fertility rite). The nature of circumcision in Israel emphasised that the covenant relation to God was a *gift*.
- Thus circumcision became *the* maker of national identity. It set Israel off from the other nations, and marked out those who were full proselytes to Judaism. Marked Israel off as God's chosen people, cut off from the nations, devoted to him as his own chosen possession.
- It was also applied to foreigners and resident aliens who had joined themselves to Israel i.e. in its scope it was *inclusive* of the nations, in keeping with the promise to Abraham.

(2) Circumcision, then, was the sign of Israel's covenant relation to God, attesting to the nation that it lived under the promise of God, marking them off from the other nations as God's special possession. To this covenant nation he gave the Law, the prophets, the worship, the presence of his glory, etc.

- So how can Paul make the statements he does?

Circumcision, Promise and Fulfilment

(1) Other Old Testament background indicates that the matter of circumcision was never a question of mere physical importance

- Deut. 10:16 cf. Jer. 4:4; 6:10; 9:25-26

(2) Deut. 30:6 is a key passage, not simply for what it promises, but for the location in the unfolding pattern of Deuteronomy

- Recommend Martin Bleby's talk at Winter School 2006 'Beyond the Broken Covenant'
- See the importance of Deut. 30:6 in relation to the covenant blessings and curses being enacted to the last letter of their intent.

(3) So, far from ignoring the passages on circumcision, Paul has in fact paid close attention to them. There would be a time when the Old Covenant would come to an end, and that God would circumcise the hearts of his people, and that the promises to Abraham (of which physical circumcision was a sign) would be fulfilled, and that in this the nations would be brought in. But this would have to come through a great act of spiritual circumcision, in which we were entirely passive and which created a New Covenant community.

- Colossians 2:11ff.; 3:11 cf. Gal. 6:15, 16. The new Israel of God = the new creation of the covenant people.
- Jesus, cut off from the land of the living, as all the Flesh attached to him on the Cross, knife of God's judgment fell, separated from God and man, cast out so that he has become a bridegroom of blood to us. He bore the hard heartedness, the uncircumcised flesh of our sin, and thence brought us to God the Father...as his precious possession, holy, beloved, cleansed and purified. Gal. 6:14.
- That new community neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. It is the new creation of God (Gal. 6:15) the Israel of God (6:16), consisting of Jews and Gentiles in one new body (as in Eph. 2:11-22)
- New Covenant community stands eternally by the promise of God.
 - We must emphasise the absolutely sure and unshakeable nature of this New Covenant (Hebrews) and compare with the old covenant which they broke. In Christ's great act of circumcision (on the Cross) all the promises and gifts are sealed and secured forever. The New Covenant could no more be broken than Christ could be crucified, buried and raised a second time.
 - This is the security in which we stand as the Israel of God, so that in Christ all the promises of God are Yes and Amen (2 Cor. 1:20).

The Israel of God

Gal. 3:6-9; 3:24-29; 6:14-16

Who or what is 'The Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16)

(1) Some translations will have 'peace and mercy upon them *and* upon the Israel of God' while others will take it as 'peace and mercy upon them, *even* upon the Israel of God'.

Both are acceptable, but we need to note that at various points in the Galatian letter Paul has emphasised that *all* believers are children of promise, and, as such, children of Abraham

- Gal. 3:7-9; 3:28 compare with Romans 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical, But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God ; 4:12 to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised; 9:6f. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel Phil. 3:3 For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh

(2) Elsewhere he emphasises the fundamental unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ, who is both the bond of peace and the foundation of the new covenant temple

- Eph. 2:11-22.
- (3) Thus, I take Paul's statement in Gal. 6:16 to be linked to his statement in 6:15 i.e. the Israel of God is a new creation.
- Gal. 6:15 may be translated '...a new creature', or '...a new creation'. The word can do service for both, and the end point is the same. If there is a new creature it is because there is a new creation.
 - Compare with 2 Cor. 5:17
 - This new creation is known by faith, and looks forward to the promise of the fulfilment. We still live in the light of Promise...albeit sealed by the blood of Christ as the guarantee, but still waiting for that which is promised, the full revelation of our inheritance.
 - All the promises of God are Yes and Amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).
 - We have received both the seal and pledge of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21f.)
 - And this new creation knows peace and mercy as it walks by 'this rule' (Gal. 6:16). This rule is (a) the injunction about circumcision, but (b) the foundation of this injunction laid in Gal. 6:14 i.e. the finished work of the Cross.

The Israel of God and Law of God

(1) This new creation of God now stands in a new relationship to the Law of God (or perhaps better, to a *renewed* relationship to the Law of God).

- Throughout the letter the Law has been a place of slavery. To be 'under' the Law in that sense was to be under its curse, condemnation and accusation.
 - Compare Rom. 3:19-20 with Gal. 3:23; 4:5; 4:21; 5:18; etc.
- To be *under* the law is the equivalent to be in the flesh not the Spirit, to be in Adam rather than in Christ, and so on.
 - In emphasising circumcision the Judaisers were seeking to bring the new Israel of God under the curse of the Law. Cf. Peter's statement in Acts 15:6-11.

(2) So does this mean that the Israel of God is law-less? This charge was certainly levelled at Paul (e.g. Rom. 3:8; 3:31 compare with Rom. 10:4 'for Christ is the end of the law *for righteousness* to everyone who believes')

- Christ is the end of the law for righteousness (not that it had ever been this way in intention, but our sinful flesh uses the Law of God to establish a false righteousness), means that we are not righteous on the basis of our relation to the Law, but on the basis of relation to Christ.
- See Romans 3:21ff. 'apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made manifest'. Circumcision, then, was the sign of Israel's covenant relation to God, attesting to the nation that it lived under the promise of God, marking them off from the other nations as God's special possession. To this covenant nation he gave the Law, the prophets, the worship, the presence of his glory, etc.

(3) But Christ is not the end of the Law in the sense that he removes it.

- See, for example, Matt. 7:17ff.
 - How does he fulfil it? In his deeds (he actually and he alone has loved the Lord etc.), in his teaching (giving the true, spiritual meaning of the law), in his death (fulfilling its curse as well as all the aspects of the Old

Testament ceremonial law which all pointed to Christ), and by his Spirit, in us!

- Matt. 5:20 cf. Rom. 8:1ff. 'That the righteous requirement of the Law may be fulfilled in us'. Also compare with Galatians 5:16.
- The promise is that the Law will be fulfilled in us! We *will* love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength; we *will* have no other gods before him; we *will* love our neighbour as ourselves; etc.
- The Father *will* have a community of his sons conformed to the image of his son.
- The fulfilment of the Law is the action and reality of love
 - Rom. 13:8ff. cf. Gal. 5:14; Matt. 7:12; 22:39ff.; James 2:8; etc.

(4) The battle is familiar to us in Romans 7, but the key to walking by the Spirit in Romans 8 is the gospel of our justification in Christ, and goal is the redemption of our bodies in the resurrection.

The Israel of God and the Nations

(1) Here we move into the material that will launch us into the new topic, but we make some comments.

- God's old covenant people were meant to be light to the nations. See Deut. 4:5ff.
 - Compare with the self-understanding of Israel revealed in Rom. 2:17ff. Where the Law became the whip of judgement, placing ourselves on the throne of God (cf. James 4:11-12).
- The light shines before men, as in Matt. 5:3ff. poor in spirit, meek, humble, thirsting for righteousness (for oneself!); etc.

(2) So, the Israel of God lives under the rule of God, without complaint against the authorities of the land

- Rom. 13:1ff. compare with 1 Peter 2:13-17

(3) But ultimately, we live and work under the rule of God that the nations may be brought to the obedience of faith (i.e. the fullness of love that flows from faith), as in Romans 1:5f.; 16:25ff.