

Cherubim

Most Israelite worshippers would never see the inner sanctuary (or ‘the Most Holy Place’) of the temple. The high priest alone went into this sacred room just once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Today’s reading describes the splendour of the inner sanctuary so that the Israelites and readers such as ourselves would be able to envisage its splendour.

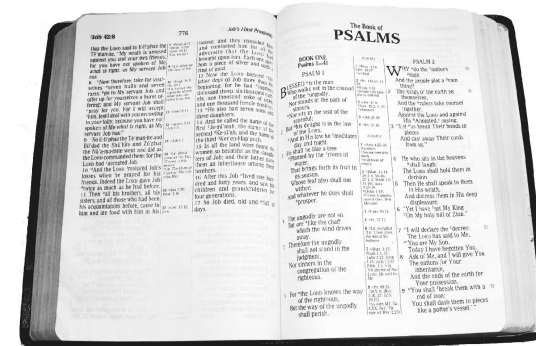
The whole of the temple interior was overlaid with gold, including the floor (22, 30). The word ‘gold’ appears eleven times in verses 20 to 35. We may think that there is an unnecessary extravagance in the use of such costly materials but Dale Ralph Davis points out that ‘if there is an indulgence that is sinful (cf. Luke 12:17–21), there is an extravagance that is godly (Mark 14:3–9) ... and perhaps the message of temple gold is that nothing cheap should be offered to Yahweh but only what is a tribute commensurate with his splendour’ (THE WISDOM AND THE FOLLY – page 64). We must offer our very best to the Lord in our worship and in our work for him. We are to be generous in bringing our tithes and offerings to the Lord.

The Most Holy Place was dominated by the figures of *two cherubim*, carved from olive wood and overlaid with gold. They stood 10 cubits in height (about 15 feet or 4½ metres), each with a similar wingspan. They were placed against one wall with the tip of their wings meeting and they covered the whole of the wall (23–28). Figures of cherubim were also carved on the walls and doors of the temple (32, 35).

Cherubim are heavenly beings who are represented in the Bible as having wings, hands and feet. God is described in the psalms as dwelling between the cherubim and being borne by them (Psalms 18:10; 80:1; 99:1). God placed cherubim in the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). Cherubim are associated with the very presence of God and this reminded the priests and worshippers in the temple to be reverent in his holy presence. **How often we forget this when we meet together to worship the living and awesome God.**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



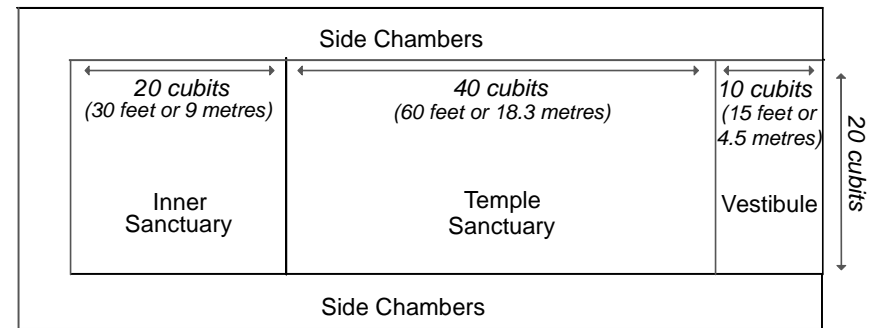
March 2017

Bible readings from Galatians chapters 2 to 6
1 Kings chapters 1 to 6

*If you ... keep all my commandments, and walk in them,
then I will perform my word with you*

Chapters 6 and 7 describe the temple and its furnishings. The temple was twice the size of the tabernacle in length and breadth (2; cp. Exodus chapter 26); it was 30 cubits (45 feet or 13½ metres) high. The stones for the building were shaped and finished at the quarry so that there was no noise from hammer or chisel at the temple site (7).

Plan of temple building



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The Lord spoke to Solomon, promising, ‘*If you ... keep all my commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform my word with you*’ (12). God promised that he would be among the children of Israel and that he would never forsake them (13). Notice that God’s promise was conditioned by obedience to his Word (cp. 3:14). The Lord required Solomon to keep all God’s commandments. Partial obedience is not good enough for God (see notes for 28 March). The Israelites were to learn that the temple with all its splendour and association with the worship of almighty God would not save them from disaster if they disobeyed God.

We know that we will not be sinless until we reach heaven, but we must seek always to obey God’s Word if we are to know his blessing in our lives (cp. Deuteronomy 28:1–2). **If you have lost the joy of the Lord’s peace and presence in your life, could it be that you are falling short in your obedience to him?**

The LORD my God has given me rest on every side

Hiram, king of Tyre had been a friend of David and he sent a delegation to Solomon on hearing that he had been anointed king over Israel. This delegation may have visited the court of Solomon not only as a gesture of friendship, but also to hear his wisdom (1–2; cp. 4:34). Solomon now sought to enlist the help of Hiram to help him build the house of God. The king of Tyre was aware that the Lord had not permitted David to build a temple because he had been a man of war (3; cp. 1 Chronicles 28:3).

Solomon acknowledged, '*The LORD my God has given me rest on every side*' (4). **Peaceful times are not for slumber! If God has blessed and prospered us, it is all too easy to be complacent and to take our ease. We must seek every opportunity to work for the Lord.** There will always be work to do for him until Jesus comes again. The church is described as *a holy temple in the Lord* (Ephesians 2:21). We need to be at rest (peace) among ourselves in our own local church if this temple is to be built up. We must always endeavour *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (Ephesians 4:3). Solomon remembered the Lord's promise to David, that his son would build a house for God (5). The promises of God encourage us in our work for him.

Hiram had skilled workmen as well as huge forests which would supply top quality timber for use in the construction of the temple. Solomon promised to pay Hiram for the labour and materials supplied, and the king of Tyre responded favourably (6–11). Solomon raised a vast labour force to build the temple, but he was not insensitive to their family needs. Those who went away to work in Lebanon were there for one month and then returned home for two months (13–14). There is a vital lesson here not only for labour relations in industry and commerce, but also for leaders in the Lord's work. People work best for those who are thoughtful and considerate.

I ... died to the law that I might live to God

Verses 17 to 21 are not easy to understand. Paul anticipated an argument of the Judaizers who would say that if the works of the law are not necessary for salvation, Jewish believers would be free to sin and thus be no different from pagan Gentiles. Is Christ therefore a Saviour who encourages us to sin? Paul's reply to such a suggestion is, '*Certainly not!*' (17). Paul knew that he could not again build those things which he had destroyed (the doctrine of salvation through the works of the law). To do such a thing would be to imply that he was not fully justified and forgiven through Christ's work alone (18).

How had Paul *through the law, died to the law* (19)? Before his conversion, he had by all outward appearances been blameless as far as the law was concerned (Philippians 3:6). The law demands more than surface perfection however – it demands that I love God with all my heart, soul and mind, and that I love my neighbour as myself (Matthew 22:36–40). The law had shown Paul that he was a great sinner but it had failed to bring him peace with God. Paul abandoned the law as the means of justification; he became dead to the law which was fulfilled in Christ (more of this tomorrow).

There is also another most important principle in what Paul is saying here. If we could obtain forgiveness and righteousness through good works, the grace of God is set aside, for Christ's death would have been unnecessary and in vain (21). **We must always remember that free grace does not give us the freedom to sin!** We are not *without law towards God, but under law towards Christ* (1 Corinthians 9:21). If our lives are no different since conversion, we must seriously question whether such a conversion is real. God has chosen us and called us to be holy (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15–16). We have become dead to the law not to become lawless but to bear fruit to God (Romans 7:4). *For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God* (19).

I have been crucified with Christ

How have we died to the law? Every Christian is *in Christ* and is identified with him in his crucifixion. Paul was able to write, *'I have been crucified with Christ'* (20). When Jesus the sinless Saviour died, he fulfilled all of the law's demands on our behalf. The man or woman in Christ is thus dead to the law. *Crucified with Christ* – identified with him and united with him in his death. Our union with Christ not only secures our justification, but also enables us to lead holy lives (sanctification). Verses 19 and 20 must not be separated. Think of it this way: 'I died to the law – I have been crucified with Christ – that I might live to God.'

When Paul wrote, *'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me'*, he did not mean that his personality had ceased to exist, but that he had been so transformed by Christ living within him that his life was unrecognisable compared with his past life (cp. Philippians 1:21). We must beware of 'higher life' teaching which says, 'Christ will live his life through you, just let go and let God.' It sounds good, but it is not true! If we could just hand everything over to Christ, we would never have to struggle with temptation; we would be sinless. No! We must live our lives in the flesh with all of its weaknesses and temptations, by faith in the Son of God.

Notice how the apostle describes his relationship to Christ: *'The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me'* (20). Salvation is personal! **To realise that the Lord Jesus loved me so much that he gave himself to die a terrible death for me is very humbling and awe-inspiring. Surely, we should be motivated to please him, not by law, but by love for him!** We often fall short of leading a life worthy of our calling as Christians. Let us seek at all times to live by faith, depending on the Lord Jesus, who loves us so much and who will never fail us nor forsake us.

God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding

The first part of this chapter contains a list of Solomon's officials. Jehoshaphat, who was recorder in David's court, continued in the office (3; cp. 1 Chronicles 18:15). It was his responsibility to record events as they happened and to maintain the official archives. The land was divided into twelve districts, each with a governor. Two of these governors were married to daughters of Solomon (11,15). The governors were each responsible for supplying the needs of Solomon's court for one month (7).

Verses 20 to 34 give us a glimpse of Israel's greatness, prosperity and joy under Solomon. The happiness, peace and safety of Solomon's reign (20, 24–25) is a picture of the blessings that await us when Christ comes to reign at the end of the age. Our King, the Lord Jesus Christ, is far greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:42) and his kingdom is more excellent. How often we forget our great privileges in Christ. *The kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17). If we have no joy in our lives and are always complaining, we do not honour our Saviour.

God had promised to give Solomon a wise and understanding heart (3:12) and he wrote many proverbs and songs (32). He became so renowned for his wisdom, that visitors came from many countries to hear his wisdom (34). *God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart* (or 'breadth of mind', ESV) *like the sand on the sea-shore* (29). The Lord is very bountiful in his gifts to his children. **Christian, bring your needs to God in prayer, including your need of wisdom in all your decision making (James 1:5).** Remember, he loves you so much that he did not spare his own Son to save you from your sins. With him, he will freely give you all things (Romans 8:32). Rejoice and be encouraged in your wonderful God!

Therefore give your servant an understanding heart ...

Solomon went to worship God and offer sacrifices in Gibeon where the Lord appeared to him in a dream by night and said, ‘Ask! What shall I give you?’ (5). The young king responded by acknowledging God’s goodness to him but he was aware of his lack of experience to lead a great nation (6–7). He said, ‘Therefore give your servant an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil’ (9). He would then be able to rule the nation with wisdom and justice. God was pleased with his unselfish request and gave him riches and honour as well as the wisdom for which he had asked (4–15). Are your prayers self-centred or do you honour God in your praying? Do you pray for the Lord’s people (Ephesians 6:18)?

The Hebrew translated *understanding* could be translated ‘hearing’. Do we listen to what God has to say to us through his Word? Do we listen to what others in the church and in our family are saying to us? If we are not good listeners, we will hardly have *an understanding heart*. Every pastor and church leader needs to pray often that God would give them *an understanding heart*. The ideal Christian husband also needs to have *an understanding heart* that he may be responsive to his own wife’s needs (cp. 1 Peter 3:7). Parents need *an understanding heart* that they may train their children in the ways of the Lord with patience and gentleness. **Do you ever pray that the Lord would give you an understanding heart ?**

The story of the dispute between the two prostitutes over the baby is recounted in verses 16 to 28. The brilliant judgment given by Solomon was recognised by the people as God-given and gained him great respect. God had answered his prayer for *an understanding heart* to judge the people, that he might discern between good and evil (9).

We live in evil and confusing times and we need that wisdom from above which is *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy* (James 3:17).

Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?

On his first visit to the province of Galatia, Paul preached the gospel in the Jewish synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. There he taught that forgiveness of sins and justification came through faith in the Lord Jesus, not by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38–39). He pointed out that Jesus had been ‘*clearly portrayed among you* (the Galatians) *as crucified*’ (1). Their own experience of salvation had taught them that their salvation was by faith in Christ and not by adding works of the law. Paul asks questions in each of the five verses of our reading. He wants the Galatians to think about the error of their ways:

1. ‘*Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?*’ How could they be so foolish as to turn to keeping the law to obtain justification? Error has a spell-binding fascination and it is very difficult to convince heretics of the error of their ways. You can point Jehovah’s Witnesses to dozens of Bible verses which plainly show that Jesus is God, but they refuse to accept what Scripture says.
2. ‘*Did you receive the Spirit* (at your conversion) *by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*’ (2). The obvious answer was that the Galatians had received the Spirit by believing the gospel and not by obeying the law.
3. ‘*Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*’ (3). The Galatians had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. How foolish to imagine that they could reach maturity through the flesh (their own works).
4. ‘*Have you suffered so many things in vain?*’ (4). Their suffering as Christians would have been in vain if law-keeping was necessary. How could they return to Jewish legalism?
5. ‘*Does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*’ (5). God supplies the Spirit to them and works miracles among them.

Beware of those whose teaching obscures the all-sufficient work of Christ in our salvation. They undermine the truth of the gospel.

Only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham

Paul now turns to Scripture to substantiate his argument. The Judaizers insisted that Gentile Christians be circumcised if they wished to be included in God's promise to Abraham (8; cp. Genesis 12:3) and so be *blessed with believing Abraham* (9). Paul reminds us that *Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness* (6; cp. Genesis 15:6). This justification by faith was before Abraham was circumcised (Romans 4:9–12). Righteousness was accounted (imputed) to him before he was circumcised, when through faith he took hold of God's promise. Those who appeal to Abraham prove Paul's argument – that circumcision is not necessary for justification.

How was Abraham justified by faith when he lived two thousand years before Christ came to earth to die for sinners? The Lord Jesus reveals that Abraham did have faith in him. He told the Jews, '*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad*' (John 8:56). Abraham was among those godly Old Testament saints who had not received the fulfilment of the promises. They saw them afar off, were assured of them and embraced them (Hebrews 11:13).

The Jews regard Abraham as their father (cp. John 8:39), but if they are not converted to Christ, their father is the devil (John 8:44). *Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham* (7). Paul goes on to point out that the Word of God proclaimed the good news to Abraham; God would justify the Gentiles by faith. He promised, '*In you all the nations shall be blessed*' (8). The true heirs of Abraham are those Jews and Gentiles who have trusted in Christ and have been justified by faith! They are of faith and are *blessed with believing Abraham* (9).

Are you of faith? Do you enjoy the liberty that belongs to the children of God? Why wallow in uncertainty when you can know Christ? Come to him now repenting of your sin and trusting in him alone to save you.

And Solomon loved the LORD ... except ...

Solomon was foolish and disobedient to God in his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh (1); this marriage, and his subsequent marriages to heathen women were to lead to spiritual declension in his own life and to trouble in Israel (see chapter 11). We read that *Solomon loved the LORD ... except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places* (3). * The people did not have a temple where they could make their sacrifices (2) but they did have the tabernacle. God had commanded that sacrifices were to be restricted to worship at the tabernacle which at this time was at Gibeon (Deuteronomy 12:5–6, 13–14; 2 Chronicles 1:3). The high places were associated with pagan worship and should have been destroyed rather than adapted for the worship of the Lord. Solomon ended his days building high places for the worship of false gods (11:6–10).

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father, but there was the problem of incomplete obedience. He did love the Lord but he married an unbeliever (there is no evidence that his Egyptian wife had embraced the worship of Jehovah; cp 11:1–2). He loved the Lord but by his own example, he encouraged the Israelites to use high places for the making their sacrifices.

The Lord Jesus loved us so much that he gave himself to die for our salvation. Dare we offer him less than our total devotion? Do not be like Solomon, who *loved the LORD ... except...* **Is there something in your life that is spoiling your walk with God? Half-hearted devotion to the Lord is not acceptable (cp. Revelation 3:15–16)!**

* Dale Ralph Davis takes a more positive view of Solomon in these opening verses of the chapter, but I disagree (see his commentary on 1 Kings). He uses God's approval of Solomon's sacrifices at Gibeon to support his case. He fails, however, to distinguish between this and the other high places which were not sanctioned by God for worship. The tabernacle was in '*the great high place*' at Gibeon (2 Chronicles 1:3) though the ark of the covenant was in Jerusalem (15). The Lord was gracious to Solomon, despite his partial obedience, but we should not presume to follow Solomon's bad example.

The LORD will return his blood on his head

The early days of Solomon's reign were far from easy for the young king and he had to prove himself a man by taking decisive and firm action to deal with those who posed a threat to his throne. Adonijah was quite subtle in seeking to have Abishag as his wife; this was another way of laying claim to the throne (it was common eastern custom for a king's wives to be taken by his successor or rival. Ahithophel had counselled Absalom to take his father's concubines, to assert the overthrow of David – 2 Samuel 16:21).

Solomon realised that Adonijah still had designs on the throne of Israel and he ordered Benaiah to put him to death. He knew also that he had to deal swiftly with Adonijah's allies. Abiathar was removed from his position as high priest to be replaced by Zadok (26–27, 35).

Job had also been a leading conspirator in supporting Adonijah's claim to the throne. Following the execution of Adonijah, he realised that his own days were numbered and he sought sanctuary in the tabernacle (28–31). He had been a treacherous and ruthless man and he could hardly expect to receive further mercy from Solomon, who said of him, *The LORD will return his blood on his head, because he struck down two men more righteous and better than he, and killed them with the sword* (32).

Shimei was promised that his life would be spared as long as he remained in Jerusalem. He readily agreed to abide by Solomon's strict instructions, but he failed to keep his word and he too was executed by Benaiah (36–46).

All these men had been wicked and deserved to be punished. We must remember that we do reap whatever we sow (Galatians 6:7). **This is a solemn warning to those who continue to lead wicked lives and who oppose the teaching of the Word of God. The Christian's encouragement is that God is in sovereign control of all that happens in this world and that his purposes cannot be frustrated.**

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law

No one can perfectly keep God's law because we are all sinners (Romans 3:10,23). We are under the curse of God's holy law because of our sin (10). To be guilty of just one sin, however small, brings us under the condemnation of the whole law (James 2:10). We cannot therefore be justified by the law in the sight of God: *The just shall live by faith* (11; cp. Habakkuk 2:4). To rely on law-keeping for salvation is a denial of faith in Christ and his work on the cross to save sinners.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (13). The law decreed that those whose bodies were hung from a tree after execution were cursed (13; cp. Deuteronomy 21:23). If the hanging of a dead body from a tree was an indication of the curse of God, how much more that of a living person suffering slow, painful death by crucifixion? The Lord Jesus suffered dreadful and indescribable anguish and Heaven was silent in those dark hours at Calvary when he cried out, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* (Matthew 27:46). He died in order to free us, to ransom us from the curse of the law that the blessing promised to Abraham (8) might come upon us and that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (14). **His the curse, ours the blessing! Doesn't this thrill your heart? Does it not humble you? Does it not stir you up to love our Saviour and to gladly obey him?**

*Give me a sight, O Saviour,
Of thy wondrous love to me,
Of the love that brought thee down to earth,
To die on Calvary.*

*O, make me understand it,
Help me to take it in,
What it meant to thee, the Holy One,
To bear away my sin.*

(Katherine A.N. Kelly)

What purpose then does the law serve?

When a will or covenant is signed and sealed, it cannot be cancelled nor added to by another (15). If this is true in human affairs, how much more the same principle holds concerning God's promise to Abraham! This promise was made four hundred and thirty years before the law was given to Moses. The inheritance (salvation) given to Abraham by promise does not depend on law; it was fulfilled in Christ. The law *cannot annul the covenant* (16–18). Paul anticipates two questions that would arise from his statement in verses 15 to 18:

1. If salvation does not come by law, *what purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed* (Christ) *should come* (19). The law was given in addition to the promise to make men realise that they are sinners and that they are guilty before God. Sinful man may realise that something is not right with him, but that does not drive him to the Saviour. When, through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, he sees that his sins transgress (break) God's holy law, he will cry to God for mercy. The law is inferior to the promise; it was given indirectly through angels by the hand of a mediator (Moses; 19), but the promise was given directly by God to Abraham.

2. *Is the law then against the promises of God?* (21). Paul retorts, '*Certainly not!*' The law cannot give life and Scripture has confined us (shut us up) under sin. The law is pictured as:

- A jailer keeping us under guard until faith in Jesus Christ was revealed (23).
- A *tutor* (24; better translated 'custodian' – Hendriksen. See also NKJV margin which says, 'In a household, the guardian is responsible for the care and discipline of the children.'). Children become adults and no longer need the custodian. Now Christ has come, we are no longer under the custodian (or *tutor*). **By faith in him, we are his free men and women! We are justified by faith.**

Be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man

The words of dying King David to Solomon are full of instruction and challenge. He warned Solomon to deal with Joab and Shimei who were not to be trusted. He should also show kindness to Barzillai's sons who had been kind to David when he was a fugitive from Absalom (6–7). David urged his son, '*Be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man*' (2). We must never confuse true manliness with the 'macho' image admired by so many in the world. 'Macho' man is aggressive in his masculinity, loves to charm young women, is full of himself, and is vain in his imagination. This is a far cry from the manliness that God requires of Christian men. The church has a great need in these days for manly men! The Christian man must:

- Be strong (2). He must refuse to compromise God's truth and be prepared, if necessary, to stand alone against error and wickedness.
- Be godly (3–4). He must maintain fellowship with God and keep his commandments.
- Be wise (6,9). He needs to exercise much wisdom in leadership at home and (where appropriate) in the church.
- Be kind (7). Strength does not exclude gentleness or kindness.

The perfect example of manliness is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. He burned with anger against the hypocrites and the wicked (Mark 3:5; John 2:13–17) but he was full of compassion for the needy. He was always noble and gentle in his dealings with women and he wept at the tomb of his friend (John 8:3–11; 11:34–36).

Prove yourself a man – I wonder if Bishop Hugh Latimer had those words in mind when he encouraged his fellow reformer, Nicholas Ridley, as they burned at the stake in 1555? – 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.' **Christian men, take these words to heart and show Christlike manliness in your lives.** *Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong* (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Blessed be the LORD God of Israel

David was physically weak, but this did not prevent him from taking decisive action. He promised Bathsheba that Solomon would immediately be proclaimed king and he called for Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah (one of his mighty men; 2 Samuel 23:20–23). He commanded them to take immediate action to thwart Adonijah and his conspirators, and to anoint Solomon as king at Gihon which is in the Kidron valley to the east of Jerusalem (28–38).

Zadok anointed Solomon whom the people proclaimed as their king. A joyful procession followed Solomon into the city, the people playing their flutes. Adonijah and the guests were feasting at En Rogel which was further south in the Kidron Valley. They heard the sound of the happy and noisy celebration in Jerusalem and learned that Solomon had been anointed king. Adonijah's feast came to an abrupt end and his guests dispersed in panic. He took refuge in the tabernacle, clinging to the horns of the altar in order to obtain mercy (40–50). Solomon spared his brother and gave him a warning that if any further wickedness were found in him, he would be put to death (51–53).

The name 'Adonijah' means 'Jehovah is my Lord', but David's son of that name had not submitted to the lordship of Jehovah in his own life. He was very foolish to imagine that he could thwart God's purposes (cp, Psalm 2:1–4; Isaiah 14:27). 'He that, in the morning, was grasping at a crown, is, before night, begging for his life' (Matthew Henry). **Our great confidence and comfort lies in the fact that God is absolutely sovereign and that all of his purposes will surely stand.**

David bowed in worship on his bed when he heard that his instructions had been followed and that Solomon had been anointed king to succeed him. He praised God, saying, '*Blessed be the LORD God of Israel*' (48). Let us now worship and adore our sovereign God.

You are all one in Christ Jesus

The promises were made to *Abraham and his Seed* (the Lord Jesus Christ, 16). Paul reasons that if we are Christ's, we are *Abraham's seed and are heirs according to the promise* (29). Our salvation is in Christ alone! See the emphasis on the Lord Jesus in these verses – *faith in Christ ... baptized into Christ ... put on Christ* (26–27).

Paul argues that there is no difference between Jew and Greek (Gentile), slave nor free, male nor female as far as salvation is concerned. — *You are all one in Christ Jesus* (28). * **We all come to Christ on the same terms and the circumcised Jew has no advantage over the uncircumcised Gentile. Before God, Jew, Gentile, slave, free, male and female are all the same – sinners in need of a Saviour.** As Christians, we *are all one in Christ Jesus*. whatever our race, class or gender. We are all sinners saved by the grace of God alone!

The verb translated 'put on' (27) means 'to clothe oneself'. Those who follow the Lord Jesus have stripped off the clothes of the old sinful life. They are now clothed with the garments of Christ's righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; 64:6). Have you been *baptized into Christ?* (27; cp. 1 Corinthians 12:13). The clothes of the old life have gone and you are now clothed with Christ's righteousness. True godliness is a most wonderful and attractive quality. Does your life show that you have *put on Christ?* Do others see in you his beauty and graciousness?

*Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

(Nicklaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf – translated by John Wesley)

* Those who support the ordination of women to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments use the words from verse 28 to support their cause. – *There is neither male nor female.* This verse and its context have no such meaning.

God sent forth his Son

Paul continues to write concerning the position of Christians as heirs according to the promise given to Abraham by God (1; cp. 3:29). He argues that the law cannot bring the freedom that is found in Christ. All Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, are heirs of God according to his promise (3:29). He compares the inferior situation of the Lord's people under the law with the position of a child who is the heir to his father's estate. They were the true sons of God, but were like a son who cannot inherit his deceased father's estate until he comes of age. In the meantime he is no better off than a slave and he is in the care of guardians and stewards (1–2).

As a child is governed by rules, God's people *were in bondage under the elements of the world* before the coming of Christ (3). The same use of the word *elements* is found in verse 9. These *elements* are the various rules and ritual which, before the coming of Christ, Jews and Gentiles observed to gain salvation. What is this *bondage*? It is the attempt by our own efforts to gain salvation by religious observance or works. Christians are no longer under bondage, but are free to serve God out of love and gratitude.

God sent forth his Son into the world *when the fulness of the time had come* (at the time he had planned, 4). The Lord Jesus was *born of a woman, born under the law* (4). He was subject to all the demands of the law and came *to redeem those who were under the law* (5). He perfectly kept God's holy law and through his sinless life paid the price of sin through his death on the cross. *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God* (1 Peter 3:18). Our salvation from sin and its dreadful consequences is free but it came at great cost to the Lord Jesus. He gave his precious life to save us from our sins. **He is worthy of our love and joyful obedience to his will.**

*There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.*

(Cecil F. Alexander)

The eyes of all Israel are on you

Adonijah may have thought that his ailing father would discover too late that the plot to seize the throne had succeeded. Once the throne was his, David would be unable to install Solomon as king. He may have imagined that his secret scheming would go undiscovered, but he reckoned without the Lord. God used the prophet Nathan to play a crucial part in foiling Adonijah's plot.

Nathan informed Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, of the plot. She realised that the situation was desperate because when David died, both Solomon and herself would almost certainly be put to death by Adonijah (12, 21). Nathan counselled her regarding the action that they should take. She would inform David of the conspiracy and Nathan would time things so that he would come before the king while she was still speaking. He would then confirm her report (12–14).

It is always right that we pray, especially in times of crisis. God does not always choose to send some miraculous intervention, however. He uses human instruments to bring his will to pass. Nathan was aware of his responsibility toward God and also to David. He needed to do something about it! I once knew of a situation where a church was in great difficulty and the elders needed to take drastic action. One church member was convinced that they should simply pray and leave the sovereign God to intervene, and to right the wrong. She would not be persuaded of human responsibility to do something in such a situation.

David had been unaware of the plot (18) and Bathsheba reminded him, *'The eyes of all Israel are on you, that you should tell them who will sit on the throne'* (20). David too had a responsibility to take action. Nathan then came to see the king as planned and he confirmed Bathsheba's story (22–27). He too reminded David that he needed to do something quickly. **We must never use the truth of God's sovereignty as an excuse for our lethargy.**

His father had not rebuked him at any time

1 Kings does not begin on a happy note. David was obviously approaching the end of his life, (he was seventy years old when he died; 2 Samuel 5:4). It was an unseemly and shameful thing for the frail king to have the young woman, Abishag, to lie in his arms to keep him warm. He had several wives who could have been with him and his servants were lacking godly wisdom in their advice to him (1–4).

God had appointed Solomon to succeed David as king over Israel (1 Chronicles 22:9–10), though he was not the eldest son (cp. 2 Samuel 3:2–5). Amnon and Absalom, the first and third sons, were dead; Scripture is silent concerning Chileab, the second son, who may have died in battle. Adonijah, the fourth and eldest of David's surviving sons, knew that it was the Lord's will for Solomon to be king (2:15) but he planned to seize the throne. Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'Our writer sees ... Adonijah as unqualified for kingdom leadership. There is far more to it than saying, "I will be king" (5). Lust for power and position are not the marks for leadership among God's people' (THE WISDOM AND THE FOLLY – page 18).

Adonijah was aided and abetted by Joab and the high priest, Abiathar. Adonijah organised animal sacrifices to be followed by a great banquet near to En Rogel, to which many prominent people were invited, including all the king's sons except Solomon. Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest and David's mighty men were also excluded. Adonijah would be proclaimed as king at this banquet (5–10, 25–26).

Adonijah was very handsome like his half-brother Absalom; both were vain and proud (5–6; cp. 2 Samuel 14:25–26; 15:1). We read these telling words in verse 6, *And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, 'Why have you done so?'* David may have been frail, but he had the support of mighty men. A timely rebuke to his son would have spared him much heartache and trouble in his last days. **If we are cowardly, and, for the sake of an easy life fail to deal with wrongdoing in our family or church, we will reap a bitter harvest!**

The adoption as sons

Our salvation is truly wonderful! It would have been wonderful had the Lord Jesus only redeemed us from the curse of the law so that we might escape the judgment of God. He has done far more for us, however! He came into the world *to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons* (5). We have been rescued from slavery to become sons and heirs of God (6–7). Think about this – we are reconciled to God through the death of Christ and brought into his family. God lovingly cares for us and Jesus is our dearest Friend. Suffering and death cannot separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:35–39). We have eternal life through Christ and endless joy awaits us in heaven where we shall be with our precious Saviour, and every believer from all ages. There will be no more temptation or sin. There will be no more pain, sorrow or death (Revelation 21:4).

How marvellous the love of God; how wonderful the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! The holy Son of God took the form of a servant and died so that we who were the servants of sin and unable to save ourselves might become sons by adoption. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God* (1 John 3:1).

Are you discouraged? Is your faith being sorely tried by opposition or by adverse circumstances? Remember who you are. You are a child of God, a son of the King of kings. God is your heavenly Father (read Matthew 6:25–34). *He will never leave you nor forsake you* (Hebrews 13:5–6). Rejoice in him and trust in him at all times!

*Blessings on blessings through ages unending,
Covenant fulness in glorious flood;
Ours is a hope which no mortal can measure,
Brought in by Jesus and sealed by his blood.*

(Jessie F. Webb)

God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts

We saw yesterday that God *sent forth his Son* into the world to redeem us and to adopt us into his family (4–5). Paul goes on to write, ‘*Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts*’ (6). It is most important that we understand that every Christian is a son, a child of God (John 1:12) and that as a result, every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (cp. Romans 8:14–15). If we do not have the Spirit of Christ, we do not belong to him (Romans 8:9). Some Christians believe that it is possible to be born again and not to have the Holy Spirit. They teach that the baptism or fullness of the Holy Spirit is an experience for Christians to seek after conversion. They are sincere, but I believe that they are wrong. They do not understand that because God has adopted us into his family, we all have the Holy Spirit.

As sons of God we have access to him in prayer. By the Holy Spirit we cry to him, ‘*Abba, Father!*’ (6; *Abba* is the Aramaic word for ‘father.’ – Aramaic was the language spoken by Jews in New Testament times and was similar to Hebrew). The apostle coupled *Abba* with the Greek word for father (‘pater’). *Abba* was a term of intimacy used by young children to address their father. The Lord Jesus addressed God the Father by this title (Mark 14:36). The Gemara (a commentary on the Mishna, the traditional teaching of the Jews) states that slaves were forbidden to address the head of the family by the title, ‘*Abba*’). We are not slaves, but sons of God (7). **We can come to God in prayer with boldness and confidence because he is our loving heavenly Father! Let us now worship him and bring our requests to him with joy.**

*‘Abba, Father,’ Lord, we call thee —
Hallowed name! — from day to day;
’Tis thy children’s right to know thee,
None but children ‘Abba’ say.
This high glory we inherit,
Thy free gift through Jesus’ blood;
God the Spirit, with our spirit,
Witnesseth we’re sons of God.*

(R. Hawker)

1 & 2 KINGS

The two books of the Kings cover a period of four hundred years in the history of Israel. They open with the death of King David and close with the people of Judah being carried off into captivity in Babylon. Solomon who succeeded David began well and built a magnificent temple for the worship of God. He was renowned for his God-given wisdom but was foolish in his personal life. He married many wives and succumbed to their heathen influence. He turned from the Lord and worshipped their gods, bringing divine displeasure and judgment upon himself (1 Kings 11). The lack of wisdom in Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, brought about a great rebellion which divided the kingdom.

The turbulent history of the two nations is recorded in 1 Kings 12 to the end of 2 Kings. All those who ruled over Israel were evil but Judah was blessed with some good kings. Most of the prophets exercised their ministry during this period, including Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Jeremiah. Some of them prophesied to one kingdom, others to both. The Lord is merciful and slow to anger and he sent the prophets to warn his erring people. Persistent and repeated disobedience inevitably brought the judgment of God upon them and Israel went into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC, Judah to captivity in Babylon in 586 BC.

Outline of 1 Kings

1. The Reign of Solomon (chapters 1 to 11).

His kingdom established	–	1:1 – 4:34
The temple constructed	–	5:1 – 8:66
Solomon’s glory from the Lord	–	9:1 – 10:29
Solomon’s apostasy	–	11:1 – 43
2. The Divided Kingdom (chapters 12 to 22)

Early kings of Judah and Israel	–	12:1 – 16:34
Ministry of the prophet Elijah	–	17:1 – 22:53

For further reading: Dale Ralph Davis ‘THE WISDOM AND THE FOLLY: AN EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF FIRST KINGS’ published by Christian Focus.

I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus

Paul again reminds us that in Christ circumcision has no advantage over uncircumcision (15; cp. 5:6). It is a new creation brought about by the Holy Spirit in our hearts that is all important (John 3:3,5; Romans 2:29). Though he was a Jew, Paul did not boast in his circumcision or his pedigree as a Pharisee; he gloried in the cross. *'The Israel of God'* (16) is not the Jewish state, but the church of Christ to which every Christian belongs, whether Jew or Gentile (cp. Romans 2:28–29). *

The *rule* of which the apostle writes (16) is that of placing our complete trust in Christ to save us from our sins and glorying in his cross (14). **When we walk according to this rule, we enjoy the peace and mercy of God in our lives (14–16).**

Paul writes, *'Let no one trouble me'* (17). Troublemakers take up time and energy that could be better spent in feeding the hungry sheep in the church and in reaching needy people with the gospel. Troublesome people do weary us but we must be gracious and firm in dealing with them.

The apostle writes, *'I bear in my body the marks (Greek = 'stigmata') of the Lord Jesus'* (17). These 'stigmata' have nothing to do with wounds in the hands, feet and side displayed by some who are revered as 'saints'. The New Testament has no record of Paul bearing such wounds. The marks that Paul bore in his body were the scars which came as a result of his suffering for his Saviour (cp. 2 Corinthians 11:22–28). He had been persecuted in Galatia and had been stoned and left for dead when in the city of Lystra (Acts 14:19).

The apostle had been grieved and hurt by the Galatians, but he still loved them and called them *brethren* and prayed, *'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit'* (18).

* William Hendriksen is very helpful in his comments on *'the Israel of God'* (COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS, pages 246–247).

How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements?

People are sometimes heard to say, 'I have my own idea of God' but our 'own idea of God' is not good enough! If we do not know God as he is revealed in the Bible, we believe in a false god. The Galatian Christians were in that situation before their conversion and they served such gods (8). Salvation in Christ had brought them the knowledge of the true God and liberty. They owed this salvation to the fact that they had been known by God before they knew him (9). Every Christian was foreknown by God in eternity past and all those whom God foreknew, he calls, justifies and glorifies (Romans 8:29–30). In the light of this, the astonished apostle asked them, *'How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements?'* A return to the observance of Jewish feast days, sacrifices, ceremonies and circumcision, was a return to bondage (9–10).

Luther, commenting on verse 9, tells us that he had known monks who zealously laboured to please God in order to obtain salvation but the more they laboured, the more impatient, miserable, uncertain, and fearful they became. He said, 'The law is weak and poor, the sinner is weak and poor: two feeble beggars trying to help each other. They cannot do it. They only wear each other out. But through Christ a weak and poor sinner is revived and enriched unto eternal life' (quoted by William Hendriksen in his COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS).

To know God and to be known by God is to experience great liberty and joy and we must not *turn again to the weak and beggarly elements*. **We must always beware of legalism which will rob us of our joy. True holiness does not bring bondage but happiness!** Christianity is not keeping rules or doing good works in order to obtain or to retain salvation. Our liberty in Christ is not a licence to do as we please however. There are commandments to keep, but we gladly keep them out of love and devotion to our Saviour who loved us and gave himself for us (John 14:15–17; 15:9–11).

What then was the blessing you enjoyed?

Paul had rebuked the Galatians but he now urgently and tenderly appealed to them: ‘*Become as I am, for I am as you are*’ (12). He had not allowed his Jewish heritage to keep him from seeking to win them to Christ. They must understand like him that observing the law cannot save them; they must trust in Christ alone and his work for salvation. He recalled the time when he had first preached the gospel to the Galatians. His physical appearance had been such that they could have despised and rejected him. They had, however, welcomed him as if he had been an angel (Greek = messenger) or even Christ Jesus himself (13–14).

The grieved apostle asked them, ‘*What (or ‘where’) then was the blessing you enjoyed?*’ (15). They had so highly regarded Paul that they would have given their eyes for him if possible. All that had now changed; the apostle asked whether he had become their enemy because he told them the truth (16).

The Judaizers had zealously courted them, but not for their own good. Their zeal was not motivated by godliness but by a desire to alienate the Galatians from Paul (17). The apostle was very different from these false teachers; he loved them and had their best interests at heart. He had suffered much in his missionary work among them (see Acts chapters 13 and 14). He likened this to birth-pangs and he appealed to them as to little children for whom he would continue to suffer birth-pangs until they were mature in Christ (19). He had doubts about them (20; *I am perplexed about you* – ESV)

When we first know the Lord we are joyful and keen in our love and obedience to him, but so often we grow cold. **Have you lost the joy of your salvation? Has your zeal for Christ disappeared? Have you become remote from God’s people through straying from the truth?** ‘*What then was the blessing you enjoyed?*’ Oh, do not be side-tracked by Satan but turn from your backsliding to your Saviour who loves you.

God forbid that I should glory except in the cross

Some believe that Paul wrote with *large letters* (11) because he suffered from some disease of his eyes (cp. 4:15). Others believe that he signed off in large letters in order to emphasize his point that circumcision is of no avail. The Judaizers were trying to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ by boasting of the numbers that they had persuaded to submit to circumcision (12–13). They compromised the gospel by urging Gentile Christians to be circumcised as a sign that they were keeping the law.

Paul indulged in a different kind of boasting from that of the Judaizers. He writes, *God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (14). The cross was to the world a symbol of shame (cp. 1 Corinthians 1:23) but we love the cross because without the death of Christ we would still be in our sins, lost and *having no hope and without God in the world* (Ephesians 2:12). Let us never boast of our good works or attainments but glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus.

The crucifying work of the cross is again shown here. We are crucified to the world through the cross. The values, honours, pleasures and treasures of the world have lost their charm for those who love the Lord Jesus (cp. Philippians 3:–8). **Have they lost their charm for you? Do you glory in the cross of Christ?**

*I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share;
Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasure there.*

*It was the sight of thy dear cross
First weaned my soul from earthly things;
And taught me to esteem as dross
The mirth of fools and pomp of kings.*

(William Cowper)

Let us not grow weary while doing good

Those who are taught the things of God have an obligation to share their material resources with those who teach them (6). The Christian ministry must be financially supported (cp. 1 Timothy 5:17–18). There are thousands of Christians who attend good churches where the Word of God is faithfully preached and taught. They may even be members of such a local church, but they do not share the burden to support the church and its pastor. I hope that you are not such a person. We should remember that we have to give an account to God on the day of judgment (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:9–10).

Paul goes on to write about sowing and reaping and warns that God is not mocked. We may deceive ourselves but we cannot deceive God and whatever we sow, we shall also reap. If we sow to gratify our flesh, we *will of the flesh reap corruption*, but if we sow to the Spirit, we *will of the Spirit reap everlasting life* (7–8). What does it mean to sow to the Spirit? It means to be led by the Spirit and to walk with him in obedience to his voice through God's Word. It means doing good. Yes, good works are important, not to earn salvation, but they are the evidence of God's work in our lives.

We must seize every opportunity that comes to us to do good, *especially to those who are of the household of faith*, that is to our fellow-believers (10). *Let us not grow weary while doing good* (9). The work of God is often difficult and discouraging and we may soon grow weary and lose heart. That is just what the devil wants because he hates the Lord's people and all that they do for their Master. Have you been losing heart in prayer (cp. Luke 18:1)? Is Satan tempting you to give up in your work of doing good, in the Sunday school, in your witness, in encouraging other believers, in visitation or door-to-door evangelism? The enemy of our souls hates our good work and he will put obstacles and discouragements in our way. *Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. There will be a time of reaping and reward for our labours so let us persevere and look to the Lord for strength and help.*

The Jerusalem above which is free

Paul challenges those *who desire to be under law* (21) by bringing three contrasts before them: two sons – two covenants – two Jerusalems (22–26). **This passage of Scripture is vital in helping us to understand the promises made to God's people in the Old Testament.** We have already seen that the promise made to Abraham is for those who are in Christ (3:7–9, 14), and this is again stressed in today's reading (28). Hagar the slave-woman who gave birth to Ishmael (Genesis 16) is a symbol of the old covenant *which gives birth to bondage* (24). The promises of the new covenant are for Christians!

Some Christians sincerely believe that the promises found in the Old Testament prophets (eg. Isaiah) point to the restoration of the Jews to Israel before Christ returns. They believe that the Jews will acknowledge Jesus as their Saviour and a great period of worldwide peace will follow. The promises in Isaiah are often quoted to support such a view; it is interesting to note that in verse 27 Paul quotes from Isaiah 54 to show that this promise is fulfilled in Christ and is for the church. We do not belong to an earthly Jerusalem but to *the Jerusalem above which is free* (25–26). John Newton, in his hymn 'Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God!' shows our great privileges in belonging to the Jerusalem above.

There will always be conflict between those who seek salvation by law-works and those who rejoice in salvation by God's grace alone. We must not return to fleshly righteousness for we *are children of promise* (28), *children ... of the free* (31).

*Saviour, since of Zion's city
I through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in thy name.
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.*

(John Newton)

Faith working through love

Paul urges the Galatians, *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free* (1) because they were children of the free (4:31). They had already been persuaded by the Judaizers to keep Jewish feasts (4:10) and they were now about to yield to them in being circumcised (2). Religious legalism, insisting on outward ceremonies and rites as essential to salvation has dreadful consequences:

- Christ will profit us *nothing* (2). His death is sufficient for our salvation and nothing else is necessary. If we add to the requirement to trust in him alone, we deny the free and sovereign grace of God and trust in our own works to help us gain acceptance with God. – ‘A Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted’ (Hendriksen; COMMENTARY, page 195).
- We become *a debtor to keep the whole law* (3). If salvation comes through keeping the law, we are obliged to observe the whole law and not just one or two ceremonial rites such as circumcision. The expression. ‘*I testify*’ indicates a solemn warning.
- We become *estranged from Christ* (4). If we look for justification by our own works according to the law, we are renouncing the grace of God and are severed from Christ as the One who freely provides for us to be saved through his obedience and death. This verse does not mean that a Christian can fall from grace and lose his salvation. It is a warning to any professing Christian who would seek to obtain salvation by their own works or ritual that their profession of trusting in Christ is false.

We cannot be justified through the works of the law but *we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness through faith* (5). Our righteousness will be complete when we are made perfect in glory. In Christ it does not matter whether we have been circumcised or not. What does matter is that our lives show our *faith working through love* (6). This faith works through love for Christ, for his people, and for those who are lost. **Is your faith in Christ obvious to those around you because it works through love?**

Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ

Legalism may make us self-centred and proud (5:26), but to *walk in the Spirit* and to be spiritual, is to be humble and concerned for others. What should we do when one of our fellow-believers in the church falls into sin? The expression, *Overtaken in any trespass* (1) suggests that the person was caught off guard and that he did not plan a deliberate course of rebellion against God. We must not be like Pharisees and harshly condemn the fallen Christian. We should seek to *restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness* (1; cp. 5:23). We must remember that we too should be on our guard for we are not immune from falling. The Greek word translated *restore* is used elsewhere to describe mending nets (Matthew 4:21) and to be spiritually whole (*become complete*, 2 Corinthians 13:11). The work of restoring the fallen is best done by the Christian who is spiritual and not by one who is immature (1).

The law is fulfilled in loving our neighbour as we love ourselves (5:14). We are to *bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ* (2). This means helping one another to shoulder the difficulties, trials and weaknesses which beset us. This is true fellowship and it is so often woefully lacking among us. We need each other and must not deceive ourselves through pride into believing that we are better than others and above receiving help (3). John Eadie comments, ‘Self-importance based on self-ignorance is the grand hindrance to the duty of mutual burden-bearing. If a man thinks himself so perfect that he can have no burden which others may carry with him, or for him; if he regards himself so far above frailty, sin, or sorrow, that he neither needs nor expects sympathy nor help, – he will not readily stoop to bear the burdens of others.’ (GREEK TEXT COMMENTARY ON GALATIANS).

We should examine our own works rather than compare ourselves with others (4). Verse 5 does not contradict verse 2. While we are to bear one another’s burdens, we are also to bear our own load, to be concerned with our own God-given responsibilities. **What are we doing to bear one another’s burdens?**

If you are led by the Spirit

Those who are *led by the Spirit* (18) are the same as those who walk by the Spirit (16). They are not saved by keeping the law. When Paul stated, *'If you are led by the Spirit'* (18), he was not for a moment suggesting that the leading of the Holy Spirit is only for the 'super-saints'. He wrote elsewhere, *'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God'* (Romans 8:14). All Christians are led by the Holy Spirit! We must be wary, however, of some who have very fertile imaginations who are forever claiming that the Spirit led them to do this or is telling them to do that. They are often unstable and restless souls who give the Holy Spirit the dubious credit of being responsible for the most strange and bizarre practices which they have concocted.

It is true that the Holy Spirit does guide us and prompt us (John 16:13), but the leading of the Holy Spirit is more than that. To be led by him is to be under his control. Paul goes on to write, *'If we live in (or 'by') the Spirit, let us also walk in (or 'by') the Spirit'* (25). 'Walk' in this verse is from a different Greek word from that found in verse 16. Here it means 'to walk in line'. If we live in the Spirit, we must keep in line with him, being led by him into truth and godly living. The proof of the Holy Spirit within us is found in our conduct. If we are led by the Spirit and walk in line with him we will not become conceited; we will not provoke one another causing division in the church and we will not envy other believers (26). *Let us also walk in the Spirit.*

The evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not the ability to speak in tongues but in bearing fruit, and what precious fruit it is! *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law* (22–23). **Let us think about this fruit and examine our own lives to see whether it is in evidence.** Do we radiate the beauty of the Lord Jesus? Let us be determined with God's help, to *walk in the Spirit* and so please our Saviour. This is liberty and blessing indeed!

You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

It is very sad to see Christians who make a good start but then turn aside to strange doctrines. Paul remembered that the Galatians had begun the Christian race well and he asked them, *Who hindered you from obeying the truth?* (7). Paul knew the answer – it was not God, but the Judaizers, whose persuasion was so strong that it had bewitched them (8; cp. 3:1). *A little leaven* (yeast) will soon cause a whole lump of dough to be leavened (9) and it only takes a little error to corrupt the purity of the gospel. Why are false teachers so successful in their persuasion? They generally take their heresy and skilfully mix it with truth making it hard to discern the difference. They are often very friendly people and we may ask, 'Can such a pleasant and kind person be in error?' The simple answer is, 'Yes'. We must measure all that we are taught by the Word of God. Let us remember that *Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light* (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Paul was confident that the Galatians would come to their senses and that they would again run well. He reminded them that he did not preach the necessity of circumcision for salvation; had he done so, he would have avoided much persecution. The preaching of the cross is an offence to those who believe in their own ritual and goodness to obtain salvation (10–11).

The apostle was vehement in his intolerance of the Judaizers. His sentiment in verse 12 is very strong. He called those who taught the necessity of circumcision *'the mutilation'* (Philippians 3:2). Those people who were causing such havoc in the early churches believed in the necessity of a little mutilation through circumcision. Paul writes that they should go the whole way and castrate themselves (*cut themselves off* 12); there were pagan religions at that time whose devotees did just that). We are to have nothing to do with false teachers who pervert the gospel of the grace of God. **We must be intolerant of error while remaining gracious! Let us beware of any teaching that would hinder us from obeying the truth.**

Through love serve one another

The Bible is absolutely clear – to be free from the law does not mean that we are free to sin. Paul writes, *You ... have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh* (13). The word *flesh* used here refers to our fallen human nature which is opposed to all that is pure and good. *The works of the flesh* are dreadful and those who practise them are excluded from God's kingdom (19–21). To be *under law* is to be in bondage to sin; to be *under grace* is to be under the control of grace so that sin cannot have dominion over us (Romans 6:14). The reign of grace in our lives brings a righteousness which the law cannot possibly give (Romans 5:21).

The works of the flesh gratify self but we must *through love serve one another* (13). The grace of God in our lives enables us to fulfil the law in loving our neighbour (cp. Romans 13:8–10). Some believers *bite and devour one another* and do terrible damage in their church and to themselves. They ruin their testimony, lose their joy and will be consumed by others who in turn seek to bite and devour them. **If we love one another, we will avoid such dreadful situations. We will know God's peace and joy as we obey Christ's new commandment to love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34–35; 15:9–12).**

What is your attitude to other Christians in your church? If you do not love them, could it be that you are fulfilling the lust of your own flesh which seeks personal power or indulges in pride? The Lord Jesus loves all believers and so must we!

*Love ever gives,
Forgives, outlives,
And ever stands with open hands,
And while it lives it gives.
For this is love's prerogative,
To give and give and give.*

(author unknown)

Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh

Paul lays a great emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer – *we through the Spirit eagerly wait* (5); *walk in the Spirit* (16); *the Spirit against the flesh* (17); *led by the Spirit* (18); *the fruit of the Spirit* (22); *if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit* (25).

The Christian is free from the dominion of sin (Romans 6:14), but he is not free from sin. We often fail to do the things that we desire to do because there is a conflict between the Holy Spirit and the flesh (17; cp. Romans 7:15–23). We must *walk in the Spirit* (that is live depending on his power and help) if we are to overcome sinful desires. *The flesh* is our fallen human nature which is sometimes referred to as our *old man* (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:9). Christians can fall into terrible sin and the apostle found it necessary to name some of the works of the flesh (19–21). These include:

- Sexual sins – *adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness.*
- False religion – *idolatry, sorcery.*
- Sins of ill-will – *Hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders.*
- Intemperance – *drunkenness, revelries* (drinking parties which lead to all manner of sinful excesses).

When we become Christians we are joined to Christ and we make a break with the flesh, the old nature. *Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires* (24). The old nature writhes and struggles in its crucifixion, but we must be determined to put to death the stirring of sin within us (cp. Romans 8:13). We must not feed fleshly lusts by putting ourselves into the path of temptation (eg. watching unwholesome television programmes, looking at pornography on the internet, or reading pornographic magazines and books). *Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh* (16). **Are you struggling with temptation to sin? Do not think it strange because this is the common experience of all believers.**