

The Art of Arguing

Galatians

David Gooding

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Arguing For the Truth

Overview of the Twelve 'Arguments'

It is a pleasure to be with you once more. The topic for this series of studies is to be the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians. It is commonly said that this epistle is the most argumentative of all Paul's Epistles, and that perhaps is true. Indeed I wish to lay emphasis on this fact as we study the epistle. Here we have an inspired example of how to argue for the truth. It is sometimes said that Christians should not argue. It depends what you mean by arguing! If you mean that Christians shouldn't lose their tempers, and become aggressive and insulting, then of course Christians should not argue in that sense. 'The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone,' says Paul to Timothy (2 Tim 2:24). We should argue in meekness, though that may still involve saying some solemn and severe things.

Our prime example, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ. As we read the Gospels, we find him constantly arguing. John Stott at one stage in his career wrote a book entitled, *Christ the Controversialist*¹ because a great deal of our Lord's public ministry, as recorded in the Gospels, is taken up with his controversies, particularly with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. So arguing like Christ argued, arguing like Paul argued, for the sake of the truth of the gospel, is a very necessary and good thing to do.

Background of the issue

So let us sum up for ourselves what the arguments of this epistle are about. Hopefully we can do that in the words of Scripture itself. If we look at Acts 15, we see that the matter which Paul is discussing in Galatians had come to a head and was debated by the apostles and teachers at Jerusalem. So let's read Luke's account of it.

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. (Acts 15:1-4)

¹ John R. W. Stott, published 1970 by IVP Books.

Let me pause at this moment to make the point that Paul and Barnabas were not going up to Jerusalem to enquire what the gospel was. We shall see Paul arguing very strongly in Galatians that he didn't get the gospel from Jerusalem, or even from those who were apostles before him. He wasn't going up to Jerusalem in order to find out more exactly what gospel he ought to be preaching: he was never in any doubt about that. But these men who had come down from Judea were making out that they came from James, and they were maintaining that Paul and Barnabas were preaching a different gospel from what James and the other apostles said and taught. It was therefore very important that Paul and Barnabas and others should go to Jerusalem and get a statement from the other apostles that all the apostles agreed on what the gospel was, and that they agreed with what Paul and Barnabas were teaching elsewhere among the Gentiles.

James makes this very important fact clear in verse 24, in the letter that they sent around to the churches: 'we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions'. In coming down from Jerusalem, and making out that they came with all the authority of James and the other apostles, they were in fact perverting the truth by teaching this false gospel that except you are circumcised, you cannot be saved. James and the other apostles at Jerusalem had not given them authority to say any such thing.

We see in verses 3 and 4 that as they journeyed they had told the churches the wonderful news of the conversion of the Gentiles in many places where they had preached the gospel. That of course is one of the characteristics of the true gospel: it does lead to conversion to God. But now notice verse 5:

But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.'

So these Pharisees claimed to believe in the Lord Jesus for salvation. Perhaps they were genuine believers but were muddled in their thinking about the relationship of the law of Moses in general, and circumcision in particular, to salvation. There are many people in the broad acres of earth who profess faith in the Lord Jesus — and may indeed be true believers as best they know how — who if pressed will nonetheless show themselves uncertain about this basic doctrine. They are uncertain as to whether circumcision, or baptism for that matter, or the keeping of the law of Moses, are necessary in the end for salvation.

At this gathering of the apostles and elders, we read that Peter stood up and said to them,

'Brothers you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.' (vv. 7–11)

Peter is not boasting but is saying to the believers in general, and to these particular Pharisees, that it was God who chose that he would be the one to take the gospel to the Gentiles in the beginning. He's referring to the vision which God gave him, recorded in Acts 10, when God told him that it was perfectly good and proper for him to go to a Gentile house and eat with Gentiles, and God had demonstrated that to him by the thrice repeated vision that God had sent down from heaven, and by God's own comment, 'What God has made clean, do not call common. . . . [Do] not call any person common or unclean' (Acts 10:15, 28). And then God sent him to Cornelius where he preached the gospel, and upon his preaching, without any further ado, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and those who heard and believed—God thus authenticating the message that Peter was sent to proclaim.

It is true that when he got back to Jerusalem, he faced criticism from some. To them, it contravened the Old Testament laws of cleanliness, as they had understood them. In their view, for Peter to go to a Gentile house and eat with Gentiles was unthinkable. And Peter stammered out his reply, because he was always a bit nervous underneath, and his defence was this, 'All I did was I went there and as I preached, the Holy Spirit fell on them. I couldn't help it. Who was I to withstand God?' (see 11:1–18). That is a good pillar of defence to stand behind! God did it: I couldn't stop God doing it!

Now Peter quotes this instance to the brothers at Jerusalem. God had chosen him to preach; and God who searches the heart gave the Gentiles witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, and 'he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith' (v. 9). God was not compromising with uncleanness, nor was Peter. God had cleansed their hearts so clean that God could put his Holy Spirit in their hearts. And how had God managed to cleanse these Gentiles' hearts so they were fit to receive the Holy Spirit? Says Peter, he had done it 'by faith.' Not by the works of the law, not by circumcision: it was the purifying work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believers which God accomplished through faith. Peter makes the same point in his first letter, 'Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart' (1:22). So it's the same concept—the purification of the heart through faith in Christ and obedience to the gospel.

The doctrinal statement

So we come back to Acts 15:11 for the doctrinal statement. Our version, like many others, says, 'But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will'—which really doesn't get across what the Greek is saying at all! The question is, where in this sentence does the emphasis lie? Is it that we *believe* we're going to be saved? How marvellous. So that's what you believe, is it Peter? Well, yes of course he did, but that's not quite the emphasis of the Greek that Luke writes here in this verse. So, let me translate the Greek more literally, which will put the emphasis where it should be. This is Peter talking for himself and for all the apostles: *It is our belief—our conviction—that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved.* The emphasis in the Greek sentence is altogether on that. We have to get it in English by putting in a phrase such as 'it is'—'it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we will be saved.'

Of course they were going to be saved. The question is, how and on what terms would they be saved? In English, we sometimes get that kind of emphasis by increasing the volume

of sound, but in some languages you can't do that. You can raise your voice with a Japanese person, and he doesn't understand what on earth is happening! In Greek, you get that kind of emphasis by the order in which you put your words. It's this which leads to a proper understanding of what is being said. It's not we *believe* we're going to be saved, though of course we believe that; the argument is, on what terms are we going to be saved? The Pharisees had just said that except you are circumcised and keep the law of Moses, you can't be saved. That is what Peter is answering when he says, 'It is our conviction that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we will be saved.'

And then notice what he adds: we will be saved 'just as they will.' Do you see the relevance? 'We Jews, we Christian Jews, believe that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we will be saved. Not by our circumcision, or keeping the food laws, or anything of the sort. We Jews believe that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we will be saved, and we're going to be saved in exactly the same way and on the same condition as the Gentiles.'

The core issue and its vital importance

So there then is the centre of the dispute. I cite Acts 15 to show what this basic contention was. Put in simple words: what are the conditions for salvation? Are we saved by faith, or do we have to add ceremonies like circumcision, or the keeping of the food laws, in order to gain salvation? This is the great topic, therefore, about which Paul argues in the epistle to the Galatians. Learning how to argue the case for this is important, because it affects people's salvation.

If you were to see a doctor treating a patient by administering some drug or treatment that had long since been proved to be of no use whatsoever, and positively harmful, you would argue and protest, wouldn't you? As a child I can recall my parents telling me what had happened in the past. There was a condition in the human body called a twisted bowel, at least that's what they called it in those days. The treatment for that was to get the child to swallow some mercury, because mercury is rather heavy and the theory was that the mercury going down into the bowel would, by its very pressure, twist the twisted thing straight. Alas, the children's teeth and hair fell out, and they died. So if nowadays you found a doctor prescribing the swallowing of mercury, you would be right to protest and argue the case, because a child's life depends on it. If the doctor prescribing that antiquated method got annoyed, that's too bad, but what he is practising must be denounced.

So Paul argues, like our Lord argued, against doctrines that undermine salvation. We should notice that this letter is written not as a gospel sermon to be preached in the next marketplace that they came to. It is written to the believers who had made a profession of faith, and now they are being troubled by this false teaching. So these are not the methods that we necessarily use in evangelism. But because there are many folks who have been brought up in a Christendom which teaches that infant baptism, and this, that and the other, are necessary for salvation, then of course in Bible studies and elsewhere, this kind of argument becomes exceedingly important.

Overview of the arguments

First of all, I want to go through this epistle and point out to you the different kinds of arguments that Paul uses, and then to notice the order in which he applies them. That doesn't necessarily mean that we must always copy that order, but the order in which Paul uses his various arguments is significant, as we shall see in a moment. So let us spend some time listing them and beginning to think about them.

Argument 1: Apostolic authority (1:1-10)

The first argument he uses is based on Paul's own apostolic authority.

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. (v. 1)

We'll come back to that later as we look at it in more detail. But the argument from the apostolic authority of Paul is basic to this question. I remember talking to a Roman Catholic priest who wanted to say that it was by our works that we will be saved. I pointed to what Paul says in Romans:

To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (4:5)

And the reply from the priest was, 'Oh, I don't know what that means. I didn't know it was there in the Bible, but Paul was an old rascal anyway.' Many down church history have held that view. Paul is the least loved of all the apostles. The first thing that goes in many a church is Paul's teaching on justification by faith, and the next thing that goes is Paul's doctrine of the church. He is not liked on either account. Here he will tell us about the basis of his apostolic authority that lies behind the gospel he preaches. And so he expands it now in chapter 1, verses 1-10.

Argument 2: Early church history (1:11-2:21)

Paul then develops a long argument from church history—if you will allow me that term in referring to the early days of the gospel from Pentecost onwards. Very often 'church history' is the term given to the post-apostolic period onward. I want to claim the term to cover from the very beginning, as being a necessary fundamental part of church history. It is concerned basically with the question of where Paul got his gospel from. Did he get it from the other apostles? Did he get it from the church? To show why that is important, let me tell another story.

Years ago there was a good Protestant man who for various reasons, good or otherwise, determined to join the Catholic Church. His colleagues in the university had been pleading with him that, before he took that step, he should come and talk to me, for some reason or other. So eventually he came and told me what his proposal was. He was a Church of Ireland man, but now he was convinced that the Church of Rome was right, and he was going to become a monk in the Roman Catholic Church. What did I think of that? I said it was very

difficult for me because the church he was proposing to join anathematized me as a heretic and worthy of damnation.

'Why do they say that?'

'Well, the Council of Trent says that if anybody says he's sure of salvation, let him be anathema.'

'But you shouldn't be sure of salvation, should you?'

'Why not?'

'Well, it all depends on your works.'

So I read him that verse in Romans 4:5 which says that a person is counted righteous on the basis of faith not because of his works, but he didn't know that was in the Bible, and he didn't know what it meant.

But then he said, 'Of course, that Paul was a bit of an old rascal anyway. Your trouble is that you think you can just read the Bible like that, and believe it and be saved. You can't do it like that because it was the church that gave us the Bible, and you must ask the church what it means. You can't make up your own mind as to what it means.'

So I said to him, 'Paul says that he got the gospel direct from God, and not from the church. So when Paul was in Arabia, could I have gone to him and asked him how to be saved, and when he had told me by word of mouth what he has now written here in Romans 4, could I have listened to him, understood what he said, repented and believed, and been saved there and then? Or would I have had to take it to the church to find out what Paul's words actually mean?'

He said, 'Yes, of course you would have had to take it to the church. You couldn't just listen to what he said, believe it, and be saved.'

'You mean the church that was in Jerusalem at the time?'

'Yes, to Peter and the others.'

'Well, Paul says that when he eventually got to Jerusalem, the apostles added nothing to him.'

'Oh, but they did. They told him what the gospel was.'

No they didn't. The Bible says they didn't add anything and there's a fundamental point here. When we began our work in Russia, there came a gentleman who professed to be a believer and helped us in various things, but then he went and joined the Orthodox Church. We raised the difficulties involved in that and in a letter to him I laid out, as I understood it, the doctrines of the Orthodox Church and how they were not according to Scripture. He wrote back saying that my letter was ridiculous. 'How can you use the Bible to criticize the church when it is the church that gave you the Bible in the first place?'

So it is too in Judaism. A really orthodox Jew won't read the Old Testament and decide what it means for himself: that's far too difficult. He must apply to the Rabbis, and they to the Talmud and to the Midrash. On what principle? Well, the rabbis will say that God gave Moses the law, the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances. The law was given to Moses orally, but eventually the law was written down, and we have that in the Old Testament. But, say the rabbis, the statutes, the ordinances and all the other things were not written down

until the time of the Great Synagogue², so you can't just take the law in isolation: all the other tradition that was not written down is important for understanding the law. The Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches make the same claim. They will tell you that Paul writing to the Thessalonians refers to his letters but also refers to what he told them orally when he was with them. The Orthodox Church will say, 'There you are: some of the apostolic tradition was written down and some wasn't written down. Some was communicated orally, and that oral tradition has been carried along all down the centuries until the present. You can't take just the written word of the Bible or Paul's letters, and think you're going to understand them. It's the church that can tell you what they really were intended to mean because of the oral tradition.'

So we come back to the question, 'Where does Paul's gospel come from? Was it the church that gave him the gospel or not?' That is basic to our gospel preaching and to our evangelism, and in writing to the Galatians Paul makes the position clear.

Argument 3: The Galatians' experience at conversion (3:1-6)

Then we come to the argument from the experience of conversion of these believers in Galatia. Paul points out that when they believed, they received the Holy Spirit; and he asks them to ponder how, and on what conditions they received the Holy Spirit originally. Was it by hearing with faith or by works of the law? It is valid, of course, to use an argument based on people's experience but not as an argument that stands simply by itself. And we see that Paul immediately follows it with clear statements from Scripture.

Argument 4: Explicit statements of Scripture (3:7-14)

The next argument is based on the explicit statements of Scripture. A whole list of quotations from the Old Testament now follow, to cover a number of different points. Paul has drawn attention to the Galatians' own experience, but it is experience that must be based on, and matched by, and equate to the straightforward explicit statements of Scripture.

Argument 5: Sound legal practice (3:15-18)

In these verses, Paul brings up what is absolutely basic to the Christian gospel—God's covenant with Abraham. Genesis 15 contains the fundamental statement that Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. On that very same occasion, God made a covenant with Abraham and his offspring, and therefore it is important that we should interpret that covenant and its terms absolutely correctly and exactly. This is therefore an argument from sound legal practice in interpreting the covenant that God made with Abraham and his offspring. It will tell us that the great promises which God made to Abraham and his offspring were not founded on the law, because the covenant was made four hundred years and more before the law was given. Sound legal practice maintains that you cannot subsequently add any other conditions which God did not lay down when he made that

² According to rabbinic tradition, this was a great assembly of prominent rabbis after the time of the Prophets. However, details are few and uncertain.

covenant with Abraham. So man is justified, and not only justified, but the promises and the glorious inheritance promised according to that covenant, do not depend on the keeping of the law, for the great inheritance and the promises were made through that covenant four hundred years before the law was given.

Argument 6: The function of the law (3:19–29)

Paul knew by experience—because he'd argued the case in many a synagogue and many a forum—that if you preach that salvation is not by the works of the law, you will eventually be met by a counterargument—why then was the law given? You can't deny that God gave the law, and you're not going to say that God was wrong in giving people the law. So if you're going to maintain that salvation is not by the law you will eventually have to do what Paul now does in this next argument. He has to address the question of what is the true function of the law—what then is the law and what was its function? Paul argues that it was a temporary device God imposed on the nation in their childhood, but now that Christ has come, that temporary arrangement is done away with.

Argument 7: A Scriptural analogy—The adoption of sons (4:1–7)

Next, Paul brings out an argument from analogy. He had already used an analogy in the previous chapter—the analogy that in a Roman household a boy would be put under a pedagogue. A pedagogue was a slave who was responsible for the boy's general behaviour, and in particular for taking him to the school to be taught by a school master, and then brought home again. So this slave was appointed over the boy even though the boy was his father's heir. That slave nonetheless would control the boy's behaviour, if need be by discipline, until the boy grew up and became an adult, whereupon he would no longer be under the slave.

So now in chapter 4, Paul uses an analogy drawn again from a Roman household where, when a boy was born—perhaps he was the first-born—the father would, or would not, recognize him as his son. That was quite a formal ceremony. If the father picked up the son and owned him as his son, he was now the father's son, even though he was a baby. But the father wouldn't immediately put into the son's hands the running of the father's great estate and wealth. Though he was legally the father's son in character, he was still a baby—and in due course a child and an early teenager—he was not yet fit to be put in charge of the father's estate. So the father would take this little boy who was legally his son and put him under governors. They generally would be slaves as well, but in the Roman household slaves could be very high-powered officials, as in the palace of a king or a queen in our country. In a big wealthy Roman household, your personal, private secretary would be a slave, though he knew several languages, and you would consult him on policy and all that kind of thing. And your doctor, excuse me everybody, your doctor would be a slave as well! So the boy was put under the authority of these governors, in various directions about his health, and his education, and everything else. He himself would be nothing different from a slave, though he's a son, until the time came when he reached his majority and he would be accepted by the father now to join with the father in the running of the estates.

When we come to investigate it in detail, we shall have to ask ourselves whether it is a valid analogy. Let me point out what I mean by that. Analogies are very useful things, but they prove nothing. Analogy only illustrates. So if I said to you, ‘You keep telling me that salvation is by faith and without works. I disagree: salvation is like the village pump.’

‘Oh yes, how’s that?’

‘Well, you couldn’t arrive at the old-fashioned sort of village pump and start pumping: you wouldn’t get anything out. You had to prime the pump. You first had to pour water into it to prime it, and then start pumping. Salvation’s like that: you have to put the water in first before you get any water out. You have to put in your works before, by faith, you get out salvation.’

Would my analogy prove the case? What you would say is, ‘I’m sorry, but your analogy is quite invalid.’

Analogies don’t prove anything but an analogy that is valid is very helpful for understanding and clarifying the situation. We must watch our analogies if we use them in presenting the gospel to people.

Argument 8: The Galatians’ changed attitude to Paul (4:8–20)

Paul’s next argument is again drawn from the experience of the effects of conversion. Here the argument is that when the Galatians got converted they were so grateful to Paul that they would have gouged out their eyes and given them to him (v. 15).³ But they’re not so keen on him now—why is that? Now that’s very important, particularly coming from the Apostle Paul. Any doctrine that makes converts dislike Paul and shun him is thereby exposed as being false doctrine. The priest that said to me, ‘Paul is an old rascal,’ shows the symptoms. The doctrine of salvation by works will dampen people’s enthusiasm for Paul.

Argument 9: An Old Testament prototype (4:21–31)

The next argument is drawn from an Old Testament prototype or, to put it in modern language, an argument from typology. It is sound to use typology: Paul uses it! But notice where it comes in our list. It comes in after Paul has established his case (in Argument 4) by quoting literal straightforward verses of Scripture: only then does he eventually use the typology of Scripture to add to his argument.

Argument 10: Implications of the false doctrine (5:2–12)

Paul now firmly refutes the false doctrine by pointing to the implications of it. Look at what he says, as he points out the serious implications for those who receive this false doctrine.

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole

³ It is widely thought that Paul suffered from a severe and debilitating eye condition—his ‘thorn in the flesh’—and the Galatians were clearly sympathetic to his plight.

law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (5:2–4)

Argument 11: Provision for holy living (5:13–6:10)

The argument from the fact that the gospel of justification by faith *does* make provision for holy living, and what that provision is. Just briefly, let's look at these verses and see the flow of the argument.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (5:16–17)

The provision for our leading a holy life is the Holy Spirit and his leading. That is the fact, but Paul is adducing this fact as part of an argument. Look at verse 18:

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

You will know it very well from your evangelistic work that if you preach the gospel of salvation by faith and not by works, very soon people will come back at you and say, 'That means then you can do as you like: you can sin and it doesn't matter.' And you, of course, come to say what Paul is saying here. That is not true. Justification by faith includes a genuine, real, positive provision for leading a holy life, which is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit's desires within us, the leading of the Holy Spirit. But that is not the same as law. The authenticity of the gospel of justification by faith is shown by this, that it does make provision for leading a holy life that the law itself cannot make. That is part of the argument then in favour of the doctrine of justification by faith.

Argument 12: Motives of the false teachers (6:11–18)

This argument rests on the exposure of the unworthy motives of the false teachers, compared with the marks of true apostleship displayed by Paul. Notice that it is the last argument Paul uses. It is a valid argument. If you're arguing with somebody yourself, that salvation is by faith, and not by works, and they object to this, saying, 'No, no, our priest tells us it's by works', you say, 'Excuse me, isn't he the chap who is the talk of the town because of his inappropriate behaviour?' Well, of course, if that is the case, that is a valid argument, but it is the last one Paul uses because you have to establish the conditions of salvation based on Scripture not on people's behaviour. Do remember that sometimes when you say to somebody that you believe salvation is by faith, and not by works, they could say, 'There's a man where I work and he believes what you believe. He's run off with somebody else's wife, and now we've found he's been cooking income tax records.' That could happen, sadly, so we don't found the great gospel of justification by faith by first of all pointing to people's behaviour. Exposing the false motives of the false teachers is an argument to be used, but as you see here, it is the last argument of the twelve.

Reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit

I'm aware that this kind of survey of Paul's epistle is hard, and may seem legalistic. But we are being trained as soldiers, and we are to strive for the faith once delivered to the saints. Learning to do it properly may involve you in learning how to argue the case in true spiritual fashion, and to argue with sound arguments. As we've studied today, let us seek the help of the Holy Spirit that he may teach us how to be effective witnesses for the Lord, how to be effective in our gospel preaching and in our personal testimony; knowing how to argue for the truth of the gospel of justification by faith, particularly when that gospel is disputed by religious people who want to say that justification by faith is not enough, and you have to add to that your good works or your effort to keep the laws of Moses or whatever else.

Arguments 1 & 2

In our first session, I was trying to make the point that in the Epistle to the Galatians Paul meets the false doctrine that was troubling the converts in Galatia by a series of arguments. It is enough if I have called your attention to the fact that in this epistle there is a series of arguments and the arguments are of different kinds. Don't worry at this point if the different arguments don't matter much to you, because you have not recently read the details that each one of them contains. So long as we get the idea that Galatians is composed of a number of arguments of different types, we shall be prepared now to take seriously the detail of each argument, and to recognize the different kinds of argument we shall meet as we proceed. As we see what the force of each argument is, we can seek God's help in any practical situation to know when, and where, and how, and in what order, to use these arguments when they are relevant to a discussion and relevant to leading people to genuine faith in the Lord Jesus.

Argument 1: Paul's apostolic authority (1:1-10)

The first argument then comes from Paul's apostolic authority. Let's come to the actual verses, and notice the detail.

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. (v. 1)

All Paul's letters start in the format used in the ancient world, first naming the writer of the letter and then passing on his greetings. Paul does that constantly, following the normal form, but here his normal greeting is enlarged. Things are said here that are not said elsewhere, and they are things which are absolutely basic to the Christian gospel. Let's take that last clause first, to show the importance of what Paul is claiming.

Paul has been appointed an apostle by the very God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. In raising Jesus Christ from the dead, God established the very basis of the gospel. If Christ had not been raised from the dead there would be no gospel, but the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and commanded that his resurrection be proclaimed as the very basis of the gospel, is the very same God who appointed Paul to be an apostle. That is exceedingly important. Apostleship is not just a little detail. We might in conversation compare one evangelist with another and say, 'Yes, they're both good in their way, but you don't have to take everything they say.' You don't say that about Paul. Paul isn't just an evangelist, he's an apostle. And the same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead

appointed Paul an apostle, to preach that gospel, and to expound it, and to lay down the terms of the gospel. That is the importance of his apostleship.

So now, where did he get his apostleship from? Paul tells us explicitly that it was not from men nor through man. Was it the church that appointed him? Well, by definition, no. Was it the apostles in Jerusalem, who were apostles before him, who appointed him? No, the source of his apostleship was not men. But somebody may say, 'Yes, Paul, of course, your apostleship came originally from God, but it had to be channelled through men surely—by the laying on of Peter's hands, wasn't it?' No, it wasn't. Not only was it not *from* men, it was not *through* man. Notice the double negative. Why argue about details like that? Well, we shall find out as we go through these first and second chapters that this is absolutely fundamental to the gospel message.

Paul says it is through Jesus Christ and through God the Father. Why in that order? Well, of course he was appointed an apostle at his conversion, was he not? Read the story of the Damascus Road experience (see Acts 9) when it was the Lord who appeared to him: 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting' (v. 5). But the voice came out of that light, brighter than the sun (26:13), and Paul, as a Jew, would not need telling what that brightness was: it was the Shekinah glory of God. In response to the voice from the glory, Paul said, 'Who are you, Lord?' That was a very significant utterance. Granted that the Greek term *kyrios* can mean simply 'sir', but Paul is not likely to have responded to this glory above the brightness of the sun as 'sir'. The word *kyrios* is used constantly in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as a translation of *Yahweh*, Jehovah. Remark from your memory how many times Paul uses that term, 'Lord Jesus Christ' in his epistles—it goes back to the time when the Lord appeared to him.

Paul was then told to go into the city, where he would be told what to do. They took him into the city, and soon thereafter it was the risen Lord Jesus who sent Ananias, as we see recorded as follows:

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.' (Acts 9:10-14)

When the religious authorities gave Paul this authority to go to arrest and imprison 'all who call on your name' as Ananias says, what did they mean? He wasn't sent to imprison those who call on the name of God but those who call on the name of Jesus. Because to 'call on the name of' is a phrase the Old Testament uses for prayer to God, to call upon God. To call on the name of Jesus is to imply that Jesus is God incarnate—hence the anger of the Jerusalem religious authorities. For these Nazarenes to call upon the name of Jesus was, to them, a blasphemous thing to do.

But notice who it is that's talking to Ananias. It is the Lord Jesus—Jesus himself personally, from the glory—who is talking to Ananias. And the Lord said to him,

'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.' (v. 15)

Paul is an apostle through Jesus Christ—Christ was the first actual agent in his appointment. And of course, from God the Father. We noticed that he is described as the God who raised Jesus from the dead. That is God's authentication and justification of the person of Jesus—that he raised him from the dead. Thus the whole story of the atoning death of Christ has been validated by God by that very fact. And Paul's apostleship is a thing that can be mentioned in the same breath as those great events which are the foundation of the gospel—the atoning death of Christ, his resurrection and ascension to God's right hand, and his position in glory as being, excuse the term, the commander-in-chief and director of world evangelism. But Paul does not refer only to himself: he includes 'all the brothers who are with me' (Gal 1:2). Paul wasn't a solitary man doing his own thing in that sense but Paul's authority was recognized and corroborated by all the brothers who were with him.

Now comes the normal grace, the normal greeting as in all his epistles but notice the description which is given of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. (vv. 3–5)

So grace and peace is not just a formal greeting. It is laden with the terms of the gospel, the salvation by grace leading to peace with God. And the basis of this grace and peace is that Christ gave himself for our sins. Notice the term 'gave himself': we shall meet it again in Galatians:

I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (2:20)

He gave himself for our sins. This is absolute basic gospel. Nothing else could save us from the guilt of our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present age with all its evil. The only thing that will deliver us out of this present evil age is the sacrifice of Christ. Let me use an analogy—you'll see at once it is merely an analogy! What was the only thing that could save people from the flood? Being circumcised, keeping the food laws, or the law of Moses? No, the only thing that saved all the people of that day was the ark. And the only thing that can save us from this present age with all its evil is the sacrifice of Christ.

That sacrifice was 'according to the will of our God and Father'. It was not a question of Christ doing something heroic to deliver us out of the hands of a wrathful God, against God's intention. That's an old pagan idea. The sacrifice of Christ at Calvary was the will of God himself that we should be saved thereby. And if these are the bases of salvation then the doxology in this context is significant.

To whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

That is, the glory for our salvation is God's. The credit and the glory for our deliverance is due solely to Christ and to God.

Paul's appointment—in summary

This then is Paul's apostolic authority. We see that its source was not from men nor through man; and his authority was recognized and corroborated by all the brothers who were with him—he's not a lone, solitary character. So in his apostolic greeting you have the gospel in miniature, and our point is that we must notice that his apostleship is a thing that can be mentioned alongside these fundamentals of the gospel. Not that his death saved us, but the God who instituted salvation through the death of Christ and his resurrection was the same God who appointed him to be an apostle to preach that gospel of salvation. And the blessed Lord who died for us likewise appointed him to his apostleship to expound and preach that gospel worldwide, as we see in the book of the Acts.

Paul's 'anathema'

Now we come to a very solemn thing, verses 6–10. Notice this comes very early on, which is logically the place. For if Paul is a divinely appointed apostle to tell us what the gospel is, then anyone who disputes that apostolic authority is corrupting the very gospel of God. Let that be said before we come to any detail of this false doctrine—starting from basic premises, so to speak. You can't refuse the apostolic authority of Paul and still have the gospel. If anyone should preach differently, says Paul, 'let him be accursed' (v. 8), or as it is expressed in Paul's original Greek, 'let him be *anathema*'.

So what does 'anathema' mean? It's the Greek translation of the Hebrew term *kherem* in the Old Testament, which means a curse such as that which was pronounced on Jericho (see Josh 6). It means something that is devoted to or set aside for God's judgment, just as Jericho was set aside for God's judgment. Israel had to destroy the city and everybody in it: nothing should be salvaged from it. Things that couldn't be burned with fire, like the silver and gold, had to be given over to God. Nobody profited from it. This wasn't Israel acting out of spite. On that occasion, Israel were the commissioned instrument of God's judgment on that city. So Paul, in pronouncing an *anathema*, hands the people over to God, for God's solemn judgment because they are in opposition to the God who appointed Paul to preach the gospel; and they are daring to preach something different from that officially ordained gospel.

Departing from grace

So, to go back upon what has already been said, and now to come to verse 6.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

That's to be pondered. It doesn't say simply, 'I am astonished that you are deserting the gospel.' But here it's more than moving away from a doctrine: 'you are deserting him'. It's far more than different theological points of view. If you move away from the gospel of grace, you are deserting a person. That is a very big claim on Paul's part. If you deny the gospel of grace, you're moving not merely from a doctrine but from the God who called you in the grace of Christ. You'll notice how well chosen his words are, and how every word counts. You are

not simply removing from the teaching of Christ, but from the grace of Christ. Salvation comes of God's grace: it is the gracious gift of Christ. He offers you salvation by grace. If you won't have that as a gift and want to pay for it, you insult Christ. You're moving away from the grace he presents to you now, and therefore you're removing from him.

Distorting the gospel

And they're doing it so quickly, 'to a different gospel—not that there is another one.' There is only one. There are not differing gospels. It should be evident how necessary it is to preach that in this age of post-modernism and religious syncretism. The common notion is that Islam and Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism all have their gospel message. 'No they don't,' says Paul, 'there's only one true gospel. There is not another.'

But there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (v. 7)

It is not merely distorting the doctrine of the Millennium or something where there are different views. This is distorting the very basic gospel of Christ. Then he adds,

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (vv. 8–9)

If Paul in his old age were to go silly in the head and start preaching a different gospel, says he, 'I would deserve to be accursed too.' And he says it twice over.

God's gospel cannot be changed

Now it's not a question merely of persuading men. He's responsible to God and therefore, even if men reject his message, he must be faithful to God and to Christ. So he's not free to change the gospel, because it is God's gospel. His task is to persuade men to believe and accept it, not to try to persuade God to change it.

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. (v. 10)

His task as an apostle is not to please men, but to please the one who appointed him. Now that has to be read of course, against the exhortation in one of the later epistles. We have to consider one another, to please one another, even as Christ pleased not himself. We are to consider others, and bring them grace and pleasure in that sense. But when it comes to basic principle, and deciding what the gospel is, it's not a question of taking a show of hands and deciding it by majority vote or something. It is not a question of pleasing men but being faithful to the gospel that God himself has ordained.

Argument 2: Early church history (1:11–2:21)

That then is the argument from Paul's apostolic authority. Having established the source of his apostolic authority, Paul now argues likewise that he didn't get his *gospel* from the church, or from the apostles that were before him. He launches into a long argument which I have

called the argument from early church history. I'm conscious that many people would think I am misusing the term 'church history' because they use it to cover the period after the New Testament, the church fathers, and so forth. I use it deliberately, however, to stress the fact that our gospel didn't begin with the early church fathers. It began with our Lord, with his death, resurrection from the dead, and historically with the apostles. Paul states the argument right from the very start,

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (1:11–12)

Four periods of Paul's 'early church history'

That is the basic and substantial point he is going to make, and he's going to sketch in for us four periods of his early history—all of them aimed at showing that his gospel is not from man, and not indeed from the church nor from the other apostles. The four periods are:

1. Before his conversion

Paul's behaviour before his conversion and what type of man he was before his conversion.

2. His conversion itself

How Paul's conversion came about and how it is relevant to the question of whether his gospel is from God. If I ask you who it was who led Paul to Christ, what would your answer be?

AUDIENCE: Christ.

Christ, yes, that's exactly so. There was no other man that led Paul to Christ. We know that Andrew went and found his brother and brought him to Christ. But no Christian, not the church, not any apostle, brought Paul to Christ. His conversion was all of God, not from men. It didn't even come from Paul himself. Then three years after Paul's conversion there was his first visit to Jerusalem, where he gives us evidence to show that he didn't get his gospel from the apostles on that occasion.

3. Paul's second visit to Jerusalem

This happened fourteen years after Paul's conversion (2:1–10) and he describes the reason for his visit to Jerusalem—all aimed to show that he didn't get his gospel from men, or man, or from the church, or from the other apostles.

4. The incident at Antioch

This was a later occasion (2:11–21) when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch. Paul shows that, far from getting his gospel from Peter, on that occasion he had to correct and rebuke him for his hypocritical behaviour when he chose to behave in a way that denied what in his heart he believed about the gospel. For the sake of the clarity of the gospel, Paul publicly had to oppose and rebuke Peter before everybody else. It was not that Peter, in his heart, believed a different gospel, but under pressure Peter behaved in such a way that his behaviour suggested he didn't believe the gospel. In other words, he behaved inconsistently with the gospel.

Four periods, then, of church history, all relevant to this basic proposition that Paul did not get the gospel from men, or through a man. It wasn't even delegated to him through a man, but it came direct from Christ and God. And he goes to all this trouble to get this established on a historical basis.

The importance of history

I was once asked to go and see a young gentleman down in the area of Newcastle. This chap had been a believer and in the Baptist Church. Now he'd gone over to the Roman Catholic Church. He had done a lot of research, so he informed me, and he got all this tremendous evidence. And here we had it: you can't just read the Bible, you have to take into account the church's view, and all the church's traditions that they received, and if I want to know what Paul preaches I must go to the church. So I faced him with this.

'Let's do a little bit of history. When Paul got converted, who led him to Christ, historically?'

'Oh, but you don't know. It was the church that told us which books are to be in the New Testament canon.'

'Well, let's get the first century history first. Suppose I had met Paul before he'd ever written anything, and I met him in the deserts of Arabia, and I said, "I want to be saved, Paul. Can you tell me how to be saved?" and he told me, by word of mouth, what he here writes in the epistle. Could I have listened to it, understood it, believed it, and been saved there and then?'

That is the issue of history, brothers and sisters. Don't be put off by getting into long disputes about who decided what the canon should be. We can go to the time before Paul had even written anything in the deserts of Arabia, and listen to him. Could we accept from his mouth what he hereafter writes? Well, the young man made all sorts of marvellous discursions from that, about the canon and all sorts of things that are irrelevant to the matter of history.

The facts of history are that Paul didn't get the gospel from others. How can we be sure of that? Well, look at his behaviour, his manner of life. See his persecution of the believers and his ardent zeal for the Jewish religion. Did he really go and listen to sermons, and learn the gospel from these chaps that he was persecuting and torturing? Did Peter take him and counsel him? That's nonsense. What led to his conversion therefore? The gospel came to him, he says, 'through a revelation of Jesus Christ' (1:12). That can be taken in two senses. First there is the revelation when Jesus Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus, but then there is the revelation *about* Jesus. One of the things that drove Paul nearly mad before he was converted was the Christian claim that Jesus was the Messiah. But Jesus was crucified and, as Paul himself observes, 'Anyone hung on a tree is cursed of God' (see 3:13). For the Christians to claim that somebody who was hung on a tree and cursed of God was the Messiah, seemed the extreme of blasphemy. What changed his view? Well, it was not the preaching of the Christians but the revelation of Christ in glory. It revolutionized his whole idea of God and led him to ask, 'Well, if righteous Jesus was the Son of God, why was he dying, hung on a tree, cursed of God?' It was through the revelation of Christ therefore.

But notice verse 15.

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone.

So it was God's plan and purpose, and not taken on the spur of a moment either. Not saying, 'Well, this unlikely chap, this foolish Pharisee, has got converted. What could we do with him: how will we make use of him?' Like Jeremiah, Paul is claiming that God had his eyes on him before he was born: God was going to use this man to preach the gospel. If I put it like that it will please my Calvinist friends! But it doesn't mean that Paul was a machine, and that he had no opportunity, power or strength to say no to the appointment. But God had had his eye upon him right from his birth. Paul is making a tremendous claim: this is said of Jeremiah, the classical prophet.

Now strictly speaking, the Greek says, 'to reveal his son *in* me.' Of course that meant revealing his Son *to* him, as he did on the Damascus Road. But it was God's purpose to reveal his son *in* Paul, in and through him—in his conversion and in his preaching. I can see what Paul means in part by reading again the story of his conversion as he tells it to Timothy:

But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Tim 1:16)

Paul was chosen to be a practical example of salvation, an example of what God is prepared to put up with and still forgive a man, and turn him into a very apostle. He is a model therefore, that God chose as an example of conversion to show the tremendous longsuffering of God through Christ, and shown to the chief of sinners who had persecuted the church.

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. (Gal 1:15–17)

This is therefore talking now about his conversion itself—God's timing, God's predestination, God's call, God's purpose, and Paul's reaction during the next three years. God's timing, when it pleased God. God's predestination of Paul to be an apostle before he was born, or from his birth. God's call, by his grace. God's purpose, to reveal his Son in and through Paul, that he should preach the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles. Paul's reaction during the next three years: he did not consult or confer with other Christians nor go to Jerusalem, but he went to Arabia and then back to Damascus.

Understanding the chronology

Well that being so, we have a little historical research to do because we could misunderstand the chronology and the sequence of events in Paul's conversion if we were not careful. So let's look back at his conversion as told us in Acts 9.

So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' And all who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem . . . (vv. 17–26)

So from Damascus he went straight to Jerusalem, did he? Is that how we shall understand it? For in Galatians he tells us that when he got converted, he did not immediately confer with anyone but went away into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. From this we gather something that Luke doesn't tell us. He was on the road to Damascus when he got converted, struck blind, he was led by the hand into Damascus, and lodged there. Ananias came to him and his blindness was removed. He received the Holy Spirit and forthwith began to preach. Then eventually the Jews laid up trouble for him, and he escaped and went to Jerusalem.

Damascus—desert—Damascus

Luke doesn't tell us what Paul himself tells us, that in that period when he was in Damascus, got converted, doubtless began to preach in the synagogues, he then went off to Arabia and was there for three years or so—presumably inclusive counting, meaning it could be a little more than a year and two bits of two other years. Then he returned to Damascus, and it was from Damascus that, after three years since his conversion, he went up to Jerusalem. There is no contradiction: it is simply that Luke hasn't thought to tell us about what happened. From Damascus initially he went to the desert, Arabia, and came back to Damascus. There was a lot of fuss, they tried to catch him, and he got lowered down the wall in a basket, and went to Jerusalem.

Now let's look at 2 Corinthians to fill in the detail.

At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.
(2 Cor 11:32–33)

Let me introduce you to Aretas! He's king of the Nabataeans, and if you haven't heard of the Nabataeans, look up your Bible dictionaries and they'll tell you that the Nabataeans controlled the desert of Arabia to which Paul went. Damascus was ruled at that time by a governor appointed by Aretas. Paul, therefore, after he was converted was a few days in Damascus and then went off to the Nabataean desert, under the Nabataean kings. But Damascus was ruled

by a governor appointed by Aretas and when Paul eventually returned to Damascus, the Jews made a fuss, being citizens under King Aretas. Doubtless, when Paul got to the desert, in the dominion of Aretas, he would not only have communed with God—like John the Baptist in the desert—but if he did what he normally did, he would have preached to the Nabataeans and sundry others when he got the opportunity.

He'd begun already to preach in Damascus anyway, and that upset the Jews. When he went off into the wilderness of the Nabataeans, and he preached to anybody around there as well, then of course the Jews—who couldn't tolerate him anymore—would apply eventually to the governor under King Aretas to have Paul arrested. So Damascus was no longer safe to him, and he would have been captured had not the believers let him down secretly in a basket by the wall, and then he went to Jerusalem. So we have to put all those passages together to see what actually happened.

Meeting Peter

So we've covered what his style of life was before he got converted. It was not then that he got his gospel from any apostle or church. We've considered the nature of his conversion, and his time in Damascus and in the Nabataean desert when, obviously, he didn't consult with the apostles in Jerusalem. Then, three years after his conversion—those three years would include his sojourn in the Nabataean desert—Paul went to Jerusalem. It is his first visit to Jerusalem and he tells us the purpose of it. He went to get to know Cephas, not to inquire the gospel of him. The Greek verb used at that point is a term you would use of a tourist going to Egypt. I went to visit the pyramids, meaning, 'I went to get to know the pyramids, and to look at the pyramids.' He went to meet Cephas, and get to know Cephas. He was only there fifteen days. Notice the scope of the visit: he saw none other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. Then after fifteen days, as a result of plots on his life, he left for Syria and Cilicia. And because that visit was so short he was still unknown by face to the churches of Judea, though they had heard his fame and glorified God in him.

Again, Paul is quoting this incident of his brief visit to Jerusalem three years after he was converted, to show once more that he didn't get his gospel, and certainly not his apostleship from the people at Jerusalem. Acts is telling us that, right from his conversion in Damascus, he preached the gospel in Damascus. It wasn't a question of his being appointed by the church, or by Peter, or James, or John. He had already been preaching the gospel for three years on his first visit to Jerusalem. You say, 'Though it doesn't tell us there, perhaps they did have to correct certain things in his ideas, and fill him in a bit.' No, that happened fourteen years after his conversion, his second visit to Jerusalem, but that's a longer story, and we must leave it until a later session.

Let me merely impress on you, by the sheer boredom of my exposition, how long a time and space Paul has devoted to this matter of history. It leaves me wondering how many times you have heard these chapters expounded in the church—half a dozen times since you were converted or maybe more? However many times you've heard it, you need now to get them up your sleeve—or any other metaphor you'd like to use!—so that you know them inside out and you could say to yourself, 'What are the four arguments of church history that Paul adduces to show that he didn't get his gospel from man, nor his apostleship, but it was a direct

revelation from God? We need those four parts of the history if we're going to be good soldiers. If a soldier is faced with an enemy coming around the corner, he doesn't say, 'Oh dear me, I've got some bullets here somewhere. Wait half a minute, don't shoot yet, I've got some bullets here!'

You've got to be at the ready. You have to get it at your fingertips and know it well enough to recite it. Because the arguments are so fundamental to the gospel, and particularly fundamental to this question of how, and on what terms we are saved and justified before God. Is it through faith in Christ, plus the works of the law? Or by faith alone, through grace alone, without the works of the law? That's a fundamental issue in salvation, I don't need to tell you that. But this history, though you might find it a bit boring, Paul judged to be absolutely fundamental to his case. Here is the evidence that his apostleship came from God, and that his gospel came from God: he received it by revelation and not by the teaching of others.

Argument 2 (cont'd)

The source of the gospel

When we broke off, we were considering Paul's lengthy argument from church history. The central point is that he is arguing that he got his gospel direct from the ascended Lord. Just as he didn't get his apostleship from man or even through man but from God the Father, and his dear Son, the gospel was revealed to him from the risen Lord. And so he cites some epochs in his history: what his style of life was before he got converted—his persecution of the church and so forth. He shows that he wasn't in close contact with any of the apostles to be taught by them what the gospel was. Then he talks about what happened three years after his conversion, when he went up to Jerusalem. He wasn't there long enough to see any other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. He went in order to make the acquaintance of Cephas, but he was only there for fifteen days.

Second visit to Jerusalem

Then there was another visit to Jerusalem, fourteen years after his conversion. Now I said that this is the second visit to Jerusalem: I mean the second one that he records. Whether it was in the absolute sense, the second, or third, or so forth is a matter for interest, not immediately relevant now to exploring this passage. It was fourteen years after his conversion that he went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus with him. Now taking Titus with him was a provocative thing to do in one sense. Titus was a Gentile and, as you see from the subsequent discussion, the presence of Titus with the Apostle Paul raised the question of whether Titus ought to be circumcised or not.

Paul says he went up because of a revelation. That is significant: it seems to me he's claiming therefore that he wasn't summoned to Jerusalem, or invited to Jerusalem by the other apostles to come and discuss the gospel, and so that he could be straightened out on anything. He didn't come at their invitation or command: he went up because of a revelation. And his purpose in going up was to,

set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.
(2:2)

That phrase needs to be pondered. Is Paul admitting that he went up because in his heart of hearts he wasn't quite sure of the gospel he was preaching, and he went up to get it confirmed by the apostles, and feared that if they disagreed with him, and showed him that

his gospel wasn't what it ought to be, then he had wasted the intervening years by preaching an inadequate gospel? Is it that? Well, from the context I suggest to you, obviously not that.

'Running in vain' seems to me to involve the following. Suppose the opponents of Paul had been right and the apostles at Jerusalem were preaching another different gospel from what Paul preached, that would have had serious repercussions in the assemblies which Paul had founded. He went up therefore by revelation: God showed him that the wise thing to do was to set before them his gospel, and gain from the apostles their statement that they agreed with him totally. That would show that those who maintained that the apostles at Jerusalem preached a different gospel from Paul were false.

So he went up and he says in verse 3, 'But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.' People have argued about what that means. He wasn't compelled to be circumcised, but we circumcised him anyway—as a tactical device? For you will remember that later on in the Acts when, on their second missionary journey Paul needed another fellow worker, the local brothers recommended Timothy. His mother was a Jewess, his father was a Greek, but he wasn't circumcised, and he was a believer, well reported of. But Paul took him and circumcised him. Whatever for, when he had resolutely opposed those who said you had to be circumcised in order to be saved? Luke himself, by the very ordering of his material, invites us to raise the question. Why did Paul on one moment resist circumcision, and on the other go and voluntarily circumcise Timothy?

The answer lies, of course, in the reason why. If it were a question that you must be circumcised to be saved, Paul would fight you tooth and nail: he wouldn't concede you a centimetre. Circumcision is not necessary for salvation. But when it was a question of taking Timothy with him, and in many places they would go to the synagogue and preach, then it was a matter of Christian wisdom and tactics to circumcise Timothy. Not to get him saved, but so as not unnecessarily to offend the conscience of Jews in the synagogue.

For instance, if fifty years ago you had gone to the outer islands off Scotland, the dear folks were Calvinist in the extreme, and kept the Sabbath religiously. Now you, as believers, know that you don't have to keep the law to be saved, but these folk thought that Sabbath-keeping was part of the moral law. It isn't part of the moral law, because you'll notice what the Lord Jesus said, 'on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless' (Matt 12:5). It can't be a moral law. Substitute any of the other Ten Commandments in that context and see what you come at. In the temple on the Sabbath day, the priests commit adultery, and are guiltless?! None of the other ten could be substituted there, but in the temple on the Sabbath, our Lord says, the priests break the Sabbath because they're serving God, not themselves.

So then here you're going to these outer islands to preach the gospel, and to have a campaign, and the folks are very religious, and they think that you have to keep the law to be saved, and in particular, you have to keep the Sabbath. And you come driving your car into this little town on this island, to preach the gospel. Well you might as well rob the bank on a Friday, and start preaching on the Sabbath. To them this is outrageous, and you would close their ears completely. So you might decide to walk into the town instead of driving your car on the Sabbath day, not because you think it's necessary for salvation, but so that you

wouldn't unnecessarily worry their consciences—and keep their ears open so that you could preach the gospel to them.

So some people hold that what Paul is saying is that Titus wasn't compelled to be circumcised, but they did circumcise him. But that is not the inevitable deduction to be made from Paul's statement. We can leave it as it stands. They tried to compel him to be circumcised, but they refused the compulsion, and he wasn't circumcised. Paul is standing now as he stood in Acts 15, at the counsel in Jerusalem, that circumcision was not necessary to salvation, and therefore he was not going to allow anybody to compel Titus the Gentile to be circumcised. Paul explains that it was false brethren who tried to seize on this, to see their liberty in Christ, and then to denounce them. Why didn't he put up with them?

to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. (2:5)

The folks Paul is writing to are in Galatia, and Paul is talking about what happened in Jerusalem. Would you notice his motive? He had to stand clear on this matter for if he hadn't stood clear on this matter, when the people in Galatia heard of what happened, they wouldn't know for certain what the gospel was. Was it necessary to be circumcised in order to be saved, or wasn't it necessary? Paul stood his ground so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved right up to them. And Paul in standing his ground has the effect of maintaining what the gospel is, right to our day. That's a thing to be pondered, isn't it? The necessity to stand so that what we do and say, and the stand we take, preserves the truth of the gospel not only for our immediate context but throughout the generations. It's the truth of the gospel that is in question.

But then he turns to the people whom he counted as influential—James, Cephas, and John, known throughout the Gentile churches as the leaders of the faith in Jerusalem—as distinct from false brothers. The reaction of the leaders, the true apostles, was that they did not demand that Titus be circumcised. Secondly, they added nothing to the gospel which Paul preached. '[They] added nothing to me' (v. 6). Thirdly, they simply exhorted Paul and Barnabas to remember the poor. 'But that I was already zealous in doing,' says Paul (see v. 10). Fourthly, they were happy that Paul had been entrusted by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles while they themselves took the gospel to the Jews. And fifthly, they signified their total confidence in Paul and Barnabas, and their unreserved fellowship with them, by giving them the right hand of fellowship, that they should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcision. So we notice that by going up to Jerusalem, what Paul achieved was that the apostles at Jerusalem publicly recognized him and agreed that they preach the same gospel as Paul preached, and he preached the same gospel as they preached. They did not demand the circumcision of Titus, and certainly not as necessary for salvation.

Peter's behaviour at Antioch

From 2:11–21, Paul now relates another period of church history. In the previous verses, he'd been talking about his visit to the apostles in Jerusalem, now he talks about what happened when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, whenever that was. Far from Paul getting his gospel

from Peter, or needing to have Peter's sanctioning of his gospel, on this occasion the point of the thing is that Paul had to resist him, and rebuke him publicly to his face. Up to this point Peter had been taking his food along with the Gentile believers, even though the Gentile believers had not been circumcised, and they didn't keep the cleanliness laws—the ceremonial washing of hands, and things that Jews did. Nevertheless, Peter had been happy to have table fellowship with them.

For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. (2:12–13)

Hypocrisy comes in two forms. You can pretend to be what you are not, and to believe what you don't believe: when you say you believe, you're just play acting. The opposite can also be true—to behave in such a way that gives the impression that you don't believe what you do believe. With Peter, it was the second of these two. Peter believed that these Gentiles were saved, and because they were saved, their hearts purified by faith because they possessed the Holy Spirit, God had received them and it was perfectly all right to eat your food with them. Peter believed that—we know that from what happened when he was first sent to the house of Cornelius. He knew that, and believed it.

But when these people came down, ostensibly from James, he took panic and withdrew. And Paul rebuked him publicly because he was fluffing the gospel by his behaviour. He was acting inconsistently with what he believed. And at that, Paul started to argue.

But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?' (v. 14)

Peter had been freed from the ceremonial laws and from the food laws. He'd been happy to go to Cornelius' house and eat with him. That's how he normally lived and he had been living like that in the early days of this conference in Antioch, until he changed his behaviour out of fear of these people from Jerusalem. If then Peter had normally eaten with the Gentiles and didn't demand that they fulfil the Jewish laws, how do you now turn around and compel the Gentiles to live like the Jews? That would be inconsistent, wouldn't it?

Then he adds, 'We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners.' So what are 'Gentile sinners'? Jews would have admitted that they were sinners to some extent, but they weren't sinners like the Gentiles. The Gentiles were unclean in their sight: they didn't go in for the ceremonial washings; they were not circumcised; they didn't keep the Sabbath. To the Jewish mind, these were outrageous things that made fellowship with them impossible. They would do business with them of course, but they wouldn't eat at the same table with them.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ

Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (vv. 15–16)

So Paul is saying that the Jews were not sinners like the Gentiles but, in spite of that, they knew very well that a man was not justified by the works of the law. As believers they might carry on receiving circumcision, they might carry on the ablutionary laws of the Old Testament because it was their tradition, but they jolly well knew that a man was not justified by those works of the law, but solely through faith in Jesus Christ. And what is more, they personally believed on Christ Jesus that they might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law.

Paul's sentence seems to be a little bit complicated, but he's making two logically separate points. First of all, we know what the gospel is: that a man is not justified by the works of the law. But more than that, we have personally believed in Christ that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law—for the fact is that nobody will be justified by the works of the law. So he's arguing with Peter, when he sees him rising up from the table, because what is at stake is the truth of the gospel.

'You're leaving, Peter?'

'Yes, I've got a stomach ache. I'm going to my room.'

'No you don't, I'll have a word with you before you go—stomach ache or no stomach ache—there's more to it than meets the eye. You were quite content to eat with these Gentiles. Now you're getting up and withdrawing from them, and you're doing it out of fear of these folks coming from James. But to do that is to deny the gospel. You know what the gospel is. People are not saved by the works of the law, but through faith. And you have yourself believed: isn't that what you believed when you put your faith in Christ? This is what in your heart of hearts you believe. Why are you now behaving as if you didn't believe it?'

This is making Peter face what he actually in his heart of hearts believed about the basic gospel. Now look at verses 17–18.

But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

Now these verses have been the subject of much dispute as to what they actually mean. John Stott in his beautiful and helpful book on the Epistle to the Galatians plumps for one view. Do read him because I hold the other view, so you must decide! What I take Paul to mean—and you should challenge it as you do ordinarily everything I say!—is this: 'We believed in Christ for salvation through faith, and not by the works of the law. But now you're saying in spite of that, we are still left sinners before God, and in need of keeping the food laws and circumcision before we can be saved. So that faith in Christ is not enough to deliver you from the guilt of sin, not enough to give you peace with God, and acceptance with God. It leaves you still a sinner, and you cannot be saved, except in addition to faith in Christ you have to be circumcised and keep the works of the law. If that is what you are saying, then Christ is a servant of sin, isn't he? And this gospel of faith in Christ leaves you a sinner still.' That is the seriousness of behaving as though something is necessary in addition to faith in Christ.

I was in West Germany a long time ago when there was still a wall between East Germany and West Germany, and I was invited to West Berlin to go to a prayer house, as they're called, and to preach for a week on the Acts of the Apostles. Now these prayer houses have come into being over many decades. They are basically Lutherans, but they tend to be believers who have got themselves their own places to meet in, and they run their own meetings, and they're not in that sense controlled by the parson in the Lutheran Church. They can do what they like in their own place. The only thing is they don't have a meeting on Sunday mornings to facilitate those who feel the need to go to the Lutheran Church to attend the liturgy there; and they get their children, as infants, baptized by the Lutheran pastor. But otherwise, they are out of sympathy with a lot that goes on in the Lutheran Church and they run their own place.

I was invited to go along to preach, and when I went, the leading brother who had invited me to preach on Acts said, 'Try to go easy on baptism. We have a lot of dear believers now, real believers, but they were brought up in Lutheranism and they were baptized as infants, and they find the preaching of believers baptism difficult. Don't provoke them more than you have to, because we have now got permission to have the Lord's Supper here in amongst ourselves, and we're going to get them towards being an autonomous assembly. So go easy on these elderly folks.' Compromising the truth of the gospel, I don't know, but I went easy — which was mightily difficult in the Acts of the Apostles, to go around baptism every time you meet it!

After one session two senior ladies, genuine believers, came up and asked, 'What do you think of baptism?' So I was on the spot, and the leader was standing nearby!

I said, 'Well, different believers, to my knowledge, hold different views on this.'

'Yes, but what do you believe?'

I said, 'You were baptized as infants, but I wasn't. And that wasn't exactly my fault because I didn't understand: I was only just born. So, picture the scene, there you were in your pram as infants, and you've been baptized; and there was me in my pram, and I hadn't been baptized. And if you had died you would have gone straight to heaven. And if I had died I would have gone to hell. It wouldn't be my fault, would it? My parents didn't baptize me. Do you really believe that?'

Well of course they didn't believe it.

Paul's tactic with Peter is likewise to put it in stark terms. 'If you're saying faith in Christ is not enough, that still leaves you at a point where you have to keep the food laws and be circumcised. So faith in Christ lands you up simply as a sinner, subject to the wrath of God, to be excluded from God's heaven eternally. Is that really what you believe? That's what you are implying if you are telling us that to be saved you must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses.' That's what it comes to, doesn't it? What an insult that all is to Christ and his work — that faith in Christ and his work at Calvary leaves you in a position where it needs to be supplemented by the works of the law, and by circumcision and what have you.

Then Paul adds,

For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. (v. 18)

Paul applies it to himself to spare Peter's blushes. He's saying that if, having shown that salvation is not by the works of the law and by circumcision, I give all that up, in that sense I

destroy it as a condition for salvation, and put my faith in Christ alone. But if then I start behaving as if the food laws and circumcision and all those other things were necessary for salvation, I am rebuilding what I tore down. If having taken the one position, and destroyed it, I build it again, I make myself a transgressor. He is indicating the implication of Peter's behaviour and making him face the fact that in his heart of hearts he knows that salvation and justification is by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law. He knows that is the gospel.

Paul's attitude to the law

Now Paul gives his own personal testimony as to his attitude to the law.

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. (vv. 19–20)

So let's pause on the tenses of his phrase. 'Through the law I died to the law'. What does he mean? When did he die to the law? Notice the past tense. He died to the law when God revealed his Son from heaven to him on the Damascus Road because, as he explains elsewhere, he had given his utmost to try and keep the law and exceeded many of his contemporaries, and had persecuted the believers. When he saw that Jesus was risen from the dead, he had to face the question. If Jesus is God incarnate, what was he doing allowing himself to be crucified, and coming under the curse of God? Then Saul saw it. It was because all Saul's frantic effort to keep the law and achieve a righteousness through the law was so defective, and came so far short, that the only solution to the problem was for Christ to bear the curse of the law that Saul had broken, on Saul's behalf. And Christ died for him. 'When I saw that, I saw that however I try to keep the law, I would come short, and the only solution was to accept that Christ bore the curse of the law I had broken, for me. I died to the law.'

Paul came to see that he had broken the law, and it was the law itself that condemned him. His best efforts to keep it left him short, and the law's penalty was death. He died to the law then because of what the law demanded. Except this, that Christ died in his place: 'I have been crucified with Christ.' If you are reading the Authorized Version, 'I am crucified,' do bear in mind it's old English. It's not a present tense: it's not saying, 'I am daily being crucified with Christ.' It's a perfect tense.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (2:20)

He died, then I died. As Paul explains in Romans 6:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3–4)

That's not an aspiration: that's a fact. What we're symbolizing is that Christ bore our penalty and therefore he died and was buried. Because it was our penalty, we see that we died with him and we were buried—that we symbolize in baptism. But we symbolize the extra thing, that Christ rose again, and that new life he gives us too, and comes to live within us. That's a new life, and we have it not because we have kept the law; we have it as a gift through union with the risen Lord. That's a very personal thing too, not merely a doctrine. 'The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' This is not just abstract theology: for Paul it is absolutely personal, and he must live on these terms.

I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (v. 21)

If all that was required was that Christ should come alongside us and give a little helping hand so that we could keep the law—by his grace of course, but with his help—and by keeping the law be saved, then Christ need not have died.

This is the serious implication therefore of teaching that these works—circumcision and the food laws and the law of Moses—are necessary for salvation, because if that had been true, it implies that the death of Christ would not have been necessary. So this is a very solemn passage, that Peter's inconsistent behaviour could have undermined the clear truth of the gospel.

A parallel for us—at the Lord's Supper?

Paul is here talking about an incident that occurred over eating your meals at a table with Gentiles, but it naturally raises in our minds a deeper matter, that is our Lord's Supper. On what grounds do we receive anybody to the Lord's Supper? And more importantly, on what grounds will we deny anybody the right to partake of the emblems? I leave outside the question that would come through church discipline, that if a man who professes to be a believer behaves so shockingly badly that it calls into question whether he is a believer at all, then he must of course be excommunicated from the church. But what happens if it's not a question of the believer who sinned in that outrageous way, but a person whom you know to be a believer, who's living a godly life, and he wants to break bread with you and partake of the emblems that speak of Christ's death on our behalf, his body given, his blood poured out.

If this man is a true believer, therefore you do believe, must believe that he is covered by all the value of the death of Christ. And the bread and the wine on the table are but symbols of that great reality—symbols of the body and blood of Christ, and of all the value that comes to us through that sacrifice of our Lord's body and blood. You believe and know in your heart before God that this man in question is a believer like you are, and is in the good of what those symbols represent. On what ground then would you deny him the right to come and remember the Lord, and take those symbols? Is it not enough that he has genuinely repented, and has put his faith in Christ? Would you add other conditions to it? You don't add other conditions if it's a question of his benefiting from the reality of which those symbols speak. But would you add other conditions that he must fulfil in addition to faith in Christ, so that he might partake in the symbols? Knowing, I repeat, that the man in question is a genuine believer, and living a godly life.

We have to behave in a way that is consistent with the gospel we preach. If it was a serious mistake of Peter not to be willing to eat socially with Gentile believers, even though they were believers, it seems to me it would be a more serious thing to deny people eating and drinking of the symbols of Christ's death and sacrifice, if they are genuine believers. Ponder the matter, brothers and sisters, and let God exercise our consciences as to what our behaviour should be. But in wider circles it seems to me there is need for great clarity of thought. In the current ecumenicalism we must not behave in such a way as to deny by our behaviour what we actually believe in our hearts.

The question has arisen of course with dear folks who have been converted, and still remain in the Catholic Church. As for those converts themselves, let God teach them, and even if he please so use us to teach them the gospel, and the way of God more perfectly. But for a true believer, understanding the gospel, to join in the celebration of the Mass, the meaning of which is officially laid down by the Roman Catholic Church, that it is a sacrifice offered for sins, to join in it is, by our behaviour, to deny what in our heart of hearts we believe the truth of the gospel is. That is the other extreme, isn't it? We must therefore do what Paul twice over states in this chapter: he did what he did, that the truth of the gospel might continue, and not be fluffed by our inconsistent behaviour. We must not fluff the gospel. Mark what I say. I didn't say you must not fluff assembly truth, I'm saying we must not fluff the gospel by our inconsistent behaviour. Let's leave it there then for the moment, and in our final section we'll try to move on to two other basic arguments.

Arguments 3 & 4

We have spent a lot of time on what I have called Arguments 1 & 2 from Paul's letter to the Galatians. My defence, if I need one, is that these two chapters are a third of the epistle, and are very important. It is not unimportant, of course, to take out from such arguments the wonderful verse in chapter 2, verse 20, and to preach it to our own hearts and to other people's hearts devotionally. That is very good but it is also important, from time to time, to consider those verses in the context of the bigger argument of which they form part. Now, in this final session today, I hope to go on and talk about Arguments 3 and 4, and obviously we should not spend so much time on each of those as we have spent on the first two.

Argument 3: The Galatians' experience at conversion (3:1–6)

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'?

So this is an argument from the experience of their conversion. Paul is writing to people who profess to have been saved, profess to have been converted through Paul's preaching of the gospel. They would thereby have received the Holy Spirit of God, and have known the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, the assurance that the Holy Spirit gives, and the way the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God for us. And Paul's preaching at that time would have been accompanied by some miracles.

So in appealing to their conversion experience, we should notice that the experience was a genuine experience. I say that in view of the fact that sometimes people think if only they can induce their neighbour to speak in tongues, that is a sign that he has been converted. They'll say that it was of the Spirit—where subsequent behaviour shows it was anything but the Holy Spirit. But here it's a question of what were genuine conversions in response to Paul's preaching. And we notice the theme of Paul's preaching:

It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. (v. 1)

The image, so to speak, was not only conveyed to their intellect, but to their imagination. You didn't come away from Paul's preaching without having a very vivid sense of the death and crucifixion of Christ, and why that crucifixion was necessary, and what that death accomplished. That was the basis of their repentance and faith, on the basis of which they then received the Spirit. With these Galatians Paul is appealing to the fact that they received the Spirit when? When the Judaizers had come and preached to them? Certainly not. It was as the result of preaching Christ and him crucified, and their professed faith in him. That was indeed the gospel that he preached, and the gospel that had this effect with them. So having begun in the Spirit, are they now to be perfected by external ceremonies like the food laws, and so on. If the biggest thing was through Christ and him crucified, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, are you now going to be perfected by the flesh?

And then an argument from what they suffered. Before they professed conversion they didn't endure persecution. Now because they had received Christ on those terms, they suffered persecution. Abel was murdered, you know, by a very religious man. His name was Cain. It was in the context of offering sacrifices to God. Religion can become very persecuting when you start to preach justification by faith and not by the works of the law. You don't have to read a lot of the history of Christendom to find how that principle has often been exemplified.

Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'? (vv. 4–6)

And you'll notice that in his answer, Paul appeals to his stock, basic text about the faith of Abraham, quoted from Genesis 15:6.

Bewitched?

With that experience behind them, how do you account for their so soon being attracted away from him that called them? If it's merely experience of the fluffy kind that you preach, that's one thing. But if it's the gospel of Christ crucified that you preach, which gets at your conscience and your heart, then these other doctrines call you away not merely from the theory of your conversion, but from Christ and him crucified. How do you account for it? Paul describes what is happening as a kind of a bewitching—who has bewitched you, brought you under a spell, confused your thinking—your moral sense and your spiritual sense? But having given the answer using the example of the faith of Abraham, Paul now develops his answer in a way which leads him into his fourth major argument.

Argument 4: Explicit statements of Scripture (3:7–14)

Paul now turns to a series of quotations from the Old Testament. It's rifle fire, not merely a random shotgun with a few pellets going off in all directions. It's a series of verses quoted from Scripture, and as we follow the succession of them, and try to see what the flow of thought is between them, and why they are in the order they are, we will ask ourselves whether they are simply repetitions or whether they are dealing with various points that are

at stake. We shall see, I think—at least I shall try and convince you—that they are in a very deliberate order, and that they are organized to deal with a number of different questions that arise when one is discussing the way of salvation according to Scripture.

Let me set out the possible flow of thought between them. In verse 6, Paul is addressing the question of the terms on which God gives the Holy Spirit—on the basis of works or of faith. Notice at that point he doesn't say to them, 'On what basis did you get the wonderful feelings you had?' The answer is not determined by their feelings: it's determined by Scripture. On what basis does God give the Holy Spirit? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. That is the gospel Paul had preached to them, which led to their repentance and faith, and thus they received the Holy Spirit. Paul now draws the conclusion from this quotation:

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. (v. 7)

If it was Abraham's faith in God that was counted to him as righteousness, then it is those who are of that same faith that can be rightly described as sons of Abraham. You will remember the argument in John 8, when our Lord was talking to those who professed to be his disciples, and professed to believe on him. When he said they needed to be saved from the bondage to sin, they said, 'We are Abraham's offspring and never were in bondage to anybody' (see John 8:33). Said Christ, 'If you were children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham, wouldn't you?' Sons of Abraham in the sense of character, and if Abraham got his righteousness by faith in God, not by the works of the law, then it's those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham.

Possible objection: But the term 'sons of Abraham' surely only applies to Jews? How can you say it applies to Gentiles such as these people in Galatia, or to Gentiles anywhere?

Answer: Another Scripture.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.' (3:8)

It was God who foresaw it of course, but Paul is quoting his Scripture, and because it is God's word, he speaks of 'the Scripture' foreseeing. This isn't Paul therefore taking the principle of justification that applied to Abraham and taking the liberty of saying it applies to Gentiles as well. The Scripture itself said, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed' (see Gen 22:18). The further conclusion from that is,

So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (3:9)

Possible objection: 'But we Jews can merit that blessing by keeping the law that God appointed. After all, didn't they have a very notable ceremony when Joshua first brought the people into the land, and they went up to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, like Moses told them to do? They built an altar and they wrote out the law, the Ten Commandments, on the stones of the altar. Then the Levites on the first mountain pronounced the blessings on those who kept the law. And on the other mountain, the Levites read out the curses on those who broke the law. Each time each blessing or curse was pronounced, the people had to say,

‘Amen.’ Well, can’t we Jews therefore be true sons of Abraham by keeping the law and thus inherit the blessing of the law?’

Answer: No you can’t.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ (v. 10)

Those who take their stand before God on the basis of the law are under a curse. You cannot therefore earn the blessing that was pronounced to Abraham, and the blessing that would come upon the Gentiles in him, and through him, and through his offspring by keeping the law.

‘Oh, but we can,’

No you can’t.

‘Why not?’

Their own law tells them: ‘Cursed is everyone that does not continue in *all* things written in the law’ (see Deut 27:26 KJV). That’s their own law talking. The law pronounced the blessing on those that kept the law, but notice the strictness of the law: you have to continue in everything. If you don’t continue in *all* things written in the law, you’ll come short and then the law will curse you.

That’s a point still to be made in your conversation with religious people not yet converted, and they put to you the proposition that if you do your solid best to keep God’s law, and do his will, you will be saved. As a good evangelical, you say, ‘Salvation is not by works, but by faith.’ Well does that mean you could do just as you like, and God’s law doesn’t matter? So you turn the tables on them.

All right, you’re going to do your best to keep God’s law, and then you’ll be saved thereby. And when you come to die, will you be in a position of having kept *all* God’s law?

‘Well, not all of it perhaps.’

So you will have come short. And what are you expecting God to say? You did your very best: you did come short a bit, but not enough to be serious. So in the end the law doesn’t matter really?’

It’s they who are saying that the law doesn’t matter; it is the gospel that says that the law does matter, and we all come short; and because we come short, we deserve its curse. And the curse must be performed. The penalty must be paid because the law cannot be cheated. Sin matters, and it is Christ who bore that curse for us. Cursed therefore is everyone that continues not in all God’s law.

But suppose somebody says, ‘But we Jews can and do continue in all that is written in the law.’ And they are really and honestly convinced that that is what they do. What do you say now? ‘Well, actually you don’t, but even if you could and did, justification before God, according to Scripture, is not achieved through the works of the law—it’s not achieved through works, but on an altogether different principle.’

A Scripture quote to prove the point:

The righteous shall live by faith. (v. 11; Hab 2:4)

That is a basic principle: by faith and not by works. But suppose somebody answers, ‘Oh, but I have great faith that if I do my best to keep the law, I shall be saved. I have great faith in that.’

Answer: That is to misunderstand what is meant by faith. When the Bible says that we’re saved by faith, faith in that context means the opposite of works. Paul states the fact in verse 12 and quotes another Scripture from Leviticus.

But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’ (3:12; Lev 18:5)

It is exceedingly important to establish the meaning of the terms ‘faith’ and ‘works’ in these technical contexts. Paul defines the term, as you’ll notice, not merely by stating that faith is the opposite of works, but by pointing out that the law is not of faith but of works—the one who *does* them shall live by them.

Possible objection: ‘Well, of course we’re saved by grace. I too am saved by grace, for Christ gives me the grace to do the works that merit salvation. And all the credit goes to him for it’

Sanctifying grace?

This is not some imaginary objection that I thought up out of my own little brain. Some years ago I spent a week in a Catholic home in Randalstown⁴, leading some Bible studies. Those who attended were mostly Catholic, and I tried to talk to them about salvation by grace, through faith. All I could get out of them by way of response was, ‘Ah, sanctifying grace.’ Judge the extent of my ignorance, for I had not met that phrase before. So being in London at one stage, I took the opportunity to go to the bookshop attached to the Roman Catholic Cathedral, and I said to the lady, ‘Now, I have a bit of a problem. I have some Catholic friends who keep talking to me about sanctifying grace. What do they mean? Have you got any book on sanctifying grace?’ ‘Oh, yes,’ she said, ‘I could recommend a very good book.’ So I bought it and read it. It sounded marvellous—salvation is an encounter with Christ and a relationship with Christ. That’s all it is—not all these ceremonies and things. In the footnotes it would quote old-fashioned Roman Catholicism, but it was expounding the ‘new look’ (this was in the 1970s of course)—that salvation is by grace: that there’s a sanctifying grace of personal relationship with Christ.

I read on, and as distinct from all the other rather lurid things that you would have expected from old-fashioned Roman Catholicism, this propounded the new look—sanctifying grace. It said that if after this personal relationship with Christ, you sin, that breaks the fellowship, but it could be restored through confession and a Mass. Eventually it got to what happens when we die. The book said, ‘When we first see God, we shall be terrified, and shall be glad to escape for a while to purgatory.’ They preface that by saying, ‘When we come to die, none of us will have done anything worthy of eternal damnation.’ I said to myself, ‘Really? I thought that is exactly what we had done.’

Sanctifying grace, according to this book, is when Christ gives us the grace to do the works that merit salvation. Behind that theory, there was a denial of repentance. When we come to

⁴ A small town in County Antrim, Northern Ireland.

die none of us will believe we've ever done anything worthy of eternal damnation—which is directly contrary to Romans 3:23: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19–20)

There is a refusal to repent, and then not true faith. For the Bible says when we see him we shall be like him, but according to this wretched doctrine, when we see him we should be terrified and glad to escape his presence for a while. No, salvation by grace does not mean that Christ gives us the grace to do the works that then merit salvation—so that when we are saved, we shall turn around and say that it was God who helped me—like a student who smuggles in his professor, hides him under the desk in the examination hall, and is able to get the professor to help them answer the questions. And then when the certain student qualifies and gets his degree, he openly confesses that it was all by the grace of the professor who helped him, or something of the sort. No, no, that isn't how Christ saves us. He doesn't save us by giving us the grace to do the works that merit salvation.

How does he save us? Christ does not redeem us by helping us to keep the law: he redeemed us by bearing the curse of the law we had broken. Why else was he crucified? And to answer that question, Paul comes up with a statement of Scripture once more, the quotation of an explicit verse of Scripture:

Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree. (v. 13; Deut 21:23)

Christ redeemed us by bearing the curse for us. Now this is very important. Perhaps you'll meet, one of these days, somebody brought up in the Orthodox tradition. They hold that we're saved not by Christ suffering the wrath of God for us, but by his suffering. They'll say it this way around, 'Christ came to suffer, to show us how to suffer. We are saved by our own suffering.' Bishop Timothy Ware of Oxford, Orthodox bishop, in his book on orthodoxy, enunciates this. He won't have substitutionary atonement. Christ suffered to give us the example of how to suffer. We're saved by our suffering. That is what the great Russian novelist, Dostoevsky taught in his novels, and what many people think—Christ suffered to give us an example.

Now there is a sense in which the suffering of Christ was an example:

Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten. (1 Pet 2:21–23)

He left us an example that we should follow his steps: that is perfectly true. But when it comes to being justified before God, then of course it is not by following his example that we are saved: he saved us by becoming a curse for us. Why would he have been crucified if it wasn't that he had to bear the curse of the law for us? These are simple, basic things, and you know

them all very well. All I've done is point to the fact that Paul has collected these verses of Scripture, and they're at his fingertips.

Be prepared!

Through much personal witness in synagogues, and preaching, and meeting people in the forum, and answering their objections and whatnot, Paul had these actual statements of Scripture at his fingertips. It's a good thing for us to have them in our heads as well. For example, if you say to someone that it says in the Bible, 'Prepare to meet your God' and your questioner asks, 'Where is that?', you will need to know the reference or you will leave an awkward pause in the argument. It's good to have thought in advance of all these objections, so they can all be met and you know key Scriptures to quote. Not in parrot fashion—not merely 'proof texting' as some people call it—but knowing how to apply God's word and Scriptures that are relevant, and not only these particular ones. I point to it as an example of the way that Paul argued. Presently, when he gets round to chapter 4, he'll eventually use a long bit of typology from the story of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Ishmael, and all that. But first in his order of arguments comes, not the typology but the explicit straightforward statements of Scripture. Yes, he's got his arguments in the right order, hasn't he? But that's enough for today. Perhaps next time, if God grants us another time, we shall be able to move on more quickly. Now we are going into questions.

Question session

Question one

You'd have thought that if somebody wanted an argument about the validity of the gospel, they would go straight back to the words of the Lord. Why do you think Paul doesn't use that argument at all?

DWG: Well, to be absolutely exact, he does of course. That is to say, he says he got his gospel from the risen Lord, by the revelation of Christ. So he would say that he got his gospel straight from the Lord. That's number one. Your question however is a very important question. Why doesn't he cite the words that the Lord spoke while he was here on earth? Well, he may well have known them—he subsequently did by moving amongst Christians. But when he got converted, his own writings were some of the earliest of the New Testament ever written. Secondly, he didn't have, in the early days, much converse with the apostles who, as is said in Acts 1, were companions of Christ right from John's baptism until the resurrection, and were witnesses of that physical resurrection of Christ. On those terms, Paul wouldn't have been an apostle because he wasn't with Christ, nor was he, in the sense that they were, a witness of the resurrection. If he had then quoted the words of the Lord Jesus to the general public, and to the Jews, they would have said, 'How do you know? You only got that second-hand.' So it seems to me that that may have been one of the reasons why, in his establishment of doctrine, he doesn't appeal to the words of the Lord Jesus.

In his writings on other matters, to the elders of the church at Ephesus, he quotes a word of Christ that is not even in our four Gospels, but perhaps when Paul quoted it, none of the Gospels had been yet written. But he knew of the sayings of Christ, for he quotes the one, 'It

is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). And secondly, in 1 Corinthians 11 for instance, he says, 'I delivered to you what I received, that the Lord Jesus, in the night he was betrayed . . . ' (see v. 23). And now he quotes the words that the Lord Jesus uttered at the institution of the Lord's Supper. So yes, he does quote some things from the Lord Jesus, but perhaps not to his establishing the basic principles of the gospel which he everywhere preached. He is happy to acknowledge in these other circumstances, 'I delivered to you that which I also received,' and that leaves open where he received it from. The details of the Lord's Supper, he may well have got from the other apostles: he's not against that tradition. What he is preserving is that his basic principles of the gospel he got straight from Christ, from the risen Christ, therefore his words go back to Christ. That is his claim.

Question 2

Regarding the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, and other summits of the apostolic church age, what similarity or differences do they have to the councils that we read about in Nicaea, and times and places like that? And if heresy, God forbid, were to come into the church today, how would we possibly have such summits, or publicize the truth? That sort of thing can't happen today. Was it right to have ever happened in Nicaea, and times like that?

DWG: Forgive my simplicity, but I get the impression that the church councils were mainly concerned about the question of the Trinity. Does that square with your understanding of them? You will notice that there is no formal doctrine of the Trinity expressed in the New Testament. So a lot of what those councils were concerned with, not the only thing perhaps, was deciding how it is proper to talk about the relationship of Jesus to God and to the Holy Spirit—hence the formal doctrines of the Trinity. That, I would say, is number one of the subject matters which is not discussed as a basic doctrine of the gospel in the New Testament. We are required to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, for instance. But we are not given the detail and description of the relation of Christ to God—for example, how on the one side you can say that God who keeps his realm, never slumbers or sleep, and then go on and say that Jesus slept in the boat on the sea, and yet he is God. How do you resolve things like that, and how may we speak about the Trinity?

But it doesn't appear to me that, to be saved, you have to understand all the mysteries of the Trinity. I remember one of the early times I was in Russia, and gave a talk in a drawing room to mostly unconverted people. And the first question that came afterwards was from a good lady and a very capable physicist: 'Why do I have to believe in the Trinity?'. Because in Russia it is a very prominent thing. They'll tell you, 'I believe in the Trinity,' and that's that, that's a key to heaven, or whether they're saved or not saved. In that sense I don't think it is a requirement that you must be able to explain the Trinity in order to be saved!

So that's one of the things I would say about the councils. Secondly, some of the later ones are summoned by the emperor, so they're in a very different situation from what Paul is talking about. As for 'the council at Jerusalem', we talk about it as a council, but what exactly was it? It was agreed that Paul and Barnabas should go up, with certain of the men from Antioch, to Jerusalem because it was in response to people who said they came from James. So they went up to clarify this whole matter, and to get a statement that they all actually

believed as apostles altogether. Whether that was a council in the sense that the later councils were, I'm not so sure, because when the apostles came to Jerusalem in Acts 15, it wasn't to talk it over amongst themselves: 'Now, what exactly do we believe? And have we got it all straight yet? And what is the proper way to speak about it?'

You'll notice that it's not that kind of discussion. They met the opposition, the Pharisees who believed, alas, that you must be circumcised to be saved. How did they proceed? Well, Peter got up and said, 'I'll tell you what I believe,' and then James got up and said, 'I'll tell you what I believe.' They both believed the same thing. In other words, it wasn't a council in the sense of debate, like the big councils were: 'How do we talk right and properly about the Trinity?' They didn't discuss, 'What do we really think about salvation?' The apostles just gave their view, and they all agreed of course. So there was a material difference in what happened at that council to what happened in the subsequent councils. Does that seem fair to you in your knowledge of church history? It is for differences like that, that many scholars have declined to call that thing at Jerusalem a council. They weren't talking, discussing among themselves, 'What is the real gospel? What do you think it is, John?' No they just delivered their belief and, of course, confounded the Pharisees who said you have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses.

In fact, if you listen to the views that were expressed by Peter and then James, they said some very severe things about this view that the Pharisees propounded. 'Why do you propose to put a yoke on the neck of the believers that neither we nor our fathers could put up with?' says Peter. And James holds forth and says, 'These men claim to come from us. They didn't come from us, and they subvert your very souls.' They went to Jerusalem because that was the only way they could stop the slanders that had come down to Antioch, from men that said they came from James, and began to teach the people that you have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses to be saved. They claimed to have the authority of James for saying it, so the only way you could scotch that rumour was to go up to Jerusalem and get a public statement from the apostles.

Question three

The last part of that question got me thinking about a friend who is in the reformed church in the States, and finds it very comforting, he says, to have a synod that the church can fall back on when issues of doctrine come up. If nowadays something comes up, why is it that we don't have that? Should we have that? How do we deal with such things now? As we understand it, we do not have a headquarters on earth to call to, and send our problems to.

DWG: It can be very comforting for people to gather together as elders and responsible people to discuss these kinds of things that come up from time to time. So I'm not saying that you shouldn't arrange this. What we need to remember is that while it might be a comforting thing to fall back on synods and whatnot, Catholics claim it's very comforting to fall back on Trent. Not all councils have been good councils. If you take practical matters, like whether homosexuals should be appointed as bishops, and you have a council called of all members of the Anglican Communion, and churches within the Anglican Communion, it doesn't necessarily lead to a universal adoption of the truth, if you see what I mean. So the councils

in these days have their limits. What we have in the New Testament are apostles defining the gospel, and any subsequent council has to appeal after all to the apostles. There are those who believe in an apostolic succession, and many big churches do that, but they are now extending the term 'apostle' very largely. I don't think with an audience like this, I have to argue against the notion of apostolic succession! Apostles were special—*sui generis* (one of a kind) as you might say.

If Christians wanted to gather together to discuss, say, what attitude we should take to government legislation which says you mustn't publicly any longer preach that Jesus is the only way for salvation—how we should behave in the light of this government edict, and the possible persecution and imprisonment that could arise. Well, many churches might like to get together all their leaders, all their evangelists and talk about it. I myself would be wary of denominational headquarters, because in that sense I am prejudiced! I don't belong to *the Brethren*, as you know. I belong to a church in Belfast, near what used to be the gasworks. I belong to a local church, and out of that, I belong to the church which is his body. I don't belong, as far as I'm aware, to a denomination. I would therefore be very wary of a denominational council that then decides what the Brethren churches teach.

Question four

An issue we have to deal with today is the so-called evangelical movement coming together with Catholics, reaching out, as it were, with the gospel together. How should we react to that?

DWG: There is a very big dispute that arose in the States on this matter of Protestants and Catholics coming together. I can recall twenty years ago maybe, there came a lecturer from the famous Fuller Bible College in the States who addressed this kind of problem in a lecture at the Belfast Bible College. Friends of mine who'd worked with Catholics, and had seen a number of Catholics saved, came down to this lecture with these converted Catholics. The lecture proceeded on the following kind of ideas. 'We used to hold a very great distance between us Protestants and Catholics, but then we began to work together in social good works and things like that, and that has proved very, very beneficial,' said the lecturer, 'because we've got to know what Catholics actually believe, and lo and behold, there isn't much difference between us.' So we all pricked up our ears. He said, 'For instance, I discovered, through working together with Catholics, that they feel it is good to pray to the Virgin Mary because they say that in many societies, children find it difficult to speak to the fathers direct, because the fathers are rather distant, forbidding personalities. So they find it much easier to speak to the mother, and the mother speaks to the father for them.'

Well, the lecturer found this very reasonable. I don't know where he'd been all his life because I've heard of that argument for decades and decades. It seemed all new to him, and from that, he began to deduce, 'Yes, why wouldn't we have a more united front?' But that shows where my uncertainties would begin. Working in social causes could be right. If you are a missionary in the swamps of some remote place, and you've got some dreadful disease, and the only hospital you could get at was a hospital run by missionary Roman Catholic nuns, I suspect you might go to it! And relief work, and all that kind of thing. But when it comes to

working together for the gospel, how can that be done if your Catholic in his heart of hearts has the gospel that Paul is here denouncing? How can you speak with a clear voice?

I remember being in Spain in the early 1970s, and the local Jesuits asked if they could come and talk, and, what they proposed was that we cooperate in various things. And I said, 'Well, gentlemen, there is a prior difficulty, isn't there? I don't think we believe the same gospel, do we?' And I quoted one or two things.

'Oh that, we don't believe anything of it anyway,' they said.

That was true of the Jesuits, and it's more true of many Catholics now, at the university level, than you might think. They don't necessarily believe in the virgin birth: it is a myth. If you ask them, 'Do you believe in the virgin birth?' they'll say yes. If you know enough to ask them, 'Do you believe in it as an historical event?' they'll say no. If you ask them, 'Do you believe in the resurrection of Christ?' they'll say, 'Yes of course.' But some of them, if you ask them, 'Do you believe in the resurrection of Christ as an historical event?' they'll say, 'No.' I say that, knowing some of them. And some of the softening of the differences has come about because of that very reason. So I would say we have to be very careful. If it's a question of locally engaging and supporting some good social work, like a hospital in some area, or something of this sort, that's one thing. But joining together as churches in a gospel work or something, that seems to me a very doubtful thing, on the very basis of what Paul is explaining here.

Argument 4 (cont'd), Arguments 5 & 6

This short series of seminars on the Epistle to the Galatians, as you know, is not aimed at investigating every detail of the epistle. Its aim is to acquaint ourselves with the main arguments that Paul uses so as to define clearly what the gospel is. What he writes is particularly for the benefit of people who have trusted the Saviour, but have recently been confused by erroneous teaching as to what the basis of the Christian gospel is. So I have listed for you the arguments—twelve of them—that we find in this epistle. We shall not argue as to the precise number of the arguments because, in places, one argument leads on immediately to another in the same paragraph. But it is a good thing, as soldiers with rifle fire, to know how many bullets we have in our round of ammunition, and to be able to distinguish one bullet from another, and how to use the arguments that Paul presents to us.

In our evangelism we shall need to know these arguments, especially in circumstances where people have been brought up in traditional religion where they are taught that it is by our faith in Christ plus our own works that brings us salvation. Last time we looked at the first argument, the argument from apostolic authority—to be placed against all such arguments as would invest that ultimate authority in the church or in some merely human head of the church.

Secondly, we considered the argument from early church history, concerned with the question of how, and from what source, Paul got the gospel. And his argument is that he did not get it from the church, nor from the other apostles. He got it by direct revelation of and from the risen Lord. It is relevant to our situation still, when very often we shall be told that it is the church which gave us the Bible. That is nonsense of course. When the Christians of Galatia received this letter, they weren't getting it from the church: it was signed by Paul himself and sent directly from Paul to these believers. And when they received it, they didn't have to go up to Jerusalem or elsewhere, to some supreme authority, to know whether this was the truth or not. And the same is true of all the other books in the New Testament. It is not the church that gave us those books: it is the inspired apostles who gave their epistles and gospel records to the church. That is a very important thing to get hold of: it is not merely a theoretical detail. You may be faced with dear folks who are afraid to accept the gospel when you point it out to them from a Scripture, because they've been indoctrinated in this notion that it is the church that gave us the Bible and therefore it is the church which must tell us what it means. So Paul's argument here becomes of exceedingly practical importance and benefit.

Then came the argument from the experience of conversion. How did they first get the Holy Spirit and the joy of salvation? Was it by their works that they attained it? Well, self-

evidently not. With these Galatians, that experience came to them when they heard the gospel preached, and they received by faith God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. If they began that way, then it is obviously false to suppose that now that gift of the Holy Spirit actually depended on both faith in Christ and their works.

Argument 4 cont'd: The flow of the argument

From the argument from the Galatians' own experience of conversion and salvation, Paul passes to a succession of biblical texts, biblical statements. The argument from experience is good, but of course people have all kinds of experiences and therefore we must not found our authority for the gospel simply on experience. That experience must be biblically based. So if someone says, 'I got the Holy Spirit, and the assurance of eternal life, through faith in Christ, and therefore it was by faith,' that's very good. But notice now Paul appealing to a number of Scriptures that say that very thing. We need not at this point go through them all again as we did on our last occasion (see ch. 4) but it is a good thing to have them at our fingertips and to see them in their order.

Question: On what terms does God give salvation and the Holy Spirit—works or faith?

Answer: Genesis 15:6, 'And [Abraham] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.'

Possible objection: 'But the term 'sons of Abraham' can only apply to Jews, and we Galatians are Gentiles.'

Answer: 'In you shall all the nations be blessed' (see Gen 18:18; 22:18). The Gospel is equally applicable to Jews and to Gentiles, 'So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith' (Gal 3:9).

Possible objection: 'But we Jews can merit that blessing, and so can other people, by keeping the law.'

Answer: 'No you can't, for all those who take their stand on the works of the law are under a curse. And that is based on an actual Scripture: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things that are written in the law, to do them' (see Deut 27:26).

Possible objection: 'But we can and do continue in all that is written in the law.' You may think that is an absurd objection, but I do remember in years gone by, we had the opportunity in Cambridge to go into what was the Corn Exchange during the week. This was just after the war, when food was scarce, and the city council put on sandwiches and mugs of coffee you could buy in this aforesaid place, in order to get the people off the streets. We would stand up in a corner with the microphone, and sing and preach for half an hour, and then we would buy ourselves sandwiches and coffee, and go round the tables and get talking to the people. So I accosted a group of otherwise respectable citizens, and they turned out to be from the country near to us here!

They informed me that I was wrong in what I preached, and that you did have to keep the law for salvation; they said they were Catholics, and I was wrong. So I said, 'I didn't know I was wrong, but if you could show me I was wrong, and that Catholicism is right, I'll join the Catholic Church! But I don't have your advantage, if that is so, as I was not brought up a

Catholic. But at least I agree with this, that you accept the Bible, don't you? And I accept the Bible.'

They said, 'Yes, we do.'

So I said, 'Well, then I read here, and it says we're saved by grace and not by the works of the law.'

'Oh,' they said, 'you must keep the law to be saved.'

I said, 'How much of it have you kept?'

So they went over them: 'You shall have no other God but me. Bridget,' one lady said, 'we haven't got any other God but God, have we?' 'No.' 'So we kept that bit . . .'

And they went through all ten, and discovered they kept the lot. We may laugh, but they were serious. That led to months of small group Bible studies. But you will meet some people like that, who imagine, on the whole, that they've kept the lot.

Answer: Actually you haven't of course, but notice Paul's answer. Even if you could and did, justification before God, according to Scripture, is not achieved through works, but on an altogether different principle. Here comes the actual Scripture citation, 'The just shall live by faith' (see Hab 2:4).

Possible objection: 'Oh, but I have great faith that if I do my best I shall be okay.'

Answer: But that is to misunderstand what is meant by faith. Here faith is the opposite of works, for the law is not of faith.

'What do you mean?'

Well, here Paul cites another Scripture, Leviticus 18:5, 'if a person does them, he shall live by them.'

Possible objection: 'Oh, but I *am* saved by grace, for Christ gives me the grace to do the works that merit the salvation. The credit of course is all his. He gives me the grace to do the work, but I must do the works, and it is upon those works that I must eventually depend for salvation.' I've heard the argument not merely from Catholics, and ordinary Protestants, I've heard it in slightly different form from Muslims: 'We trust in God's grace to do the works, but of course upon the works will depend the salvation.'

Answer: Christ does not redeem us by helping us to keep the law. He redeemed us by bearing the curse of the law that we had broken. Why else was he crucified? How can you establish that? Well, Scripture again: 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree', and of course our Lord was so hung upon a tree. So only thus could the blessing of Abraham come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Argument 5: Sound legal practice (3:15–18)

But now another argument based on sound legal practice. Many Christians will tell you that we mustn't be legal: we must be very gracious. Legalism is thought to be a bad thing, and so it is in one sense. But there is another side to that, for the salvation God offers us is based on sound legal principles. You will all have argued the case on that by preaching justification by faith. That is a legal term, and thank God our salvation is based on sound legal principle, 'so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom 3:26). That is

legal terminology. And our salvation is legally based so that we may pin our faith, not merely on the love of God, but on the justice of God. As the old hymn put it,

Payment God will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.⁵

Covenant and inheritance

But it is not merely justification by faith for which Paul now argues. He proceeds to demonstrate that not only justification, but the covenant, the promises, and the inheritance are also by faith. So let us look at the context now and note these dominant terms.

So that in Christ Jesus the *blessing* of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made *covenant*, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the *promises* were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings', referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring', who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterwards, does not annul a *covenant* previously ratified by God, so as to make the *promise* void. For if the *inheritance* comes by the law, it no longer comes by *promise*; but God gave it to Abraham by a *promise*. (3:14–18)

So let's acquaint ourselves with those terms. We often hear justification spoken of, and sanctification spoken of, and eternal life spoken of, and you will hear believers rightly praising God for all the blessings he has blessed us with—all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. Not so often do you hear people thanking God for his covenant and for the inheritance, yet these are an integral part of the gospel message.

The covenant

So as we go through the argument, Paul is saying that if you have a legal covenant or contract, once it is signed, sealed and settled, neither party to the covenant can arbitrarily change it. That is why, in Britain at any rate, there used to be a great fuss made about fixed-term contracts. Someone would want to invest £30 million in some vast development in the city; they would get a builder to do it; they would sign a contract, and in those far-off days the contract would specify by what date it had to be finished. It was a fixed-term contract, and if the builder didn't finish it on that date there were penalties attached in the contract. And it often happened that the builder couldn't finish by that date, but the terms of the contract couldn't be changed. When you have a legally binding contract, neither side can arbitrarily change it. Now the covenant in particular that Paul is referring to, is of course the covenant made with Abraham, according to God's promises. We read of it in Genesis 15.

⁵ Augustus M. Toplady (1740-1778), 'From whence this fear and unbelief.'

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land'.
(v. 18)

Here then is the covenant. It is sometimes argued that this was only the first stage of the covenant, and in chapter 17 God amplified it by introducing the covenant of circumcision. This is an argument often put forward by those who favour the Reformed doctrine. It flies in the face of what Galatians is now saying, which is that once the covenant has been confirmed, no one can add anything to it. So Paul explains in verse 17 that when God gave the covenant of the law at Sinai 430 years later, he was not adding anything to the terms of the covenant given in chapter 15. The same principle applies to the covenant of circumcision given in Genesis 17: that covenant was not given until years later, for Genesis 17 tells us that Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised.

Galatians, with its careful legal language, mentions two things that no one is allowed to do once a covenant has been ratified. No one can make it void by cancelling it, and no one can add to it. If you object that it was God who gave the covenant to Abraham, and therefore God had a right to add to it, the passage is pointing out that not even God added anything by giving the covenant of the law at Sinai. When God made that covenant with Abraham, it was in the nature of a promise, 'To you and your offspring, I give this land.' If you therefore added another condition to it later on, it would make that promise of no effect. Paul's particular argument is that the law is such that no man can keep it. So if God at first gave Abraham the promise on the ground of his grace, and it was received by Abraham solely by faith, and then subsequently God added a condition that not even Abraham could keep, it would ruin the promise. 'For if the inheritance comes by the law,' says verse 18, 'it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.'

The promise

So now we must pause over this legal term 'promise'. In our ordinary life you can have promises of all kinds. Notably there are promises made at weddings, for better and for worse, which are supposed to be unconditional. If mother says to her infant, 'I promise to give you an ice-cream for tea' and leaves it thus, that's an unconditional promise. But mother could also say, in her wisdom, 'Now, Johnny, if you are good this afternoon—and that's an enormous "if"!—I will give you an ice-cream for tea' that is a conditional promise. Notice in this context that Paul is talking about an unconditional promise—it doesn't have any conditions attached to it. So the inheritance is not of the law, for if the inheritance were of the law, and you had to keep the conditions of the law to inherit the inheritance, then it wouldn't be a promise, but God had granted it to Abraham by a promise.

Some theologian barrister, doubtless, will come back at us and say, 'But surely salvation is conditional—it's on the condition that you repent and believe.' Quite right, but the conditions are not works. When God offers you salvation, he allows you the choice. You can believe him and take it. Or you can refuse to believe, and not take it. Suppose one day you get a letter from a hitherto unknown solicitor and it says your very rich uncle in America has died. (All such rich uncles come from America of course!) He has died and has named you in his will. You didn't even remember you had such an uncle and you try to feel sorry that he's died!

Then you rush down as soon as you can to the solicitor and he proceeds to read you the will. Your uncle has left you his Cadillac, preferential shares in some oil company, plus the oil wells, plus three or four homes in the country, and an up-to-date apartment in New York. When he finishes reading, you ask him, 'What conditions do I have to fulfil?'

And so he reads it again and says, 'No conditions whatsoever. He's just left it to you like that.'

You say, 'No conditions to fulfil, and this is mine? I can't believe it.'

'All right,' says the solicitor, 'don't believe it. You don't have to believe it: you can give it to me if you like!'

Of course you have to believe it, but that's not a legal condition in the terms of the covenant. It's just, as the preachers put it, 'the empty hand of faith' taking it.

You say, 'But don't we have to repent to be saved? That's a work, isn't it?' Well, no it isn't, because consider what repentance means in this context of the gospel. It means agreeing with God that you cannot earn salvation. It means agreeing with God to take salvation as an undeserved, unearned free gift. If you insist that you have to earn it by doing this, that, and the other, then you haven't yet repented. Repentance means not only acknowledging I'm a guilty sinner, but that I have no claim on God, and if I'm going to be saved, I must take it as a free gift. As to the terms of the covenant, it is an unconditional promise.

A one-party covenant

In everyday life, covenants can be of different kinds. One covenant can be a one-party covenant. Another kind of covenant is a two-party covenant. One example of a one-party covenant is a will. In English, we use the legal term a *testament*—'your last will and testament'. Where somebody makes a covenant of his own will, in that sense it is not a contract in our modern terminology. Greek uses the term for will, which is *diatheke*, but applies it also to these covenants such as you have in Genesis, and hence we use the term covenant, and not a will.

In our Bible, what we refer to as the New Testament could as readily be called the New Covenant, because the Greek for that is *diatheke*, and the word *diatheke* is the word being used here by Paul, of these covenants. It is where Jews are making a treaty or a covenant, and therefore he uses it to translate the Hebrew word *berith*. What kind of a covenant was this covenant with Abraham—a two-party covenant, or a one-party covenant? It took the ancient form of making a covenant in which animals were taken, cut into pieces and laid in two rows. And then the person or persons who were binding themselves to keep the terms of the covenant, and had terms to fulfil, would walk between the pieces. That was the ceremony. If it was a two-party covenant, and both parties had conditions to fulfil—such that if one or other broke them, the covenant would be ruined—both parties walked through the pieces. If only one party had conditions and terms to fulfil, only one party walked between the pieces. So when your aforesaid rich uncle in America made his will in favour of you, did you sign it? Well, of course not, he signed it. Yes, he had to get witnesses to the fact that he had signed it, but you didn't sign it.

So in this ancient ceremony, here were the two rows of the animal sacrifice, and the party that had conditions to fulfil walked between the pieces. On this occasion, who walked

between the pieces? You better look at it very carefully (Gen 15:9–17) for your eternal blessings, your great inheritance depends on the terms of the covenant! Who walked between the pieces? Well, God walked of course. ‘When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces’ (v. 17)—evidence of the presence of God. It was God walking between the pieces and guaranteeing that he will fulfil the promises. Did Abraham walk between the pieces? Well, no of course he didn’t: he happened to have been asleep actually, it says. He saw it in his sleep, presumably in a vision, but not even in his vision did he see himself walking between the pieces. It was a one-party covenant.

The basis of justification—faith

With that we come back to Paul’s argument in Galatians:

For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. (3:18)

If you think that this is merely concerned with the Jews and not with us Gentiles, let’s look back to Paul’s use of this same argument in Romans. It is very clear that Paul there is arguing the terms of our justification by faith.

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? (Rom 3:28–29)

He then appeals to Old Testament Scripture as the authority, and quotes the case of Abraham as a legal precedent.

For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ . . . Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and 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. (Rom 4:3; 9–12)

For if Abraham had already been circumcised, you might argue that he was justified on the condition that first of all he was circumcised, and then he believed. So Paul makes the point historically, based on Genesis, that his justification preceded his circumcision. That is very important, for that applies to us Gentiles. Abraham sets the pattern of justification for us Gentiles who are uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe.

Then Paul adds that Abraham is also ‘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.’ Meaning Abraham had the faith of people like Paul himself, who was

circumcised as an infant but now he no longer thinks that that circumcision contributed anything at all to his salvation. Paul's justification depends on faith, such faith as Abraham showed when Abraham was still uncircumcised.

The basis of our inheritance—faith

But now just look at the next verses:

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. (Rom 4:13–14)

Now we're not merely talking about justification but about inheritance. And Paul brings in this matter of the inheritance in order to show that not only is justification by faith, but the inheritance is on the same terms, and is by faith. And so he repeats it in Galatians 3:18, 'For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.'

This is tough legal stuff, isn't it? But what would you think of the chap whose aforesaid rich uncle died in America and left him all these things in his will, if when the solicitor started to read out the details, he said 'Look here, solicitor, keep it simple. I don't want to know all about these details.' You wouldn't, would you? You would say, 'Solicitor, make it as detailed as you possibly can: even if it takes until tomorrow, carry on reading!' Why do we want to keep it simple when God has a whole eternity of inheritance to give us? It's right that we keep the gospel simple, so simple a child can understand its simple terms. But when it comes to the blessings, don't keep them simple, add as much detail as Scripture allows you!

Argument 6: The function of the law (3:19–29)

Why then the law?

Now we come to what is logically a further argument, but of course it is embedded in this argument about legal practice. Paul is maintaining that justification is not by the law but by faith. He has argued that not only justification, but the promises, the covenant and the inheritance are also by faith and on the same condition. Of course, when he propounded that in a synagogue or amongst his Jewish friends, he very soon got the reaction, 'Then what did God give the law for? Are you saying the law was all for nothing?'

Paul has argued from the Old Testament and from the covenant with Abraham that justification, the inheritance, the promises, the blessings, are by faith and not by the works of the law. But if he's going to win this argument, he must have the answer to that question as well. And so must we. We need to be able to show why God gave the law and that God's giving of the law does not contradict the terms upon which God preached justification by faith to Abraham and to the rest of us.

You can't be in a position of saying 'I don't know why God gave the law and I don't bother because we're not under the law.' You must be able to explain what the law was and the purpose for which God gave it, so that when people see that purpose, they will see it does not

contradict the fact that God gave these things to Abraham on the grounds of faith, and not of works. Paul is a master controversialist and dealt with this kind of thing thousands of times in synagogues, and in the marketplaces, and with individuals. We notice how logical and fair and complete his argument is turning out to be. But I grant you that these legal things can be vexing to the old grey matter. It's time we had a break to fortify ourselves for the rest!

[Argument 6 \(cont'd\) & Argument 7](#)

Argument 6: The function of the law

When we broke off our study we were considering the challenge in verse 19 of chapter 3, ‘Why then the law?’—a challenge that Paul would often have met in his conversations and arguments with his fellow Jews and others. If Paul is going to say that justification, the covenant, the promises, the inheritance, the blessings, come to us through faith and not by the works of the law, he will have to face the objection, ‘God gave the law: are you just going to discard it and take no notice of it, or say somehow it was bad? What then is the law?’ We shall come back to that presently, but let’s go back for a moment to the earlier verses to pick up another detail in the covenant.

Abraham’s offspring

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings’, referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring’, who is Christ. (3:16)

Now people have found it difficult to follow the argument on linguistic grounds. The word ‘offspring’⁶ in English can imply a plurality. The Hebrew word likewise can mean one of two things, and Paul is arguing here that it’s meant to be singular, and when God said he was going to give it to Abraham and to his offspring, the offspring was Christ. Now you may want to question it but I’m going to leave it there for the moment, to come to the prior point that in a covenant you cannot change the terms—you must keep to the terms as strictly intended and defined. Paul’s argument is that the offspring God had in mind was Christ. If then it was to Christ that these things were promised, the inheritance in particular and the great promises, then surely we are ruled out, because you can’t alter the covenant. Once it’s signed, sealed and settled, you can’t add anything to it.

Do you remember I talked to you about the rich uncle in America who died? Suppose you were to say to me, ‘I got some tremendous news today; our uncle in America has died and has left us stuff in his will.’

So I accompany you to the solicitor and he reads it all out; and the sole beneficiary under the will is you, Tom. And when the solicitor has finished, I say, ‘But you haven’t mentioned me yet?’

‘Who are you?’

⁶ In the King James Version, it is translated as ‘seed’ which, like ‘offspring’, can be singular or plural—so the same argument applies.

'I'm David, of course.'

'Well, you're not mentioned.'

'Oh, but that's impossible. I know my uncle: I was just his favourite, perhaps a bit more than Tom here. So I know he really meant to include me. Can't you just add it in?'

But of course he couldn't do that. And if the inheritance is promised to Christ, that's that. You can't add my name or your name. So how on earth would we ever come into it? You will see Paul dealing with that question at the end of chapter 3.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (vv. 27–28)

We must keep it in the context. He's talking about the terms of this covenant, which are the terms of salvation, the terms upon which we shall inherit. He's not talking about order in the church! But within its own strict context, salvation has done this for us: we've been baptized into Christ, we have put on Christ—as a person puts on a robe which obliterates all other distinctions. Then Paul adds,

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (v. 29)

One can't deny that Christ was Abraham's offspring, surely. He will inherit all that God intended, but if you are in Christ—if you are Christ's—then you too are Abraham's offspring and included in the inheritance. Shout a private 'hallelujah', for you are infinitely wealthy!

There is one thing the testator of a will could do if he managed to survive, he could add benefits. He mustn't add conditions. If the promises were made to Abraham, and to his offspring, and God's covenant guaranteed these explicit benefits, then Christ will inherit everything. But more than that, if you are in Christ, if you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's offspring and therefore 'heirs according to the promise.' So we see that this notion of inheritance is a big basic term in Scripture in the New Testament for the blessings that come to us through Christ. That is how the argument is going to end up.

The function of the law

But we come back now to verse 19, 'Why then the law?' Its true function was this:

It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

So the law was a temporary measure until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and that is Christ of course. It was ordained through angels by the hand of an intermediary. God made that covenant with Israel through an intermediary, namely Moses, and a lot of angels as well.

Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. (v. 20)

That's a verse capable of many interpretations. For time sake, I give you mine, for what it's worth. The law was not a one-party covenant, it was a two-party covenant. God proposed the terms, Moses brought them to the people. Moses read the terms and spoke them in the hearing of the people, and the people agreed to keep all the terms. Moses went back to God, and the covenant was ratified. So Moses, a human being, was an intermediary. It was a two-party covenant, not a one-party covenant.

You may well think of an objection at that point. Was not the new covenant mediated by Christ? 'He is the mediator of a new covenant,' says Hebrews (9:15); and he is guarantor of it as well (7:22). But consider who Christ is. He is not just a successor to Moses—certainly human, but not only human. This is God incarnate. The covenant he sealed and signed with his blood was the new covenant, and he was the sacrifice that guaranteed the fulfilment of the covenant.

So the law was temporary then for transgressions. Let's read what Paul says elsewhere about the law. This is Paul complaining to Timothy about people 'desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions' (1 Tim 1:7). Now note what we're talking about: we're talking about law as a principle. The law of God in the Old Testament, summed up in the Ten Commandments, was not just advice or guidelines: it was command plus penalty. It was prohibition plus penalty. 'Do this,' says the law, 'or else I curse you. Do this or you'll pay the penalty.'

That is law as a principle. That's why it is so serious to make law the principle of the gospel. You must keep the law or else you get the penalty of eternal death. You don't try to get salvation on those terms. And Paul adds,

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practise homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. (1 Tim 1:8–11)

That was what the law was for: to discourage and to repress transgressions. And let Paul tell you that, for he was the best trier to keep the law in all the ancient world. That never did convert him—never did produce true love for God, and certainly not true love for his fellow men. The law was added on account of transgressions, to deal with transgressions, and to repress them. 'Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?' (Gal 3:21). God made these promises to Abraham on the terms of the covenant that God had made with him, that all these blessings would be to Abraham and to his offspring through faith. Did God subsequently give a law to alter those conditions, to cancel that covenant? Was the law contrary to the promises of God? In other words, did God first promise this as a gift, then add the law as an unexpected condition—a condition that ruled out the gift completely? Certainly not.

What then is the law? Well now you'll see that the law has a definite limit to it. It has an inadequacy:

For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.
(3:21)

Let's go back as an illustration to Abraham. While Abraham was yet childless, God said to him, 'I'm going to give you a son' and Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. What did God say next? 'Now Abraham, I'm going to give you a son, but this is what you'll have to do to get this son. If you practice yoga every day, and go for exercise, and run at least five miles a day, and abstain from eating too much fat, and don't drink too much tea, you possibly will become a father.' Absolutely not, for none of those conditions could have produced new life. Nor could God's law produce life. It could tell you how to live once you got it, but the law couldn't produce life. And the issue over which Abraham believed God initially, and it was counted to him for righteousness, highlights that very point. God was going to give Abraham a son, and eventually he left him until not only Sarah was barren—she'd been that all the time—but until Abraham was now decrepit and old, and no health regime or gymnastics or anything of the sort could have cured him. God gave him the gift of a new life. The law could never do it anyway.

Another function of the law

We know now that God gave the law to repress transgressions, but it had another function. Look at verse 22.

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now Paul is not wasting words: notice the phrase 'by faith,' and then 'those who believe'—the promise is by faith in Jesus Christ. That is what God says: if you want the fulfilment of this promise, it is by faith in Christ. That's all the terms are. Yes, but it only applies to those who actually believe the promise by faith in Jesus Christ. What is the function of the law in this regard? The law is given to shut you up to the point where you see that it has to be simply by faith: there is no other way. Why isn't there another way? Well, the law, properly understood and applied, will bring us to our knees and prove us to be sinners, and show to us that we couldn't possibly ever overcome that. The law shuts us up to sin, to the point where it dawns on us that if ever I am to be justified, saved, and become an inheritor, I couldn't do it by the keeping of the law. The only way is through faith in Christ.

And Paul then uses an illustration, an analogy, a metaphor:

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. (vv. 23–24)

He's talking about the coming of Christ, and how Christ, through his death upon the cross, made possible the fulfilment of the covenants of grace, and made it evident that the inheritance, according to that covenant, would be simply by faith in him. Before that came, — before, in that sense, the new gift of the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ, with a new power to live lives pleasing to God—God put Israel under the law. The law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. In Greek the word here translated 'guardian' is *paidagogos*. He was not a pedagogue in the modern sense of pedagogy—the teaching of children in schools, which requires great qualification. The Greek word simply refers to a slave—with not much education either I suspect—who was put in charge of the children, and had to look after them in the sense of seeing they didn't play football or attempt golf too close to the house and smash all the windows, or things like that. His role was largely in imposing restraint; and fathers despairing of every other means of keeping early teenagers in order, would appoint a pedagogue to look after them and the more muscle the pedagogue had, the better! He was there to restrain from undue excesses, and to motivate the child.

One day the child would grow up. I remember in my house as a kid, that my brothers, (I'm sure it was they, it couldn't have been me!) had to be restrained from running in from the garden with mud on their boots, across the carpet. The restraint was a threat of six of the best if we ran in without cleaning our shoes or taking the shoes off, and running right across the carpet. But now I'm grown up (or more or less grown up!) I don't come in with my shoes all muddy and run across the carpet—not because there's somebody standing behind the door with six of the best, waiting to inflict them. Grown up, I now share the principles that my parents had, that you shouldn't ruin carpets by silly behaviour.

And so God provided Israel with a pedagogue until faith came—until salvation through the sacrifice and death of Christ was made known, until the coming of the Holy Spirit within the heart to be the new power, the spirit of God our Father. Until then the law was the threat of six of the best, to restrain their transgressions, and to bring them to the point where that law brought Paul. We read his own confession in Romans 7. He desperately tried to keep the law and thought he had attained it or could attain it. But one of the commandments defeated him—you shall not covet. He found he couldn't overcome it. Faith in Christ was the only option.

Argument 7: A Scriptural analogy—The adoption of sons (4:1-7)

So then for the legal arguments. They are necessarily detailed, but this is the legal side of the gospel and not to be disparaged. The gospel tells us of the love of God, but the gospel also tells us of the righteousness of God, and the way God saves us is righteous. Moreover, God is a Father. He knew what to do with the race in its infancy, with Israel in its childhood, and in its early teenage years. But now Paul is going to make the point that the treatment of teenagers or infants is one thing, the treatment of grown-up sons is another. So there is now another argument from analogy, to show the difference of treatment that a father will give to a child on the one hand, and on the other, to a grown-up son.

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. (4:1)

Paul is citing what would have happened in a wealthy home, particularly a Roman home, where the father was a very wealthy man with houses and lands and so forth—riches in his possession and under his control—and a child is born to him. Under the Roman law the father would wait a while, and then will come a ceremony in which a father would take that child up and own him as his child—Greek term, *huithesia*, placing as a son. Of course if the child was a genuine child of the father, even though he were but a few months old, he would in one sense be a son, for inheritance depended on sonship. The child, as soon as he was born, and it was established he was a genuine child of his father, was by definition heir to his father. As in the original English monarchical system, the sovereign's first male child was heir to the throne, from the moment he was born.

But in a great Roman household, even though the father acknowledged this infant as his son legally, and he was therefore heir to everything, the father wouldn't give everything to him to administer while he was still an infant, but would wait until the child had grown up. Until then the child would be put under guardians and managers. In a Roman household they would mostly be slaves. In Roman households your secretary, in charge of all your affairs, was probably a slave. Your doctor was a slave; and the manager of your fields, if you had farms, would be a slave. Some of them were of a high position—at the time of the Roman emperors, the heads of their civil service were slaves.

If you were an ordinary, true-born Roman, but you'd fallen on hard times and hadn't got the wherewithal to feed yourself, you went along to your patron, who was a very wealthy citizen. He expected you to vote for him when the elections took place, and in return you could turn up at his door every morning for the dole out—the necessary bread, or money to buy bread, and money to go to the circus. It was galling when you went for it, because the chap who dished it out was a high-powered slave, and though you were a Roman citizen you would have to go to a slave to get your money. And if you were a child, even though you really owned the estate, you had to go to him to get your pocket money. That's how it was until the lad grew up, and that time would be appointed by the father.

Paul says that we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world—referring to Judaism of course. Elementary principles ('elements' in KJV) is the Greek word *stoicheia*. As applied to language, it would mean the basic ABC of the language, the basic elementary principles of the language. Why does Paul describe the law as the *stoicheia* of the world? Well, let's listen to what the writer to the Hebrews says. Under the law, they had an earthly sanctuary, says Hebrews 9, meaning it was made of wood, stone, gold, silver, linen, copper: it was a sanctuary of this material world, as distinct from the true sanctuary which is in heaven, as a spiritual thing. So the law was the ABC of behaviour, but it dealt with the things of this world.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (4:4-7)

Now notice the exact terms. He did not send his child, but his son. Get the majesty of it in this context. He sent forth his son with all the dignity of the father—the full expression of the

father, 'the exact imprint of his nature' (Heb 1:3). Then notice the next terms: 'born of woman' — that is, truly human to share our humanity; 'born under the law' — do you mind if I use the term, that God sent him to the same school as Israel had been under? He was circumcised as a child, taught the law — but he kept it, and kept it fully. God sent him — a human being born under the law — that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Notice that Paul says 'we': he's talking about Jews who were under the law, and God put his Son under the law too. What for? That he might redeem those who were under the law.

The penalty of the law paid

When it came to the New Testament gospel, God could not say, 'Well, now the gospel's come, Christ has died and risen, and so now it doesn't matter, you Jews, whether you keep the law or not. The law is now scrapped from that point of view. It doesn't matter whether you broke it or not.' No, no, the law had its penalties, and before Israel could be saved, those penalties of that broken law had to be paid for.

Suppose my parents had been well enough off to send me to a private school and as I got to early teenage years, I couldn't stick the teacher of chemistry — horrible type, forever putting me in detention, and setting impossible homework, and all that. I was determined to get my own back on him, and I stole some stuff from the chemistry lab one day, and I put it on an extended fuse under his desk and blew the whole place up. And dad came along and said, 'Oh, he's blown the whole place up. Well, he shouldn't have done that. But anyway, he's old enough to leave now, and I'm taking him out of school and I'm going to set him up as a partner in my firm. Never mind the explosion that blew the lab up, and the teacher as well.' He just couldn't walk out of it like that. The damage would have to be paid for before I could be brought out and set on another course. Before Israel could be saved, their transgressions under the law had to be paid for, and Christ did it.

Placed as sons

so that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (4:4-7)

These are magnificent words, aren't they? 'Receive the adoption as sons.' Even now, legally that is. Romans 8 will tell us that we are awaiting adoption, the redemption of our bodies, but here it is the legal thing as to our status. And we are sons, and because we are legally sons, look at the logic of it; God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' A very sentimental story is told of a couple who had their first child, and they were a good and godly, and spiritual couple, and they were determined that the first word this child ever spoke would be 'Jesus'. So when they nursed him, they said, 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Jesus, Jesus.' They did this for months. And one day the babe spoke, 'Dadda,' he said. Yes, of course so: nature will have its way! And because you are sons and God has put the spirit of his Son in you, it is natural for you to say, 'Dadda,' with all the intimacy, the reverence that that shows. *Abba* is the Aramaic word, and the New Testament leaves it untranslated, but adds the Greek

translation, *Pater*. And the early Christians left the *Abba* untranslated because they heard the way Christ himself prayed. Some people say it's 'daddy', but that's too much a childish word. Maybe 'dad', in English. It is a word of intimacy from a child to its father. But it would be an enormous affront of God for us to use it unless God had given us the spirit of his Son. But more than that, he has given us the Holy Spirit. Not on the grounds of our keeping the law, but on the grounds of our salvation through Christ—the new birth and the new life given us by his Spirit. Marvellous, isn't it, to have that status and that intimacy?

Meaning of *Stoicheia*?

Let me conclude by saying a little more on something mentioned earlier. I interpreted the words 'we . . . were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world' (4:3), as applying to the law of Israel in its broader sense. Many commentators are unhappy with this interpretation of the Greek word *stoicheia*. They admit that this is its meaning in Hebrews 5:12, which says,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

That's the word *stoicheia*—the basic principles of the oracles of God. It is applied to the Old Testament law and laws, so why object to that interpretation here in Galatians 4:3? First, because Paul doesn't just say 'elementary principles' but 'the elementary principles of the world.' Secondly, they object to it on the grounds that it was God who gave this teaching to Israel, and whilst it was elementary and physical, it came from God. So how could Paul say that the Israelites were enslaved under this God-given education?

There has been an enormous movement in theological circles this last twenty years saying that when Paul talks about the works of the law, he doesn't mean the moral commandments of the law but simply things like the food laws and the ceremonial washings. And that when he says he was enslaved to the law, that is simply Paul speaking—very few other Jews ever have admitted that the law was a slavery. Like the psalmist they would say such things as, 'Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it' (Ps 119:35). You should remember that if you are talking to modern Jews, for the orthodox will not necessarily admit to you that they feel the law is a slavery: they pride themselves on the law.

So then what is the answer to it? Well, in reply we can say a number of things. Paul is saying that so long as the child was under the care and authority of the guardians and managers, he differed nothing from a slave. We should remember also that Peter, in a context similar to that which Paul is discussing here in Galatians, described circumcision and the law of Moses as a yoke—though of course Peter would have admitted that that yoke was given by God.

Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? (Acts 15:10)

And Paul himself repeats the phrase in this letter when he describes circumcision as 'a yoke of slavery' (Gal 5:1).

Now those who are unhappy to interpret this Greek word *stoicheia* in chapter 4:3 as the elementary teaching which God gave Israel in the Old Testament, suggest an alternative interpretation. They say that it refers to the elementary spirits of this world—that is, evil spirits and demons. These are said to have perverted God’s law in the minds of Israel, deceiving them into thinking that they had to keep the law to be saved, and so plunging them into slavery. But this translation won’t fit the facts in general, nor what Paul is talking about in this context. In Old Testament times, all Israel—the godly as well as the ungodly, believers as well as apostates—were under the law. But it surely would be grotesque to think that even godly believers like David and Isaiah were deceived by evil spirits into thinking that salvation was by keeping the law. The guardians and managers who treated the infant like a slave and insisted on his submitting to his elementary training were not malicious deceivers: they were appointed by the father.

Moreover, it is clear that even people like David, who knew forgiveness of sins—Paul quotes him as such in Romans ‘just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works’ (Rom 4:6)—but though forgiven, he would not have been allowed to enter into the most holy place in the tabernacle of this world. He had no boldness and freedom to enter the presence of God as we have today. He was an heir of all of the promises made to Abraham and a good many more besides, but he was still an infant: he was not yet a full-grown son. He still had to offer physical sacrifices. His conscience was not yet made perfect (see Heb 10:2). It would not be correct to say that when David discovered forgiveness through faith, he ceased to be under the guardianship and management of the law. This state of being under guardians and managers was ordained by the Father, to last until God sent forth his Son to redeem those who were under the law.

We should notice that, and let me say it in particular because I do not believe what some say I teach. I do not believe that Israel is the same thing as the church. I do not believe that. What has made the difference? Not only the sacrifice of Christ, but the coming of the spirit of God on the day of Pentecost, to form of the two—Jew and Gentile—one new man. It is not that the church has just been added on to Israel—what some call ‘the replacement theory.’ It is that God has done a new thing at Pentecost such as was never before. He has taken godly Jews who believe in Christ, and only Christ, for salvation; and he has taken Gentiles who have put their faith in Christ, and only Christ, for salvation, and made them both one by giving them his Spirit, baptizing both in one Spirit into one body. This is a major difference.

That said, we have observed from the previous chapter that the law was a temporary institution given after the time of Abraham, and given until the coming of Christ. Because the law was temporary, it doesn’t add anything to the promises made under God’s covenant to Abraham. And we are said therefore to be children—the offspring—of Abraham, through faith in Christ. Abraham was never part of Israel: the very name Israel was not given until Jacob. Abraham is never called an Israelite.

One final thing. Others say that in chapter 4 of Galatians, when Paul talks about being enslaved, he’s not merely talking about Jews, but about Gentiles. As he begins to say, in verse 8, ‘Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods’, there he is talking to Gentiles. It is simply my contention that in the first paragraph, verses 1–7, he is still talking about Jews.

Arguments 8 & 9

Argument 8: The Galatians' changed attitude to Paul (4:8–20)

Paul now turns to another argument: once more an argument from the experience of the Galatians who had professed conversion when Paul preached to them. Now they were in danger of believing what false teachers had told them—that faith in Christ was not by itself enough for salvation, but they must add circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses.

Paul reminds them of the tremendous joy they had when first he preached the gospel to them, shown in the way they treated him. Apparently at the time he had some illness, or disease or something that he refers to in verses 13 and 14.

You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? (4:13–16)

The authority of the gospel, as it came to them through Paul—even in his weak condition that they might have naturally found repulsive—led them to receive him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus himself. And in the wonder and the joy of salvation that gripped them, so grateful were they to him and to the gospel that they would have gouged out their eyes if necessary and given them to him.

Now comes the argument. 'What has happened to your attitude to me? What has happened to that experience of gratitude and joy that came upon you when you learned that salvation was a free gift from God?' Any doctrine that changes our attitude to Paul, and makes us somewhat hostile to him, or to disregard him, is a very doubtful doctrine by definition. False gospels will not produce that joy and gratitude of heart to God that salvation by faith produces. Why has he become their enemy? It is because of these false teachers.

They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. (vv. 17–20)

They make much of you—they court you, I suppose a modern equivalent would be—to court somebody's interest, favour, loyalty. 'They court you, but not in a good way, they desire to shut you out,' that is from Paul, 'so that you may seek them as the great authorities.' There's nothing wrong, says verse 18, in someone seeking to gain your attention, and your friendship, so that you listen to the gospel. 'And that is not merely confined to when I'm with you: let another true preacher of the gospel come, and you should show the same respect and loyalty to him too'

But now he is perplexed about them, why? Look at what he says:

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain. (vv. 8–11)

At the time when Israel were under the law, these Galatian Gentiles with their polytheistic ideas were enslaved to those that by nature were not gods. Now they have come to know God, or rather to be known of God, but are they going to turn back to those 'worthless elementary principles'? Why should he be so afraid of their observing days, and months, and seasons, and years? No doubt you all know some Christians who keep Christmas! And sometimes Christians arrange great conferences at Easter time, not to speak of July the 12th! What's wrong in that? Well in itself, there's nothing wrong with it, of course. Even with Christian days and months and festivals, the danger is when people think that keeping the festival somehow helps their salvation. As Paul points out at the end of Galatians 2, these things at best are shadows, symbols. It's so desperately easy to be content with a symbol, and not have the reality.

There are millions of people who at Christmas time feel very cuddly and moved in their heart about the baby. To them, that is what Christmas is about—babyhood—but nothing about the reason for the virgin birth, and the fact of it, and the coming of Christ, and what he came for. Then at Easter some people go on pilgrimage barefoot, thinking they are helping their salvation thereby. These Gentiles had had their religious calendar, but they were pagan; and now they had heard of Christ and were delivered from it. But the danger was for Jews now to impose on them the days and seasons of their ritual calendar given to them in the Old Testament. The danger would be that these Gentiles would think that they had to keep those days, and by keeping those days somehow they were adding to their salvation. If you go to Mexico, so they tell me, you will find celebrations of Easter and such like saints days in the Christendom aspect in Mexico, but a lot of the Mexicans who would count themselves 'Christians' have added their pagan rites and ceremonies on to those festivals. Likewise in Malaysia, there are many Buddhists who can't see the difference between the goddess of mercy, which they worship in their Buddhist shrines, and the Virgin Mary in the Catholic shrines, so they go to both of them indiscriminately.

What would you deduce from their present behaviour? What Paul is anxious about is whether he has run in vain, and their conversions were not true conversions. And he wants to be with them again to make sure they've got the gospel the right way round, and it is Christ

that they have got hold of, and is being formed in them. An argument from experience then: it is an important argument. When false teachings and the imposing of religiosity upon Christianity leads people to such behaviour, it makes you wonder if they have really got the point at all, that salvation is through Christ only, and by faith, and not of works.

Argument 9: An Old Testament prototype (4:21–5:1)

Paul now comes to the false teachers—those that desire to be under the law—which introduces another argument. Paul wants them to be as he was: when he got converted, he really got converted. Steeped in Judaism as he was, he saw the difference between law and faith. Yes, he was prepared in the case of Timothy, who was a half Jew anyway—his mother being a Hebrew would have meant that to the Jews, he was a Jew—to circumcise Timothy, not because it was necessary for salvation; but many a Jew would have been offended and stumbled if they had found a Jew like Timothy had not been circumcised.

I think, on another occasion, I used the analogy of a very Sabbatarian community, such as in the Western Isles off Scotland where all were Sabbatarians to a man, so to speak, so that it was a very grave public offence if you drove your car on a Sunday. You all walked to church. I lived in such a community once, but not in Scotland, in a place called Belfast where I lodged at one stage, and the good lady where I lodged scolded me for whistling on a Sunday; and what's more, you didn't polish your shoes on a Sunday! Well, if somebody's going to have a conscience about whistling or polishing shoes on a Sunday, and I have a chance to preach the gospel to them, I will not whistle or polish my shoes on a Sunday then. Not that I think it's necessary to observe these prohibitions to be saved, but I'm not needlessly going to offend their consciences as they won't listen to the gospel. If I get the chance to tell them the gospel, I shall tell them the gospel, and then point out that not whistling on a Sunday doesn't help your being saved.

So now he talks to those who know the law, and this time he is going to expound some narrative portions from the book of Genesis, and talk about Sarah and Hagar, and Isaac as the promised offspring. In the course of that argument, according to the translation I have in front of me, Paul now speaks 'allegorically' (4:24) ('which things are an allegory' KJV). Many therefore have accused Paul of using allegory to prove his point. They say he is treating the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac, as though it were an allegory. You say, 'What do you mean by an allegory?' Well, John Bunion's *Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory. It's no good saying, 'Where would I find that man Pilgrim: could you tell me what street he lived in?'. It's part of the allegory that he lived in this world, and went through Vanity Fair and so on, but it is merely an allegory after all. So they say that for Paul to treat Genesis as an allegory is false because it was never written as an allegory: it is history.

Some go so far as to say that in those days people would have accepted an argument from an allegory like this—Paul's allegorical interpretation of Genesis—but thinking people nowadays wouldn't accept it. So in effect they're saying Paul used a false argument because the people of his day wouldn't have regarded it a false argument, but he wouldn't use it today because they'd know it is false. Really? When God inspired Paul to write this in Galatians 4, did God use a bad argument knowing it was a bad argument but that the Galatians wouldn't

have noticed? No, God never uses bad arguments. The difficulty has arisen from the translation and what it means by allegory. We can decide when we have looked at the stories.

Not allegory but prototype

I am now going to argue that, far from being an allegory, Paul is taking the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac as straightforward history that actually happened. The people were real people, real historical characters, and what is said about them in Genesis is straight history. But if you read the history carefully, you will see these people behaving in certain ways, and displaying certain attitudes, literally so, that in principle were the same as the false teachers were advocating. And they had the same result as the teaching that keeping the law and circumcision for salvation will produce in people. The word I would use, therefore, to denote the way Paul is treating these stories is to call them *prototypes*—in the sense that we use that term to describe the early aeroplanes.

When I was at school and an aeroplane came over, we all ran out of school to see it: it was such a rare thing. They were curious contraptions made of bits of wood and what looked like paper stuck together with glue and a few elastic bands. They were forever crashing but they did fly because, even in those early models, they had discovered the principle of an aileron. So you had a wing that was flat underneath and bevelled at the top, and as you pulled it into the air by your engine, the air that went underneath remained just as solid as it was before; but the air that went over the top was, by that very method, thinned out, so the pressure under the wing was greater than the pressure on top of the wing, and the thing went up. That same principle is to be seen in the jumbo jet that flies overhead at 35,000 feet. It's a very different thing from those early aeroplanes but it's got the same principle embodied. So the early thing was a prototype of the bigger thing, an early expression at that humble level of certain principles that were later to be expressed at the much higher level.

Many of the stories in the Old Testament are not only historical—and they remain historical—but are also prototypes. If you want an example of it, the simple one that you know very well is the *Passover*. The principle of being delivered from God's wrath by the shedding of the blood of an innocent lamb was a prototype that our Lord fulfilled. He said, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God' (Luke 22:15–16). Passover was the prototype. It wasn't a prophecy: it never pretended to be a prophecy. It was a memorial of a past event but it contained that basic principle of deliverance from the wrath of God through the blood of the sacrifice of an innocent victim. That same principle is expressed now at the highest possible level in the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. He's not a woolly lamb, but the wrath of God remains the same, and the fact that redemption is through his blood remains the same.

The prototypes—'flesh' and 'promise'

So we're now going to see, with Paul's help, how the story of Abraham and Isaac, Sarah and Hagar are prototypes, taking up at verse 22.

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. (vv. 22–23)

We better stop and get that straight. When it says that the son of the slave woman was born according to the flesh, it is not referring to the fact that Abraham was the physical father, and fathered the child according to the normal principles of human reproduction. ‘Flesh’ here is in the *Pauline* sense of man working in independence of God. And it is literally true, not allegory: it is fact that Ishmael, Hagar’s son, was born according to the flesh. God had promised to give Abraham a son, and God’s promise was that God would give it, and it would be a miracle of God’s intervention to give life to this aged couple. What Sarah suggested, and Abraham went along with, was to attempt to fulfil that promise by using their own resources, and therefore Sarah suggested to Abraham that he take Hagar, thus bypassing the difficulty that Sarah herself was barren. Thus by their own ingenuity and effort in taking Hagar, they would produce a son which then they would say, ‘Well, by God’s grace, we did it. We did the best we could and God honoured it.’ No, says Paul, that is acting according the flesh—acting in independence of God to try to get the promise by doing the best you can to fulfil it.

That is precisely what Abraham and Sarah went to when Sarah suggested that he take Hagar—acting independently of God to produce by their own effort the promise of God. And God said, ‘No, that is not what I meant. When I said I was going to give you a son, I meant I was going to give you a son. I will yet give you a son, and when I do it, it will be by my divine intervention.’ The son will be born through promise, meaning that God promised to give him a son. Abraham believed it, eventually believed it solely, and kept on believing, and against hope, believed in hope, and considered the fact that his body was as good as dead, but kept on believing God’s promise (see Rom 4:19–21). And God himself fulfilled the promise. Do you see the difference?

Paul is now drawing the analogy between that incident in the Old Testament—Abraham and Sarah’s attempt to use their own resources—as equivalent to those who take the law, and suppose that they have, by their own strength, to keep this law in order to gain eternal life and forgiveness of sins. That is an act of the flesh. That is a fleshly attitude. The true attitude is believing the promise, and therefore counting on a God who can bring life out of death. Letting it be a gift from God, not earned by my effort but given by God according to his unconditional promise. So those characters—the two sons of Abraham, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman—were prototypes, not an allegory.

A contrast of two covenants

Paul then adds,

These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. (vv. 24–26)

What does Paul mean by saying, 'These woman are two covenants'? It isn't allegory but simply a metaphor. Paul says these two woman are two covenants, meaning they represent and are the expression of the principles of those two covenants. The one is the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai, a two-party covenant where God laid down the terms, offered them to Israel, Israel said, 'Yes, we'll keep all those terms,' and on that basis the law was given. So it depended on Israel keeping those laws. The other is the new covenant—a one-party covenant which our Lord fulfilled. 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many' (see Mark 14:23–24). We have forgiveness, but not through our efforts.

Two different covenants therefore. We know of course that Abraham and Sarah are to be blamed in that whole incident about Hagar—they sponsored the scheme to start with. But Hagar was a slave girl and her son was never anything else than a slave boy. He didn't become a member of the family as a true born son but remained a slave. 'Very appropriate,' says Paul, 'because if people try to keep circumcision and the law to gain salvation, it will make slaves of them.' How could it not, if you took the law seriously—with its condemnation of sin. A lot of folks who hope to be saved by keeping the law don't take the law seriously. They think that if you get eighty percent, God will wave you through. That isn't true. To take the law seriously means understanding that if you break one point, you're guilty of the lot. Taking that seriously would make a slave of you, whereas the new covenant will set you free and make you, as Paul has been declaring to these Galatians, not only children of God, but sons of God—giving you that status as a gift from God.

Paul continues, 'Sinai is a mountain in Arabia.' What's the point of saying that? Well, it wasn't in the promised land. You will have observed that long since, because you know your geography well. Mount Sinai was not in the promised land but in Arabia. Hagar had come from Egypt, and went off into the desert when she was thrown out of Abraham's home and lived in the desert like an Arab. Says Paul, 'She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.' Isn't Paul being rude, claiming that the present Jerusalem is in slavery? How dare he say it. Well, our Lord said it to the Jews who professed to believe in him, 'If you continue in my word, you will be my disciples indeed, as you'll know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'

They said, 'Excuse us, what did you say? Make us free? We were never in bondage to anybody.'

'He who practices sin is a slave of sin,' said Christ, and it wasn't long after that he said, 'You are of your father the devil' (see John 8:31–34, 44).

And Paul knew what he was talking about: he had tried to keep the law and take it seriously. It enslaved him. The present Jerusalem was in slavery.

'But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.' It is the gospel as preached to Abraham and Sarah—'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.' The covenant given to Abraham and to his offspring—which is Christ and those united with him, being in Christ, and Christ in us—sets us free and gives us the status of freeborn sons of God. And the gift of the Holy Spirit within, whereby we cry, 'Abba Father.'

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' (Rom 8:15)

A slave does what he does very often because of the fear that if he doesn't do it, he'll be lashed by the taskmaster. The true born son doesn't do it for that reason: it's a different principle. The Jerusalem above is free. That Jerusalem is a city of freeborn sons: there will be no slaves in heaven. There will be nobody in heaven who doesn't want to be there.

Now Paul substantiates his interpretation of the behaviour of Abraham and Sarah, and Hagar, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and this part of it in particular:

But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, 'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.' (Gal 4:27)

That is not everybody's favourite verse in the Old Testament! But it is part of the poetry of Isaiah (see Isa 54:1), and he's talking about Jerusalem city, and how she will one day be restored. This isn't allegory either, but an ordinary metaphor for any Semitic speaker! Jerusalem city is regarded as a mother and her citizens are her children. Listen to our Lord standing outside the literal Jerusalem and weeping, 'Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How often would I have gathered your children?' He's talking to mother Jerusalem really, and when he talks about gathering her children, he's talking about her citizens. It's figurative language. So here God, through the prophet Isaiah, is talking to Jerusalem who because of the nation's sins, has been bereft of her children and left alone, an emptied city, the children all gone into exile, and she feels deserted by her husband. But the prophet bids her rejoice, because one day Jerusalem will be restored and her citizens will be uncountable in number.

You could use that metaphorical language of Abraham and Sarah, now I think of it! It was Sarah's suggestion to Abraham (he never dared suggest it!) that Abraham take Hagar and father a child. And all went well until Hagar realized she was pregnant. Then when Sarah said, 'Now I'd like you, this morning, to clean up the sand inside the tent', Hagar replied, 'I can't do that. I'm carrying Abraham's child.' Sarah didn't stick that very long, and she advised Abraham that the woman must be cast out. 'I'm not having that slave girl treat me like that. Throw her out!' So Abraham set her going, and she wandered in the wilderness until the angel of the Lord met her, and said, 'Hagar, my dear, this is no place for you to be in the condition you're in. You better go back to Abraham's home.' And the angel of the Lord sent her back, and said, 'You'll have a child, and I will bless him, but he'll be a wild donkey of a man. His hand against everybody else, and everybody else's hand against him' (see Gen 16:1-12).

So the angel of the Lord sent back this Hagar, with her child to be, to Abraham's home. And she brought forth a child and this youngster, when he grew up, was a wild donkey of a chap; there were likely many awkward scenes in Abraham's home while he grew up. And Sarah must constantly have felt, 'Hagar has the child. I have no child. I am barren.' But Sarah learned her lesson eventually—a bit long in learning it, but she learned it—and joined Abraham in the act of faith and, according to God's promise, brought forth Isaac. And then she had more children than Hagar did, for God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. And Sarah eventually joined him in the same faith.

It's a long distance from that until Christ was born of the offspring of Abraham. And now, says Romans 4, Abraham is the father of all who share his faith—multitudes like the stars of

the heaven and the sand of seashore, children who trace their spiritual lineage back to the great act of faith of Abraham and Sarah, as Paul now says:

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. (v. 28)

That is, our spiritual birth has come about on this same basis. God makes the promise, and we have believed, and we are born again children of the promise.

Enmity between 'flesh' and 'promise'

But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.' So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (4:29–5:1)

So then we come back to the narrative. Eventually Isaac was born, a result of Abraham and Sarah learning to believe the promise of God—born by God's own miraculous intervention. The boy grew up a little bit, and then one day Sarah noticed Ishmael was not only playing with Isaac—for Ishmael was now 13 years old plus—but engaging perhaps in horseplay with him. Sarah's maternal instincts were provoked and she said to Abraham, 'Abraham, you'd better cast him out. I'm not having this slave boy inherit along with my freeborn son' (see Gen 21:9–10). And this time God told Abraham to do exactly what Sarah said. The slave boy and his slave mother were turned out. God promised to bless them and make of them a great nation, and God has done so, but they were not the nation that would be used of God to bring in the promised offspring, which was Christ. The slave boy then, the son of the slave woman shall not inherit, notice the term again, with the son of the free woman.

It is the fact then that the son who was born according to the flesh, by man's own independent effort, persecuted the one who was born by faith in the promise of God. It remains true. It is a curious psychological fact that those who insist that the way of salvation is by our effort to keep God's law, will from time to time persecute those who stand for the gospel that we're saved, not by our works, but by faith in Christ. Cain persecuted Abel in the context of religion. And we think of medieval Christendom, and what happened when Luther and company and other dear souls arose and stood for the fact that justification is by faith without works. You know what happened, and still to this day there is a gospel which encourages people to think that they are Christians because some little ceremony was performed on them as infants and therefore now the way for them is to do the best they can to keep the law and behave like Christians do. And you say, 'No, that is not God's way of salvation: you are putting your faith in something that it quite wrong. You must be born again. You must jettison all these ceremonies and put your personal faith in Christ, and Christ alone.' If you insist on it, you will in some quarters be very disliked, and you can understand it perhaps. If some people have prided themselves that they have gone through all the ceremonies, and are doing their level best to keep the law, and you come along and tell them

they're sinners, and if they go on like this they'll never make heaven anyway, it insults them, or so they feel. Notice the paradigm laid down for us in the story of the way the son of the slave girl persecuted him who was the son of the free woman.

Answering the question

We heard Paul say, when he raised the question, 'What then is the law?' that it was a temporary institution imposed until the promised offspring should come. So now let me take you back to the Genesis story and read it in the light of what we've learned in chapter 4.

Isaac was the child of promise: that is, he was born on the basis that Abraham and Sarah believed God's promise and God did the miracle and gave them new life. Hagar was the opposite. At Sarah's earlier suggestion, Abraham had taken Hagar and fathered a son called Ishmael. He was not the 'child of promise': that was Abraham and Sarah trying to fulfil the promise of God by their own human effort. Paul draws the parallel that the law, if you take it seriously and try to keep it for salvation, will make a slave of you. What then was the law? It was added to suppress transgressions, four hundred years after the covenant God made with Abraham, and it was added until the promised offspring should come.

So let's look at Genesis, and remind ourselves that this is not allegory. It is plain, straightforward historical narrative. In Genesis 15:5, God promises Abraham an offspring. Genesis 16 is the story where Sarah convinced Abraham that he ought to take Hagar and father a son, but when Hagar realized she was carrying Abraham's child, she behaved badly towards her mistress Sarah, and Sarah so mistreated her that she fled. But lo and behold, the angel of the Lord sent her back, and put Hagar and Ishmael back into Abraham's home. So now he had this slave boy in his home, this wild donkey of a chap. Abraham got to like him in a way, but he was put back into Abraham's home for thirteen years and more, until the promised offspring, Isaac, arrived (Gen 21). And immediately you have the story, how Ishmael treated the infant Isaac badly, and this time God agreed with Sarah that Hagar and Ishmael were to be cast out. Therefore Paul says in Galatians, for reasons that we have considered, that Hagar and her son represent and express the principles of the old covenant—man doing his best to keep God's law. Well, if that's what Hagar and her son represent, notice that 'until' period in Abraham's life: the angel puts Hagar and Ishmael into Abraham's home *until* the promised offspring came. Whereupon the slave woman and her slave son were cast out.

Now we can see that Paul, in following his line of argument, is drawing a parallel between the story of Abraham and the bigger picture of the nation as a whole. We start at the same point—God's promise to Abraham—but the offspring Paul focuses on now is not Isaac but Christ, as the ultimate fulfilment of God's promise. There is also an 'until' period—God gave the law as a temporary measure *until* the promised offspring came. He came and at Calvary he paid the price a broken law demanded. Righteousness comes from placing our faith in him, and not from the works of the law.

Arguments 10–12

Three main arguments are left for our consideration, and they mostly cover ground that is well-known, amongst evangelicals at least. The argument from the implications of the false doctrine, which Paul here rebuts (Argument 10). The argument from the fact that the gospel of justification by faith does make provision for holy living, and what that provision is (Argument 11). And finally, Argument 12, which rests on an exposure of the unworthy motives of the false teachers, compared with the marks of true apostleship displayed by Paul.

Argument 10: Implications of the false doctrine (5:2–12)

First of all then, the argument from the implications of the false doctrine.

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offence of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

As he begins his argument, notice again Paul's apostolic authority—'I, Paul, say to you'. So what are the implications or consequences of following this false teaching? Paul says that if they accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to them. Now we have to read it in its context, remembering again that Paul at one stage voluntarily circumcised Timothy—but not for salvation of course. Here, when he says if anybody accepts circumcision, that is with the idea that it helps them to gain eternal life, justification, forgiveness, and so forth; if they accept circumcision with that motive, Christ will profit them nothing.

It is not true that Christ comes alongside us and gives us a tremendous help to keep the law so that we can then gain salvation. That is not true. Christ refuses to help on those terms. When it comes to justification, forgiveness, eternal life, then our faith must be solely in Christ. If you're going to put your faith in other things as well, then you won't have the hope of Christ. Christ will profit you nothing.

Paul explains that you can't pick and choose in the law to help to gain salvation. If you're going to use the principle of law, it must be the whole lot. So if you accept circumcision you are under an obligation to keep the whole law. If you want to be justified by the law, you are severed from Christ and you have fallen away from grace. This verse was taken to support what has come to be known as the 'falling away doctrine'—that is, that true believers can fall away and lose their salvation; and because that is so, you can't be sure that you're saved until you're in glory. That seems to me to arise from a misunderstanding of what it says, and what the point of the argument is.

To show what is happening here, let me quote you what was happening in Corinth, and is dealt with by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. There were some dear believers in Corinth who had put their faith in Christ for salvation, but false teaching had arisen, and they now believed there was no such thing as the resurrection. Like a lot of dear believers, ourselves included, we can sometimes have funny ideas in our heads, and don't realize that they contradict the very basis of the faith. The way that Paul dealt with that false doctrine was to show in detail to the Corinthians that if there is no resurrection, then the bottom is knocked out of salvation: there is no such thing as salvation anyway. If Christ has not bodily risen, you are still in your sins. Now believers can manage to hold those two contradictory things together in their heads, and they don't see that the second contradicts the first. They are to be treated graciously, and to have the thing pointed out to them, but if thereafter they persist in saying and believing there's no resurrection, what does that imply? Well, they're not believers anyway.

So it is with this matter. You can be a believer and think that you ought to be circumcised and keep the law as best you can to get salvation, and not see that this contradicts the basic principle of the gospel. That therefore depends whether somebody had understood the matter. You see Paul's concern for these believers: 'Have I laboured in vain? Because if now you're serious, and understand what you are doing and you really think that circumcision and keeping the law are necessary for salvation, then you've missed the point altogether. Were you ever saved?' Because to hold that doctrine—and hold it really and seriously and believe it—you are severed from Christ. You can't have both the gospel and that.

That is the seriousness of this false teaching. You are estranged from Christ. You have fallen away from grace. That doesn't mean in the context you've gone into sin. It means that instead of holding fast to the fact that salvation is by grace, you've now fallen away from it because you're now saying that certain other things as well—your religious works—are necessary for salvation. You can't mix the two. It's either by grace or it's by your works. It can't be by both. And if you insist on it being by your works of the law, so to speak, you are not being saved by grace. You are not believers.

Notice the effect of doctrine then upon our relationship with Christ. 'You are severed from Christ. You are estranged from Christ.' Bad doctrine at this level is very serious. Many Protestants would tell you that you don't get salvation by keeping the Mass, and pride themselves that they don't go to Mass. The question is whether they have personally repented and received Christ. The real issue is not circumcision or uncircumcision, but a real vigorous, lively faith in Christ. That is the motive power behind the necessary following works.

Paul says that they have been running well but now they are in danger of being tripped up by this false teaching. 'A little leaven leavens the whole lump'—meaning that if you bring

in the slightest idea that by your meritorious work you deserve salvation, that ruins the lot. Then he adds this encouragement 'I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.'

People had spread this story about him — that Paul was inconsistent for he did circumcise Timothy, which showed that, at heart, he believed that salvation is by works as well as faith. (He did circumcise Timothy, as we have said before, but he didn't preach it as a means of salvation.) So Paul says 'If it were true that I still preach circumcision, why is it that I'm still persecuted everywhere I go' — that is, by the religious sect. And now he says something very severe, 'I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!' (see vv. 12). 'You keep on telling people that salvation is by circumcision, while claiming now to be free from the law.'

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' (vv. 13–14)

The doctrine of salvation by faith is not a licence to sin. It leads to good works, and provides the motive power for good works, as we shall see in the next argument. But as regards the law, it is not that we despise the law — let Romans 8 be a guide to us in this context.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:3–4)

Paul then says in the next verse, 'But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another' (5:15), which is a very healthy reminder for us to distinguish between the penalty of sin, and the consequences of sin. So let me point out what I mean by the difference between the penalty of sin and the consequences of sin. I am a true believer, I repented and put my faith in Christ, and I have eternal life, and I believe that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Marvellous truth — no condemnation and the penalty of sin gone forever.

Well, I'm out with a friend at a party, and it's been a marvellous party. I'm taking the air on the veranda of this hotel: the dining room is on the first floor. Alas, I have given in to temptation and I have had too much to drink. I'm more than a bit tipsy and I fall over the veranda, down on to the ground. Mercifully my life is spared, but my right leg is so smashed up that even the best surgeons in the world have to decide that the leg will have to come off. So I lose my right leg. Now I come to the Lord, and say, 'What a fool I was, Lord, I am sorry for this. I really knew it was wrong, but I yielded to temptation, and I did what is wrong. Please forgive me.' Yes, the Lord will forgive me, surely he will, and assure me I will still be in heaven, for there's no penalty. And then I'd say, 'Lord, life is difficult without this right leg, please make the right leg grow again.' Do you think he would? He might direct me to somebody who is very good at prosthetics, and could make me an artificial leg. It is most unlikely, I think, that God would do a miracle and restore the right leg. Well, he will do it one

day. You won't be hopping around glory on one leg, that's for sure. But for the time being, there are consequences of sin, and God may allow us to suffer them.

Be it said that God will then take those consequences—painful and lifelong as they may be—and use them to help educate us, and make us more like Christ, by the pain of it and the discipline of it. But just because we are justified by faith, and there's no penalty, be careful what happens in your assembly, won't you. For if you start biting and devouring one another, don't say, 'It doesn't matter because I'm going to heaven, and I have eternal life, and can never lose my salvation'—there are consequences and we shall meet them again.

Argument 11: Provision for holy living (5:13–6:10)

Then follows the long argument from verse 13 of chapter 5 onwards, down to the beginning of chapter 6. And the argument is that the doctrine of justification by faith, and salvation by faith does not provide us with a licence for sin. It does in fact provide for a holy life, and you will see what that answer is.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (vv. 16–18)

This is the provision of the Holy Spirit within us. Paul preaches it again in Romans 8, fairly strongly so, but it is part of Paul's argument here. Because you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law anymore. This is a different principle. You are not trying to live right in order to escape the damnation of hell. You're doing it because you are energized by God's Holy Spirit. This therefore is an argument still to show that the doctrine of justification and salvation by faith and not by works, is true.

Paul develops his description of the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the rest of that great paragraph. Notice what he has to say about those whose behaviour is a constant unrepentant indulgence in the works of the flesh. Verse 19: 'Now the works of the flesh are evident'—and he lists them; and then says, in the middle of verse 21, 'I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.' The Greek word which Paul uses carries the sense of doing something continually or repeatedly. He's talking about people therefore that indulge in this kind of behaviour and quite unrepentantly carry on doing it. Well, it's evident that they are not true believers. They are not born again. They do not have the Holy Spirit. They will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul contrasts this with the behaviour and lifestyle of those who are true believers:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. (5:22–6:1)

That doesn't mean that they are sinless, or that they never fall into sin, but their attitude towards the flesh and its works is that they agree with God that these things must be crucified. They believe that Christ died for them in order to save them from the penalty, and therefore positively and actively they take the attitude that these things must be crucified, dealt with. And when I fall into sin then I must confess it to God, and seek God's grace and help not to do it again. My personal attitude, and constant attitude must be that these things have to be crucified. It's a lifelong practice: we shall not be free of the exhortation to do it until we get home to glory.

Moreover, being led by the Spirit doesn't lead to conceitedness or putting on airs and graces, thinking we're better than other people. Even if someone is caught in a transgression, be careful how you treat him. Don't be too surprised—you won't if you consider yourself, for, if you were tempted, could you guarantee you wouldn't fall? The temptation might prove too much for you too. We need to show meekness and care for others, and to help them.

One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (6:6–10)

Appreciating and heeding what we have been taught leads to a sharing between believers. It leads to gratitude for what God has taught us and calls on us to help in the spread of that same gospel. Then we come again to the question of consequences—not penalty, but consequence. 'The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.' It's not a penalty, it's a consequence. 'But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.' You say, 'I got my eternal life as a gift.' Yes, so you did but this eternal life that you have, what on earth is it, and where do you keep it? It is a life, isn't it, and you see it in physical life that some men and women having a natural talent, put their back into it and develop that talent. There are others who had the talent, but can't be bothered, and they don't put their heart and soul into it, and waste their time and resources on trifling things. And they reap a very poor harvest from it. The same is true with the gift of eternal life. We cannot lose it if we're true believers. But it's a life to be exploited and developed. And if we sow to the Spirit, we have God's guarantee—who made the law of seedtime and harvest—that what we sow we shall reap. So let's do good to all.

Argument 12: Motives of the false teachers (6:11–18)

The final paragraph is the argument exposing the false motives of those who taught this false doctrine.

See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circumcised do not

themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

They do it 'that they may boast in your flesh' (v. 13). Notice this is the very last argument, not the first. Paul waits until he has proved it by Scripture, and called upon experience. It's the last argument, where now he impugns and criticizes the false motives of those who preached the wrong doctrine. But you say, 'Isn't Paul priding himself, and boasting about his gospel that he teaches?' Listen to his answer. 'Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 14). That is the means by which I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me. It's not to my credit. The thing that has separated me from this world and all its evil, is not my own attainment—in which I could boast—but it is the cross of Christ.

'From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear [branded] on my body the marks of Jesus Christ.' So he did, very literally. When he thought that salvation was by works, he didn't suffer: he persecuted others. When he found that salvation was by grace through faith, he never persecuted anybody again, but bore extraordinary persecution, suffering, and spent himself to a frazzle, to bring this free gift to others. He bore the marks of true apostleship.

Question session

Being very generous, I have left you not just ten minutes, but eleven minutes for questioning!

The law—a delight or a slavery?

Question one

Just from earlier, you were saying about how Peter and Paul both described being under the law as bondage, but yet whenever you read the Psalms, sometimes David describes the law as honey and sweet. So can you reconcile those for us?

DWG: Oh yes, quite so. One needn't deny that. And modernists who have called attention to it are right. The law that God laid down is a delightful way of doing things, is it not? Paul says in Romans 7, 'I agree with the law, that it is good' (v. 16); '[It] is holy and righteous and good' (v. 12); 'I delight in the law of God, in my inner being' (v. 22). Witness the Old Testament: multitudes of Jews just broke the law, but even the godly, who rejoiced in the law, still sinned. Then how did they find salvation? Listen to Daniel confessing his sins, listen to David confessing his sins, watch Moses lose his temper and strike the rock; the law giver himself, and as a consequence, was not allowed to lead Israel into Canaan. He'll be in heaven of course: it didn't affect his salvation. But then it became a bondage, a slavery.

Question two

I was also thinking of Paul's experience in Romans 7, when he talks about the law slaying him. I've never really understood at what point in Paul's life that was happening. He didn't really seem repentant whenever the Lord met him on the Damascus Road. It seemed at that stage, he would still have felt he was fulfilling the law, and it was maybe only after that experience that he started to see how much the law affected him. So, is it after the Damascus Road really that Romans 7 would be Paul's experience? Maybe you can't really answer, but I'm only wondering.

DWG: Well, it was certainly written after the Damascus Road experience. How much was it his experience after he became a believer? Now, I personally think that that question, though a historically and interestingly important question, is not perhaps the first order question to be asked because this is in the part of Romans where Paul is explaining the gospel, and how God saves us from the wreckage of Adam's sin. So he comes around to what is the point of the law, and the point that he cites now is that the law, however much you try to do it, will not deliver you. 'I delight in the law of God — that is my aesthetic judgment. It's a sensible way to live, it's beautiful. The things that I want to do, that is his will. Intelligently the wrong I do, I know not; meaning I don't agree with it. Intellect, heart, aesthetics, will, all combined, oh wretched man that I am,' says Paul. That is not enough. What is enough is God's provision through the Holy Spirit, and he sums it up in this way:

But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (Rom 7:6)

Those are the terms of the new covenant. The old covenant was written on tables of stone. The new covenant is written by the spirit of God on the tables of the heart. And the difference is between trying to keep the law by your own unaided effort and being empowered to keep it by the Holy Spirit dwelling within.

That I think, is the doctrinal side. On the practical side, then I think it is true of us all—well it's true of me anyway—that we live in two worlds, if not at once, then alternately. It is easy for us to lapse into behaving as though it were our effort merely that enabled us by sheer dint of will to keep God's law as we should keep it, whereas our most serious exercise of willpower will not suffice, or at least certainly won't suffice by itself. The provision God has made for us is the power of the Holy Spirit writing the laws on our hearts and on our minds.

The consequences of sin in eternity

Question three

In your discussion about the penalty and the consequences of sin, you talked about yielding to temptation and falling off a balcony and losing your leg, and you said, 'But of course that leg will be restored to me in the future.' Could you discuss the physical consequences of sin as well as the spiritual consequences of sin in our lives, and the difference between them? And the physical consequences of sin, will it be that it'll all be restored back to us when we get new bodies? And what happens to the spiritual consequences of sin?

DWG: You've asked a very, very important question! I was talking there, as you rightly say, about the physical consequences. The illustration I gave is a physical thing that will be put

right: we shall have new bodies. And likewise believers who are mangled under torture will get new bodies. But what about the spiritual thing? Let me talk within this context and with baited breath. I think there are spiritual consequences that are eternal.

Peter says (see 2 Pet 1) that God's divine power has given us all that is necessary for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us. But alongside that, we are to use all diligence to add certain qualities to our faith, and:

if you practise these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom. (vv. 10–11)

I take it the emphasis is on the adverb *richly*. Entrance into the eternal kingdom, mere entrance, if I may put it that way, is based for all believers alike, on the blood of Christ.

Blessed are those who wash their robes [that is, in the blood of Christ], so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. (Rev 22:14)

The dying thief, who hadn't the chance to add anything, was granted to be with Christ in paradise that night.

Peter is making the point about the difference between sheer entrance and an entrance richly. To have an abundant, a rich entry, Peter makes dependent on not merely belief, but on adding these things so that we shall be fully grown up, to use another term. The believer that is neglectful to add these things and doesn't make progress when he or she could, will be saved of course—they will enter. But what if somebody says, 'Oh you must be talking nonsense because the Bible says that when we see him we shall be like him.' When we see him as he is: yes, every believer will be like Christ. But then let me add, to clarify what I really think in my own heart, we shall all be like Christ—what there is of us. You can be a believer and be careless to add all these qualities to your character, and never attempt to serve the Lord—you're saved and you'll never perish, so why bother? Well, if you're genuinely saved, yes you'll be in heaven. But compare that to the dear man or woman who for the last fifty-six years has served Christ, has attempted to add by the grace of the Holy Spirit these qualities, and develop a Christian character, and even in this life is seen to be a great saint of God. To suppose there will be no difference between that person and the Christian who has just wasted his life and not troubled to add anything, I find difficult to accept. I think there will be spiritual consequences.

We should all be like Christ. In a family you might see four children, one is seventeen, the other is thirteen, the other is eleven, the other is six. If you look at them carefully you can see a family likeness, but one has grown up a bit more than the others and is able to do more things. The youngster is still playing with toys on the carpet. The older chap is helping to run the family business. They're all like their parents, but some have grown and are more capable of more things. That there will be difference in reward for work done is explicitly stated. That there will be differences in maturity of character, and growth of character, I think is stated just as explicitly in 2 Peter 1.

Does that seem to be seriously false doctrine? It's a very important question to be faced. You might like to go away and think about it, and if you think that I have erred from the truth,

the next time—if there ever were a next time—when I would be invited to come along to this seminar, you could raise it again. Put in an advance question to the chairman, to make sure I face it and answer it! Or in the spirit of Galatians 6, seeing me overtaken in a fault, you could, in the spirit of meekness, come and help me get out of the fault!

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He has published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.