

## THE SEVEN GREAT WORDS OF GALATIANS

(References from the Revised Version)

1. REVELATION – 1:12, 16 and 2:2
2. LIBERATION – 2:4 and 5:1-13
3. JUSTIFICATION – 2:16
4. CRUCIFIXION – 2:20, 5:24, 6:14
5. UNIFICATION – 3:28
6. TRANSFORMATION – 4:19
7. IDENTIFICATION – 6:17

The Apostle Paul travelled through Galatia on his second Missionary journey, recorded in Acts 16:6, and again on his third journey three years later, Acts 18:23. He refers to his first preaching the Gospel with them when he wrote subsequent to those visits. It seems that on his second one something quite alarming happened to his facial appearance, possibly to do with his eyes. It obviously caused him great concern and he was thankful that the new converts did not despise or reject him because of it, Galatians 4:12-15. There is a practical lesson here. It is that God can overrule in blessing despite seeming setbacks! It is also evident that he detected a change in atmosphere and beliefs among the saints – 1:7. He refers to the preaching of “*another (different) gospel*”, perverting or twisting around the gospel of Christ. In 3:3 he speaks of “*works of the spirit done in the flesh.*” He is concerned about their emphasis on the law, the observance of “*days, months, seasons and years*” – 4:10, and in 5:2 their reliance on circumcision. All of this he summarises in his comment “*O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth*” – 3:1. The apostle therefore sets out to correct this deviation from the true gospel by establishing his apostolic authority. This takes up practically the whole of the introduction to his letter.

The key word to this is REVELATION. He refers to it in 1:12, 16 and 2:2. In the three accounts of his conversion in the Acts there is no suggestion of his receiving any instructions about the gospel from Ananias. Verse 12 states quite

clearly that he did not receive any details of the gospel "from men". In Ephesians 3:3-6 he speaks of "*the mystery of Christ given by revelation...*" The word 'revelation' is translated from 'apokalupsis', which means to unveil or uncover, ('apo' from 'halup' to uncover - the use here is objective and refers to something presented to the senses, sight or hearing - W.E. Vine). If we understand by the gospel, as preached by the Apostle, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ this, he received by revelation.

*"I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you..."*

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 when he wrote to the Roman believers he used the same word; "*I am not ashamed of the gospel...for therein is revealed the righteousness of God by faith...*" - 1:16-17. In Ephesians 3:3-5 he states the same truth "*...you have heard...of the grace of God which was given me to you; how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery...the mystery of Christ.*" The Apostle Paul therefore stands out uniquely apart from the other inspired writers in this underscoring of direct revelations from God. We know, too, of his account of the 'in or out' of his body experience in 2 Corinthians 12:1-7 which may or may not be directly connected to these references in Galatians. It was upon this solid and incontrovertible foundation that he challenges and sets in order the errors they had been espoused.

On a practical level there is an interesting reference to 'revelation' in Philippians 3:14-16. "*...I press toward the goal of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect (mature), be thus minded, and if in anything ye are otherwise minded, even this God shall reveal it unto you.*" Believers are to pursue the same objective as the Apostle, that is, looking forward and not back. If they would be tempted to dwell on a lower level and desist from pressing forward to the goal, God would reveal the truth to them even if eventually it meant chastening. This seems to be the import of Hebrews 12:5-11, where the goal is "*partakers of his holiness*" The method of this revelation will not come through visions and dreams but by the Holy Spirit's intervention through the Word of God.

The second great word is embodied in the truth of LIBERATION. In 2:4 he talks about "*our liberty in Christ*". He continues the theme in chapter 5, which

commences with the word *“freedom”*, defending it in a most robust way. *“... stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage”*... *“you were running well; who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth”* and *“he that troubleth you all bear his judgment, whosoever he be”* – 1:7, 10. The first three verses of this chapter are in one sense the key to understanding the main message of his letter. In a nutshell it is not a matter of ritual but of faith. Faith in the Son of God and their incorporation into Him, through His death, burial and resurrection. This is the basis of the new Covenant and there could be no thought of reverting to the rites and restrictions of the Old one. Hebrew 1:1-6 teaches that *“Christ as a Son over his own house”* is superior to *“Moses as a servant over his house”*. And so in 2:13 there is the call to ‘liberty’. To serve God, not according to the letter of the law but in the energy and fullness of the Spirit. We remind ourselves of the injunction of the Apostle to the Roman believers *“But now, we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were holden, so that we serve the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter”* – Romans 7:6.

Our third word is JUSTIFICATION. The great truth the apostle propounds here he enlarges on when he come to write the letter to the Christians in Rome - *“Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law: for by the law shall no flesh be justified”* – 2:16.

Justification is an objective truth. It originates in God, and rests on His immutability and unchanging character. It is the act of God in removing from the believing sinner the penalty of death due to his sin and imparting to him the righteousness of His Son. In other words God sees us perfect and complete in Christ. Twice over, in Acts 22:14 and 1 John 2:1 the Lord Jesus is called the ‘Righteous One’ and the apostle Paul tells the Corinthian believers that *“Christ Jesus was made unto us wisdom from God and RIGHTEOUSNESS ...”* - 1 Corinthians 1:30. The truth of the matter is that God in Christ has forgiven all, has cancelled all and has forgotten all! This is the ground of the believers’ triumph. The saving work of Christ, closes every mouth, dismisses every accusation and ignores every threat that can be brought against us. There is

no other standard by which saved sinners can stand before Him. It is not in any sense *"of works lest any man should boast"*. The performing of good works results from the workmanship of God in the believers' life - Ephesians 2:9-10.

The fourth word is CRUCIFIXION. *"I have been crucified with Christ..."* - 2:20. What a statement! What did He mean? In Romans 6:8 He says, *"If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him"*. The tenses indicate something that happened in the past and would be completed in the future. But how far back do we go? Some to a baptism that they say makes us inheritors of the Kingdom of God, but that surely contradicts the teaching of this epistle. Some believe that it happened at the moment of conversion when eternal life was imparted. I think, however, that the apostle went farther back - back to Calvary! When the Lord Jesus cried, *"It is finished."* He meant this in the fullest possible sense. It encompassed all those who had and would trust Him by faith. He looked back and forward down the ages and saw it all accomplished. He called it His baptism (Luke 12:50). And in that baptism all believers are included. To personalise it; when He died I died in Him; when He was buried I was buried in Him and when he was resurrected so was I! If this is so, it means that when I trusted Christ and commenced to walk in *"newness of life"* (Romans 6:4) I came into the good of all that He accomplished in His death, burial and resurrection. My baptism by immersion in water was my public identification with Christ in His baptism and an act of obedience to Him as He had commanded. Finally the apostle sees this crucifixion as having important on going implications. In 6:14 he sees not one but three crucifixions; His Lord's, his own and the world's. What a challenge to us who are united to Christ.

Word number five is UNIFICATION. *"Ye are all one (man) in Christ Jesus"* - 3:28. Jew, Gentile; bond, free; male and female are listed. This does not do away with nationality or gender. Rather it puts all categories of believers on the same basis and on the same level - equally one in Christ. This is an indissoluble union it can never be ruptured or annulled. The hymn writer has caught the true meaning:

*'Once in Christ, in Christ for ever, thus the eternal covenant stands'*

In John 10:27-28 the good Shepherd announces the terms of being one of His sheep. *"I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."* The uniqueness of this unity He expresses and emphasises further to His disciples, *"If any man love me he will keep my word: and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him"* - John 14:23. The same apostle in the introduction to his first letter links this to the idea of fellowship, partnership or communion; *"that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ"* - 1 John 1:3. As we listen to the very heartthrob of the Son to the Father in His intercessory prayer, we realise what the continuing unity of His own meant to Him. While they could never be separated as to their position in Him, there could be a disruption in fellowship and that could be only of benefit to *"the evil one"* hence the prayers intensity; *"Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we are"* - John 17:11.

Our penultimate word is TRANSFORMATION. *"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you"* - 4:19. This is the high water mark of Christian living. It is a blessed fact to be IN Christ, but to have Christ FORMED in us is quite another matter. W.E. Vine in his Dictionary of New Testament words explains; *'this refers not to the external and transient, but to the inward and real...it expresses the necessity of a change in character and conduct to correspond with inward spiritual condition, so that there may be moral conformity to Christ'*. It is important to note the word UNTIL. The apostle does not say *'might'*. He is confident that this transformation can take place, but at the cost of his continued intervention and intercession in spiritual birth pains. It entails anxiety, labour and wrestling in prayer for them. This begs the question, who is doing this for US now?

Many of us have had spiritual mentors, those who have *"watched for our souls"* - Hebrews 13:17. Perhaps this goes some way in finding an answer. But we know, too, that *"the Spirit himself maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God"* - Romans 8:26-27.

Our final great word is IDENTIFICATION. *"I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus"* – 6:17. It seems best to take this text literally and see these as physical scars, the evidence of vicious thrashings at the hands of the enemies of his Lord. Acts 16:23 refers to *"many stripes"*, 2 Corinthians 6:5 *"in stripes"* and in 11.25 *"thrice was I beaten with rods"*. As in this first century so the persecution of those who identify themselves as believers in the One true God and His Son Jesus Christ continues with unrelenting fury. This is an area of Christian profession that we who live in freedom should feel very uncomfortable with.

2 Timothy 2:12 tells us plainly that *"if we suffer (endure) with him we shall also reign with him: if we shall deny him, he also will deny us."* I often ask myself; is God partial? In other words, why have some places in our world, notably in what we call 'the West', been spared physical and psychological persecutions while for millions of other believers in many lands it has been and is still their common lot? If we consider carefully and prayerfully the present condition of our so-called free world we can only conclude that there are dark clouds on the horizon. Restrictions on Christian teaching and testimony are now gaining a frightening momentum. The intensity of evil and sheer Godlessness is bound soon to reap a harvest of judgment. A correct reference is often made to the imminent return of the Lord Jesus for His Church; is it possible that before He gives the 'shout' we too, here in free and favoured countries, may have to face an onslaught of suffering shame for His name? Something I think we should ponder!

*'Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease,  
while others fought to win the prize and sailed through stormy seas?'*

DREW CRAIG