

Martin Luther



A COMMENTARY ON SAINT PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS 1535

From the preface to this old, but precise translation:

The original edition of this Commentary - in Latin, like the lectures on which it was based - was prepared for the press by George Rörer, one of Luther's most assiduous and reliable reporters, with some assistance from Veit Dietrich and more from Caspar Cruciger. These are the 'brethren' to whom Luther refers in his Preface. All three had attended the lectures in 1531, and Rörer, at any rate, had taken very full notes (in an abbreviated script of his own) on the whole course. These notes are printed above the published text of the Commentary in the Weimar edition of Luther's works, and they are occasionally cited in the footnotes of the present volume, where they are referred to as 'Rörer's MS.' They show, incidentally, that the course began on July 3rd and ended on December 12th, and that there were forty-one lectures in all. The whole of the published text is based on these notes, except for the exposition of Galatians 5:6, which derives from a manuscript of Luther's own that was made available to Rörer, although it was not written specifically for this Commentary. At the end of July 1532, Rörer began to write out the lectures, consulting Dietrich and Cruciger from time to time to check his accuracy. Early in 1534 the work was in the hands of the printer, and a year later it was published. A second, revised edition followed in 1538, and a German version in 1539.

More than thirty years later, in 1575, the first English edition was published, the translation being based on the second Latin edition. In 1577 it was 'diligently revised, corrected, and newly imprinted againe,' and two more printings followed before the century was out. All subsequent English editions, with one exception, appear to have been either reproductions or abridgments of the sixteenth-century translation. The best known of them is the so-called 'Middleton' edition, first published in 1807, which was reprinted six or seven times during the nineteenth century, and furnished the text for J.P. Fallowes'

abridgment in 1939. It takes its name from the fact that it is prefaced by a 'Life of the Author and a complete and impartial history of the times in which he lived, by the late Rev. Erasmus Middleton, B.D., Rector of Turvey, Bedfordshire.' Middleton was an Evangelical clergyman of the Church of England, who died in 1805. His 'Life' of Luther had been published in the first volume of his *Biographia Evangelica* in 1769. It is not clear by whom the 1807 edition of Luther's Galatians was prepared for the press, but its general character suggests a not too skillful modernization (in respect of spelling, punctuation and so forth) of a considerably older text, without any reference to the Latin original.

In the preparation of the present edition an original 'Middleton' has been used, together with a black letter edition of 1616, which was the earliest available; and *the entire text has been compared with the original Latin*. It would have been too long and costly an undertaking to produce a completely new, modern translation, and there was in any case much to be said for retaining the style of the Elizabethan translators, who were at least as close to Luther in spirit as in time, and who spoke English as he would have spoken it if it had been his native tongue. If their rendering of the Latin is not entirely literal, it is often more nearly so than modern speech would allow, and it retains much more of the pungent flavor of the original.

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LUTHER'S PREFACE

I myself can hardly believe I was as verbose when I lectured on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, as this volume indicates. But since I recognize as mine all the thoughts which the brethren have taken such pains to set down in it, I am forced to admit that I said as much and perhaps even more. *For the one doctrine which I have supremely at heart, is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night.* Not that I find I have grasped anything of a wisdom so high, so broad and so profound, beyond a few meager rudiments and fragments; and I am ashamed that my poor, uninspired comments on so great an Apostle and chosen instrument of God should be published. Yet I am compelled to forget my shame and be quite shameless in view of the horrible profanation and abomination which have always raged in the Church of God, and still rage to-day, against this, *one solid rock* which we call *the doctrine of justification*. I mean the doctrine that we are *redeemed* from sin, death and the devil, and made partakers of eternal life, not by ourselves (and certainly not by our works, which are less than ourselves), but *by the help of another*, the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ.

This rock was shaken by Satan in Paradise, when he persuaded our first parents that they might by their own wisdom and power become like God,

abandoning faith in God, who had given them life and promised its continuance. Shortly afterwards, that liar and murderer (always true to himself) incited a brother to murder his brother, for no other reason than that the latter, a godly man, had offered by faith a more excellent sacrifice, while he himself, being ungodly, had offered his own works without faith and had not pleased God. After this there followed a ceaseless and intolerable persecution of this same faith by Satan through the sons of Cain, until God was compelled to purge the world and defend Noah, the preacher of righteousness, by means of the Flood. 'Nevertheless, Satan continued his work in Ham, the third son of Noah, and in others too many to mention. Thereafter the whole world acted like a madman against this faith, inventing innumerable idols and religions with which everyone (as St. Paul says) went his own way, hoping to placate a God or goddess, gods or goddesses, by his own works; that is, hoping without *the external [alieno] aid of Christ* and by his own works to redeem himself from evils and sins. All this is sufficiently evidenced by the doings and writings of all nations.

But these are nothing in comparison with that people of God, Israel, or the Synagogue, who were blessed beyond all others, not only with the sure promise given to the Fathers and with the Law given by God through angels, but also with the constant testimony of the words, miracles and examples of the prophets. Yet even among them, Satan (I.e. the fury of self-righteousness) had such success that after killing all the prophets they killed the very Son of God himself, their promised Messiah; and all for the same reason, namely, that they taught that we men are received into the favor of God by the grace of God, not by our own righteousness. This is the sum of the doctrine of the devil and the world from the beginning: 'We will not appear to do evil, but whatever we do, God must approve of it and all his prophets must agree. If they do not, let them die. Let Abel perish and Cain live. Let this be our law.' And so it is.

In the Church of the Gentiles, however, things have been and are even worse, so that the madness of the Synagogue may well seem mere child's play in comparison. For the Jews, as St. Paul says, did not know their Messiah; otherwise they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But the Church of the Gentiles has accepted Christ and confesses him to be the Son of God, who has been made our righteousness; and this it publicly sings, reads and teaches. Yet despite this confession, those who claim to be the Church kill, persecute and rage against those who believe and teach by word and deed nothing else but that Christ is precisely what they themselves are compelled (though insincerely) to confess him to be. For they are in power to-day under the name of Christ; but if they could keep their power without the name of Christ, they would openly declare him to be what in their hearts they think him. They have a far lower opinion of him than the Jews, who at least take him for a thola, a thief who deserved his crucifixion, whereas our people regard him as a fable, like some invented God of the heathen, as can be seen at Rome in the Papal Curia and almost everywhere in Italy.

Since, therefore, Christ is made a mockery among his Christians (for so they wish to be called), and Cain kills Abel continually and the abomination of Satan now reigns supreme, it is necessary to pay the very closest heed to this doctrine, and to oppose Satan with it, whether we are eloquent or not, learned or not. For if all men kept silence, this rock ought to be proclaimed by tile very rocks and stones themselves. Hence I am willing to do my duty and let this extremely verbose Commentary be published in order to stir up my brethren in Christ against the wiles and malice of Satan, who in these last days has become so infuriated at the recovery of the sound knowledge of Christ, that whereas it has hitherto seemed as if men were possessed by demons and raving mad, it now seems as if the demons themselves are possessed by worse demons and raving with a more than demonic madness – which strongly suggests that the Enemy of truth and life feels the Day of Judgment to be imminent; a dreadful day of destruction for him, but a lovely day of redemption and the end of his tyranny for us.

For he has reason to be alarmed, when all his members and his powers are so assailed, just as a thief or adulterer is alarmed when the dawn breaks upon him and he is caught in his act.

For, leaving aside the abominations of the Pope, whoever heard of such an outbreak of monsters as we see to-day in the Anabaptists alone? Truly, in them Satan is stirring up his own everywhere with frightful commotions, as if he were intent on breathing out the last blast of his kingdom, and were seeking all of a sudden, not only to subvert the whole world with seditions, but also to swallow up completely Christ and his Church through innumerable sects. He does not vent such rage on other kinds of life or thought, like those of adulterers, thieves, murderers, perjurers, the ungodly, the sacrilegious, the unbelieving. On the contrary, he keeps them in peace in his court, pampering and indulging them in everything. Just as in the earliest days of the Church he not only tolerated but splendidly supported all the idolatries and religions of the whole world, while he everywhere harassed the Church and religion of Christ, so to-day he has no other concern than the one that is always peculiarly his own, to persecute Christ (who is, our righteousness without any works of ours) as it is written: 'Thou shalt bruise his heel.' But these thoughts of mine on this Epistle are being published not so much against these people as for our people, who will either thank me for my pains or pardon my weakness and temerity. I have certainly no wish that the impious should approve of them, but rather that they and their God

should be irritated by them; for I produced them (with much toil) only for such as those to whom St. Paul himself wrote his Epistle – the troubled, afflicted and tempted (who alone understand these things), wretched Galatians in the faith. Those who are not such may listen to the Papists, monks, Anabaptists and all the other masters of infinite wisdom and religion, heartily despising what we say and do, without even caring to understand it.

For the Papists and Anabaptists are to-day agreed on this one point against the Church of God (even if their words disguise it), namely, that the work of God depends on the worthiness of the person. According to the Anabaptists, baptism is nothing unless the person is a believer. From this principle (as it is called) it must follow that all the works of God are nothing if man is not good. If baptism, which is a work of God, ceases to be a work of God when man is evil, it follows that the married state, the office of a magistrate, and the station of a servant, which are works of God, are no longer works of God because men are evil. The ungodly have the sun, moon, earth, water, air, and all that is subject to man; yet since they are not godly, it must follow that the sun is not the sun, and moon, earth, water, air, are not what they are. The Anabaptists themselves had bodies and souls before they were re-baptized, but because they were not godly, they had not real bodies and souls. Similarly, their parents were not really married – as they admit – because they were not re-baptized, and therefore the Anabaptists themselves are all illegitimate and their parents were adulterers and fornicators. Yet they inherit their parents' property, although they admit themselves to be illegitimate and without right of inheritance.

Who cannot see here in the Anabaptists, not men possessed by demons, but demons themselves possessed by worse demons? So also the Papists still to this day insist on works and the worthiness of the person, contrary to grace, thus giving strong support (in words at least) to their brethren the Anabaptists. For these foxes are tied together by the tails, even though their heads look in opposite directions. While they outwardly profess to be great enemies, inwardly they think, teach and defend one and the same thing against our one and only Savior Christ, who alone is our righteousness. Let him who can, then, hold fast to this one article; and let the rest, who make shipwreck, be driven by the wind and waves until they either return to the ship or swim to the shore. But more about the Anabaptists another time, if the Lord Christ wills. Amen. [The foregoing formed the preface to the first edition (1535). In the second edition (1538) and subsequent editions, the following paragraphs were added after 'swim to the shore.'] The sum and end of the complaint is that there is no hope of peace or an end of complaint so long as Christ and Belial do not agree. One generation passes, another comes. If one heresy dies, another springs up, for the devil neither slumbers nor sleeps. I myself – although I am nothing – who have now been in the ministry of Christ for twenty years, can testify that I have been attacked by more than twenty sects, of which some have entirely perished, while others still show signs of life, like parts of dismembered insects.

But Satan, that God of all factious men, daily raises up new sects, and the latest is one which I should least of all have foreseen or expected. I mean those who teach that the Ten Commandments ought to be taken out of the Church, and that men ought not to be put in fear of the Law, but sweetly exhorted by the grace of Christ; that the saying of the prophet Micah might be fulfilled, that no man should reprove another: 'Thou shalt not drop upon us.' As if we did not know, or had never taught, that afflicted and contrite spirits are to be raised up through Christ, but that hard-hearted Pharaohs to whom the grace of God is preached in vain, must be put in fear of the Law. Why, they themselves are compelled to invent revelations of wrath against the wicked and unbelieving – as if the Law were or could be something other than a revelation of Wrath! Such is the blindness and pride of those self-condemned men.

Ministers of the Word, therefore, if they would be counted faithful and prudent on the Day of Christ, ought to be very sure that St. Paul did not speak empty words or prophesy of a thing of nought, when he said: 'There must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. Let the minister of Christ know, I say, that as long as he preaches Christ purely, there will be no lack of perverse persons, even among our own people, who will make it their business to cause trouble in the Church. And he may comfort himself with the thought that there is no peace between Christ and Belial, or between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent. Indeed, he may rejoice in the trouble he is caused by sects and the constant succession of seditious spirits. For this is our glory, the testimony of our conscience that we are found standing and fighting on the side of the Seed of the woman against the seed of the Serpent. Let him bite our heel and never cease biting; we for our part will not cease to crush his head through Christ, the first to crush it, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTORY

I HAVE taken in hand, in the name of the Lord, yet once again to expound this Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians: not because I do desire to teach new things, or such as ye have not heard before, especially since that, by the grace of God, Paul is now thoroughly known unto you: but for that (as I have often forewarned you) this we have to fear as the greatest and nearest danger, lest Satan take from us the pure doctrine of faith, and bring into the Church again the doctrine of works and men's traditions.

Wherefore it is very necessary, that this doctrine be kept in continual practice and public exercise both of reading and hearing. And although it be never so well known, never so exactly learned, yet the devil our adversary, who continually rangeth about seeking to devour us, is not dead; likewise our flesh and old man is yet alive; besides this, all kinds of temptations vex and oppress us on every side. Wherefore this doctrine can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough. If this doctrine be lost, then is also the whole knowledge of truth, life and salvation lost and gone. If this doctrine flourishes, then all good things flourish, religion, the true service of God, the glory of God, the right knowledge of all things and states of life. Because therefore we would be occupied and not idle, we will there begin now where we made an end, according to the saying of the son of Sirak: 'When a man hath done what he can, he must begin again' (Ecclus. 18:6).

THE ARGUMENT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

First of all it behooveth that we speak of the argument of this Epistle: that is to say, what matter St. Paul here chiefly treateth of. The argument therefore is this.

St. Paul goeth about to establish the doctrine of faith, grace, forgiveness of sins, or Christian righteousness, to the end that we may have a perfect knowledge and difference between Christian righteousness and all other kinds of righteousness. For there be divers sorts of righteousness. There is a political or civil righteousness, which emperors, princes of the world, philosophers and lawyers deal withal. There is also a ceremonial righteousness, which the traditions of men do teach. This righteousness parents and schoolmasters may teach without danger, because they do not attribute unto it any power to satisfy for sin, to placate God, or to deserve grace: but they teach such ceremonies as are only necessary for the correction of manners, and certain observations concerning this life.

Besides these, there is another righteousness called the righteousness of the law, or of the Ten Commandments, which Moses teaches. This do we also teach *after* the doctrine of faith.

There is yet another righteousness which is above all these: to wit, the righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness, the which we must diligently discern from the other afore-rehearsed: for they are quite contrary to this righteousness, both because they flow out of the laws of emperors, the traditions of the Pope, and the commandments of God, and also because they consist in our works, and may be wrought of us either by our pure natural strength (as the sophisters term it) or else by the gift of God. For these kinds of righteousness are also of the gift of God, like as other good things are which we do enjoy.

But this most excellent righteousness, of faith I mean (which God through Christ, without works, *imputeth unto us*), is neither political nor ceremonial, nor the righteousness of God's law, nor consisteth in our works, but is clean contrary: that is to say, a *mere passive* righteousness, as the other above are *active*. For in this we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only *we receive and suffer another to work in us*, that is to say, God. Therefore it seemeth good unto me to call this righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, *the passive righteousness*.

This is a righteousness hidden in a mystery, which the world doth not know, yea, Christians themselves do not thoroughly understand it, and can hardly take hold of it in their temptations. Therefore it must be diligently taught and continually practiced. And whoso doth not understand or apprehend this righteousness in afflictions and terrors of conscience, must needs be overthrown. For there is no comfort of conscience so firm and so sure, as this passive righteousness is.

But man's weakness and misery is so great, that in the terrors of conscience and danger of death, we behold nothing else but our works, our worthiness and the law: which when it sheweth unto us our sin, by and by our evil life past cometh to remembrance. Then the poor sinner with great anguish of spirit groaneth, and thus thinketh with himself: 'Alas! How desperately have I lived! Would to God I might live longer: then would I amend my life.' Thus man's reason cannot restrain itself from the sight and beholding of this active or working righteousness, that is to say, her own righteousness: nor lift up her eyes to the beholding of the passive or Christian righteousness, but resteth altogether in the active righteousness: so deeply is this evil rooted in us.

On the other side, Satan abusing the infirmity of our nature, doth increase and aggravate these cogitations in us. Then can it not be but that the poor conscience must be more grievously troubled, terrified and confounded.

For it is impossible that the mind of man itself should conceive any comfort, or look up unto grace only, in the feeling and horror of sin, or constantly reject all disputing and reasoning about works. For this is far above man's strength and capacity, yea and above the law of God also.

True it is, that of all things in the world, the law is most excellent: yet is it not able to quiet a troubled conscience, but increaseth terrors, and driveth it to desperation; for by the commandment sin is made exceeding sinful (Romans 7:13) Wherefore the afflicted and troubled conscience hath no remedy against desperation and eternal death, unless it take hold of the promise of grace freely offered in Christ, that is to say, this passive righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness. Which if it can apprehend, then may it be at quiet and boldly say: I seek not the active or working righteousness, although I know that I ought to have it, and also to fulfill it. But be it so that I had it, and did fulfill it indeed, yet notwithstanding I cannot trust unto it, neither dare I set it against the judgment of God. Thus I abandon myself from all active righteousness, both of mine own and of God's law, and embrace only that *passive righteousness, which is the righteousness of grace, mercy and forgiveness of sins*. Briefly, [I rest only upon] the righteousness of Christ and of the Holy Ghost, *which we do not, but suffer, and have not, but receive*; God the Father freely giving it unto us through Jesus Christ.

Like as the earth engendereth not rain, nor is able by her own strength, labor and travail to procure the same, but receiveth it of the mere gift of God from above: so this heavenly righteousness is given us of God without our works or descryings. As much therefore as the earth of itself is able to do in getting and procuring to itself seasonable showers of rain to make it fruitful, even so much are we men able to do by our strength and works in winning this heavenly and eternal righteousness; and therefore we shall never be able to attain unto it, unless God himself by mere imputation and by his unspeakable gift do bestow it upon us. The greatest knowledge, then, and the greatest wisdom of Christians is, not to know the law, to be ignorant of works and of the whole active righteousness, especially when the conscience wrestleth with the judgment of God. Like as on the contrary, amongst those which are not of the number of God's people, the greatest point of wisdom is, to know and earnestly to urge the law, works, and the active righteousness.

But it is a thing very strange and unknown to the world, to teach Christians to learn to be ignorant of the law, and so to live before God, as if there were no law: notwithstanding, except thou be ignorant of the law, and be assuredly persuaded in thine heart that there is now no law nor wrath of God, but altogether grace and mercy for Christ's sake, thou canst not be saved; for by the law cometh the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

Contrariwise, works and the keeping of the law must be so straitly required in the world, as if there were no promise or grace; and that because of the stubborn, proud and hard-hearted, before whose eyes nothing must be set but the law, that they may be terrified and humbled. For the law is given to terrify and kill such, and to exercise the old man; and both the word of grace and of wrath must be rightly divided, according to the Apostle (Timothy 2:25 f.).

Here is then required a wise and faithful disposer of the Word of God, which can so moderate the law, that it may be kept within his bounds. He that teacheth that men are justified before God by the observation of the law, passeth the bounds of the law, and confoundeth these two kinds of righteousness, active and passive, and is but an ill logician, for he doth not rightly divide. Contrariwise, he that setteth forth the law and works to the old man, and the promise of forgiveness of sins and God's mercy to the new man, divideth the Word well. For the flesh or the old man must be coupled with the law and works: the spirit or new man must be joined with the promise of God and his mercy. Wherefore when I see a man that is bruised enough already, oppressed with the law, terrified with sin, and thirsting for comfort, it is time that I should remove out of his sight the law and active righteousness, and that should set before him by the Gospel the Christian and passive righteousness, which excluding Moses with his law, offereth the promise made in Christ, who came for the afflicted and for sinners. Here is man raised up again and conceiveth good hope, neither is he any longer under the law, but under grace (Romans 6:14). How not under the law? According to the new man, to whom the law doth not appertain. For the law hath his bounds unto Christ, as Paul saith afterwards: 'The end of the law is Christ' (Galatians 3:24; Romans 10:4); who being come, Moses ceaseth with his law, circumcision, the sacrifices, the Sabbaths, yea and all the prophets.

This is our divinity, whereby we teach how to *put a difference between these two kinds of righteousness, active and passive*: to the end that manners and faith, works and grace, policy and religion should not be confounded, or taken the one for the other. *Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their bounds*: Christian righteousness appertaineth to the new man, and the righteousness of the law appertaineth to the old man, which is born of flesh and blood. Upon this old man, as upon an ass, there must be laid a burden that may press him down, and he must not enjoy the freedom of the Spirit, or grace, except he first put upon him the new man by faith in Christ (which notwithstanding is not fully done in this life); then may he enjoy the kingdom and unspeakable gift of

grace.

This I say to the end that no man should think we reject or forbid good works, as the Papists do most falsely slander us, neither understanding what they themselves say, nor what we teach. They know nothing but the righteousness of the law, and yet they will judge of that doctrine which is far above the law, of which it is impossible that the carnal man should be able to judge. Therefore they must needs be offended, for they can see no higher than the law. Whatsoever then is above the law, is to them a great offense.

But we imagine as it were two worlds, the one heavenly and the other earthly. In these we place these two kinds of righteousness, being separate the one far from the other. The righteousness of the law is earthly and hath to do with earthly things, and by it we do good works. But as the earth bringeth not forth fruit except first it be watered and made fruitful from above (for the earth cannot judge, renew and rule the heaven, but contrariwise the heaven judgeth, reneweth, ruleth and maketh fruitful the earth, that it may do what the Lord hath commanded): even so by the righteousness of the law, in doing many things we do nothing, and in fulfilling of the law we fulfill it not, except first, without any merit or work of ours, we be made righteous by the Christian righteousness, which nothing appertaineth to the righteousness of the law, or to the earthly and active righteousness. But this righteousness is heavenly and passive: which we have not of ourselves, but receive it from heaven: which we work not, but *apprehend it by faith*; whereby we mount up above all laws and works.

Wherefore like as we have borne (as St. Paul saith) the image of the earthly Adam, so let us bear the image of the heavenly (1 Corinthians 15:49), which is the new man in a new world, where is no law, no sin, no sting of conscience, no death, but perfect joy, righteousness, grace, peace, life, salvation and glory.

Why, do we then nothing? Do we work nothing for the obtaining of this righteousness? I answer: Nothing at all. For the nature of this righteousness is, to do nothing, to hear nothing, to know nothing whatsoever of the law or of works, but to know and to believe this only, that Christ is gone to the Father and is not now seen: that he sitteth in heaven at the right hand of his Father, not as a judge, but made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption: briefly, that he is our high-priest entreating for us, and reigning over us and in us by race.

Here no sin is perceived, no terror or remorse of conscience felt; for in this heavenly righteousness sin can have no place for there is no law, and where no law is, there can be no transgression (Romans 4:15).

Seeing then that sin hath here no place, there can be no anguish of conscience, no fear, no heaviness. Therefore St. John saith: 'He that is born of God cannot sin' (1 John 3:9). But if there be any fear or grief of conscience, it is a token that this righteousness is withdrawn, that grace is hidden, and that Christ is darkened and out of sight. But where Christ is truly seen indeed, there must needs be full and perfect joy in the Lord, with peace of conscience, which most certainly thus thinketh: Although I am a sinner by the law, as touching the righteousness of the law, yet I despair not, yet I die not, because Christ liveth, who is both my righteousness and my everlasting and heavenly life. In that righteousness and life I have no sin, no sting of conscience, no care of death. I am indeed a sinner as touching this present life and the righteousness thereof, as the child of Adam: where the law accuseth me, death reigneth over me, and at length would devour me. But I have another righteousness and life above this life, which is Christ the Son of God, who knoweth no sin nor death, but is righteousness and life eternal: by whom even this my body, being dead and brought into dust, shall be raised up again and delivered from the bondage of the law and sin, and shall be sanctified together with the spirit.

So both these continue whilst we here live. The flesh is accused, exercised with temptations, oppressed with heaviness and sorrow, bruised by the active righteousness of the law; but the spirit reigneth, rejoiceth and is saved by this passive and Christian righteousness, because it knoweth that it hath a Lord in heaven at the right hand of the Father, who hath abolished the law, sin, death, and hath trodden under his feet all evils, led them captive and triumphed over them in himself (Colossians 2:15).

St. Paul therefore in this Epistle goeth about diligently to instruct us, to comfort us, to hold us in the perfect knowledge of this most Christian and excellent righteousness. *For if the article of justification be once lost, then is all true Christian doctrine lost.* And as many as are in the world that hold not this doctrine, are either Jews, Turks, Papists or heretics. For between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of Christ, or between active and passive righteousness, there is no mean. He then that strayeth from this Christian righteousness, must need fall into the active righteousness; that is to say, when he hath lost Christ, he must fall into the confidence of his own works. This we see at this day in the fantastical spirits and authors of sects, which teach nothing, neither can teach anything aright, concerning this righteousness of grace. The words indeed they have taken out of our mouth and writings, and these only do they speak and write. But the thing itself they are not able to deliver and straightly to urge, because they neither do nor can understand it, since they cleave only to the

righteousness of the law. Therefore they are and remain exactors of the law, having no power to ascend higher than that active righteousness. And so they remain the same as they were under the Pope, save that they invent new names and new works, and yet notwithstanding the thing remains the same: even as the Turks do other works than the Papists, and the Papists than the Jews, etc. But albeit that some do works more splendid, great, and difficult by far than others, notwithstanding the substance is the same, the quality only is different: that is to say, the works do differ in appearance and name only, and not in very deed, for they are works notwithstanding, and they which do them are and remain, not Christians, but hirelings, whether they be called Jews, Mahometists, Papists, etc.

Therefore do we so earnestly set forth and so often repeat this doctrine of faith or Christian righteousness, that by this means it may be kept in continual exercise, and may be plainly discerned from the active righteousness of the law. (*For by this only doctrine the Church is built, and in this it consists.*) Otherwise we shall never be able to hold the true divinity, but by and by we shall either become canonists, observers of ceremonies, observers of the law, or Papists, and Christ so darkened that none in the Church shall be either rightly taught or comforted. Wherefore, if we will be teachers and leaders of others, it behooves us to have great care of these matters, and to mark well this distinction between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of Christ. And this distinction is easy to be uttered in words, but in use and experience it is very hard, although it be never so diligently exercised and practiced; for in the hour of death, or in other agonies of the conscience, these two sorts of righteousness do encounter more near together than thou would wish or desire.

Where I do admonish you, especially such as shall become instructors and guiders of consciences, and also every one apart, that ye exercise yourselves continually by study, by reading, by meditation of the Word and by prayer, that in the time of temptation ye may be able to instruct and comfort both your own consciences and others, and to bring them from the law to grace, from active and working righteousness to the passive and received righteousness, and, to conclude, from Moses to Christ. For the devil is wont, in affliction and in the conflict of conscience, by the law to make us afraid, and to lay against us the guilt of sin, our wicked life past, the wrath and judgment of God, hell and eternal death, that by this means he may drive us to desperation, make us bond-slaves to himself, and pluck us from Christ. Furthermore, he is wont to set against us those places of the Gospel, wherein Christ himself requires works of us, and with plain words threatens damnation to those who do them not. Now, if here we be not able to judge between these two kinds of righteousness, if we take not by faith hold of Christ sitting at the right hand of God, who maketh intercession unto the Father for us wretched sinners (Hebrews 7:25), then are we under the law and not under grace, and Christ is no more a savior, but a lawgiver. Then can there remain no more salvation, but a certain desperation and everlasting death must need follow.

Let us then diligently learn to judge between these two kinds of righteousness, that we may know how far we ought to obey the law. Now we have said before, that the law in a Christian ought not to pass his bounds, but ought to have dominion only over the flesh, which is in subjection unto it, and remains under the same. When it is thus, the law is kept within his bounds. But if it shall presume to creep into thy conscience, and there seek to reign, see thou play the cunning logician, and make the true division. Give no more to the law than belongeth unto it, but say thou: O law, thou wouldest climb up into the kingdom of my conscience, and there reign and reprove it of sin, and wouldest take from me the joy of my heart, which I have by faith in Christ, and drive me to desperation, that I might be without all hope, and utterly perish. This thou dost besides thine office: keep thyself within thy bounds, and exercise thy power upon the flesh, but touch not my conscience; for I am baptized, and by the Gospel am called to the partaking of righteousness and of everlasting life, to the kingdom of Christ, wherein my conscience is at rest, where no law is, but altogether forgiveness of sins, peace, quietness, joy, health and everlasting life. Trouble me not in these matters, for I will not suffer thee, so intolerable a tyrant and cruel tormentor, to reign in my conscience, for it is the seat and temple of Christ the Son of God, who is the king of righteousness and peace, and my most sweet savior and mediator: he shall keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the sound and pure doctrine of the Gospel, and in the knowledge of this passive and heavenly righteousness.

When I have this righteousness reigning in my heart, I descend from heaven as the rain making fruitful the earth that is to say, I come forth into another kingdom, and I do good works, how and whensoever occasion is offered. If I be a minister of the Word, I preach, I comfort the brokenhearted, I administer the Sacraments. If I be an householder, I govern my house and my family, I bring up my children in the knowledge and fear of God. If I be a magistrate, the charge that is given me from above I diligently execute. If I be a servant, I do my master's business faithfully. To conclude: whosoever he be that is assuredly persuaded that Christ is his righteousness, doth not only cheerfully and gladly work well in his vocation, but also submitteth himself through love to the magistrates and to their laws, yea though they be severe, sharp and cruel, and (if necessity do so require) to all manner of burdens and dangers of this present life, because he knoweth that this is the will of God, and that this obedience pleaseth him.

Thus far as concerning the argument of this Epistle, whereof Paul intreateth, taking occasion of false teachers who had darkened this righteousness of faith among the Galatians, against whom he setteth himself in defending and commending his authority and office.

CHAPTER 1

Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the father, who raised him from the dead).

NOW that we have declared the argument and sum of this Epistle to the Galatians, we think it good, before we come to the matter itself, to shew what was the occasion St. Paul wrote this Epistle. He had planted among the Galatians the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the righteousness of faith; but by and by after his departure, there crept in certain false teachers, which overthrew all that he had planted and truly taught among them. For the devil cannot but furiously impugn this doctrine with all force and subtlety, neither can he rest so long as he seeth any spark thereof remaining. We also, for this only cause, that we preach the Gospel, do suffer of the world, the devil, and his ministers, all the mischief that they can work against us, both on the right hand and on the left.

For the Gospel is such a doctrine as teacheth a far higher matter than is the wisdom, righteousness, and religion of the world, that is to say, free remission of sins through Christ, etc. It leaveth those things in their degree, to be as they are, and commendeth them as the good creatures of God. But the world preferreth these creatures before the Creator, and moreover, by them would put away sin, be delivered from death, and deserve everlasting life. This doth the Gospel condemn. Contrariwise, the world cannot suffer those things to be condemned which it most esteemeth and best liketh of, and therefore it chargeth the Gospel that it is a seditious doctrine and full of errors, that it overthroweth commonwealths, countries, dominions, kingdoms and empires, and therefore offendeth both against God and the Emperor, abolisheth laws, corrupteth good manners, and setteth all men at liberty to do what they list. Wherefore, with just zeal and high service to God (as it would seem) it persecuteth this doctrine, and abhorreth the teachers and professors thereof as the greatest plague that can be in the whole earth.

Moreover, by the preaching of this doctrine, the devil is overthrown, his kingdom is destroyed, the law, sin and death (wherewith, as most mighty and invincible tyrants, he hath brought all mankind in subjection under his dominion) are wrested out of his hands: briefly, his prisoners are translated out of the kingdom of darkness, Into the kingdom of light and liberty.

Should the devil suffer all this? Should not the father of lies employ all his force and subtle policies, to darken, to corrupt, and utterly to root out this doctrine of salvation and everlasting life? Indeed, St. Paul complaineth in this and all other his epistles, that even in his time the devil through his apostles shewed himself a cunning workman in this business. Likewise we also at this day do complain and lament, that Satan hath wrought greater harm to our Gospel by his ministers, the fantastical spirits, than by all the tyrants, kings, princes and bishops that have persecuted it and still do persecute it by force. And had we not watched and labored with such diligence in planting and teaching this doctrine of faith, we had not so long time remained in concord, but among us also there had long since arisen sects. But because we abide constantly in this doctrine, and it is ceaselessly urged by us, it preserveth us in fullest unity and peace. But others, who either neglect it or desire to teach (as they think) something more exalted, do fall into various pernicious errors and sects whereof there is no end, and so they perish.

We thought good to shew here by the way, that the Gospel is such a doctrine as condemneth all manner of righteousness, and preacheth the only righteousness of Christ, and to them that embrace the same, it bringeth peace of conscience and all good things; and yet, notwithstanding, the world hateth and persecuteth it most bitterly.

I have said before, that the occasion why St. Paul wrote this Epistle, was for that by and by after his departure, false teachers had destroyed those things

among the Galatians which he with long and great travail had built.

And these false apostles being of the circumcision and sect of the Pharisees, were men of great estimation and authority, who bragged among the people that they were of that holy and chosen stock of the Jews (John 8, Romans 4:4 ff.), that they were Israelites of the seed of Abraham, that they had the promises and the fathers; and finally, that they were the ministers of Christ, and the Apostles' scholars, with whom they had been conversant, and had seen their miracles, and perhaps had also wrought some signs or miracles themselves for Christ witnesseth (Matthew 7:22) that the wicked also do work miracles. When men having such authority come into any country or city, by and by the people have them in great admiration, and under this color of godliness and religion, they do not only deceive the simple, but also the learned; yea, and those also which seem to be somewhat confirmed in the faith: especially when they brag (as these did) that they are the offspring of the Patriarchs, the ministers of Christ, the Apostles' scholars, etc. Moreover, these false apostles, by all the crafty means they could devise, defaced the authority of St. Paul, saying: 'Why do ye so highly esteem of Paul? Why have ye him in so great reverence? Forsooth, he was but the last of all that were converted unto Christ. But we are the disciples of the Apostles, and were familiarly conversant with them. We have seen Christ working miracles, and heard him preach. Paul came after us, and is inferior unto us: and it is not possible that God should suffer us to err who are of his holy people, the ministers of Christ, and have received the Holy Ghost. Again, we are many, and Paul is but one, and alone, who neither is conversant with the Apostles, nor hath seen Christ. Yea, he persecuted the Church of Christ a great while. Would God (think ye) for Paul's sake only, suffer so many churches to be deceived?'

Even so the Pope at this day, when he hath no authority of the Scripture to defend himself withal, useth this one argument continually against us, 'The Church, the Church.' 'Thinkest thou that God is so offended, that for a few heretics of Luther's sect he will cast off his whole Church? Thinkest thou that he would leave his Church in error so many hundred years?' And this he mightily maintaineth, that the Church can never be overthrown. Now, like as many are moved with this argument at this day, so in Paul's time these false apostles, through great bragging and setting forth of their own praises, blinded the eyes of the Galatians, so that Paul lost his authority among them, and his doctrine was brought in suspicion.

Against this vain bragging and boasting of the false apostles, Paul with great constancy and boldness setteth his apostolic authority, highly commending his vocation, and defending his ministry. And (although elsewhere he never doth the like) he will not give place to any, no, not to the Apostles themselves, much less to any of their scholars. And to abate their pharisaical pride and shameless boldness, he maketh mention of the history done in Antioch, where he withstood Peter himself. Besides this, not regarding the offense that might arise thereof, he saith plainly in the text, that he was bold to accuse and reprove Peter himself, the chief of the Apostles, who had seen Christ, and had been most familiarly conversant with him. I am an Apostle (saith he) and such a one as pass not what others are: yea, I was not afraid to chide the very pillar of all the rest of the Apostles. And to conclude, in the first two chapters, he doth, in a manner, nothing else but set out his vocation, his office and his Gospel, affirming that it was not of men, and that he had not received it by man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ: also, that if he, or an angel from heaven, should bring any other gospel than that which he had preached, he should be holden accursed.

THE CERTAINTY OF CALLING

But what meaneth Paul by this boasting? I answer: This common place serveth to this end, that every minister of God's Word should be sure of his calling, that before God and man he may with a bold conscience glory therein, that he preacheth the Gospel as one that is called and sent: even as the ambassador of a king glorieth and vaunteth in this, that he cometh not as a private person, but as the king's ambassador; and because of this dignity, that he is the king's ambassador, he is honored and set in the highest place: which honor should not be given unto him if he came as a private person. Wherefore, let the preacher of the Gospel be certain that his calling is from God. And it is expedient, that according to the example of Paul, he should magnify this his calling, to the end that he may win credit and authority among the people, like as the king's ambassador magnifieth his office and calling. And thus to glory is not vain, but a necessary kind of glorying, because he glorieth not in himself, but in the king which hath sent him, whose authority he desireth to be honored and magnified. And when in the name of the king he willet aught to be done by his subjects, he saith not: We pray you, but: We command, we will this to 'be done, etc. But for his private person he saith: We pray, etc.

Likewise, when Paul so highly commendeth his calling, he seeketh not his own praise, but with a necessary and a holy pride he magnifieth his ministry; as

to the Romans (11:13) he saith: 'Forasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I will magnify mine office,' that is to say, I will that men receive me, not as Paul of Tarsus, but as Paul the apostle or ambassador of Jesus Christ. And this he doth of necessity, to maintain his authority, that the people in hearing this, might be more attaint and willing to give ear unto him. For they hear not only Paul, but in Paul Christ himself, and God the Father sending him out in his message: whose authority and majesty, like as men ought religiously to honor, so ought they with great reverence to receive and to hear also his messengers bringing his word and message.

This is a notable place, therefore, wherein Paul so glorieth and boasteth as touching his vocation, that he despiseth all others. If any man, after the manner of the world, should despise all others in respect of himself, and attribute all unto himself alone, he should not only show himself a very fool, but also grievously sin. But this manner of boasting is necessary, and pertaineth not to the glory of Paul, but to the glory of God, whereby is offered unto him the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. For by this boasting, the name, the grace, and the mercy of God, is made known unto the world. Thus therefore he beginneth his Epistle.

Paul an apostle, not of men, etc.

Here in the very beginning he toucheth those false teachers which boasted themselves to be the disciples of the Apostles, and to be sent of them, but despised Paul as one that was neither the Apostles' scholar, nor sent of any to preach the Gospel, but came in some other way, and of his own head thrust himself into that office. Against those Paul defendeth his calling, saying: My calling seemeth base to your preachers; but whosoever they be which are come unto you, are sent either of men, or by man; that is to say, they have entered either of themselves, being not called, or else called by others. But my calling is not of men, nor by man, but it is above all manner of calling that can be made after the Apostles, for it is 'by Jesus Christ, and by God the Father,' etc.

Where he saith 'of men,' I mean such as call and thrust in themselves, when neither God nor man calleth or sendeth them, but they run and speak of themselves; as at this day certain fantastical spirits do, which either lurk in corners and seek places where they may pour out their poison, and come not into public congregations, or else they resort thither where the Gospel is planted already. These I call such as are of men. But where he saith 'by man,' I understand such as have a divine calling, but yet by man as by means. God calleth in two manner of ways: by means and without means.

He calleth us all to the ministry of his Word at this day, not immediately by himself, but by other means; that is to say, by man. But the Apostles were called immediately of Christ himself, as the prophets in the Old Testament were called of God himself, Afterwards the Apostles called their disciples, as Paul called Timothy, Titus, etc. These men called bishops (as in Titus 1), and the bishops their successors down to our own times, and so on to the end of the world. And this is a mediated calling, since it is done by man; yet notwithstanding it is of God. So when a prince or magistrate or I call any man, that man hath his calling by man; and this is the general manner of calling in the world since the Apostles' time. Nor ought it to be changed, but magnified, on account of the fantastical heads, which contemn it and boast of another calling, whereby they say they are impelled by the Spirit to teach. But they are liars and impostors, for they are driven by a spirit which is not good, but evil. For it is not lawful for me to leave my appointed place as a preacher and go unto another city where I am not called, and there preach although as a Doctor of Divinity I might preach in the whole Papacy, would they but tolerate me); no, not even if I hear that falsehoods are bring taught, and souls seduced and damned which I might snatch from error and damnation by my sound doctrine. But I ought to commit the matter unto God, who in his own time wilt find occasion of lawfully calling ministers and giving the Word. For he is the Lord of the harvest, who will send laborers into his harvest; our part is to pray (Matthew 9:38).

Wherefore we ought not to force our way into another's harvest, as the devil is wont to stir up his ministers to do, so that they run without being called and profess with most ardent zeal to be grieved that men are being so miserably seduced, and to desire to teach them the truth and snatch them from the snares of the devil. Even, therefore, if a man with a godly zeal and a good intent seeketh by his own sound doctrine to deliver from error them that are led astray, notwithstanding there ariseth hereof a bad example, whereby occasion is given to ungodly teachers to thrust themselves in, through whom Satan afterwards occupieth the chair; and this example worketh very great harm.

But when the prince or other magistrate calleth me, then can I with assured confidence boast against the devil and the enemies of the Gospel, that I am called by the command of God through the voice of a man. For there is the command of God through the mouth of the prince; and these are true vocations. We also, therefore, are called by divine authority, not indeed immediately by Christ, as the Apostles were, but 'by man.'

Now this place concerning the certainty of calling is very necessary on account of those pestilential and satanic spirits, so that every minister of the Word may boast with John the Baptist: 'The word of the Lord is come upon me' (Luke 3:2). When, there, re, I preach, baptize, administer the sacraments, I do these things as one commanded and called, because the voice of the Lord is come unto me: not in a corner, as the fantastical spirits do boast, but through the mouth of a man who is in the exercise of his lawful right. But if one or two citizens should ask me to preach, I ought not to follow such a private calling, since a window is thereby opened to the ministers of Satan, who following this example do harm, as we have said above. But when they which hold public offices ask me, then I ought to obey.

Therefore, when Paul saith, 'Not of men, neither by man,' he beateth down the false apostles; as though he would say: Although those vipers brag never so much, what can they brag more than that they are either come 'of men,' that is to say, of themselves without any calling, or 'by man,' that is to say, sent of others? I pass not upon any of these things, neither ought you to regard them. As for me, I am called and sent neither of men, nor by man, but without means, that is to wit, by Jesus Christ himself, and my calling is like in all points the calling of the Apostles, and I am indeed an Apostle. Paul, therefore, handleth this place, of the calling of the Apostles, effectually. And elsewhere, he separateth the degree of apostleship from others, as in 1 Corinthians 12:28, and in Ephesians 4, where he saith: 'And God hath ordained some in the Church, as first Apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers' etc., setting Apostles in the first place; so that they be properly called Apostles, which are sent immediately of God himself, without any other person as means.

So Matthias was called only of God (Acts 1:23 ff.), for when the other Apostles had appointed two, they durst not choose the one nor the other, but they cast lots, and prayed that God would show which of them he would have. For, seeing he should be an Apostle, it behoved that he should be called of God. So was Paul called to be the Apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Hereof the Apostles also are called saints; for they are sure of their calling and doctrine, and have continued faithful in their office, and none of them became a castaway saving Judas, because their calling is holy.

This is the first assault that Paul maketh against the false apostles, which ran when no man sent them. Calling, therefore, is not to be despised; for it is not enough for a man to have the Word and pure doctrine, but also he must be assured of his calling; and he that entereth without this assurance, entereth to no other end but to kill and destroy. For God never prospereth the labor of those that are not called. And although they teach some good and profitable matters, yet they edify not. So at this day, our fantastical spirits have the words of faith in their mouths, but yet they yield no fruit, but their chief end and purpose is to draw men to their false and perverse opinions. They that have a certain and holy calling must oftentimes sustain many and great conflicts, as they must do whose doctrine is pure and sound, that they may constantly abide in their salutary office, against the infinite and continual assaults of the devil and rage of the world. Here, what should he do whose calling is uncertain, and doctrine corrupt?

This is therefore our comfort, which are in the ministry of the Word, that we have an office which is heavenly and holy, to the which we being lawfully called, do triumph against all the gates of hell. On the other side, it is an horrible thing when the conscience saith: 'This thou hast done without any lawful calling.' Here such terror shaketh a man's mind which is not called, that he would wish he had never heard the Word which he teacheth; for by his disobedience he maketh all his works evil, were they never so good, insomuch that even his greatest works and labors become his greatest sins.

We see then how good and necessary this boasting and glorying of our ministry is. In times past, when I was but a young divine, methought Paul did unwisely in glorying so oft of his calling in his epistles; but I did not understand his purpose; for I knew not that the ministry of God's Word was so weighty a matter. I knew nothing of the doctrine of faith and a true conscience indeed, for that there was then no certainty taught in either the schools or churches, but all was full of sophistical subtleties of the schoolmen; and therefore no man was able to understand the dignity and power of this holy and spiritual boasting of the true and lawful calling, which serveth first to the glory of God, and secondly to the advancing of our ministry, and moreover, to the salvation of ourselves and of the people.

For by this our boasting we seek not estimation in the world, or praise among men, or money, or pleasures, or favor of the world; but forasmuch as we be in a divine calling, and in the work of God, and the people have great need to be assured of our calling, that they may know our word to be the Word of God, therefore we proudly vaunt and boast of it. It is not then a vain, but a most holy pride against the devil and the world, and true humility before God.

And by God the father, who raised him from the dead