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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS: AN EXPANDED PARAPHRASE

THIS paraphrase of Galatians was prepared in connection with a series of Bible readings on the epistle at a young people's conference a year or two ago.

GREETINGS. Ch. 1: 1-5

To the churches of Galatia this letter comes from me, Paul—an apostle whose apostolic commission was not received from men or through men, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead—and from all the brethren who are with me. Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who gave Himself up for our sins so as to rescue us from the present course of the world with all its evil, according to the will of God our Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THEIR NEW "GOSPEL" IS NO GOSPEL. Ch. 1: 6-10

I am astonished that you are moving away so soon from God, who called you by the grace of Christ, to embrace a different gospel. A different gospel, I say: indeed, it is not really a gospel at all. The fact is, that certain people are throwing you into confusion, for they want to change the gospel of Christ into something else. But mark well: if we ourselves, or even an angel from heaven, were to preach another gospel to you than the one which we preached to you when we were with you, let him be accursed. I have said it once, and now I say it again: if anyone preaches another gospel to you than the one which you first received, let him be accursed.

Is it men's approbation that I am trying to win now, or God's?¹ Is it men that I am trying to please? No indeed; if I still set out to please men, I should not be [as I am] the bondslave of Christ.

¹ A reference, probably, to the charge that he was (in the worse sense) "all things to all men"; that he adapted his message from place to place so as to please his hearers.

PAUL RECEIVED HIS COMMISSION DIRECTLY FROM CHRIST.

Ch. 1: 11-17

Let me tell you this about the gospel which I preached to you, brethren. It is not a human gospel. It was not from men that I received it or learned it; it was a direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

You have heard about my former career when I practised the Jewish religion. I persecuted the church of God and harried it beyond all bounds; and I made more progress in the Jewish religion than many of my contemporaries who belonged to the same national group as myself, and was a more thorough-going zealot for my ancestral traditions. But when God, who had set me apart for this work from my very birth, was pleased to call me by His grace and reveal His Son in my life, in order that I might preach His gospel among the Gentiles, what did I do? The first thing I did was this: I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went off into Arabia. Then I came back again to Damascus.

PAUL'S FIRST VISIT TO JERUSALEM AFTER HIS CONVERSION.

Ch. 1: 18-24

It was not until three years after my conversion that I went up to Jerusalem. I went up to have an interview with Peter, and in fact I spent a fortnight with him; but I did not see any of the other apostles, except James the brother of our Lord. Now please take note: in all that I am writing to you now, I am telling no lie; God is my witness.

When that fortnight was over, I made my way to the districts of Syria and Cilicia. I remained unknown by face to the Christian churches of Judaea. They simply heard people say, "Our former persecutor is now preaching the good news of faith in Christ, which he once tried to overthrow"; and they gave glory to God on my account.

PAUL'S SECOND VISIT TO JERUSALEM. Ch. 2: 1-10

A space of fourteen years elapsed before I paid my next visit to Jerusalem. That time I went up with Barnabas, and took Titus along with us as well. On this second occasion I went up in consequence of a divine revelation. I set before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles—privately, I mean, to the men of repute among them, in case it should turn out that I was running in vain, or had run in vain. And what happened on that occasion? Titus, who was with me, was a Greek; but the idea of compelling

him to be circumcised simply did not arise. (When the question of circumcision did arise later on, that was not the act of responsible leaders, but of some false brethren who had been brought in by underhand means. They infiltrated into our company in order to spy on the freedom which is ours in Christ and bring us into bondage if they could. But to them we never submitted for a moment, for it was our purpose that the truth of the gospel should remain in full force with you.) Well, to go back to the men of repute at Jerusalem (it makes no difference to me what sort of men they were, for God has no favourites), these men of repute conferred nothing on me over and above what I already possessed. On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the Gentiles just as Peter had been entrusted with the same gospel for the Jews; for the same Lord who had empowered Peter for his apostleship among the Jews had also empowered me for my apostleship to the Gentiles. So then, they recognized the grace that had been bestowed on me, and James, Peter and John, men of repute as "pillars" among them, shook hands with Barnabas and me as a token of fellowship, agreeing that we should concentrate on the Gentiles and they themselves on the Jews. "Only", they said, "please do not stop remembering the poor"; and in fact I had made a special point of attending to this very matter.¹

WHY PAUL OPPOSED PETER AT ANTIOCH. Ch. 2: 11-21

But afterwards, Peter came to Antioch, and I had to oppose him to his very face. He stood quite self-condemned. He had sat at table and eaten with the Gentiles there until a certain party came down from James. When they came, however, he drew back and separated from the company of Gentiles, because he was afraid of the circumcision group. The rest of the Jews who were there joined him in this play-acting; matters went so far that even Barnabas was carried away into joining their play-acting. But when I saw that they were deviating from the straight path of gospel truth, I said to Peter before them all: "If you, a Jew by origin, follow the Gentile way of life and not the Jewish, how can you try to make the Gentiles live like Jews? It is true that by birth we are Jews and not 'Gentile sinners' [as they say]. But we know that it is not through the works prescribed in the law but by faith in Christ Jesus that a man is justified in God's sight. Indeed, this was the very reason why we put our trust in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by legal works :

¹ Cf. Acts 11: 29 f. ; 12: 25, where the same visit is probably referred to.

for by legal works [as the Scripture says] 'no living person will be justified'.¹

But [to answer those cavillers who says that the gospel of justification by faith simply encourages people to go on sinning] supposing that we ourselves have been found out to be sinners while we are seeking justification in Christ, does that mean that Christ encourages sin? No indeed! [It is impossible on that pretext to go back to the principle of justification by legal works] for if now I begin to rebuild what I once pulled down, I put myself in the position of a law-breaker. It was the law that drove me to the point where I died in relation to the law, that I might become alive in relation to God. Yes; I have shared in Christ's crucifixion, and it is no longer I who live; it is Christ who lives in me. As for my present bodily life, I live it by faith in the Son of God, the One who loved me so and gave Himself up for me. No; I do not make the grace of God null and void: I know full well that if righteousness is attainable through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

AN APPEAL TO THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE. Ch. 3: 1-14

My foolish friends in Galatia! Who is it that has hypnotized you? Why, "Jesus Christ Crucified" was posted up, as it were, for public display before your very eyes! Just tell me this: it is all I want to know. Was it by legal works or by the message of faith that you received the Spirit? Can you really be so senseless? You began on the higher plane of the Spirit; are you now trying to complete the process on the lower plane of the flesh? Have your many sufferings been all to no purpose?—if indeed they are to be to no purpose [as they would indeed be if you went back from faith to law]. Again: when God supplies you with the Spirit and performs mighty miracles among you, does that come about through legal works or by the message of faith? Why, you may find the answer in the Scriptures: "Abraham *believed* God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness."²

Now, take Abraham. You should know that it is the people who believe God who are the true sons of Abraham. The Word of God, foreseeing that God was going to justify the Gentiles on the ground of faith, preached the gospel to Abraham in advance: "In you all the Gentiles are to be blessed."³ So then, it is the people who believe God who are blessed along with believing Abraham. On the other hand, all those who hold to legal works

¹ Ps. 143: 2. ² Gen. 15: 6. ³ Gen. 12: 3.

are under a curse. Yes, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not persevere in all the things written in the book of the law, so as to perform them."¹ It is clear that no one is justified in God's sight on legal grounds; the Scripture says: "He who is justified by *faith* will live thereby."² The law, however, is not based on faith but on works; its principle is: "He who *does* them will live by them."³ But Christ has redeemed us from the curse which the law pronounces, and He has done so by becoming accursed on our behalf. For another Scripture says: "Everyone who hangs on a tree is accursed."⁴ Christ, I say, has redeemed us in order that Abraham's blessing might fall upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise—that is, the Spirit—through faith.

LAW AND PROMISE. Ch. 3: 15-22

Now, brethren, let me use an analogy from human life. Even though it is only a man who makes a settlement of his property, no one else can cancel it or add a codicil to it. Well, the promise of God was settled on Abraham and his "seed".⁵ Mark this word "seed": it is a noun in the singular number and therefore can refer to a single individual as well as to many; the primary reference, in fact, is to one individual, Christ. This is what I mean: this settlement or covenant had already been solemnly confirmed by God four hundred and thirty years before the law was introduced. Obviously the law, which came so long after, cannot make the original covenant null and void. Now, if the inheritance of Abraham is based on the law, it can no longer be regarded as resting on God's promise. But it was by a promise that God freely bestowed it on Abraham.

What is the point of the law then? It was an extra dispensation, introduced in order that transgressions might be brought to light, until the coming of Abraham's "seed" to whom the promise referred. The law was administered through angels, by the agency of an intermediary. Now an intermediary is a third party between two others [when both sides bind themselves by a contract, and has no independent authority]; but when God gives a promise in unconditional grace, He acts entirely on His own account, and without any intermediary.

Was the law then contrary to the promises of God? No indeed! If a law had been given that was able to impart life, then of course

¹ Deut. 27: 26. ² Hab. 2: 4. ³ Lev. 18: 5. ⁴ Deut. 21: 23. ⁵ Gen. 22: 18.

righteousness would have come by the law. But as it is, what the law did was to shut the whole world up together under a verdict of sin, in order that the promise, based on faith in Christ Jesus, might be given to those who believe.

WE ARE FULL-GROWN SONS NOW. Ch. 3: 23-29

Before faith came, we were all guarded by law as though we were under the charge of a jailor, shut up until the arrival of the faith that was to be revealed. So then, the law was, as it were, our guardian, keeping us safe for Christ, so that we might be justified by faith. But with the coming of faith we are no longer under a guardian, for through faith in Christ Jesus you are all full-grown sons of God. All of you who were incorporated into Christ by baptism have "put on" Christ. Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female—these distinctions have no more place here, for in Christ Jesus you are all one. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's true seed, Abraham's heirs in the sense intended by the promise which God made to him.

GOING BACK TO INFANCY. Ch. 4: 1-7

Let me put it this way. So long as the heir to an estate is an infant in law, there is no practical difference between him and a slave, although he owns it all. He is under the direction of tutors and administrators until the time fixed for him to take over his father's inheritance. In the same way when we were infants in a spiritual sense, we were kept in subjection under the elemental powers of the world; but when the appointed time duly arrived, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem us who were under the law so that we might receive our status as full-grown sons of God. But now that you are full-grown sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts: it is that Spirit within us who calls "Abba" — that is "Father". So then, you are not a mere slave any more; you are a full-grown son, and if you are a full-grown son, then by God's grace you are an heir as well.

GOING BACK TO SLAVERY. Ch. 4: 8-11

In those former days you did not know God, and you were kept in subjection by beings which by nature are no gods [although you thought they were]. But now you have come to know God—or rather, it is God who has recognized and acknowledged you. How then can you turn back again to those elemental powers—poor, weak things as they are—and want to be enslaved to them all over again? You are actually observing special days and new

moons and sacred seasons and holy years. I am afraid that the labour I expended on you may prove to have been to no purpose.

A FURTHER PERSONAL APPEAL. Ch. 4: 12-20

Please, brethren, be like me, for I am like one of you. You have not done any wrong to me. You know that when I preached the gospel to you the first time, I did so in bodily weakness, and you did not feel contempt for my physical condition, which was a real trial to you, nor did you show any disgust at it. No, you welcomed me as you would have welcomed an angel of God, as you would have welcomed Christ Jesus Himself. You counted yourselves fortunate then; where is that sense of good fortune now? I can testify on your behalf that, had it been possible, you would have plucked out your very eyes and given them to me. So, have I become your enemy now because I tell you the truth? It is no honourable enthusiasm that these people display over you; they simply want to cut you off from any contact with me, so that you may be enthusiastic over them. Now, it is always good to be enthusiastic over someone in an honourable way, and not only when I am present with you—my own dear children, for whom I endure veritable birth-pangs all over again, until the image of Christ takes shape in you! Oh, I wish I could be with you right now and change my tone of voice, for I do not know what to do about you.

FREEDOM, NOT BONDAGE. Ch. 4: 21 — 5: 1

Come, you people who want to be under the law, tell me this: do you not pay attention to what the law says? In the law we read that Abraham became the father of two sons, one by the slave-girl, and one by the freewoman. The son of the slave-girl was begotten in the ordinary way of nature; the son of the free-woman was begotten by virtue of the promise of God. Now this teaches us a spiritual lesson. These women represent two covenants. The one derives from Mount Sinai, and produces children for bondage; that is Hagar. For Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present earthly Jerusalem, which is still enduring bondage along with her children. But Jerusalem above is freeborn, and she is the mother of us who are Christians. For the Scripture runs:

Rejoice, O barren woman, bringing no children to birth;
Break forth into shouting, O woman enduring no birth-pangs;
For the desolate woman has now more children than she who is
married to a husband.¹

¹ Isa. 54: 1.

Now you, my brethren, are children of promise, as Isaac was. But just as in those days the one who was begotten in the ordinary way of nature persecuted the one who was begotten by the Spirit, so it is now. All the same, what does the Scripture say? "Drive out the slave-girl and her son, for the slave-girl's son is not to share the inheritance with the freewoman's son."¹ So then, brethren, we are not the slave-girl's children but the freewoman's. For Christ set us free with true freedom; therefore stand firm, and do not let the yoke of slavery be fixed on you again.

GRACE, NOT LAW. 5: 2-12

See here, I tell you this (it is Paul himself who is speaking to you): if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no use to you. Let me repeat: I solemnly assure everyone who gets himself circumcised that he is under an obligation to keep the whole law. You who find your justification through the law have forfeited your status so far as Christ is concerned; you have expelled yourselves from your standing in God's grace. We for our part by the Spirit look forward to the hope of justification on the ground of *faith*. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any importance; what *is* important is faith, operating through love.

You were running a good race [when we saw you last]. Who put an obstacle in your path to hinder you from obeying the truth? This persuasive talk to which you have listened did not come from Him who first called you. "A little leaven leavens the whole mass of dough."² I still have confidence in the Lord regarding you that you will continue to be of this same mind. But whoever it may be that is confusing you in this way will bear his judgment. As for me, however, brethren, if [as they allege] I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the stumbling-block which the cross presents has been taken out of the way. If only those who are upsetting you would cut themselves right off!

LIBERTY, NOT LICENCE. 5: 13-26

But you were called to freedom, brethren. Only, don't allow your freedom to become a base of operations for your lower nature, but render lowly service to one another in a spirit of Christian love. For the whole law is summed up in one commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."³ But if you bite one another

¹ Gen. 21: 10. ² Presumably a proverbial expression; cf. 1 Cor. 5: 6.

³ Lev. 19: 18 (cf. Mark 12: 31).

and eat one another up, take care that you don't exterminate one another.

What I want to say is this: live in the power of the Spirit, and you will not carry out the cravings of the lower nature. For the lower nature's cravings are contrary to the Spirit, just as the Spirit is contrary to the lower nature; the two are diametrically opposed to each other. That is why you find yourselves acting differently from the way that you would like to act. But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the yoke of the law. Now the activities of the lower nature are well known: they are fornication, impurity, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, self-assertion, quarrelsomeness, party-spirit, envy, drunkenness, revelling and such like. I have warned you before, and I warn you again, that the people who indulge in such things as these will not inherit God's kingdom. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. No law has any power against such things as these! And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the lower nature with its passions and its cravings.

So then, if our principle of life is the Spirit, let our behaviour also be governed by the Spirit. Do not let us be filled with empty conceit, provoking and envying one another.

A CALL TO MUTUAL AID. Ch. 6: 1-5

My brethren, if one of your number is caught off his guard by some sin, those among you who are spiritual men must restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Watch yourself, in case you too are exposed to temptation. Carry one another's loads; in this way you will keep Christ's law. If any of you imagines that he is something, he is hoodwinking himself; for he is a mere nothing. Let each one test his own work, and then he will keep his boasting to himself and not give his neighbours the benefit of it; for each man will have his own pack to shoulder.

SOWING AND REAPING. Ch. 6: 6-10

The person who receives instruction in the Word should give his instructor a share in all the good things of life. Make no mistake: you cannot cheat God; what a man sows he will certainly reap. A man whose sowing is for his lower nature will have a harvest of destruction from that same lower nature; a man who sows for the Spirit will receive from the Spirit a harvest of eternal life. Do not let us grow tired of doing good; we shall reap a

splendid harvest at the proper time if we do not give up. So then, as opportunity offers, let us do good to everybody, and especially to our fellow-members in the family of faith.

PAUL TAKES UP THE PEN. Ch. 6: 11

Look how big the letters are which I write with my own hand !

FALSE BOASTING AND TRUE BOASTING. Ch. 6: 12-16

Those who want to make a fine show outwardly are the people who try to compel you to be circumcised ; their only aim is to avoid persecution on account of the cross of Christ. For those who get themselves circumcised do not even keep the law themselves ; they merely want you to be circumcised so that they may have some bodily mark of yours to boast about. But far be it from me to boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: that cross forms a permanent barrier¹ between the world and me, and between me and the world. Here neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters at all ; here is a new creation. And as for all those who make this their rule of life, may peace and mercy be upon them, and upon God's people Israel.²

THE TRUE MARKS OF A SERVANT OF CHRIST. Ch. 6: 17

For the rest, let no one interfere with me. I carry marks on *my* body—the brand-marks which proclaim me to be the slave of Jesus.

THE BENEDICTION. Ch. 6: 18

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

¹ There seems to be a play on the two senses of $\sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{\omega}$ here: (a) to erect a fence, (b) to crucify.

² Perhaps an echo of Ps. 125: 5, "Peace be upon Israel".