

The Corrective Epistles

Part 2

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[00:00:00] Let us turn to the Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 8, Romans 8, verses 3 and 4.

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. [00:01:01] The Epistle to the Galatians, Chapter 1. Now, verse 1.

Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia. Grace be to you, and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. [00:02:07] I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel, which is not another. But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again. If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, O God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. [00:03:10] But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Chapter 6 Verse 17 From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

[00:04:08] The exercise for the week is very much in line with the mood of our time of prayer.

That any difficulties that arise, that any problems that need to be resolved, any discipline that needs to be applied, is all intended to be with a view to full restoration of spirit.

To communion with the Lord Jesus, and the establishment of that basis for the enjoyment of every blessing that the blessed God has prepared for those who love him. [00:05:11] Individually, collectively, and corporately, and ultimately for the establishment of the glory of God in the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ. To this end, we are looking, in turn, at the five corrective epistles that bear the name of the Apostle Paul.

On Saturday, we looked at the epistle to the Corinthians, the epistles to the Corinthians. They give us

a fair example of a situation with many negative connotations.

[00:06:07] The disorder that arises when man's wisdom gives rise to man's activities, which are the display of the disorder that arises when man has his place, man according to the flesh.

And how that negative situation was so dealt with under the encouragement of the Apostle, that this opened the way for the development of true order, God's order, in the assembly as given in chapters 10 to 14. All in the light of the significance of the death of our Lord Jesus and his personal bodily resurrection outlined in chapter 15. [00:07:09] And then having dealt with this, in order that man's order might be removed, God's order established that there might be the way made clear so that the development of the personal graces of our Lord Jesus Christ, that are given in the second epistle, that they might have room for promotion and development. Such was the attempt on Saturday night, a basis for further private meditation. Tonight we turn to the epistle to the Galatians. Again, a negative situation which, when dealt with properly under the hand of God, opens the way for the development of that which is positive and constructive under the eye of God. [00:08:18] If, in Corinth, the difficulty was disorder, in what we would speak of as Central Turkey, Galatia, the difficulty there was that true believers had been deluded into accepting erroneous doctrine. They had been deluded. They had been deceived.

[00:09:04] And the matter that arose was so serious that the Apostle uses stronger language to the Galatians than he used to any other assembly.

Now, if I had been asked to guess, with some general acquaintance with the problems at Corinth and Galatia, if I had been asked to suggest, without a detailed study of the two epistles, if I had been asked to suggest which letter was addressed in the strongest language, I'm sure that I would have guessed, without prior knowledge, the epistle to the Corinthians. [00:10:01] The grave moral disorder and the condition of soul that permitted it, condoned it, promoted it, was so terrible that I would have guessed that the strongest possible language would need to be used. He does indeed use strong language. But when we turn to the Galatians, we find that the matter there was even more serious than that at Corinth. Before we go any further, let us consider the relative problem. There is a comparison, because these are the two epistles which contain the statement, Again reminding us of the general principle that there may be something introduced which appears to be small, but if it isn't dealt with and removed when it's small, it will nag away and grow and develop till it becomes of such a size that it seems almost insurmountable. [00:11:25] And the problem at Corinth was bad behaviour, a serious problem indeed. But the language, the relative language is such that we must face up to this, that in Galatia the problem was even worse. Now, in order that we might establish this, I'm going to read verses from most of the chapters, even if we get no more than right impressions tonight to lay a foundation for future meditation, I'll be more than satisfied. [00:12:08] Let us look again at the epistle to consider the language that is used. In chapter 1 we read the verse 6, I marvel that ye are so soon removed.

Chapter 3, verse 1, O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you? That phrase justifies the title of delusion or deceit as crystallising the problem. Verse 3, Are ye so foolish, having begun in this spirit? Are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

[00:13:02] Chapter 4, verse 9, But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements? Whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

Chapter 5, verse 1, Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. Be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold I, Paul, say unto you that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law. [00:14:05] Christ is become of no effect unto you. Whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace. Verse 7, Ye did run well. Who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you a little leaven, leaveneth the whole lump. Verse 11, I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off. Which troubled you? For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty. Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love to serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. [00:15:10] But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. Chapter 6, verse 11, Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand. As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law, but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. [00:16:15] Back to chapter 1, please. One way of gaining help from the scriptures is to read an epistle, get a general impression, to go back to the beginning and comb through, noting salient features, and then to start at the beginning again and comb through, and every time we go through, look at finer and finer detail. And we'll be doing a little bit of that tonight. Now, he uses strong language indeed. Now back to chapter 1. Look at verse 6 again, please.

[00:17:11] I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another, but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. I would think most of us are aware. If not, perhaps this is an opportunity. In the New Testament, there are several words translated into English as another, but there are certainly two which bear a particular significance. [00:18:03] One of the words means another of the same kind. The other word means another of a completely different kind, if you like. One is a difference of quantity, it's a quantitative difference, another one of the same kind. The other is not so much a quantitative difference as a qualitative difference. It's of an entirely different quality or character. Now, the way Paul was guided by the Spirit to write verse 6 and 7, he says, now, you've been called into the grace of Christ, he says, but you've been removed, he says, unto another gospel of a completely different kind, which is not another gospel of the same kind. There's a double emphasis. He says it's so bad that this other gospel of a different character is not another one of the same character, he says, because it's no gospel at all. [00:19:27] It's no good news at all. He says, in fact, it's a perversion of the gospel. Oh, how topical Scripture always is. We understand well, don't we, in these days where we are encouraged to use food and drink which is pure, unadulterated, without any additives which might contain impurities which will be bad for us. [00:20:01] We are well equipped to understand the language of Scripture here. There be some that trouble you who would pervert, adulterate, pollute, corrupt the very gospel that we believe. And that was the problem that the Galatians had fallen foul of. The basic problem can be summed up in the question, is Christ sufficient?

Or, looking round, how happy most of us have been. That from toddlers onwards, we've been educated that, in the proper sense of the term, we've been trained to understand that salvation has been wrought and won by Christ alone. [00:21:08] And that our blessing rests 100% on him. You see, of course, I've never believed anything else. Praise the Lord for that. Sadly, there are many committed believers in the world today who are encouraged to accept as the Galatians had been

encouraged to accept.

Oh yes, there's only one foundation for blessing, the person and the work of Christ. But then they were told, and there were so-called Christian teachers, had come all the way from Jerusalem into central Turkey, and they said to the believers, you're alright so far in trusting Christ for salvation. [00:22:17] Oh, but there's something more needed. There are certain ceremonies that have to be fulfilled. You should really be circumcised. There are certain days which are special for certain ceremonial activities. New Moons and Sabbaths, the text is there. And really, unless you fulfil these ceremonial functions, and unless you always bear in mind that God has given his rulebook, the law of Moses, as your guide for life which must be kept, [00:23:04] unless you do all that, your salvation will never be full, entire and complete. Sounds alright. How many present-day believers would fully go along with the idea that the law of Moses, whether we say the Pentateuch as a whole or the Ten Commandments as a summary of it, that the law is the rule of life for the Christian? Then it sounds plausible. What does Paul say to the Galatians? He says, it's another gospel of a different character to the pure gospel. It's an adulteration of the gospel. It's corrupt. It's impure. It's unadulterated. And he says, it's no gospel at all. [00:24:08] And it's that doctrine that Christ is most of all, but his work is not quite sufficient, that it needs these additional things to be kept by the Christian before the salvation is complete. It's that that compelled the Apostle Paul to write to the Galatians in using the language that he did.

Now the fundamental message is, at Corinth there was bad behaviour and that was terrible. At Galatia there was bad doctrine and the Apostle says, that was even worse.

[00:25:10] Most of us, most of the time, might well go along with the idea that doctrine is good, doctrine is proper. We need to have a body, an outline of Christian truth. But really, surely the most important thing is the practical outworking in the lives that we live. Well, that's good. That's good. But that's very different to saying that the law is the rule of life for the Christian. And we'll come to the text and demonstrate that.

Scripture as a whole upholds this principle. Good doctrine, rightly understood and applied, is the basis for good behaviour.

[00:26:19] Indeed, good doctrine, properly understood and practised, is the only true precursor to good behaviour. And sadly, lived out in history, not excluding the last fifty years, the converse is also sadly true. Bad doctrine, sooner or later, leads to bad living, bad behaviour, behaviour which is obnoxious in the sight of God.

Where there is improper behaviour and good doctrine, the good doctrine will eventually produce the state of soul where the behaviour will be corrected.

[00:27:18] Good behaviour in itself could never, by its practice, lead to good doctrine. The apostle says, good doctrine is more important than good behaviour because it can lead to good behaviour. And the converse sadly expressed significantly in the Corinthian epistle, 1 Corinthians 15, about verse 33, evil communications corrupt good manners. Bad doctrine leads to bad behaviour. [00:28:02] Now, we are going to scan through, just for a few moments, the language that Paul uses to demonstrate the utter folly of displacing doctrine and trying to substitute man's behaviour as the regulator of all that's to take place. Now, there are four words that we need to consider in the epistle that, by the Spirit, Paul uses to emphasise the end and the only end of man's activities. Now, the first word we're going to

look at comes, first of all, in chapter 1 and verse 8. We look at verse 8. [00:29:02] Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. Chapter 3, verse 10. As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. Chapter 11, verse 13. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree. [00:30:03] Seven times over, then, this word curse is injected into the text.

Take the earliest opportunity, read again Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28.

People of Israel gathered together, two high mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, representatives of six of the tribes were put on the top of one of the mountains, representatives of the other six tribes were put on the top of the other mountain. And Moses said, this is to be a demonstration. He says, on the other hand, on the one hand he says, look, hope I've got them the wrong way round, check the test, the right way round, top of Gerizim, [00:31:13] representatives of six of the tribes, to demonstrate the fact that if you obey everything that God says, he will bless you. And there's a list for the six tribes, bless, bless, bless, bless, bless, bless, six blessings held out to them. If you disobey, he said, you'll be cursed. Curse, curse, curse, curse, curse. Equal opportunity for blessing or cursing. Six tribes or representatives of six on each of the high mountains. That's the prospect. That's the potential. That's chapter 27. Chapter 28, there's the outcome. God says, well, through Moses, God says, now, I'll tell you what's going to happen. [00:32:20] He doesn't list six blessings and six curses. Curse, curse, curse, twelve of them all in a row. Tells us, if you want the law, he tells you what the law says. The only possible outcome of pleasing God by what you do is to have the curse fall upon you.

Paul takes up this matter in Galatians. He has the same message for converted believers as for those who, in the days of the wilderness, were under the law.

[00:33:14] He says, in yourself, you know better than you were before you were converted, there's something in you which, when allowed to unleash itself, will result in every activity being of a kind which will cause you to be under the curse. It's a severe lesson. But, not unlike Corinthians, man's wisdom in man's world, giving rise to man's activities, have only one outcome. The curse of God.

Now, this leads us, I must leave that there. Let us move, then, to our second word, the word crucified, used four times in the epistle. Chapter 2, verse 20. [00:34:16] I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Chapter 3, verse 1. O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you? Chapter 5, verse 24. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Chapter 6, verse 14. [00:35:10] God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. Man's works, man's activities, can only lead to being brought under the curse of God. The curse can only be removed.

Everything that man does as a result of his own efforts can only be dealt with before a holy God on one basis, by one work.

[00:36:07] The death of Christ, not by natural causes, not only by violence, but by crucifixion.

Death by crucifixion is not only abrupt and final and violent and painful, it is a shameful death.

What a sorry commentary upon the works of man, that it has to be brought not only to an end, but a shameful end, signified in a shameful death by crucifixion.

[00:37:09] Examine the distinctions between those four examples where the word is used in the epistle. The true Christian position is to accept that everything that I might try to do with my strength and my wisdom from my own volition only brings me into shame before God, and could only be dealt with fully before God by death by crucifixion of the Son of God. The Christian accepts that.

He says, my works were such that they had to be brought to that shameful end when Jesus my Lord was crucified. That's the assessment before God of man's activities.

[00:38:22] Please meditate further upon that. Chapter 5, we must move on. Chapter 5, verse 11.

I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased. Chapter 6, verse 12.

As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. [00:39:10] But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. Seven times the curse that arises because of man's activities, seven times over it's stressed. The necessity of a shameful death, bringing to a shameful end man's activities, stressed four times.

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, emphasised in a three-fold way. [00:40:06] Chapter 5, verse 11, tells us that the cross is God's continuing witness that anything that I can do in itself because of what I am as a man can only come to one end before God, it's brought to an end in judgement. The cross is God's judicial comment on man's activities. Man trying to please God by the works that he does. Additionally, in chapter 5, verse 11, it says if I have anything connected with myself, even religious works and ceremonies, the offence of the cross is ceased. [00:41:14] What is the offence of the cross? The offence of the cross is, it's offensive to me, it's offensive to my flesh, to tell me there's nothing in me or about me that's capable of pleasing God. Or the false teachers went to the Galatians and said, now look, the work of Christ is vital. But as some would say, you know, there's a little spark of good in you which just needs fanning into a flame. Promote it, develop it, cultivate it and you'll really find that there's all sorts of ways in which you as a person can please God and it's necessary to do that in order to get a full salvation. [00:42:13] Pollution, corruption, adulteration of the pure gospel.

It's offensive even now to tell someone that they are in such a sinful and moral state before God that there's no way in which you can please God and there's no way that you can earn salvation as a result of anything that you seek to do before God. Now that's offensive to the flesh. Give me something to do, give me a performance to aim at, metres in a second, words in a minute, an examination to pass, something where when I've done it I can say, there you are, I did it, I achieved it, look what a good boy I am. [00:43:21] Preening myself on what I've been able to do, that's no gospel at all. Oh how thankful we can be that it's not true, that there's anything about us which contributes to God's plan of salvation. What a sorry state we'd be in if one millionth of one percent of our salvation depended upon anything that you or I can do. We'd have no assurance of salvation at all. It's all of

Christ.

[00:44:03] Paul said to the Galatians, is Christ sufficient? Yes, a thousand times yes.

We've tested the strength of the language, we've combed through for that. We've gone right through these words, curse, crucifixion, the cross, there is another word, almost at the end of the epistle.

[00:45:01] I think we'll leave that till the end. Turn back to chapter 5 please.

Chapter 5, verse 19.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, verse 22, but the fruit of the spirit is.

Then we get the ninefold fruit of the spirit. Really, this is the crux of the matter. Man's activities are listed in verses 19, 20 and 21. Do we believe it?

[00:46:04] In our mixed condition, if it wasn't mixed there'd be no struggle, God says there is that in us which, given due reign, would express itself in adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like.

That is what man is capable of if the circumstances are right. [00:47:03] Terrible thing.

No wonder that all the judgment of God that's due on such things had to be expressed in the judgment of God as to sin upon the Lord Jesus Christ, expressed in the shameful death by crucifixion.

And that's the end result of man's unbridled activities. A sorry tale.

Not a set of rules, nothing connected with the activities of man, but rather the fruit of the spirit.

[00:48:02] Now this is where we get to the crux of the matter. May well be that some of us take offence at this idea of saying the law is not the rule of life for the Christian. That's what the Bible says, that's what Galatians says, but does that bear examination? Oh, proper behaviour to the honour of Christ is essential, not by the keeping of rules, not by aiming at a standard, but as the natural outflow, the outflow according to nature of that which God has formed within us.

There's a major distinction between the two. Fruit arises because there is life in the plant which has been established, the life is promoted, and the ultimate outcome of that life flowing through the branches, the life expresses itself in the bearing of fruit.

[00:49:28] Not by the keeping of any commandments or set of rules, it's according to its nature, naturally expressing itself in the bearing of fruit. Christian behaviour to the honour of Christ is the natural expression of the life that is within. Romans 8 verses 3 and 4 give us the doctrine of it.

[00:50:05] Romans, the exposition of the gospel. Galatians, the vindication of the gospel, that there's no other way before God. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. Deeply significant that in the epistle to the Galatians there are fourteen references to the activities and the expression of life in the spirit. And those who

walk not according to the flesh, showing the works of the flesh, but according to the spirit, the life by the spirit expressing itself in fruit according to God, [00:51:01] God finds its outcome in love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

Against such there is no law. A basic, clear, simple message.

Blessing can only come to us because Christ personally and the value to God of his work is sufficient for every necessary aspect of our salvation. He refers to it, chapter 1, the opening verses, As to the past, he gave himself for our sins. As to the present, that he might deliver us from this present evil world. As to the future, glory forever and ever. Amen. [00:52:11] It's to be entered into in a very personal, individual way, chapter 2, verse 20, I am crucified with Christ. I can do no more than accept God's statement, God's judicial comment, that not only all that I've done, but all that I am in myself has been brought to the proper shameful end. The curse of God being carried out in that shameful death by crucifixion at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. As an individual, Paul said, he can't say it for you and me. We can't say it for each other. I can only say it for myself. So can you. [00:53:12] I have come to realise that God's comment is the only possible judgement on the situation. I am crucified with Christ. The old I, the old life, finished once and for all, nevertheless I live. Yet, not the old I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live, in the flesh, I live, it's a life of faith. The focal point, the centre, the basis, the foundation of that life is Christ. My trust, my faith is in him, the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. [00:54:04] We move on again to chapter 6, similar comment. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The more we get to know ourselves, the more grateful we need to be that salvation resides in him alone and not connected with anything that you or I can do for ourselves. Entire, whole, complete, eternal, heavenly, spiritual, because it's in him. The apostle says that's the salvation I can glory in, based upon the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he goes on as an individual to say, now it's God's judicial comment, but it was also man's comment, that the one who lived that perfect life, the one who alone magnified the law and made it honourable, [00:55:21] they said of him, we don't want a man like that, away with him, crucify him. Paul says, I need to say, if that's what the world thought of him who loved me and gave himself for me, I want nothing to do with a world like that. By which he says, by the cross, if that's what the world thought of him, I'm crucified to the world. I would regard it as a shameful thing to be connected personally with a world like that. [00:56:04] Or no, he adds, he says, I realise that if I say I want nothing to do with a world like that, that treated my saviour like that, it won't be very long before the world says to me, good riddance, we don't want you either. Personal, and it has its result. Verse 17, he says, from henceforth let no man trouble me. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Not only the curse, not only the crucifixion, not only the cross, but here the marks, the stigmata. Not a miraculous copy of the marks that were incurred by the Lord Jesus in his personal body on the cross, but the outward evidence that he was so true to the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him.

[00:57:24] That he'd suffered every kind of abuse in the world where he endeavoured in every way to be true to the Master that he served. Read the catalogue in 2 Corinthians 11 of the things that he suffered, even in his body. Oh yes. Letting the fruit of the Spirit develop and manifest itself in the power of the Spirit will lead to the offence of the cross, will lead to its effect even in our lives. [00:58:04] Living in a way that is true to the one who loved me and gave himself for me will certainly lead to that persecution. Yes, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution in my spirit, in my soul, even in my body. It will become evident in the life that I live that because I've aligned myself with the one who was cast out of the world by the shameful death of the cross, that the world will treat me in

measure in the way that it treated him. Solemn things, solemn treatment, a solemn matter, but leading in the power of the Spirit to the fruit of the Spirit being exhibited in every department of our lives. Let us pray. [00:59:05] Oh God our Father, we give thee thanks that it is with joy that we can acknowledge before thee that the Christ is sufficient to meet our every need.

Our need for the forgiveness of sins, the need to develop those features of Christ that are well pleasing to thee and mark us out in this wicked world as those who are waiting for their Lord to come. Help us, our God, to be true to the pure, unadulterated gospel of Christ, that there might be that fair demonstration in the world that cast him out, that there are those who are prepared to be true to him and wait for his coming. [01:00:11] We commit ourselves to thee, thank thee for the preservation to us of thy holy written word. Pray that an appreciation of it might deepen in every soul while we wait for the Lord to come. We ask it and give thee thanks in his most precious name. Amen.