



REF TEAC AUTH BIBLE GRK HEB HIST COMM THEOL DICT SERM DEVOT PHILOS TOPIC WRIT LANG CREED AUDIO

Index Bookmark This Page

Audio Bible Help Manual Bibles Time Line



# ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS - EDITOR'S PREFACE

[PREVIOUS CHAPTER](#) - [NEXT CHAPTER](#) - [HELP](#) - [FB](#) - [TWITTER](#) - [GR VIDEOS](#) - [GR FORUMS](#) - [GR YOUTUBE](#)



Bad Advertisement?

Are you a Christian?

Online Store:

- [Visit Our Store](#)



OLDER ENGLISH editions of Luther's Commentary on the [Epistle](#) to the Galatians usually describe it as having been 'collected and gathered word by word out of his [preaching](#).' In point of fact, it was based on a course of lectures which he [delivered](#) in 1531 at the University of Wittenberg, where for over thirty years he was Professor of Biblical Exegesis. He was not himself responsible for its publication, though he contributed a Preface to it, in which he acknowledges that it truly represents his thought. He was not in the [habit](#) of writing out his lectures, but spoke freely from a carefully prepared but brief outline, as he did also when he [preached](#). We owe this Commentary, therefore, as we owe much else of his extant [work](#), to [friends](#) and admirers who were [busy](#) with their pencils while they listened to him in classroom or in [church](#).

The original edition of this Commentary — in [Latin](#), like the lectures on which it was based — was prepared for the press by George Rorer, 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 Rorer, 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 'Rorer'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 Rorer, although it was not written specifically for this Commentary. At the end of July 1532, Rorer 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.

Luther is not easily turned into twentieth-century English, and even when he is made to ‘talk American’ — as Th. Graebner admits in the preface to his ‘streamlined’ version — many a passage seems **weak** and ineffectual by comparison with the **Latin**. The difficulty **lies** perhaps partly in the things Luther says, and not only in the way he says them, as can be seen in the version of his own Preface in the present edition. Here a **fresh** translation seemed desirable, and it has been rendered into as modern **speech** as could well be done without resort to pure paraphrase. Elsewhere, however, even when alterations or additions have been necessary, an attempt has been made to harmonize them with the sixteenth-century style.

The names of the Elizabethan translators (as the then **Bishop** of London f6 explains in his Foreword) are by their own wish unknown to us. But something can be **discovered** about them, both from their rendering of Luther and from the translators’ preface with which they furnished it under the title: ‘To all **afflicted** consciences which grone for Saluation, and wrastle vnder the Crosse for the kingdome of **Christ**.’ They were, it appears, Zwinglian in sympathy; for greatly as they admired and commended Luther and his **work**, they could not help regretting (though they could excuse) his inability to agree with the Swiss reformer in the matter of sacramental **doctrine**, and they had to confess that they had omitted from their translation a number of passages in his Commentary, which some readers

might have found **offensive**, In this connection, it is interesting to notice that on its first **appearance** in 1535, Luther's Galatians evoked **protests** from theologians of the Zurich **school**.<sup>f8</sup> The passages omitted from the English translation, however, covered more points than sacramental — or any other — **doctrine**, and some of them could hardly be classed as likely to give offense. They included, for instance, grammatical and philological points, and references to earlier commentators; and they were rather more numerous than might have been expected. It may be that the translators **worked** with a defective copy of the original text, although there can be no doubt that it derived from the second **Latin** edition. Their major omissions are indicated in the present volume by the use of italic type. Shorter and less significant passages which have had to be supplied, it has seemed unnecessary and undesirable to mark, lest the pages should be too much **disfigured** by changes of type. For any omissions, however, the translators more than made up by the verbosity of their rendering. If Luther was surprised (as he says in his Preface) to find himself represented as so *verbosus* in Rorer's **Latin**, he would surely have been more surprised to see how prolix he had become in English. He might also have mildly **protested** at some points, that while he knew how to be vituperative on occasion, he had really not expressed himself as strongly as that!

Nevertheless, the Elizabethans had caught the genuine accents of Luther, and their translation, with the omissions repaired, sundry errors corrected, and wholly superfluous phrases pruned, may be said to represent him fairly to the English reader. Changes in rendering have in general been **avoided**, even in places where the translation is somewhat free, so long as Luther's sense is sufficiently represented and no matter of special importance is involved. In some instances, explanatory words and phrases not present in the original have been enclosed in square brackets instead of being removed. Many Scripture references given either by the old translators or by the Weimar editors, but not by Rorer, have been retained. Scripture quotations have been allowed to stand in their sixteenth century form (instead of being assimilated to the later Authorized Version), except where the **Latin** demanded some modification of it. In the matter of punctuation and the use of capitals, neither earlier English editions nor the **Latin** could be slavishly copied; but if there is a measure of inconsistency, especially in capitalization, it may be taken as reflecting the even greater inconsistency of the **Latin** text.

The fact that this version is based on the second rather than the first edition of the original is no disadvantage, since the changes made in the revision were mainly to improve the style and clarify the sense. No very drastic alterations were made, although some references to events more nearly contemporary with the lectures of 1531 were omitted as no longer relevant in 1538, and in a few places modifications were introduced to **avoid** unnecessarily offending the Zwinglians. In addition, the score or so of subtitles (**printed** in the present edition in heavier type) were inserted to indicate the subjects under discussion at certain points. That these things were done with Luther's consent and approval is shown by the fact that the revised edition carried not only his original Preface, but also an addition to it from his pen. We may take it, then, that he regarded it as truly expressing

his views, which — we may note — so far as his theological convictions were concerned, remained unchanged from the first edition and, indeed, from the lectures on which it was based.

The **Epistle** to the Galatians was a favorite of Luther's. He called it 'my own **Epistle**, to which I have plighted my troth. It is my Katie von Bora.' He found in it a source of **strength** for his own **faith** and **life**, and an armory of **weapons** for his reforming **work**. He had twice **expounded** it previously: in 1519, when he largely depended on St. Jerome and Erasmus for his exegesis, and in 1523, when he departed from them both. In the present **work** he frequently expresses his dissent from St. Jerome, and occasionally takes issue with Erasmus. He came to think very little of his earlier commentaries. 'They won't do at all for this age,' he said, 'they were only my first struggles against the **confidence** of works.' But he rated his later exposition more highly. When the complete **Latin** edition of his works was in **preparation** a couple of years before his **death**, he said, 'If they took my **advice**, they'd **print** only the books containing **doctrine**, like the Galatians.' f12 In 1531 Luther seems to have decided to lecture again on the **Epistle** because he felt that the centrality of the **doctrine** of **justification** had been somewhat obscured during the controversies of the preceding years. For nearly a decade he had been fighting a **war** on two fronts: against what he called *Enthusiasmus*, or *Schwarmerei*, and against scholastic theology and popery. The former, which he first encountered in the 'Zwickau prophets' in 1522, is variously represented in the present Commentary by — the 'fantastical spirits,' Sectaries, Anabaptists, Sacramentarians, and so forth, whom we meet in its pages. The latter, with which he had been engaged from the beginning of his reforming **work**, has its representatives in the 'sophisters,' the **school**-divines, the monks, the Papists and the Pope. These two sets of his opponents were, of course, opposed to each other as well as to Luther, and it was perhaps not unnatural, though it was unfortunate, that each of them should take his divergence from themselves to mean that he shared the errors of the other side. By the 'Enthusiasts' he was regarded — on account of what to-day is often miscalled his 'conservatism' — as in many ways little better than a Papist; while to the Papists — on account of what is equally miscalled his 'individualism' and 'subjectivism' — he seemed no better than an Enthusiast. f16 Those whom Luther called Enthusiasts, however, were a very heterogeneous **crowd** and by no means a united body. Most of them, it is true, belonged to the left **wing** of the **Reformation** movement; but they were divided into numerous **sects** and parties, which differed from each other as well as from Luther in their conceptions of the form that the **Reformation** ought to take. They included revolutionary radicals like Munzer and those responsible for the passions of the Peasants' Revolt, or for the excesses, ten years later, of Anabaptist Munster. But they also included **world**-renouncing puritans like Carlstadt, and men of a mysticalrational turn of **mind** like Schwenkfeld and Franck; and even the Zwinglians could in certain respects be numbered among them. In view of their obvious **diversity**, they had some ground for complaint when Luther lumped them all together and **dismissed** them as *Schwärmer*. Nevertheless, they had something in common besides their anti-**Roman** **zeal**; for not only were they all dissatisfied in one way or another with Luther's reforming outlook, but their different objections to it could all be traced back to one



and the same source. So at any rate it seemed to Luther, who accordingly ignored the differences between them, and **accused** them one and all of Enthusiasm.

What Luther understood by Enthusiasm, might be described broadly as an assumption of superior spirituality, the claim to represent a more truly **spiritual** outlook. For the essence of the Enthusiasts' quarrel with himself, it appeared, was that his conception of Christianity was not nearly **spiritual** enough. Indeed, to the more extreme among them, it was not **spiritual** at all, as witness the attack on him that Munzer **published** in 1524, entitled: 'Against the unspiritual, soft-living **flesh** at Wittenberg.' This alleged lack of spirituality manifested itself in a variety of ways, which we have not space to **examine** in detail here. But it was to be seen not least in the importance that Luther still attached to the externals of **religion**, such as the Sacraments and the written and spoken Word. These things could never be of more than secondary significance for the Enthusiasts, for whom the one thing needful was the direct operation of the Spirit in the individual **soul**. This operation might be conceived in terms of apocalyptic visions, mystical illumination, or rational insight, but it was in any case independent of external mediation. It was a matter of inward experience, for which priority was claimed over all outward things, even including Scripture itself — for Scripture could not be rightly **interpreted** without it. The 'outward Word,' written or spoken, was therefore profitless to those who had not first heard the 'inward Word' (or received the 'inner light') of the Spirit in their **hearts**; and still more profitless were all outward rites and ceremonies. Although such external, corporeal things might have their place, they could not be thought of as actually mediating the toward and **spiritual** realities of **religion**.

In support of their views, the Enthusiasts commonly (if a trifle inconsistently) appealed to Scripture. After all, was it not written that 'the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life' ( **2 Corinthians 3:6**), and 'it is the spirit that quickeneth; the **flesh** profiteth nothing' ( **John 6:63**)? But Luther had a ready reply. If these texts were read in their contexts, as they should be, they would be seen to speak, not for, but against the Enthusiasts. When St. **Paul** spoke of the letter and the spirit, he was not setting the outward, written Word over against an inward Word experienced in the **heart**, nor was he distinguishing between, the literal meaning of the written Word, and some deeper, **spiritual** (or allegorical) meaning. He was elaborating the contrast between the **Law** and the **Gospel**, both of which can be plainly set forth in **speech** and writing without being any the less **spiritual** for that. Why, in **Romans 7:14**, St. **Paul** expressly describes the **Law** — which in **2 Corinthians 3** he calls the 'letter' — as **spiritual**. As for the contrast between the spirit and the 'flesh,' it is clear to Luther that the Enthusiasts have quite **failed** to understand the biblical meaning of these terms. They equate 'flesh' with 'body,' with what is external, visible and tangible, and 'spirit' with what is (psychologically) inward and imperceptible by the physical senses. But according to biblical usage, Luther maintains, everything is and is called spirit and **spiritual**, that proceeds from the **Holy Spirit**, no matter how corporeal, external and visible it may be. And everything is **flesh** and **carnal**, that proceeds without Spirit from the **natural** powers of the **flesh**, no matter how inward and **invisible** it may be. Thus St. **Paul** in **Romans 8**, calls the

carnal mind ‘flesh,’ and in **Galatians 5** he reckons among the works of the **flesh** ‘heresy, **hatred**, envy’ etc., which are entirely inward and **invisible**. f21 Hence Luther can speak of the **flesh** of the incarnate **Christ** as a ‘spiritual **flesh**,’ which from the point of view of the Enthusiasts is as absurd a phrase as ‘wooden **iron**.’ f22 Now it is possible, of course, to find quotations from Luther which appear — when isolated from the **rest** of his thought — to show that he was a thoroughgoing Enthusiast himself. In the Introduction to his exposition of the Magnificat (1521), for instance, he says:

No one can rightly understand **God** or God’s Word, unless he receives it directly from the **Holy Spirit**. But no one can receive it from the **Holy Spirit** without experiencing, proving and feeling it. f23 This passage is quoted (at second **hand**) by Monsignor Ronald Knox, to illustrate the mystical creed on which, he alleges, Luther’s theology was ultimately based, and to show that Luther ‘quite irrationally’ took his stand against Munzer. Naturally Monsignor Knox does not point out — since perhaps he is unaware — that Luther’s understanding of the relation between the Word and the Spirit of **God** was quite different from that of Munzer and the **rest** of the Enthusiasts. They held that the Spirit was given independently of external mediation; Luther held that the Spirit employed external means, and above all the written and spoken Word, to **gain** entry into the **hearts** and minds of men. In a sermon **preached** in 1526, he says:

The Word is the **door** and **window** of the **Holy Spirit**... If you shut this **window**, **God** does not give you the true **Holy Spirit**. He wills to use this **door**, namely, the written or spoken Word... If you **seek** to do otherwise, then... you will have a spirit to **boast** of which is **Satan**. f26 Here Luther clearly has the Enthusiasts in **mind**, but what he says is entirely in harmony with the views he held before he encountered the Enthusiasts; for already in 1519 he had written ‘The Spirit is nowhere more present and alive than in His own **sacred** writings... We must let Scripture have the **chief** place and be its own truest, simplest and clearest interpreter... I want Scripture alone to rule, and not to be **interpreted** according to my spirit or that of any other man, but to be understood in its own **light** (*per seipsam*) and according to its own Spirit. f27 Here Luther was fighting on the anti-**Roman** front, against the claims made for ecclesiastical **authority** in relation to the interpretation of Scripture; but his words might equally well have been directed against the Enthusiasts.

As Luther sees it, there is in fact little to choose between his opponents on the two fronts, despite their hostility to one another. Although on the whole he prefers the Pope to the Enthusiasts, he finds in them both simply different manifestations of the same fundamental error. Hence in the *De servo arbitrio* (1525) he writes: I do not approve of those who have recourse to boasting of the Spirit; for I had last year, and still have, a sharp enough **conflict** with those fanatics who subject the Scriptures to the interpretation of their own spirit. On that account I have also set myself hitherto against the Pope, in whose **kingdom** nothing is more commonly accepted than the saying that the Scriptures are obscure and ambiguous, and that the Spirit to **interpret** them must be sought from the Apostolic See of **Rome** — a most **pernicious** idea, which has led **ungodly** men to exalt themselves above the Scriptures and make of them what they please. f29 Thirteen years later, in

the Articles of Schmalkald, we find him saying much the same thing. Insisting that the Spirit is given only ‘through or with the external Word,’ he proceeds:

We must **beware** of the Enthusiasts, who **boast** that they possess the Spirit before and without the Word, and then sit in **judgment** on Scripture or the spoken Word, turning and twisting it as they please, as Munzer did and many still do, who want to distinguish sharply between the spirit and the letter, though they understand neither... Likewise the Papacy is sheer Enthusiasm, whereby the Pope **boasts** that he has all **laws** in the **shrine** of his **heart** so that whatever he decides and commands in his **church** is spirit and right, even though it goes beyond and against Scripture and the spoken Word. This is nothing but the **devil** and the old **Serpent**, that turned **Adam** and **Eve** into Enthusiasts by drawing them away from the external Word of **God** to spiritualities and their own **imagination**s. f32 In other words, both parties of his opponents are **guilty** in Luther’s **eyes** of what, in **Bishop Butler**’s phrase, may be called ‘pretending to special revelations of the Holy Ghost’; and that, to Luther no less than to the **Bishop**, ‘is a very horrid thing.’ f33 From this point of view, the main difference between the Papists and the Enthusiasts is that, while the former look to the **authority** of the **Church** (institutionalized in the Papacy) for the authentic guidance of the Spirit, the latter look to the direct operation of the Spirit in the individual **soul** (so that — in theory at least — every man may be his own pope!). But this difference between his opponents is of minor importance compared with the basic error of which Luther **accuses** them both alike, and which constitutes their most vital difference from himself — the error, that is to say, of looking for the Spirit of **God** elsewhere than in the Word of **God**, as if the Word itself were not the living expression and vehicle of the Spirit. f34 The various manifestation of this error, as Luther encountered it in the ‘two fronts’ of his reforming campaign, are sufficiently illustrated in the present Commentary, where the controversies of the time are frequently reflected, and although they tend to impede the progress of the exposition, are related to the central theme — the **doctrine** of **justification** — in a way that is instructive for our understanding both of it and of them.

When the first English edition of this Commentary was **published** in 1575, the translators began their preface by assuring the ‘godly Reader’ that amongst many other godly English bookes in these our dayes **printed** and translated, thou shalt find but few, wherein either thy time shall seeme better bestowed, or thy **labor** better recompensed to the **profit** of thy soule, or whereto thou maist see the spirit and veine of S. **Paul** more liuely represented to thee, then in the **diligent** reading of this present commentarie upon the **Epistle** of S. **Paul** to the Galatians.

They also gave some **advice** about the way to read the book ‘with profite and judgement,’ saying that two things were specially necessary, of which the first was to reade it wholly together, and not by peeces and parts here and there, but to take it in order as it lieth, conferring one place with another, whereby to understand the better the right meaning of the writer, how and in what sence he excludeth good works, and how not: how he neglecteth the **law**, & how he magnifieth the **law**. For as in the case of iustifying before **God**, the free **promise** of the Gospell admitteth no

condition, but **faith** onely in **Christ** Iesu: so in the case of dutifull obedience, Luther here excludeth no good workes, but rather exhorteth thereunto, and that in many places. Thus times and cases discreetly must be distincted.

The second thing necessary for anyone who would ‘take fruit’ from this book, is that he should ‘bring such a **mind** with him to the reading, as the **author** himself did to the **preaching** thereof: that is, he had need to have his senses **exercised** somewhat in such spirituall **conflicts**, and to be well humbled before with the feare of **God** and inward repentance . . . For albeit most true it is, that no greater **comfort** to the soule of man can be found in any booke next to the holy Scripture, then in this commentarie of M.

Luther: so this **comfort** hath little place, but onely where the conscience being in heaviness hath need of the Phisitions **hand**.

The other, who feele themselues whole, and are not touched in soule with any **sorrow**, as they little care for these bookes, so haue they little vnderstanding of this **doctrine** when they read it. f35 Such **advice** is perhaps not altogether beside the point even for the modern ‘godly Reader.’

However that may be, it is interesting to notice how the sentiments of the translators — and also of **Bishop** Sandy’s Foreword — were echoed in the two centuries following, by men whose influence on English-speaking Christianity has been both **far-reaching** and profound.

In the account of his **spiritual** pilgrimage, written in Bedford **jail** and entitled *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, John Bunyan tells us how, many years before, the **God** in whose **hands** are all our days and ways, did east into my **hand**, one day, a book of Martin Luther; it was his comment on the Galatians... the which, when I had but a little way perused, I found my condition, in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my own **heart**... [and] this, methinks, I must let fall before all men, I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, excepting the Holy **Bible**, before all books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a **wounded** conscience.

Then, half a century further on, a certain William Holland, lately returned from America to London, records in his diary that on May 17th, 1738, he was ‘providentially directed to Martin Luther’s Commentary on the **Epistle** to the Galatians.’ He continues:

I carried it round to Mr. Charles Wesley, who was **sick** at Mr. Bray’s, as a very precious **treasure** that I had found, and we three sat down together, Mr. Charles Wesley reading the Preface aloud. At the words, ‘What, have we then nothing to do? No, nothing! but only accept of Him who of **God** is made unto us **wisdom** and **righteousness** and **sanctification** and redemption there came such a **power** over me as I cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an instant; my **heart** was so filled with **peace** and **love** that I **burst** into tears... My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their **knees** and **prayed**. When I afterwards went into the **street**, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon. Charles Wesley’s *Journal* confirms this incident, and



also tells us of the effect that the reading of Luther had on Charles himself. He says:

I **marveled** that we were so soon and so entirely removed from him that called us into the **grace** of **Christ**, unto another **Gospel**. Who would believe that our **Church** had been founded upon this important article of **justification** by **faith** alone? I am **astonished** I should ever think this a new **doctrine**; especially while our Articles and Homilies stand unrepealed, and the key of **knowledge** not yet taken away.

From this time forward I endeavoured to ground as many of our **friends** as came in this fundamental **truth**, **salvation** by **faith** alone, not an idle, dead **faith**, but a **faith** which works by **love**, and is necessarily productive of all good works and all **holiness**.

I spent some hours this evening in private with Martin Luther, who was greatly **blessed** to me, especially the conclusion of the second chapter. I **labored**, waited and **prayed** to feel 'who **loved** me, and gave himself for me.'

Four days later, Charles Wesley's prayer was answered, when on Whit Sunday he experienced his 'evangelical conversion' and knew what it was to have, not only the **doctrine** of **justification** by **faith**, but also the **faith** itself of which the **doctrine** speaks.

John Wesley entered into the same experience three days after Charles, and Luther's *Preface to the **Epistle** to the Romans* was instrumental in bringing him to it. But he does not appear to have read the Commentary on Galatians until three years later. When he did read it, his reaction was very different from that of his **brother**. In his Journal for June 15th, 1741, he writes:

I was utterly **ashamed**. How have I esteemed this book, only because I heard it so commended by others; or, at **best**, because I had read some excellent sentences occasionally quoted from it! But what shall I say, now I **judge** for myself?... the **author** makes nothing out, clears up not one considerable difficulty... he is deeply tinctured with Mysticism throughout, and hence often dangerously wrong... How does he (almost in the words of Tauler) decry reason, right or wrong, as an irreconcilable **enemy** to the **Gospel** of **Christ**!... Again, how blasphemously does he speak of good works and the **Law** of God... Here (I **apprehend**) is the real spring of the grand error of the Moravians. They follow Luther, for better, for worse.

Hence their 'No works; no **Law**; no **commandments**.'

In a sermon **published** many years later, Wesley declared that, while Luther was excellent on the subject of **justification**, he displayed in his *Galatians* 'a total ignorance with regard to **sanctification**.' But there is evidence that Wesley had read his Luther, very cursorily, and that he was prejudiced from the start by the **trouble** he was having at the time with the antinomian and quietistic teaching of the Moravians. If he had paid attention to the translators' **advice** to the reader, he might well have found that Luther could be quoted against the Moravians as well as by them.

At the same time, it is perhaps relevant to note that in 1531, when Luther was lecturing on Galatians, it was not antinomianism, but rather legalism that was his problem, as it was St. Paul's in the [Epistle](#) itself.

Antinomianism became a problem for him, however, in 1536, when Johannes Agricola [adopted](#) a position similar to that of Wesley's Moravians. It is to this that Luther refers in the passage added to his Preface for the second edition of his *Galatians*, where he says that Satan 'stirreth up [daily](#) new [sects](#), and last of all... he hath [raised](#) up a [sect](#) of such as say that the Ten [Commandments](#) ought to be taken out of the [Church](#).' Luther's reaction to this 'sect' found expression, not in a further course of lectures on Galatians, but in a series of vigorous *Theses against the Antinomians*, in which, while there is nothing to [contradict](#) the teaching of the present Commentary, there is naturally a somewhat different emphasis. But even in the Commentary, when he attacks 'the law' and 'works,' he more than once explains that it is not these things in themselves that he is attacking, but the legalistic misconception and misuse of them. And when he condemns *ratio*, it is not 'reason' simply as 'the faculty of apprehending, judging and discoursing' (to use Wesley's definition) that he has in trend, but rather the use made of that faculty by the 'natural man,' to whom nothing seems more 'rational' than the legalistic way of thinking. Of this there are examples enough in the following pages.

Rightly understood, Luther's criticism of 'reason' and 'the law' (or 'works') is nothing else but an attack on the human propensity to self [justification](#) and self-[righteousness](#), which he regards as 'the universal [plague](#) of the whole [world](#).' It is a subtle [plague](#), of which he finds symptoms in unexpected places, and it is hardly too much to say that the whole aim of his exposition of the [Epistle](#) to the Galatians is to make us aware of it and point us to its antidote. This he finds in St. Paul's [doctrine](#) of [justification](#) by [faith](#) — [faith](#) in [Christ](#) and in [God](#) through [Christ](#); a [faith](#) that 'carrieth us out of ourselves'; and a [faith](#) that is 'not idle,' but always 'working by [love](#).' That Luther's exegesis of his Pauline text can at every point be [defended](#) in the [light](#) of modern scholarship, no one would wish to maintain; but that he has caught 'the spirit and veine' of the [Apostle](#), and that 'liuely' (as his old translators claim), will hardly be denied; and he has much that is illuminating to say in the course of his exposition. Since, moreover, the 'plague' of self-[righteousness](#) — not only in individuals, but (still more) in classes, [nations](#), and even ecclesiastical denominations — cannot be said to have been banished from the [world](#), the main theme of his Commentary is not less relevant to-day than it was four centuries ago.

**PHILIP S. WATSON. HANDSWORTH METHODIST COLLEGE, BIRMINGHAM.**

[GOTO NEXT CHAPTER - LUTHER'S WORKS INDEX & SEARCH](#)

*GOD RULES.NET*