

3-6-94. Romans. Beginning today, and for the next 3 months, we shall be reading and talking about two ltrs that Paul of Tarsus wrote to young churches (in the middle of the first cen a.d.) As we have them, these 2 epistles were addressed to churches in the capital city of Rome, and in the province of Galatia, in AsMin. We usually think of Paul as the missionary to the nations beyond Judea and the people of the first covenant. We study his journeys as described in the Bk of the Acts, and some of us embark upon a tour, a pilgrimage, to retrace Paul's travels in the Medit world. So dramatic are the missionary journeys that we are tempted to forget that Paul was also the first great Xn theologian. The word comes from two Grk words, Theos, God, and logos, word; we might loosely translate it as God-talk. In a recent book, seminary professor John Leith wrote about his special field of study. Theology has the assignmt of disclosing the inadequacies of the secular concepts intended to explain human life and society. If the ways of the enlightened university accurately expressed the world and all that in it is, then we would have no need for theology, or doctrines of the faith, or creeds, or, for that matter, faith in the unseen. But because the candle of human knowledge burns so dimly, and flickers just when we need a flash of light, we human beings need to know the language and the experience of religious thinkers and doers. Theology must grow out of experience, or ^{of} the remembered confrontations with transcendent mind and spirit, or it has no roots, and will fail. To forget, or to ignore, the language of the Bible, and Xn experience, is to lose the power, and the joy, that life in Xr will bring to us. It is the faith of the Xn community that the revelat of God in Xr is the only repository of information that does justice to the facts of human nature and human life. It makes sense out of the complexities and confusions we find all about us, and we need above all to know the word of God as it speaks to us in our time. At the center of our understanding of the meaning of what God did in sending his only begotten Son into the world, there stands the mind and spirit of Paul. He was born Saul, he was a Pharisee, a member of the strictest denomination in the tradition of Israel, so zealous that he led the persecution in Jerusalem of those who believed that Jesus was raised from the dead, and that confirmed his position as Messiah, the Xr, the Chosen of God. Into his certainty of mission, God intervened; appeared to him in a light so bright it blinded him, and convinced him, and made of him the evangelist to the Gentiles in the world beyond the Jews. Scholars date Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus about a.d.35, and the earliest epistle we have about 50-51. There are two sides to his work, and as we have the record there was no overlapping. In the Bk of the Acts we read of Paul the missionary, who for about 15 yrs travelled widely and at great risk to his personal safety, a great speaker and preacher who wrote nothing. In the seven ltrs we attribute to him, written over about 15 yrs, we read little of missionary activity, and in one of them (2Cor10) he said his speaking ability was poor. For nearly 5 cens there is ~~is~~ little evidence that what Paul wrote in the ltrs had any theological impact. And yet, anyone who is interested in Xty must begin with them, and in particular with the ltr to the Romans. In every age since St. Augustine, when the church seemed a weak, small voice threatened w/extinction, it has been a re-reading and acceptance of Paul's teaching in the Roman ltr that has restored faith and confidence in the Xr-event to make us whole. You and I may have little interest in what bothered Augustine in his time, or what aroused Martin Luther in the north of Europe, or what in the skeptical age we call the Enlightenment drove Xns of all persuasions back to Paul's description of human life as it really is. But the ltr to the Romans remains the treasury of the faith, however it be assaulted, and ridiculed, and declared obsolete. Romans is always relevant to the human situation, one commentator wrote, because its msg is not dependent for its effectiveness on conditions that change from generation to generation. It speaks to those fundamentals that do not vary. It is unlike any other ltr of Paul which survived to us; it speaks not to particular problems or questions people asked. It is apparently carefully composed, well planned and thought, and it contains basic theological assertions and argument. Remember that the earliest of the 4 gospels was not written until after Paul's death. The first Xn documents to appear, and to circulate, were letters, not gospels. The ltrs tell of the meaning of God's invasion ⁱⁿ time in the person of his Son, and tell us very little about what that invasion was. It means that before a.d.65 the tradition of J's teaching, and healing, and sacrifice, was for the most part in the oral ^{expressed} memories of eyewitnesses. The tradition of the gospels began in order to provide a standard by which to measure the true Messiah from the false varieties who appeared. And, it is significant that the gospel tradition ended with the 4 accepted gospels--the word is canonical--but the practice of writing ltrs to individuals and to Chs continued into our time. So we read the ltr to the Romans, written at the close of Paul's missionary career, perhaps 55 to 60. It spoke to the needs of that time, as it speaks to our own, for it continues to break thru the, as one writer put it, "the solidified and frozen" tradits of the past, to confront each of us with our selves, and with the righteousness of God, and to bring us to faith in the God who loved us enough to send his very best, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, so that he is with us when we need his presence. Paul can speak to us because he deals with human nature as it is, and as it might be. So let us return, this spring season, to our roots to see where our faith began to be explained, and to help us to live in these days of the secular and the pagan which surround us. Romans 1:1-17. In these

lines we have the prologue to the letter, and the statement of its themes. The first thing to note is that this a ltr from Paul, by himself. In the other ltrs for which his authorship is unquestioned he included others with him as co-authors and assistants. Not here. He sets down for the people of the faith in Rome the good news of God in Xr as he understood it, with no one else contributing. It means that in this ltr we have a remarkable, a one-of-a-kind insight into Paul's theology, the msg he carried when he preached the gospel in the eastern Medit world. It is an account of the revelat he had received, for which he was willing to take responsibility, for which he would not hide behind a committee. It is something he did not do in any of the other ltrs that we have. Here he wrote to people he did not know as a group; evidently he knew some of them as indivs, people whom he had met in the east, who had moved to the capital city. And perhaps because it was the center of the world, he gave his statemt much thought and preparation. He wanted help from the Xns in Rome, for a mission to their city; or for a journey farther westward, to Spain, and to get it itle explained as fully and as succinctly as possible what his gospel was. And because he wrote it, and it was preserved for us, we can never escape the meaning of the gospel as Paul knew it to be. The 2d thing to note is that at the very beginning, in the first 4 vv, we have a summary of the significance for all the world, and for all time, of the Xr-event. In one sentence we have the entire sweep of God's relat to his creatures, and to the whole creation. Here is the record of God's love through history...the chosen people, to whom a messiah was promised, v.2; the birth to them of that messiah, v.3, descended from David according to human genealogy; designated Son of God in pwr according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, v.4. It is the epitome, the meat and substance of the biblical record from Abraham to Jesus. It was not the teachings of J that confirmed his sonship, not the miracles, not even the obedience that took him to the cross. It was the resurrection that declared, and designated him to be son of God. In his earthly life and ministry he emptied himself, he was weak, and human. But the resurrection made him son of God in pwr. To Paul the faithful Jew, the Pharisee who studied in the best rabbinical schools of his time, Jesus was the fulfillmt of God's eternal promises to his chosen people. He brought the promised redemption and blessing which would be all the families of earth; he was the fulfillmt of the messianic hope of the Jewish people. It was not the fulfillmt that many of the chosen people awaited; they looked to a divine pwr that would rescue them from political and military oppression, who would liberate them from their present conditions. J did all that, to be sure, but not in the dramatic and physical way that many expected. That meant that God's promise was fulfilled in J in a way that marked God's new beginning w/his creation. v.5, thru him we have rec'd grace & apostleship. Grace is the unmerited mercy of God, something we cannot earn or ever deserve. ~~Nothing we can do can win us deliverance.~~ Now the promised blessing comes no longer by our birth into a particular family. It is offered to all people; what was promised to Abraham is now the heritage of everyone who accepts it. The old covenant is now ours to rely upon, because in the resurrection Jesus has opened the way to God for us, whoever we are. We have rec'd grace, we have been called to be apostles, which means one sent forth, a messenger, to proclaim God's truth to all. In the resurrection God has broken the pwr of our nature, which is sin and rebellion. In the opening words we have Xmas and Easter; the virgin birth, designated God's Son; by his resurrection from the dead we have rec'd grace to obey the faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including those who are at Rome, who are called to be saints. The message of grace offered also to gentiles, which we know from the Acts, but not from the ltr, Paul has been actively preaching for 15 yrs or so; this is the measure of the newness of what God has done in Jesus. What folws, 8-15, is Paul's thanksgiving for the faithful to whom he wrote. For all of you I give thanks he wrote, because your faith is proclaimed, it is spoken of, thruout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve w/my spirit in the gospel of his Son. The importance of what he is about to write is underlined by these words. To insure that people would believe him, he called upon God to witness to the truth of it..which was that he prayed for them always, that he might be permitted to visit them, to teach them, to give them spiritual strength, so that they may encourage him as his faith undergirded their faith. Preaching must always be a 2-way street. The preacher encourages the congregation to grow in mind and soul; the congregation teaches the preacher the meaning of endurance and inspiration in the faith. Paul was under obligation to Grks as well as to those who could not speak Grk--the meaning of barbarian in this sentence; he was obligated to wise as well as foolish, to university scholars and to small children; all of us need the word that brings life and meaning to us. Until he had preached to all kinds of people, in all parts of the world, he was in debt; till then the call of God to him was unfulfilled, still pending. So he could say, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome, v.15. These words, about the call, and the obligation, and the preaching, are often cited at ordinations of those called in spl ways to do God's will. For he was not ashamed of the gospel, Paul wrote; he would not hide it, or compromise it, or make it fit the secular and pagan world around him. It is the pwr of God for salvation to everyone who has faith; for in it the righteousness of God is revealed thru faith. By accepting humbly and thankfully what God has done for us in J-Xr, we are counted as righteous in God's court of judgmt. We cannot earn it, or deserve it; it is freely given. Only believe only believe, all things are possible. Here is the key to Paul's theology. May we know it.

3-13-94. Redemption. Last month an essay in the weekly newsmagazine commented upon the current attempt by biologists and geneticists to explain human cussedness as the result of birth defects. Scientists have announced that they were on the verge of pinning down genetic and biochemical abnormalities that predispose their bearers to violence. Last summer a science journal announced the discovery of what might be an Aggression gene. Crime thus joined a host of other ills that issued not from human volition but from defective codes written into our cells. Homosexuality, smoking, divorce, schizophrenia, alcoholism, shyness, political liberalism, intelligence, religiosity, cancer, and blue eyes are among the many aspects of our lives for which biology is destiny. It is the great all-encompassing excuse for our tendency to do harm rather than good, to cheat and lie and embezzle, to break solemn vows and ignore the voice of the conscience, to make the path of morality the way of wisdom and happiness. It is the thing many of us have been seeking ~~for~~ all our lives. We need no longer be held accountable for our ~~wrong-doing~~ ^{misconduct} for we were born to be bad. We can put the blame for our mistakes on biology. An attention ~~span~~ ^{deficit} disorder can explain our violent outbursts of temper, the evidence for which may be detected at the tender age of 5 yrs. A simple blood test might prevent the incidence of bar fights and the desire of an out-of-control baseball manager to kick dirt on the umpire's shoes. Maybe the experts should also seek ~~for~~ the racism gene, the homophobia gene, the corporate confidence scheme gene, the domestic abuse gene. As the writer put it, we should test white men wearing suspenders ^{with} and cellular phones stuck in their ears for the greed gene. The rush to define criminals as sick ^{with} relieves both individual and society of the responsibility for disorderly and disreputable behavior. The problem with all that biological jibber-jabber is that the cause of evil at the core of our beings has already been explained, in the Bible, in Genesis 3 with the temptation of representative human beings to be gods in their own right, and their eagerness to distrust, and disbelieve, the promises and the goodness of God. Yes, Virginia, we are born to be bad, because that is our moral nature. Sin in some shape or other is the great staple of history, and is the sole object of law, wrote the great English historian F.W. Maitland; someone--was it Gilbert Chesterton?--wrote that the only Xn doctrine which can be empirically proved is that of original sin. Interesting, isn't it, that in our generation the agnostic laboratory experimenters announce the discovery of a truth that Bible-readers have known ^{to be true} from the beginning of human history. But that is a theological assertion, and regrettably, theology is no longer the queen of studies. It has a bad reputation in most Xn Chs these days, as theologian William C. Placher wrote in a recent article. Congregations want pastors who are good administrators, good counsellors, effective speakers and good storytellers, hearty jokesters. Theology, if mentioned at all, is far down the list. Yet Karl Barth said 50 yrs ago that theology is the conscience of preaching. But because people in the pews find theology difficult, or unnecessary, Placher said, the word trickles back to the seminaries and divinity schools that training in theology, and wide and serious reading of the great minds which have contemplated the wideness and the depth of God's love, will not get the candidate the job she wants. It is wrong, I think; people out there are hungry for intelligent and faithful teaching and preaching about the God who is revealed to us in the Bible, and to Xns in the final and complete revelation in Jesus Christ. One of the first bks of theology about the meaning of the Xr-event--if it is not in fact the first--is the text for the lessons this quarter. It is the ltr Paul wrote the the Xns in Rome, the capital of the world. In it he wrote his mature understanding of what God had done in sending his son. Anyone who takes Xty seriously must put the Roman ltr at the top of her list of source material. It is a classic document of the Xn faith, and the best theological bk in NT; it is an affirmation of the nature of God in son and in spirit, written in the form of a ltr. It is instruction in Xn doctrine, a writing intended to teach its readers what happened to people and to the world when Jesus gave himself a ransom for the sin which doth so easily beset us. Or would you prefer, for the congenital birth-defect which drives us to act in ways we resent when we see other people doing them? Chap 3 of the Roman ltr is a sustained description of humankind's nature as God sees us, and judges us. It offers no consolation, in fact no hope for us when we act on our own. Are Jews any better? no. We are all under the pwr of sin; there is none righteous, no, no, not one. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, we are justified by his grace as a gift, thru the redemption which is in Xr J. We cannot boast of meeting God's conditions; no obedience to the law, no good deeds, can help us. Only faith can bring God's favor, ^{despite obedience to law} apart from works of law. Then, at 3:21, there is a digression, but an extremely valuable one. Part of that aside, that explanation of what Paul meant by his teaching, is our text for today, Rom 4. For our Lenten meditation, and for our study, the Roman ltr is our source for thought and commitment in the coming spring months. It is theology, and some of us might consider it unnecessary, or incomprehensible. I well remember my own first experience with the bk. It was in the spring of my freshman year in college, long ago and far away, in a galaxy of time and circumstance which no longer exists. The student relig ldr got some small pocket-sized booklets of the Epistle to the Romans, and gave us a copy, with instructions to read it during spring break. I tried; oh, how I tried, but the world was young, and inviting, it was spring, with buds bursting and flowers blooming, I did read it, as assigned, but it did not mean to ^{band concert tour}

me what it has come to mean. It is profound, but not too difficult; full of meaning, so that we could spend years studying it. One commentator whose work I used said in the preface that he had conducted a seminary graduate course on Romans for over 30 yrs. And that, you may be sure, is not an entry for the book of records. So let us read, and take seriously, Paul's magnum opus, to learn from it, and from the guidance of the holy spirit. Rom 4:13-25. Remember that this is part of a digression which began at 3:21, where we learned that we cannot look to ourselves for comfort or salvation, however good we may consider ourselves. But now he turns to Abraham, who entered the Bibl story in Gen 11, after the tower of babel and the scattering of the people. Now you may ask, what has Abraham to do with us, in this year of enlightenmt and genetic consolations? Paul used Abraham as his proof-text because from him we learn the kind of faith that is now, in Xr, made available to all people everywhere. Abraham went when God called him, not knowing where he was going, but trusting God to get him there, and to make the way plain to him. Abrah offered his son Isaac when God commanded him, even when he could not understand the reason, or accept the necessity. Rabbi Yeshayahu Leibowitz made his criticism of Xty at the point of Abr's obedience; Abr expressed a theocentric attitude central to Judaism, he wrote, in contrast, the Xn attitude is anthropocentric (man-centered)--God sacrificed his son for man. And yes, that is correct, for which we Xns should give thanks (Man is willing to sacrifice his son for God) for God has indeed done all that needs doing. As sinful people we can only be saved by the grace shown in Xr and accepted by faith. For that, our example, as it was for Israel, is Abraham. God regarded Abraham as righteous in Gen 15:6, before Abrah had been tested at the altar on Mount Moriah, Gen 22, before Abrah made covenant w/ God and was circumcised, Gen 17. So it was not for something Abr did that God reckoned him as righteous. It was at the basis of Paul's teaching that the law rests upon faith, and it points to faith. So faith does not destroy the law, it fulfills the law, by showing for the first time what the law means. But the point is that faith went before the law, and the law is based upon faith. The blessing God promised to bring to all the families of earth, Gen 12, is ~~now~~ open to all; if you and I want a share of that blessing, we must get it thru Abrah or we will not get it at all. God made Abrah righteous on the basis of Abrah's faith; unless we have the same trust in God's goodness, we cannot know the blessing of God which is our heritage. But we become descendants of Abrah, and heirs of the blessing, by sharing his faith, not his genes. In 4:1 Paul called Abrah our forefather according to the flesh; in 4:11 he is the father of all who believe w/o being circumcised, and still have righteousness reckoned to them. This, then, is the promise to Abrah & to his descendants; it did not come thru the law--the law would not be given until Moses and the Isrs reached Sinai, centuries later. 4:13 is the cornerstone of Xn faith--not thru the law, but thru the righteousness which is ours in faith. Faith is not intellectual assent to a set of propositions; it is fundamental trust in God's goodness and dependability. The devils believe, but it does not change their nature; it does not turn them into angels. Faith is total commitmt of self to the God who made us and wants nothing but good for us. The probl w/ the law is that it makes us think that if we just obey its every jot and tittle we need not rely on God's mercy, but can make it on our own. We can become worthy without begging mercy; we want to earn God's favor, so we can boast of what we have done; we want to do what only God can do. It is idolatry to think that we do not need God because we have the law, or an inerrant book, or belong to the correct convention or synod or association. Idolatry is at work when we declare ourselves worthy to be saved because sin has no hold on us. Our human virtues, our charitable contributions, our care for the less fortunate, they will get us salvation. What it means is that we want a god of our own making, not the God we know in J Xr. So why Abraham, in this day of learning and goodness? because our father in faith has much to teach us, much we need to know. It is by acting in faith, in trusting in God, that we are accounted as righteous. By faith God will receive us, despite our confessed defects, for all who humbly put trust in God belong to the family of God. If salvat were by law, then it was open only to Israel, it would exclude all others; but it is ours (instead) thru the righteousness of faith. The promise to Abrah was given to a gentile, before there was an Israel to father children to become the tribes, before there was a passover or a redemption from Egypt. If the law is necessary, then faith is of no importance; but if from the law we learn only that we are sinners, if from the law we know only the wrath of God, then it is by faith in the work of God that we know the peace and the joy of God's favor. V.16, all who share the faith of Abrah are descendants of Abrah, for in his trust he is father of us all. Paul was born into the faith and tradit of Judaism, he was brought up and educated to be a devout Jew, even a member of the strictest sect among them. ~~Now~~ We can sense his enthusiasm, his excitement, that now the ancient promises to the patriarchs of his people are fulfilled in the new family of God, a new nation that is wide enough to take in all men and women everywhere. The Creator God, who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist, ^{V.17} made Abraham the model, the father of faith. In hope he believed against hope, that what God promised would become real; even old as he was, if God promised a son, a son there would be. He did not waver. We, too, as we hold fast to the faith we have professed, in Him whom God raised from the dead, who was put to death for our transgresses, & raised for our justification. May that truth be our faith, for it is God's gift to us.

V.21 = fully convinced that God was able to do what He promised.

3-20-94. Justification. Many of us in our day are under the impression that the Roman world of the first century, being pagan, had no religious thought or activity, and existed in a spiritual vacuum into which the Xn missionaries moved. It is not true; it is a distortion. All pagan societies suffer not from an absence of religion, but from an overload of competing appeals for the devotion and the wealth of the populace. There were the old Grk gods of Olympus, Zeus and Apollo and Diana; there were sophisticated philosophies such as Stoicism to which many people, and in particular the educated and the literate, turned for solace and support; there were eastern religions which returning Roman soldiers brought, religions which demanded self-mutilation and the use of the blood of slain animals; there were fertility cults, and mystery religions, and practices that found a divine spirit in alcoholic beverages. And there were the state religions that compelled the worship of a dead emperor who was defined, and deified, a god after his death. With it all there were large armies of astrologers, and palm-readers, magicians, who preyed upon the superstitious, who might, for a fee, whisper in your ear the magic incantation that was guaranteed to get you past the 3-headed dog that guarded the gates to the hereafter. Paul the Xn apostle to the world beyond Judea encountered all of those practices and beliefs, from the university scholars in Athens, to the silversmiths who crafted and sold small shrines to Artemis, goddess of hunters & magic and moon. Because he had confronted them in the eastern Mediterranean, he knew that Rome would be filled with their devotees and their agents, all claiming to offer salvation and inner peace. In that world Paul spoke of the one-of-a-kind revelation of God in his son, declared to be the son with power by the resurrection from the dead. Only Jesus, he taught, offered justification of mankind, and reconciliation with God and with other human beings. Where other speakers might have been tempted to dilute the message, to compromise with the cultists and the fakirs, to win a following, and a large budget, and letterhead stationery, Paul stood firmly upon his faith. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Xr, for it is the pwr of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. This morning the text is Rom 5; in it Paul spoke about the justification that God offered, by grace, thru faith, and the peace with God that we have thru our Lord J Xr. Paul knew that the proof of the gospel promises about the unique Christ lay, not in a secret formula, or a logical syllogism, but in a personal experience and relatshp w/God thru the Holy Spirit. His msg to the Romans is that when we put our trust in the Lordship of Xr we have life, a bundant, overflowing life. He spoke to them in words they could understand, but which may sound strange to modern ears. So let us listen, and then discuss, for our world needs the same assurance, the same announcement, that ancient Rome needed, for ours is/as was theirs, teeming with self-centered religions, and self-serving charlatans, and confusion and hurting people. Romans 4:23--5:17. This is another of those places where the division into chapter and verse conceals the point Paul made. So we must back up to the end of Ch 4 to hit the ground running at Ch 5. Beginning with the teaching about Abraham, Paul described the new life that begins when first we dare to believe. It is a passage that continues thru Ch 8. It speaks directly to us here, today. We are apt to say, to ourselves, silently, perhaps, "so God's son died, long ago; so God raised him from the dead; how nice. But so what? What does that have to do with me, here, on a different continent, 2000 yrs later? It is exactly that attitude that Paul speaks to, in a discussion of sin and grace, as they are represented in Adam and Xr. Why should I need justification, we ask; why should I need to make peace w/God? I did not know we were at war with one another. It is a human response, and it is for that reason pagan, and secular, and human-centered. What was said in the bk of Genesis about Abraham and his relatshp w/God must also be said to the Romans, and it must also be said to us. Because Abraham trusted God, his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness, before there was the Law, before there was circumcision, before the Passover. That same heritage is ours to claim in faith, Paul wrote. Then, at 4:23, he turned from the past to the present; this new direction begins here, and not at 5:1. The three themes Paul will present in the following sentences are expressed at the end of Ch 4. They are righteousness, 23-4; Xr's death for sin, 25a; Xr's resurrection for righteousness, 25b. The sentence itself is another aphorism, another nutshell summary expression of the Xn faith. It was not said for Abraham alone; it was said for us also; our Lord makes the promise real for us. He was put to death for our trespasses, and raised for our justification. Believe that, Paul said; accept that, put your trust in that, bet your life upon it, and feel the burden of guilt fall away, and the knowledge of inner peace fill us with its beauty. So, we say, how nice. But, so what? What is justification, and why do I need it? Justification means being made right, correct, our lives and our ideas confirmed to be based upon truth. In Xn terms, it means forgiveness of sin, it means being received into the grace of God, a taking by adoption into the family of God, a relatshp out of which flow good works into the world about us. Justificat, John Calvin wrote, is the hinge on which relig turns...for unless we grasp what our relatshp to God is, and the nature of his judgmt about us, we have no foundation on which to claim salvation, and no basis to build a pious & Godly life. Martin Luther made justificat the key to the righteousness of God. How can a sinful person stand in God's presence, he kept asking; how could a person clothed in human flesh be perfect, as God is perfect, as Xr was sinless? In these words of the Roman ltr he found his answer,

as we ourselves may find it. We moderns may not experience guilt before God in the same way Martin Luther did; he lived in a different world; he was an Augustinian monk, who knew St. Augustine's theology, and he read Paul. But we do know the experience of lostness, of condemnation, of moral confusion when ~~any~~ ^{our} course we take seems wrong. We may rationalize our righteousness, we may try to escape judgment by blaming our childhood, our neighborhood, or some other excuse. A cartoon in the local paper earlier this month showed Cain standing beside the body of his brother Abel, and a voice from heaven asking, Why did you murder your brother? To which Cain responds, brandishing his club, Hey, I'm the victim here! You have no idea what an abusive childhood I had! Without taking sides, or sitting in judgment, we can understand that cartoon, even if it is on the editorial page and not the religion page, because we all seek an excuse for our infidelities (It was my father who drove me to break my vows by abusing me in my childhood), our violence (~~some ethnic groups honor a fight in spirit in a young person~~), our selfishness (hey, if I don't look out for myself, then who will?) We quote that celebrated saint, Benjamin Franklin, who wrote, God helps those who help themselves; but it matters what it is we are helping ourselves to, doesn't it? the cross tells us that God saves those who cannot help themselves. But we must first recognize, and confess, that we need help; we need righteousness; we do evil for the sake of good, and deny one loyalty in the name of another loyalty, and all the choices open to us are evil. Read George Eliot's novel Middlemarch for a fictional treatment of our predicament. Within ourselves we know who we are; we know that human wisdom becomes our undoing because we deny that it has limits; our strength becomes our defeat because we put too much trust in it. If we are honest we will confess that our finest hours have human flaws for which we must bear responsibility. It means that we cannot distinguish between good people and bad people, relig people and sinners. There is no gospel for the self-righteous who think themselves good in their own right. Those who are not sick need no physician; self-righteousness is self-deception. The most difficult problem facing the Xn mission in our time to to breach the barrier of the self-righteousness of contemporary humanity. We are not sick, we say; we can save ourselves; we can show mercy, but we do not need to receive it from God. ^{To} that attitude Paul says it loud and clear and persistently--you are I, brother, are standing in the need of prayer, and forgiveness, and mercy, and justification. Sin is rebellion, it is defiance of the good, and it is also the corruption of the good. All that we touch we tarnish, for without God and the sacrifice of his Son we can do nothing. There is offered to us a grace, an unmerited love, that enables us to understand ourselves, and to face an unknown future, and to live with joy overflowing in the face of tragedy and irony and pathos, and to accept the incompleteness of our lives/in the trust and the hope that the God who made us knows best how we should live. Paul wrote it, to a different city, in a different century, but it is a special-delivery letter to us, in our time and place. What we could not do for ourselves, God has done for us; now that we are set right w/God by faith in the death & resurrection of Xr, we are at peace w/God thru that faith. God's grace is so pwrfl that even when we try to work against it, it is strengthened, so that--as Paul wrote in an unforgettable and exciting sentence--sufferings produce endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us. Starting w/tribulations and ending w/hope; how can any problem, or setback, or misguided prophet, or an evil and sensual world, have any effect upon people who live that way? 50 yrs ago, when the world was at war, and troubles seemD huge and endless, preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick used that text for a sermon; you and I can't for our motto, for the roadmap of our lives, and for the foundation of our joy. For we know, and give thanks, that while we were helpless, Xr died for the ungodly, v.6. What an amazing thing! imagine--dying for sinners! we would hesitate to give up this life for the very best people, but it is the death of Xr for sinners that is the proof of God's love, v.8. To know it, and to accept it, is the way to God that God himself has provided. We can be made right w/God/only by what God has done, not by anything we may do; in that way we show our kinship w/Abraham, who trusted God before he did anything to boast about. God showed his love to us in what Xr did; he also showed us that he is our friend. If while we were enemies of God/we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, we shall be saved by his life, v.10. Here is help, when our need is greatest, here is the love of God for us who do not deserve it; for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. Loved the world despite its violence and rebellion, its self-seeking and its destruction of the world in which we live. In the blood of Xr's sacrifice we are made right, we are justified; as sin came into the world thru one man, and death thru sin, reminding us of our father Adam, who is the representative of every one of us, by one man grace abounded for many. This is the passage in Paul's writings upon which St. Augustine, and after him many teachers, based the doctrine of original sin, evil within us that comes thru the genes, inherited from the first of the human race, so that confronted with a choice between good and evil, we choose the bad, the destructive, thinking we know better than the Maker what we should do. But in our weakness, God acted mightily, to offer us the free gift of righteousness by faith in the Christ who died for us, in our sin and rebellion. Rejoice, therefore, sursum corda, lift up your hearts, for God reaches out to us, to heal, to comfort, and to forgive. May we confess, and know, God's salvat. saying, as old as anc Roman ~~missionary~~ ^{missionary}: *Pisny* - his only fault was his belief that he had none.

Next Sunday, 23-hour day.

Reid Staton Bible Class, David L. Smiley Teacher.

3-27-94. Baptism is a key word in the Xn vocabulary, and the practice of the rite has been from the beginning a source of discord and division among the faithful. The word itself is untranslated Grk, one of the terms Kg James commanded the scholars not to translate into English, for fear of its possible effects upon the faith and practice of the established church. It was another chapter in the long and disputed story of the initiation into the faith that we call baptism. It has been accepted by the keepers of the creeds in at least three forms--aspersion, meaning to sprinkle; affusion, or infusion, to pour on the head; and immersion, to dip in water deep enough to cover the entire body. The proper time, and the age or awareness of the subject, have also contributed their share of the family quarrel over baptism. From the 2d century some Xn ldrs argued for the baptism of new-born infants, citing proof-texts in the scriptures; others, taking other texts as authoritative, have maintained that baptism and initiation into the community of faith can be administered only to believers, who know and who confess, that J Xr is Lord. Strange, isn't it? and sad as well, that the two most basic of Xn practices--baptism as the initiation, and the communion table with the broken bread and the poured wine--the acts which should make of us one united brotherhood and sisterhood, have instead been the stumbling blocks upon which we divide, and do battle. Whether we call ourselves dioceses, or synods, or conventions, or alliances, or whatever, there should be a core of commitment and agreement that would make us one, as God the Father and God the Son are one. Baptism ought to be one of the keys to the house of harmony and union. 30 yrs ago Warren Carr, former pastor of the church on this campus, published a book about Baptism, in which he called it the conscience and clue for the church. Conscience, because the manner by which the Ch enlists or incorporates its members, will have appreciable bearing upon the quality of its life. In the beginning, baptism was a door, swinging inwardly, thru which the convert came from the world to the Ch, from a life of faithlessness to one of faith. But in time it became a swinging door, thru which converts could walk both ways. People came and went in such numbers that it was no longer possible to know where the world ended and the Ch began. That, Carr wrote, was not entirely undesirable, for that two-way street gave the Ch an impact upon the surrounding culture. But while the Ch ethically sensitized the world, the world secularized the Ch. Baptism is conscience, then, for to trivialize it, or to deny its power, is to deprive Ch of her distinctives and her gospel. The mission to proclaim the work of God in Xr remains, for however scientific or intellectual we may think ourselves, we cannot escape ^{KNOWING} the sense of failure. Carr quoted ~~Reinhold Niebuhr~~ American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr--no man, ^{KNOWING} how deeply involved in sin, is able to regard the misery of sin as normal. Some memory of a previous condition of blessedness seems to linger in his soul." It is to speak to that collective unconscious, that is the mission of the Ch, and that mission begins w/baptism in the assurance of forgiveness. Baptism is also clue for the Ch, Carr wrote, by virtue of its symbolic quality; it is the measure of faith and commitment that no other community action of the Ch provides. English preacher P.T. Forsyth said: baptism is not a small miracle play for didactic effect, but a real act, an act of will; an act of preaching and conveyance on the one side, or worship and confession on the other." Symbols are important, as clues to devotion and to mission. If we could formulate a doctrine of the sacraments that was entirely satisfying, we could then dispense with the sacraments themselves, one commentator said; for the sacraments are the acts that begin at the point where words fail; they are the acts in which the original saving acts of Xr reverberate in their own key and they cannot be transposed into the key of systematic doctrine." "Martin Luther, himself a master of words, called baptism, God's word in water." We can, with bread and cup, and in the waters of baptism, see, hear, and respond to the Word of God, Carr said. The morning text is from Rom 6; it calls us to consider, and to contemplate, the meaning of the symbol of baptism. With today we come to the end of the first third of a spring series based upon Paul's epistles to Rome, and to the churches in the province of Galatia, with the theme, Good News for God's People. Good news is the Engl transl of the Grk word evangel, the word Xns/beginning w/Jesus/used for the msg of repentance and faith and acceptance into God's kgdm. The Roman ltr is, as we have seen, one of the earliest, if not in fact the first, theological explanation in writing of the meaning of the Xr event. For that task, Saul of Tarsus was uniquely, even providentially, equipped. Schooled in the best of classical Grk learning and literature, ~~and~~ formed and trained in the leading rabbinical schools of his time, he knew what Jerusalem had to say to Athens, which is what every community of faith must constantly repeat to the secular university and the humanistic assumptions of the world beyond the portals of the sanctuary. What he wrote to the churches of Rome ^{TO} ~~we~~ call theology, which is the expression of the conscience of the Ch, and the clue to its spiritual health; many of us, even among the professionals called of God to full-time Xn service, dislike theology; cannot understand it, and see little point in it. Which means, of course, that the theologically illiterate cannot speak to the secular faiths of their university or town, and cannot as a result proclaim the gospel to people who cannot speak the language of the faith, for neither do they speak that language. So let us listen and respond to Paul's teaching, Romans 6:1-14, 20-23. This is the first part of a passage, that extends thru Ch 7, about the meaning of the freedom that comes with release from sin and the law. The new life in Xr begins w/a decisive break with the old life, and that is why

it is a distortion to believe that because God's grace is free, and all-powerful, we should continue in sin so that grace might be made greater. Three times Paul repeated his question, what then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin? The question received three answers, each of them emphatic. In 6:1, in 6:15, and again in 7:7, we see Paul's teaching. Shall we remain in sin, in order that grace may abound? ...because we are not under law, but under grace? ...is the law sin? There can be no compromise or casuistry; we cannot do evil in the name of good. To such a contention, which Paul must have met often as he preached the gospel of salvation by faith alone, he countered with a question of his own--can people who are dead go on sinning? How can we, who died to sin, still live in it? The dead are free from sin. To which the reader might reply, who is dead? Not I, for I still live. No you don't, Paul said. You Xn readers are dead to the old life, or to the old existence, and have entered the new life in Xr. And that reminds us of what Paul had to say about Adam & Xr in Ch 5--sin came into the world thru one man and death thru sin, and death spread because all humankind sin; death reigned until Xr broke the bonds by the resurrection. One man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men, 5:18. The assertion that we all have died to the old covenant also takes us to an understanding of Xn baptism, 6:3. Death pays the price of sin, so that when we die we no longer have to answer for sin. But that is of help to us only if we could return from death, to live forgiven, free of the burden. That is exactly what Paul declares in this text. Do you not know that all who have been baptized into Xr J were baptized into his death? In baptism we share in Xr's death; we are dead to sin; it no longer has dominion over us. We are ~~in fact~~ ^{METAPHORICALLY} dead, so far as the pwr of sin over us is concerned. Xr also rose from the dead, so that by dying he conquered sin, and by rising he defeated death. We also share in that triumph, but not yet; the verbs describing the victory over sin are all in the past tense, while ~~our~~ ^{THESE ABOUT} share in Xr's resurrection are all in the future, 5b, 8b. Until that time, the new life we have is a gift of Xr's obedience and his death. Before we can know the resurrection of our bodies, they must be transformed; this mortal must put on immortality, this perishable must put on imperishability. But already, here and now, we share in Xr's death. That does not mean we shall sin no more. What it means is that now, for the first time, we have a choice in the matter. Before we were baptized, symbolizing the spiritual change in our natures, dramatizing our descent into the grave, and being covered over, we were under the domination of sin; we were slaves to sin; we had no freedom to make our own decisions, to choose between right and wrong, between self and God. But now, with Xr's death, which we ~~share~~ ^{SYMBOLICALLY} when we are baptized, we have a choice. We are emancipated, liberated, set free. The Xn faith is in deed a theology of liberation, but note clearly that it speaks not of liberation, politically or economically, as the secular world defines the term. God's liberation, from the Egypt of oppression and sin, gives us freedom NOT to sin. Because of that swinging door between Ch and world, the world has secularized the Ch, rather than the Ch ethically sensitizing the world. Liberation has become for many of us the physical, fleshly freedom to do as we please; it is the definition of Messiah that Jesus rejected. Paul says that by baptism into Xr's death, we are dead to trespasses and sin, to the enslaving pwr of sin, and Paul means that literally. It is not poetry, it is not meaningless talk. In the baptistry we confess our faith, we respond to God's call in the gospel, and we are from that moment buried in Xr, and therefore dead to the old human being, the old Adam. We are not yet raised to walk in newness of life--that will come when the trumpet sounds. But to take Baptism lightly, to see it as just a routine ritual that goes no farther than wet clothing, is to miss the point of the Xr-event altogether. Baptism changes our past, yes; it also changes our future. It leads not to death but to life, and a new relationship w/God. We can now hear and obey ethical teachings that we not sin, which is why, when Paul completed his theological essay, he always extended the teaching into the area of the moral. No moral teaching can have any meaning to us if we are not dead to sin...if our baptism meant nothing to us. To baptize infants is to act upon the truth that we are saved by God's grace, which we have not deserved; to baptize adults going of their own choice into the water, is to act out Xr's descent into the tomb. Infant baptism runs the risk of assuming that God's grace requires no personal response, or free decision of the individual; adult baptism, if a confession of faith is demanded as the ticket to the water, runs the risk of assuming that you and I can in some way make us worthy of God's free grace, that came to us while we were yet sinners, when we were unworthy, without one plea or defense. Nowhere does Paul teach that baptism is effective only if the person has confessed a faith. But it seems clear that the act of being baptized into Xr's death presupposes the trust that in Xr God has acted to save us. So the act becomes a statement, the symbol becomes reality, the water is the key to the jail-cell we occupy w/o that trust, and our slavery to sin. So, in whatever tradition we practice our faith, however we understand the visible act of baptism, may we understand it as conscience and clue, to our commitment to the new life in Xr, may we see God's will written in the water of the fount, may we give thanks that in his death on the cross Xr has borne the pain and paid the price of the new birth which is ours, and may we rejoice in the freedom from sin which is now ours to live, and to proclaim, and to tell everybody about. Our behavior in the world should be different from that of the unbaptized, of the unbelievers; it should be contrary to accepted behavior out there; it may even appear strange, irrational, even crazy. But the eye of faith can see beyond the years, to the reality which awaits us, in the age which is yet to be.

4-3-94. Resurrection. The American poet Stephen Vincent Benet wrote it: Something is loosed to change the shaken world, and with it we must change." The line is an appropriate commentary upon the meaning of the event we celebrate, and remember this morning. The Xn Ch has been from its beginning an Easter Ch, or it has been no more than another community of moralists and reformers. As we read the scriptures the early Ch prepared and preserved for us, we find nothing that would lead us to believe that those apostles and martyrs were concerned about anything other than their knowledge of Jesus as the One who died, and was raised, and will come again. To those believers, the resurrection was not something they narrated, or attempted to explain; it was something they proclaimed. It was an announcement they made to the world. The Apostles' Creed has been known and used since 4th cen, if not earlier, before it was written; I believe in J Xr, God's only Son, our Lord..who was crucified..and was buried..and on the 3d day arose from the dead. Before that, the bodily resurrection of J the Xr of God was the theme of the sermons and testimonies of witnesses and believers. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts, said it: this Jesus..you crucified and killed..but God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." That line is the foundation-stone of the Xn faith; one of the most beautiful of Johann-Sebastian's chorales quoted it--Christ lag in Totesbanden; Christ lay in the bonds of death. But, up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er his foes; he arose a victor from the dark domain, and he lives forever with his saints to reign, Hallelujah! Brooklyn minister and poet Robt Lowry wrote over a century ago. Take away that shout of joy and faith and only ashes of dead hopes remain. If Xr has not been raised, Paul wrote, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain. To Paul, it was not Jesus' ministry, or his teaching, or the miracle-stories, that changed a shaken world; it was the cross, and the death, and the resurrection, of Jesus. He was put to death for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote of the central significance of the passion and triumph of our Lord."Ultimate confidence in the goodness of life can not rest upon confidence in the goodness of man. If that is where it rests it is an optimism which will suffer ultimate disillusionment. Romanticism will be transmuted into cynicism, as it has always been in the world's history. The faith of a Xn is something quite different..it is trust in God, in a good God who created a good world, though the world is not now good...this kind of faith is not optimism. It does not arise until optimism breaks down, and men cease to trust in themselves that they are righteous...the basic plan of life cannot be finally defeated. The will of God prevails even when the Son of God is crucified. In that very crucifixion God has absorbed the contradictions of historic existence into Himself. Thus Xty transmutes the tragedy of history into something which is not tragedy. God is revealed as not only the ground but as the goal of human existence, and man's rebellion against God is proved to be an abortive effort which cannot finally prevail. The suffering servant is the son of man. This is the foolishness of God that is wiser than the wisdom of men." So wrote Reinhold Niebuhr in 1937. Swiss theologian Karl Barth said it like this:"the frontier of religion is that line of death which separates flesh from spirit, time from eternity, human possibility from the possibility of God." In the zone along that line there is the knowl that comes not from the scientifically proven, but from the certainty of faith. It is a truth that many knowing people cannot accept, considering it irrational, and illogical that a human being, once dead, can return to life, in the same body he had taken from his mother at his birth, but now in new conditions, a spiritual body, but one people could recognize as His. It is so far above our capacities of knowl, and even of imagination, Paul VI wrote in 1972, that it is necessary to make room for it in our minds thru faith."As those early Xns knew it, it was the something that was loosed to change the shaken world, and with it we must change; it was the beginning of the end-time; it meant that as they read the ancient prophecies, the promises of God were made real, and made available to all who believe. If the modern critical mind cannot live easily with the Xn certainty of the resurrection, then, Raymond Brown wrote 20 yrs ago, that does not destroy the faith and the experience of the believing community. We cannot allow Xn theology to be shaped by the contemporary distrust of the miraculous; the modern world view is no more infallible than the first-cen world view; it knows more about some things but is less perceptive in other ways. Our generation must be obedient, as were our predecessors, to what God has chosen to do in Jesus; and we cannot impose on the picture what we think God should have done, or what we in our limited visions include within the realm of the possible." Today we proclaim the truth that is the hope and the faith of the new covenant community, accepted in the testimony of the first-cen Ch, and confirmed in our own lives as God in spirit speaks to us, and lives in us; the texts are Mark 16 and Romans 8. This spring term the lessons are based upon letters Paul of Tarsus wrote to churches in the capital city of Rome & in the Asian province of Galatia. Today we begin a unit that will conclude our studies from the epistle to Rome, and will stress the theme that in Xr, and in his resurrection, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit of God who offers us the possibility to live both in the flesh and in the spirit. We begin with a return to a garden in Jerusalem, to a tomb carved into a hillside, where a shaken world first became aware that something of God's pwr was loosed upon it, to change it for all time,

and also to change human beings, in every generation from that glad morning, to this happy day. Mark 16:1-8. Each of the 4 gospels recorded the events of that startling and dramatic morning, and each of them used a different tradition, and therefore each of them differed in the details of the story. If you put them down on your table, side by side, you will immediately recognize the variations...Mark 16, Matt 28, Lk 24, John 20-1. Different people were there, their purpose in going there were not the same; three of them report that when the group arrived, the stone covering the entrance to the tomb had already been moved aside, but Matt wrote that as the group approached, an angel descended, moved the stone, and sat upon it. It is impossible to harmonize these versions, but it is important to note that they are in agreement over the fundamentals--that Jesus died, was buried in a previously unused tomb, wrapped in linen grave-clothes, and that a group of mourners came, either late on the Sabbath, as Matt, or early, at dawn, on the first day of the week; that they were all women, led by Mary Magdalen, and another woman named Mary, and others. The version we have read, from Mark, is the shortest and most puzzling of the four accounts we have. If the Bible you use contains vv. 9-20, they represent two, or more, attempts/much later/to complete what appears to be an unfinished story. Some students speculate that the scroll of Mark was torn and its ending lost; others take it as it is, as all that Mark thought we needed to know about the glad and awe-some event. It is possible, but highly unlikely, that the original Passion Narrative ended with the description of J's burial, the body wrapped for burial, and anointed with 100 lbs of myrrh and aloes, given by Nicodemus, who first came to him by night. But that presents even greater problems; how explain the change in the disciples, from fearful, whimpering men whose ldr denied ever knowing Jesus, who hid in the city for fear they too would be executed--to people who boldly proclaimed the truth that had been revealed to them in the appearances of their risen Lord. If they perpetrated a hoax, as critics of Xty have argued; if somehow they stole the body and buried it in another grave; or if the women who came to visit the tomb came to the wrong garden, their eyes misted over with tears, the dawn's early light flickering and uncertain, to be ordered away by the gardener, who did not want his cabbages trampled upon; then why did they give their lives for something they knew to be fiction? Only the certainty provided by faith can know that Jesus lives; it is, ultimately, not the empty tomb that is the proof; we believe in a living Jesus, not in a hole in the ground. To the tomb the women went, for the men were hiding; women can make the most significant discovery of human history, but they cannot preside, or offer the sacrament, or in some communions even serve as ushers and pall-bearers. There they found a young man, inside the tomb, dressed in a white robe..hardly the place or apparel, of a gardener. Be not affrighted, he said; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here, he has risen; behold the place where they laid him. Go, tell his disciples, and Peter, that he goes before you into Galilee. They went out of the tomb, and they fled, for they were afraid. It is an unfinished story, one for each of us to complete, in our own lives, and in most beings, in our testimonies of what God has done thru Jesus to us. There is a blank page at the end of Mark's gospel, a slate we can write upon, to complete, finally, factually, and forever. In faith, the morning always points to Easter. The other text for today is Romans 8:9-17. This is a classic statement of the meaning of the resurrection to all who believe. The presence of the spirit marks those who belong to Xr, v. 9. Paul did not ^{here} talk about imitating Xr; he spoke of identification w/Xr, in the Spirit Jesus promised to send, the Spirit he breathed upon them on the day of resurrection; the spirit poured out upon them at Pentecost. In that spirit we live and move and have our beings. In the risen Xr we are free to forget the evil in our past, and accept forgiveness, and newness of life. The new life we have in the Spirit is the life we shall have in full when our mortal bodies have put on immortality, in God's heaven. We do not, therefore, live by the flesh; if we live by the flesh we shall die; Paul understood human nature to be entirely dominated by sin, or by God. The resurrection offers us the choice between false and true, between good and evil. Without it, we are slaves to sin; with it, we have the decision to make, to become truly free, really liberated, as we submit ourselves as servants, or slaves, of God. This is life, to know Him in whom we have believed, and to know beyond doubt that in him is life, full, abundant, everlasting. In the midst of death, God gave life, then, and now. The presence of the spirit is the presence of Christ, a life so filled w/pwr that in it God raised Jesus from the dead. If the dead are not beyond God's pwr, then neither are we. Even more assuring, all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God. From slaves we are transformed into the children of the family, entitled to the birthright and to the blessing of the Father. To Paul that was not poetry, or romantic dreaming; it was literally true, that by faith in the pwr of God to raise Jesus from the dead, we become member's of God's family, our future is changed from death to life, our relashp to God no longer rebellion but obedience, no longer enemy, we are beloved children. When we call God Father, Abba in the Aramaic that Jesus spoke and that Paul knew, it is the spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God, fellow heirs with Xr; provided we suffer w/him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Something is loosed to change the shaken world, and with it we must change. We shall be changed, in the twinkling of an eye; since God raised Jesus, by faith we put to death the deeds of the body, we put on immortality, and we know life everlasting.

4-10-94. Live in the Spirit. In these days we hear much talk about freedom, of the unborn, of dissatisfied worshippers at the local church, of the right to speak one's mind, freedom to live well-nourished and in good health. In the news we read of people all around the world who repeat the 2 words that were widely spoken earlier in our tormented century. Natlism is the code-word for the freedoms of people from the domination by other, and presumably different people; socialism, or the welfare state, ~~that~~ provides freedom from the inequities of society. 35 yrs ago the sociologist C. Wright Mills published an article to comment upon one of the basic ideas that emerged from the cauldron of the 18th Cen enlightenment--that as human reason improves in quality, and becomes more generally available, then would freedom blossom like the flowers in spring. Increased rationality was considered the prime condition of increased freedom. "The liberating notion of progress by reason, the faith in science as an unmixed good, the demand for popular education and the faith in its political meaning for democracy--all these ideals of the Enlightenment have rested upon the happy assumption of the inherent relation of reason and freedom!..to be free, the individual must become more rationally aware, Sigmund Freud taught; liberalism based its appeal upon freedom and reason as an indivisible entity. But in our own time, sociologist Mills pointed out, confidence in the steady march of freedom founded securely upon the wisdom of reasonable people ~~has~~ faded into the realities of irrationality and intellectual oppression. To cite him again--ldrs adopt apparently rational actions w/o any ideas of the ends they serve, and there is the increasing suspicion that those at the top, like Tolstoi's generals in his novel War and Peace, only pretend they know. More significantly, Mills continued, Science, it turns out, is not a technological Second Coming; universal education may lead to technological idiocy and natlist provinciality, rather than to ~~an~~ informed and independent intelligence! We know that man can be turned into a robot, by chemical and psychiatric means, by steady coercion and by controlled environment. Reason has the capability of producing what Mills called cheerful robots ~~instead~~ of free men and women thinking their way to freedom. Must we all then live uncertain of the very nature of humankind, reasoning slaves, bound to repeat the errors of the past, finding in man's intellect not the defender, but the destroyer, of freedom? It is a question for both the community of faith and the community of reason ~~to~~ confront, if we are to achieve the freedom we were born to know; if we think our freedoms are fragile, insubstantial, like a candle in a high wind, then perhaps it is because they still seek their roots in human reason, rather than in the God who created us for Himself. The American poet John Ciardi composed a brief but pwrfl statemt of the process; he called his poem Credibility. "Who could believe an ant in theory? a giraffe in blueprint? Ten thousand doctors of what's possible could reason half the jungle out of being. I speak of love, and something more, to say we are the thing that proves itself not against reason, but impossibly true,* and therefore to teach reason/reason." To the doctors of what's possible, those who love and believe must speak w/o ceasing of the impossibly true, for it is in that kind of world that we live, and it is about that world of the incredible but the real ~~that~~ the community of faith must teach. So, right in the center of Paul's ltr to the Xns in Rome, the capital city of the world, he spoke of life in the spirit of God who sustains us, and who sets us free from the chains that would enslave us in the darkness of evil, text Rom 8. After today only 2 more weeks remain in a winter's study of the highlights of the epistle to the Romans. It is a one-of-a-kind essay, the carefully considered thought of an intelligent and inspired missionary and teacher who wrote to explain the meaning of the incarnation, of the cross and the resurrection, of the Xr-event. What is remarkable about Paul's theology is its redefinition of the word FAITH, faith in Xr; it goes beyond any doctrine of God-fearing in the Jewish tradition. To Paul, faith means more than remaining faithful to the covenant and the law given to Moses. It was a radical commitmt to an individual experience with the risen Lord, it was a radical change in the community to which the believer gives allegiance. Out of Paul's experience as a Pharisee, the strictest and most devout of the Judaism of his day, came his knowledge of the law; out of his personal encounter w/Xr came evidence that God's Messiah would come not as conquering commander to liberate his people in a physical and political sense, but instead as suffering servant of God, who gave himself on the cross as a sacrifice for all people. That which was a stumbling-block for Jews and a folly to Gentiles ~~was~~ God's plan of redemption, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, & the weakness of God is stronger than men. The same act that takes away the guilt of sin also brings us the freedom we want, strong, permanent, not dependent upon human reason. So let us hear: Rom 7:21 8:11. The passage about the life in the Spirit follows what must be the lowest spiritual point in NT. In his own efforts, Paul cannot do the good he wants to do, but does the evil he does not want to do. Wretched man that I am, he cried, for all of us who wrestle with the same contradictions & confusions. Who will deliver me from the body of this death? At that moment of surrender to the mercies of God, with nothing in his hand to offer in payment to God, the truth came pouring in upon him. Thanks be to God thru J Xr our Lord, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Xr J. Paul now turns in his argument to the pwr which saves the Xn from law and sin and death; it is the Holy Spirit of God. A large portion of this generation's alienation and personal discontent arises from our failure to recognize the ~~person~~ ^{power} and the mission of the 3d person in the holy trinity. We may recite the creeds correctly, we may declare our faith in what our fathers called

the triune God, God in 3 persons, yet one holy God, but in our thinking and in our worship many of us think of God as one, or perhaps as two. But to Paul it is the Holy Spirit in whom we walk in this life, it is the Spirit in whom we live, it is the Spirit who makes us free from the law of sin and death which makes us so wretched and distressed. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth wrote a most influential commentary on the Roman letter earlier in this century; in it he appealed for recognition of the power of the Spirit of God as expressed in these words of Paul. The Spirit is the Yes of God which erases the negative knowl which men have of themselves, Barth wrote; because of the Spirit, we are not under the sentence of death by which all men, and especially relig men, are threatened. For the law of the Spirit of life in Xr J made us free from the law of sin and death. Note that it is Spirit, and it is in Xr, that God has done what the law could not do, vvl-3; here is the Holy Trinity at work to restore to us who are guilty the fresh clean feeling of innocence to which we are heirs. The Spirit is that new, existential, once-for-all, universal life, which has been revealed in Xr. The Spirit is the impossible possibility of our lives, Barth wrote; the thing that proves itself not against reason, but impossibly true, to teach reason/reason, John Ciardi called it. We have the Spirit whose law of life in Xr has set us free from the law under which we suffered before we knew what freedom was. It comes not from human reason; that leads us to idiocy and bungling and war and corruption. It comes not from the proper organizat of the home mission board, or the right managment of a theolog seminary. No, it comes from the Holy Spirit of God who makes us free; for in Him we are forgiven, liberated, to concentrate upon those first things which matter eternally. In a ringing passage Karl Barth wrote of that presence--What then becomes of thy sin, of thy death, of thy negation, when, in Xr J, their relativity in relat to the Otherness, is made known? Thou are free;--in the knowl of thy slavery; thou art righteous--in the knowl of thy sin; and thou dost live --in the knowl of thy death." The Spirit makes us free and righteous and alive. To quote Martin Luther: the "Spirit writes the Law of God with living fire in our hearts, so that the Law is not doctrine but Life, not word but Existence, not a sign but a very fullness." The Spirit has done what the Law ³ could not do--it condemned sin in the flesh thru God in the flesh, to give us life in the Spirit. We must note that Paul here used the words flesh and spirit in very special ways; they refer not only to two aspects of the human body, but also to two different ways of living. Life in flesh means rebellion and idolatry, creating god in our own image, so we can worship ourselves, so we can live in and for our sinful selves. For that reason it is not life, but death, for in the life of the flesh we are dominated by rebellion against God; we will make our own rules, we will live by our own sense of the good life, we will be free from the ancient superstitions of those whose reasoning minds were less competent than are our own. It would be nice, wouldn't it, if we could write our own scriptures, define goodness in human terms of justice and mercy and humility, and live in a heaven of our own creating? That is what the word flesh, or world, meant to Paul. It is the reality around us, into which we educate our young, so that we live not only in this world, but it also lives in us. But Paul also knew the reality of spirit; it meant a changed relatshp to God, in obedience and righteousness. Xr's appearance made available not only the transformat of indivs, but also the transformat of the world in which they live. It is the function of the Ch, the community of the transformed, those who live in Xr thru God's Holy Spirit, to be the place where the changed world exists for the Xn. Paul the Pharisee, Paul the scholar of the scriptures, knew the vision of the prophet Ezekiel (11:36) of the new spirit God would give his people, of the new heart which would replace the heart of stone; thus saith the Lord God of Israel. In Xr the promise was fulfilled // the prison-house of sin has been broken, and we are given freedom to be what God made us to be; in Xr a new life is offered us, and a new world is born. Rom 8, v.3, is a nut-shell statemt of Xn proclamation--for God has done for us what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do; sending his own Son, in the likeness of sin-controlled flesh (Barth); in that human nature which causes the trouble (Phillips). And, Phillips' transl continues--While Xr was actually taking upon Himself the sins of mankind, God condemned that sinful nature. In Xr God did not recreate the innocence and directness of the Garden of Eden; his mission occurred on account of sin. In Xr the love of God breaks thru all our man-made defenses, to give us freedom in mind and soul, freedom from the law of sin & death. God sent his own Son, that is the good news; God sent Jesus to announce the resurrection of the flesh; God sent his Son, on account of sin. It is an unpopular topic in our supposedly rational world. We prefer to think of sin as something we do, something of lust or appetite, something of violence or thievery. If that were true, then we would need no incarnate word; we could save ourselves, simply by saying No, by reading a book on ethics. The size of our God depends upon our idea of sin. If it is ~~not~~ something I do, something I can on my own correct, then my God is very small, made in my own image, and in my own imagination. But if it ^{is} something I AM, if the good I want to do I cannot do, and the evil I dislike is what I do, then in our wretchedness God sent his son, to condemn sin in the flesh, even as the Son came in the likeness of that same flesh. We may live after the flesh--the world around us, with its sense of incompleteness and failure; or we can live by faith in the Holy Spirit, God's comforter, and teacher, and our friend. The Spirit of him who raised J from the dead will live within us, and will give life to our mortal bodies, so that we are alive because of righteousness. It is a matter of life and death, and the choice is ours to make.

4-17-94. Living sacrifice. What you and I put first in importance as we build our lives and our thinking makes a difference in what that building shall be. There is an old story, so old that only an historian would dare to use it, about a building contractor named Murgatroyd, whose company began a construction job. It did not go well, so Murgatroyd called the architect. Do you begin a building at the top and build downward, or do you begin at the bottom and build up? A few seconds of silence, before he hung up the phone, and shouted to the crew. Tear it all up, men; we have to start over and put in the foundations first. It is a parable of the way many of us try to put our lives together, in the mix of creeds and conduct we pour into them, in the balance and priority of theology and morality in the living of these days. It is easy to say that all we must do is love everybody, or give of our time and means to provide food and clothing and shelter for those in need, or just say No when tempted to go off the track. But no one can read the advice and the teachings of Paul the Apostle and live by those standards. Paul knew that to try to live in moral purity that did not have roots deeply planted in faithful commitment to God would lead only to failure. Paul's central concern was the relationship between God and his creation; he had no doubt that the only way the creature could survive is by keeping the favor of the Creator. Because God is Creator he can deal with us as he pleases, because He has the right to sit in judgment upon us. We did not make our selves, or our world, so we cannot claim to possess either selves or world; we cannot control our own lives, or determine our own destinies. It was humankind's attempt to do that, in the representational story of The Man and The Woman in the garden; we, you and I, must face the truth about ourselves; that we want to be like gods, and order our own affairs. But in Biblical terms, which Paul emphasized, that rebellion brought us under the control of sin. We are enslaved to it, and we are in ourselves incapable of freeing ourselves from its control. The irony in which we live is that, as we recognize our loss of God's favor in our own loss of trust in God's goodness, and as we just say No, as we try harder to return to the approval of the Creator, we get farther from it. If everything we do is under the power of sin, then the more we do to escape that power, the deeper we fall into it. Until something, or some one, can break the chains with which we are bound, we have no choice. We belong to a rebellious and stiff-necked race of beings, and we are condemned to sin; we have a share in the human preference for self-control, and independence from an unseen God. Until you and I know our condition, and accept it as a given that we have lost God's favor, and that we can return to it only by faith in the mercy of God, we have no choice but to corrupt the power we exercise, to misuse the gifts we are given, to pollute our environment, and to consider ethics and personal integrity something we can learn and practice on our own. That is why Paul in his writings did not begin with ethical teachings; until we are made new creatures by faith in Christ's power to break the bonds of sin and death under whose power we live, ethical teaching has no meaning for us. We cannot just say No, we cannot rule our own destinies, we cannot. The good we want to do turns into evil in our hands; the evil we do not want to do, we do; Oh, wretched beings that we are! who shall deliver us from this body of death? Paul's answer is clear; by faith we are saved from that body, by faith in the mercies of God, who Created us for himself, and who loves us, but who sets the rules by which we can live. Any other blueprint for building our lives, and we live in a topsy-turvy world where nothing turns out right, where even the best-intentioned charitable endeavor, such as harsh punishment for lawbreakers, or sending the Marines to Somalia or Korea, ends in more misery than we knew before. Today's text is Rom 12; it appears to be part two of a two-volume writing, with no connection to what went before. But it is not so. Paul wrote a collection of moral teachings, but he did not intend them to stand alone, apart from the foundation of faith and freedom that is essential to it. Karl Barth, eminent Swiss theologian of our century, in his classic commentary on the epistle to the Romans, said, We are not starting a new book, or even a new chapter of the same book. Paul did not in the conclusion of his essay talk for the first time about practical religion, as if theology were immaterial, ethereal, impractical. No, he said, they may not be put asunder, no more can be the marriage of man and woman, for God has joined the teaching about the human condition into a whole, into one teaching, all of which is practical, down-to-earth, fundamental. Unless you and I have the courage and the humility to confront what Geo. Santayana called the human predicament, and accept God's offer of reconciliation in the blood of Christ the Lamb, we will find that peace and joy are beyond our reach, and that all we do to reinvent government, or to reform public welfare, will tarnish and rust in our fingers. Changed people can make heaven of hell; the same old headstrong selfishness we have lived by ever since whoever lived in that 3 Million-year-old skeleton recently discovered in Ethiopia will be the best we can do. If that is the human track record, who would dare speak of evolution, or progress, or upward and onward the course of human history? We can reject Paul's teachings, of course; in one way or another most of us do just that, and pat ourselves on the back for our intelligence and our generosity. But then we are left with the enigma which has puzzled observers of the human condition since the questioners in the Aegean Sea 25 centuries ago...why cannot people just get along? why do we not see the good sense of simple honesty, and fidelity, and morality, in our persons and in our communities? Is it possible that the God who made us knows us better than we know ourselves? and that what the Spirit

of God taught Paul the Pharisee in his sojourn in the deserts for three years of post-graduate instruction, has meaning for all of us? So let us hear again Paul's words, Rom 12:1-18. As the scholars outline the letter to the Romans, this passage is the beginning of a section on the consequence of Xr's sacrifice on the cross, and the resurrection from the dead. Xr is Lord, by grace are we saved --how do those facts affect us in daily living? Paul would have us know that what we believe, and what we do, are intimately and inseparably bound together. Belief that does not produce ~~showness~~ ^{shewness} of life//has in that fact proved its nonexistence; morality on the human level, not based upon gratitude to God for peace and contentment within, is self-delusion//that continues our rebellion against the Creator. The call for a Xn morality apart from a thorough grounding in Xn theology//would have made no sense at all to Paul; he knew enough of history to learn that every previous effort of people to do good//while discarding the basis of what God has done for us in Xr, has come to failure. Because Paul connected his ethical teachings to his exposition of the Xr-event, he avoided the remoteness and superstition that can be the inevitable effects of holiness for its own sake, and he rescued Xn belief from its superficiality and its compromises with the secular world in which it must exist. I beseech you, I appeal to you, I exhort you; ^{the line is not easy to translate; it is stronger than a simple appeal, but not a command.} J.B. Phillips read it: with eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship (and how we need such acts, on a university campus, down the street from where we live, where the prevailing attitude may be//that if we worship we must not be intelligent beings!), to give him your bodies as a living sacrifice. And I also like the reading by James Moffatt, to which I have added some words that belong between the lines--Well then, my brothers, you have seen Christmas and Easter, therefore I appeal to you, by all the mercy of God which the nativity/and the resurrection/proclaim to a sinful world, to dedicate your bodies as a living sacrifice. The word THEREFORE is a small one, a simple adverb and conjunction, but what a difference it makes by being there! Because of what God has done for us, while we were still sinners, THEREfore, we make ourselves sacrifices on the altar of God. Xn ethics must always be a THEREfore morality; we are not good in order to impress God; that way leads us deeper into sin, as we refuse to give up our rebellious ways; we are good/as a way of thanking God for liberation from the enslavement of sin and death. The difference between Xty and every other religion that ever existed among humankind//is tied to that word. If we give our bodies to be burned, and have not the certainty of life thru the sacrifice of Xr, it profiteth us nothing; to teach that what God demands of us is something we can do for ourselves, without God, is to turn the gospel of repentance and faith upside down. The builder Murgatroyd can teach ^{FUNDAMENTAL} us something ~~about~~ the necessary basis and foundation of our behavior; we build upon the rock of God's outreach to us in Xr, the only-begotten Son, else we know the shallowness of legalism and piety when poisoned by our presumed goodness. Unless we do good, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the imprisoned, because we have been forgiven, made new, filled with God's spirit, //our good works reveal our selfish motives and are therefore ^(that word again!) suspect. It is by the MERCIES of God that we act, and that means that we must ^{BEGIN} ~~begin~~ not at the call for food, or funds, but back at the beginning, back to Paul's opening words, of the grace of God given to us in the resurrection from the dead of J Xr our Lord. It is God's mercy that explains the richness of the new life in Xr, and it is the basis of Paul's exhortation that we present our bodies as sacrifice. That means our observable, historical existence, as an unconditional gift to the Creator God who gave us life, and talent, and time. It is not a human action by which God is appeased; it is recognition of our debt to God for the cross, and the death of Jesus, and the inner peace that faith brings to us. Our intelligent response is that we are not conformed to this world, that we do not fashion ourselves according to the present form of this world, but according to its coming transformation; instead of being molded to this world, James Moffatt translated it, have your mind renewed, and so be transformed in nature, able to make out what the will of God is; namely, what is good and acceptable to him, and perfect. Our duty is to find and do the will of God, Paul wrote; vv 1,2 stand as a thumbnail summary of the new life in Xr, in God's spirit, which is ours to claim because of faith in God's love and goodness, proved to us by J's resurrection. God has acted to break down the dividing wall of hostility that separated us; our answer, and note well that it is intelligent, it is wise, is to present ourselves as living contributions to God's purposes in the world; it is to refuse to conform to peer pressure or to our own selfish goals, but be transformed in MIND, note, not in feelings; that self-centered world out there will try to make us ashamed of the gospel, to make us believe that reasonable, intelligent people will not trust God for their well-being. Do not fall for it. To take our guidelines of what is good, from people who resist any absolute truth, or goodness, or beauty. From that basis Paul offers instruction on living within the Ch, vv 3-13, a community of faith in which any believer is accepted, not commanded to leave, because in Xr we are all one; a community in which evangelism is at the front door, to invite all//to know the goodness of God, and at the back door, where the unlikely are ejected; where each has a gift without which the whole cannot be in health; where love for those who persecute and excommunicate is normative; where all live in peace and harmony. How else can we thank our God for our salvation, and for the gift of the Spirit which is ours to know; and joy bubbling over, in whatever state we may live. MURGATROYD KNEW: the way we build determines the shape & stability of what

- OR DRIVEN OUT -

4-24-94. Freedom under Constraint: In the Upper Room, at that final supper of Jesus with his disciples, the master prayed a prayer, reported to us in John 17, words which are central to the community of faith to this day. It was a prayer for the unity of the brethren, and sisters, that they --you and I-- may all be one, as God the Father and God the Son are one. The glory, the evidence of the presence of God, which the Father gave to the Son, was granted to all believers, that we may be one, be united into a whole, even as Father and Son are one. It was a moving and a heartfelt prayer, but one that for many of us remains unfulfilled. Even in the months after the resurrection, after the ascension of Christ into the cloud, and even among the apostles who were witnesses to the glory of God in Xr, quarrelings and dissensions appeared. The holy appeal for unity collided headlong with the brokenness of human nature. The outpouring of the holy spirit did not prevent one group of believers from complaining that another group--and there were ethnic barriers separating them--did not share equally with them their daily bread. The appointment of deacons, is not an event of which we should boast; servants, in Grk, deacons, were chosen to heal the bruised feelings of those who complained. In the Ch at Corinth, where Paul was pastor, and to whom he wrote ltrs, perhaps as much as a decade before he wrote to the Chs in Rm, squabbling and dissension appear to have been routine, as sad as that may make us. There can be no question but that from the very beginning of the Xn life there have been disagreements and divisions among the faithful, caused by a long list of debate topics, and into our own time, though the jarring notes of discord are not the same as those which confused and dismayed those of earlier generations, the silly and immature practice continues. When I was half your age it was a bad, and perhaps irreverent joke, that God made the family, so people could learn how to fight, and then made the Ch, or temple, so they wld have a place to do it. It was not God's intention, of course; but when mature insights into the meaning of life were offered to mankind, immature minds seized control of its institutional expressions, to make a hell of what should have been the colony of heaven on earth. Jesus prayed that it would not happen, the disciples testified against it, and Paul taught the faith that would prevent it. So he knew it was necessary to conclude his essay to the Romans on the meaning of the Xr event with warnings about divisions and disputes among the faithful. Just as the reader had assumed Paul's teaching of freedom in the mercies of God, in the theological lesson he wrote in Chaps 3,4, that nothing we do makes any difference to God, we hear the klunking sound of the other shoe dropping. In Karl Barth's unforgettable words, "just when we think we have understood the question, to which the only answer is Yes to God, we hear the urgent command--Halt! Paul's teaching is now turned against Paul's teaching. What we do can make no difference to God, he wrote earlier; now he shouts it out that our freedom imposes restraints upon us. Just when we go forth to do battle, armed with the knowl of the epistle to the Romans, we are brought up short by the understanding that the epistle to the Romans is an attack also upon our own pretensions. The free and the strong are what they are because they have the humility to confront the great question-mark that follows their declaration of freedom and of strength. We are not warned against faith, but against OUR faith //not against the place where we can stand and live, but against OUR taking a position there, and defining it as the only place where people can stand; not against freedom, but against OUR freedom, when we express it to destroy the freedom of others." To quote the Swiss theologian Barth--The warning is uttered against any position or manner of life..that WE think to be satisfactory & justifiable, as though WE were able in some way or other to escape the judgment of God." To think and act that way, even when we are free under God, is to set ourselves up as the maker of the rules, as the creator of the world, it is self-idolatry in a faith which calls upon us to deny the self and to worship God only. Whether we may we think right is of a political nature, meaning that we distress ourselves over who is minding the store, instead of the store's stock in trade; or whether it be a preference for two genders, or only one, as a lifestyle; or whether it be any of a number of other points of contention in our day; the teaching of Paul is the same--if we attempt to establish OUR words, and OUR ways, as the only true pathway to God, then we have lost sight of the fact that we too are under judgment. It is only when we accept in humility the beams which are sticking out of our own eyes, that we can love and accept those who appear weak and erring. It is the condemnation of one group by another, however the lines are drawn between them. Anything other than that is the idolatry of self-worship, of making ourselves God, and then burning or driving out of the fellowship those who will not bow the knee to us. As we understand, and accept, and live by, the theology of Paul in the Roman ltr, we come to know that we are our own worst enemies long before we face the hostility of others. Except the Lord build the house, those who build it labor in vain; except the Lord watch over the city, the watchman awakens in vain, Psa 127. We forget whose world this is, & whose remnant of the faithful, when we cleanse the altar of the most high by commanding the dissenters to leave the temple. "Enslaved by our freedom," we are; it is an unforgettable word from the prophet and pastor who served this campus in times gone by. Salvation thru slavery, is the title of a book on Paul's theology. Paul said it too; who are you to pass judgment? So let us hear again the teaching about freedom and its limits; Romans 14:1-19. This is part of a passage that extends into the middle of Ch 15; its theme is unity in the faith, and the communion which must ex-

ist between those ^{of} ~~he~~ characterized as the strong and the weak. Specifically their disagreements arose of differences in individual responses to the gospel of God in Xr; some thought they should not eat certain things, or drink wine; some thought one day of the week was more sacred than was another; and there were likely other issues that they disputed. But beyond the specifics, which change from time to time, and place to place, there is the much larger matter of self-righteousness of people who are standing in the need of prayer, behaving as if they were more ethical than God...refusing to confess that before the judgment of God we are all found wanting. Paul urges us to know that our understanding of the proper response to God's love as expressed in his Son should not be the standard by which all other responses. Paul would have us know that there is room in the tent of the tabernacle for differing ways of eating and managing and living out our days. Any effort to impose one person's response upon another will destroy the very unity which is the tie that binds our hearts in Xn love; let us break bread together on our knees, and not think ourselves so right in God's eyes that we can exclude those whose response to the call of God in a different manner. To what advantage is an argument, however compelling, that results in the breakup of the wholeness of the community of faith? when in Paul's teaching in the early chaps of Romans we know ourselves to be sinners, law-breakers, dissidents, who in penitence and in tears accept the grace of God, freely offered, in the broken body of Xr? ~~If the community newsletter listed those who felt themselves unwanted, and judged, and criticised, and were compelled to leave, as it listed with praise those who joined its number, then would the self-righteous idolatry of those who think themselves strong would be apparent.~~ Paul's word to us is that each of us must help the weak, and the mistaken, as part of a responsible and thankful acceptance of God's forgiveness in Xr. As for the man or woman who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes, v.1; hear J.B. Phillips' version of it--we who have strong faith ought to shoulder the burden of the doubts and qualms of others, and just go our own sweet way. "It is not enough to say to a dissenting member of the body of Xr, that the problem is not w/minister, or song-leader, or carpet on the aisle; it is w/ the dissenter--and then not offer to help the weaker vessel work h/her way thru the problem. Our actions should mean the good of others, not their exclusion. Some think eating meat is an offense to the universe, while some consider a well-broiled steak a gift of a loving father-God. The one who eats, and the one who abstains, should not pass judgment on each other. Asceticism wins no brownie points w/God, nor is it what goes into a person's mouth defiles that person, but the carping & the hatred and the self-satisfaction that come out of it. Paul does not condemn those who limit their diet to foods they can accept, any more than he condemns those who feel that their freedom in Xr has liberated them from the food laws of Judaism or from the strange ways of gentiles. That is not his point. It is, rather, that we are all svts of God, we all belong to God's household, & not one of us is so right before God that we can judge the conduct of another servant in the same household, v.4; we all stand before the same master, and will be upheld, for the Master is able to make us stand, to uphold us in our weakness. There was a 2d argumt against the divisive meanness that disrupted Xn unity; to condemn fellow Xns because their lifestyle differs, is to ignore the fact that as Xns everything we do is done to honor God, 5-6. Whether we eat, or whether we fast; whether we esteem one day more highly than another, make our choice in a way to honor God, and give thanks to God. That is the only acceptable reason for doing the things we do, for we do not live for ourselves, but for God. Should we, in our secular world, in our selfish ways, live for another reason, then we are not members of the household of God. It may be that the gravest need in any bold mission thrust is to begin with members whose names are on the rolls of a Xn church. When a professional psychologist like Daniel Yankelovich can say, and I quote; existentialism presents us with a depressing image of modern man: cut off from his roots in nature by science & technology, falsely related to his fellow man by mass culture, and closed off to meaning in life by the counterfeiting of values...worshipping false gods, modern man stands forlorn before the gaping void of nothingness--fragmented, dehumanized, estranged, alienated, anxious, and guilty," it presents a reading that St. Paul would understand and approve. We set ourselves up as god when we sit in discordant and arrogant judgment of those whose response is not that of our own; whose understanding of authority in the life of faith cannot submit to earthly pwr and human understanding; whose food and drink are not on the menu of other tables in the family. It is not the eating, or the day, it is the assumption that we will not be judged, for we possess the pwr and the favor of God. It is at the heart of Paul's theology that all will be judged, even faithful Xns, and as we arrogate to ourselves the pwr to play God, and order souls who differ to leave the table, we act our pride & denial of Paul's teaching. Paul wants us to know that in Xr we are free, but that in freedom we are under restraint. One of the prevailing and destructive ills of our day is the refusal to accept accountability, responsibility, for our behavior. Free lunch is on the counter, and we may take of it as we please, for no bill will be presented; we are in total control of our life and of our world; and in that, my dearly beloved, is the victory of the evil one. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; none of us lives to ourselves, and none of us dies to ourselves. V.9 is another summary statement of the meaning of the Xr-event: For to this end Xr died & lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. May Xr be Lord of all that we are, and have, to protect the unity of the faithful until the end of the age.

5-1-94. Delivered from Bondage. Today we begin a new month, one that is the favorite of many people, and we begin a brief study of a brief but very important NT ltr. Paul's epistle to the Chs of Galatia is the shortest of his correspondence that has survived to us--150 vv, compared to 1000 vv in Acts, and I did not count them--and ^{one} of the earliest, written in the middle 50s of 1st Cen. It is also Paul's angriest ltr that we have, because something fundamental had happened in the Chs of what is now central Turkey//to which Paul vigorously objected, and to which he wrote an impassioned response. It may be to our discredit that many of us are apathetic in the presence of error of opinion and practice of whatever kind--of secular or sacred fallacy of thought or deed. It is easy to follow the French writer Voltaire's advice and tend our own gardens, no matter that the noble idea of collective security is dying in a distant and unimportant place, or that our country now pays in interest on an unpaid debt more than for almost anything else in the budget, or that rank and offensive heresy is heard regularly in the churches of the land, with little outcry from the faithful. In the Galatian ltr Paul revealed his concern, and his caring, in the wrath he wrote, in an essay that has been for every generation since ad. 55 a signpost marking the fork in the road between truth and falsehood. It has been a profound influence upon believers who have the courage and the conviction to struggle with the problems of freedom and faith, gospel and law, and the meaning of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Xr. Galatians is Paul's declaration of independence from all man-made rules and creeds for living, and his ringing affirmation of humanity's dependence upon the love and the mercy of God; it is, as seminary professor Raymond Stamm said, the Magna Carta of the Xn faith, repudiating all authorities, institutions, customs, ^{and} laws, that interfere w/direct access of the individual to God. Because of that, the Galatian ltr speaks to the supreme need of all people in all times. The question Paul addressed, that was uppermost in his understanding, was: How can men & women, who are by nature sinful, win God's favor, with our knowl that God is holy and will not tolerate sin? It is a question that for many of us has lost its urgency, and has moved off the front burner, off page one of the morning paper, out of the loop altogether. To quote radical ^{THEOLOGIST} Thomas Altizer, "As the historical world of Christendom sinks ever more deeply into the darkness of an irrevocable past, theology is faced with the choice either of relapsing into a dead and archaic language or of evolving a whole new form of speech." If it be truth, as it appears to be, then it is a bitter truth, not easy for believers to swallow. Langdon Gilkey, in a book published 25 yrs ago, described theology as a fortified castle, on a rocky hill far above a town, so isolated that its presence is unrelated to the life of the town except as a tourist curiosity. "How can theological reflection...move intelligibly, honestly, and with regularity//from our life in the town//to an existence...on these heights, and how does the Word of God heard there//have credibility and usability in the life of the town?" Gilkey asked. He warned against a tourist religion, one we visit only as an embalmed corpse of a once vibrant and meaningful faith; and he described the influence of the secular upon the Ch. He said there is no longer any position for a world view//that is absolute, fixed, eternal, and under control of the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the Creator to whom we give the name God. Theology cannot remain theology, Gilkey wrote, if it submits to the limitations the secular, ^{the} self-styled intelligent/world would impose upon it. "How, then, set our compasses, and adjust our sails, for the voyage which is our life? To answer that question, Paul wrote a revolutionary essay that sets us all free from any barrier that would separate us from the love and mercy of God, from any act or practice that would displace the work of God in sending his only Son, to die as ransom for our sinful nature, as the way we are saved from the wrath of a holy God. Rightness with God requires a new nature, and not one of us can make ourselves over. Only God, through the Son, and in the Spirit, can do that. Our part is to accept in tears of penitence & contrition the free offer ^{of} God to pardon and forgive, to overcome for us our fear and our sin, and to give us a moral nature beyond the pwr of rules, and laws, and practices, ever to achieve. Any other way to truth and to life than the way of the cross is of human invention, a god made in the image of the created universe, one ^{that} ~~will~~ not liberate but will enslave, one that ~~will~~ not forgive but will condemn. No ~~man-made~~ system of sacrifices that we make can do for us what the sacrifice of Christ has already done; no act of morality or generosity can win for us the salvation which already is ours by faith, faith activated by God's creative love to produce fruits of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control. It is good news, it is gospel; it is too good to be true; surely God demands something of us as the price of his acceptance and pardon. It is an idea so revolutionary, so radical, that in every generation Xns have been tempted, and have--sadly--been taught, to relinquish faith in the goodness of God, and to fall back upon obedience to law, or morality, or religious practice, something that we can do to win God's approval. It is part of being human to want to earn our way to God; we should ~~not~~ give thanks that in the mercy of God//all that is necessary has already been done. Not long ago a preacher in his pulpit said he was glad that none of us can work our salvation, because he would not like to be in Heaven with people who were boasting of all they had done to get there. For all of us, the ltr to the Galatians is as new as the latest religious crusade or campaign, or the loudest public and secular appeal to us to give money, or just say No, or to save the environment, or show how good we are by sending fighting aircraft to bomb people who commit evil against their neigh-

bor. For us the Galatian ltr is a reminder that by faith in Xr we are made new creatures, not of ourselves, not of works of law or charity, lest any of us should boast. So let us hear again, Gal 1:1-10; 2:11-21. Paul had visited the towns of the region known as Galatia once, or perhaps twice--the record in Acts 16/18 are not clear; but he had preached and won converts.. Sometime later other preachers and teachers came, and taught that faith in Christ was not enough; they must submit to the covenant in the flesh, the Jewish law, before they could be children of God. The issue was one that is no longer debated; but in its wider sense remains eternally real. How can sinful people enter the presence of a holy God? by what authority did Paul teach, and by what right do we teach, by grace thru faith alone are we saved from God's judgment? It is a question of what the scholars call soteriology, the study of salvation. Paul's teaching was of the supreme authority of grace, the unmerited, unearned forgiveness of God...not of law, not of our act or creed. Other teachers came in to deny Paul's right to teach--he was not a member of the inner group of disciples, he ^{HAD BEEN} a fanatical enemy of the resurrection church, he had not studied at the proper divinity school; and they also repudiated his teaching. So it was in anger that he wrote them, intensely and emotionally. It mattered to him that they so quickly accepted a false teaching. Note first the introduction, vv 1-5; it is like no other of Paul's ltrs. It begins with a negative; his call to be apostle was NOT from men, but thru J Xr and God the Father who raised him from the dead. It was Paul's response to those who questioned his authority//to undermine his message. It anticipated the argument of the ltr by beginning not with a description of individuals in need of salvat, but rather with the saving work of Xr. It is another summary statemt of the Xn faith. Vv 3,4 repeat the proclamat--grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord J Xr, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God & Father. That is a theological statemt that brings ^{KLING} down from the fortress on a rocky hill, into the market-place and the lives of people in the town. Xr died to set us free from sin, so we need no longer hold to them. K.Barth--J entered the evil way with the result that we are forced from it; it can be ours no longer; Jacques Ellul--it is no longer our affair to prosecute and represent this case; thus the past lives, not in the hell of my unconscious, but in the holiness of God. Martin Luther--we may say with sure confidence, Xr, the Son of God, was given, not for the righteous and the holy, but for the unrighteous and sinners. Then comes the anger, v.6--I am amazed that you have so quickly transferred your allegiance, so quickly deserted him who called you, so quickly turned to a different gospel. There can be no different gospel, Paul said, but there are some who cause you to worry. Any response other than faith in the risen Lord negates the very nature of the gospel. It is not a call to do, but a call to trust, to believe, to put one's life on it. It is no accident that in vv 6-10 the word for gospel, as noun and as verb, occurs 5 times; it mattered to Paul that we know and accept gospel, and that we resist the temptat to add anything at all to the statemt of faith. In itself the gospel has authority to save; it needs not to be approved by a committee on creeds and covenants, nor by councils and synods or boards of elders. It comes from Xr and it is built upon the rock of our confession in his nature and work. It is the acceptance of God's grace, or it is idolatry, and superstition, and false. All teaching and preaching must be judged by this measure; does it declare J to be in and by himself//our liberator from relg legalism, from secular self-worship, from our apathy and our anxiety, from our sinful natures? It is a call to us to look to the light, to sing and shout, to dance and to love God and fellowman. It is a divine act that draws us into the grace and love of God, 6,7. We are not sinners in the hands of an angry God; we are sinners pardoned and accepted by faith in the mercy of a God of love. Any effort to tame the gospel will fail; it will burst old wineskins, and repeal ancient rules and rituals. The teacher or the preacher does not make gospel true; gospel makes preacher authentic, real, effective. Then, in passage begin 2:11 Paul made his case for the truth of the gospel of grace. Here he discussed the meaning of justification, making the Galat ltr a textbook for Xn theology; and discussed the mutually exclusive ways of confronting God--by works of law, and by throwing ourselves, just as we are, upon God's promise of mercy and forgiveness whose proof is in the resurrection of Christ. So basic is this passage that in his commentary on the Galat ltr Martin Luther filled 80 pages on these few words. These are the words to turn to when anyone tells us that we must do more than have faith--be baptized in the proper manner, read the right Bible or sing the right hymns, say the right words in antiphonal responses. What happened at Antioch, where disciples were first called Xns, where Gentiles first heard the gospel proclamat, mattered greatly. Peter wavered between the law and grace, and Paul confronted him with his behavior. But what is even more important is the use that Paul made of the incident. There could be no compromise of gospel truth, however a half-way position, or a weakening of the teaching, might preserve the unity of the believers, or add to its numbers some secular persons. I have been crucified w/Xr, Paul wrote, 20; it is no longer I who live, but Xr who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. That is the assertion of all who know themselves forgiven, cleansed, made new, by the finished work of Jesus. If justification were oursto earn through the law, through our own doing, then Xr died to no purpose. In our trust in God's goodness and love, we live free of all bonds, secure in faith in the God who makes us whole, and what we were created to be in the beginning, when God created.

5-8-94. Adopted. The death recently of British Jesuit philosopher Frederick Copleston, at the age of 86, was a reminder of the enormous contributions to human understanding and truth that one person made. He was prolific author and scholar, best-known in the profession for his 9-volume survey of the history of philosophy. But to many who knew him it was his faith which expressed Copleston's character. In 1948, on a BBC radio broadcast, he debated atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell, about whether God existed, and if religion could be proved. Copleston said a sentence that is unforgettable: If God does not exist, human beings and human history can have no other purpose than the purpose they choose to give themselves, which--in practice--is likely to mean the purpose which those impose who have the power to impose it." Copleston understood that if there is no God, and if the teaching of judgment to come is unfounded, and therefore irrelevant, then there can be no negative, and for that reason there cannot be a positive. Goodness exists only when we possess a choice between very real alternatives, and if there is no God, there is no purpose to life or to history, except as we ourselves provide it. The rationalist and the unbeliever have therefore no measure by which to judge good or evil, no plumb-line to show whether the wall is straight, or tilts to one side. Did you ever consider the leaning tower of Pisa as a parable of human construction, or all the unramped steps you find in buildings, a testimony to the planners' lack of concern for the handicapped? But God is; only the fool has said that the creation came into existence with no mind behind it; that, given four billions of years, if we just keep throwing boxes of printers' type into the air, in time they will fall to spell out Shakespeare's Macbeth, to teach us the tragedy of seeing ourselves as larger than we are. God is, but getting that conviction, that knowledge, into the minds and lives of people, before it is too late, is not easy. Jewish theologian Martin Buber said, "Either the teachings live in the life of a responsible human being or they are not alive at all." That is the problem, isn't it? We may know the self-destructive force of the evil we do, and the hate we harbor, but ^{LIVING} doing it is an enormous mountain to climb. And we succeed to reach its top, we may discover that instead of a life of peace and joy and goodwill we have subjected ourselves to a repressive religion, full of No-nos and restraints, darkness and pain, instead of the lofty plateau of light and laughter we desired. The 16th Cen Protestant Reformer Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, gave much thought to that problem. "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 gift of God from above, so heavenly righteousness is given us of God, without our works or deservings," still knew of man's weakness. "God, seeing that this universal plague of the whole world, which is man's opinion of his own righteousness, his hypocrisy, and confidence in his own holiness, could not be beat down by any other means" ..so that God would slay that plague by his law, so that, "when it is once slain, man might be raised up again, above and beyond the law, where we all might hear God's voice, saying, Fear not; I have not given the law, and killed thee by the law, that thou shouldst abide in this death, but that thou shouldst fear me and live." The yearning of human beings for acceptance by the Creator, and for the freedom and gladness that should be ours to know and to enjoy, is the subject of Paul's Ltr to the Chs in Galatia, and the texts assigned us for today, Gal 3,4. The first 2 Chaps of the Galat Ltr dealt w/probls of false teachers//by affirming the authority of the one gospel, the one Paul learned not from human teachers, not from the Jerusalem disciples, but from the Holy Spirit of God. There are not two, or more, gospels, he wrote; there is only one, and it is of Xr and him crucified as the ransom for the sin, for the universal plague which does beset us all--the opinion we have of our own self-sufficiency, our own control of our present and our future. To accept Gentiles into the Xn flwshp was not just a matter of good-will, or political correctness; it was theological. It was the effect of the one gospel, the good news which shall be to all people everywhere, and it concerned God's actions in sending his Son into the world, and what it meant to be related to him and to live every day in Xr. Now we come to what the scholars mark off as Part 2 of the Ltr. Its theme is faith, law, and the people of God. It begins at 3:1 and continues to 5:12, of which we shall read only portions, in 3 of the 5 lessons we have on Galatians. I invite you to read all of it, to think upon it, and take it as the plumb-line that measures the right angle of our lives. In these words Paul no longer talks of his own autobiography and instruction; now he turns to OT history to make his point. It is not a new one in the Ltr; it is the expanding of the words Paul said to Peter at their confrontat, 2:15f; Paul's teaching is that the bond of Xn unity is the good news of God in Xr; it does no good to compromise that good news, or to accept something other than the gospel as the basis for including all people who confessed faith in Xr as Lord. To do that//meant denying that God's grace is freely offered to all people, and to erect a wall around the church that would keep believers out of it, on some other basis--gender, race, ethnic, economic, political--than the clear message of the cross. So let us hear again the words of Paul. Gal 3:1-5, 23-4:1-7. Note that Paul began w/caustic words about the false teachers and those who heard them--O foolish Galatians! who has bewitched you, to whom Xr was publicly portrayed--the Grk verb is the one Paul used//to mean preaching; literally it means posting a billboard beside the road--as crucified. It is this declaration of independence from rituals and regulations, from foods and special days,

that is the theme of Paul's theology, and of the Galatian ltr, ^{IT} that is the proof-text for every reformation from Paul's time to the most recent change in catechism or liturgy in the Ch. A dozen yrs ago British classical scholar Michael Grant published a biography of Paul; in it he said that this ltr is the noblest blow for liberty that has ever been struck; it is the manifesto and Magna Carta of Christian freedom against thralldom to Law, sin and death." Here is the dividing line between old covenant and new; Christ set us free, to be free people. Who bewitched you, after you heard Xr preached to you? In 1520 Martin Luther published what is his best-known writing, the Freedom of a Xn... a Xn is perfectly free, lord of all, subject to none; a Xn is a perfectly dutiful svt of all, subject to none... a Xn has no need of any work or of any law in order to be saved, since thru faith he is free from every law, and does all that he does out of pure liberty and freely, seeking neither benefit nor salvation, since he already abounds in all things and is saved thru the grace of God because of his faith, now seeks only to please God." So wrote Luther; to deny Xn freedom requires us to quarrel with Jesus, and Paul, and Augustine, and a host of witnesses. But still we are tempted, we are bewitched; it is an insult to us that we are helpless of ourselves, to do some thing to earn God's favor, that all that is needful has already been done, that Xr died for us, while we were yet sinners. Paul preached it as plain as a billboard on the road, that Xr was crucified for us, that the one essential was to put on the new creation as a member of the body of Xr, in whom all ^{OUTWARD} religious customs had been repealed and put away. Still we are bewitched, whenever we take our eyes off the Cross as the center of the Xn life; it is an objective fact of history that becomes a subjective fact of experience when we put our trust in its healing work. It is easy to seek other paths, of our own making; to prefer contrary gospels, just as did the bewitched Galats. There is moralism, which makes the Xn life a set of rules to obey, of lessons to learn, of ethics and family values and integrity. Necessary, to be sure; fatal when morality disappears in a sea of violence and greed and selfishness. But the Xn life is not a roadmap or a blueprint; it is too large for that. It is above and beyond rules and laws, or it is nothing. There is humanism, another contrary gospel, that sees Jesus as the highest expression of the human ideal, but not more than that. To quote ^{COMM} Lynn Hough, the brilliant materialisms, the pretentious secularism, and the confident idealisms whose hopes have a consummation w/o God, have had their day. They have brought bitterness and disintegration... they build a tomb at the end of the human enterprise and call it the ultimate peace." But alas, those brilliant humanisms have by no means had their day; you will hear them praised and exhorted on the campus of every university, ^{IN THE LAND} and at the pulpits of far too many Chs, for it is an attractive and seductive contrary road to travel. And then there is the environmental path to perfection. It teaches that if we just improve the neighborhood, with better housing, a hot meal and a generic prayer in school, a more equitable economic system, or freedom from fear and of want, and more time for ideas and arts, then would we have better people. People are good; what is wrong is the chains into which they are born, and there is much to be said for the gospel of pure milk and minimum wages and habitats and food for the hungry. But it too is a man-made religion; far too many of us who are well housed and adequately fed, are neither good nor happy; political and economic freedoms may in themselves produce chaos in the streets and despair in high places. Unchanged people, trying to change the world, telling us to try harder, to say No, to be wildly promiscuous but hygienically safe, have yet to show any commendable results. No, we are bewitched, when we reject as ridiculous, or irrelevant, the gospel of Xr crucified; for that is an offense to those who trust the laws of Moses, and a stumbling-block to intellectuals and free-thinkers. There can be no atheism, Paul Tillich taught; it is humanly impossible; a god can only be denied in the name of another God; and God appearing in one form can be denied only by God appearing in another form. We cannot find a place outside of God, by which to judge; but we do not cease the search for such a place. If God does not exist, Frederick Copleston said, then human beings and human history can have no other purpose than the purpose we choose for ourselves, and that provides no answer to the question, to whom, or to what, am I attached? Paul's answer is to remind us of the new family of faith, the sons of Abraham, who believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. In him shall all the nations of earth find a blessing, Gen 12:3, 18:18; it was the prophecy that gentiles would find acceptance in God's love, by faith in God's redeeming act. Having begun with the Spirit, we should not end with the flesh, or race, or gender, or any other human barrier. But more than that, all who believe are children of God, and when Xr came we were justified by faith, just as Abraham was. In Xr there are no human distinctions; 3:28 is the declaration of equality before God our maker. There is no Jew nor Grk--and we must add other divisions of culture and language that we take as important; neither slave nor free--or any other condition which might set us apart on either side of US 52; there is neither male nor female, for in our human predicament we are all one creature, whether we can become fathers or mothers when we start a family. Our spiritual condition, and needs, are the same. But in Xr we are no longer children, no longer slaves, in the household. ^{HEAR} When the time had fully come--and only this have that sense of time--God sent forth his Son, born of woman; born under the Law; this is the only reference in all of Paul's writing to Xr's birth; we are redeemed, and are adopted as children, to give us freedom to approach God, to cry Daddy, Abba, children, and heirs to the promise. That is true freedom, to be what God made us to be. Let us give thanks for it.

5-15-94. Recently there appeared in the press a story about a frightened woodpecker who had somehow gotten into a house and could not find its way out. The glass walls of the sun porch seemed inviting, but were invisible barriers against which the creature desperately flung herself. The householders propped open a door, and with a broom attempted to send their uninvited guest to the outside. That merely scared the bird all the more. They tried going away to permit her to become more calm, and find escape. After an hour they returned to the porch to find the prisoner perched upon a light fixture in the ceiling, much the worse for wear. So the people decided upon drastic action. Putting on heavy work gloves they managed to grab the bird and take it outside. But when they released it, it flew straight through the open door, back into the prison from which it had been set free. It is a story that makes us smile even as it makes us sad. It is also an allegory of the human condition. We want all wild creatures to enjoy the freedom of the out-of-doors, to bang on the tree-trunks, and to know the camouflage of leafy bushes, to be what they were made to be. It is a reminder of the Bible theme of God's unceasing quest to restore humankind to the faith and trust of our beginnings, to be free because we know and accept our limits, because we have the faith to let God be God, and ourselves to be creatures in God's providence. But it is also a part of us, stamped into our natures, that although we want to be free, freedom frightens us, so that we beg for the chains that bound us, and for the relief they give us from our fear of tomorrow. That is why growing up is so painful a process, and why many of us old gray-beard grouches never do complete the course. Growing up is an invitation to freedom, to make our own decisions, to provide our own income by rewarding and exciting work, to be mature adults who love and respect the parents but who have flown the nest to build a nest for our own fledglings. It is also frightening, so that we wish for a master to tell us what to do, what to wear, and to eat all our carrots, dear. It is an enduring theme of literature. J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan was a boy who did not want to grow up, and is therefore an analog of us all; Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky in the Brothers Karamatzoff has a character who had "no more pressing need than the one to find someone to whom he can surrender, as quickly as possible, that gift of freedom which he, the unfortunate creature, was born with." Irish playwright Bernard Shaw wrote that if we could find that person who wanted to liberate us from the bars of our self-built cage, we would kill him...as has happened often enough in history to be not a laugh-line, but a tragedy. Some years ago, when the local newspaper printed the Doonesburg comic strip, there was a character who intended to make a career of being a college student, with all the privileges and none of the burdens of life; one day in spring he got a letter from the Registrar telling him that he had met all requirements and would be graduated in June. So terrified was he at the prospects of being thrown out into the job market, into the routine of regular hours and obligations, that he broke into the Registrar's office and falsified his records so he would have many additional years in the infantile life he loved. Set the bird free from the prison of the sun-porch, and it flies back into it. And aren't we like that confused bird? We want to have our physical needs met without effort, wealth without work, and to belong to the peer group which gives us the strength, and the meaning for life, which we individuals lack. Those who step to a different drummer are driven off the reservation, attacked as we always set upon those who are different. Into that soothing lullaby of conformity and imitation of the world around us, comes crashing the liberating word of God, as spoken by the apostle Paul to the churches of the ancient province of Galatia, text today is a passage from Gal 4. Paul founded house churches in that region, preaching the gospel of Xr and the cross. To his amazement, soon afterward, other people came, representing the Jerusalem church, to undo what Paul had taught. We cannot be sure exactly what they said, but reading between the lines of what Paul wrote them, we can guess. Here I use a helpful paragraph from a book about Paul by Christiaan Beker, a Princeton theologian. As he reconstructed their argument, it went like this: you were Gentiles when you turned to Xr, thru Paul's preaching. Your turning from the elemental spirits of the universe was an important first step, but you must not stop there. It is only a first step, not the end of the road. Our Xr was the Messiah promised to the people of Israel, to the true sons of Abraham. That does not mean that you are excluded from the promise; you can participate in the full blessing promised to Abraham (if you join the people of the promise. When Paul opposed the Torah, the Law, with all its majesty, he was wrong, and also opportunistic. Opportunistic because he will appear successful as he increases his numbers by offering painless mass conversions, by preaching an abbreviated gospel. The Jerusalem church sets the rules and requirements, and ordains missionaries; Paul was not one of us, nor have we approved his mission. To say that salvation rests on faith alone ignores the law and the Jewish origins of Messiah, destroys the continuity of Israel with the Xn Ch, and lacks a clear and authoritative ethic. It is false to suppose that Gentiles can enter the KgdM of God, proclaimed by Jesus Xr, without first putting on the yoke of the Torah, accepting the food rules, and the special days on the calendar, and submitting to the covenant in the flesh, for all males. Without this, the Galatians were told that they were not heirs of the promise of salvation history which began w/ Abraham, Gen 12. You cannot enter by a side door; you need to go around to the front door and get a ticket. That means coming under the Law, of which Christ is the fulfillment. That will complete your initiation

continuing appeal of those who would divide; turn freedom into yoke, set up entrance requirements ^{for others} into full status as Xns, and will guarantee God's richest blessings upon you as true sons of Abraham. Paul should have made all this clear to you. That he did not is proof of his ego-mania and his disobedience. He is an apostate, not an apostle; he has denied his standing as Pharisee made Xn, and has therefore cut away the fundamental foundation upon which the Ch of God in Xr rests. These were fundamentalists, and inerrantists, as they worked to correct Paul's glaring and heretical errors. And it was to answer their charges, and to calm their fears, that Paul wrote the short ltr we call Galatians. Because Paul wrote about the newness of the new covenant, and about the radical revelation of God's love that Jesus offered, it is one of the most valuable writings for theological instruction that we have in NT. Today the text is a call for spiritual maturity which the Xr-event makes available to us. Gal 4:8-20. Earlier in the ltr Paul had made other appeals to his readers to accept his teaching as authoritative and as divinely inspired. It was not from a human source, he wrote, it was from God; ^{the God of Law} there is only one gospel, and it is the one he preached to them, the one they accepted. It was the same gospel, and the same risen Lord, who had appeared to Paul, the same Holy Spirit who had taught him, and had entered into the lives of the faithful in Galatia. Then he returned to the history of Israel, to what Xns call OT, to show how from the beginning God intended for Gentiles to become part of Israel, and to share in the promise, and all that to Abraham before circumcision, and many centuries before the giving of the law. The promise was fulfilled not thru Law, but thru Xr, he wrote. Now, in these lines, he turned to a personal appeal, one to the heart and to their remembrances of his sojourn among them. He began with the Galat's ignorance and bondage, v.8; you did not know God, and the Greek word means ignorant, not to know; and in that ignorance they lived in bondage to beings that are no gods. It is a text we need to note, and to think about, for we are lost, people of unclean lips, living in the midst of a people of unclean lips, trying as hard as we can to be just like all the rest of us. We keep the law, at least that small part of it that we can keep without changing the way we live; we are known by the things we do not eat or drink, and by our tacit acceptance of the immoralities of a sensual and now-centered world. Before we knew the freedom which is in Xr, we were ignorant, we did not know. And ~~that~~ is not easy. The way of Xr requires self-denial--which brings us to self-fulfillment, but not the way we want it--and the way of the cross; the way of the mystic is easy, requiring acceptance of a creed or obeying a law, by keeping an eye on the stars in the zodiac and by noting lucky days and spl seasons. To say that within myself I am in tune with the infinite; I am God, and God is I; is self-worship and therefore the reality of idolatry. Being known of God comes first, and is something real. Only those who love God, and trust in his goodness, are known of God. With that assurance, how can we go back into the glass prison of the warm and safe sun-porch? how can we return to become slaves when we are set free? It was enough to make Paul think he had wasted his time w/those people. So in v.12 he reminded them of his personal concern for them. He wrote from his heart to theirs; his appeal is emotional, as all good preaching must be, but it is not irrational, although difficult for the modern reader to know for certain what its mystifying phrases mean. He spoke of things about which the readers were familiar, but which we do not know; so he did not fill in the details for them. They knew the nature of his infirmity; we can only guess. All we can know is that it was an embarrassment to Paul, but one his converts accepted ~~as~~ as a blessing, for it kept him among them, so he could teach them. He reminded them that he had become as one of them in respect to the grace of God; faith to him, and to them, required that they give up their reliance upon human works as a way to salvation. Here he revealed his personal freedom more clearly than at any other place in the ltr. He opened himself to them, because he knew that the heart and soul and spirit of Xty was at stake in what happened in the Galatian Chs. If Peter had his way, then past, present, and future would all be different, and the newness of the revelation of God in Xr would be lost for all time. So he appealed to their affection for him. It was his final plea; if they would not hear him at that point, then there was no other way. There must be a bond of love between teachers & learners, or there will be neither. Authority which must be commanded crumbles even as its building is going up. What has happened to the blessedness you knew? have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? He had to tell the truth even at the risk of losing his congregation, at the cost of having them define him as enemy. He could have said, I have my relig, and you have yours; let us respect the truth each of us knows, and not try to convert each other. That would have ended the Xn missionary movement at its very beginning. Or, he could have said, since error is sin, relig liberty does not include the right to err; we who have the whole truth have the right to prevent you from teaching anything contrary to our gospel...burning ^{you} driving out of the fold. That would have made correct the Pharisee Paul, who approved the stoning of Stephen because he preached what to the old faith was error; it would have made violent action the behavior of those who took Xr to be Messiah because he taught people to turn the other cheek. But instead he took the path of testing all things, and writing anathema upon error; that led some of his converts to see him as the enemy. But they preserved his ltr to them; their Xn love was stronger than the divisive force of relig controversy. Paul was not at ease until Xr be formed in you, v.19; it is a verse often used at Xmas, when for all the world Xr was formed in a stable in Bethlehem of Judea, bringing joy to the world, and the glory of God, which is the blessing of God, shone round about. ^(We like)
In each of us who believe there is an inner shrine where the Xr of God is formed, by which

5-22-94. Freedom/Responsibility. It is one of the fundamental paradoxes of human existence that we feel ourselves born to be free of all restraints, and at the same time feel ourselves to be subject to the sovereignty of the Creator-God. To emphasize the conflict, in every generation there have been people, some of them political, some religious, some patriarchal, who have offered to relieve our individual consciences of the need to choose, by doing our thinking for us. When a threat to their authority arises, they may strike back with force and fury, and all in the name of respect and tradition and public order. Five years ago a screen writer named Tom Shulman won the Academy Award for best screenplay of that year. The title was Dead Poets Society, directed by Peter Weir, about a young English teacher in an exclusive preparatory school who encouraged his teen-aged students to break with the habits and restrictions of their elders, to live and to think for themselves. He had them to rip out of their textbooks a learned essay which reduced poetry to a mathematical formula, devoid of imagination and adventure; on campus he had them walk in lockstep and then to step to their own drummer, to walk any way they wished. At his command they stood upon the desk-top, to think about the different perspectives from which we can view the same classroom. And above all, poetry, read as romance, as music to the ear, as a reminder of the beauty of nature. Seize the day, he shouted to them; carpe diem; put little trust in tomorrow; the ancient ode of the Roman poet Horace, who lived in 1st Cen b.c. Freedom is a precious gift, that young English teacher was saying; enjoy it while ye may. Prepare yourselves for the profession that is in your future, but do not miss out on the poetry, and the art, and the music, that enrich the life the profession makes available. And, as you may guess, authority cracked his knuckles, while the students responded in an emotionally moving scene. It is a secular humanistic expression of Paul's appeal to the Xns in the Galatian Chs. Accept God's offer of salvation apart from whatever merit we may accumulate by obedience to law; enter into God's favor just as you are, a sinner, a rebel, disobedient, incapable of doing good in sufficient quality and quantity to win God's approval on our own. It was a violently revolutionary doctrine, then, and even yet finds few who are mature enough to understand it, and to accept it. To quote commentator Oscar Blackwelder, "Paul's gospel has always been in danger of being stifled by those who would treat the teachings of Jesus as laws to be enforced by a hierarchy. The function of his ltrs to the Galatians and the Romans has been to keep the Ch aware of the difference between his dynamic conception of faith and pseudo-salvation by obedience to law!" But God's freedom is not the right to do as we please; it is release from enslavement to self, and to the false gods of this passing age, and to enter upon an enslavement of love to God and fellow-man. So Paul objected to the teachings some were saying in Galatia, because they would impose upon Xns the same restrictions which had been thrown off by Xr's offering of self on the cross. But he was careful to make it clear that freedom carries with it responsibilities, else it is not freedom. Text Gal 5. After today only one session on the Galat ltr remains to us. It is, as we have noted, one of the very highest spots in NT, the beginning point in Xn theology, the declaration of independence for those to whom faith has been given. It is the announcement that in Xr we are liberated, set free, from the law of sin & death, so that we may live in an evil age without being influenced by its limitations of time and motivation. In that freedom there is an inner peace such as the world can never provide, and cannot know; there is joy overflowing, and a lightness of heart that is the gift of God's spirit. In that freedom we can indeed seize the day, and live it in love and laughter, secure in the knowl that tomorrow is in God's hands, just as was yesterday, just as is today. We can march to an eternal drummer, we can hear music in the ugliest of times, we can see ourselves, and other people, from a different perspective, without the necessity of standing upon the teacher's desk, or going into a dark cave to read Keats and Thoreau. This is true freedom, when we know without doubt that this world of flesh is not the real world, for it is perishing and transient, and can provide nothing but corruption. This is true freedom, to throw off the chains of the law and tradition, to put on with gladness the yoke of the Holy Spirit, to exchange the slavery that kills, for the slavery that gives life. Paul knew, as we must, that true freedom was in our complete commitment to the grace of God in Xr, which balances freedom w/responsibility. So in the Galat ltr Paul filled 4 Chaps with his call to freedom, and his arguments in defense of that freedom, ending with the two women of Abraham's household, one free, one a slave. At the end of Chap 4 he said, so, brethren, we are not children of the slave, but of the free woman; Gen 21:10. Then, in Chap 5, he spoke of the responsibility which freedom imposes upon us. Let us listen. Gal 5:1, 13-25. ^{SET WORDS ARE} The closing of the ltr is an invitation to us to use our freedom for good rather than for evil. Theology is essential to the Xn life, but it must become real, it must be translated into action, for it to make a difference. 5:1 presents problems to interpreters; ~~but~~ no one can be sure whether it should be the summation of the theolog treatise that has gone before, or the overview of the moral instructions which follow. However we divide it, and in my version there is a space in the column between 4:31 and 5:1, it is a transition between the theory and the practice of Xn liberty. And, however we read it, it is the fundamental proof-text of freedom--freedom from all restrictions upon us, of the right foods to eat, or the right day to celebrate; or of human divisions among believers, whether male or female, free or slave, Jew or Gentile; free of requiring one

or another prayer, or worship form, or music to go with it. For freedom Xr has set us free from all that, just as in the drama of the exodus God overpwr'd the pharaoh to set his people free, so they might serve him. Liberation did not convey to those people the right to live as they pleased; they became God's property, a kgdm of priests and a holy nation; God's possession among all peoples. To say that Xr has set us free is therefore to remind people of the Bibl story of liberation, and what it meant to those who were set free. God's salvat came with a complete change of allegiance and with an entirely different clock and compass. No longer are we bound to the taskmasters of sin and death, we have been set free to show our gratitude in service to God and to other people. It is not enough to strike off the shackles from wrists and ankles; there must also be an inner change, of mind and heart renewed and made over. God's freedom is not from burden to no burden; it is instead a transfer from one lordship to another, from one bondage to another, with the surprising effect that the new bondage is that perfect freedom that our souls prayed for all our lives. Freedom is not just the power to choose between options, to vote for our candidate, to decide upon our lifetime mates, and careers, even how we shall spend this afternoon. That is not freedom in the spiritual sense. Freedom as God offers is not in human choices, but in divine choice already made for us, in God's sending his Son, and graciously giving us the faith to know his gift. Nor is freedom a negative; it is not the absence of the whip, or the oppression of the pwrfl; some of the freest people who ever lived are ^{END OF} those who lived behind iron bars, who were beaten, set upon by wild beasts and guard dogs, denied human dignity. To correct a social wrong does not produce the Kgdm of God; it must be succeeded by a new loyalty and dependence upon God. Freedom is our heritage, as members of God's family; it is not a retreat into the self, or the avoidance of pain. It is taking a cross upon our shoulders, and laying down our private vision of the good life to share the hurts and the happiness of other people. Scholar Jacques Ellul said, the freedom which is given in Xr is radical insecurity from the human standpoint..for our only security is Xr. If..we seek..some other protection..that of the state, or wealth, or social security, or socialism, or violence, or revolutions, or justice..it will be a repudiation of our security in Xr, and..it will be an alienation of our freedom..Freedom is both supreme insecurity and yet, as the whole of the Bible reminds us, it is the only true security." To understand that about our own time, and place, is to understand why we are so troubled in mind and soul. Trusting the faithfulness of God enables us to confront all that life can offer. For freedom Xr has set us free; we should not be entangled again w/yoke of bondage. From that towering assertion, Paul turned to words about the right use of freedom, 13-23. He said that the task of the Ch is to produce Xr-like minds, and lives, and thus to enable us to outlove, and out-think, the world. Does it concern you, as it concerns me, that we who speak for God in our day are defensive, ashamed of the gospel, and of morality, earnestly begging the world out there to tell us how we should behave, and proclaim, and believe? It is for the prophetic ministry to tell that world how it should think and act, and if it rejects the word, remember that it rejected Jesus. To Paul, Xn theology is the basis of Xn ethics; the work of Xr in liberating us from sin is the foundat for all else that we do and say. We can live the good life with no reference to the freedom that Xr has given, we say; but that means a return to the cage from which we flew. Goodness, to Xn, is not a good deed, so much as it is an expression of the freedom given by God, whose call is for unselfish love. Note the words in the passage--do not use your freedom as an occasion to the flesh; but in love be svts to one another. Svts, by choice! It is a reminder that God led forth the children of Israel from servitude; now the faithful are urged to return to it, but this time voluntarily. Note Paul's use of the ancient law, quoted by Jesus, as text--Lev 19--the whole law is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. In freedom we become slaves to one another; the proper use of freedom is to serve; the Grk word means slave. We who were once slaves to sin, demonstrate our freedom by being slaves of righteousness. It is not a summary of the law, that we love neighbor as self; it is the fulfillmt of the law. Love does not do away w/law, or repeal it; it confirms and correctly interprets the law. Obedience is not a way to evade the call to love, as many would have it--that we hate the thing we obey; what is owed to neighbor is not a single thing; it is a total approach to life. Then Paul describes the battle between flesh and spirit. When he uses the word flesh, it means more than the meat upon our bones; it has been translated "lower nature, "human nature; "sinful nature, "self-indulgence." It is part of God's creation, so it is neither evil nor corrupt. It means the earthly sphere in which we deceive ourselves into believing that we are in control of our lives, and our world; that we can get from here to where we want to be, on our own, without help; when we do that we are in rebellion, we are in opposition, to God. So our minds, and our wills, are the stage of battle, just as we are also the object of the war. Spirit is God at work in the world. We must walk by the Spirit, to know the freedom which is ours. The key is v.18--if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. The sentence immediately folwg is, the works of the flesh are plain, manifest: KJV begins w/adultery, which is omitted in RsV, because the later translators used an earlier MS; fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, and so on. For many yrs I struggled with those two sentences. If I am not under law, then why are there No-Nos? The key, is, if we are led by the spirit, we would not want to break our vows, to drink to excess, to go after palm-readers and impurity. We would rejoice in the fruits of the spirit--love, joy, peace, patience. As we walk in the Spirit we are free, as God made us to be free, to taste of life to the full, to read the dead poets, and to march to a divine drummer. allelujah.

5-29-94. Some of you have heard me say, and others of you have suspected, that I get ~~much~~ my philosophy and theology from the comic strips. Earlier this month an episode of Calvin & Hobbes, drawn by a cartoonist named Watterson, is an example of what I mean. It showed the little boy & his stuffed tiger friend, walking in the woods. The boy says, I don't believe in ethics any more. As far as I'm concerned, the ends justify the means. Get what you can while the getting's good--that's what I say. Might makes right! The winners write the history books! It's a dog-eat-dog world, so I'll do whatever I have to, and let others argue about whether it's "right" or not." But even as Calvin is speaking, declaring his independence, the tiger Hobbes violently shoves him into the mud. Hey, Calvin shouted; why'd you do that? To which the tiger replied, with a look of angelic innocence, You were in my way. Now you're not. The ends justify the means. And all Calvin can say is, I didn't mean for everyone, you dolt! Just me." It is just a comic strip, but it carries a heavy load of meaning to all of us, whether we live by the Biblical faith, or not. Many of us try to live by the attitude that Calvin expressed--take what you want, fight fire w/fire, do not get all steamed up about right and wrong. Intellectuals in many academic disciplines teach that given the human propensity to imagination, and accumulation, whatever any of us find profitable or helpful in our endeavors, we will call good, and whatever hinders or opposes us we call bad. To such thinking, morals, or ethics, or whatever it is that we OUGHT to do, is as self-centered, and as situational, as it was to the selfish little boy named Calvin, who just may be closely akin to all of us. It suggests what may be a terrifying possibility--that, as George Santayana said, the life of reason is continually beaten back upon its animal sources, and nations are submerged in deluge after deluge of barbarism. The half-gods of secular morality are not absolutes; they are not even rules for polite and ethical behavior. Their first commandment is to get all you can, to pile up possessions; life consists of the multitude of things which we have. But the price is high indeed, so high in fact that in gathering things, and then getting rust-proof paint, and moth-balls, and strong locks to protect them from rust and pest and thieves; in doing all that, we lose our souls. Many of us prefer to worship things, ideas, values, that resemble Xty, to worship them, so much that we lose the distinction between them. We want democracy, and freedom, but we deny the dignity of the individual upon which they are based. Democracy is impossible without the Xn faith in the value of every person as a child of God; freedom is impossible until we are liberated by faith in God's forgiveness. The 2d Cen Latin Father of the Ch Tertullian said that the virtues of the pagans who are w/o Xr are in fact only "splendid vices;" to which we must add, for our day, that virtues which in our imaginats we can attain by ourselves, are fatal virtues. Against all that the community of faith must stand firm exactly where St. Paul stood, as we have read in the materials we have studied for the past three months, from the ltrs to the Romans and to the Galatians. Today's text is the concluding passage from Galat 6. Next wk, should we be granted the time, we shall begin a new series of lessons on the meaning of God's liberation, based upon the bks of Moses: Exod, Levit, Numb, Deut. Any who would like a listing of topics and texts... Today we have some of the richest texts in Bibl about the meaning of Xn ethics, and the way we are to live out our Xn commitment in these days. Paul made it clear to all who would hear, that we cannot earn God's approval of our deeds and thought. It comes by faith in the grace and mercy of God. But he also shouted it out that we are to live above and beyond a set of rules. If we live by the Spirit, he told the Galats, and know the peace and the joy of the Spirit's presence with us, then let us also walk by the Spirit. It is altogether in agreement with Paul's great theological insight, that those who thru faith are righteous shall live. Life is given to us who believe, who put our trust in the resurrection of Jesus; where there is life there is also purity of life. Be ye transformed, he told the Romans; be not conformed to this world. It is a passing thing; its days are numbered; do not live by its measure, or walk to its drummer. Lead a life worthy of God, he said; lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. And in another place he wrote; as therefore you received Xr J the Lord, so live in him (Col 2). Wherever we read Paul, it is the same; God has done something for us that is beyond our power to do for ourselves; we have received something from him for which we can never repay; we know the peace that passes understanding in him; so we are to live a life that is in harmony with what we have received. If we have died to sin, then how can we justify our continuing to live in the death of the soul? And yet we watch in amazement as relig ldrs, teachers, exemplars of the faith to those of us who are babes in the faith, behave not one whit different from those who claim to be gods and laws unto themselves. If everyone in the world were Xn, by the standards many of us accept, would it mean stronger families, with no child-abuse, no divorce and re-marriage, no adultery? would it mean no more hungry people, no more angry people, no more tribal warfare, no more studying war, no more thievery, or false witness, no more coveting of another's position as president of a theological seminary? No, in all of that, for far too many of us, professing Xr, and urging other people to profess Xr, is no constraint upon us. We do as we please. Does it mean that in professing Xr as Lord and Savior we are not conscious of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable, we are not aware of our dependence upon the mercies of God for our lives, or of having that mind in us which was in Xr J? Do we expect to get to heaven on J's coat-tails, as

the old preacher of my boyhood often put it, of calling J"Lord, lord," while ignoring the things that he said? To all that, Paul shouted, God forbid. So let us hear again Paul's instructions for the healing fellows^{hip} of the Ch, Gal 5:25-6:18. We go back two vv into Ch 5, because they are so closely connected to what has gone before, and what came after, that scholars cannot know where the chapter division should come. Here we read of the demands of the spirit upon those of us who believe. There is an order to things; it matters deeply, and eternally, what we believe about rights and wrongs in life. To try to make our own rules, is to run across the grain of the universe; historically, as well as individually, it means disaster. It is the way God has created and ordered his world that we must accept, and find our place in; finding it, and living by it, gives us a great and unexpected miracle. Living by the rules gives us a freedom we cannot know when we break them and live as we please. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit; let us have no self-conceit, no desire for vainglory. ^{the} The Grk word means glorying in that which is empty, and it produces envy of one another, and provoking one another; inciting, goading, pretending to be more spiritual, more tolerant, more open, than were others. It breaks the unity of the felwshp into fragments, in which people treat the unimportant as matters of life and death. Paul said: let us not lose sight of what is crucial--the faith, the love, and the hope which remain. 5:26 should be the text-motto of every believer, who may experience in every church conference a pitched battle between opponents, seeking not the brotherhood/sisterhood of the whole, but the triumph of a part over the all. With that beginning, Paul then set forth the paradox of burden-bearing in the felwshp. Would that we all could hear, and believe. When one of us commits a fault, we do not appoint a committee to interrogate, and to drum out of the company that person; instead, we seek to restore her in a spirit of gentleness. Is there a one of us who, looking into our mirrors, can see perfection in all things? Jesus spoke of the mote in your eye, the beam in mine; put vv 2, 5 together, for a guide to problem-solving. Bear ye one another's burdens..each person shall bear his own burden. They are not contradictory statemts; they go together to make the whole truth we need to hear. Paul would say to us, broken into hostile camps; take seriously your life in the Holy Spirit of God; restore those who have fallen away. Make evangelism in the Ch your mission; when people want out, seek them out, talk and pray with them, for the unity of the brotherhood is more important than the private life-style of any member of it. V.3, if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. A self-evaluation that does not use the erring colleague as the standard of measuremt is thereby more realistic; self-conceit multiplied by zero equals zero plus self-deception. Or, as someone said long ago, a human being wrapped up in himself makes a very small package. Oh, but how enormous we see ourselves! We can carry another person's burden, but we cannot carry that person's responsibility. Each of us must face the fact of God's judgmt upon us; we must each bear our own load. The world was not intended to be a place where no one could fail, or ride on the backs of others. We all need a helping hand, but we all have hands of our own, to offer to those coming after. Then, with v.7, Paul tells of the gardening of the spirit. Do not deceive ourselves, he said; God is not mocked; whatever we sow, that shall we also reap; if we sow to the flesh we reap corruption; if we sow to the spirit will reap eternal life. It is a teaching we prefer to forget; to take kindergarten scissors--for we act like small children--and cut out of our testaments the portions that offend us. God is not one to be trifled with. We can never be as smart as God, however we see ourselves as clever, as evading the rules in order to win, as taking the trusting fools to the cleaners by our superior intelligence. I don't believe in ethics anymore, the small boy Calvin said; ignore the honor system, steal the book from the library so classmates cannot use it; might makes right; cook the books and laugh at the auditor. From that juvenile perspective it is a dog-eat-dog world; let others debate the right and wrong while I live by the rule that greed is good for everybody. Ah, but then comes the word--be not deceived, for God is still in control. God is a just judge, who operates on the truth that we are free to sow our wild oats, but we cannot expect from them a nourishing and healthy supper. There is a co-relation between behavior and reward. God does not punish all drunk drivers with a collision that kills a medical student; but have you noticed how often drunk drivers collide? Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. Note well the law of the identical harvest, as far back as Gen 1:12; by the very nature of our being, our every act is a sowing. As we sow, so shall we also reap. However we ridicule that ancient truth, because we think we are not under so foolish a rule, it remains true. We cannot grow grapes with thorn-seeds, nor do we produce love and harmony by a childish insistence upon our right to be wrong. To be flesh-minded isto put oneself above the God who made us, and who wrote into our beings the rules by which we may live in peace and contentmt. So then, we reach the end of the instruction, and the end of the spring term, w/v.10--as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men. That is the general roadmap for our lives in the world; but because the Galat Chs were in particular need--and do you know of any Ch anywhere that is not in need of the calming spirit of God?--spl care was needed for "those who are of the household of faith." With these words the main body of the ltr ends. Paul added a PS in his own handwriting, in large ltrs so all could read them. It was a final appeal, with two blessings; with them we may well conclude a lesson unit on these two NT bks. Peace & mercy be upon all who walk by the rule that only the new creation counts for anything; the grace of our Lord J Ar be w/your spirit, Amen.