

## Sermon Series: *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians*

### We Are Not Children of A Slave

#### **Galatians 4:21-31**

21 *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?*

22 *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.*

23 *But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.*

24 *Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.*

25 *Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.*

26 *But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.*

27 *For it is written,*

*Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;*

*break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!*

*For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.*

28 *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.*

29 *But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.*

30 *But what does the Scripture say? Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.*

31 *So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

#### **Galatians 4:21**

21 *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?*

#### **What's Wrong With Being Under the Law?**

When I read this verse, my first question is, "What's wrong with desiring to be under the law?" Everyone should want to be under the law shouldn't they? Everyone is supposed to abide by the law aren't we? However, the way this question is framed it sounds like being under the law is a bad thing. So the first question that comes to my mind is what is so bad about being under the law?

#### **Under the Law**

When Paul uses the phrase, "under the law," he means the Mosaic ceremonial law—the full observance of Jewish calendar (4:10), receiving circumcision (5:3), and all the dietary restrictions that are part of all that Moses commanded.

## Why Desire to be Under the Law?

Isn't it good to obey the law? Doesn't God want us to obey the law? Certainly it is good to obey the law. God does want us to obey His laws. So what is the problem? The context of the letter helps us understand what the problem is.

The problem was not that they desired to obey God's law. The problem was **why** they desired to obey the law. These Galatians were beginning to embrace an understanding of the law that was unlawful. The law is good if one uses it lawfully (1 Tim 1:8), but the law can be deadly if one uses it unlawfully. The Galatians were beginning to view obedience to the law as a means of earning righteousness in the sight of God. There were beginning to view keeping the law as a necessary requirement for salvation. Using the law in this way, is unlawful.

## The Law Is Not A Ladder But A Mirror

The law is not a ladder whereby one can ascend into heaven on the rungs of self-willed obedience. Complete obedience to the law is impossible. The law is a mirror that reveals the blackness of our sinful desires and exposes our utter inability to attain in our own power the perfect righteousness that God demands. To break even the slightest command of the law places one under a curse (Gal 3:10; Jam 2:10), because God only accepts perfect obedience.

## Why Did the Galatians Desire To Be Under the Law?

This situation begs the question, why did the Galatians desire to be under the law in the first place? What was going on in their hearts that led them to embrace this kind of legalism. Legalism is the teaching that man gets to decide on the standards by which God will accept a person. If these Galatians had come to Christ, then what was it about keeping the Mosaic law that so appealed to them. How were they falling into this trap of the Judaizers?

## We Love to Glorify Ourselves

I think the answer lies in the fact that we sinful humans love to glorify ourselves. We delight more in what we can do for ourselves than in what another can do for us. Sinful people naturally resist giving glory to anyone other than themselves. This is contrary to a salvation that comes from outside ourselves.

Salvation that comes as a gracious gift given to us by God, means that God deserves the glory for being such a gracious giver. The Giver gets the greater glory. *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:25). However, if we can work hard enough and earn our own salvation, then we can keep the glory for ourselves. We can pat ourselves on the back for all the good deeds we have done. We can have the salvation we want and we can have it on our own terms as a result of our own efforts. We can be saved and have ourselves to thank for it.

We can praise ourselves for all of our hard "righteous" work (i.e. righteous according to our own estimation) which we have done in our own strength rather than praising God for giving us the strength we need to serve Him (1 Peter 4:11). ***We would rather receive the glory ourselves than give glory to God.***

In this case, it is better to receive than it is to give. *We would rather work for our own salvation than receive a salvation given to us by grace. This is why being under the law was so appealing.* In the beginning, we may have needed the little jump-start of faith, but as we mature, so goes the lies of the Judaizers, soon we begin to learn to obey the law based upon our own willpower and self-effort. Only then can we truly feel good about ourselves. These, of course, are lies from the enemy.

This is just as true today as it was in A.D. 48. We love to receive the praises of man. Humanity lives for celebrity. We love the glory that comes from one another. As a culture we glorify self-accomplishment and self-achievement. We yearn to be like the athletes who “worked hard and made themselves” great! ***Independence is the idol of the day.***

We are no longer tripped up by striving to keep an ancient law-code. We have moved far beyond that. We have progressed and now we *worship ourselves and our own great accomplishments*. Self-esteem is the opium of the masses. We don’t mind being under a law so long as it is a law of our own making. And these are the people whom we glorify. We glorify those who are the captain's of their own ships. And Jesus said seeking this kind of glory is a barrier to believing the gospel.

#### **John 5:44**

*How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*

Living to receive the praises of the populace will cause you fall far from the praise that comes from God. You can be THE most religious person in the world, but if your religion is based upon self-effort rather than faith in a suffering Savior, slain then resurrected, then your religion is in vain.

#### **Paul’s Point: Self-Effort Will Not Inherit Eternal Life**

This is the point Paul is trying to make by pointing the Galatians back to the law, that is back to the first book of the law. Paul again uses Abraham as an example to demonstrate that self-effort will never inherit eternal life. Receiving the promised inheritance, which is receiving the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:14) only comes by faith—by believing God’s promise. He says,

#### **Do You Listen To The Law**

##### **Galatians 4:21**

*Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?*

Paul is playing on the larger meaning of the word “law.” If the Judaizers were teaching obedience to the law, meaning the Mosaic law, as necessary to salvation, then Paul says “listen to the law,” and by this he means the Pentateuch<sup>1</sup> which was also referred to as the “law.” We know this is what he is doing because he goes back to the first book of the law and looks again to the an example of Abraham.<sup>2</sup> [He has most likely used Abraham so frequently because the Judaizers have probably been using Abraham as the foundation for teaching the necessity of receiving circumcision.]

So Paul is pointing out that if you want to listen to one part of the law, then you have to listen to the whole law. Paul wants the Galatians to listen to the law. The question for us is, what does the law have to say?

Your Parent’s Faith Will Not Get You Into Heaven (v.22)

Flesh Begets Flesh & Spirit Begets Spirit (vs.23-27)

Those of the Flesh Persecute Those of the Spirit (vs.29-30)

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<sup>1</sup> The first five books of the Bible which were written by Moses.

<sup>2</sup> Paul had previously used Abraham as an example of salvation by faith in chapter 3.

## You Cannot Get Into Heaven Based Upon Your Parent's Faith (v.22)

The first truth the law says is that just because your parents had saving faith, does not mean that you automatically receive saving faith. Your parent's faith will not get you into heaven, unless their faith is in Jesus and you embrace that faith as your own faith. No one gets into heaven, because mom and dad were Christians. *Surrogate faith is not a saving faith.*

### **Galatians 4:22**

*22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.*

The Jews took pride in the fact that they were descendants of Abraham. Many thought that this fact alone guaranteed their acceptance by God. Paul is illustrating the fact that just because you are physically descended from Abraham does not automatically receive access into heaven. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, but only Isaac inherited the promise. So just because you are descended from Abraham does not automatically mean you are accepted by God.

John the Baptist was the first to explode this false assurance.

## Do Not Presume to Say, "Abraham Is Our Father"

### **Matthew 3:7-10**

*7 But when he [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

*8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*

*9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father, for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*

*10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

John knew how much confidence the Pharisees and Sadducees had in their lineage. True saving faith includes genuine, personal repentance. Merely going through external rituals, such as baptism, or traditions handed down from mom & dad without there being any genuine, personal repentance for sins was not the kind of fruit God was looking for. Only those who have personally embraced the faith of Abraham are the true children of Abraham.

## Abraham Is Not Your Father—The Devil Is

Jesus also sought to remove a false faith in being descended from Abraham. In John 8 Jesus was trying to convince His listeners that they needed to be freed from slavery to sin. They rejected this notion claiming, *"We are Abraham's offspring and have never been enslaved to anyone"* (Jn 8:33). They became so mad at Jesus for saying this that they wanted to kill Him. Jesus replied,

### **John 8:39-41**

*"If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did 40 but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did."*

Jesus went on to explain to them that in reality their father was the devil! Eventually, they became so angry at him that they picked up rocks to stone Him.

Faith is not genetically transferred from parent to child. Each of us must make up our own minds whether we will trust Jesus or not. Your mother or father cannot believe for you. You must decide for yourself. Will you rejoice in Jesus being your Savior or not?

## **Flesh Begets Flesh & Spirit Begets Spirit (vs.23-27)**

The second thing the law has to say is that the flesh begets flesh and Spirit begets spirit. This is what Jesus said to Nicodemus.

### **John 3:6**

*6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

Spiritual life does not originate in deeds of the flesh. Spiritual life does not come from human effort. That which is of flesh can only give rise to that which is flesh. Spiritual life originates from the Holy Spirit, not from human determination. Human effort to obey the law and establish its own righteousness, leads only to slavery not freedom. *Freedom comes from the Spirit and the Spirit comes into our lives only by faith, not works.*

This is the point Paul is making in verses 23-27. Paul illustrates the point by recounting the stories of the births of Ismael and Isaac. You can read this in Genesis chapters 16 and 21.

### **Galatians 4:23-26**

*23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.*

*24 Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.*

*25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.*

*26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.*

Paul contrasts the births of Ismael and Isaac. Ismael was the son of Hagar, who was Sarah's slave. If you recall, God first spoke to Abram (his name before God changed it to Abraham - Gn 17:5) calling him into a relationship with Himself when he was 75 years old. God called him to leave his family and follow Him to a place that He would later show him. Abram obeyed. It was at this time that God promised to make a great nation of him (Gn 12:2-3).

However, as time went on, Abram and Sarai become impatient. So 11 years later Sarai tells Abram to marry her servant girl, Hagar, and then Sarai could have children through her. Abram listens to Sarai, marries Hagar, and soon she was pregnant. This caused tension between Sarai and Hagar (Gn 16:5). [In the Bible, two wives never yields a peaceful home. One man and one woman, both being obedient to the Lord, is God's design for a happy home.]

Finally, they get things worked out and Ishmael is born when Abraham was 86 years old (Gn 16:16). But Ishmael was not the son through whom God had chosen to fulfill His promise to Abram & Sarai. So 13 years later, when Abraham was 99 years old (Gn 17:1), God appeared again to him and told him that He was going to give him and Sarah a son. Abraham cracked up laughing. He was 99 years old and Sarah was 90. Abraham was thinking, "God, you missed your window of opportunity!" But God knew exactly what He was doing.

One year later (Gn 21:2), Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Abraham was 100 years old. This was clearly a miracle. God waited 25 years to fulfill His promise to Abraham. They were both well beyond child bearing years. The author of Hebrews said Sarah was "past the age" (11:11) and Abraham was "as good as dead" (11:12). God did it this way on purpose. He did it this way to demonstrate a spiritual reality. That reality is that spiritual life with God comes as a result of faith in God's promises. The

only reason Isaac was born was because God made a promise and Abraham and Sarah both believed He could keep His word (Heb 11:11-12).

Paul said there are spiritual truths to be learned from these events. First, verse 23, the son of the slave, Ismael, was **born according to the flesh**. This means according to the natural ability of human effort. Ismael was born without any miraculous intervention by God. However, Isaac was born **according to the promise** and in verse 29 he said it was **according to the Spirit**. Meaning the ultimate reason for Isaac's birth, was the promise of God at work through the Spirit of God.

Ishmael was born because Abraham and Hagar decided to have a child and they were both able and they did. Abraham and Sarah had tried for decades to have a child but could not. Sarah even said, "God has prevented me bearing children" (Gn 16:2). Sarah was unable to have children. Yet, because God gave His word and they believed it, He miraculously allowed a 90 year-old woman and a 100 year-old man to give birth to a baby boy! This truly was a miracle.

Paul says this may be interpreted allegorically (v.24). In other words, there is a deeper meaning beyond the bare historical facts. The two women represent two covenants. Hagar represents the old covenant which was the covenant of law received at Mt. Sinai. This covenant leads only to slavery. Hagar was a slave and she gave birth to a slave. The covenant of law brought spiritual freedom to no one, because no one could keep it. The law condemned everyone because we all fall short of its righteous demands in some way.

Now, Hagar corresponds to Mt. Sinai in Arabia (which is outside the Promised Land) yet Paul says this represents the Jerusalem of his day—a Jerusalem that was in bondage, a Jerusalem that was in slavery both physically and spiritually. Physically they were under the dominion of Rome. Spiritually they were under the dominion of sin.

However, Sarah represented a new covenant that was purchased (though this is not stated by Paul) on Mt. Calvary (or Mt. Zion). Sarah was free and gave birth to a free man. This new covenant leads to spiritual freedom, through believing the promise. Sarah's children are represented by the heavenly Jerusalem (i.e. the Jerusalem above). This Jerusalem from above is free.

#### **Galatians 4:27**

*27 For it is written,*

*Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;*

*break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!*

*For the children of the desolate one will be more*

*than those of the one who has a husband.*

And Sarah's children will be more in number than Hagar's children. Sarah was the barren one, yet her children will be as numerous as the sands on the seashore, more numerous than the children of the one who had a husband. This will be true because Gentiles who receive the gospel by faith will be counted as her offspring. She will not cry out in labor pains, but she will cry out in joy! She will rejoice in the birth of her many children!

God's promise yields life and freedom. It was the Spirit of God at work in Abraham's and Sarah's body granting them the ability to give birth to Isaac. His was not a virgin birth, but his was a miraculous birth. Human self effort did lead to a birth, but that child was born in slavery.

Trusting in the promise of God leads to life and freedom. Attempting to fulfill God's promise based upon human self-effort leads only to slavery. Resting in Jesus by grace through faith brings life and peace. Striving to be accepted by God based upon your own confidence in doing religious activities, brings nothing but slavery and death.

Salvation comes as a result of the divine working of God as we believe his promise by faith. No effort of our own will ever save our souls.

#### **John 1:12-13**

12 *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

New birth ultimately happens as a result of the will of God. Salvation is a miracle of God's grace. Do not put confidence in your flesh. Put your confidence in the Spirit of God who works in your life through faith not self-effort.

#### **Those of the Flesh Persecute Those of the Spirit (vs.29-30)**

Lastly, the law says that those of flesh persecute those born of the Spirit.

#### **Galatians 4:29**

29 *But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.*

When Isaac was weaned, at about age 3 (Gn 21:8ff), Abraham made a great feast. Ishmael was about 17 years old. During the feast Sarah saw him mocking and laughing at Isaac. The older brother was picking on the little brother. Before little Isaac came along Ishmael was the supposed heir. However, now that Abraham and Sarah have their own son, Ishmael had been displaced. So he became jealous of Isaac and angry at him.

Notice Paul refers to Ishmael as **he who was born according to the flesh** and Isaac as **him who was born according to the Spirit**. The origin of Ishmael's life was simply human effort. The origin of Isaac's life was the working of the Holy Spirit. The flesh and the Spirit will never live at peace with one another. Those born of the flesh will always persecute those born of the Spirit. There are simply too many differences. This has been the case since the beginning of time.

Paul says this has been happening since Ishmael and Isaac and it was happening in the Galatian churches. These so called brothers were false teachers and they were persecuting the faith of the Galatians. They saw their freedom in Christ and they sought to steal that freedom. Paul said, **so also it is now**, meaning that the Galatians were presently being persecuted. So what should they do?

#### **Galatians 4:30**

30 *But what does the Scripture say? Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.*

Sarah told Abraham what she saw happening between Ishmael and Isaac and she said, "Kick them out! For this slave woman and her son will not be an heir with my son Isaac" (Gn 21:10). Abraham

was very upset with Sarah's request and he went and talked to the Lord about it. God said, "It's ok. Let them go. Sarah's right. I will fulfill my promise through Isaac not Ishmael." (Gn 21:12-13).

Paul's message to the Galatians is clear; cast out the false teachers who are seeking to enslave you. Do not allow them to lead you back into slavery. Jesus has set you free, so do not submit again to a yoke of slavery!

**Galatians 4:31**

*31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

Abraham sent Hagar and Isaac away and peace then came to their house. We each need to examine our hearts and see if we have allowed legalism to creep into our house. Have you set up your own standards whereby you have become the judge who determines whether or not God accepts a person or not?

- Do you love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God?
- Is your faith in Jesus your own? No one else's faith will get you into heaven. You need to make up your own mind about Jesus.
- Are you trusting in your own self-effort or are you trusting in what Jesus has done for you?
- Are you experiences some of the persecution to which Paul refers?

Jesus said, "*He whom the son sets free is free indeed*" (Jn 8:36). Jesus is able to burst the bonds of anything that holds you. There is freedom in Him that cannot be found in any other place. Freedom from sin. Freedom from legalism.