

29. The Book of Galatians 4:21-31 (Topical)

Liberty From Law-Part 26

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(8-25-24)

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This morning in our study in Galatians, we come to the end of Chapter 4, where Paul is concluding his doctrinal arguments against a group of Jewish false teachers known as the Judaizers.

The Judaizers were trying to incorporate the law (religious works) into the gospel of grace as a basis for salvation—

Galatians 4:21–23 (NKJV)

²¹ Tell me, you who desire to be under the law [under legalism/religion], do you not hear the law? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³ But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise,

So here, Paul begins to bring his argument to its conclusion—the argument that *salvation* is a total promise of God, a gift of His grace and not a reward for keeping the Law. As if presenting his closing argument in a court of law, he appeals to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people—let me give you the background for Paul's argument.

- Back in Genesis 12:2, God first promised Abraham (Abram) when he was 75 years old (his wife Sarah was 65), that He would make him a great nation—which of course implied he would have many descendants.
- Then in Genesis 13:16 God affirmed His promise by telling Abraham that his descendants would be as the dust of the earth—in other words, innumerable.
- As we come to Genesis 15, Abraham is now 85 years old and God appears to him in a vision and reaffirmed His promise to him—expanding it by saying, *“I’m going to bring you into a new land. I’m going to give you a new name. I’m going to make you great. And from you will come forth a people as innumerable as the stars in the heavens or the sand on the seashore.”*
- And we read in Genesis 15:6 that Abraham believed God and God accounted it to him for righteousness.

But when he was eighty-six years old, and still childless, Sarah said to him, *“Honey, I realize God spoke to you, but let’s be practical. You’re eighty-six, I’m seventy-six— this promise isn’t going to come to pass the way we thought it would. Let’s help God. Therefore, take my slave girl, Hagar, have relations with her, and the child you produce will be the promised seed from which will come the nation God promised you.”*

Now listen, when God makes a promise—there is almost always a gap of time between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of the promise.

It is in that gap of time that we get impatient—“*Time is running out,*” we say, “*I’ve got to make something happen!*”

So, with their ‘*biological clocks*’ ticking and God not having yet fulfilled the promise He had given to them, Abraham agreed to Sarah’s plan—which turned out to be one of the worse decisions in the history of mankind—for sure in the history of the Jewish people!

The greatest lesson we can take from this story is that God doesn’t need our help in fulfilling His promises, that what He has promised He is able to perform (Romans 4:21)—and if we try to ‘*help*’ Him it often leads to disaster (like using a credit card to buy necessities rather than praying and waiting for God to provide)!

So, Abraham and Sarah decided to help God fulfill His promise—and the result was the conception and birth of a baby boy named Ishmael! After Ishmael was born, another 10 years went by before God spoke to Abraham again, saying to him—“*My promise to you still stands—I’m going to give you a son.*”

Abraham basically says to God, “*Don’t worry about it Lord, we took care of it. Let Ishmael live before You, he’ll do!*”

To which God says to Abraham—“*No, Ishmael is not the fulfillment of My promise, he’s only your fleshly attempt to help Me fulfill my promise. I’m going to give you the son I promised you and Sarah 24 years ago.*”

That son was born a year later and was named Isaac (laughter).

Isaac is called the ‘*son of promise*’ because he was the first son born to Abraham in the promised Messianic line—the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah...down to Jesus, the Messiah.

Jesus was the actual ‘*Son of Promise*’ in that it would be through Him that God would ultimately fulfill the promise He gave to Abraham way back in Genesis 15:5—“*Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.*” And He said to him, “*So shall your descendants be.*”

As we have already pointed out in our study of Galatians—this promise would go far beyond the literal descendants of Abraham (i.e., ‘the Jewish people’)—and would extend to all mankind:

Galatians 3:26–29 (NKJV)

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Romans 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all...

“...that the promise [of salvation] might be sure [to everyone].”

Let me say this one more time—if the promise of salvation was based on us perfectly keeping the Law—that promise would be worthless not ‘sure’ because it would be based on conditions that no one would be able to meet (sinless perfection).

But if God said (which He did) to all mankind, “*I promise to give you eternal life—if you believe in My Son*”—that is a promise that is attainable by everyone it’s sure, because everyone can believe in Jesus!

That’s why God could promise us eternal life the moment we put our faith in Jesus (1 John 5:13)—because it’s based on what He did for us and not on what we do for Him (which is why Jesus said, “*It is finished*” from the cross right before He died).

You see the fact that God promised eternal life to us instantly and forever the moment we put our faith in Jesus testifies to the fact that—it is by grace and not by our works—

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NLT)

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

In the Mosaic covenant, God promised Israel blessings based on their obedience to the Law—whereas in the New Covenant, God promised us blessings based on our faith in Jesus Christ. This is critical to Paul’s argument that eternal life is a gift that God has promised to us through our faith and not something we earn by our works.

**God promised us eternal life if we put our faith in Jesus—
but that promise isn’t dependent on our faithfulness
in keeping the Law (God’s commandments)—
it’s an unconditional promise!**

In other words, we don’t *earn* eternal life through our obedience to what God has commanded (Jesus did say if we love Him keep His commandments)—but obedience to God is always the *result* (fruit) of salvation never the prerequisite for *earning* salvation.

The point is that in the New Covenant we receive God’s promise of eternal life by believing in and receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior—

John 1:12 (NKJV)

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Now the story that Paul is using to prove his point really happened—in other words, it was not fictional, it was an actual historical story. But Paul sees in it a spiritual lesson that God is using it to communicate—in other words, the true story of Isaac and Ishmael represents a deep spiritual truth, which Paul now proceeds to explain.

Galatians 4:22–26 (NKJV)

²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³ But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴ which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—²⁵ for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—

Paul tells us that, the two women represent two covenants: **Hagar** the covenant of law (the Old Covenant under Moses); and **Sarah** the covenant of grace (the New Covenant in Christ).

The covenant given at Sinai produced slavery to the Law—thus Hagar, a slave-girl, was a fitting type of the Law. The descendants of Hagar (through Ishmael)—eventually moved into the desert areas to the east and south of the Promised Land. They came to be known broadly as Arabs and their territory as Arabia—which is significant in that Mount Sinai is located in what is still known today as the Arabian Peninsula (not Egypt).

Next, Paul pointed to two **‘Jeruselems.’**

The first Jerusalem that Paul says **Hagar** represents was the literal first-century city of Jerusalem—a city in bondage to Rome and in slavery to the Law.

One pastor said, *“Earthly Jerusalem was the capital of religious Judaism. This was the way most Jewish people in Paul’s day tried to be right with God—by trusting in their ability to please God by keeping the law.”*

Sarah, on the other hand, corresponded to New Jerusalem—the capital city of heaven for those who are justified by faith and free from the Law—

Galatians 4:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ **but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.**

‘The Jerusalem above (representing the New Covenant) **is free’**—or in other words, it is **free** because it recognizes that Jesus paid the price, and we don’t have to pay it ourselves—which we can’t!

‘Which is the mother of us all’—in other words, this covenant has many children.

Every Christian through the centuries belongs to this new covenant, the covenant of the heavenly Jerusalem.

And every birth under this covenant is a *miracle* (just like Isaac)—like the fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah 54:1a: *“Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,”* says the Lord. (Galatians 4:27)

That last statement—*“For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,”* suggests that eventually the glory of the New Covenant in Jesus will greatly surpass the glory of the Old Covenant under Moses.

In that the New Covenant will give birth to and have many more followers than the Old Covenant.

Let’s review:

Galatians 4:22–23 (NKJV)

²² **For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³ But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise.**

Warren Wiersbe—

“Paul begins with the two sons, Ishmael and Isaac (Gal. 4:22–23), and explains that they illustrate our two births: the physical birth that makes us sinners (thru Adam) and the spiritual birth that makes us the children of God (thru Jesus).”

Galatians 4:28–29 (NKJV)

²⁸ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. ²⁹ But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born according to the Spirit*, even so *it is now*.

William MacDonald—

“Ishmael mocked Isaac, and it has always been true that those born of the flesh have persecuted those born of the Spirit—consider the sufferings of our Lord and of the Apostle Paul at the hands of unsaved men. It may seem to us a trivial offense that Ishmael should mock Isaac, but Scripture records it, and Paul sees in it a principle that still abides—the enmity between the flesh and the Spirit.” (Unsaved vs. saved, religious vs. grace)

Galatians 4:30–31 (NKJV)

³⁰ Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? *“Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”* ³¹ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman [religion/law] but of the free [grace].

Warren Wiersbe—

“It was Sarah who gave the order: “Cast out this bondwoman and her son” (Genesis 21:9–10), and God subsequently approved it (Genesis 21:12). Ishmael had been in the home for at least seventeen years, but his stay was not to be permanent; eventually he had to be cast out. There was not room in the household for Hagar and Ishmael with Sarah and Isaac; one pair had to go.

It is impossible for Law and grace, the flesh and the Spirit, to compromise and stay together. God did not ask Hagar and Ishmael to make occasional visits to the home; the break was permanent.

The Judaizers in Paul’s day—and in our own day—are trying to reconcile Sarah and Hagar, and Isaac and Ishmael; such reconciliation is contrary to the Word of God. It is impossible to mix Law and grace, faith and works, God’s gift of righteousness and man’s attempts to earn righteousness. Don’t become entangled in legalism. Jesus fulfilled the law and because we are in Him so have we in God’s eyes.”

So that ends the second section in our study of Galatians.

So far, we have studied: **I. Liberty from Lies; II. Liberty from Law**—and next week we’ll start looking at: **III. Liberty for Life—5:1-6:15**

Let me just end by saying that I have been a pastor for almost 45 years. Though I have taught hundreds and hundreds of times on the importance of relating to God on the basis of His grace (getting what I don’t deserve)—yet even I still sometimes find myself falling into the trap of legalism.

Where I find myself thinking that if I have a good spiritual day, I’m closer to God and He loves me a little more than on those days I mess up and don’t perform so well spiritually.

Legalism enslaves us to a system of works
as a basis for earning God’s love,
His favor and ultimately a place in heaven.

Once a person embraces the Gospel of Jesus Christ (the gospel of grace) by faith and is saved—the next thing the devil will try to do is put them under law for sanctification and blessings.

But if Satan can get you to buy into legalism as a basis for pleasing God, earning His love, and receiving blessings from Him—your relationship with God will be stunted and your ministry severely crippled.

Because from that point on you will live a life of condemnation, guilt, and misery.

Galatians 4:10–11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Let me paraphrase, *“I am fearful for you lest I have worked to the point of exhaustion to bring you the gospel of grace for nothing—I feel like I’ve wasted my time with you.”*

➤ *Is Paul saying that he is afraid because, by going back to the law, they were proving they were never really saved?*

That’s unlikely since in verse 9 he talks about them knowing God ‘**intimately**’ (which speaks of genuine salvation) and in verse 12 he addresses them as ‘**brethren**’.

I believe he is saying that even though they are saved, by going back to the law, they will remain spiritual babies incapable of growing up in their faith to full maturity and usefulness for God. And in that regard, legalism is used by the devil to keep young Christians in an arrested state of spiritual development so that they never mature and go on to be a threat to his kingdom.

We have to learn (every day) to relate to God through grace and not works.

Romans 5:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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