

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 16TH–17TH, 2024 // GALATIANS

## NO LONGER SLAVES (GALATIANS 4:1–7)

In a Roman house, even though a child may have been the future heir of a great estate, he very much would have still lived and functioned as a slave (vs. 1).

- Trustees, teachers, and servants would've made all the big decisions for him until he reached the age of maturity that was set by his father (vs. 2).
- In the same way, this is how it was with our spiritual condition before Christ.

Prior to our faith in Christ, we were in slavery to the "elements of the world"—this basic sense of morality and right and wrong was given to us either through our own conscience or the written law of Scripture (vs. 3).

- We were like children under the guidance of a "paidagogos" (teacher/guardian/tutor, Gal. 3:24).
- But the "time came to completion" for Jesus to come and carry out God's redemptive plan.

## "PLEROMA (FULLNESS OF TIME/TIME OF COMPLETION)"

Jesus came at just the right time in God's redemptive plan when the world was perfectly prepared for God's work.

- Christ came during the Pax Romana (era of peace), when a network of roads made travel easier, and there was a global language (Greek) which simplified communication.
- God's timing is always perfect!

At just the right time, Jesus came for two purposes: (1) to redeem those under the law, (2) so that we might receive adoption as sons (vs. 4–5).

- Jesus was born under the law, and in his life, he followed it perfectly—this was to buy us out of our slavery to the law with the price of His own life on the cross.
- Jesus came to elevate us to a place where we receive our full rights as sons and daughters.

As a son and heir, the down payment of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14) is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- Through the Holy Spirit, our hearts have the right and the ability to cry out and call God, "Abba, Father" (vs. 6).
- Why? Because we have the same nature as our Father (2 Pet. 1:4), and we relate to Him differently than a slave or servant.

## "NO LONGER A SLAVE, BUT A SON...AN HEIR" (VS. 7)

Slaves have masters to obey out of fear, but sons and daughters have fathers to obey out of love.

- Slaves are poor and have no inheritance, but sons and daughters have provisions and an inheritance.
- We have a promise of a future inheritance, but even now, we have access to the riches of God's grace (Eph. 1:7), glory (Phil. 4:19), goodness (Rom. 2:4), and wisdom (Rom. 11:33).

Paul's point is this: under grace, we have grown up and progressed from being children and slaves to being sons and heirs.

- With all the privileges of "spiritual adulthood," why would we ever want to regress and go back to the law?
- A loving relationship with God the Father through Jesus is so much better than a list of rules to try to follow out of fear, obligation, or pride.

## RETURNING TO SLAVERY (GALATIANS 4:8–11)

The greatest irony of legalism is that legalists almost always present their observance of law/rules as a sign of true Christian maturity.

- Actually, returning to the law after having received God's grace is a sign of great spiritual immaturity.
- There are two contrasts Paul will flesh out for us: (1) freedom and bondage, (2) knowing God and not knowing God.

Before coming to Christ, many of the Galatian believers were enslaved to pagan gods (vs. 8).

- Paganism, hedonism, self-indulgence, and pleasure-seeking almost always promise liberation and freedom.
- In the end, surrender to the desires of our flesh always leads to bondage through addiction and dependency.

When these believers came to know God (or rather, be known by God in an intimate, salvific, and familial sense), they were delivered from their bondage to this empty, meaningless, and destructive way of life (vs. 9).

- So, after having been delivered from the slavery of pagan self-indulgence, why would you go back to slavery again by submitting yourself to the, "weak and worthless" elements?

False teachers were pressuring the Galatian Christians to adopt the Jewish system of religion with all its observations of "special days [weekly sabbaths], months [new moons], seasons [Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles] and years [of Shmita and Jubilee]".

- These were festivals that the Galatians were apparently keeping to try and gain God's favor.

It's not wrong to observe a weekly sabbath, holidays, or participate in observances that remember the work of God in the history of His people.

- However, if we observe those special days thinking that by doing so we're earning some kind of spiritual merit from God, we're sinning.
- We're also sinning by judging and legislating our religious observances on other Christians (Rom. 14:4–13).

Paul is greatly concerned and fearful that all his labor to preach and teach the gospel to these believers was all for naught because they were abandoning the freedom of the gospel for the bondage and slavery of legalism (vs. 11).

- To know and have a relationship with God through Jesus is freedom!
- To follow rules and dead religion to try to appease God is nothing but slavery.

## THE FRUIT OF LEGALISM (GALATIANS 4:12–20)

In preaching the gospel to the Galatians, Paul had become like the Gentiles in rejecting the Jewish law as the thing that saves.

- Now he appeals to the Galatian Christians to become like him in rejecting legalism and clinging only to Christ (vs. 12).
- Paul isn't saying, "I'm perfect, so be just like me," but rather, "Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ"

(1 Cor. 11:1)—look to Jesus and boast only in him.

Paul apparently had once enjoyed a very close, personal connection with these believers and he's appealing to them based on their previous affection (vs. 13–14).

- Paul came to these believers in a weak physical condition. We don't know for certain what it was, but some think it might have been poor eyesight (Gal. 6:11). Maybe that's why they would've torn out their eyes for him (vs. 15).

Even in Paul's physical infirmity, the Galatians loved him, cared for him, and received him as a messenger (angel) from God.

- Paul essentially asks, "What's happened to your love, your affection, your blessing and hospitality? You had these things when you believed the gospel and trusted Jesus...but now I've become your enemy simply because I'm telling you the truth" (vs. 15–16).

If legalism is the answer to knowing God and being like Him, why then are legalists so mean-spirited, ugly, cold, and antagonistic towards those who disagree with them?

- Legalism can turn us into hard-hearted, divisive, spiteful, and judgmental people who have little regard or care for anyone outside of our own tribe.
- As Christians, we might disagree with others, but we're never called to hate them or feel superior to them.

The true motives of the false teachers are identified by Paul in vs. 17–18. They are simply trying to recruit the Galatians into their tribe to separate them from Paul and strengthen their own cause.

- The Galatians were being manipulated and "love-bombed" by these false teachers just so they'd join their group.
- Paul agrees that it's good to pursue good things; zeal and passion aren't bad, but it's to be done in a good manner over good things.

Paul is deeply burdened to see Christ formed in these believers—he longs for them to be transformed and conformed into the image of Christ (vs. 19–20).

- This is why Paul is writing such a tough letter. He's not taking a fleshly delight in calling out false teachers, he's experiencing spiritual labor pains as a parent longing to see his disciples walk in the freedom of Christ.

## A TALE OF TWO SONS (GALATIANS 4:21–31)

To those who want to be under the law, Paul asks them, "Don't you hear the law?" Do you even understand what the law means? (vs. 21)

- Paul will now give an allegorical interpretation of Abraham and his two sons as a way of speaking to the bondage of legalism and how different it is from the life of faith.

These events really happened in Abraham's life, but they also had a spiritual meaning.

Abraham was given a promise from God that he'd be made into the father of a mighty nation (Gen. 12:1–9).

- Ten years passed, and still no child had come—so Abraham's wife gives him her maiden, Hagar, to have a son through her (Gen. 16:1–3).
- Hagar gets pregnant, and Sarah gets jealous! When Hagar's son is born, he's named Ishmael.
- Finally, Sarah gets pregnant with Isaac (Gen. 21).

There was a tension between Ishmael and Isaac—for 14 years, Ishmael had been his father's only son, but when Isaac was born, there was a rivalry that was also born (Gen. 21:8–9).

- So, on the day when Isaac was weaned, Ishmael and Hagar were sent away from the family of Abraham.
- This was a familiar story to the Jewish people, and Paul says that it has a deep spiritual meaning.

Ishmael was the product of an ordinary birth, while Isaac was the product of a supernatural birth.

- The two women represent two covenants: Hagar represents the covenant God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai—her children are slaves.
- Sarah represents the covenant God gave to Abraham—her children are free.
- The law produces slaves, while grace produces free children who belong to the family.

## SARAH AND HAGAR ALSO REPRESENT JERUSALEM.

Hagar (law) symbolizes Mt. Sinai and the 1st Century Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish religion still held captive by the law.

- Sarah (grace) symbolizes the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city of God, where we will live as believers for all eternity.
- One produces offspring who are supernatural and will live forever, the other does not.

Just as Ishmael mocked and persecuted Isaac, so now the slave children of the law were mocking and persecuting the Christians (children of promise, vs. 28–29).

- Paul's instruction is to "drive out the slave and her son"—get rid of the legalists and any hint of legalism in their midst and be free (vs. 30).
- Why? Because we're not children of slaves but children of the free woman (vs. 31).

## SONS AND DAUGHTERS: NOT SLAVES.

- "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." – A.W. Tozer
- Do you relate to God as a cruel, distant taskmaster whom you must obey as a slave?
- Only because of Jesus, we have the ability and the privilege to have a personal, intimate relationship with God as our Abba Father.

## WHY RETURN TO SLAVERY?

- The influence of tradition/culture, fear and control, or external pressures from legalists
- Personal struggles with guilt, shame, or a sense of inadequacy
- Spiritual immaturity, insecurity, and a misunderstanding of God's grace
- Overcoming legalism starts with developing a deeper, more trusting relationship with God

## CHILDREN OF THE PROMISE.

- Slavery to either pagan self-indulgence or to lifeless, dead religion is a horrible existence.
- To know and have a relationship with Father God through Jesus is what it means to truly be alive and experience real freedom.
- "Drive out the slave and her son," get rid of the legalism in your own heart and life and cling to Jesus!