

LISTEN TO THE LAW!
PART 5

Text: Galatians 4:21-31

July 10, 2011

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

In Galatians 4:21-31, Paul has been teaching us how to properly read the Scriptures (i.e., OT). He says to the Galatians in v. 21, “Do you really want to be under the law (Mosaic Covenant)? Do you listen to the law (Torah)? Do you really understand what the Torah instructs? If you read the Scriptures properly, you would know that it teaches you to trust in God’s promise rather than your own self-effort.”

By teaching us how to properly read the Scriptures, Paul is seeking to move us from performance to promise. The God of Promise is also the God of Performance and it is in His works -not ours!- that we are to trust continually throughout our lives.

Working on our behalf, God the Father sent His Son to redeem sinners from every form of spiritual slavery (Gal. 4:5). He did so to change slaves into sons (Gal. 4:6-7). As justified, adopted sons we are heirs and no longer debtors. Thus, adoption as sons means boldness and confident access to the Father precisely because Christ has paid all our debt to the law (cf. Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12).

In Colossians 2:14, Paul says that Christ has canceled “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” In Paul’s day, the “record of debt” (χειρόγραφον) was a written note of indebtedness. Paul uses this word to illustrate our indebtedness to God because of sin. But, the gospel—because it is a covenant of promise—announces that Jesus has graciously paid our debt by taking our note and nailing it to the cross, where it says, “Paid in full!” Thus, as Lord and Servant, Christ has fulfilled all the obligations of the covenant! The God of Promise is also the God of performance!

So, in order to motivate the Galatians to abandon their desire (4:21, θέλοντες) to be the under law (“Do this and live”/performance) and instead to live in the freedom of the gospel (“Live, now do this”/promise)- enjoying the privilege of access to the Father as adopted sons- Paul appeals to a lesson from the Law (Torah) itself.

Specifically, he sees from the Genesis story of Hagar and Sarah an analogy, which illustrates the spiritual truth he is teaching (i.e., all who rely on self-effort end up in sin and bondage whereas those who trust in God’s promise receive salvation and freedom).

Paul divides his analogy from the Torah into three sections: The Historical Basis of the Analogy (vv. 21-23); The Spiritual Meaning of the Analogy (vv. 24-27); The Personal Application of the Analogy (vv. 28-31). Last time, we began looking at Paul’s personal application (vv. 28-31).

III. SECTION 3: THE PERSONAL APPLICATION OF THE ANALOGY (vv. 28-31)

A. WE MUST EXPECT PERSECUTION FROM LEGALISTS. vv. 28-29

Paul's first application of his analogy demonstrates why we must properly read and understand the Scriptures.

Your understanding and trust in the fact that God is a promising and performing God is essential because you are going to be persecuted and thus be tempted to give up! But, you can persevere and take comfort knowing that the temporary harassment you receive from legalists will give way to the eternal inheritance that is yours as an adopted son.

LESSON:

B. WE MUST REJECT LEGALISM AND THOSE WHO TEACH IT. v. 30

This is the fourth time in vv. 21-31 that Paul appeals to the authority of the OT Scriptures to establish his point (cf. vv. 21, 22, 27, 30). He is appealing to the rejection of Ishmael recorded in Genesis 21.

¹ The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. ² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him...⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." ¹¹ And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹² But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. ¹³ And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring" (Gen. 21:1-2, 9-13).

Upon a superficial reading of this account, one might think that Sarah is acting harshly and uncharitably (e.g., F.F. Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 224). But, we must keep in mind that earlier in Genesis 17, Abraham asked God to grant Ishmael his inheritance but God refused. And, even though God blessed Ishmael in many ways (cf. Gen. 21:13), He never included Ishmael in the covenant of promise, which was for Isaac. Genesis 17:18-21 reads,

¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" ¹⁹ God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. ²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

Once again, when Sarah calls for Abraham to cast out Ishmael, Abraham is distressed at this (Gen. 21:11). And once again God reminds Abraham of His earlier instruction (i.e., Gen. 17) and confirms Sarah's statement, "But God said to Abraham, 'Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named'" (Gen. 21:12).

John Calvin writes, "God employed the services of Sarah for confirming His own promise. In a word, the casting out of Ishmael was nothing else than the consequence and the accomplishment of that promise, 'In Isaac shall thy seed be called,' (Gen. xxi. 12)- not in Ishmael" (*Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 21, p. 145*).

Ishmael was born without any word of promise from God. He was born instead at the request of Sarah (Gen. 16, i.e., by self-effort; offspring of unbelief). Sarah (and Abraham) were "playing God" by helping God fulfill His promise (self-righteous legalism- being their own savior- see Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, p. 405).

Because Ishmael was not promised to Abraham he was to be rejected. He was a son of the flesh rather than a son of promise (4:23, 29). Thus, God- through Sarah- commands that Ishmael be cast out (Gen. 21:10).

By quoting Genesis 21:10, Paul is making the point that those who teach a false gospel of justification by works are to be expelled from the church. Legalists who teach a distorted gospel are not to be allowed to remain and teach in a church that confesses and proclaims salvation by grace through faith alone.

Specifically, in the context of Galatians 4 Paul is referring to the Judaizers. This is now the second imperative issued by Paul in chapter 4 (cf. 4:12, "become as I am"). The imperative "cast out" comes from the Greek verb, ἐκβάλλω, which means "to force to leave, drive out, expel."

The Judaizers are Ishmaelites and must be driven out. Legalists and legalism are not to be tolerated in the church but rather driven out and expelled. Philip Ryken writes, "By trying to place Gentiles under the law, they (Judaizers-J.F.) proved that they themselves were actually slaves, spiritually speaking, and therefore had no part in God's inheritance. If salvation comes by grace, then the church cannot tolerate salvation by works. Freedom in Christ can be preserved only by abolishing bondage to the law" (*Galatians*, p. 191).

Salvation by works and salvation by grace cannot coexist in the church. Slavery and sonship are not compatible. Legal bondage and gospel freedom are wholly opposed. Righteousness and unrighteousness are not comparable with each other.

In chapters 3-4, Paul has been answering this question: Who are the genuine members of Abraham's family? Paul has clearly taught that the sons of Abraham are those- like Abraham- who are declared righteous before God by faith alone (3:6-9).

Paul has labored to show that salvation comes to us by grace through faith alone apart from the works of the law (2:16; 3:10-25). Now, in the analogy of Sarah and Hagar, Paul once again drives home the truth that the true descendants of Isaac- thus Abraham- are those who are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Salvation comes on the basis of the God who promises and performs- the birth of Isaac- rather than those who seek to justify themselves through their own performance- the birth of Ishmael/Judaizers. The true descendants of Abraham then are those born according to God's promise/Spirit rather than those born according to flesh (vv. 23, 29). We are counted righteous through faith in Christ not by observance of the law.

The blessing of justification (2:16), the privilege of adoption (4:1-7), the freedom of the believer (4:31-5:1) and the glory of God (1:5) are jeopardized by legalism. Therefore, Paul commands the Galatians- and us!- to reject all forms of legalism- bondage to the law- and stand firm in the grace of the gospel.

We must not fail to realize that this imperative is born out of the marvelous gospel truth Paul has set forth in his letter. Paul's command to "cast out" is our reasonable response (Rom. 12:1) to his entire theological defining of the gospel (3:1-4:11). Paul, himself, practices what he commands. He provides several examples of such a response in Galatians from his own life and ministry.

1. DOCTRINAL "CASTING OUT"

In Galatians 1:8-9, Paul began his letter by rejecting all "distorted/contrary gospels" and pronouncing the curse of the law upon all- angels or apostles- who would seek to introduce a false/distorted gospel into the church.

The gospel is over angels, apostles and church. The gospel creates and sustains the church not the other way around. The church and her leaders must submit to the authority of the gospel and guard its truth. The gospel is not only to be proclaimed but its integrity and purity is to be protected- so that it might be proclaimed.

Paul instructed Timothy, "O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you..." (1 Tim. 6:20). Again, in 2 Tim. 1:14, "By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."

In Galatians 2:5, Paul says that he, Barnabas and Titus did not yield in submission to the false brothers even for a moment (to the demand for Titus to be circumcised) so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for the Galatians. Paul's response to the false brothers was of immense importance. If he had given into the legalistic demands of the false brothers to circumcise Titus, the Gentiles- such as the Galatians- would not have heard and received the true gospel! They would have remained as slaves in their sin condemned under the curse of the law!

Like Paul, we too must remain vigilant to stand uncompromisingly against all forms of distorted doctrines of salvation. For example, we readily acknowledge and reject the false views of salvation espoused by Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, etc... All of these religions operate on the principle of law- "Do this and live." They are slave religions.

The same is also true for distorted versions of Christianity. The New Perspective on Paul (which is really an old perspective) poses a great threat to the gospel and to the believer's freedom in Christ. Paul labors in Galatians to show that "getting in by grace and staying in by obedience" is a gospel-distorting, grace-destroying legalism. We don't begin by grace with God and then continue in our Christian lives by our own ability to keep the law. This was the problem that prompted Paul to write to the Galatian churches!

B.B. Warfield writes,

"There is nothing in us or done by us, at any stage of our earthly development, because of which we are acceptable to God. We must always be accepted for Christ's sake, or we cannot ever be accepted at all. This is not true of us only when we believe. It is just as true after we have believed. It will continue to be true as long as we live. Our need of Christ does not cease with our believing; nor does the nature of our relation to Him or to God through Him ever alter, no matter what our attainments in Christian graces or our achievements in behavior may be. It is always on His 'blood and righteousness' alone that we can rest" (*Works*, 7:113).

Regrettably, over the past decade or so, some influential Evangelical leaders have been calling for renewed efforts to seek unity and accord with Roman Catholicism (e.g., ECT and GOS). But what exactly does the Roman Communion believe about the doctrine of salvation- particularly justification?

Listen to Canons 9, 11-12 of the Sixth Session of the Council of Trent:

Canon 9: "If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema."

Canon 11: "If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema."

Canon 12: "If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema."

Clearly these ecclesiastical laws deny the truth of the gospel, which Paul is contending for in Galatians. These canons add works to faith as the ground of our righteousness before God, thus bringing men and women into slavery and bondage. Therefore, they must be wholly rejected- cast out as a slave religion.

2. PERSONAL “CASTING OUT”

Just a few verses later in Galatians 2:11-21, Paul, in Antioch, records how he withstood the apostle Peter face to face for his hypocrisy with the Jews in regard to dietary laws. The problem with Peter here was not so much doctrine (though he definitely obscured it!) but personal.

For a time, Peter had been sharing in meals with Jewish and Gentile Christians. However, when fear of the circumcision party overtook his faith he drew back and separated himself from the Gentiles and only ate with Jewish Christians (2:12). As a result, his hypocritical actions led astray the rest of the Jewish Christians and even Barnabas- who knew better due to his earlier experience with Paul and Titus in Jerusalem (cf. 2:1-10).

In Galatians 6:1, Paul instructs those who are “spiritual”- not an elite group of Christians but those who are more consistent in walking by the Spirit (5:16, 18, 25)- to restore those overtaken in sin. Certainly the Galatians had sinned grievously. Thus, Paul, in a spirit of gentleness (4:12-20; 6:1) with strength/authority (1:6; 3:1; 5:7) seeks to restore the Galatians to truth and freedom of the gospel.

From Paul’s own life and ministry, we see it doesn’t matter if it is an angel from heaven or an apostle commissioned by Christ, distortion of the gospel is not to be tolerated. All forms of legalism- doctrinal and personal- must be driven out/expelled.

We must not tolerate false doctrines of salvation- legalism- in the church (e.g., Judaizer’s/Jerusalem) or in our own lives (e.g., Peter’s hypocrisy/Galatians bewitchery). Every last trace of legalism is to be “cast out.”

There is one final insight we need to consider concerning Paul’s imperative “cast out.” Lest we still be tempted to think that such action seems harsh or unloving, consider the following. The verb Paul uses here in Galatians 4:30 is used in the *LXX* in Genesis 3:24.

Knowing the Creator had become their Judge and that they had come under the penalty of the creation covenant (Gen. 2:15-17), Adam and Eve- in an act of self-justification- attempt to cover up their nakedness (Gen. 3:7). This is the first act of self-justification (“Do this and live” legalism) in the Bible.

In response to their self-effort, Genesis 3:24 says, “He (LORD God) drove out the man (שָׂרָף MT, ἐξέβαλεν *LXX*), and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”

This is why God issues the command to Abraham- through Sarah- to cast out Ishmael. This is why God issues the command to the Galatians- through Paul- to cast out the Judaizers (legalists) from their midst. The LORD God Himself drives out self-righteous, legal works from His presence!

God will not accept our acts of “self-justification.” He will not accept our “best” efforts! His law doesn’t grade on a curve. God will only accept His own works in us! Augustine wrote, “This only I say, this I ask, this I desire: despise not the works of thy hands; see in me thy work, not mine. For if thou seest mine, thou wilt condemn it. If thou seest thine own, thou wilt crown it. For whatever good works are mine are from thee” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.20).

Calvin concludes there are two reasons why we dare not boast or trust in our works before God:

1. If we see any good works in us, we see in them no evidence of our own;
2. All of our good works are overwhelmed by a multitude of sins.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Q. 62 asks, “But why can our good works not be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of it?”

Here’s the answer, “Because the righteousness which can stand before God’s judgment must be absolutely perfect and in complete agreement with the law of God, whereas even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.”

Paul has labored to show us that the Scriptures leave us no reason to be exalted in our own sight. Rather, the purpose of the law is to restrain our pride, to humble us, to cast us down, to crush us and reveal our utter lack of righteousness before God. The law reveals that through our works God doesn’t accept us but rather “drives us out” of His presence, East of Eden! He will only accept and reward His own works in us!

Casting out all forms- doctrinal and personal- of legalism is not an option but rather a direct command from God Himself-through Paul, an apostolic directive- because God’s glory and man’s salvation are at stake (cf. 1:5; 2:21; 1:8-9; 2:16). We must earnestly contend against all semblance of legalism in our doctrine as well as our hearts.

Paul’s imperative, “cast out” raises an important question: What are the limits of tolerable diversity within the Christian community for the sake of maintaining unity (see George, *Galatians*, p. 347)?

Paul’s toleration level was considerably high in respect to the chaos in Corinth. But, when it came to the doctrinal error that was plaguing the churches of Galatia, Paul rejected any notion of compromise. He well understood that the true gospel unites the church and that a false/distorted gospel divides- and damns (Gal. 1:8-9)!

In his book, *The Basis Of Christian Unity*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

“The starting point in considering the question of unity must always be regeneration and belief of the truth. Nothing else produces unity, and, as we have seen clearly, it is impossible apart from this. An appearance or a façade of unity based on anything else, and at the expense of these two criteria, or ignoring them, is clearly a fraud and a lie. People are not one, nor in a state of unity, who disagree about fundamental questions such as, (i) whether we submit ourselves utterly to revealed truth or rely ultimately upon our reason and human thinking; (ii) the historic Fall, and man’s present state and condition in sin, under the wrath of God, and in complete helplessness and hopelessness as regards salvation; and (iii) the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ and the utter, absolute necessity, and sole sufficiency, of His substitutionary atoning work for sinners. To give the impression that they are one simply because of a common outward organization is not only to mislead the world which is outside the church but to be guilty of a lie” (pp. 72-73).

REFLECTION:

As we reflect upon Paul’s imperative, the implication is to encourage the Galatians- and us!- to prefer to continue in their freedom (i.e., receiving and resting in Christ alone who is both Lord and Servant, the God of Promise and Performance and nothing else). This is Paul’s conclusion in v. 31, “So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.”

Verse 31 serves a summary and climactic conclusion, not only to the Sarah/Hagar analogy but also to Paul’s entire argument in chapters 3-4. By “casting out” legalists and legalism, Paul is exhorting the Galatians- and us!- to prefer our freedom in Christ rather than remain under the bondage of the law.

Only Isaac was the son of promise. Ishmael was a son of the flesh. Ishmael was the work of Abraham’s, Sarah’s and Hagar’s attempt to “play God” (self-righteous legalism/self-justification) by bringing about God’s promise by their own actions rather than trusting in God’s promise and performance.

How often are we also guilty of the same thing (i.e., “playing God” by being our own savior rather than receiving and resting in Christ alone for our salvation)? How often are we guilty of self-righteous acts of self-justification?

We must take notice that it was God who ultimately cast out Ishmael, the Judaizers, and Adam and Eve. God, Himself, casts out all who seek to earn His favor through their own works. But, the amazing good news is that God the Father “cast out” Jesus for us at the cross. On the cross Jesus was banished from God’s presence- He was “East of Eden”- and undertook the curse of the law for us.

However, as a consequence of His perfectly obedient life, the Father accepted His sacrificial offering of Himself and glorified Him by raising Him from the dead, exalting Him as Lord overall! So now, all who trust in Christ alone, the God of promise and performance- will be declared righteous, adopted as sons and granted an eternal inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4).

So, as we consider Paul's imperative let us be diligent to war against and cast out all semblance of legalism in both our doctrine and our lives. Let us not be content to tolerate any remnant of a distorted gospel or trace of personal self-righteousness. All who are the offspring of sovereign grace have a responsibility to guard the gospel that God has entrusted to us.

The heart of apostolic preaching consists of the truth that it is by faith alone that a man is justified- not by works of the law or any righteousness of his own (cf. Rom. 3:21-27). This is the primary and fundamental blessing of the gospel. Apart from *sola fide*, adoption- the highest privilege of the gospel is impossible (4:1-7). The only alternative is slavery, bondage and condemnation. All freedom is forfeited. *Sola fide* is the gospel and there is no other (Gal. 1:7). The gospel announces that God justifies the ungodly who receive and rest in Christ alone (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 4:5).

We are to live by faith in the joyful freedom that we have from the curse of the law enjoying our privileged access with the Father as adopted sons. As we do, like Paul, we can conclude, "So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman."

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