

## Galatians #12

October 13, 2024

### Series: Galatians: Treasuring the Gospel of Grace

#### Today's Message: It's Better to Be the Children of Promise; Galatians 4:8-31

Sometimes when we learn exactly what burdens lay heavy on the heart of a respected laborer for the Lord, we begin feeling empathy for that person; we begin sharing in that leader's burden. On the contrary, the thing that brightens the countenance of that leader usually brightens our countenance as well.

In our passage today we can feel for Paul and share empathetically with him as he relates his burden and concern for the Galatian believers. I'm reminded of how Paul opened up and shared his ardent concern for the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12. He wrote,

As apostles of Christ, we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into His kingdom and glory.

. In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul provides one of the most riveting accounts of his many harrowing experiences of his suffering for the gospel. In 11:28 he inserts a burden which is maybe more painful than flogging, and that is his inward concern for those churches which were yet in their infancy. He reflects, "Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."

Up until today's text in Galatians Paul has been all business. Now I don't mean that in a pejorative way, but it is apparent that Paul has been confrontational as he addressed the danger facing the churches of Galatia. But I want you to keep in mind that there is a time for simply laying out the problems clearly and factually. Often times that can come across to us as uncaring, and the leader can seem detached from any personal connection to those he is confronting. I don't believe that to be the case with Paul. To the contrary, as we mentioned in one of the earlier messages in Galatians, Paul demonstrates godly grace through his willingness to actively confront the issues rather than cut his losses and run.

Today we will look Paul's parental-like concern for the Galatians (4:8-20), and then Paul's convincing contrasts of the Old and New Covenants (4:21-31).

- I) (4:8-20) Paul's Parental-like concern for the Galatians.
  - A) (4:8-10) Paul appeals to the first-Truths first. (They belong to God!)
    - 1) (vv8-9a) They are no longer what they once were.
      - (a) (v8) "**Formerly**"
        - (i) "when you **did not know God**"
        - (ii) "you **were** slaves."
      - (b) (v9a) "**But now**"
        - (i) "that you **know God**"
          - (a) "or rather are **known by God**"
    - 2) (4:9b-10) Now they are back-sliding from their "freedom" to slavery once again.

- (a) In 4:8-9a Paul was contrasting what they once were—slaves—with, by inference, their newfound freedom because they are known by God.
  - (b) (vv9b-10) Paul asks *questions for them to discover their folly* by returning to slavery.
    - (i) (9b) Two questions:
      - (a) “How is it that you are **turning back** to those weak and miserable principles?”
      - (b) “Do you wish to be **enslaved** by them all over again?”
        - 1. Remember the Israelites when they first left Egypt when they were trapped between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea? Or, when they were low on water and food? The pressure was so great all they could think about was *how good* they had it back in Egypt, even as slaves. They were willing to *turn back* and be *enslaved*. This was foolishness. (see Exodus 14:10-12; 16:2-3)
          - a. When the pressure of the *powerful* (be it people or trials) becomes weighty there is always the temptation to turn back to that which was familiar.
- B) (4:11-16) Paul gets personal and recounts their first encounter and the love they had for him.
  - 1) (v11) Paul expresses his disappointment at their immaturity and low value of their freedom.
  - 2) (v12) Paul *pleads* with them in two ways:
    - (a) To become like him: free from legalism and law keeping for righteousness.
    - (b) Reminding them that he became like them, in that he had abandoned all the rabbinic traditions and instead became like them aligning with them in the freedom they enjoyed.
      - (i) But now they are being harassed, pressured and intimidated by the Judaizers.
  - 3) (vv13-16) Paul is baffled at how their love for him grew cold.
    - (a) Open arms. When Paul first came to them, in his sickness, they cared for him.
    - (b) They embraced his message of the gospel and were full of joy.
    - (c) But then, they lost their joy and their deep love and concern for Paul. He feels disowned.
- C) (4:17-18) The powerful negative affect of the Judaizers.
  - 1) (v17) The zeal of Judaizers was persuasive and divisive.
    - (a) They sought to win the Galatians over to *themselves* and not to Christ.
      - (i) To the contrary, Paul sought to win them to Christ and not to himself.
  - 2) (v18-20) Paul’s concern for them:
    - (a) (v18) They were zealous and favorable to Paul when he was with them, but when he was away, apparently, they acquiesced to the Judaizers. **Double minded (James 1:8).**
    - (b) (v19) Laboring, painfully in spirit for them “**until Christ is formed in you.**”
      - (i) Paul’s goal for them was in line with God’s goal for them. Every painful trial they were facing would accomplish God’s will for them only as they remained faith to the Truth.
        - (a) **Look up Romans 8:28-29 and Ephesians 4:13.**
          - 1. To be conformed to the likeness of Christ
          - 2. And, to attain to the full measure of the fullness of Christ.
    - (c) (v20) Paul expresses his feeling of perplexity (of being at his wits end).
      - (i) He is saying everything he knows to say to help them but feels like he’s failing.
        - (a) He was working hard in hopes of seeing the image of Christ spring forth in them.
        - (b) John Stott wrote, “The Church needs people who, in listening to their pastor, listen for the message of Christ, and pastors who, in laboring among the people, look for the image of Christ.” (Taken from Stott’s commentary, *The Message to the Galatians.*)
- II) (4:21-31) Paul’s convincingly contrasts the Old and New Covenants (of slavery and of freedom).
  - A) Yet Paul doesn’t give up. He may be at his wits-end, but he graciously perseveres to win them. Now he uses an Old Testament analogy to illustrate the supremacy of grace over law, and faith over works.

- B) (v21) Paul leads into the analogy by asking the question, “are you not aware of what the law says?”
- 1) He is referring to the first five books of the OT, the law of Moses, and asking if they understand that the law demands “do this” and never promises to provide righteousness (Gal. 3:21b).
    - (a) “For if righteousness could be attained through the law, Christ died for nothing.” (Gal. 2:21).
    - (b) The law imprisons people, holding them in slavery, but pointing them to Christ (Gal. 3:23-24).
  - 2) So, the analogy will illustrate that the law enslaves people while the promise sets people free!
- C) (vv22-23) Paul reminds them of the historical event from Genesis concerning Abraham’s two sons.
- 1) The analogy keys in on the distinctions between the two sons, Ishmael and Issac.
  - 2) There were two mothers:
    - (a) One is a slave who gives birth to a son who is born in slavery.
    - (b) The other is the free woman whose son was born as the “result of a promise.”
  - 3) We have to connect our thinking this way: The slave woman’s pregnancy came as a result of failed faith and by **human efforts** in hopes of creating the “heir” of promise. But the free woman’s pregnancy came by **divine fulfillment** of the promise made to Abraham.
    - (a) Ishmael represents man’s means and efforts in the **flesh** to achieve God’s purposes.
    - (b) Issac represents God’s means and work by the Spirit to fulfill His promise to Abraham.
- D) (vv24-27) The Interpretation of the analogy: The two women are analogous to the two covenants.
- 1) (v24-25) The Old Covenant established at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness.
    - (a) The children born under the covenant of Sinai are born slaves.
    - (b) Hagar illustrates this.
      - (i) She stands for Mt. Sinai and corresponds to “the present city of Jerusalem.”
        - (a) Paul says she, Hagar (Sinai and Jerusalem), is in slavery with her children.
          1. Paul is interpreting this in light of Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection and the fact that Jesus was rejected as the Christ and the people were still in bondage to the law of works instead of trusting in Christ as the fulfillment of the promise.
            - a. Hagar and Ishmael represent the works of the flesh, slavery, and law.
  - 2) (vv26-27) Paul illustrates the New Covenant calling it the “Jerusalem that is above.”
    - (a) She is our mother: The Jerusalem from above, like a mother, gives life and freedom.
    - (b) Sarah illustrates this Jerusalem from above, the divine, heavenly city.
      - (i) The New Jerusalem: (**see Revelation 3:12; 21:2, 10**)
        - (a) Everyone born under the New Covenant in Christ are born free from law, from works, from bondage, and from the flesh—are born of the Spirit according to God’s will!
          1. Sarah and Isaac represent the promise fulfilled by the Spirit, faith and freedom!
  - (c) (v27) Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 to illustrate the power of God to produce life out of death.
    - (i) Sarah was old and barren. Conception was impossible. But God caused Sarah’s womb to be fruitful!
    - (ii) In the same way, God removes the spiritual barrenness that no human effort under the Old Covenant of law could remove.
      - (a) The heavenly Jerusalem will “be populated with born-from-above saints of God until every predestined believer has entered.” (MacArthur: Galatians, p127)
        1. It is a work that is all of God for everyone who is justified by faith in Christ.
- E) (vv28-31) Paul applies this to the Galatian believers and to all who will believe in Christ by faith.
- 1) (v28) Through faith, you are, like Isaac, born the children of promise.
  - 2) (v29) Like Isaac, you are being harassed and persecuted by those born of the slave woman.
  - 3) (v30) Separate from, break all ties with those who fan the flames of the conflict of legalism.
  - 4) (v31) You are free. So, live like free people. Live faithfully to the Lord, not to legalistic rules.