

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of**  
**February 2017**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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Galatians – Chapter 3:19 – 4:7 (c)  
The Place of the Law in Making Us Sons

(Review of last two weeks)

Two weeks ago we commenced this lengthy section, Gal 3:19 – 4:7, concerning how the law works in the process of making us Sons of God.

We have chosen to break this up using the three words: history; experience and illustration.

**History:** (verse 19-22) On hearing and understanding that the Gospel is the message of Justification, not by the law but through the finished work of Christ, one might ask: What then is the use of the law? Why did God give it?

God gave the law because of transgression. No one can or has been able to gain life through it, because no natural man has kept it. The law was given – some 430 years after the promise of a Saviour – to convince sinners that they need to be saved. That they must have a Saviour! The promise takes precedence over the law, not only because it came first in history, but because God gave the promise in person to Abraham, while the law was passed third-hand: angels – Moses – the Israelites.

The law and the promise (of the Gospel) are not in conflict, because only the Promise offers salvation.

This history isn't a meaningless jumble: God's history shows purpose in the order of events: promise, the law, the Cross. And harmony is found in the way the law draws people to Christ. When they are shown that God's law makes it a certainty that they're hell-bound, they start looking for a way to be heaven-bound. The law must be preached to provide the power of preaching the Gospel.

**Experience:** (verses 23-29) While history shows that a Saviour is promised and then comes the law which keeps us imprisoned until the Saviour comes, this is also borne out in Christian experience.

It is God's will that we should go from one to the other. Wounded by the law, then healed by Christ.

Paul uses two pictures of the work of the law. As 'shut up' in a cell until faith is revealed – through the call of the Gospel made effective by the work of the Spirit in conversion. And the example of the Greek paidagogos, where a strict overseer guides and disciplines a youth to insure his correct growth to maturity.

When you hear God's law and you say a wrong word: God's law strikes your conscience. You think a wrong thought: God's law strikes your conscience. It pains you. It hurts you. It punishes you for your misdeeds and it promised you that worse punishment is to come. Therefore it makes you long for a period when you'll be free of that. And we are free of that when we come to Christ. The law isn't a way of putting us

right with God. It makes us long for another way by which we may be put right with God. That is the way of being justified by faith.

Then as we experience 'being in Christ', what a difference. We are like the youth who now comes into his inheritance. The work of the *paidagogos* has finished. You are no longer under a guardian but 'in Christ', through faith, shown by Baptism. Full citizens of God's Kingdom, His family. And we enjoy with other Christians the oneness of family life with one another.

What a radical thing Christian conversion is! If you're converted you're related to God; you're related to each other; and if you're a believer you're related to the believers in the long centuries of the past – right back to Abraham and beyond.

So we have looked at history and experience.

This week we will look at **illustration**.

Chapter 4 verse 1-7: Generally, except for one little phrase this is relatively easy to understand. Paul so far has made his points clearly, but like a good teacher he wants to make sure everyone understands so he repeats the conclusions made so far with an illustration.

“Imagine”, he says, verse 1 & 2, “a boy who is the heir of a great estate. One day it will all be his. He walks around the grounds and past the lake. One day it will all be his. But it isn't his yet! It's going to be his. It's promised to him by his father. But it's not yet his in experience. He's still a child.

Now that lad, although he is lord of all, he's no better off than a slave. In fact he's under the control of guardians and trustees. They control him and they control his property. They tell him how he has to dress and how much pocket money he can have. They order and direct him and even discipline him. He's got no liberty. He's lord of everything and yet he must stay like that until the date set by his father.” *<sup>1</sup>I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, <sup>2</sup>but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.*

Verse 3: In the days before Christ came to us, we were heirs of the Father's promise to Abraham, but we hadn't inherited the promise. We hadn't yet come into what was promised to us. Those days were days of bondage.

We can explain it like this: The purpose of the *paidagogos* was to lead the child to something better. But very often that man was very much more tyrannical than his father ever intended. The law was intended to drive us to Christ. But evil powers take hold of the law and they use it to drive us to despair. The purpose of the 10 Commandments was to make me run to a saviour. But those evil powers take hold of the law and sometimes they bring a person to the point where he looks at the 10 Commandments and gives up hope of being saved. Surely that's what Paul is talking about in verse 3: *<sup>3</sup>In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to*

*the elementary principles of the world.* [The elementary, or basic, principles may refer to the ancient concept of 'wind, water and fire', which were revered as deities governing the cosmos. Paul may have had in mind the sacred calendar of the Jewish law and its seasons which were determined by the celestial bodies – such as the moon. Such aspects of the ceremonial law subjected life to the control of these elementary principles. As did the pagan religions earlier practised by the Galatians.]

But at last the time came, which the Father promised. At last the time came when we were to enter into the promise. That's what Christmas is all about. What a time it was! The Romans ruled the known world. So there were communications from one end of the world to the other. There was – an enforced – general peace everywhere. There were no customs barriers, so any news which came into the world could quickly spread. There was a common language, Greek – by courtesy of the earlier Greek Empire of Alexander the Great. But the old Greek and Roman myths were losing their hold on people. People were getting 'fed up' with the old liturgical religion – they wanted something that meant something – a religion that was real and satisfying. The old 10 Commandments and the ceremonial law had been doing its tutoring work for 13 hundred years. Some people's hearts were actually crying out for redemption to come and make them free.

Into a world like that: a Saviour came.

Verse 4 & 5: <sup>4</sup> *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,* <sup>5</sup> *to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* The fullness of the time it really was. At this fullness of time God did two things: first of all He sent His Son and then He sent His Spirit.

Look at His Son: He was a man! If He hadn't been He wouldn't have been able to save men. *Born of a woman.*

He was a righteous man: He kept the law. He was made under the law and He fulfilled it. If He hadn't been a righteous man, He couldn't have saved people who were condemned by the law.

But He was God. If He hadn't been He couldn't have brought us to God.

That's who God sent. Someone who was perfectly equipped to save sinners. And when we come to Christ: we come into adopted son-ship. And when we come into son-ship there is a second 'sending' spoken of here. Look at verse 6: <sup>6</sup> *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* God's purpose isn't just to bring you into son-ship, through His Son. God's purpose is to bring you into the **assurance** of son-ship, by His Spirit. Christ gives me the status of son-ship, the Spirit gives me the **experience** of son-ship. I receive the Spirit, not because I've 'tarried for Him' or longed for Him, or worked out that I must have some special second blessing. I receive the Spirit on no other ground than: that I am a son. No other ground is required. Every Christian has the Spirit! Every Christian has the Spirit of adoption. Every true Christian is therefore able to be intimate with heaven. There is something in him which cries out and says to God, "Father, *Abba.*" "That's what a Christian is." says Paul.

Verse 7: <sup>7</sup> *So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.* A Christian is not a slave, like people trying to get right with God through the law. A Christian is a son, knowing that he is accepted. That he has intimacy with heaven. That's what a Christian is.

**A Christian isn't someone who comes to Christ but then has to earn his way into God's favour by having to be some PLUS.** A Christian is someone who was a slave, but is now a son. The Christian life is son-ship through propitiation. That's how the Christian life is to be lived. As those who were slaves but are now sons. If you lose sight of that you lose sight of Christianity. If you lose sight of that you've lost the gospel.

That's what had happened in Galatia. They had forgotten that to be a Christian is to be a son of God, because of what Christ had done on the cross. They'd forgotten that living the Christian life is the question of a son pleasing his Father. Having forgotten that, they had lost the Gospel. Our prayers are that will never happen to us. What we long for is to see in our own and in other Christians some increased gratitude. Remembering that I was a servant. Now I am a son.

We need a little more Christian joy: I was a servant – but now I am a son!  
We need more intimacy with heaven. I may be intimate with heaven. I'm a son!  
We need a better understanding of the Christian life. It's not all rules and regulations – they are there AND they are right – but I keep them not like a slave who has to do them otherwise he gets punished, but because it's my Father's desire that I should live as they direct. I'm a son, so therefore I should long to take on the family likeness – more and more like THE Son, Jesus Christ. We are nothing less than Sons of God. That is the Gospel message.

[1965]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

Galatians – Chapter 4:8-20 (a)  
Paul's Concern for Christians and How he Deals with them.

We continue with our study of the letter of Paul to the churches in Galatia. A letter that was dynamite to those Christians, and ever since. When rediscovered at the time of the Reformation (nearly 500 years ago) it changed the history of the world.

We now begin to consider Chapter 4:8-20, which is a plea to the Galatians: not to return to paganism.

There were these recent converts in the Churches of Galatia. Then into these churches infiltrated 'false teachers', who were severely leading astray, these converts. Unfortunately this is not difficult to do! They were telling these young (in the faith) Christians that they needed something more than faith in Christ to be accepted by God: they needed to adopt the Jewish rites and ceremonies; to observe the Jewish calendar; to keep the Jewish feasts; to be circumcised. To perform all the ordinances of Jewish religion. And if they did that well enough, then they would indeed be accepted by God. To become a Jew, to all intents and purpose, was necessary to be saved.

So Paul with others has taken up his pen and is writing against this awful teaching. He's proved, by a number of all-conquering arguments, that, that is not the way we are saved. God does not demand of you that you live a righteous life – **to be saved**. Christ has done it! God does not demand of you pay the penalty of your own sins. Christ has done it! The way a man or woman comes into God's favour is that he casts himself on what Jesus Christ has done for him and comes to a personal faith in Jesus Christ. This is sufficient. Paul has proved that.

Also he has shown the Galatians the place of the law in it. God gave the Old Testament law, not that you may be saved by it but to show that you need to be saved. The place of the law is not to be a means of salvation. It's to show you that you need a saviour. It exposes your sin, and therefore the law is a schoolmaster who brings you to Christ.

But Paul hasn't finished yet. There's still chapters 4, 5 and 6 to go.

Most of us probably when we have something to say, we put the truth forward and leave it at that. A sort of 'take it or leave it', approach. Paul wasn't like that. He puts the truth in front of the Galatians, but doesn't then just 'walk away'. Now he continues to plead and to persuade. To do everything in his power to win them back to the truth. That's what we must learn to do.

Chapter 4:8-20: Two approaches we will use. We will go through the whole passage and look at Paul's arguments – there are two of them. And then through the whole passage again looking at Paul's manner – how he shows his concern. There are two

things to notice there as well.

We shall learn a lot. Sometimes people are tempted to go back into dependence on works. It happens!

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century there was a man – John Henry Newman. He came from a reformed evangelical church. He believed the great truth of Justification by faith. But he forsook it. First of all he became an Anglo-Catholic - at the 'high end' of the Church of England. Then he went into the Church of Rome (1847). In 1879 he became a Cardinal – turning his back entirely on the truth that he once believed. Then believing that he received his salvation by receiving Christ in the Mass and in fulfilling certain rites and ordinances.

In the same Century, there was once a blunt Yorkshireman called F W Faber. He was an out and out Calvinist of the old school. He believed, and preached, the truth that we have covered in the past several months. But he forsook it! Becoming first an Anglican, then a Catholic and died: depending on rites and ceremonies for his acceptance by God. There have been others like that. Paul pleads with people who are tempted in that direction in this chapter. He also shows us something of how we should deal with people who are in spiritual trouble.

Firstly then. Paul's arguments:

1. Verses 8-11: He says simple this. That to adopt this new gospel, so called, is in fact to go back to paganism. To believe these false teachers, is not just believing an alternative form of Christianity but a return to the paganism that they had left behind. He brings this out in verse 8: “How was it”, Paul asks, “when you first heard the Gospel?” “Before you heard the Gospel it was a time of ignorance,” “In those days you didn't even know God. Instead you spent your time serving and worshipping imaginary deities, which were of human invention. That's what it was like then!” <sup>8</sup> *Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.*

*Verse 9:* “But now it's totally different. Between then and now. Now you know God.” Here is an example of one of the most difficult things to explain to non-Christians: people who are spiritually blind, cannot just grasp, that mortal men and women can actually know God. They understand that we can know information about Him, but they can't grasp at all that we can actually 'know' Him. “That's your privilege as a Christian”. says Paul. “In fact”, he says, “now that you know God – or rather – you are 'known' by God.” He is using that lovely Hebrew word 'know' – which means to intimately love. And the reason you know God is that first God intimately loved you. Your 'knowing' God is the fruit of His 'knowing' you. The fact this morning, that you know God, is because God long before you ever had the merest thought about Him, intimately loved you. And your present salvation is the fruit of that everlasting love.

“Well then”, says Paul, “now that you know God, how can you turn back to the weak and worthless, elementary principles to which you were previously in bondage.” <sup>9</sup> *But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by*

*God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?*

“Now knowing God how can you turn back to the very things that were not able to let you know God, in the first place?”

These people had been pagans. They had bowed down before idols. They had thought to themselves that if I do this .. and this .. and this, I will be accepted by whatever god there is. Now they were no longer pagans – they were professing Christians. But they were going back to a system where they were saying .. if I do this .. and this .. and this I will be accepted by God. They weren't actually going back, specifically to the religion they had left behind, but they were going back to a system of: do this .. do this, and you'll be accepted by God. And to go back to that is to go back to paganism.

There is no difference between paganism and a form of Christianity, so called, which says that you must do something yourself to be saved. No difference. There are only two religions in the world. Christianity – Apostolic Christianity – and a 'religion of works'. A 'religion of works' may take the form of: love your neighbour; pay 100 cents in the dollar; do no harm to anybody. It may take the form of modern Catholicism; Hinduism; Islam; animism; any other forms of paganism. But they are all versions of the same thing. They are all version of: if you 'pull your socks up', try hard enough, God will have you.

And if you go to one version or another, which every you might do, you are in fact going back into paganism. To go into any form of so called Christian teaching which says, “do this” and you will live, is to go back into paganism. To go to weak and worthless elements which you should have left behind. They are 'weak', because they can never get you to 'know' God. They are 'worthless' because they are too poor to bless you. It's a system of 'bondage' because no matter how hard you try you can never ever be certain that you are accepted by God.

“So now that you know God through Christ, how can you go back to those very things that you left behind?” says Paul, “Instead of resting on the finished work of Christ”, verse 10, “your religion has become a succession of <sup>10</sup>... *days and months and seasons and years!* “ These people in Galatia were now observing the Jewish calendar: this is a special day ... this is a 'high' day ... this is a special month ... we must observe this new moon ... this is a special season – this is a Jubilee Year! They had adopted the Jewish calendar. They thought that by doing that, they would be accepted by God.

How subtle and clever false teachers can be. They first of all got the new converts to adopt the Jewish calendar, and were only now pressing them to adopt Jewish circumcision. Having got them to adopt the least objectionable thing, before getting them to adopt the more objectionable thing. That's how false teachers work.

“I'm afraid for you,” verse 11, says Paul, “I'm afraid that all the time and effort I've spent upon you has been wasted. I'm afraid that all my preaching to you may have been a waste of time. I'm afraid that everything that has been done in Galatia may come to nothing. <sup>1</sup> *I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain.* They were in danger of walking out on the very Gospel that He had preached. To go back to a different form of works – but a form of works none-the-less. They were becoming like people who had never heard Justification by Faith. So Paul is afraid that he has wasted his time. Because, in principle they were becoming no different from what they were before. Because reversion to works is to walk out on the Gospel. And to walk out on the Gospel is to be lost. We should be as distressed as Paul! Here and now, because the vast majority of what passes for Christianity today is not Christianity. It's a system of works. Almost every church you go into – almost every spokesman on radio & TV – is telling you that if you do certain things and adopt certain practices and live in a certain way, that that is the way you come into the favour of God. When did you last hear an uncompromising declaration of the great truth of Justification by Faith: that you are put right with God on the basis of Christ's righteousness and blood ALONE. That's the only Gospel there is!

Virtually everything else, which is said in the name of Christianity today, is not Christianity. It's paganism with a Christian vocabulary. Therefore it is apostasy. [The most pervasive and damaging example in our current environment is the cult of the so called Jehovah Witness – a modern day manifestation of the 'false prophet' in Revelation!] These are religions of works. We are in the midst of a heathen nation. Where people at best give 'lip service' to Christianity, but they are no different from men and women who have never heard the Gospel. Because ultimately they are all relying on the same thing. Something they themselves can **do**: habitually knock on doors and glory in the rejection which follows; put their physical lives in jeopardy, by, refusing medical treatment on the basis of misunderstood references, taken out of context, from Jewish rites, so that in their 'brain washed' quest to **do**, even at the risk of their life, what their organisation demands, is met.

So easily are people misled. What Paul was fearing was happening to the Galatians has happened over and over ago in the centuries ever since. And still is so today. Here in Bunbury. Paul's letter is so important to us as well as the Galatians.

[2082]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

Next week we will look at his second argument: verses 12-20

(Review of last week)

The return to a works based, so called Christian religion, is as worthless as any other pagan form of religion.

Now Paul turns to his second argument: “How different is your present attitude towards me from your original attitude toward me?” Verse 12. “Brothers,” he says, “listen to me. I am a Jew you are Gentiles. When I came among you Gentiles I cast aside Jewish rites and ordinances. I became as you are.”

That's how Paul behaved amongst the Gentiles. When Paul was among the Gentiles, although he was a circumcised Jew, he didn't insist that they be circumcised. Although sometimes he observed Jew feasts and Festivals, as a matter of Christian liberty, he didn't insist that anybody else should do it. He didn't bring Jewish rites and ceremonies with him when he preached to the Gentiles. He became as a Gentile. Because those things have no place when it comes to the question of salvation.

“So”, he says, “if I a Jew, can put aside rites and ceremonies, why can't you become like me, and give no place and have no interest in the Jewish rites and ceremonies? Why can't you regard Jewish rites in the same way that I regard them?” That's what he is saying in verse 12.

Now at the end of verse 12 and into verse 13, he says this: “When I first came among you, you didn't do me any wrong. I had a physical illness. The result of that physical illness was that I had to change my plans. It was because I changed my plans that I first came to preach in Galatia.”

Of course we don't know exactly what Paul is referring to here. We know from 2 Corinthians (12:7) that Paul had been given a 'thorn in the flesh'. It's generally believed that he had an awful form of ophthalmia, which means that his eyes were swollen, red, bloodshot, and inflamed. Horrific to look at as a result! What he is saying here is that he wouldn't have come to Galatia to preach the Gospel if he hadn't been ill.

“Now”, he says, in verse 14, <sup>14</sup> ... *though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.* In other words, “There it was, that I came to you in great bodily weakness.” And as he preached in those pagan areas, if this was his illness, he would have looked really ugly – detestable to look at! It would have been easier to look the other way. But he didn't get that sort of reaction from the Galatians. Look again, at the end of verse 14: How they treated him! They welcomed him as though an angel had come. Even more: as if the Lord Jesus Christ had come to Galatia! They gave him that sort of welcome.

But. Verse 15. “How different your attitude to me now is,” says Paul. “ ‘What a blessing Paul is to us.’ is what you used to say. ‘How very fortunate we are to have

Paul amongst us,' is what you used to say. <sup>15</sup>*What then has become of the blessing you felt? You said I was a blessing. Why can't you say that any longer? What happened to that 'blessing'? You felt so highly of me that if it had been possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.*"

<sup>16</sup>*Have I then become your enemy, simply for this one reason: that I tell you the truth?"*

It's clear that they had held Paul in high regard. He had this awful illness, it appears, yet they didn't despise him. They welcomed him as they would have welcomed Christ. They listened to him attentively as if it were the Lord Jesus Christ speaking. They felt for him, if it had been possible they would have replaced his inflamed eyes with their own. They would have done anything for him. But now they don't want anything to do with him. Because of the false teachers.

"O yes," says Paul, verse 17, "these false teachers are zealously courting you. But they're not courting you for your own good. They want to cut you off (*shut you out*) from all contact with me. Why? So *that you may make much of them.*"

"They're not anxious for your good," says Paul, "all those false teachers want is not your welfare but, simply that you will 'tread the party line'. And they want to cut you off from every other influence."

That's how cults work today! This has been the case from the first century. In more modern times if the Jehovah's Witnesses, so called, come to your door with their pernicious gospel and you're foolish enough to listen to them, the very first thing they will want to do is to cut you off from the influence of your evangelical friends. And from the influence of a Biblical ministry. Not because they want your good, but rather to swell their ranks, with more 'brain washed' recruits for their 'works' religion. That's how cults always, and still, work.

Be careful of people who try to cut you off from fellow Christians. Be careful! We must cut ourselves off from false teachers, but however failing other Christians may be we are Scripturally bound to keep our lines of communication and fellowship with them, whoever they are.

"Yes," says Paul, verse 18, "zealous courting is good, provided there is a good end in mind." Paul seems to be implying that that was the same sort of courting that he gave them. <sup>18</sup>*It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am with you.* Yet while his back was turned they were inclined to ignore him for somebody else.

"Oh yes", somebody may remark, "Paul you're jealous! All you're bothered about Paul, is that you had influence in the Galatian church and now someone else has it. You were courting them and now someone else is courting them and doing a better job! You're jilted and that's all you're bothered about."

"No it isn't", says Paul, verse 19. He then uses a most tender form of address, continuing so throughout the verse. "At the time of your spiritual birth", he says, "I was in an *anguish* of pain, like childbirth. Now that you have defected, you are

bringing on that *anguish* all over again. That pain that I feel in my heart is not that I want you to join my ranks as opposed to another's, but because I want to see Christ formed in you."

What Paul wanted of the Galatians was not loyalty to Paul! What he wanted was loyalty to Christ. He didn't want to see some 'mask' of Christianity – some outward form of Christianity-- he wanted to see Christ formed in the individuals who made up the Galatian church. He wanted to see that man, that woman, those people over there, with their hearts in love with Christ.

He wanted to see Christian character being formed in them by the Spirit of Christ. He wanted their minds to be true to Christ. Their hearts to be taken up with Christ. To be entirely overwhelmed by Christ! That's why he was in such agony. Because defection from the Gospel is defection from Christ.

<sup>20</sup>*I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.* "How I wish I could be present with you! The last thing I want, is to go on talking like this. I long to change my tone. But as it is," he says, "I have severe doubts about your spiritual position, and I'm entirely at a loss to know, how you are, as you are."

That's how Paul's two pleads run: he is pleading, imploring, beseeching, persuading and you can detect, especially in those closing verses the pain which is in his heart. The tears which are in his eyes. You can recognise not only what he says but also how he says it.

So now we come to review the passage again briefly, to see how the description on the front of today's order of service is justified. We shall note the two ways how Paul by his manner shows his pastoral concern. He is frank and also affectionate.

- Frank.

Verse 11: <sup>11</sup>*I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain.* There's no possibility of misunderstanding. "I'm afraid you're on the road to apostasy. I'm afraid that you're on the road that leads to damnation. I'm afraid that all my efforts will be as if nothing had been done. That you will become no different from those who have never heard the Gospel." That's blunt. That's frank!

Verse 16: <sup>16</sup>*Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?* That's what Paul has been doing right from Chapter 1: telling them the truth frankly and bluntly. There has been no misunderstanding.

Verse 17: He's equally plain and blunt, when he describes the false teachers. "I know their methods", he says, "I know their intentions. How they work. What they want. Who they are." He tells it to them as it is.

One can't fail to be impressed with Paul's approach: no discourtesy, but strict honesty. No possibility of misunderstanding. Clarity and accuracy. That's how people in spiritual trouble need to be approached. By someone who will expose their sins and show them their heart as it is. To explain the outcome of how they

are living at present. Not to confront them plainly and accurately is in turn, unfaithfulness on our part. Paul had a great understanding of the responsibility of his pastoral ministry. That he would have to answer for it before Christ.

- Not only frank but also affectionate:

Verse 12: As long as he can, he calls them: brothers; he doesn't call them enemies (or clients). He has obvious love for them, despite their waywardness. He desires not his own advancement, but their good.

Verse 13,14 & 15: Paul the real master of winsomeness! The least effective way to approach is to say, "You should be thankful that I have done so much for you." Paul is wiser than this, instead he reminds them of the things they have done for him. In that way he shows them how inconsistent they are. Shows them why he feels perplexity. He tries to win them back, not bludgeon them back to the truth. With this rare art. This winsome way. A fruit of spiritual character: being possible to be frank, brutally blunt and at the same time to be winsome, tender, gentle and affectionate. That rare combination is demonstrated here.

Verse 19 & 20: Who can fail to be moved. His longing to be present; his longing for the restoration of the old trust. The old relationship. He's not sobbing and saying, "I'm hurt." But it's obvious that he is concerned for the people to whom he is writing. Not concern for himself.

That's how spiritual wanderers are restored. Not just by being frank. If someone comes to you and they are frank all they do is drive you away. But neither are spiritual wanderers restored by one just being affectionate. "Sickly sweet", impresses nobody. But if the approach is with a faithful word delivered by one with the spirit of a servant – with humility and the motive to rescue. Full of 'grace and truth' like the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a mighty power in that combination.

As for us: will we resolve not to slip back to paganism. To any religion of 'works'? And to be frank and affectionate in our dealings with each other? Because if we are not determined to be both, no one will recognise the Christ that has been formed in us.

[2000]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

Galatians – Chapter 4:21-31 (a)  
Paul's Concern for the 'false teachers'.

(Review of last week)

Galatians: Chapter 4, verse 21 to end of that chapter.

Often when the day's reading is read it means something to us even before any explanation. However for many, this passage can be a mystery – what is Paul getting at?

It's often found difficult for two reasons:

- firstly, Paul assumes that you know your Old Testament as his audience did. It contains 7 different names and places in only 11 verses;
- secondly, it's the type of argument common among a group of professional Rabbis of that time. Their own way of arguing with each other, which they loved to do, being argumentative by profession and training.

Since Paul himself was a trained Rabbi, he takes up the form of argument that would convince Jewish Rabbis, since the false teachers came from this background. We on the other hand are Western in our thinking and find Eastern forms difficult to follow. Thus we need to put in a bit more effort today.

This way we will be rewarded with the important message that is being presented.

From verse 21 we discover to whom Paul is applying the argument: <sup>21</sup> *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law,*

We know already that the new converts at Galatia had been infiltrated by the 'false teachers', who basically wanted their converts to become Jews first, to then become counterfeit Christians. These false teachers (and anyone else, then or now, who demonstrate that they follow the Galatian heresy) were the ones Paul speaks to: *you who desire to be under the law*. Faith in Jesus Christ is not enough, they say, to be saved you must keep the ceremonial laws, keep the Passover, keep the special festivals. Do, do, do it all yourself. Sadly though no one (besides Christ – the 'proper man') has ever been able to satisfy even a part of the law, so that by the law all fail.

So, this morning, in your 'heart of hearts', your secret feelings, you think that there is anything that you can do to gain acceptance by God, then this argument is very specially directed to you! People who claim to be Christian, but deep inside feel that something that they do, will bring them into favour with God, while at the same time by so doing make Christ's sacrifice unnecessary.

Verse 21 continues: *do you not listen to the law?* “Oh you give such a high place to the law, very well then. I will use that very law, which you consider to be of such great importance, to prove that your position is wrong. You believe that to submit to the law is the way to be saved.”

So Paul goes back to the Old Testament to prove yet again<sup>1</sup> that they are wrong.

The rest of the passage is in three parts:

- Verses 22-23 sets up the historical event. He reminds us that Abraham the 'father' of the Jewish faith, had two sons: Ishmael the son of a slave and Isaac the son of a free woman, Abraham's wife.
- Verses 24-27: He says that the story of these two boys and their mothers has a spiritual meaning – an allegory or 'figuratively speaking'. They represent two great religions: Ishmael represents Judaism; Isaac represents biblical Christianity.
- Verses 28-31 the close of the passage is a personal application: if we're believers, we're not like Ishmael – slaves. If we're believers, we're like Isaac – we are free. But if you're an Isaac, expect to be treated like an Isaac and be persecuted by this modern world's Ishmael.

So to more detail:

The historical background. This is simply what the Old Testament says. Abraham had two sons – a double descent from Abraham. Ishmael and Isaac. Although they both had Abraham as their father, there were great differences between them:

- firstly, they had different mothers. Ishmael's mother was Hagar, a slave or servant of Abraham; Isaac's was Sarah, Abraham's wife. Each boy took after his mother! When Ishmael was born he was born into slavery, Isaac into freedom, the heir of the promise.
- Secondly, they were born in different ways: not biologically – both had a conception and gestation, and came screamingly into the world. But different for all that. Ishmael was born according to nature – according to the flesh. The natural process. Not Isaac! Sarah was barren, being over 90. Abraham was over 100 years old. There was no human (natural) possibility. It was beyond possibility, that this boy could ever be born. But God had promised that one day such a son would be born from Sarah. And he was. He was born, not according to nature but against nature. Not a natural birth – a supernatural birth. Relating to Ishmael there were no spiritual promises. But relating to Isaac, it was God's promise. These then were the facts of Jewish history. And Paul goes on to observe (verse 24), that these facts also have a spiritual meaning. An allegory – a picture of a 'higher' truth. These simple historical facts are in the Bible to teach us something! To make a truth clear to our minds.

Now we make a start on the section, verses 24 to 27. The Spiritual Meaning.

We begin by noting how the orthodox Rabbis then and now interpret this story: In many of their writings they saw that this is an allegory. So they agree with Paul, that it

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<sup>1</sup> A lesson for us to learn: Paul has already shown the Galatians the way of salvation. He supported that with four strong arguments. He's shown them why God gave the law. He's pleaded with them not to listen to this Galatian heresy. We would probably by this stage have said, "Well I've done my best. I've tried to talk them out of it. My conscience is clear. Their blood must be on themselves. I wash my hands of them. I've done the best I can to win them back to the true Gospel." Not Paul! He's tried so many ways, but he still isn't giving up.

One of the reasons why people who seem to make a consistent Christian start, only to fall away, is that when we see the beginning of this sliding away we don't try hard enough to win them back. We might try once or twice but not often enough. Here then is Paul's lesson in perseverance.

had a spiritual meaning, but they didn't agree with what that meaning was.

- The Rabbi's said that Ishmael became the 'father' of the Arabs. (That's open to dispute, but it's what they said!) Therefore they deduce that this is a 'picture' of the Gentiles. While we Jews are descended from Isaac. In the historical narrative God comes to say, "*Cast out the slave woman and her son.*" Which is taken to mean, by the Rabbis, that God has finished with the Gentiles. He wants nothing more to do with them. It was Isaac that became Abraham's heir, and therefore the Jews are the special people of God. They maintain then, that God has no purpose to be fulfilled in the Gentiles. God has a special people whom He will never give up, whatever they do and they are the Jews. And to bring our minds back to the Galatian situation, this was also the way that the 'false teachers' understood the special favour of the Jews. On coming to Galatia they in effect said to the Gentiles there, that there was no hope for them since God has finished with the Gentiles. If you're really to be saved, Faith in Christ isn't enough, you must become a Jew first. (It's too bad that you're not actually a 'blood' descendent of Abraham but at least become like a Jew – a proselyte,<sup>2</sup>)

They were using this allegory to support their false teaching.

- Now note what the inspired Apostle describes as the true spiritual meaning. Recall the picture: a slave boy born of a slave woman by the natural birth process; a free boy born of a free woman, supernaturally. There are children of Abraham AND children of Abraham. There's more than one sort of descendant.

Verse 24: *these women are two covenants.* A Covenant is a solemn agreement between God and men. And by that agreement God makes those people His people and He becomes their God. There are lots of covenants in the Bible. Two great ones are 'the Covenant at Sinai' – God said at Sinai, "Obey the Law and you will live". Keep the law and you will have everlasting life. That was the Covenant. They didn't keep it. So that Covenant is void.

Then there's the New Covenant, which is sealed in Jesus Christ's blood:

<sup>9</sup> *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* <sup>10</sup> *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ...*

<sup>13</sup> *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Romans 10:9, 10, 13.

The first of these Covenants was a Covenant of Works, the second is a Covenant based on Promise. The first announced from Mount Sinai the other from Mt Calvary. By the first a sinner must do something to live but fails and with the second Christ has done everything that is necessary for the person who 'rests' on Christ to be saved.

Two covenants. The two boys represent these two Covenants.

"Not only so," says Paul, "But the two mothers each with her boy represent two

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<sup>2</sup> In Jesus' time converts to Judaism were referred to as proselytes. They were second class citizens of Zion for whom the outer courts (court of the Gentiles) in the Temple grounds were the closest they were allow to come to the temple.

Jerusalems!”

Verse 25 and 26: is where they are mentioned. Verse 25: Hagar – she who is *bearing children for slavery, corresponds to the present Jerusalem*, and continues in slavery with her children. This is earthly Jerusalem.

But verse 26 talks about Jerusalem which is above and is free. What's this about? Consider this: When in international affairs a particular group of people – the residents and leaders of a particular Country – carry out some example of aggressive 'foreign policy', the news report may say with respect to the USA, for example, “Washington has embarked on a deliberate policy of such and such.” If this policy were being applied against the English people, say, the press report may continue, “the World is waiting to see how London reacts to this provocation”. The point being that we might talk about the collective actions of a country of people by referring to them by the name of their capitol city. The name of the Capitol is used to describe the whole group of people.

In Paul's letter, Jerusalem is the Capitol of the children of Abraham. But there are two Jerusalems. The earthly Jerusalem (at that time under the bondage of the Romans) and as Paul has said earlier in the letter, that there is a heavenly Jerusalem.

To sum up: There are some children of Abraham who are simply descended naturally from him – they have his blood in their veins. And others who though they are not naturally descended from him, because they have the same faith as he had in their hearts they are spiritually his children. There's an earthly Israel and a spiritual Israel. The two boys represent: the two Covenants; the two Jerusalems; the earthly Israel and the heavenly Israel. Hagar's represent the Jewish religion (note how this differs from the view of the orthodox Rabbis) and Sarah's represent Biblical Christianity.

Not for the first time (or the last) Paul is showing that there are two types of people, two religions, two destinies. Only two, no middle ground”

- The ones who, like the descendants of Abraham by the slave woman, born by natural means are born into the slavery of a covenant of works, such that in their heart of hearts believe that the way to get right with God is by what they do. They seek to rely on self-justification through perfectly obeying the law – and always fail. They can never escape from this bondage of failure. They are the citizens of the earthly Jerusalem. Like the false teachers they follow the Jewish religion in a works based way as do all forms of religious belief and practice. All except one!
- The ones who are the true spiritual descendants of Abraham, through a supernatural new birth, in which they are made capable of receiving a faith like that of Abraham and so are justified – made right with God. They rely not on who they may be physically descended from, nor what they are trying to do, but on who Christ is and what Christ has done. They are new-born as free. Freed from the penalty of their sin. They have an eternal place waiting for them as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. They are the believers of true Biblical Christianity.

The one and only 'way' of belief and practice that leads to the heavenly Jerusalem and the eternal presence with God.

Is there really any choice? For you or for me.

[2039]

**May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.**

Next week we continue and complete this section.