

LESSON 10

GALATIANS 4:19-5:6

GALATIANS

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“Everyone you know should be aware that you believe with all your heart that ‘there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved,’ but the name of Jesus Christ.”

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GALATIANS 4:19-31

Paul has gotten just about as much mileage as one could reasonably expect out of the allegory involving Abraham and the promise made to him. But he isn't through yet. “One more time,” as the leader of the band would say. It isn't just another time around, though. Paul is concluding the doctrinal section of his letter here and rises to the occasion with a climactic conclusion to his chosen example.

There are two ways to go, he begins. You can follow the route where you are the active agent, or you can follow the route where God does for you what you can't do for yourself. What better illustration than the story of Abraham and Sarah and the dilemma they felt when God promised them the sun, moon and stars all wrapped up in an offspring? The problem was that Sarah was far beyond the age for bearing offspring; Abraham was pretty sure and Sarah was positive. She thought, and he did too, that they would have to do something about it. There it was: The route where you become the active agent. The solution Sarah came up with is the story of Hagar and Ishmael and Abraham going along with it. He wasn't sure either that God could manage this without help.

In a rush of thoughts and ideas which follow, Paul piles up all the troubles and failures and pitfalls on the one side with Hagar and doing things yourself, and all the hopes and the glory on the side of Isaac. Isaac becomes the hero, though he certainly didn't earn the right to be called a hero. But that's consistent with Paul's point. Being a hero is totally the free gift of God. At any rate, Paul puts a neat conclusion on the whole thing by quoting from the Old Testament: “Cast out this

slave woman [Hagar] with her son.” Actually, that had been Sarah’s idea and it was bound to come to that. But Paul uses the words in a sort of exasperated conclusion to his entire argument. Cast out the way of the law. One has got to suspect he’s referring not only to the doctrine of works but those who were promoting it.

Just one more thought. God named Sarah’s son Isaac (Genesis 17:19). Isaac means “laughter,” and while we don’t want to belabor the point, it is a neat touch, isn’t it? Laughter! Because with all this effort of Sarah, Abraham and Hagar doing what they thought needed to be done, and now the Judaizers doubting the adequacy of the Gospel of grace, enter Isaac “laughter.” Guess who gets the last laugh, after all. The Galatians, it is hoped, didn’t miss the point. And we shouldn’t miss it either.

THE PRACTICAL SECTION

GALATIANS 5 – 6:18

We move now into the final section, the practical section, of Paul’s letter which consists of chapter five to the end of the epistle. Like Gaul and a good sermon, Paul’s letter is divided into three parts; and like a good sermon, it ends on a practical, a sort of “how to,” note. To set this concluding section into motion, Paul calls for a drum roll and trumpets. He dresses the guard, hangs the royal purple and with a great fanfare makes a declaration, states grandly the whole point of the epistle. Here is the key to unlock the treasures in the letter to Paul’s converts in Galatia - the theme, the conclusion, the upshot and finale: “Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Paul isn’t talking about lounging under a street light fingering your cap. “Stand firm” conjures up images of Atlas, legs spread, feet planted, exerting great effort. “Dig in,” the sergeant is wont to tell his troops. It’s fascinating that the Christian religion, built on the conviction that God in Christ does for us what we cannot do, has produced activists and historic heroes. Christians have been responsible

for more service to mankind generally, and more good Samaritans, in particular situations, have built more hospitals and established more schools of learning, housed more homeless and befriended more orphans and comforted more of this world’s desperate than all other religions and governments of nations combined. To decline to put your trust in good works doesn’t mean you don’t do any. To live by the commitment that God is the active agent of one’s salvation and life produces an abundance of works, the epitome of lawfulness and the most meritorious lifestyle.

Paul will now say so, and saying so will produce that greatest catalogue of Christian characteristics which has to date found its way into the record (Galatians 5:22-23).

C.F.W. Walther talks about rightly dividing law and gospel and nobody can do it better than he. Except Paul. Certainly one great secret to it is wrapped up in the key verse of Paul’s epistle. To “stand firm” in Christian liberty is the launching pad for Christian action and work. It is just such freedom from constraint which enables the higher motive and more forceful and aggressive potency of faith, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to come into play. The compulsion of the Spirit of God, rather than the repression of the law, is what makes Christian activists of us all. That’s why you are as likely to find Christian strength and heroism in the most obscure Christian grandmother as you are in the most celebrated Christian clergyman.

The Spirit blows where He wishes and seems to have a penchant for stirring up the hearts and lives of common folk for Christian activity, in lives just like yours. That’s why it is brought up at all. The practical section of Paul’s letter is just that — practical — not in some obscure, intellectual way, but in the most feasible terms. Unless you approach it like that, very personally, as regards next Tuesday morning in your life, you’ll miss the point and the glory of this, Paul’s conclusion to his declaration of Christian independence.

GALATIANS 5:1-6

Somewhere along the line in every sibling spat the deep and ominous voice of dear old Dad penetrates with some such phrase as, "I'm only going to say this once." The Navy blows a pipe and the speaker box demands, "Now hear this," or, "This is the captain speaking." "Listen up," is Marine Corps talk. It all means the same thing. What you next hear will be the straight scoop, the final word, the undebatable conclusion. You will hear it and abide by it. You can hear some of that ringing through the first words of Galatians 5:2. "Listen, I, Paul say to you..." This is now it. The argument is over. Time for polite conversation is past. These are your marching orders.

Paul, of course, was harking back to what he had told them all in the very first sentence of this letter (1:1). At this point he wants them to remember that they are not dealing with a mere father figure (4:9), Mr. Nice Guy. They are mixing it up with the top-of-the-line. Paul was not only a first-ranked apostle called directly by God; he was, in addition, the one and only apostle commissioned by the ascended Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and lives and reigns to all eternity.

What's to come of all this that Paul has taken upon himself to write to them? That's what chapters 5 and 6 are setting down. This is the conclusion now, from the authoritative voice of Christendom. There is a law path, circumcision, and there is a Gospel path, grace. Those who will now choose law are nullifying the grace of God in Jesus. That, then, is it. We turn our backs on such. They are fallen from grace. "For we" (5:5), we all, the rest of the Christian church, have also made our choice. And we, through the work of the Holy Spirit, have chosen the Gospel of grace.

The Galatians got the point. There was, you might well imagine, no more talk about Thursday morning clinic to get the male membership circumcised.

Where is the authoritative voice of Christendom today? We used to think the Bible was the last word, but some people in the church have set their minds to it and discovered (or at least decided) that the Bible should be subject to the same scrutiny and rules of scrutiny as Alice In Wonderland. That means you can, and you should, pick and choose and bring it strictly up-to-date. Peter didn't really walk on water and Lazarus was in a coma when Christ "raised" him from the "dead." Everything is up for grabs. There is scarcely a voice anywhere nowadays which speaks to us with any authority. But the Words of God, they are spirit and they are truth.

The church must sound a clear and clarion note which declares, "Thus says the Lord." Granted, these days, there are segments of the church which are a great deal more certain of themselves than they have a right to be and pontificate on every subject under the sun, who declare their own thoughts and say, "He says." Nevertheless, the world today is being treated too often to a mushy sound out of the church's trumpets. No wonder it pays so little heed. Surely when it comes to something as glorious and basic as the Gospel of grace, we need to stand up and be counted. Everyone you know should be aware that you believe with all your heart that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," but the name of Jesus Christ.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 5:7-18

To you, Savior of all, to Whom all glory is owed and for Whom all life is to be a reasonable service, I dedicate this time of study. Let these moments serve to give me spiritual knowledge and proper praise and honor to You. Amen.

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1. Galatians 5:7 – Paul was fascinated by the imagery of the arena.
 - a. An athlete trains to keep strong and to practice his skill. Of what Christian activity might training be an allegory? (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

 - b. Philippians 3:14. An athlete sets and seeks his goal. What are some:
 1. Short-range Christian goals?

 2. Long-range Christian goals?
 - c. Read Hebrews 12:1. An athlete strips and dresses for the contest. What hindrances to the race must a Christian be rid of?

 - d. What are the elements of Christian equipment?

 - e. Read 2 Timothy 4:8. In the light of all Paul says in Galatians, with whose righteousness will we be rewarded? Who will be rewarded?

 2. Galatians 5:8-9 – “A Little Leaven”
 - a. Read Matthew 16:12. To whom or what does leaven refer in this passage?

 - b. To whom or what does a little leaven refer in these references? (1 Corinthians 5:1-6; Ecclesiastes 9:18).

 - c. If Paul in 5:9 is talking about a little bad doctrine, to what does he refer?

 - d. If Paul in 5:9 is talking about a bad person or bad people to whom does he refer?

3. Galatians 5:11
- a. Why does Paul allow circumcision? (Acts 16:3)
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- b. Did Paul preach in favor of circumcision? (1 Corinthians 7:19)
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4. Galatians 5:12 – “Those who unsettle you”
- a. Read Acts 15:1-24. Who were the troublemakers?
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- b. What kind of trouble were they causing?
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- c. From Matthew 7:6 and Revelation 22:15, make a list of the company to which Paul relegates the troublemakers.
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5. Galatians 5:13-18
- a. In what terms is human behavior described?
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- b. Of what does the description remind you?
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- c. What is the upshot of such behavior in the church?
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- d. In Galatians 6:12 one Galatian faction is described. Give it a name.
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- e. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-12. Give a name to the Galatian faction which agreed with the apostle Paul.
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- f. In Galatians 5:13, a third party is described. Give it a name.
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6. Galatians 5:13 – Liberty, not License
- a. Read John 8:32. What is the instrument which produces liberty?
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- b. From John 14:6, explain “truth.”
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- c. Who is the agent who produces liberty? (2 Corinthians 3:17)
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d. According to 1 Peter 2:16, what is the proper and improper use of liberty?

e. Explain the tragedy of using liberty as license. (1 Corinthians 8:9)

7. Galatians 5:14 – Loving Service

a. Summarize the will of God as found in Matthew 22:37-40.

b. In whose interest does love serve? (John 15:13)

c. In whose interest does love not serve? (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

8. Galatians 5:17 – At War with the Spirit

a. What is the natural inclination of man? (Romans 7:18)

b. Who produces the “good” life in us? (1 Corinthians 2:12-13)

c. Who or what are the enemies in the “war within”?

d. Which of these (c. above) goes with the “law path” and which with the “gospel path”?

9. Do you think verse 5:15 is a fair description of some of the struggles which occur in today's church? Explain.
