

The Weekly Word

May17-23, 2021

Hello Reading the Bible readers. I am enjoying this more indepth journey through these books of the Bible. This week we read and ponder Galatians 4&5 Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, May 17: Galatians 4:1-7 NIV2011

¹ *What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.* ² *The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.* ³ *So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.* ⁴ *But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,* ⁵ *to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.* ⁶ *Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."* ⁷ *So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Paul outlines the wonder of our adoption into the family of God through Jesus Christ. Before Jesus came the children of God were like underage heirs which meant they were no better than a slave because they were subject to the guardians and trustees until they came of age. Since they were underage, they were slaves to the elemental forces of the world. But then the time God set came and Jesus ushered in the moment when we became 'of age.' No longer were we under the guardians and trustees, no longer were we slaves to the elemental forces but we were adopted into sonship to the Father.

God sent the Spirit of Jesus and placed that Spirit in our hearts and the Spirit of God within us allows us to cry, "Abba Father".

Paul rounds this out with an incredible verse 7, *So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Understanding our adoption into God's family is a powerful truth that the church in all ages and on all continents must proclaim. Through faith in Jesus, we are all adopted as sons of the Father. When adopted, God places the Spirit within those who confirms their sonship and allows us all to cry, "Abba Father."

The words "Abba Father" roll off our modern tongue so easily. But I suspect we have lost the incredible understanding that comes with them. Abba means 'daddy'. We get to use the familiar word for the father in greeting our God. The God of the universe allows us to cry out to him, "Daddy"! He is our Father. This is an incredible gift to the church. Jews may have understood the fatherhood of God but they never would have addressed God as Father. What a

privilege it is for us to address God as Father. The church needs to proclaim and repeat and proclaim and repeat this incredible truth. We are loved. We are adopted. We are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ and we can cry out to our Father just like any child can cry out to his or her father. What a gift.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I find my mind delighting in and exploding at the truth that I can call God, “Abba”. I can call God, “Daddy”. God adopted me, I am part of His family. I have a new name. I have a new heritage. I have an eternal future. All because I have a new daddy, the Lord God Almighty.

As I prepared to close my Bible I simply bask in the wonder of God, my Abba, my Daddy.

Tuesday, May 18: Galatians 4:8-20 NIV2011

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

¹⁰ You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

¹² I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. ¹³ As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you,

¹⁴ and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.

¹⁵ Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶ Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

¹⁷ Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. ¹⁸ It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. ¹⁹ My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, ²⁰ how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The essence of this section is encapsulated in the first paragraph. Paul mentions three stages of the Galatians spiritual journey and invites them to a fourth, which is really returning to the second stage.

Stage one, lost before Christ. Rather than using ‘lost’ language Paul talks about being slaves... *slaves to those who by nature are not gods*. Slaves to self, slaves to the evil one, slaves to fallen human nature.

Stage two, verse 9a: knowing and being known by God. This is another way to say that were saved. They were walking with and loving the Lord Jesus. They had moved from lostness to foundness; they moved from slavery to freedom in Christ.

Stage three, they are turning from freedom in Christ to slavery to the law. Although Paul doesn’t use the word law (as in Jewish Law) it is what he surmises when he says they are enslaved again, *observing special days and months and seasons and years!* They have been led

astray into a form of works righteousness trying to earn their way into God's graces by what they do, namely living according to the Jewish law.

Stage four, to which Paul pleads... Paul bids them to become like him... wholeheartedly devoted to Jesus and free from the law, which is the gospel he first preached to them.

From here Paul appeals to their former love for him. Paul exposes those who are leading them astray as no good, alienating them from Paul.

All of paragraphs 2 and 3 are an attempt to have the Galatians return to Jesus, pure Jesus, no add on, no extras; simply Jesus.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

It is important for the church to continually be reminded that we are saved by God, NEVER by our own works. Whenever we turn faith into something we must do to earn or gain our standing before God we have in fact polluted the gospel and created a not-gospel attempt at salvation.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Spirit whispers to me to examine my motivations for piety, worship and the like... Am I reading the Bible to get into God's good graces or because I love the Lord? Do I worship weekly because by doing so I merit God's favor or because I love the Lord and want to be with His people praising Him? And so the questions flow...

Wednesday, May 19: Galatians 4:21-31 NIV2011

²¹ Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.

²⁴ These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. ²⁵ Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷ For it is written:

*"Be glad, barren woman,
you who never bore a child;
shout for joy and cry aloud,
you who were never in labor;
because more are the children of the desolate woman
than of her who has a husband."*^f

²⁸ Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰ But what does Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave

woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." ^{j 31} Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Paul continues his argument that the way of faith in Jesus Christ is the way of God now and into the future. Paul teases this truth out of the Old Testament story of Ishmael and Isaac, sons of Abraham. Ishmael the son of Abraham and Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, represents the Old Testament covenant. It is a covenant of slavery.

Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, represents the New covenant, faith in Jesus Christ. Isaac was born by the power of the Holy Spirit in Sarah's old age. He inherited Abraham name and promise from God. We are heirs with Isaac of the New Covenant through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul, speaking to the Galatians, concludes this portion of his argument in verse 31, *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.*

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Followers of Jesus are heirs of Isaac, the son of promise to Abraham. This is our heritage as Christians. Paul also explains that those who follow the law are figuratively descendants of Hagar. Therefore, they live under the law and are slaves to the law.

Paul's point is that the Galatians should not forfeit the grace and covenant they have through faith in Jesus Christ by returning to following the Jewish law with its rules, regulations and laws. The church must constantly be vigilant in teaching this same truth. The temptation to fall back into a works righteousness happens in every time and on every continent.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I feel a bit like Paul is beating the same drum over and over again. First of all, this lets me know how important the distinction is between being under the law and under faith through Jesus Christ the Lord. Paul is inviting me to treasure the gift of faith I have in Jesus. I delight in Jesus and I magnify His name.

Thursday, May 20: Galatians 5:1-12 NIV2011

¹ *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

² *Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

⁷ *You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? ⁸ That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹ "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." ¹⁰ I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the*

penalty. ¹¹ *Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.* ¹² *As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Galatians, unlike other letters by Paul, primarily addresses one singular focus; are we saved by grace through faith or are we saved by following the law. Apparently, the Galatians received the good news of Jesus Christ and opened their hearts to the Lord, but someone infiltrated the church and is turning their hearts from grace back to the law. This someone is requiring that they become circumcised. As Paul points out, should they become circumcised, they are agreeing to follow the whole law; no longer are they under the umbrella of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

I can't read verse 1 without being reminded of the song our worship leader, Angelo Natalie, wrote based on that verse. *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* This verse captures Paul's message. In Jesus Christ we are set free, but we need to stand firm in our freedom of faith. If we leave our foundation of faith we return to slavery, slavery to the law, slavery to having to earn our way of salvation, which is an impossibility.

Then in verse 2, Paul states the issue about as clearly as one could state it. *Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.* The only way of Salvation is through Christ Jesus, to allow yourself to be circumcised means that Jesus Christ is of no value to us. Therefore, we are now outside of the family of God. Paul is arguing for nothing less than the salvation of believers in Galatia. This is no insignificant matter, which is why Paul labors over and over again to drive his point home. Jesus and faith in Jesus is the only doorway to salvation. To resort to the works of the law is to abandon the faith and step out of God's gift of salvation.

In verses 3, 4 and 5 Paul makes a similar point from slightly different angles. And then he nails his argument shut in verse 6, *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.* The only thing that counts is faith...

In the second paragraph Paul laments those who are leading the Galatians astray. So angered is Paul by their deception that he suggests they should go all the way and emasculate themselves. This is a chilling comment; one that carries Paul's disgust for what they are teaching and how they are destroying the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

I feel a bit like a broken record as I attempt to answer this question. Honestly, it is the same answer I have been giving throughout much of my reading of Galatians.

Paul is waging a battle against those who want to re-enslave Christ followers through the yoke of the Jewish law. We are free in Christ, says Paul. Why sacrifice our freedom in Christ for slavery to the Jewish law, which was ineffective in saving anyone? The church must continue to preach the purity of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ; nothing else can bring salvation. And nothing can add to the salvation we already have in Christ Jesus.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

Again, God is relentless in reminding me that all I need for salvation is Jesus. All I need to be adopted into the family of God is faith in Jesus. All I need is Jesus. What a joy it is to be reminded again that Jesus Christ alone provides salvation. I add nothing, I can add nothing to the salvation I have through faith in Jesus.

Friday, May 21: Galatians 5:13-18 NIV2011

¹³ *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* ^k ¹⁵ *If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

¹⁶ *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Paul shifts gears, instructing the Galatians on how a Christ-follower should live when they are free in Christ. Our freedom in Christ is not a ticket to indulge ourselves, instead it is God's golden ticket to serve one another, to help one another, to encourage one another humbly in love. Freedom in Christ should divert our gaze from ourselves and allow us to see our sisters and brothers so that we might help them, love them and encourage them.

Paul goes on to say that the entire law of God is summed up in one command, "love your neighbor" as yourself. Apparently, the Galatians fell into the trap of fighting with one another; Paul's concern is that by doing so they may devour each other. That is not the way of Christ because that is not the way of love.

Paul reminds us that if we keep in step with the Spirit, if we keep our ears tuned to the Holy Spirit's voice within us then we won't ratify the desires of our flesh. The Spirit's voice will lead us to love. The flesh and the Spirit are at war with each other. They are in conflict with each other. Our defense is to be led by the Spirit; we are no longer slaves to the law; we can be led by the Spirit which means we will live in love for one another.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

The church needs to constantly be reminding its people that we are in a constant battle, an internal battle between following the voice of the flesh (our sinful desires) and the voice of the Spirit of God. Living by faith in Jesus means we are living obediently following the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is a message that the church must constantly be teaching, reminding ourselves of the struggle that every Christian must battle every day. [I am reminded of Paul's words and teaching in Romans 7 about how he does what he does not want to do and does not do what he wants to do... this is a picture of the internal battle we all face as believers.]

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Holy Spirit asks me if I center my life in Jesus as I begin my day. The Spirit asks me if I pause throughout the day to make sure that my communication channels with the Holy Spirit are open and flowing. The Spirit probes if before I close my eyes I reconnect with God through the presence of the Spirit within me. Am I available and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit within?

Saturday, May 22: Galatians 5: 19-26 NIV2011

¹⁹ *The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Paul paints the dichotomy between life in the Spirit (living for and with God) and life in the flesh (living for and with ourselves).

In verses 19 through 21 Paul paints life when it is lived for ourselves. I don't believe the list is either exhaustive or meant to convey that every action when we live according to the flesh is as grievous and obviously hurtful as each of these actions might project. But this list certainly is exemplary of life when humans live for themselves. Just open the news and read the headlines! Christ followers should not live this way.

We, as Christ followers, are to exhibit the character traits of God *love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control*. Paul brilliantly observes that *against such things there is no law*. This is how we are to live. And when we live this way it means we are living in step with the Spirit; it means we are living in sync with God, the Holy Spirit who is within us.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

As Christians, as people who are filled with God, the Holy Spirit, our lives should reflect different values and different motivations than people who are not Christ followers. And the differences we display should be character traits. Our character should be ones that lookout for others, care for and encourage others, love others. As believers, life should not be focused on selfish ambition and all manner of living that allows us to claw our way ahead or push ourselves to the top or gain what we want. As difficult as it is to attain this godly ideal, the church needs to continually hold these ideals before its people, lest we look no different than any human being who has ever lived.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I would be served well as a Christ follower to meditate on the 9-character traits associated with Jesus and a life endowed with God's Holy Spirit... *love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

Oh, Lord, may these traits exude from me as I live my everyday life. I pray this in the name of my Savior Jesus. Amen.

Sunday, May 23, 2021 - Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

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