

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

February 10, 2021

Series – The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

Series - *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*

*Are You a Son or a Servant?*

Text – Galatians 4:1 - 20

## Introduction

The Letter to the Galatians is very important because it establishes clearly and concisely that salvation is through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ plus nothing:

Salvation is from the penalty of our sins, which ultimately leads to eternal death in Hell. Salvation also brings us through a personal relationship on this earth with the Lord Jesus Christ ultimately to an eternal destination of Heaven.

Settling the questions of where we go when we die, and how to get there, are really the most important questions that we can answer in this life; and they have to be answered in this life – you cannot wait until you die to find the answers to these questions.

Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia answers these questions.

*The Letter to the Galatians* demonstrates that the Christian is saved by the grace of God, and also teaches that the Christian life is lived by the grace of God:

*"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:11)*

We saw in chapter one where Paul introduced the letter to the believers in Galatia by giving them an extremely strong warning – don't mess with the gospel of grace! The strength of this warning was magnified even more due the fact that it was repeated twice:

*"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:6-9)*

In chapter two we learned that there was some contention between Peter and Paul surrounding the doctrine of grace; but we also saw that out of the contention came Paul's creed on the subject of grace:

*"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Galatians 2:16)*

In chapter three, Paul once again used some strong language to drive his point home about changing the doctrine of grace:

*"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Galatians 3:1)*

Paul also used an Old Testament illustration in chapter three which further proved his argument. He said that the Scriptures plainly taught Abraham was justified by faith, and Abraham lived hundreds of years before the Law came into existence. Paul concluded that it was foolish to attempt to live according to the Law, because it was impossible. He further taught that the real purpose of the Law was to show us that we could not keep it – we needed God.

In chapter 4, Paul will admonish the Galatian believers to grow up. Many Christians who have been liberated from the bondage of the Law, and from the penalty of sin have in them a strong desire to grow. Unfortunately, they often go about it the wrong way. Many times, they place themselves under a “New Testament Law”, a new set of rules and regulations that is oftentimes more constricting than the Old Testament Law. Paul will challenge them here to grow up. He will remind them that they are not servants, but rather are sons.

### **I. A Principle - You Are a Son, Not a Servant (vs. 1 – 10)**

Paul uses the illustration of a child of a king. When the child is young, he is under bondage. He has to obey many people that are over him: tutors and governors (v. 2). But when he grows up, he is no longer a servant to these overseers, but actually becomes a ruler over them.

The same thing is true for them who were once under the Law. They were like these immature children who were not capable of caring for themselves, but now they are no longer to think of themselves as servants, they are full grown sons, and as such they have liberty. They no longer need to be controlled by a schoolmaster.

We were servants to the Law before we were saved, but now we have been adopted by God as sons. The word adoption in the New Testament has the idea of receiving the full privileges that an adult heir would receive. We get adopted into God’s family when we are born again through faith in Christ.

When a person is born into God’s family through faith in Christ, he is **positionally** a full grown Son, though he may be for a time **conditionally** a spiritual babe. He needs to grow up, to

mature; but maturity does not come by keeping the Law, it comes through intimate fellowship with the Father.

*"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"* (John 1:12)

*"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:26)

*"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ;"* (Romans 8:17a)

Notice the Trinity in vs. 6 – 7. The Father sent His Son to die for us, and now the Son sends the Spirit to live in us. The Spirit helps us to get to know the Father and the Son. Notice the words *Abba, Father*: these are not words that a servant uses, these are intimate words used only by a son to a loving Father. The Spirit helps us to live out the will of God. We don't need to be controlled by the Law; we need to be filled with the Spirit.

One of the keys to Christian maturity is that you stop thinking of yourself as a slave – you are not a slave, but a very dearly beloved son. Act like a son, not a servant. A servant obeys out of fear; a son out of love.

A servant has to go to church – A son gets to spend time with his Heavenly Father.

A servant has to go soul winning – A son gets to tell others about his wonderful Heavenly Father and his Saviour.

A servant has to tithe – A son gets to help His father finance the salvation of souls, and the transform lives around the world.

A servant has to obey a bunch of constrictive rules – A son knows that the Father knows what is best for him, and he voluntarily yields to Him.

Watchman Nee tells about a new convert who came in deep distress to see him. "No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm losing my salvation." Nee said, "Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ's heir because it is for you that He died." We are Christ's heirs, not through our perfection but by means of His grace.<sup>1</sup>

Illustration – me working for my father – also the sons of Joseph Saker at Shop Rite.

## **II. A Plea – Listen to Me (vs. 11 – 20)**

Paul now reminds them that he was the one who loved them enough to preach the gospel to them. At one time, he says that they loved him so much that they were willing to pluck their

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<sup>1</sup> Unknown Author; taken from sermonillustrations.com under the topic of sonship.

eyes out and give them to Paul. Now Paul had become their enemy. Why? Because there were people influencing them to think that Paul's doctrine was wrong. These legalists were trying to make the Galatians act like servants instead of sons.

### **III. A Picture – Ishmael and Isaac (vs. 16 – 20)**

Once again Paul will go back to the Old Testament illustration of Abraham who had two sons: Ishmael who was born to Hagar, Sarah's handmaid; and Isaac who was born to Sarah, Abraham's wife. Ishmael was the son of a servant, and was therefore not going to be an heir. Isaac was the child of promise, and was going to inherit everything that Abraham owned, including all of the promises of God.

Perhaps the easiest way to grasp the historical account is to trace briefly Abraham's experiences as recorded in Genesis 12 through 21. Using his age as our guide, we will trace the events on which Paul is basing his argument for Christian liberty.

75—Abraham is called by God to go to Canaan; and God promises him many descendants (Gen. 12:1–9). Both Abraham and his wife, Sarah, wanted children, but Sarah was barren. God was waiting until both of them were “as good as dead” before He would perform the miracle of sending them a son (Rom. 4:16–25).

85—The promised son has not yet arrived, and Sarah becomes impatient. She suggests that Abraham marry Hagar, her maid, and try to have a son by her. This act was legal in that society, but it was not in the will of God. Abraham followed her suggestion and married Hagar (Gen. 16:1–3).

86—Hagar gets pregnant and Sarah gets jealous! Things are so difficult in the home that Sarah throws Hagar out. But the Lord intervenes, sends Hagar back, and promises to take care of her and her son. When Abraham is 86, the son is born, and he calls him Ishmael (Gen. 16:4–16).

99—God speaks to Abraham and promises again that he will have a son by Sarah and says to call his name Isaac. Later, God appears again and reaffirms the promise to Sarah as well (see Gen. 17–18).

100—The son is born (Gen. 21:1–7). They name him Isaac (“laughter”) as commanded by God. But the arrival of Isaac creates a new problem in the home: Ishmael has a rival. For fourteen years, Ishmael has been his father's only son, very dear to his heart. How will Ishmael respond to the presence of a rival?

103—It was customary for the Jews to wean their children at about the age of three, and to make a great occasion of it. At the feast, Ishmael starts to mock Isaac (Gen. 21:8ff) and to create trouble in the home. There is only one solution to the problem, and a costly one at that: Hagar and her son have to go. With a broken heart, Abraham sends his son away, because this is what the Lord tells him to do (Gen. 21:9–14).

On the surface, this story appears to be nothing more than a tale of a family problem, but beneath the surface are meanings that carry tremendous spiritual power. Abraham, the two wives, and the two sons represent spiritual realities; and their relationships teach us important lessons.<sup>2</sup>

Paul said that these two children of Abraham were an allegory, a picture. Ishmael was picture of those that are unsaved and still under the Law, and are still in bondage. Isaac was a picture of those that are saved and free from bondage.

Ishmael was born naturally, but Isaac was born miraculously, just as those that are born again by the Spirit of God.

The child born of the bondwoman had to be cast out, and so does the Law.

Notice in v. 29 that the children that are in bondage will persecute the children that are free.

## **Conclusion**

Are you a son or a servant?

You may be asking yourself, "if I am a son then why do I desire to do things that displease my Father?"

The answer is simple you are still human. You still have the old, sinful flesh that wants to do its own thing, and often wants to rebel against God. But just because you may be a disobedient son at times, does not mean the Father loves you any less.

Besides, your adoption is not finished yet. You have already been adopted by God as His son, but you will someday receive a new body that will no longer desire to sin:

*"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." (Romans 8:22-23)*

*"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:1-3)*

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 709). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.