

Thirty-Five Days in Galatians

Study Four: Days Twenty-Two to Twenty-Eight Galatians 4:22-5:21

Day Twenty-Two

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 in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

24 These things may be taken figuratively, for 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.

v. 22 – Abraham lived centuries before the Law was established. Since Jews draw their ancestral identify from Abraham, then their actual “roots” were not in the Law but faith. So Paul once again taught from Abraham’s life story to further his case against the teaching of the circumcision party.

Abraham’s two sons were Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was born to Abraham’s maid Hagar, while Isaac to his wife Sarah. If you have the time and interest, their birth stories are found in Genesis 16 (Ishmael) and Genesis 21 (Isaac).

v. 23 – There was nothing miraculous about Ishmael’s birth, but Isaac was born to Abraham when he was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. Abraham had waited many years for God to fulfill His promise that Abraham would have a son. That is why Isaac was referred to as the son of promise.

What has God promised you? Are you still waiting? You are in good company. It seems that everyone whom God used in the Bible had to wait at some point in their life for what God had promised.

v. 24 – When interpreting the Bible, we must always be careful *not* to read our own meaning into symbols, people and events. We are always on safe ground when we let the Bible interpret itself. Here is just such an interpretation. Paul told us that Hagar represented Mount Sinai, the Law and the old covenant. The children of the Law were slaves, just like Ishmael was. Eventually Abraham dismissed Hagar and Ishmael to roam the desert, just like Jesus dismissed the Law to do the same, figuratively speaking.

v. 25 – This is a strong statement. Paul likened Hagar and her children of slavery to the city of Jerusalem. This was an amazing statement for a Pharisaical Jew to make! He was relegating physical Jerusalem to “slavery” since they put their trust in the Law instead of Christ. There is no doubt that at that point in his ministry, Paul was finished making

conciliatory gestures toward the believing Jews, especially where his apostolic work among the Gentiles was concerned.

Have you made concessions to individuals, family or church members who are still not happy with you? Compromise never works, for both parties still feel like they lost something and don't have what they truly want. Stop making compromises! Stand for what you believe is right and stop trying to please other people. Isn't it time that you pleased God?

Day Twenty-Three

26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.

27 For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."

28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

29 At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.

30 But what does the 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."

31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

v. 26 – The heavenly Jerusalem is free and is the mother of all who have faith. The infatuation that some believers have with the Holy Land, while understandable, is misguided. I have been to the Holy Land five times and I have enjoyed and learned from each trip. But there is no physical land that holds my allegiance today. I am a heavenly citizen and my heavenly capital city is Jerusalem. Yours is too. I am free—free to serve God as He directs.

v. 27 – Paul quoted Isaiah 54:1. The entire passage reads:

"Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the LORD. "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. "Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband--the LORD Almighty is his name--the Holy one of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth." (Isaiah 54:1-5).

This passage called for faith, for the recipient of this word is directed to enlarge and stretch based on the promise that the barren woman will bear fruit. Faith without action is dead and useless (James 2:17). If you get a promise from God, there is always something that you can **do** to make room for the provision of the promise. If God has promised you a car, then you must shop and find the model He will give you. If you are going to India as a missionary, then you must study and prepare before you leave. Too many people are waiting for God to do what only they can do. Is this your tendency?

v. 28 – We are like Isaac, children of promise. We who believe in Christ—and not Israel—are the promised children of Abraham, not Israel. Believers are the fulfillment of the promise that the children of the barren woman will be more than the children of the fruitful woman with a husband.

v. 29 – Ishmael and Hagar were a source of persecution for Abraham and Isaac.

“But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."
(Genesis 21:9-10).

Paul likened the teachings of the circumcision party to the persecution that Isaac received from Ishmael. Legalism does not like freedom; it hates freedom and persecutes it. The circumcision party was angry that the Gentiles did not have to follow “the rules” as they had to as Jews, so they were determined to bring the Gentiles under the same yoke that they endured. Legalists are angry and bitter people, who hate seeing anyone enjoy the fruits of grace, fruits that they feel should be worked for.

vs. 30&31 – What do you do with the effects of legalism and the persecution from legalistic people? You shake them off! It is up to you and me to reject, avoid and escape from any bonds of legalism that may try to hinder us. We are to “get rid of” the slave woman and her children. You cannot wait for someone else to set you free from the bonds of legalism; you must free yourself.

Are you under the oppression of some religious system? Does someone or a group of people hold you hostage so that you cannot freely serve God’s will and enjoy His benefits? Is your mind held captive by guilt, confusion or some misapplied teaching? Then this word is for you: Get rid of the slave woman. She is not your mother. Faith in God is your mother, so to speak. Stop acting like a “wimp” and take steps to free yourself. You got yourself into this, now you can get yourself out of whatever it is you are in.

Day Twenty-Four

5:1 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 law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

v. 1 – This seems like an obvious statement. Christ set us free for freedom. But the Galatians were considering a return to slavery by considering whether they should follow some aspects of the Mosaic Law. What a step backward that would have been! Someone once said that we are set free in Christ to be what God wants us to be and do what He wants us to do. I am free from sin to be a “slave” to righteousness. It is not a freedom to self-will, but freedom to God’s will.

This freedom can be likened to a train on its tracks. When it stays on its tracks, it is free to move. But if it jumps its tracks, it is no longer free. Our freedom track is righteousness. We are free to move about freely on that track, but if we jump that track to go our own way, then there is a train wreck and we are no longer free. Does that make sense to you?

Here are some other verses that speak to the issue of freedom in Christ. We see in them that all creation was subject to bondage so what it too could be freed to the “glorious freedom” of God’s children:

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:20-21).

Make sure the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak (1 Corinthians 8:9-10).

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17).

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does (James 1:24-25)

Is your freedom in Christ being hindered by anything or anyone? What are you prepared to do about it? Have you put yourself under a yoke of bondage?

vs. 2&3 – Paul continued to “hammer” this issue into the minds and hearts of the Galatians. Paul taught that if anyone submitted to circumcision after his conversion,

Christ was useless to that man. That circumcised man was then also obligated to follow the whole Law, something that no man could do and earn salvation. Could Paul's position be any clearer? Is there any doubt where he stood on this question?

vs. 4&5 – Paul contrasted the rival doctrines once again: works and law versus faith and grace. I hope that you are convinced that faith and grace are the order of the day for believers in Jesus Christ.

Day Twenty-Five

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 and kept 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."

v. 6 – Paul was probably criticized (or at least questions arose) concerning his circumcision of Timothy in Acts 16:

“Paul wanted to take him [Timothy] along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:3).

Why would Paul have done this if he felt so strongly that circumcision was useless where following Christ was concerned? This had to be a concession of sorts to the Jews, from whom Paul had just come in Acts 15. As mentioned earlier, it is obvious that the believers in Jerusalem looked at Paul's ministry with skepticism. Paul, wanting to prove that he wasn't *against* the Law but rather *for* faith in Christ, circumcised Timothy so that the Jews among whom he was working, both believing and non-believing, would not have a problem being around Timothy.

I think this was probably a decision that Paul regretted and one that could have been used against him by the circumcision party in Galatia. This brings up something to remember, which I stated at the beginning of this study: compromises seldom satisfy the parties involved. Both sides feel like they have lost something and often the issues need to be revisited later when the dispute arises again. If you believe something to be right, don't compromise that for the sake of peace or harmony. The peace or harmony seldom last and you will feel like you've "sold out" in the long run. Stand your ground.

vs. 7-9 – Paul indicated that the Galatians started out well enough, but someone had persuaded them to turn from following the truth. He then quoted what was probably a proverb of the day when he wrote, “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” He was saying that the belief that circumcision was necessary was not a little thing, but had the potential to affect every facet of their relationship with Jesus.

Little things do count. It does indeed matter what you believe, for Paul said that only faith expressing itself in love should be the objective for all who follow Jesus. As I have stated in my other studies (and in this one), faith without action is dead and useless. Paul wanted them to be expressing their faith in love, which means actions that are in the best interests of other people.

Is your faith being expressed in love or in the intellectual agreement with certain doctrinal beliefs? If it is the latter, then you are walking in legalism unless you find practical loving expressions for your faith.

Day Twenty-Six

10 I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be.

11 Brothers, 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!

13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

v. 10 – Paul must have prayed about this situation and had confidence, not in the Galatians, but in the Lord that God would help them sort this issue out. And Paul was clear that whoever was causing this problem would pay a penalty for causing the faith of the Galatians to be shaken. I want to be someone who builds up the faith of others and not confuse it, for there is a penalty for anyone who does the opposite.

v. 11 – As stated yesterday, the circumcision party was trying to tell the Galatians that Paul was preaching the importance of circumcision. Paul made the point that if he was, why was the circumcision party still criticizing and persecuting him? If circumcision and the Law had the power to save, according to Paul, then the cross of Christ was rendered worthless. If I wasn't convinced of Paul's position by now, I would be at this point. I think he has made every possible argument in support of his position.

The cross—the need for death and resurrection—is the focal point of Christ's work on earth. The cross was foolishness to the Greek world of the Galatians:

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18-19).

“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

The cross is still a stumbling block, for many people feel they are pretty good just the way they are. They have also devised religious systems that will allow them to get back into God's good graces should they stumble or sin. But all need to identify with Christ in death and be raised with Him in baptism. For a proud, religious person, the need for the cross is truly a stumbling block.

v. 12 – Whoa! Paul makes a strong statement here, wishing that those who were preaching circumcision would “go all the way” and castrate themselves! I would not want to have been on Paul's bad side.

v. 13 – Paul returned to what he had written earlier in verse 6: He urged the Galatians to use their freedom for the right thing. That right thing was not to return to a religious system, but to express faith through love. He urged the Galatians to serve one another in love and with faith.

No matter how much doctrine Paul taught in his letters, he always ended with practical instruction on how faith in Christ was to be carried out in the day-to-day activities of the home, work and church. For those who wanted to follow the Law, Paul summed it up in one phrase: love your neighbor. That is so simple but religious people want to make it (and have made it) more complicated.

If love is your motive, then you will have plenty of opportunities to express your faith and fulfill the Law. How beautiful!

Day Twenty-Seven

15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

v. 15 – I wonder if the Galatians were arguing this heresy among themselves, some believing one thing and some the opposite. I have seen many arguments among believers turn destructive and it has weakened the church against its true enemies. Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined” (Matthew 12:25). That includes God's kingdom. We must work hard to maintain our unity as Paul instructed: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3).

v. 16 – It is not enough to *not* walk in the flesh. For example, if you say, “I will not lie” you will probably lie because you are focusing on a negative, on what you won't do in your own power. What would be better to say is, “I will tell the truth.” That sets your

being in the right direction. You cannot lie if you are telling the truth—living by the Spirit will not allow you to gratify the desires of the flesh, for you cannot do two things at once!

I have worked with many people who were trying to stop bad habits. The more they focused on the bad habit—smoking, eating, cursing—the more they seemed to do that very thing. It wasn't until they took their eyes off those actions and put something else in its place, that they began to follow the Spirit and have some measure of release.

v. 17 – There is conflict between the Spirit and the sinful nature. The sinful nature can never, ever accomplish the will of the Spirit. They are mutually exclusive. That is why I often counsel people that they must stop expecting Christian behavior from a non-Christian. A non-believing boss or partner cannot possibly do spiritual things in a spirit of kindness or patience if they don't have the power of the Spirit in their lives. But neither can you. Stop trying to do God's will and instead say, "God, I cannot do this. I cannot love this person. So I am asking that you come into my life and love this person through me. I will cooperate with your Spirit to do your will where this person is concerned."

v. 18 – If you are led by the Spirit, you cannot follow the Law at the same time. As said above, they are mutually exclusive. The law of the Spirit will cause me to fulfill the requirements of the Law but it is actually God doing those things through me by my faith. I am not negating discipline or doing the right thing even when you don't feel like it. But the goal is Spirit-led living, pure and simple. I want to obey the Spirit's leadings and then rely on the Spirit to help me fulfill what I have decided to do.

Day Twenty-Eight

19 The acts of the sinful nature 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.

v. 19 – These acts are indeed obvious and are at the head of Paul's list.

v. 20 – Idolatry and witchcraft were also high on Paul's sinful list, but then things that are much more common began to appear. There are many who feel self-righteous that they are not doing the more "serious" sins, but who regularly indulge in hatred, jealousy, anger, and discord. These sins are listed with sexual immorality, so they too must be serious in the sight of God. We cannot rank sin as some have done for we will tend to focus on the "big" things and look past the "little ones." But those "little" sins are still significant in the sight of God and need to be put to death in the power of the Spirit.

v. 21 – Paul warned, and his warning still stands, that those who practice these things will not enter God's kingdom because they cannot be doing these things and follow the Spirit

at the same time. But there is only one way to overcome these sins and that is in the power of the Spirit:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:5-8).

If you are struggling with any sin, I pray that you will redirect your efforts. Don't try *not* to do that sin, but instead try to focus on the Spirit and allow Him to assist you in performing acts of faith in love. This is not an easy concept to grasp and I pray that the Lord will give you great grace and understanding to see how the law of the Spirit can set you free from the law of sin and death.