

Thirty-Five Days in Galatians

Study Three: Days Fifteen to Twenty-One

Galatians 3:21-4:21

Day Fifteen

21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

22 But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

23 Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.

24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

v. 21 – This letter is one concerted, consistent argument in support of the freedom in Christ that Paul first preached to the Galatians during his initial missionary visit. He confronted the perverse influence of the “circumcision party” with logic, Scriptural evidence and passion. His urgency was so deep that he sent this letter instead of trying to come in person, because time was of the essence.

The problem wasn't the Law; the Law was righteous but incapable of bringing anyone to “right standing” with God. The problem was that the Law could not impart life. Think of it: Legalistic people are some of the saddest, dourest individuals on the face of the earth. And that is true not only of Christian legalists but rule-keepers in other religions as well. (Have you ever seen a joyous Muslim at prayer or worship?)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. **Knowledge puffs up**, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

And

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for **the letter kills**, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry [the Law] that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! (2 Corinthians 3:6-9)

Christians have a new and better covenant than the Law could ever offer and Paul was passionate to prevent anyone from stepping back from the covenant of grace to the covenant of legalism.

Armed with this understanding, are you a joyous Christian or an uptight Christian, overly concerned about minor issues that don't really matter?

v. 22 – The promise of God in the Old Testament was Jesus! The Law put gave everyone an awareness of sin without any power to deliver man from this imprisonment. But God always intended faith in Christ to be the way out. Faith isn't just the entrance; it is a way of life! Without faith, it is *impossible* to please God.

vs. 23 & 24 – The Law held men captive through rules and regulations that were endless and impossible to keep perfectly. The problem wasn't the Law, but rather sinful man. The Law was our tutor that led us to Christ; the Law taught us that there was a better way to God than through the sacrifice of animals, circumcision and the keeping of holy days. But man is a religious being. By that, I mean that we yearn for a system that can simplify and codify our way to God. Thus some people prefer the legalistic tutor rather than freedom in Christ. But faith is the only means to God. Are you walking in faith?

Day Sixteen

25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

v. 25 – As stated earlier, believers are not free from righteous living because they walk by faith. In many ways, the law of the Spirit is more “legalistic” than the Law. The Law said not to commit adultery; the law of the Spirit says don't even consider adultery in your heart. The Law said give 10% of your income to God; the law of Spirit says to obey the Spirit and give what He directs (which could be everything!) But the law of the Spirit empowers the believer to do God's in the power of God and not in the power of human strength.

v. 26 – We are part of God's family. How does that make you feel? That fact causes me to rejoice! Faith is the common “gene” among all God's children.

v. 27 – In baptism, I put on Christ like a garment. What a powerful picture that provides! In 2:20, Paul stated that it was no longer him living, but Christ in him. Here he pictured

us as being clothed in Jesus. Inside or outside, it's all about Jesus in my life. The focus is never to be on arguments about the Law, man or his institutions. The focus is on Jesus.

I have stated previously that Paul made it clear over and over again that it was all about Jesus. Paul was always directing everyone's attention to the Lord Jesus Christ. Is Jesus your focus, or are you consumed with other issues of church life, doctrine and church rules?

vs. 28&29 – Christ is all in all for everyone, no matter what sex, race or economic class. This was an absolutely revolutionary concept in Paul's era. Slaves and women had access to God by faith and were equal with all other believers, even free men! For me, that is the message of the story of Mary and Martha, which has often been interpreted to mean that the worship/prayer lifestyle is superior to all others. I have seen that story in terms of women being permitted, just like men, to sit at the feet of Jesus as disciples (see Luke 10:38-42). That was nothing short of revolutionary in the Roman/Greek world.

Paul once again took a swipe at ethnic Jews by stating that the true heirs of Abraham were not according to the flesh, but were those who put their faith in Jesus. That was a strong statement from a Jew and a Pharisee. Paul definitely had a revelation from God that changed his life and the course of history.

Day Seventeen

- 1 What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.
- 2 He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.
- 3 So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.
- 4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,
- 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

vs. 1-3 – Paul used excellent analogies to explain his point and this may be the clearest one of all. He likens those who were under the Law to those underage heirs who have some sort of oversight and protection until they are of legal age. Up until that point, while legally they own everything, they are subject to those who would control them and their wealth. When they come of age, they enter the fullness of their inheritance. The same was true for those who functioned under the “oversight” of the Mosaic Law. Legalism doesn't represent a mature Christian walk, but an immature one. Do you agree?

v. 4 – I like the King James translation here for it says, “in the fullness of time.” It may seem like God is delaying beyond reason or necessity, but He always acts “in the fullness of time.” And how did God act? He sent His Son, born of a woman and under the Law. God worked within the righteousness of the Law to establish a new and better covenant to redeem those under the Law. We now enjoy the full rights of sons. Why would anyone want to go back to an inferior system when liberation has come?

Are you waiting for God to do something for you? He will, but it will be in the fullness of time. Then when He does begin to work, He may do things in a manner that is easy to miss or misunderstand. I have always said that while Israel was crying out for a deliverer, Mary was changing Jesus' diapers! Jesus was not released into ministry until He was 30 years of age! The psalmist wrote: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). God's night, however, may be a long one. But when the morning comes, you can forget the night.

And sometimes God disguises Himself. It may not be evident at first sight that God is actually moving on your behalf. But if you look carefully enough, you will see the Lord working for you. Sometimes you can only see this truth through eyes of faith.

Don't forget what Jesus said: "A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy" (John 16:21-22). You may be in travail right now, but this will end and joy will come. And when it does, your pain and sorrow will diminish in memory and importance.

Day Eighteen

6 Because you are 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 a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

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 principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

v. 6 – You are a child of God. John wrote in his gospel: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:11-13).

There are many other references to being God's children. Perhaps you need to be reminded of this fact. As I write, I am approaching my 30th anniversary commemorating the night when I gave my life to God. But I am still a son and it is an unspeakable, incomprehensible privilege to call God my Father.

Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:14).

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him (1 John 3:1).

vs. 8&9 – If you aren't careful, you can actually prefer slavery over liberty. At least you know the rules in slavery. When Israel was delivered out of Egypt, at one point they talked about going back because the "free" life in the desert was hard and unpredictable. They longed for the predictability of slavery! Since we are religious beings, who want a system by which we can please and follow God, then a legalistic system can be more attractive than the life of faith. How about you? Have you returned to any enslaving lifestyles or principles that have subtly replaced the need for faith in your life?

Do you go to church because you have to or because you want to? Do you feel you have to give money, or that you get to give to the Lord? There is nothing wrong with obedience in the absence of any feeling, but if that is a long-term condition, there is something wrong. And you need to ask God what it is.

Day Nineteen

- 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, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong.

v. 10 – Paul pointed out that if the Galatians returned to following some of the Law, they would eventually be open to more and more of it. Soon they would be celebrating the Old Testament festivals, holidays and Sabbath days. I don't think Paul would object to the historic church calendar that emphasizes certain Scripture reading themes. In fact, I think the modern church could use more of the historic church calendar and have certain topics and emphases at specific times of the year. But Paul would object to any faith being put in the ability of those practices to earn any special grace from God. The grace of God comes by faith not by anything that we do.

v. 11 – Paul feared for the Galatians because they were playing with fire. They weren't just considering a preference of worship style or some optional issue. They were tampering with the basic means for entrance into the kingdom of God, which is only by faith. The Galatians and the circumcision party were trying to change the rules, rules that God Himself had set and revealed to Paul. They were actually considering a departure from faith in Christ, which meant a departure from Christianity.

v. 12 – Paul had invested a lot in the Galatians. If the position of the circumcision party won the day, Paul knew that his work was over. So he pleaded and begged the Galatians

to return to what he had explained to them. Paul now transitioned from biblical arguments to the emotions and love of his relationship with them as their spiritual father. Paul wasn't trying to save his ministry or his network of relationships so he could brag about his work and influence. Paul knew that the Galatians were tampering with eternal things, things that could severely impair God's work through him.

There are times when you must fight to maintain or advance what God has given you. Paul "came out swinging" on this important issue. Do you need to do the same with something God has given you? Remember these admonitions:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force" (Matthew 11:12 NAS).

Day Twenty

13 As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.

14 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 What has happened to all your joy? 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?

vs. 13&14 – What was Paul's mysterious illness? And what were the conditions that brought him to this region? Luke, the writer of Acts, did not mention this illness. And something must have happened just prior to Paul's team arriving here that caused John Mark to abandon the team and return to Jerusalem (see Acts 13:13). This departure later caused so much friction between Saul and Barnabas that they parted ways when Barnabas wanted John Mark to rejoin the missions team (see Acts 15:36-41).

The work of the church continues in spite of our human condition—sickness, disagreements, weakness and sin. Many idealistic people have started to serve the Lord, believing that their generation, their message or their grace and zeal would overcome the problems that have plagued every generation that has tried to serve God. But the problem with every movement is "us;" we bear our sin and frailty with us wherever we go.

Some experts believe that Paul's weakness was malaria, a reoccurring, debilitating illness. Others conjecture that Paul had a problem with his eyes, since he makes the strange statement in verse 15 that the Galatians would have torn out their eyes for him.

Whatever it was, God used it to cause Paul to stop and preach in an area that perhaps wasn't on his original list. If you look hard enough, you can see the hand of God in all your circumstances.

vs. 15&16 – Relationships are important in the body of Christ. Paul was trying to use the bonds of love that were forged during his first visit to bring the Galatians back to the truth. But notice how Paul tried to *influence* and not *control* the Galatians. The decision of what to believe was ultimately theirs. He did not pressure them beyond the arguments and the stated facts of how he first came to them. His appeals were strong, but were also contained in a letter. The Galatians could have ignored the letter or torn it up. One leader could have confiscated it or refused to read it. A lot could have gone wrong with sending this letter and many believe it was Paul's first epistle. I think Paul applied a principle he explained in another epistle that other church leaders would do well to imitate:

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul-- an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus--I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him-- who is my very heart-- back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced (Philemon 1:8-14).

Paul made every effort to convince the Galatians without controlling the Galatians. That was truly a spiritual approach and would be a novel one for some current church leaders.

Day Twenty-one

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 be zealous for them.

18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and 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!

21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

vs. 17&18 – Again, Paul pulled no punches in appealing to the Galatian churches. He exposed the motives of the circumcision party in trying to “win them over” and alienating them from Paul. The Galatians must have been a very intense people. They took exceptional care of Paul while he was sick. Then they gave themselves to obey Paul's gospel. But now they were transferring their zeal to someone else. Paul wanted them to be zealous to more than him or another religious party. He wanted them to be zealous for

the truth! That is the goal of any leader—that his or her people would stand for what is right whether the leader is present or not.

It is much better leadership to connect people to a cause or idea than to the charisma or personality of the leader. The weakness of the American church in particular is its infatuation with the leader.

v. 19&20 – This matter was so urgent that Paul could not wait to take care of it in person. He had to send a letter and a letter and its tone can always be misinterpreted. But Paul took that risk because the stakes were high and the matter urgent.

Paul did refer to the Galatians as children and in the faith they were. But that was not to control them, but to identify and clarify his role as their father. And Paul was going through much pain and anguish as he faced their potential defection to a rival group. I think of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (2 Corinthians 11:28-29).

This was one mark of his role as an apostle. Paul was not building a network that bore his or some other catchy name. He was working with churches and fighting to preserve them from wolves and the devil. That brought tremendous pressure into his life. You can only imagine how he agonized over his work, work from which he was separated by distance and the necessity to advance into new areas. This is the model that all apostles should follow. Instead I fear that modern apostles are building their own kingdoms that are well-funded and controlled by personalities and their families. This is not the model that Paul established.

v. 21 – Paul now left his appeal based on their relationships and returned to his appeal based on the nature of the Mosaic Law. Do you realize we are almost two-thirds of the way through this letter and the theme is still the same? Whereas Paul’s other letters cover a variety of topics, this letter was singular in focus. That indicates how urgent this issue was in Paul’s mind.

I remember seeing a sign in front of a church one time and it said, “It does matter what you believe.” This would be a good summary for this letter. What you believe determines what you do. If you believe that God heals the sick, you will pray for the sick. If you don’t, then you won’t pray for a healing miracle.

What do you believe? Do you know? Can you articulate it? Do you have opinions about God, or do you have a solid foundation of truth? Is your knowledge of God growing along with your experience in God? Are the truths you know finding their expression in what you do on a daily basis? I hope that you will see the importance of holding the correct understanding of God and its importance and impact on your lifestyle and behavior.