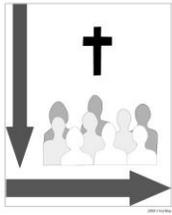


Week Forty-six: Kingdom Liberty - Galatians 2:11-21; 4:1-7, 21-31; 5:16-25



Overview

Old Testament stories lay the foundation for New Testament truths. Paul states, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, so that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Paul often refers to the Old Testament stories in his epistles as he exhorts, encourages and instructs believers in their walk with God. One such epistle, Galatians, addresses the problem of legalism in the early church. He uses the story of Abraham to teach the truth about the law, righteousness, and sanctification.

This lesson focuses Paul’s use of the Abrahamic story to the believers at Galatia.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will understand that neither salvation nor maturation is obtained by keeping the law but by receiving the promise of salvation by faith and the promise of the Spirit by faith.

Key Truths

Righteousness before God has always been a faith-based righteousness—not a lawkeeping righteousness.

The Law was given to prevent man from total self-destruction and to prepare him for salvation, but the law couldn’t deliver him from sin or mature him once saved.

Old Testament stories reveal that the law never produced righteousness in the heart of man. In the same way, keeping the Law cannot produce righteousness in the heart of any believer.

The Spirit fulfills the righteous demands of the law by saving and maturing those who trust in Christ.

Lesson Outline

The church at Antioch commissions its first mission team, Paul and Barnabas. Their mission trip, and subsequent trips, begin fulfilling the latter portion of Jesus' command in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

As the gospel spreads, so does heresy. Confusion over faith and the role of the Law grows as some Jewish teachers teach Gentile converts that they must embrace both the Law and circumcision. These young believers are tempted to desert the real gospel and embrace a false gospel that adds works to faith. Even Peter is caught up in this deception. He acts the hypocrite by behaving one way when he is with Gentile believers and another when with Jewish background believers. Paul responds to the confusion brought on by such teaching and behavior by writing a letter to the Galatians to clarify the role of the Law and faith in a believer's life.

1. Problem of Legalism - Galatians 2:11-21

Peter and Barnabas' behavior distorts the gospel message by combining law-keeping with "grace through faith" salvation (Eph. 2:8). Paul corrects this distortion by declaring, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal. 2:16).

Paul teaches that, because he is unable to please God, he must die, and that Christ's life is the only life that pleases God. People cannot please God by walking in the flesh; faith in Christ alone pleases God and makes humans acceptable to God. He states this truth, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (2:20).

2. Powerlessness of Legalism - Galatians 3:3, 10, 21

Paul paints a dismal picture of legalism in chapter 3. He says those who follow legalism are "bewitched" (3:1), that they did not receive the Spirit by the works of the law but by the hearing of faith (3:2), and that God does not do mighty works by legalism but by the Spirit (3:5).

He points out the powerlessness of legalism in three simple truths:

- Legalism replaces the work of the Spirit who began the believer's salvation: "Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (3:3)
- Legalism places every person under the curse of the law, for those under the law must fulfill the entire law, even though the law cannot justify anyone (3:10-12)
- Legalism fails because it cannot give people what they need most—life (3:21)

3. Pictures of Legalism and Faith - Galatians 4:1-7; 21-31

- *An heir under the tutelage of a slave (4:1-7)*

Paul uses an example of the temporary oversight of an heir (from age of 6-18) by a slave. Just as these special slaves were given oversight of the heirs to prepare them for sonship, so the law provided oversight to the Jewish people until the coming of Christ. Believers who return to law-keeping prefer the continual directives of the appointed slave over the freedom of sonship. Why would any heir return to the former days of oversight by slavery?

Commenting on this truth, John MacArthur states, "Paul is saying that before Christ came into the world, Jews were under the guardianship of the written law. Gentiles were also under the guardianship of the law of conscience. So all men were like children. There was a potential inheritance; there was a coming salvation; there was also an available promise; but they were not yet mature sons who could inherit it. This is true also of any person today who is living without Jesus Christ. He is living subject to God's laws. He is an infant subject to that law and the only thing that will make him a mature son able to receive the promised inheritance is to come in faith to Christ."¹ Living under the law after trusting Christ is like being treated as a minor still under guardianship rather than as a mature son.

- *Two Women (4:21-31)*

Paul further illustrates the difference between those under the law of human effort (the slave, Hagar, and her son, Ishmael) and those under the promise by faith (the legal wife, Sarah, and her son, Isaac). Using these two women demonstrates that Paul taught the stories of the patriarchs to the Galatians during his early stay among them.

After twenty-five years of waiting, **Sarah** experienced a supernatural renewing of her own womb and received the son that God had promised her and Abraham. Isaac represents God's supernatural activity on the couple's behalf. Sarah's birth of Isaac pictures spiritual regeneration.

Hagar's child was produced through human effort, unbelief, and sinful scheming; there was nothing supernatural about the birth of Ishmael. Ishmael represents the best the flesh can accomplish. Hagar's birth of Ishmael represents unceasing servitude to the law.

The birth of Isaac dashed any hopes that Ishmael would inherit Abraham's blessing. So too, the birth of Christ dashes the hopes of those who think they will inherit the kingdom of God through human merit or effort. Enmity has always existed between those who seek to inherit through human effort (law-keeping) and those who receive the promise of both salvation and sanctification by faith.

3. Prevention of Legalism - Galatians 5:16-25

The flesh and its sins cannot be overcome or crucified by keeping the law. Paul offers the only solution: "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (5:16). Only the indwelling Spirit overcomes the sins of the flesh and produces the righteousness which God loves and requires—"Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (5:22-23). Mature believers

¹ John F. MacArthur, *Liberated For Life* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1975), 69.

appropriate the truth that, when Christ died, they died; when Christ was buried, they were buried; when Christ rose from the dead, they too, rose from the dead. Resting in that truth produces peace, not striving. Resting in that truth mirrors the faith of Abraham, who received the son of promise not through self-effort, but through the activity of God on his behalf. The great lesson of the fruit of the Spirit teaches that when the fruit of the Spirit is not present in our lives, we are not to pray for that fruit (i.e., love, patience, or peace), but rather to discover how we have grieved the Spirit. When the Spirit controls us, we will (super)naturally produce His fruit in every situation. When He is not in control, the issue is never the fruit, but the root.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption? *Just as human effort (Ishmael's birth) did not inherit the promises given to Abraham, so those who attempt to keep the law do not inherit sonship. Furthermore, law-keeping doesn't bring the sons of God to maturity.*

The Law cannot save, nor can it keep those who have trusted in Christ from sinning. The Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer to prevent him from sinning. If the law can't save a believer, neither can it mature a believer.

Summary

God speaks through Old Testament stories to teach New Testament truths; therefore, believers must know the Old Testament stories.

God acts to protect His people from the self-destruction, spiritual destruction, and social destruction of sin by giving them laws to guard their behavior and to prepare them for the need of a Redeemer.

God reveals the powerlessness of the Law to save or to sanctify; He also reveals the tendency of the human heart to rely on things other than Christ alone for righteousness.

Discussion Questions

Paul bases his discussion on Abraham and Isaac. Suppose Abraham had rejected God's ram and killed Isaac—would God have raised Isaac up? Can we reject God's provision and still see Him fulfill His promises?

Why do believers often “pray for patience”? What does lack of patience toward people actually reveal?

Why is it so tempting to base our righteousness on rules rather than the relationship?