

Let's Worship God

24th-29th June 2024
Galatians



Galatians

Monday - Galatians 4:21-23 - The Law Has Never Taught Salvation By Law-Keeping

The false teachers in Galatia were using the Old Testament to try and argue for salvation by works. Paul refuses to accept their argument that the Old Testament taught salvation by works. Paul's argument in these verses is quite technical. We may struggle to follow it all. But if you can at least get the big picture of what he's saying, it will help you understand the whole Bible better.

Paul starts in v21 by addressing those who desire to be under the law. There's a lot of confusion about what this phrase 'under the law' means. That's especially true when Paul uses it in Romans 6 and says we're not under law, but under grace. So every time we come across this phrase, we need to be really clear about what it means. To be 'under law' isn't a description of someone who thinks the law still defines God's standards. God doesn't change, and his standards don't change. Instead, to be under law describes someone who is under the law as a way of trying to earn salvation. That's clear from everything we know about the false teachers in Galatia. And it's especially clear in Romans 6:15, where Paul immediately goes on to deal with the objection: 'Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? (In other words: 'if we don't have to keep the law to get to Heaven, can we live however we want?'). He answers: 'By no means!'

So in v21 here in Galatians, Paul is saying - 'You who desire to be under the law. You who think that Jesus isn't enough to get to Heaven. You who think you have to be circumcised and perfectly obey God. Have you actually listened to what the law says!' (Paul is using the word 'law' here in the wider sense as referring to God's word in general). Why does he use the example of Abraham? To show that attempts to earn our way to the promises of God by human effort have always failed.

Paul is making the point, in v. 23, that Ishmael was born according to the flesh, and Isaac was born through the promise. Ishmael was born as an attempt to get what God had promised by human effort. Isaac was born as evidence that getting what God had promised is only possible by faith in him. Do you see the connection with the false teachers in Galatia? They believed in the same promises of God that Paul did - that Heaven was on offer. But they weren't content to trust in the promises of God in order to get there. Instead, they wanted to get there through human effort. So they added in circumcision and law-keeping.

Questions

1. What does it mean to be under the law?
2. What do Isaac and Ishmael symbolise?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that we would trust in the promises of God instead of trying to earn them.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

Praise: Psalm 80 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Tuesday - Galatians 4:24-26 - The Law Teaches Justification By Faith

Why is Hagar is compared to Mount Sinai in v25? Sinai was where the 10 commandments were given. At the time of Moses, God had renewed his covenant with his people. So did this covenant say that if they obeyed the 10 commandments, they would get to Heaven? No! It was a promise of spiritual life through faith in Jesus. All those sacrifices and offerings and priests that were put in place under Moses - God didn't give them as a way for sinners to deal with their own sin! He gave them to point forward to Jesus. But very few of the people in Moses' day put their faith in God's promises. Instead, they turned the law into a way of trying to get right with God. It became a form of slavery.

Paul says of the Jews of his day: 'Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works' (Romans 9:31-32). Those last few words are vital. What explains Israel's failure? Not God's covenant. But their own lack of faith. They 'did not succeed in reaching that law (or to put it another way - they did not succeed in reaching the righteousness the law pointed towards)...because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works'. AS IF it were based on works. God's promises never offer righteousness by works. But that's what the people turned them into. We see the sad fruit of this in the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They firmly believed that they could get right with God by their own efforts. But the promise to Abraham didn't come about through Ishmael. And the promise to Moses didn't come about through law-keeping.

What happens to Hagar as a result of this attempt to gain what God has promised through human effort? In Genesis 21 she's left wandering in the wilderness. What happens to the nation of Israel as a result of their attempt to gain what God has promised through human effort? Failure to gain what was promised. The implication for the Galatian Christians is clear. Any attempts to earn God's promises by human effort rather than faith end in disaster.

Questions

1. Why did God give Israel the sacrifices and ceremonies?
2. What happened in the Old Testament when people tried to earn God's promises?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that we would trust in God's promises.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

Praise: Psalm 81 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Wednesday - Galatians 4:25-31 - There Have Always Been Two Types of People

Paul applies the Hagar story to his own day in v. 25. She corresponds to first century Judaism, that had rejected Jesus Christ. But the believing Galatians belong to what Paul describes in v. 26 as 'the Jerusalem above'. In v27 he quotes from Isaiah. Right there, in the Old Testament, there was a description of two Jerusalems. There is the Jerusalem that has been rejected for her sins. But there's also a future Jerusalem, which is described in Isaiah as a mother. And that future Jerusalem will be marked out by the work of God's Spirit. The present Jerusalem is the same one that was condemned in Isaiah 30:1 by God for making plans, but not by his Spirit. But the Jerusalem from above is given the promise in Isaiah 44:3 that God will pour out his Spirit on her.

Yet that doesn't mean that no-one in the Old Testament had the Holy Spirit or was part of the Jerusalem above. Yes, many of them tried to earn God's favour by law-keeping and proved themselves to be part of the earthly Jerusalem. But some didn't. There have always been those who pursue God's favour by their own efforts, but there have also always been those who truly knew God's Spirit working in them.

In v29 we're reminded that Isaac was born according to the Spirit. And how did the one born according to the flesh treat the one born according to the Spirit? Ishmael persecuted Isaac. At every stage in the history of the world there will be conflict between those who are God's people, and those who aren't. Often, the most intense persecution will come from those who're outwardly religious — but who don't have the Holy Spirit inside them. Those who believe that they're saved by their own works tend to persecute and oppose those who believe that they're saved by grace. In v30 Paul tells the Galatians what to do with the false teachers. Cast them out. Don't listen to them. You aren't children of the slave, but of the free woman.

The struggles you face as a Christian are part of a bigger battle, and one in which victory is certain. In Isaiah, the barren Sarah, giving birth at last, becomes a picture of the church. At times it may look like the church of Jesus Christ is on life-support. But in the end, the picture will be glorious. So keep going. Yes, it's a tough slog now. But one day, you'll rejoice. You're on the winning side. Unimaginable joy is within touching distance. So keep going. The inheritance is yours.

Questions

1. What two types of people have there always been?
2. What glorious promises do we have?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for the glorious promises we have.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

Praise: Psalm 82 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Thursday - Galatians 5:1-5 - Don't Give Up Your Freedom

The Galatians were Gentiles who had come from paganism. But Paul's argument in Galatians is that if they accept circumcision — if they accept Jewish rituals — they'll in effect be going back to paganism. Because it will be Christ-less religion. That's how serious the issues here are.

Paul says in v2 that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. He was writing to people who had accepted Jesus — who had believed in him — but who thought that by himself he wasn't enough. If you live as if your standing before God is based on your performance, then all that Jesus has done on the cross will be no good to you. Faith and works are like oil and water. They just don't mix. They're completely separate ways of trying to get right with God.

Paul goes on to say in v3: 'I testify to every man who accepts circumcision that he's obligated to keep the whole law'. He's asking: do you really know what you're letting yourself in for? If you go down that road of law-keeping, you're going to have to walk down it all the way to the end. If you're going to rely on your works to please God, then you're going to have to keep the whole law. That's something you just can't do.

In v4, he couldn't be any more clear as to what's at stake. To seek to be justified by the law is to be severed from Christ. It's not that a true Christian can lose their salvation — the Bible makes it clear that they can't. But there are many who seem for all the world to be Christians who then do things which show that they aren't. That's what Paul's talking about here. If you persist in this, it will show that you were never a true believer to begin with.

In v5 Paul says that the righteousness of law-keeping and the righteousness of faith are fundamentally different. If you ask someone who believes in salvation by works whether they'll be good enough to spend eternity in Heaven, they'll point to the things that they've done, and compare themselves to others. If you ask someone who believes in salvation by faith whether they'll be good enough to spend eternity in Heaven, they'll say no! Their hope is that they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Questions

1. Why would Christ be no advantage to those who accept circumcision?
2. What is the difference between the righteousness of law-keeping and of faith.

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks that we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

Praise: Psalm 83 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Friday - Galatians 5:6-10 - A Little Leaven

Paul's next argument in v6 is that the real mark of a Christian is faith working through love - not circumcision. Being a Christian is first and foremost about loving God and loving his people. If someone doesn't show love for the other people in their church in concrete ways, then it throws their claim of salvation into doubt. Jesus said in John 13:35 "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The Apostle John tells us in 1 John 3:14: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death." Paul says: I don't care if you have on your body that marks of circumcision. I care whether you have in your life the mark of love for other Christians.

Paul's next argument, in v7, is that they were running well. Again, he's not speaking to people who aren't Christians. He's speaking to people who have been following Jesus but are tailing off.

In v8 he says: 'this persuasion is not from him who calls you'. That's a very important line. Paul there shows that it's possible to be persuaded about something - but still be wrong. It's not enough to be sincere — it's possible to be sincerely wrong. The question isn't are you persuaded that what you're doing is right. But — does that persuasion come from God?

V9 is just a few words, but is profound. 'A little leaven leavens the whole lump'. A little false teaching will soon destroy a church. Churches today that have embraced homosexuality haven't just woken up one day and accepted it. For decades they've been compromising on the inspiration of the Bible, miracles, the virgin birth, prophecy, creation, female ordination. And once you go down that road, history says that very few ever come back. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Tolerating sin, whether in our own lives, in a congregation, or in a denomination is deadly. Because it soon spreads.

In v10 Paul is again as gentle as he can be towards the Galatians. But he reminds them that false teaching will bring punishment. He's talking here about the false teachers themselves — but the implication is that those who embrace it will also face punishment.

Questions

1. What is the mark of a Christian?
2. What is the danger of tolerating sin?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that we would show love to our brothers and sisters in Christ.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

Praise: Psalm 84 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Saturday - Galatians 5:11-12 - Speaking the Truth

In v11 Paul deals with an accusation. Apparently, the false teachers were spreading the message that he himself taught circumcision. This seems to be a reference to the fact that Paul had circumcised Timothy in Acts 16. But that was a totally different situation. That was so that he wouldn't offend the unbelieving Jews that he and Paul were trying to witness to. It had no religious significance.

Paul wasn't teaching what the false teachers were teaching. Yes, he had once taught circumcision as a way of acceptance before God. But that was before he was converted. He isn't still teaching it. And the proof is that he's being persecuted for it. If a preacher's message is universally popular, it's a pretty clear sign that he has abandoned the Bible. It's not that we as Christians are to go out of our way to be awkward or cantankerous — sadly some Christians seem to take a perverse delight in it. But if we stick to God's Word, we will be persecuted. As v11 goes on to say: the cross is offensive. Those who aren't Christians will find the message of the cross offensive, and they'll persecute you. And if you are persecuted, then take comfort from the words of Jesus: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake'.

Paul ends in v12 with one of his strongest outbursts in all of his letters. Paul's harshest words are directed not at those outside the church, but at those inside the church pushing false doctrine and trying to lead God's people astray. And in doing this, he's simply following his Saviour. Jesus said: 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea'. Why does Paul speak so strongly? Because he loves the Galatian believers who're in danger of being led astray. Why does Jesus speak so strongly? Because he loves his people so much.

Praise God that he loved the Galatians so much that he sent them an Apostle who wasn't just going to sit back and watch as they committed spiritual suicide. And praise him that even when his word seems harsh — or the rebukes of his people are hard to take, it's far more loving than saying nothing and leaving us to walk away from the faith.

Questions

1. What will happen as we follow Christ?
2. Why does Paul speak so strongly?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the preaching and hearing of God's Word tomorrow.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

Praise: Psalm 85 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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