

“Children of the Bondwoman”
(Galatians 4:21-31)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered Paul’s appeal to the Galatians on four levels: First, he said don’t let everything that God has done for you have been for nothing.
 - a. He sent His messengers to preach the Gospel to you.
 - b. He gave you His Holy Spirit to change your heart so that you could believe.
 - c. He set you free from your slavery to things that are not gods.
 - d. He brought you into the liberty, the freedom, of the Gospel, of eternal life in Jesus Christ.
 - e. He made you the heirs of His kingdom.
 - f. He did all of this through Jesus Christ.
 - g. If you turn from this now and return to your former way of living – which is what they would do even if they turned to the blend of Judaism and Christianity – all that had been done for them would have been for nothing.

2. Second, Paul appealed to them on the basis of the love he demonstrated for them.
 - a. He begged them to consider that he had abandoned Judaism and had received the way of salvation he was preaching to them.
 - b. He urged them to return, to become again as he now was.
 - c. They had not offended him: he was more concerned for their relationship with Christ.
 - d. And so as the one who had through the Gospel become their father, he pleaded with them as his own children, characterizing himself even as a mother, who was again in labor until they are brought into conformity with Christ.
 - e. He wanted them to be saved, and he wanted that salvation to be demonstrated in their lives.

3. Third, he pleaded with them on the basis of their love for him.
 - a. When he came to them because of an illness, they didn’t despise or reject him, but received him as an angel, as Jesus Christ Himself.
 - b. They were blessed by His ministry; they enjoyed the light of God’s truth that he ministered to them.
 - c. They would have gladly given Paul whatever he needed to continue his ministry to them: even to the point of giving up their sight, if it might help him.
 - d. Why were they now rejecting the very truth they used to receive so eagerly from him?
 - e. Why were they now his enemies when his intentions toward them had not changed?

4. Finally, he pointed to the character of those who had deceived them.
 - a. Yes, they seemed to interested in them now, in their welfare, in their eternal salvation.
 - b. But they were only trying to make them dependent on themselves.
 - c. They weren't concerned about the Galatians, but their own interests.
 - d. On the basis of these four considerations, Paul was urging them to listen to what he had taught them and what he was now saying: hold fast to Christ and to Christ alone. Do not go back into the slavery of the Law.

B. Preview.

1. In our text today, Paul again urges the same thing again, but does so in still another way: by way of argument from an OT type.
 - a. He points to the account of Sarah and Hagar in the Old Testament.
 - b. He shows the parallelism that exists between their situations and that of the Jews and Christians in his day.
 - c. And through this, he exhorts them to continue to press forward to Christ and true freedom.

2. This morning, I want us to consider the characteristics of the children of Hagar, the bondwoman, what they are like, specifically:
 - a. First, that the children of the bondwoman are born and operate on the principle of the flesh.
 - b. Second, that the children of the bondwoman are enslaved to things that cannot save them.
 - c. Third, that the children of the bondwoman persecute those who are born of the Spirit.
 - d. And finally, that the children of the bondwoman will not be the heirs of the kingdom with those who trust in Christ.
 - e. Paul said these things were true of the unconverted Jews and the Judaizers who were accepting a half-way house between Christianity and Judaism.
 - f. The same things would be true of the Galatians, if they abandoned Christ.
 - g. It goes without saying, these things are also true of every unconverted person today.
 - h. This evening, we'll consider the characteristics of the children of the free woman.

II. Sermon.

- A. Before we begin, I want us to consider for a moment what Paul is doing here.
 1. He is not endorsing another method of biblical interpretation.
 - a. Philo of Alexandria, who lived from 20 BC to 40 AD, believed there were at least two levels of meaning in the Bible: the literal and allegorical.
 - (i) Both were not equal.
 - (ii) The literal was adapted to meet the everyday needs of men.
 - (iii) The allegorical, however, was the true meaning of Scripture, and none but the elite/initiated understood it.

- (iv) The problem with the allegorical method was twofold:
 - (a) It wasn't the correct way to understand the Scripture, because it doesn't have a hidden second meaning: there are two-fold fulfillments of prophecy, there are types and shadows in persons and events, but those are clearly explained in Scripture.
 - (b) Because it wasn't the correct way, interpretations often became ridiculous: there were no checks and balances.
- b. Sadly, there is a tendency to do a very similar thing in Reformed circles today:
 - (i) In the Historical Redemptive camp, many interpreters (not all) are searching the Scriptures – the OT in particular – to find the hidden/true meanings.
 - (ii) Followers of Harold Camping do the same when they treat the whole OT as a parable.
 - (iii) The events no longer have reference to what they report, but they point beyond themselves to something else: specifically Christ.
 - (iv) Abraham's washing the three visitors' feet becomes Christ's washing the feet of His disciples.
 - (v) Jacob's wrestling with the angel in prayer becomes Christ wrestling with His Father in prayer for the redemption of His people.
 - (vi) Now the Bible is a History of Redemption: it is the history of the outworking of God's plan to send His Son into the world: it is the unfolding of that plan through time, and it does contain many legitimate types.
 - (vii) But there are many in this camp that look for Christ in places where He doesn't appear, and turn everything that is similar to something Christ did do to a foreshadowing of what He would do.
 - (viii) The problem here again is the same with the allegorical interpretation of Philo:
 - (a) This isn't how God meant for us to interpret Scripture.
 - (b) There are no checks and balances.
 - (c) The only thing that keeps them going the right direction theologically, is that they are reading NT doctrine and events back into the OT.
 - (d) If they didn't do this, there's no telling where they would end up.
- 2. Paul here sees a legitimate analogy or type between the events depicted in Genesis with the situation that now exists between the Jews and the Christians.
 - a. He's not commending a new method of interpretation to us.
 - b. He's not saying that these events didn't actually take place.
 - c. But he is pointing out another meaning.
 - (i) The word "allegory" means to say something other than what the words actually mean.
 - (ii) History shows us that the rabbis also used this method.
 - (iii) Paul shows his own insight into understanding the analogies between the OT accounts and the NT realities.

- (iv) I believe we have to see this as a type, otherwise why would Paul be using it as an argument? If he was using it merely as an illustration of the truth he was already teaching them, it wouldn't have any compelling authority. But that is the way he uses it (see v. 21).
- (v) What then are the similarities that he draws between Hagar and Ishmael, and the Jews/Judaizers and those who followed them in those days?

B. First, that the children of the bondwoman are born and operate on the principle of the flesh.

1. He addresses those who had begun to follow the Judaizers and asks them this question: You want to be under the law? Why don't you listen to it?
 - a. The law, in this sense, is the Torah, containing the first five books of Moses.
 - b. The story of Abraham and his two sons comes from the first of those five books called Genesis.
 - (i) I'm sure you know the story, so I won't spend much time on it.
 - (ii) God promised Abraham a son, when he was old.
 - (iii) When Abraham thought God would fulfill this promise through one born in his house – Eliezer of Damascus – God said He would give him a child from his own body (Gen. 15:1-4).
 - (iv) When more time had passed and there was still no child, Sarah gave Abraham her Egyptian maid Hagar as a wife, thinking that through her child, the promise would be fulfilled (Gen. 16).
 - (v) But this wasn't His plan either: rather He would give Abraham a son through his wife Sarah (Gen. 17:19).
 - (vi) Ishmael was born according to the flesh, but Isaac according to the promise.
2. The first point Paul makes is that Jew/Judaizers are like Hagar in that they are relying on their own works, rather than the promise of God, to save them.
 - a. Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant, the one given from Mount Sinai (Gal. 4:25).
 - (i) At least as it was now after the coming of Christ.
 - (ii) We need to remember that it was a gracious covenant.
 - (iii) But after Christ came, it was set aside.
 - b. The reason Hagar represents this covenant is that Abraham tried to fulfill the promise of God through his own efforts with Hagar, rather than waiting on the fulfillment of God's promise.
 - (i) The Jews/Judaizers were relying, at least in some measure, on their own works to justify them.
 - (ii) They weren't simply trusting in the promises of God.

C. Second, the Jews/Judaizers (the children of the bondwoman) are like Hagar in that they are slaves.

1. Hagar was Sarah's slave:
 - a. Even after she became Abraham's wife, she was still Sarah's slave.

- b. This is why when Hagar despised Sarah when she was expecting a child, Abraham told her she could do whatever she wanted with her (Gen. 16:6).
 - 2. In the same way, those who are of the Law are also slaves.
 - a. They are slaves to a religion that is earthbound.
 - b. They are slaves of the Law to earn their own righteousness.
 - c. They are enslaved to a religion that can't save them.
 - d. They are in bondage to their sins.
 - D. Third, the Jews/Judaizers (children of the bondwoman) persecute those who are born of the Spirit.
 - 1. The child of Hagar, Ishmael, mocked Isaac.
 - a. When Isaac was weaned, Abraham made a large feast for him.
 - b. But when Ishmael saw it, he mocked Isaac, and Sarah saw it.
 - c. The one who was born of the flesh was persecuting the one born of the Spirit.
 - 2. This is what the Jews were doing to the Christians.
 - a. The Jews were Abraham's children, but his children according to the flesh, living according to the flesh.
 - b. In Paul's day, the Jews were persecuting Christians, those born according to the Spirit.
 - E. And finally, the Jew/Judaizers (children of the bondwoman) will not be the heirs of the kingdom with those who trust in Christ.
 - 1. The result of Ishmael's behavior was that he and his mother were cast out of the household of Abraham.
 - a. When Sarah saw that Ishmael had done, she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac" (Gen. 21:10).
 - b. Abraham was distressed, but the Lord said to him, "Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named" (v. 12).
 - c. The child of this bondwoman was not going to be an heir with the son of promise.
 - 2. And, of course, the same is true of her children.
 - a. The Jews/Judaizers would not inherit the kingdom.
 - b. Jesus said to them, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it" (Matt. 21:43).
 - c. He further said, "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:11-12).
- III. Application. What is the application of this passage?

- A. Paul is showing the Galatians what is down the road for them if they follow the Judaizers.
1. To follow them and rely at all on your works is to abandon grace and operate in the power of your flesh, which cannot save you.
 2. To follow them is to return to the slavery from which God set you free.
 3. To follow them will eventually so corrupt your soul as actually to make you persecutors of the church.
 4. And to follow them means you will not inherit the kingdom, but be cast out into the outer darkness.
- B. This is Paul's negative incentive to the Galatians, which we would do well to listen to.
1. We need to remember that we can't save ourselves; we're not good enough; we can't do anything to complete the work of Christ. We are debtors to God's mercy alone.
 2. If we try to work our way to heaven, we will make ourselves slaves to something that cannot save us and show that we never really been freed from our sins to begin with: especially the sin of pride, since we presume to think that we can do this.
 3. If we find in our hearts that we can abandon Christ for something that can't save us, it won't be long before we're going to find ourselves on the other side of the fence persecuting Christians and the faith we once said we believed and loved.
 4. Finally, if we choose to go down this road, we will not inherit the kingdom of God, but the lake of fire. To give up Christ is to give up everything.
 5. Don't abandon Christ, for anything, for anyone, for any new doctrine that claims to be the true Gospel as opposed to that which has been delivered once for all to the saints. Hold fast to Him.
 - a. How can we do this? In our own strength, we can't.
 - b. But we can do all things through Him who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).
 - c. Don't let go of Christ; don't stop trusting in Him; don't stop seeking Him.
 - d. And He will keep you safe.
 - e. This evening, we'll look at Paul's positive incentive: the glorious future of the children of the free woman. Amen.