

Kick the Old Woman Out

Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. Galatians 4:30

In Paul's instruction to cast out the bondwoman and her son, he is using an allegory, or figure, to express to us the importance of not allowing ourselves to be ensnared again in the bondage of the law. In order to understand fully the meaning of Paul's allegory, we must understand the historical event to which he refers and the situation that existed in the churches of Galatia, to whom he was writing.

The Trouble in Galatia

As Paul opened his letter to the Galatians, he wasted no time in identifying the problem that existed in the churches of Galatia.

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6,7

Notice that the gospel that was being preached in Galatia was not another gospel. That is, it did not deny the necessity of faith in Christ. It was however, a perversion of the true gospel of Christ in that it added something to faith in Christ. In getting to the heart of the Galatians' problem, in chapter 2, Paul refers to a meeting that he had with Peter and the other apostles and elders of Israel. The reason for that meeting is recorded in Acts 15 and reveals to us exactly how the gospel of Christ was being perverted.

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. Acts 15, 1,2

The teachers of the law in Judea were adding circumcision to the simple message of faith in Christ. They were using circumcision as a test of whether or not a person was truly saved.

Paul's first step in combating this error was to affirm his

authority, as the Apostle of the Gentiles, to speak authoritatively on the matter.

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:11,12

After meeting with Paul in Jerusalem the Jewish leaders agreed that Paul's message was the gospel to be preached in the Age of Grace and that circumcision had no place in that message. Paul gives his account of their agreement in Galatians 2.

But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Galatians 2:6-9

The book of Galatians was written by Paul to inform the churches of Galatia of the facts stated above. In so doing, Paul expanded his discussion of circumcision to include a discussion of the law in general.

For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Galatians 5:3

In fact, he expanded even beyond the bounds of the letter of the Mosaic Law to discuss all works of the flesh.

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Galatians 3:3

Paul's conclusion about circumcision therefore is applicable to all the commandments of the law, in fact to any work of the flesh.

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. . . . Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen

from grace. Galatians 5:2,4

This conclusion is very much in keeping with Paul's instructions to the church at Colossi.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Colossians 2:14-17

Sadly, the perversion that was so evident in Paul's day still persists in the Body of Christ. Today it may not take the form of circumcision, but there are many that would judge a person's salvation by their actions. Many today would say that if you haven't been obedient in following the Lord in baptism, they would question the reality of your profession of faith. Still others would warn that if you have not left the vices of alcohol and cigarettes behind you had better examine the sincerity of your faith. All of these admonitions are simply repeating the perversion of the gospel that was causing problems in Galatia.

Because the perversion of Galatia is still so prevalent today, it is very important for us to understand the allegory that Paul uses to combat it in his epistle to the Galatians.

As we have seen, the point that Paul is making goes beyond just circumcision and the law. Appropriately, the allegory that he cites is an event that occurred before the law was even given.

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. . . . Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. Galatians 4:21-24,28

The event that Paul refers to in his allegory is the birth of Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. These two men, their mothers, and the circumstances of their conception and birth demonstrate the distinction between law and grace.

The Free Woman and Her Son

In God's initial promise to Abraham, he had indicated that Abraham would be the father of a great nation.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: Genesis 12:2

As time progressed, and Abraham and Sarah remained childless, Abraham began to question whether God intended the promised nation to come through his *physical* seed. God responded by reaffirming His promise and making clear that the nation would be built through Abraham's *physical* descendants.

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram

in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. Genesis 15:1-4

This promise is reaffirmed again to Abraham in Genesis 17.

And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. Genesis 17:19

In Genesis 21 we read of the great event that marked the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah.

And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. Genesis 21:1-3

We should note here that the birth of Isaac was not supernatural in the sense that the birth of Christ was. Isaac was produced through a natural physical relationship between Abraham and Sarah. However, God had miraculously healed the barren and now aged womb of Sarah so that she could bear Isaac.

This then is the account of grace, an account that tells of God *giving* Abraham and Sarah a son as an act of his grace. The birth of Isaac was not the result of the fleshly efforts of Abraham and Sarah. Isaac was the result a supernatural act of God in fulfillment of a specific promise made to Abraham.

The Bond Woman and Her Son

Interwoven in Scripture with the above account of God's grace is also the account of man's unsuccessful efforts to impose his efforts into God's plan.

As Abraham and Sarah grew weary of waiting on God to fulfill His promise, Sarah came up with a plan to "help" God's program along.

Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. . . . And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. Genesis 16:1-3,15

In marked contrast to Isaac, Ishmael was the result of Abraham's own fleshly efforts. Ishmael was not a son of God's promise, but a son of Abraham's flesh.

It is informative to note Abraham's response when God told him that the promise would be passed on to Sarah's son, not Hagar's.

And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee! Genesis 17:15-18

Although the Bible presents Abraham as a man of great faith, it is clear that in this instance his faith gave way to his desire to see the work of his flesh accepted by God. Abraham's fleshly plea represents the cry of everyone who has ever supposed that their "good" works can gain them acceptance before God.

The disastrous results of relying on the flesh can be seen in God's granting of Abraham's request concerning Ishmael.

And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. Genesis 17:20,21

Although God's covenant would be confirmed with Isaac, God did promise that he would also make Ishmael a great nation. The descendants of Ishmael are the Arab nations of the Middle East. These nations are in constant conflict with Israel, the descendants of Isaac. Countless millions of people have died, and the world stands constantly on the brink of war, because of Abraham's sin of producing a son of his own flesh and his desire to see that son exalted in the earth.

This then is the account of the law, an account that tells of Abraham producing a son as an act of his flesh. The birth of Ishmael was not the result of God's grace. It was the fleshly effort of Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael was the result of Abraham trying to have his efforts accepted by God.

Cast Out the Bond Woman and Her Son

As Paul closes out his allegory in Galatians 4 he points out the fact that the son of the bond woman, the law, will always persecute the son of the free woman, grace.

But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Galatians 4:29

The account in Genesis indicates that both Hagar and Ishmael had a desire to reject and persecute what God accomplished through Sarah and Isaac.

And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD

judge between me and thee. Genesis 16:4,5

No doubt, Hagar believed that as the woman carrying Abraham's descendant, she had the right to be his wife and serve as the mistress of the house.

And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Genesis 21:8,9

Ishmael mocked Isaac because as the eldest son of Abraham he believed that it was his place to be Abraham's heir. Ishmael probably lamented that such a fuss was being made over the newly weaned Isaac, when he was already serving as a young man in his father's house.

The only remedy for this situation, in Abraham's day and in our day, is to get rid of the bond woman and her son, the law, and go forward in God's grace as the sons of the free woman.

Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. Genesis 21:10

Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. Galatians 4:30-31

Paul is imploring the Galatians, who were so beset by the legalistic perversion of the gospel of grace, to solve their problem by simply casting out the law. In casting out the law, the Galatians were not only to cast out the detailed commandments and requirements of Moses, they were to reject any system that taught that their flesh could be made pleasing to God and could perform works that He will accept. In fact Paul informed that Galatians that the only thing that God could do to make their flesh acceptable was to kill it.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

Once the flesh is crucified, the law has no more hold on us. We can stand in the glorious liberty of Jesus Christ.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Galatians 5:1

Freedom!!!

The subtle perversion of judging our standing before God based on the actions of our flesh will lead only to defeat and discouragement in our Christian walk. In order to be truly free to enjoy our salvation and rest completely in who we are in Christ, we must follow Paul's admonition to the Galatians and remove the law from our lives. We must follow the lead of that great man of faith, Abraham and "cast out the bond woman and her son"!

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