

Galatians 4v21-31

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to Galatians 4. Galatians 4, if you've got a Black Church Bible, it's on page 974.! We're looking at verses 21 to 31. Yo mama jokes. Do you know yo mama jokes? A yo mama joke is a form of humour involving a verbal disparaging of one's mother. Used as an insult, yo mama preys on widespread sentiments of parental respect. Suggestions of promiscuity and obesity are common in the yo mama jokes. Compared to other types of insults, yo mama insults are especially likely to incite violence. In non-American areas, the association can be seen with juvenile culture culturally. Wikipedia. Yo mama jokes. I think you've got a yo mama passage in chapter 4 of Galatians verses 21 to 31. That is probably the last bit of lightness you've got for another 25 to 30 minutes.

All right? Three points all beginning with I. The inheritance grace gives. Sometimes people will look at someone and they'll say, oh he's just like his mum. Just like his mum. He's his mother's son, all right? And in some ways that is what Paul is saying to the Christians in Galatia. They're their mother's sons. The matriarch was Sarah. What has amazed me this week in studying this is Paul expects the Galatians in the New Testament to know their Old Testament very, very well. He expects you and I to know our Bibles. And so Galatians is full of illusions pointing back. Sarah, who was she? She was Abraham's wife. And so we see that believers in the Lord Jesus are all Sarah's sons and daughters.

Now notice how Paul starts his argument in verse 21. It's pretty sharp, isn't it? Verse 21, the false teachers in Galatia, they seem to want to embrace life fully under the kind of complex of the law of Moses. That to be accepted by God, it's necessary to keep all the laws of Moses.

And so Paul says to them rather sternly, tell me, you who want to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? Remember, the Jewish people divide the Hebrew scriptures into three sections. The law, the first five books of the Bible, the prophets, and the writings. The law and the Torah. And it refers not just to the legal code or to case law, but the whole of the first five books of the Old Testament, including the narrative sections, including the story of Adam and Eve and Noah.

[4 : 38] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

And then there's the other way of life, which is resting on God's promises and God's supernatural provision of free grace.

All of us here, sitting here before me, we are all sons and daughters of one of these two women. We are all either children of the flesh or children of the promise.

[6 : 18] Children of works, we could say, where you're trying your best, you're doing your hardest, or children of grace. Children of the law and more children of the gospel. That's the pattern.

That's his argument in a nutshell. Now let's look a little bit more closely at it. These women, he says in verse 23, represent two covenants. A covenant is God, how God relates to us.

That is to say, it reflects two possible ways of approaching God's covenant. The first law, the first approach to God's covenant, represented by those people, those legalists, with whom Paul is kind of locked in this argument, they want you to go to Sinai, to the law of Moses.

Now this is a little bit tricky, but hang with me for a moment, alright? We need to see that Paul isn't actually saying that the Mosaic covenant, the law given to Moses, is actually just all about law.

That Moses is offering salvation to the people of Israel and us on the basis of our obedience. He's not saying that. He's not saying that. But he is saying, this is how the false teachers in Galatia taught Moses.

[7 : 36] And they distort Moses. It's a bit like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, when he says about the teachers of his day, he says, you have heard it said, he says to them.

He's not kind of sweeping away the law, but he's saying, the teachers in our day, they've changed, they've distorted the law. And that's what Paul is saying here.

He's saying these people that have come to Galatia, it's not that there's a problem with Moses, but the way they've taught it, there's a massive problem. They turn it into a covenant of works. They turn it into a way of self-salvation, which it was never intended to be.

So in the earlier sermon, we saw from 217 to 21, you remember, we used an illustration, it's not original to me, but that of a railway line on a ladder. So do you remember that?

The law of Moses, God's law is meant to be a railway line along the engine of our Christian lives travel. And the engine is powered by God's free grace alone.

[8 : 38] And the law is the rail tracks, which show us the path of a life which is honouring to the law. God's law is not meant to be a means of salvation.

God's law is meant to provide direction in our life and guidance that we gladly take. Having been saved already. So you remember the Ten Commandments? What's the beginning of the Ten Commandments?

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, who redeemed you from the house of slavery. And it is the law of God that we use as our paths of obedience, the tracks on which our lives run.

But it was never meant to be, and it was never should be, a ladder up to God. But they took the railway line of God's law, and they turned it up.

And so they made it something that they were trying to climb up to God. And they sought to use the law in a way that it was never meant to be, or ever really is possible. A means to climb up to God by our own strength.

[9 : 43] By our good works and by our efforts. One good work at a time. Trying desperately to get to God. And that's how the false teachers were using the law of Moses.

And the covenant at Mount Sinai. But as persuasive as the legalists make this appear to the Galatian church, Paul says, what is it?

It's life according to the flesh. In fact, verse 25, he says, all this approach can ever do is reduce your life to slavery. You will end up resembling your mother, Hagar.

She provides a child for Abraham without regard to the promises of God. She takes things into her own hands. And instead of trusting the Lord, what is the consequence?

Slavery. Everyone who uses God's law in this way ends up in bondage. So Hagar, she models the fleshly approach to you and I.

[10 : 48] That's how the legalists understood Mount Sinai and the Mosaic law. As a way of self-salvation. Do this, do that, do this, do that. By the power of fleshly obedience.

You'll notice in verse 25 that in Paul's contemporary situation, that approach relating to God, it's embodied in this earthly city of Jerusalem.

He uses another picture. The home, the headquarters of global Judaism. Which though it tried to keep the law for justification in the sight of God, it just resulted in slavery.

But Paul says there's another approach. There's a different approach to relating to God. And that is represented by Sarah and her son Isaac. One, a relationship that's not entered by law, by law keeping.

But a relationship that's entered into by God's free, undeserving grace. Held out in the promise of the good news of the Lord Jesus. As if Hagar is the symbol of legalism, represented by earthly Jerusalem.

[12 : 00] Then Paul says in verse 26, Sarah is the mother of all who trust in the promise of God's grace in Jesus Christ. And that's represented by, not the Jerusalem below, but the Jerusalem above.

And she is free, she's not in bondage. She's our mother. So verse 27. You'll notice Paul takes that pattern and it's repeated again, much later on in the story, in Israel's own life.

And he quotes from Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 54. Can you see that in verse 27? And he speaks to the nation of Israel and he says, Rejoice, O barren one, who does not bear, break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour, for the child of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.

Isaiah, looking back to Isaac and to Ishmael. And Paul highlights, doesn't he, from Isaiah, the same pattern of God's undeserved favour. It's grace, not works.

It's promise, not flesh. It's gospel, not law. Just like the barren Sarah. The apparent barren remnant of Israel.

[13 : 10] That people of God so beleaguered in Israel's time, they'll one day bear more children by the supernatural work of God than the one who has a husband ever could by natural means.

The children of promise will multiply as true sons and daughters of Abraham all over the world as they come to trust the promise of the gospel.

It's complex, isn't it? And I've given you pretty much raw meat to chew on this morning. But despite the complexity of the argument, it's really densely packed, it takes a bit of untangling, but the point is actually really simple, isn't it?

He's asking you, whose child are you? Who is your mother? Who's your mamma? Is your mother this morning Hagar or Sarah?

Is it Sinai or Calvary? Is it Moses or Christ? Is it law or is it the gospel? Is it the flesh or is it the promise?

[14:19] And if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning, on the basis of the promise of grace alone, you are the child of the new Jerusalem.

You are born like Isaac. Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God. And you are born from above, as Jesus told Nicodemus, he must be.

Do you remember? You are a child of the Jerusalem above. And that's why the citation, that's why the reference from Isaiah 54 is so important and so appropriate, because it begins with a summons to joy.

If you are born from above, regardless of your earthly circumstances this morning, you have the best reason for joy. And so he says, rejoice.

And only the sons of the free woman, the heirs of the Jerusalem above, have grounds for lasting joy. Because we can rejoice this morning, despite our circumstances, because we're not in bondage.

[15:31] And we're not in slavery to sin. And we're no longer under the bondage of the law. And we're no longer under the bondage of the wrath and curse of God.

And we're no longer under the bondage of satanic opposition and oppression. No, we are free by his grace. And we've been adopted children of God.

And we are born again. And we have been made heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. And we are bound for glory forever. And so whatever you're going through this morning, we can rejoice, despite all of that.

And that is the inheritance that only grace can give. Who is your mother? Is yours a life of slavery? Or do you know the joy of gospel freedom?

The irritation, secondly, that grace causes. The inheritance that grace gives. The irritation grace causes. Suppose you are a child of a free woman.

[16:44] And you are this morning an heir of grace. A citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem. And you are trust... Anyone own a black Vauxhall Vectra? Anyone own a black Vauxhall Vectra?

If somebody owns that, they can... If they can go move that, that would be great. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. That wasn't a planned interruption.

It would have been great if it was. So imagine that you are... There's a bit of lightness, isn't it? Imagine you are an heir of the free woman this morning.

You are a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem. And you're trusting today in the Lord. What's that like? When I said to you just now, I said that you could rejoice.

Some of you are in the midst of real pain and agony. Some of you have real difficulties. And so is the Christian life... Is it always joy and gladness from here on in, is it?

[17:44] Is that what you can expect? To bounce through life with a smile on your lips and a skip in your step. Is that how you're going to go? Is that what you should expect from the Christian life?

We look down at verse 29. And notice there Paul's great realism with the Galatians. Just... But just as at that time, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

Ishmael, do you remember him? Born according to the flesh, persecuted Isaac. Born through the promise. And in the same way, in Paul's day, the legalists in Paul's day were heaping scorn on the free grace people in Galatia.

And the reason that they were reacting so badly to Paul's gospel of free grace is because grace, God's undeserved kindness, is an irritant to the soul of the self-righteous.

Grace is an irritant. But when you understand that God accepts you not from anything that you've done or anything that you can do, and that despite your sin and rebellion, God in his wonderful mercy will accept you solely because of what Jesus Christ has done, that can be a real irritant to those who are relying on themselves.

[19:13] It's like grit under your eyelid. It's like lemon juice in a paper cut. It's like a splinter in your toe. It's like a stone that's in your shoe. It provokes.

And grace makes the legalistic heart restless and it stirs it up and it incites it. And you've got to get the grit out, haven't you? You've got to get the stone out of your shoe.

It makes you miserable. And it's possible that you may be here this morning and as you begin to understand about the gospel, as you begin to understand how sinful that you are and salvation has nothing to do with your self-image and what you achieve and all those things, actually grace becomes like grit in the eye, like stone in your shoe.

And when you understand the wonder of free forgiveness and adoption into God's family, it makes you just a little bit uncomfortable every time you hear it. And you kick and you struggle.

You argue and you push back against the gospel. And Paul gives you the explanation of this. He tells you what's going on in your heart. The reason why the gospel rubs you up the wrong way is because the word says that you're wrong.

[20:30] It's not that the word is wrong. And that your heart and my heart is so locked in, it is so wedded to self-righteousness. And you and I are desperate to justify ourselves before God.

And the truth is a gospel of free pardon in Jesus, received only by faith, plus no works at all of yours.

Well, let me tell you what that does to your ego. It takes an axe and it cuts your ego right down. And it strips us of any claim to personal merit before the days of God.

We're not saved because of, look what I did. But we are saved only through the blood and obedience, through the death and the obedience of the Lord Jesus.

But if you're seeking to assert your own righteousness, if you're seeking to say, well, this is who I am and this is what I've done, you cannot tolerate a salvation that is free on the obedience of another.

[21:41] And I wonder this morning that as you seek to understand the gospel and you begin to grasp it and you get irritated by it, it really is a red flag, isn't it?

It's a warning light. Alerting you to how far you are from the only safe path. Because all your religion, all your piety, all your morality, if you trust in it, you cannot hope for peace in that.

The only thing that you can hope for peace in is in the grace of God in Christ alone. And there's a word of warning, isn't there?

There's a word of warning to the faithful Christians. Paul wants the Galatians and he wants us as a church to understand opposition, pushback, criticism, persecution, shouldn't surprise us.

I think that's interesting, isn't it? As we begin to think about praying more zealously, more earnestly for people to become Christians.

[22:53] As we think about the Christians, the non-Christians that come in here week by week by week and we begin to pray for them, what must we expect? Well, we must expect people to be converted.

But we must expect also pushback and criticism and opposition. And of course, the Christian life is not just full of endlessly happy moments. Just as the rebellious, self-righteous heart is irritated by free grace, so the world is provoked by the witness of the faithful.

Grace drives legalists mad. It's an irritant. And so, believer in the Lord Jesus, don't be surprised at the hostility of non-Christian friends and family.

Get ready, that's normal Christian life. Because when we understand the gospel, that the gospel is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you say to yourself, and I often say to myself, it just can't be that easy.

It can't be that free. It can't be that gracious. There must be something left for me to do. In fact, when you explain the gospel that simply, people say, well, isn't that just a license for me to live as I want?

[24:18] Somebody said to me this week, can't I just go on sinning? If you say that God accepts you for free and only for the sake of the righteousness of Jesus Christ racked into your account once and forever, and you are forgiven once and forever in that moment that you trust the Lord Jesus, if you say that, someone might think, well, doesn't it matter how I live?

If you need to qualify every statement, if you feel like you've got to say, well, no, we have to keep the law, remember that grace that is qualified by works is not grace alone.

Paul is saying, make your stand on free grace alone. And that lifts a terrible burden from your heart. It lifts guilt from your shoulders.

The burden of trying to be so holy that you will impress God. It's a fool's errand that you'll never accomplish anyway. But you need to beware, and I need to beware, and count the cost as you begin to live your life on the promise and on free grace and on the gift of God.

Don't be surprised at just how annoying the world is going to begin to find you. when people really understand the gospel, and when a church preaches the gospel, no matter how kind and warm and loving you may be to someone, if that person hangs their hope before God on their doing and their own self-righteous, you will be obnoxious to them.

[26:04] The glory of the gospel is that it's free. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.

That's all the gospel requires. Repent. Turn from your sin and trust in Jesus Christ.

Alone. Trust his obedience and his blood. And you will find him to be a perfect and a comprehensive saviour now and forever. There is no hope. There is no hope, none for you apart from that simple message.

But as you embrace that message in all its simplicity, count the cost. Get ready because the world is perfectly happy, isn't it, with any form of self-salvation.

The world is glad to allow and embrace all manner of works righteousness. But strip people of their own power, tell them all grounds for hope in themselves and in their own efforts is futile and you shatter the illusion.

[27:21] I'm a nice guy. God is bound to accept me because I'm a nice guy. Take that away and say, no, no, no. The only hope for you is Jesus Christ and you will soon find how hostile they will be.

The inheritance grace gives the irritation grace courses and then lastly, the intolerance that grace requires. Look at verses 30 and 31. The intolerance grace requires.

Verse 30, what does the scripture say? He cast out the slave woman and her son for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman. And Paul again is quoting from the same story of God's command to Abraham to set Hagar and her son Ishmael to set them aside, to send them away in favor of Sarah and her son Isaac because only Isaac is the child of the promise.

He alone is to inherit and so Hagar and Ishmael are to be ejected. What's his point? Well, it's not very subtle. He's saying to the Galatians, do not be a tolerant and inclusive church.

Do not be a tolerant and inclusive church. What do I mean by that? There must be a limit to our tolerance when it comes to error. There must be a limit to our tolerance when it comes to error.

[28 : 47] So we live in a time, don't we, where tolerance is virtually the only non-negotiable ethic people have got left. It's the only law. Be tolerant. And yet, we know, don't we, that even the most socially progressive voices in our society that constantly preach inclusion and tolerance, actually, when you say something that they disagree with, they become awfully intolerant, don't they?

When their own moral vision is challenged, they become very intolerant. So, haven't you found that to be so? When you affirm that homosexuality is a sin, when you maintain that people cannot change their biological sex, how tolerant are people?

We all have limits to our tolerance. Tolerance cannot be an absolute ideal. And Paul is urging the church in Galatia to understand the intolerance that grace requires.

Cast out the slave woman and her son. And so, we need to be careful here, don't we? But we need to say this, false teaching must have no place in the church of Jesus Christ.

Christ. Do not make room for lies. Don't say, well, that's just another strand, another interpretation.

[30 : 12] Don't accommodate those who peddle a false gospel. grace. You cannot include in the same church both grace and anti-grace. You cannot include in the same church Christ and anti-Christ.

Christ. You cannot include in the same church the free gospel and the false gospel. The inheritance grace gives, it gives you, it gives you joy at adoption.

It gives you joy at being included in the household of God on the basis of God's rich gift. It's a glorious inheritance. But then there is, isn't there, an irritation that grace provokes.

If you embrace free grace this morning, you strip away all grounds for boasting in yourself, but watch out because grace will always be an irritant in the heart of the self-righteous and the religious.

And then the intolerance that grace requires. We cannot live with lies. We must, we must, we must be kind.

[31 : 25] And yet we must be firm. And we must stand for the truth. Because it is terribly unkind, isn't it, to not stand for the truth.

And so Paul concludes in verse 31, can you see it? Brothers, and there he does mean brothers and sisters, he says we are not children of the slave women, but the free. Stop flirting with legalism.

Stop accommodating yourself to keep in with the accepted group. Keep the world off your back for a moment. But you cannot save yourself.

And so don't embrace that peculiar religious brand of it, of self-salvation. In the end, you cannot have it both ways. So can you see you're either Sarah's or you're Hagar's this morning, two mothers, who's your man?

And if you're a child of the free woman, a child of grace, then it's time to embrace the gospel. Chapter 5, verse 1, can you see it?

[32:41] For freedom, Christ has set us free. And so put away, cast out, get rid of the legalism. Because what will that do?

it will rob you of your joy. And that's Paul's message to the Galatians and to us. May God give us grace to understand it and to embrace it.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen.