

(Galatians) the Fullness of Time

by Brian Brodersen

God has a perfect timing for everything, and we must trust in His plan and not try to force things to happen on our own schedule.

Duration: 57:41

Topics: "Christian Freedom", "Legalism"

Description

In this sermon, Paul is addressing the issue of legalism and bondage in the Christian faith. He emphasizes that believers have been set free by Christ and should not be entangled again in the yoke of bondage. Paul challenges those who want to be under the law, questioning their understanding of what they are saying. He explains that the purpose of the law was temporary and to lead people to Christ. Paul reminds the believers that they are now sons and heirs of God through Christ, and urges them not to turn back to their previous state of serving things that are not God.

Transcript

Galatians chapter 4, as we come to now the fourth chapter, Paul is continuing to show the Galatians the foolishness of thinking that going under the law was a spiritually superior position to being under the grace of God in Christ. You remember that's pretty much where they had come to. They had been in that place of just experiencing God's grace.

They were just in the groove with the grace of God and the presence of the Lord and the gifts of the Spirit and the love of God. All that was the atmosphere that they were dwelling in. And then these false teachers they come in and they start to criticize Paul and they start to challenge his message and then they start to give these guys the idea that the law is really the way to go.

And so of course as we've been studying, Paul has been refuting that. And in our previous study he actually laid out for them. Remember these Galatians, they're not Jews, they're Gentiles.

And so they're greatly impressed with this Jewish thing. They just think, wow, Jews, God's ancient people, the patriarchs, and Moses, and the Red Sea, and David, and the kingdom, and all these things. Wow, this is all great stuff.

And they were lured into it. They wanted to be part of that and they thought that by getting into the law that was going to make them more truly a part of the whole thing. But Paul's whole point is, no, you're already

part of it.

You're more a part of it than they were in some ways. And it's all through your faith in Christ. And then he went on to talk about the purpose of the law.

He said the law was actually given by God as a temporary measure to keep sin in check until the promised Messiah should come. And it was also given to educate us and to show us our need for Christ. It was basically our schoolmaster, our tutor, to lead us to Christ.

And then in the end of the third chapter he goes on to reiterate to them once again that you are your sons of God now. You're heirs. You're right in the best place you could possibly be.

And here in chapter 4 he continues to establish those truths by giving just a series of illustrations and arguments to continue to build his case. And so he says, now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the Father. So Paul is going to use an illustration that they would be very familiar with because of their Roman cultural experience.

Here's an heir. And they are the heir to a great estate perhaps, or the heir to a great fortune, or whatever the case might be. But according to Roman law and something that we would also be familiar with, there was an appointed time when they would receive the inheritance.

But until that appointed time, they were in a sense just like a slave or didn't differ much from the slave. In other words, although they were the ones who would ultimately inherit everything, until that specific day did come, they would basically conduct themselves just like everybody else did. And so he's speaking of them in the sense of being children.

And as children, they're under the guardians and the stewards. But then there's the appointed time. There's the time that has been designated in the will perhaps, or maybe a verbal declaration that at this point, this is when they would receive the inheritance.

And once that happens, then of course, they experientially enter in to the whole thing. And so he says this, even so we... Now remember, Paul's a Jew. He's speaking as a Jew right now.

He says, even so we, when we were children, we were in bondage under the elements of the world. You see, what Paul is saying to them is simply this. Listen, guys, what you are grasping at, what you are thinking is so great and wonderful was actually Israel's childhood state.

It was a state of childhood. It was an inferior state. And so he says, we, we were in bondage under the elements of the world, just like the child was under the guardians and under the tutors and the stewards and all that.

So Paul says, we as Jews under the law, that was, that was our state as well. The law was like the guardian. The law was like the steward to watch over us until the appointed time.

We were under the elements of the world. The law consisted of the elements of the world. Do not touch this.

Do not taste that. Do not handle this. Those kinds of things.

He says, but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. You see, when a child as the heir would enter into the inheritance, it would be referred to as the adoption as a son, a full grown son. Paul says, as Jews being under the law, we were there being guarded and kept until God would send his son and through his son, we would receive the adoption.

We would then enter into the fullness of what God had for us. Now, he then says, and because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts, crying out, Abba Father, therefore you are no longer a slave but a son. And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

So you see, Paul's point is simple. He says, look, you, you're already there. You're a son of God.

You're a child of God. There, there's nothing that the law can add to what you have already. You've, you've, like the, like the heir, you've now entered into that full grown state.

You've inherited all that God has promised. Now, here in verse 4, I want to go back to that for a moment because there's, there's something in it to see in, in the context that Paul originally, originally wrote it, but there's something in it for us today as well. Notice what he says.

He says, when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law. It's interesting when you look at the time when Christ came. Paul refers to it here as the fullness of time.

You know, sometimes people ask the question, well, you know, what took God so long? Or what's taking him so long now? Why, why didn't he do things more quickly? And when you think about it, you go back all the way to the Garden of Eden and the whole situation that happened with Adam and Eve there and, you know, you follow the history and you wonder, well, you know, why is everything taking so long? I mean, some 4,000 years before the Messiah came. Well, there wasn't a point in time. There was a perfect timing for things to happen because, you see, the Messianic message was to be a worldwide message.

It wasn't to be a message limited to just one people or just a few people groups. It was to be a worldwide message. And so the world itself had to be prepared for the coming of the Messiah.

And it wasn't until the Romans came and established their empire that the world itself literally was opened up to the possibility of a message going out all over the globe, basically. You see, the Romans were the ones who built roads virtually everywhere. The Romans were the ones who established a long period of peace and prosperity.

Those roads were guarded by Roman soldiers. And through Alexander the Great and through the Greeks and then through the Romans who basically just picked up where they left off, there was pretty much a common language throughout the whole world. Much like English is today, Greek was back in that day.

And so there were so many things that had occurred over the centuries in preparation for the Messiah to come into the world and to then send out his servants to take his message to the uttermost parts of the earth. And that's what Jesus said to them. You're going to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

But prior to this timing, just in a practical sense, that would have been fairly impossible. But now it's all made possible. God has the perfect timing.

Now here we are today. And I think it's interesting, you know, as communication has progressed and developed and the ability to communicate today is greater than it's ever been, except before the Tower of Babel. Back then you had a relatively small group of people and they were all clumped together and they all spoke the same language.

But since then, since the dispersion at Babel, you haven't had anything like that. But today, amazingly, through the technology, we have the ability to communicate all over the world instantaneously, really, don't we? Not only do we have the ability to communicate, but we have transportation abilities. We have travel abilities that, of course, even they didn't have back in Paul's day.

And as we look at this, I think that even today there is sort of a fullness of time kind of a thing where God has brought a number of things together. And going back for a minute to the context that Paul makes the statement in, there were a number of other things. When you look at the Gentile nations at the time when Jesus came, the Gentiles were so just sort of over their religions in many ways.

They had come to the place of recognizing the bankruptcy of their own religious systems. And that's why when the apostles would go out, and as it's recorded for us in the book of Acts, you remember from place to place, wherever they went, the Gentiles heard them gladly. They were over the whole Greek mythology thing, the Roman system with all the gods and all of that.

And even, you know, the other peoples going back to the various deities, the Canaanites would worship and just the people were at a point of spiritual openness. The Jews themselves were at a place of desperation, a place of longing, a place to see, you mean, it had been 400 years since they had even had a prophetic word. So we see the variety of ways in which the world was repaired.

Going back to where we are today, it's a similar thing, not just with communication, not just with the technology, not just with the travel. But there are people all over the world that are open to the gospel today in ways like they haven't been open, I think, before. And we've mentioned it before, but I will allude to it again.

I'm fascinated at the things that are going on in China. And here in this country that has been under Marxism for all of these years. And what's happened? They've pretty much come to the conclusion that this doesn't work.

This isn't really the way to go. And although that hasn't been publicly stated so much by the government in a proclamation sense, it's sort of been stated by them by the fact that they've sort of changed their whole approach to looking at things a bit more capitalistically than socialistically as far as their economic views and things. But the people, the masses of people are open and interested.

And we saw that happen in the former Soviet Union. And it's still going on today. I was talking to my friend George Bryson this week who's been going to Russia for the past 15 years now and takes teams regularly and has been instrumental in planting the majority of churches that are related to Calvary Chapel in Russia.

And he was telling me that their last outreach they had to turn away 4,000 people. And this is the hunger of the people. They're coming.

They're ready. They want to hear. They want to know.

And I think of India. I was reading this week some stuff from K.P. Yohanan, our friend who is Gospel for Asia. He oversees the Gospel for Asia ministry.

And again, just talking about the churches that are being planted regularly, the thousands of workers that they're training up and how in India the Gospel is spreading. And I believe that with the technology and with the transportation and all of these kinds of things. And let me just mention also the Islamic world.

I heard a report this week that literally thousands of Muslims in countries like Saudi Arabia, countries like Iran, Iraq, places like that, literally thousands of people are coming to faith in Jesus. In some cases, it's not because there's an evangelist or a missionary. In some cases, it's because the Lord is actually appearing to people in dreams and visions and they're getting converted.

And there's a work that's going on. And I really think that, again, we're at one of those places. And incidentally, the English language is very popular.

You can go into a lot of countries today and they want you to teach them English. A lot of missionaries are going in as English teachers. And I think that the authorities probably realize that that's what's going on.

But they're wanting so much to learn the language. They're inviting people to come in regardless. And so God has a timing for everything and he prepares things.

And there is that right moment when the Lord says, OK, now it's time to move. Just like when Jesus came, it was the right time in history. It was the perfect moment for God to set in motion the things that he wanted to do.

And I believe that we're at a time like that as well, that God has sort of set the stage in a lot of ways and the Lord is moving and the Lord is working. But he has a perfect timing in which he is bringing these things to pass. He's bringing these things together.

And of course, for some of us, our greatest need is patience. And I'm speaking of myself here. You know, I can see it all.

And it's like, OK, Lord, I see it. Let's just do it. And the Lord would pretty regularly say to me, just wait.

It's going to be. Don't worry, I've got the time thing down here. You know, for me, I think, well, I would have already done that.

But you see, that's me because I'm a limited, fallible person. So in the fullness of time and maybe in your own life, there's something that you've been looking at, anticipating, praying about, expecting from God, promises and so forth. And you're wondering, well, what's happening? Do you ever feel like you're just sort of standing still? Anybody ever feel that way? Let me see your hands.

Yeah, that's the case with a lot of people. You know, as I will often do, as I'm even doing right now, I'll talk about the mission field and the need, and then I'll have people come up to me and say, I want to go. Send me.

Come on, just tell me where to go. Well, I can't do that. That's, that's God's deal.

God's got to do that. But I'm ready. We here, we've sold everything.

We're just waiting. And we've got no ties and we can do this and we can do that. And I look at it and think, Lord, look, look at him.

This is great. You got a great opportunity right here. Listen to them.

They're ready to go. They've sold everything, all the things they can do for you. But the Lord just doesn't seem to jump on those things as quick as I would.

You know, I'll get them packed up and send away. And then probably a year later, they'll be crying to me saying, why did you send us out here? But the Lord knows when and he has the time. And so if you're in one of those places where you sort of feel like you're in a limbo, just know that it's because God is doing something and the time just hasn't arrived yet.

But it will come in the fullness of time. Boy, back when Jesus came, now I'm sure there were a lot of people that, you know, prior to that, of course, the Messianic expectation had been going on for centuries, literally. But coming actually to the point of when the Lord came, I am sure that there were so many at that point that they were just, Lord, when? And then he came in the fullness of time.

And so just a little diversion, but a little word of exhortation. Remember, God has a perfect timing for things. But back to Paul's presentation here, his argument.

So again, his point is, you're no longer a slave, he makes it here, but you're a son and an heir of God through Christ. But then indeed, again, he's going back to the previous state, when you did not know God, you serve those which by nature are not gods. But now, after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and the beggarly elements to which you desire again to be in bondage? See, Paul is just now reasoning with him.

He's saying, look, think about this. What are you doing? You've come to know God. This is the ultimate thing.

You can't go beyond this. This is it. This is what God promised from the very beginning.

I will make a new covenant with them, and I will write my law in their hearts and in their minds. No one will say to his neighbor, know the Lord, for all shall know me from least, from the least to the greatest. Paul says, this is it.

You've got it. How is it then that you want to turn again to the weak and the beggarly elements? You want to trade this relationship with God for a set of rules and regulations? That's basically what he's asking them. And that is actually what they were doing.

But notice he refers to the law as the weak and the beggarly elements. Why would he say that about the law? Because the law was weak in that it wasn't able to save us. And it was beggarly in that it wasn't able to bring the blessing to us because it was all contingent upon our ability to keep it.

And that's where the breakdown came. And then he says, regarding them, you observe days and months and seasons and years. I'm afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

You see, they got all caught up in the observance of the Sabbath day. They got all caught up in the new moons and the various feasts and the sabbatical years and things like that. You know, I marvel in these days.

I have seen people who have known the Lord, who have known the freedom in Christ, the simple salvation and relationship that's presented in the scriptures. And I have known people who have gone off into the Orthodox Church. I have known people who have gone back into Roman Catholicism.

And I just think, what are you doing? What are you thinking? But, you know, it's interesting. For some people, there's an attraction to formalism. For some people, there's an attraction to feast days and and new moons and Sabbaths.

And for some people, there's an attraction to all of that, all of the trappings that that go along with some of these systems. And I've had people tell me, oh, well, you know, we're going back to the historic church and they've been around for so long and there's such a history there. And, you know, this thing that we've been involved with here, it's so flaky.

And, you know, you just never know if it's going to be around tomorrow. And we're wanting to go back and connect with the historical Christian churches. I would suggest you read the history before you go back and connect yourself with the historical churches, because if you read the history and understand it, I don't know how you'd want to be connected to it.

And it would be the same sort of thing as Paul's talking about here. And I've seen it. I have seen it with my own eyes.

I've seen people do it. And I marvel. I'm stunned.

I can't believe it. The weak and the beggarly elements going back to the rituals and, you know, all of those things, the incense and the bells and the flowing robes and all of that. But, you know, when you lose touch with God, then you start grasping for tangible kinds of things to remind you.

And I've seen today a lot of times with some of the. The ministries that are oriented toward, you know, sort of the Gen X or or, you know, the younger crowd, kind of an emphasis on on some of those things again. You know, we put up a cross and we all gather around it and we just sort of, you know, kneel and pray there or, you know, we get the incense thing going or some there.

We've got to have, you know, something to touch or feel or this. You know, this is the way we worship. And.

You know, the reality is if you have to start using those kinds of things. To connect with God or to have some sort of a feeling like you're having an encounter, you know, maybe something's happened in the faith department in your life. Maybe your faith is growing weak and now you want to see something you want to you want to touch it.

It's got to be something tangible. You see, a lot of these things were they originated for that very reason to kind of, you know, remind people of God. But that's Old Testament stuff.

You know, back in the Old Testament, they had to sew a border, a hem around the garment. And the hem that was sewn there was to remind them not to send. They were to look at the hem of their garment and it was a reminder for them not to send.

You see, when you don't have the spirit of God dwelling in you, you have to have these external things to remind you about God. And as I see people today gravitating toward these kinds of things, I wonder what's

happened. You have to have these things to remind you of God.

The great cathedrals that were built all over Europe, you know, the cathedrals were built to remind people of God. Because at the time when the cathedrals were built, there was no gospel of grace around. The average person who was a Christian, as far as they knew, didn't have any idea that you could have a personal relationship with God.

It was all done through the priest. It was done through the church. And basically, you went about your life.

And of course, because you're not born of the spirit, you don't have any sense of the reality of God. So we've got to build this massive cathedral in the center of the city to remind people that, hey, there's a God. You better watch out.

He's looking at you. He's got his eye on you. That's what the Galatians were doing.

That's what some Christians are doing today. But it's really a similar kind of a thing. Now, I'm not saying that anybody who has incense or... I'm not saying that there aren't sincere, genuine people.

But what I am saying is that we just need to be careful. We need to watch out. And I would say this especially to the younger generation today.

A lot of the youth kinds of churches, they're just doing a lot of weird stuff, really, quite honestly. I mean, I consider myself to be fairly in touch with, you know, what's going on with young people and stuff. But I look at a lot of the stuff and I think, why are you doing this? It's religion.

And we don't need more religion. Remember, it's a relationship with Jesus. It's a personal encounter with him.

And, you know, when you go to these places and they've got, you know, all kinds of artsy kind of stuff related to it, and you can go and listen to the music and then you can go over and sort of do your artsy thing while you're worshipping God and all of that. You know, what is that? It's really, it's a soulish thing. It's an emotional thing.

And it's not bad to have an emotional experience with God. But the danger is, what happens is you start to substitute that for your real spiritual relationship. And then you start to look to those emotional experiences for fulfillment.

And so you just go from one thing to another to another to another. And now we've got to go here and check out what they're doing over there. And wow, I heard that that group, man, they're doing this down there.

And then, whoa, did you hear what they're doing up in Seattle? Man, that's really, and so we're off around the world to have all of these different kinds of experiences. You know, the best experience you can have is just get your Bible, get on your knees and say, God, here I am. Speak to me.

It's real simple. The Lord made it simple. Jesus came and He just simplified everything.

We can have a relationship with God without all those trappings. So Paul says, I'm afraid for you, lest I've labored in vain. He says, brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you.

He says, I didn't come to you presenting a big Jewish thing. Paul came among them presenting Jesus and the liberty. He says, follow my example.

You have not injured me at all. You know that because of physical infirmity, I preach the gospel to you at first. And my trial, which was in my flesh, you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? So Paul is really asking him, what happened? What happened to the great love that you had for me, that I experienced when I was among you? How come this sudden change of heart? Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth? Sometimes that's what happens when you tell people the truth. And there's a big temptation to just not address things a lot of times because of that very possibility.

But you know, we need to be truthful. And sometimes even at the risk of offending people, we have to say certain things. Of course, they should be said in love, the proper attitude and the right spirit.

But nevertheless, we've got to say things at times that potentially can be painful to a person. But remember what it says in Proverbs, faithful are the wounds of a friend. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Sometimes when you, you know, you tell somebody the truth that they don't like it, they don't want to hear it at times. But why do we say that? We tell them that because we love them. And that's where Paul was at.

But he says, have I become your enemy because I'm telling you the truth? He says, they zealously court you, these Judaizers. They're going after you, but for no good. Yes, they want to exclude you that you may be zealous for them.

So he reveals their motive. They really are just looking to have people following them. That's why they're after you, he says.

It is a good, it is good to be zealous in a good thing always. And not only when I'm present with you, my little children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you. I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone for I have doubts about you.

So here's where you get an insight into the heart of the apostle Paul. He is. Above all things, he's a shepherd and he loves them and he's, you know, he's laying down these theological arguments and he's challenging them and he's rebuking them.

But he's doing it all because he loves them and he knows that they're going the wrong direction, that they're embracing things that are spiritually unhealthy. But now he says to him, he says, he says, I wish I could be present with you so I could, you could hear the tone of my voice so you would know that I'm not saying these things out of anger toward your animosity. I'm saying these things out of deep heartfelt love for you.

But notice what he says in regard to them. He says, my little children for whom I labor in birth again till Christ is formed in you laboring in birth. Now, ladies, you know what that's like.

Many of you. And you know, the ministry has some parallels, has some similarities. You want to see the the life of Christ.

You want to see Christ formed in people. But sometimes it's it's like laboring in birth. You have to keep on pursuing them and praying for them and working with them and being patient.

That's that's just the way it is. You know, in our day and age. I'm afraid that there are far too few.

Shepherds in a lot of the pulpits today, a lot of times today, the pulpit has become just sort of a platform for the person, the speaker, the preacher, the lecturer to promote their ministry to further their ecclesiastical career. And that's not what it's all about. The pulpit is a place, of course, to teach the word of God and to bring it clearly to people.

But there's more to ministry than just a pulpit ministry. There's more to this whole thing of leading God's people than just standing up behind a pulpit and talking. You have to shepherd, you have to get involved in people, you have to care.

And of course, that's the example that we have all the way through the pages of Scripture, the New Testament specifically with Jesus and the apostles. And yet I'm afraid today that even within our own family of churches, the Calvary churches, a lot of times. I see a lack of genuine concern for the flock.

The people just sort of become a means to an end. To to get my thing done. And that should not be the case.

And we have in Paul just a wonderful example of a man who didn't simply go around planting churches so he could say, hey, guess how many churches I planted. But he planted churches out of a genuine love and concern, and he continued to disciple those people because he really cared about them. He didn't just roll into town with his big evangelistic event and then, you know, get a big crowd, take a bunch of photos and then head on out of town.

Sometimes people do that, sadly. But it's the people that God is interested in individually. And and so here's the heart of Paul, the shepherd heart.

And so he says in verse 21, tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? Now, I can just I can in my own mind, I can I can hear Paul's tone. You know, he's just he said, oh, I wish I was with you. I wish you could.

So I could change my tone. I'm I'm concerned about you. Tell me you who want to be under the law.

Do you really know what you're talking about? Do you really understand what you're saying? And of course, he knows that they don't. And so now he's going to give them one further illustration to show them the foolishness of their thinking and to bring them hopefully completely out of that. Now, this is sort of like his his final argument.

And after this point, Paul is going to pretty much trust that what he said has accomplished what he desired to accomplish. And then he's going to go on and begin to sort of exhort them to really, you know, walk with the Lord, follow through and, you know, give them some some basic practical instruction. But here comes his his final argument in the case, he says, for it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free woman.

But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh and he of the free woman through promise, which things are allegorical. Now, Paul is taking Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, and he is going to draw out from their story a spiritual lesson to apply to the Galatians. Now, the rabbis and remember, Paul himself was a rabbi.

The rabbis were very much into allegorical interpretation. And amongst the rabbis, there was actually the belief that there were there were sort of different layers within the scripture. And and, you know, the deeper you went, the the more spiritual you were and the greater insight you would actually have.

And and to the rabbis, the least important of those four phases was the literal statement itself. That will give you some hint as to why the Jewish people are in such a state of confusion. The literal statement itself was in their minds the least significant.

They were certain that there was something underneath. You had to keep probing. And the further down you got, then the closer you got to what was actually being said.

The allegorical method was adopted by some of the early church fathers as well, particularly a man named Origen. And he took an allegorical approach to the Old Testament, which simply means this, that the Old Testament, whatever it said literally was irrelevant. It had a deeper allegorical meaning, a deeper sort of a spiritual meaning.

And your goal was to try to, you know, find the deeper spiritual sense of it. But what that ended up doing was literally destroying the actual meaning of the text itself. And it was from Origen back in the early stages of the church's history that some of the views that are held strongly today by Reformed people concerning eschatology, concerning the second coming of Christ, concerning the place of Israel.

It was back with those guys that those misunderstandings began to develop. Because they came to the Old Testament, for example, believing that it was no longer a message to the Jews, but it was a message now to the church, and that the church had replaced Israel. So all of the good promises to Israel were actually promises to the church and had nothing else to do with the Jewish people.

Subsequently, they do not see that the Jews have any further history, any future history. Subsequently, they believe that God has finished with Israel completely, and He's just doing a new thing, and it's all based upon a spiritualizing of the Old Testament text, an allegorizing. Now, I say all of that to say this.

Paul is going to use the allegorical method here, but Paul's general habit was to interpret Scripture literally, and he does interpret Scripture literally still here. Because it's not like Paul is saying, well, you know, this really didn't happen with Abraham, Sarah, with Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac. This is just a story to illustrate a greater point.

No, it really did happen in history, but what Paul is saying is that there is a message in what happened there for us today. So there are times when the allegorical approach can be legitimate as long as it doesn't undermine or overrule the literal plain statements of the Scripture. And, of course, in looking at it allegorically, you would have to make sure that all the pieces are fitting together.

That, in other words, your allegory is not contradicting some other portion of Scripture. But, of course, one final thing to say about it, Paul could allegorize and do so legitimately because he was inspired by the Holy Spirit when he did it. And we can't say that about Origen or those who came later.

But he says now regarding these things, going back to the text, these things are symbolic, they're allegorical. For these are the two covenants, the one from Mount Sinai, which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to Jerusalem, which now is and is in bondage with her children.

So Paul says now Hagar is like Sinai. Hagar was a slave. Sinai is where the law came.

The law produces bondage. And he said now this corresponds to Jerusalem presently in his day. It corresponds to Jerusalem today.

Because what's happening in Jerusalem? What was happening then? They were still holding on to the first covenant. He says, but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all, for it is written, Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear. Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor.

For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband. So Paul now quotes from Isaiah as well. He says now, brethren, and this is his point, As Isaac was, now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.

But as he who was born according to the flesh, Ishmael, then persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, even so it is now. You see, Paul saying what happened back then on a personal level is like what's happening right now. Ishmael was born according to the flesh.

He wasn't the child of promise. He was Abraham's own effort to get God's plan accomplished. Isaac, of course, was the child of promise.

God said you're going to have a child by Sarah, and it was a miraculous thing. And so likewise, Ishmael corresponds to the law. The law is I'm going to do it.

I'm going to make it happen. I'm going to follow these rules, and I'm going to discipline myself, and I am going to do these great things for God. And then there, of course, is grace where I just say, Lord, I can't save myself.

I just trust in you to save me. Paul said that's Ishmael and Isaac, and he says, But as he who was born according to the flesh, then persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, even so it is now. You see, he's saying that's what was happening.

These Judaizers are persecuting them because they're working their way to God, and they're not going to take this idea that these Gentiles can just get in by believing, and they were actually persecuting him. But here's where we see how Paul is so masterful in his grasp of Scripture, and I love the way he brings it all down here. And, of course, again, the Spirit is leading him in this, but he says, Nevertheless, what does the Scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but children of the free. So you see, that's his whole point. This is his final point in the case, and he uses, again, because they're so enamored with and attracted to Judaism.

He goes back again to the very beginning, to Abraham, to Sarah, to Hagar, to Ishmael, to Isaac, and he shows that just what happened in their situation is similar to what you're going through. But what did God

say back then? He said, Cast out the bondwoman and her son, and that's the same message that God would say to you today. Because the son of the bondwoman will not be heir with the son of the free woman.

In other words, the law and those who try to obtain righteousness through the law will never inherit the kingdom. Only those who seek righteousness through grace. Now, one final thing real quickly.

This thing that happened with Isaac and Ishmael, the thing that happened with the Galatians and the Judaizers, this is the thing that has been going on historically. That's what happened with Jesus and the Pharisees. The thing that angered the Pharisees more than anything else, I'm absolutely convinced that they would have accepted Jesus had he gone along with their ideas that by adherence to the law, they would save themselves.

But because Jesus said to them, unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins, that's why they hated him. Because he basically told them all of their law keeping would never get them into heaven, and it enraged them. And if you go throughout history, interestingly, it's always been the case, I think, of the Reformation period.

And what was happening during the Reformation period, they were going back to salvation by grace. Who was persecuting them at the time? It was those who were trying to be righteous through a legal system. Those people that were being burned at the stake.

Those people that were being killed in all kinds of vicious ways and persecuted and cast into prison. Who was throwing them into prison? It was the church. It was the church leaders.

Sir Thomas More, a well-known person in British history, close ally of Henry VIII, he ended up finally losing his head because he crossed Henry. But he was a great persecutor of the English Reformers. And on one occasion, as he was meeting out lashes to a Reformer, as he was beating him, as he was tied to the post, it was seen his camel hair undergarment.

You see, he wore that because he believed that by afflicting his body, he was somehow obtaining merit toward heaven. And here he is with a whip flailing the back of a person who is simply trusting in Jesus for salvation and saying that we're not saved by works, we're saved by grace. And he's beating this person for this as a heretic.

But at the same time, he's thinking that he's somehow working his way to heaven because he's wearing his camel hair underwear. And it's this bizarre kind of distortion that is all wrapped up in works versus faith that has been the clash throughout history. So it's always the case, those who are born of the flesh will persecute those who are born of the spirit.

And it's especially true in the realm of religion, the spiritual realm. Actually, Paul, in a sense, kind of finishes up in the first verse of the fifth chapter where he says, Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. So that's where he kind of finishes his whole thing.

Stand fast. Christ set you free. Don't be entangled again in the yoke of bondage.

And as we close tonight, you know, legalism, bondage, works, those are things that most of us know theoretically that that's not the way to go. That's not the thing to do. And although we know it in our minds,

practically speaking, we quite often and sometimes even unintentionally, we quite often, though, find ourselves in that sort of a mode.

We're in kind of a works mode where we're subconsciously, even to some extent in this situation where we're either feeling good about ourselves or we're feeling miserable based upon performance. But, you know, this is the thing that we've pointed out before, and I want to close with this again tonight. You've got to remember that your relationship with God is not legal.

It's relational. Your relationship with God is that of father to children. Children to father, as Paul said back there, that the Spirit of God sent into our hearts Abba, Father.

And if we can just grasp that, it really makes the Christian life, it makes it so much more enjoyable. And that, of course, is what God intends it to be. You know, it's funny now that I've been a Christian for many years, and I find myself these days, I remember when I was much younger, I always read quite a bit.

And, you know, I would read a variety of different authors and books and things where I remember back in my younger days, I didn't have the ability to discern what was legalism and what was, you know, true spirituality. And a lot of times I would read something and I would think, oh, my goodness, I don't even know if I'm saved. I'm probably not going to make it.

Or, man, if I really got to please the Lord, I've got to get up at four in the morning and pray. Or I've got to do these kinds of things. And, you know, it's funny, nowadays I pick up a book and I'll read through it, and I'll find, wow, this guy was really a legalist.

These people had a perception of salvation and grace that wasn't totally biblical. And there's a lot of that works kind of mentality that creeps in. And we've got to watch it.

Because God does not want us doing things out of that sort of, you know, legalistic obligation kind of a motive. But He wants us doing things just simply out of love for Him because of this relationship that we have and all that He's done for us. And, you know, love is a much greater motivator and a much greater force than any law can ever be.

It was Augustine who said, for the Christian, it's real simple. Love God and do what you want. Because when you really, truly love God, what you'll want to do is what will please and glorify Him anyway.

You know, there's things that laws cannot, they cannot affect. You can look at a law and as much as you might feel an obligation, you can break a law. But with love, you don't even have to look at the law.

You just think, you know what, I love. And therefore, I wouldn't do that anyway because of my love. I'm not faithful to my wife because there's a law that says I should be or have to be.

I'm faithful to her because I love her, because I love God. And that's how God wants us to understand our relationship with Him and relate to Him. We're children and He loves us.

We don't have to beat ourselves to death. You don't have to put on the camel hair undergarment and afflict yourself to get yourself in a place where you can experience His blessing. You just love Him and let Him love you.

And just simply as the Galatians originally did, you just receive the grace of God and you thank Him for it. Let's pray. Lord, we do thank you for your grace, your love for us.

Lord, that we are not in a relationship with you that is based upon rules. It's based upon our ability to perform. And if we don't live up to the standard, you condemn us.

We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you met the standard. And as we trust in you, Lord, you save us wonderfully, gloriously, and you empower us to live a life that's pleasing to you. So, Lord, tonight, fill our hearts with your love.

And Lord, if we've drifted into any form of legalism, if we've drifted into a place where we're needing some kind of tangible thing to remind us that you're there. Lord, bring us back to that simplicity of faith. Lord, you said that the just shall live by faith.

And we want to be those people who live by faith, who conquer by faith. Lord, those who are like the ones that we've been reading about, who through faith inherit the promises of God. Help us, Lord, to trust you.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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