**“CHRIST HAS SET US FREE”**

**GALATIANS 4:21 to 5:6**

The key verse for our lesson this morning is Galatians Ch 5 and v 1… READ Galatians 5:1 – Jesus said to His disciples in John 8:36: “So if the Son [speaking of Himself] sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Discuss the following question: What does Christian freedom imply, what does it mean to you personally?

The false teachers in Galatia had been teaching that salvation comes by keeping the Law in addition to believing in Jesus. They taught a works-based religion. The Bible – Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, etc – emphasizes that salvation comes by faith alone in Jesus Christ. This is a fundamentally important Christian doctrine to grasp hold of and it what Paul drives home in this letter that we call Galatians.

Now, just because you and I believe that our salvation comes by our faith in Jesus Christ alone and not by any works that we perform, does this mean that we don’t have to do good works? No. It only means that our good works can’t save us. We are still to be kind to others, give our tithes and offerings, show mercy, be faithful in our church attendance, be obedient to follow the Bible's teachings in regard to our behavior, and so forth. We should still strive to do all of these things, but not so that we will somehow get in good with God or to put on airs of spirituality to those around us, no, but we are to do these things because of our love for God. We should do what the scriptures tell us to do because we know that it will please God. Motive is very important. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus tells His disciples, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” Ultimately everything we do should be done to glorify God, to bring honor to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let me touch briefly on the rest of Chapter 4. As we left off last week Paul is expressing his concern for the Galatian believers who had blindly followed the false teachers and adopted a works-based Christianity. He summarizes his feelings in v 20 when he says, “I am perplexed about you.” Then beginning in v 21 thru the rest of Ch 4 Paul contrasts grace and law, faith and works and he uses a story from the O.T. to illustrate what he’s been teaching them.

READ Galatians 4:21-5:1

God made a covenant, a promise, to Abraham (Gen 15) that Abraham would have a son. At this point, however, Abraham was 86 years old. And it wasn’t like he was married to a much younger woman. Sarah, his wife, was 76 years old herself and barren. The only way that Abraham and Sarah would be able to have a child was if God performed a miracle. But rather than wait for God to fulfill His promise to them, they took matters into their own hands. Sarah convinced Abraham to have a child with Hagar their slave woman. The result was Ismael, a son conceived in the flesh naturally. Ismael was Abraham’s son, but he was not a son of promise or grace. He was a son produced by sin and human effort (Gen 16). It would be some 14 years after this incident that God would miraculously intervene and fulfill His promise to Abraham. This happened when the Lord touched a then 90-year old Sarah and enabled her to conceive a son in her old age (Gen 21). When the infant was born, Abraham named him Isaac. Isaac was Abraham’s son, the miracle baby, the son of promise.

On the surface Ismael and Isaac appear to be similar because both were the sons of Abraham. Both Christians and Jews, those under grace and those under law, claim Abraham as their forefather. However, they had different mothers. In this allegory Hagar represents the old covenant that God delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai – the Law. Hagar represents legalistic religion. Hagar is the mother who bore children into slavery. She was a slave herself so all of her children were slaves. Ishmael was a slave his entire life. Hagar represents a slavery covenant. So this agreement bound the citizens of earthly Jerusalem, the Jews, to the law's statutes, sacrifices and punishments.

Sarah, on the other hand, represents the new covenant based on God's promises to Abraham, and not on keeping the law. This agreement was based on being declared as righteous by faith. It was ratified by Jesus Christ's death on the cross.

In this allegory, Hagar equals Ishmael, equals Sinai, equals Jerusalem, equals flesh, equals law, equals bondage. All of these things Paul pulls together to show that if you are in the line of Hagar, not physically, but allegorically, if you're a Hagar type, an Ishmael type, a Mount Sinai type, if you're like Jerusalem that now is, notice he says that Hagar “corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.” And that was Paul's comment on present day Jerusalem in his day. He was saying Jerusalem is in bondage to law, to a works based religion. Mount Sinai brought down slavery. Jerusalem, Paul says, holds men in slavery, people trying to do God's will in the flesh. That’s the illustration Paul wants to get across. The Jews had enslaved themselves to Sinai's law. They were working for their salvation. They were wrong, because Sinai is in Arabia. It isn't even in the Promised Land allegorically, so they were cut off from the land of God's promise. So Hagar, Ishmael, Sinai, the Jerusalem that Paul knew which was dominated by legalism and salvation by works… these all spell slavery and bondage resulting from trusting in human effort.

Hagar and Ismael represent all those people for all time who seek to be saved by legalism and self-righteousness. You know what happens? They work all their lives and they're slaves when they start and they're slaves when they're done. It never changes. The sinner who seeks to be saved by the law, by their own self-righteousness, is running on a treadmill like a hamster in a wheel. They spend their whole lives enslaved and they never get anywhere. All their efforts amount to nothing.

In contrast to the child of slavery, the child of Hagar, Sinai and all that, was Sarah. Allegorically, Sarah represents Isaac who represents Jerusalem, which is above, which represents promise, which represents faith, which represents freedom. This is the contrast that Paul is making in this allegory. Paul says, “But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.” What Jerusalem is he talking about? The Jerusalem that is above, speaking of heaven, where God resides. He's talking about a spiritual city, a spiritual Jerusalem. And who are the citizens of this Jerusalem? Christians. US! We who have accepted Jesus Christ and come under the new covenant. If you’re a Christian, then you’re a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem already.

What makes us, as believers in Christ, children of promise? Our faith, our faith in Christ. When we place our faith and trust in Christ, we’re born supernaturally into God's family. We’re free and are everlasting heirs of all that is His. So why would you ever want to go back to being enslaved when you’ve been set free and, as Ephesians 2:6 puts it, “raised up with Him and seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”?

Man-made religion is absolutely incompatible with God's provision of grace. Hagar and Ismael symbolize man's feeble attempt to achieve what only God can do. Therefore, just as Hagar and Ismael were cast out of Abraham's house (Gen 21), so must works-oriented religion be removed from the household of faith. They have no place there.

On to Chapter 5

Galatians Chapter 5 begins the practical application portion of Galatians. Here Paul emphasizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the One who makes the Christian life, the life of faith possible. The life of faith would not work any better than the life of law or life under legalism if it were not for the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers us. So, in Chapters 5 and 6, Paul puts a great deal of emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He calls upon all of us who have placed our faith in Christ to yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit's control.

So, in Christ we find freedom and Paul exhorts us to "keep standing firm" in that wonderful truth.

The false doctrine the Galatian believers had adopted was not faith- based. It was works-based. And Paul attacks it. In the next few verses Paul gives us the results of embracing a “faith plus works” belief system.

READ Galatians 5:2

Paul reminds us of what Christ did for us. Embracing a works doctrine devalues Christ's death on the cross. This harkens back to what Paul said in Gal 2:21 – “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

If you accept circumcision or any other religious activity in any sense as a part of your salvation, then why did Christ have to die?

READ Galatians 5:3

Embracing a works doctrine obligates you to obey the whole law, not just part of it.

James 2:10 reminds us: “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.” Just imagine that poor guy who struggles all his life to keep the law and he works, tries so hard, and when he gets old and worn out he has one bad day and blows it. He's disqualified, he's out! What a terrible thing!

READ Galatians 5:4

Embracing a works doctrine means you have fallen away from grace.

The context of this verse has nothing at all to do with losing your salvation. Other places in the Bible are clear on this doctrine. This verse is contrasting grace and works. What Paul is saying here is that if you try to mix law with grace, you have fallen away from grace as the driving principle of your salvation.

If you come all the way up to grace and you say grace is where it's at and all of a sudden you add law, you've fallen from grace as a principle. And you've fallen into law. If you include works as a requirement for salvation you fall from the grace concept. You've lost hold of grace and what it fundamentally means. “For by grace you have been saved thru faith. And this is NOT your own doing; it is a GIFT of God…”

If a man tries to combine law and grace he makes Christ of no benefit. Why is that? Because he places himself under the law, and if he's going to live under the law, depend upon keeping the law for his salvation, Christ can't do anything for him. He's cut off from Christ. Charles Swindoll says, “Legalism and grace are two paths that never cross on the way to salvation.” To fall away from grace in the context of verse 4 means to fall under legalism, as in the case of the Galatian believers. To do so hinders the transforming work of the Holy Spirit and it stunts your spiritual growth. You cannot and will not mature in Christ if you try to earn God's favor.

READ Galatians 5:5

Embracing a works doctrine excludes you from righteousness.

We eagerly look forward to righteousness, not by our good works, but by our what? Like Abraham – by FAITH. The false teachers and all those who attach themselves to a works based religion seek after righteousness thru their works, thru the flesh. They exercise the flesh by works in order to become “good enough” for God to accept into heaven. Paul says, “But you know what we Christians do? We “wait for the hope of righteousness,” which comes “thru the Spirit [speaking of the Holy Spirit] by faith.”

What does Paul mean by “the hope of righteousness”? After all righteousness is ours now, isn't it? Well, positionally, in Christ, yes; but there is an aspect of it that we are waiting for. And when will that happen? When we are with Him and eventually in a resurrected, perfect, glorified body. We look forward to a day when we will be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. This is often referred to as “glorification.” In other words, there is a fullness of righteousness that will be ours when we behold Jesus Christ, when we see Him face to face in glory, but not until.

READ Galatians 5:6

Embracing a works doctrine is empty and irrelevant.

Whether you are a circumcised Jew or an uncircumcised Gentile, it doesn't matter one bit. It's irrelevant. Old rituals and old ceremonies don't mean anything unless you are first in Christ. It's all about faith, faith in Him. So Paul says your outward religious activity is not what’s important.

But there is something that is important. What is that? “Only faith working thru love.” That immediately counters any notion that we Christians just get saved and then sit around and don't do anything, just waiting to die and go on to heaven. No, we work too. It's just that we do not work to achieve righteousness, to somehow appease God; but we work motivated by our love for our wonderful Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So then, the one who listens to the false doctrine regarding salvation by works finds that Christ profits him nothing. He’s debtor to the whole law. He’s fallen away from grace. He’s excluded from righteousness. Righteousness is reserved for those who come to Christ by faith. We are justified by faith and not by works.

A long time ago there was an artist. He had a dream all of his life to sculpt a great masterpiece and to achieve honor and fame. He finally received a commission from a great donor to do a work that was to be placed in a great museum and it would bring him the honor and fame he sought. And so he began to work. He worked for years and years, chiseling away on a huge slab of granite day after day. Finally as he was coming to the end of his life he finished his great masterpiece. And it was magnificent. It was enormous and elaborate. He was so proud of it. “Look at what I have done!” He was ready now to win the acclaim of the world. But then they discovered a problem. There was no way to get the great sculpture out of the room in which he had worked. And nobody was willing to pay the price to destroy the building in which he had worked. Everything he had done was now the prisoner of the room in which he had worked for so many years. That’s a picture of the man trying to earn his way to heaven. Everything he does for the acclaim from others is going to get left behind in his room on this old earth never to be placed before the Master.

Salvation is by God's grace and not by our works...and aren't you thankful for that? Let’s sing a hymn about salvation – “Since Jesus came into my heart.”