

Not The Law, But The Gospel Brings Salvation.

Text: Gal 4:21-31

Suggested Hymns:

149, 270, 323, 292, 65

- 1) Not the Law, but the Gospel makes us children of God
- 2) Not the Law, but the Gospel makes us free
- 3) Not the Law, but the Gospel makes us heirs of eternal life

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Galatians 4:21–31, ²¹ *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?* ²² *For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman.*

²³ *But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise,* ²⁴ *which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar —* ²⁵ *for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children —*

²⁶ *but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.* ²⁷ *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.”*

²⁸ *Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.* ²⁹ *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.*

³⁰ *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 freewoman.”* ³¹ *So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

It will help us a great deal to understand this Epistle if, before we attempt an explanation, we settle two points. We need find out to what

sort of people the Apostle addresses his words, and what kind of speech he uses in this Epistle.

To what sort of people does the Apostle address himself? This is easily found. He says, ²¹ ***Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?*** He addresses himself to those Galatians who desired to be under the Law.

In the Galatian congregations, as in nearly all the Christian congregations of Apostolic times, there were two kinds of people, those who formerly had been Jews, and those who formerly had been heathen. Now, among those who had formerly been Jews and had been converted to Christ, there were many people who still held to Jewish rites and ceremonies.

They did not dispense with circumcision. They observed the laws of meat and drink. They celebrated certain holy days. They still considered themselves bound to the ceremonial law. And they also wanted those Christians who formerly had been heathen to observe the ceremonial law.

Yes, some of them claimed that no heathen could turn directly from heathenism to Christianity, but that he must first become a Jew and be circumcised before he could enter the Christian Church.

These are the people to whom Paul addresses the words of our Epistle, those who desired to be under the Law and laid such stress on the Law that they virtually expected the Law to save them and to bring them to eternal life by a strict observance of its demands.

And what kind of speech does he use? He takes a story from the Old Testament, the story of Sarah with her son Isaac and of her bondwoman Hagar with her son Ishmael, and applies this story for his present purpose.

He says, ²⁴ ***which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar.*** So the Apostle uses the story of Sarah and Hagar as an allegory, that is, he takes certain points from this story, (which is to be found Genesis 21,) gives them a symbolic meaning, tells what they are to represent, and then draws a lesson which the story teaches if taken in such a symbolic sense.

And what is the lesson? It is a lesson directed against those who desired to be under the Law, and clung to the Law, and expected salvation through the Law, a lesson which sets forth that not by the Law, but by the Gospel we are saved.

Our theme for today is *Not The Law, But The Gospel Brings Salvation*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Not The Law, But The Gospel Makes Us Children Of God

To obtain eternal salvation, we must, above all things, be made children of God. Jesus says in John 3:5–6, ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***

We are flesh born of flesh, we are all born sinners, and our God is not a God who has pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Him. How, then, can God be pleased with us, how can we obtain salvation as long as we are in our natural sinful state and an abomination in His sight? A change must be wrought within us. We must be born again. As by our natural birth we are made children of men, so by a new spiritual birth we must be made children of God.

Now by what means are we made children of God? By the Law? Never! The Apostle says, ***“²¹ Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise”***

The Apostle is telling us that Ishmael’s mother was an Egyptian woman, a slave, and thus her son was born into slavery. Ishmael could not say: ***“I am Abraham’s dear child, I am the master of the house, and when Abraham dies, I shall get possession of all his goods.”***

As Ishmael was the son of a bondwoman, as he was born after the flesh and not by promise, he had to live in constant dread and fear. He had to fear that the day would come, as it did, when he would have to give place to Abraham’s lawful son Isaac, and would be cast out.

Now Ishmael represents those who desire to be under the Law, says the Apostle. If by the Law you expect eternal salvation, if you think that you can reach heaven by keeping the commandments of the Law, your soul will always be

filled with dread and fear. You will feel like a slave who works and works in the sweat of his face but can never satisfy his master. You will never be able to say, *“Now I have done everything that the Law requires of me, now I have kept all the commandments of God in desires, thoughts, words, and deeds.”*

Look at Luther! If ever a man did his utmost to obtain eternal salvation by keeping the Law, it was Luther at the time when he was a monk. He tried to be as good as any one could be. He prayed and fasted. He reduced himself to a skeleton in his religious exercises. But he did not feel satisfied with himself, and the dread and fear did not leave him that he would be damned if he should die.

The Law certainly will save no one. By means of the Law you will never arrive at the joyful conviction that you are God’s dear child, and that the heavenly Father is pleased with you.

The Gospel alone can make us children of God. The Gospel is the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The Gospel tells us that God does not desire to deal with us after our sins, nor to reward us according to our iniquities, but that He has given us His only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we shall have forgiveness of all our transgressions because He took upon Himself our sins and suffered and died on the cross to atone for them.

This precious Gospel is the power of God to salvation to every one who believes. If you receive this Gospel of the Saviour Jesus into your heart, you will be regenerated, born again, made a new creature, a child of God. All your dread and fear will be removed, and though at times you may be assailed by fear on account of the weakness of your flesh, you will rejoice again, and the Spirit Himself will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.

2. Not The Law, But The Gospel Makes Us Free

But to obtain salvation, we must not only be made children of God. We must be freed also from the bondage and curse of the Law, and from the punishment which we deserve for our sins. In the second part of our Epistle we are taught that not by the Law, but by the Gospel we are made free.

How could we obtain eternal salvation if we were still bound by the precepts of the Law, if we ourselves had to fulfil all the commandments, letter and spirit, that we might obtain eternal life? Where is the Christian who can perfectly keep

all the commandments of the divine Law? Do we not all daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment?

And how could we obtain eternal salvation if the curse of the Law still rested upon us, for Scripture says in Ezekiel 18:4 that *The soul who sins shall die*? Can we make the slightest sin undone? Would we not have to endure the punishment which we deserve for our sins?

To obtain eternal salvation we must therefore be made free, free from the bondage of the Law, free from all condemnation. And a true Christian is free indeed, free from all bondage, free from the dominion of sin, free from death and from the power of the devil.

By what means is this freedom secured? By the Law? Never! The Apostle speaks of Mount Sinai, where the Law was given, and says, "*the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — ²⁵ for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.*"

This means that in Mount Sinai which is now part of the old covenant, the Law, you have the counterpart of Hagar the bondswoman, and as her child Ishmael was a slave, so is every one leading the life of a slave who attempts to reach heaven by the Law.

The Law does not set him free. The Law does not take away from him the bondage by which he is held to fulfil every letter by penalty of death. The Law does not remove from him the curse which he has incurred.

And whatever he does in obedience to the Law he does not do willingly and cheerfully, but in the spirit in which a slave serves his master, from fear of punishment if he should neglect his duty. And what consolation have you in the hour of death if you desire to be under the Law, and try to reach heaven by doing the works of the Law?

Experience shows that at no time the sins of his past life weigh heavier upon man than when he sees death approaching. What comfort will the Law give you then, which you have not kept? Must you not sink into despair then?

But the Gospel makes us free. The Apostle says, ²⁶ *but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.* ²⁷ *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.” ²⁸ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.

Jerusalem above is the Christian Church in which the Gospel rules, and which was founded by the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says in John 8:36, ³⁶ *Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.* And in John 8:31–32, *“If you [continue] in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”* ³² *And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

If you receive Jesus as your Saviour, and believe that He has kept the Law for you, and has fulfilled all the commandments in your place, as your Substitute, and that He has perfectly atoned for all your sins by His painful suffering and bitter death, you will be free from the curse and bondage of the Law.

The Law will no longer condemn you because Jesus has fulfilled it for you. With Paul you will say in Romans 8:34, ³⁴ *Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*

You will then walk in the Law of the Lord and keep the commandments to the best of your ability, not as a slave who must do so, but as a child who is glad to do the will of his father. You will be as the good tree which of itself bears good fruit. And when death comes, you will not taste the second death and will have nothing to fear, because Christ has made you free.

3. Not The Law, But The Gospel Makes Us Heirs Of Eternal Life

To obtain eternal salvation, we must be heirs also of the kingdom of heaven; and not the Law, but the Gospel makes us heirs of life. This is what the third part of our Epistle teaches us.

What is the goal for which we are making? What are we Christians living for upon this earth? What is our greatest desire, our most fervent wish, our prayer day and night? It is heaven.

Our citizenship is in heaven. We have set our affection on those things that are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. We want to obtain that glory with which all the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared; we want to inherit eternal life.

By what means is this eternal inheritance secured? By the Law? Never! The Apostle refers to the sufferings of this present time when he says, ²⁹ ***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.***

But what has he to say as to the inheritance? ³⁰ ***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 freewoman.”***

He is telling us that Ishmael, the slave, was cast out of Abraham’s home. He did not share the inheritance. Likewise those people shall be cast out, and be deprived of the inheritance, who expect to obtain eternal salvation by the Law.

Does the Law secure for you eternal life and make you sure of the fact that heaven is your eternal inheritance, and that you will enter the realms of eternal bliss when you must die? No; the Law closes the gates of heaven before your eyes. The Law says: *“This do, and you shall live,”* and this means that you will not live, but die the eternal death because you have not done what the Law demands.

The Law proclaims to you that you are lost and condemned forever because you are a sinner. All that the Law can do is to threaten you with the wrath of God, to curse and to condemn, and not the faintest hope does it give you that you shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.

But the Gospel makes us heirs of life. The Apostle says, ³¹ ***So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*** As Isaac, the son of the freewoman, was the heir of his father’s estate, so are we, who in regeneration have been made children of God and whom Christ has made free, heirs also of those precious goods which our heavenly Father has in store for us in heaven.

And as Isaac was sure of the inheritance because he was Abraham’s and Sarah’s son, born by promise, so can we be sure of our heavenly inheritance. We Christians should not be doubtful as to our salvation, and fear lest we might be deprived of our inheritance.

We should, as we read in 1 Timothy 6:12, ***lay hold on eternal life, to which you were ... called.*** We should hold that inheritance with a firm grasp, and not

let it slip away from us. To this end we should keep ourselves under the influence of the divine Word, come to church, go to the Sacrament, and continue in prayer.

Then we will keep the faith and be able to say with St. Paul, “*I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day,*”¹ and “*I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,*³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”²

We have heard, then, that not the Law, but the Gospel brings salvation; for not the Law, but the Gospel it is, which makes us children of God, makes us free, and makes us heirs of life. Let us not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.³ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Timothy 1:12

² Romans 8:38-39

³ Romans 1:16