

July 19th Sunday 2015

Text: Galatians 4:21-31

Topic: Living as Children of Promise

In today's Scripture reading, Paul gives us all a lesson he takes directly from the book of Genesis. In this Old Testament book we find the story of Hagar and Sarah (Chs. 16 and 21). Hagar was an Egyptian slave woman that Abraham had a son with. Sarah, of course, was Abraham's wife who also bore him a son (this son was born because of God's promise made to the couple well after the normal child-bearing age). The Genesis account tells how Abraham loved his first born son, Ishmael. But, not surprisingly, when Sarah gave Abraham a son, Isaac, she no longer wanted the slave woman or her son around. Sarah got her way and Hagar and Ishmael were forced to go off on their own.

The Apostle Paul takes this story and says, "...these things may be taken figuratively" (v 24). He says we can look at this story and apply biblical principles to each of these women – this is called allegory. Paul says Hagar, the slave woman, stands for the Old Covenant of the Law, and Sarah for the New Covenant of Grace. Being a child of one or the other means you pursue a relationship with God either through your own efforts of trying to keep the law – which Paul says is like being a slave. Or, you seek righteousness before God by faith in Jesus Christ and his work of salvation on the cross.

Paul goes on to say if you seek acceptance with God based on faith you are a Child of Promise (v28). In Genesis 15:6, Abraham is told concerning the promise, "He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." The message for us from this allegory is that by believing in Jesus, we are the children of promise. When Paul urges his readers, "Get rid of the slave woman and her son..." (v30) he is urging us to **stop** trying to please God by our works and be acceptable in His sight by trying to conform to a list of rules. This is not God's way under the new covenant. Remember, like Isaac, we are children of promise – a living miracle.

Lesson: We should make choice like Isaac not as Samuel.

Prayer: Thank you again, God, we are so grateful for your love to us. We are no longer held in bondage to any system of rules or laws that we cannot follow anyway. By the death of your Son we have been set free. Hallelujah! In Jesus' name, Amen.

July 20th Monday 2015

Text: Galatians 5:1-6

Topic: Freedom in Christ

In today's Scripture, Paul contrasts the law's demands with freedom in Christ. We begin by reading one of the key verses in the entire letter. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." (v.1) In the remainder of the verse, Paul warns us about the demands of the law, "...do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Paul is referring to the law as this 'yoke of slavery.' His Galatian converts were being influenced by Jewish preachers who said that besides belief in Christ it was equally important to undergo the Jewish rite of circumcision. Paul knows that circumcision was just the initial step in having to follow all the laws and precepts of the Jews. Again, the point the Apostle has been trying to make all through the letter is that only belief in

Christ is required. Total reliance on Christ and his Spirit is the key to enjoying true freedom as a Christian.

Even today, well meaning churches try to convince us that violating man-made rules and traditions is sin that separates us from God. So, we try, by our own human efforts to be good and follow the rules in order to remain in right standing before God. Don't we?

Now in the remainder of the passage (v 4-6) Paul gives us some shocking facts about these well-meaning behavioral standards that are placed on us. In essence, he says, if any of us is trying to 'earn' our good standing before God by right behaviours we have been alienated from Christ and have fallen away from grace. Only through our relationship with Christ are we in a position to receive "the unmerited favor" that God has for us in our lives. Without Christ being in the centre of our life we do not share in God's favor nor do we have true hope in life with God for eternity! Lastly, says Paul, nothing else counts except living the Christ-centered life of faith that expresses itself through love. No other thing in our religious life takes precedence over our belief in Jesus Christ – tell others.

Lesson: We can enjoy God's immeasurable grace when we live in Christ not in being religious.

Prayer: God, I hear today about the importance of my relationship with your Son, Jesus. Help me from this day forward not to let anything else crowd him out of the top spot in my life. Teach me, dear Lord, what freedom in Christ really means so I can pass it on to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

July 21st Tuesday 2015

Text: Galatians 5:1-6

Topic: Running the Race of Faith

One of the simplest forms of exercise is running. At some point in our lives (barring any physical limitations) we all ran. Some people were good at and enjoyed it enough that they competed on the school track team. There were sprinters, middle distance runners and those that ran for very long distances. Which one did you compete in?

Many times in Paul's writings he compares the life of faith to an athletic event. In verse 7 he refers to his new converts as "running a good race." He means that while he was with them, ministering to them and teaching them about Christ, they were doing the right thing – putting one foot in front of the other, so to speak. The life of faith is not a sprint but a marathon. The secret is to continue "running the race" until you reach the "goal to win the price for which God calls you heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

To be cut in on (v 7b) by someone is counter-productive to running this race of faith. In these verses Paul has stern words for the trouble-makers who have upset the Galatians from their major focus. Paul is reminding his readers (which include us) that to successfully run the race believers need to keep their eyes on the cross of Christ.

There will always be people who try to distract you from focusing on Christ and the many benefits that come to those who whole-heartedly follow and rely on him for everything that is of value in this life and the hope of the one to come. Repeatedly, in this letter, Paul has been warning believers about the dangers of relying on personal

achievement or merit where God's salvation is in view. Somehow, despite Paul's urgings, too many in the Church still feel that there must be other things required in order to be saved! Relying solely on Christ and his work of redemption on the cross is a stumbling block for many people. Earlier I said running was simple. But we are all aware just because it is simple does not make it easy. It is the same with relying faithfully on Jesus. It is simple yet not easy.

Lesson: It is only by the strength God gives that we can run the Christian race. we can't do it on our own.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus. I believe that your work of salvation that you completed on the cross contains all the power that I will ever need. Fill my life anew this day as I look to you as the author and finisher of my faith. Amen and Amen!

July 22nd Wednesday 2015

Text: Galatians 5:13-21

Topic: Our Internal Struggle

Living the Christian life, fully devoted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, is not an easy thing for any human. As long as we are in these earthly bodies we will struggle to "look out for the interests of Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:21). Why? In that same verse from Philippians, Paul says, "everyone looks out for their own interests." We are the problem when it comes to living wholeheartedly for Christ.

In today's Scripture, Paul tells us more about our common struggle. He says whenever we ourselves – our desires and perceived needs – take control of all the things we do and think, it is counter-productive to following Jesus and his Spirit. That's right, we can be our own worst enemy.

Paul says that the secret to living the Christian life, sold out for Jesus, is to walk in the Spirit. In fact he points out, our desires and the needs we think only we can satisfy, are in direct contrast to walking in the Spirit! In verse 17 he says, "...the sinful nature (our agenda) desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit (Jesus' agenda for us) is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." There is obviously a battle going on within us. Other translations call this "sinful nature" the "flesh." Our flesh is selfish, demanding from us only those things our unspiritual nature believes it needs for survival. Paul says our "flesh" will deceive us into not doing those things the Lord may actually be leading us to do. What is the result of being totally led by our sinful nature? Paul lists those behaviors in verses 19-21. This, of course, is extreme and Paul says those caught up in these forms of self-centered sin will not inherit the Kingdom of God! Tomorrow, we will see what the results can be if we allow the Spirit of Christ to direct our lives.

Lesson: The Spirit is opposing the flesh. if we must walk in by the Spirit then we must be careful to live the life that will please the Spirit.

Prayer: Yes God, I am guilty of being too selfish, always wanting my way, believing "if I don't take care of myself, no one will." Help me realize that You are the One who knows what I need and You will supply all my needs according to the glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Help me Jesus. Amen

July 23rd Thursday 2015

Text: Galatians 5:22-23

Topic: Fruit of the Spirit

In verses 19-21 Paul lists the “acts” of the sinful nature. Another version calls them the “works” of the sinful nature. They are things done in the flesh and are in direct contrast to the fruit of the Spirit listed in verses 22 and 23.

In John 15, Jesus gives the key to bearing fruit. Verses 4-5 say, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me...If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit...” Jesus has appointed us to “...bear fruit, fruit that will last” (v16). We cannot bear this fruit of the Spirit unless we are connected to Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit in us that produces the fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When we decide on our own to produce fruit of say peace, we will not be able to accomplish the task. Peace as a fruit is produced by the Spirit who lives in us. It is the outward manifestation of the fact that we are connected to the vine. All the qualities listed as fruit of the Spirit are produced by the Spirit living with-in.

Lesson: If we don't have any of the fruit mentioned above then we need to turn and change our ways so we can have the guidance of the Holy Spirit. because every good gift is from the Holy Spirit. If you indeed have Him then, you need for continually ask God to help you to always be in tune with Him.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, keep me connected to you, live in me and may your Spirit continue to produce fruit in my life. Amen

July 24th Friday 2015

Text: Galatians 6:1-2

Topic: Restoring a wayward Christian by Love

Chapter 6 of Paul's letter to the Galatians is reserved for application of all the things he proclaimed in the first five chapters. In brief, his topics have been faith over observing the law and walking according to the Spirit rather than by the flesh. For applying these principles the Apostle tells us that love rather than selfish and ambitious behaviors should dictate how we get along in this world. In verse 2 this love for others is the law of Christ (John 13:34-35). By loving others we supply aid to our brothers and sisters who may fall into some transgression. Paul's main focus on restoring a wayward brother/sister is rehabilitation not shunning or ostracizing them. Paul says this is not a job for just anyone in the church but for those who are spiritual – whose life and conduct is controlled by the Spirit. They are to do this with gentleness (one of the fruits of the Spirit). To correct a brother or sister is a delicate matter. It must be done with a humble spirit, sympathetically, with a real desire to help the person get back on the right path.

Paul gives one warning concerning this procedure of restoring a wayward brother/sister: he says, “watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (v1). We should never approach this matter with a superior sense of spirituality. If we begin to think too highly of ourselves we may just fall into temptation, which leads to sin. Instead we should try to bring our errant brother/sister back by helping them with their burden. We can live out the “law of Christ” by lightening the burden of our distressed neighbor (v2).

These are not easy things to do but they go a long way in promoting unity in the Christian community. Instead of creating dissension and disunity how is Christ's Spirit leading you to be an instrument of love and unity in your church?

Lesson: Do the will of God by giving your heart to His Spirit so He can fill you with love and grace.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for the many blessings in my life and the lives of my family. Bless me Lord, with the ability and knowledge to be a light of love and togetherness in my church. Bring someone into my path that needs encouragement and a kind word this week. In Jesus name, Amen.

July 25th Saturday 2015

Text: Galatians 6:7-8

Topic: Sowing and Reaping

One of Paul's major points in the letter to the Galatians concerned the contrast between a life directed by the Spirit and one controlled by the flesh – or sinful nature (according to the NIV). Unfortunately we all know people who claim to be spiritual but their lives give them away. They are, in fact, self-centered, looking out only for themselves. Come to think about it, aren't we a lot like that too?

In Galatians 6:7-8 we read about the principle of sowing and reaping. In verse 7 Paul says, "God cannot be mocked." What he means here is that we may be able to fool people into thinking we are very spiritual, when in fact we may not be, but we cannot fool God. There are many forces that God places into action in this world. The principle of sowing and reaping is one of them. Paul warns when we think we should be the beneficiaries of spiritual blessings but are living a carnal, selfish life we only deceive ourselves.

Whatever a man sows that is what he will reap. If we sow (all our activities and motive) to please ourselves we cannot expect to receive spiritual blessings. In fact, Paul says those that sow to the sinful nature will reap destruction. This might be a good time to review those things that are considered to be a part of the sinful nature. Back in Chapter 5:19-20, Paul tells us, "the acts of the sinful nature are obvious." As we review this list again, we may say, "I'm not sowing to any of these detestable practices!" But if we are honest with ourselves, perhaps one or two of those qualities still haunt our thoughts and maybe even surface every so often in our actions. Paul himself, in his letter to the Romans asked, "Who will save me from this life of sin?" (Romans 7:24). His answer: "Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25).

None of us are perfect. There is only One who is, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:2). Seek Jesus every day. Pray continuously (1 Thes 5:17). Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:7). Remove yourself from being the most important and place Jesus where he belongs in your life – in the centre. Then you will begin to sow to please the Spirit and will reap eternal life. Amen

Lesson: Whatever a person sows, that he shall reap, Therefore, it good to sow that which is good.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please give us a heart to sow that which is good.