Gal. 4:12 – 6:18

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VI. Personal Appeal (4:12-20)

A. To accept his view (4:12-16)

1. He urges them to become like him in rejecting essentialness of the law just as he had earlier become like them in rejecting it (see, 1 Cor. 9:19-21).

2. When he preached the gospel to them, they in no way wronged him. On the contrary, despite the trial his illness caused them, they received him as a messenger of God, as Christ Jesus. Their reaction testified that they received his message as truth, but that very message has now made him their enemy!

3. From this, it sounds like Paul's original plan had been to go elsewhere on his journey (perhaps westward toward Ephesus) and that his missionary visit to the Galatians was due to his illness and his need for recuperation. Luke says nothing of it in Acts, and though scholars have proposed a variety of possible ailments, they're all just speculation. We have to content ourselves with the bare fact Paul was suffering from an illness or bodily ailment of some kind.

B. To reject the Judaizers (4:17-20)

1. The Judaizers are not honorably courting the Galatians. Rather, they are wrongly excluding the Galatians from salvation and fellowship to induce them to accept their doctrine. To be nobly sought after, whether by Paul or someone else, is a good thing, but that is not what is happening.

2. Paul, who had suffered "birth pains" to bring these churches into existence, is again suffering through their flirt with apostasy. He longs to be present with them because he is puzzled by their defection.

VII. Hagar and Sarah Allegory (4:21 - 5:1)

A. Children of present Jerusalem (those insisting on Sinaitic covenant, the Law) are slaves, but those of Jerusalem above (Christians) are free (4:21-27)

1. Those Galatians who want to be under the law are not paying attention to what the law says.

2. It is written in the law that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman (Hagar) and one by the free woman (Sarah). The son of the slave woman, i.e., the son born into slavery (Ishmael), was born according to the flesh, according to human decision and effort. The son of the free woman, i.e., the son born into freedom (Isaac), was born through God's promise, not human doing.

3. Hagar stands for Mount Sinai and the old covenant, including the law, that issued from that mountain. As Hagar's son was born into slavery, so are the sons of the old covenant. They are in slavery under the law. Thus, Hagar corresponds to present Jerusalem, to those insisting on the law.

4. But Christians are sons of the free, heavenly Jerusalem, implicitly represented by Sarah.

a. As support, Paul takes the "barren one" of Isa. 54:1 (LXX), a reference to Jerusalem, to include a reference to the "barren" Sarah. Though once "barren," Sarah has now become the mother of a miraculous number, i.e, Jewish and Gentile believers.

b. Since Christians are the sons of the free, heavenly Jerusalem, the implication is that they have been born into freedom, not slavery.

c. "Heavenly Jerusalem" is a symbol of the culminated kingdom of God (see, Heb. 11:10, 11:14-16, 12:22, 13:14; Rev. 3:12, 21:2), a reality in which the Galatians were already participating in some way (the now and not yet).

B. Relationship of children of promise/Spirit/free woman and children of flesh/slave woman (4:28-30)

1. The Galatian Christians are, like Isaac, children of the promise. Just as Ishmael, born according to the flesh, persecuted Isaac, born according to the Spirit (see, Gen. 21:9), so the Judaizers are persecuting the Galatians by attacking the gospel they originally accepted.

2. Scripture says, "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will in no way inherit with the son of the free woman" (Gen. 21:10). Paul's point is that they must reject the Judaizers, for they are not part of the redeemed.

C. Conclusion of allegory argument (4:31 - 5:1)

1. Paul and the Galatians had been born into freedom by the work of Christ.

2. They therefore must refuse to return to the slavery inherent in the Judaizers' gospel.

VIII. Warning (5:2-12)

A. Grave danger of seeking justification by law (5:2-6)

1. Paul strongly warns that if they accept the Judaizers' heresy by submitting to circumcision, Christ will not benefit them and they will be obligated to follow the entire law, not just the requirement of circumcision.

2. After the coming of Christ, those who seek to relate to God under the Mosaic covenant must obey all the commands of that covenant because the sacrifices provided thereunder are no longer recognized. Jesus, the true sacrifice behind the sacrifices prescribed in the law, has now appeared and is the only sacrifice for sins available.

3. Those who have already accepted the heresy, those seeking to be justified by law, have been alienated from Christ; they have fallen from grace! They can only look forward to the curse of the law (see, 3:10).

4. It is Paul and those abiding in his gospel who, through the Spirit received by faith, eagerly await the declaration of righteousness at the consummation. The Judaizers and their followers have no such hope.

5. For those in Christ, circumcision is irrelevant (see, 3:26-29). The only thing that has significance is faith working through love. Anticipating the coming discussion, Paul indicates that the faith of which he speaks is not "faith only" (not mere mental assent).

B. They are being lured by God's opponents (5:7-12)

1. By means of a rhetorical question (see, 3:1), Paul indicates that the Judaizers had hindered the Galatians pursuit of the truth. He adds that this type of persuasion does not come from God, thereby denying the Judaizers' claim to divine backing.

2. Employing a proverbial saying ("a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough"), Paul warns them against taking the Judaizers' influence lightly. Though the heresy may be relatively small at this point, it holds the potential for totally corrupting the Galatian churches, for making them unacceptable to God.

3. He is confident that they will agree with his assessment of the danger and give the matter the attention it deserves.

4. He is also confident that the person or persons advocating this heresy will be condemned by God (see, 1:8-9).

5. As proof that he does not still preach circumcision, contrary to the Judaizers' slander of him, he points to the fact he is still being persecuted by those who insist on binding the

law. If he preached circumcision, they would not be after him because he would have removed the stumbling block of the cross (as the sole path of salvation).

6. Paul expresses his righteous anger toward the Judaizers by wishing they would carry their fixation on cutting flesh (circumcision) to the extreme of castration!

IX. His Gospel and Holy Living (5:13 - 6:10)

A. Through love be servants of one another (5:13-15)

1. They were called to freedom, but they should not abuse that freedom by indulging the flesh. Rather, they should serve one another out of love.

a. As I said a couple of times during the Romans class, the "law," as the complete set of commands under the Mosaic covenant, is no longer in force, but the moral norms included among those commands have continuing validity and find full expression under the new covenant. That some commands included within the Mosaic law have ongoing validity while others do not is evident from 1 Cor. 7:19, where Paul says that circumcision is nothing but keeping God's commandments is everything (see also, Gal. 5:6).

b. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). Thus, the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, the set of commands that are part of Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included in that law (e.g., Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). It is this ongoing moral law centered in love that is the "law of Christ." 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2 (with 5:14).

2. By attacking one another they may wind up destroying one another.

B. Walk by the Spirit, not the flesh (5:16-18)

1. They are to live according to the desires of the Spirit, and in so doing, they will in no way carry out the desires of the flesh. The reason is that the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to each other. The result of this opposition is that, to the extent their desires are fleshly, they cannot do whatever they want to do. Paul's gospel is not a gospel of license.

2. Though there are limits on their behavior, they are the limits of the Spirit, not those of the Mosaic law. The law was fully inspired, but it was only intended to be temporary. Since the coming of Christ, the Spirit leads them in Christ's law (see, 1 Cor. 9:20-21; Gal. 6:2), in the path of the law's true direction.

C. Living by the flesh (5:19-21)

1. The actions of the flesh, those deeds opposed to the Spirit, are obvious. Paul gives examples of evil and then concludes with "and such things as these," which indicates the list is not exhaustive.

2. The specific examples:

a. sins of sensuality - sexual immorality (any immoral sexual activity), moral impurity (a more general moral looseness, perhaps in reference to sexual matters), and licentiousness (blatant sinning in complete disregard of what God or others think)

b. sins of religion - idolatry (the worship of anything other than God) and witchcraft (a secret tampering with and at times worship of the powers of evil)

c. sins of division - hostilities, strife, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, and envy

d. sins of alcohol - drunkenness and orgies

3. Those who practice such things, who see their freedom as freedom to sin, will not enter into the consummated kingdom; they will be cast out with the unbelievers on the day of Christ's return.

D. Living by the Spirit (5:22-26)

1. The fruit the Spirit produces in a Christian's life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

2. For those eager to take advantage of their freedom from the law, Paul says that there is no law against these things. Let them take advantage of that.

3. Christians have crucified (active voice, unlike Rom. 6:6 and Gal. 2:20) the flesh with its passions and desires. They have, at least by intent, put to death those passions and desires that are contrary to God's will. In other words, they have repented. To paraphrase Paul in Gal. 2:20, they no longer live, but Christ lives in them.

4. If they have been made alive by the Spirit, as all Christians have, their conduct should be governed by the Spirit. Particularly relevant to the Galatians, this means they should not become conceited, challenging and envying one another.

E. Helping the erring brother (6:1-6)

1. Paul's converts, those possessing and being led by the Spirit (i.e., the "spiritual"), must gently restore the man trapped in some transgression. In other words, they must bear one another's burdens. Such loving action fulfills Christ's law, the true direction of the law as authoritatively interpreted by Christ (Mat. 22:36-39; Rom. 13:8-10).

2. They must do so cautiously, for they also are capable of being tempted. This is both to protect them from the sin they are correcting and to prevent them from being arrogant about the absence of that sin in their lives.

3. For if anyone thinks he's too righteous to be sullied by helping such "sinners," he is deceived about his true condition because, in actuality, he is nothing! No man should judge himself by the work of others, for each man is responsible for his own load.

4. Speaking of erring brothers and correction, Paul mentions that those who instruct the church, those who guide the group in God's ways, are entitled to support from those who receive that instruction (see, 1 Cor. 9:3-14; 1 Tim. 5:18). Christian teaching is a time-consuming occupation that deserves financial or material compensation.

F. Final exhortation to sow to the Spirit (6:7-10)

1. We cannot with impunity mock God, that is, treat his desires as a joke. The one who chooses to live in the flesh, to live a life opposed to the Spirit, will be condemned. On the other hand, the one who chooses to live by the Spirit will receive eternal life.

2. We must not grow weary in sowing to the Spirit, in conforming our lives to his will, for we will reap that harvest of eternal life if we do not give up. Note that there is effort involved in godly living (since we can grow weary); we must repeatedly choose to give expression to the Spirit in our lives.

3. As a result, we need to do good to all people, as we have opportunity, but especially to brothers and sisters.

X. Concluding Comments and Greeting (6:11-18)

A. Judaizers' motives contrasted to his (6:11-16)

1. The Judaizers themselves do not keep the law, but they want the Galatians to be circumcised so they can use that fact (boast about it) to avoid being persecuted by the Zealots for fraternizing with Gentiles. In other words, they are seeking to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ, the cross that brought salvation apart from the law.

2. Paul is interested in boasting about nothing but the cross of Christ! Through the crucified Christ, Paul's connection with the world had been radically altered in that he no longer

danced to its tune, to its lures and threats. He was focused on Christ and was not going to allow anything to turn him from his calling.

3. It simply does not matter whether or not one is circumcised. What matters is the new creation, that one is born again in Jesus.

4. Paul asks for peace and mercy on all who follow this rule, i.e., those who accept his gospel that makes the law irrelevant to salvation. The last clause in v. 16 is best taken as epexegetical, meaning that it identifies those faithful to the gospel of Christ as the Israel of God.

B. His suffering for the name (6:17) - Paul warns that no one should cause him difficulties (with this heresy) because he is under Christ's ownership and blessing, he is Christ's man, as evidenced by the scars and disfigurement received in his apostolic service.

C. Final greeting (6:18) - A familiar prayer for the Lord's grace.