

Galatians Chapter 4 v 21 - 31

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[0 : 00] Do you struggle with legal documents? Are you sometimes anxious as to whether or not you've got the right understanding of the small print? One document that you might have to deal with from time to time is that of insurance. Essentially insurance policies set out the duties of the insurance company. You look very carefully at what sort of cover they give you and you want to be sure that everything is covered. But there's another side of such a document. You have your obligations. You have to tell the truth and you have to pay for your cover. If you decide to pay a monthly instalment and stop paying halfway through the year then your cover is null and void. With this sort of arrangement both parties must keep their part of the covenant that they make. A similar type of covenant is entered into between a landlord and a tenant. The landlord allows the tenant to live in his house as long as certain conditions are fulfilled. Crucially the rent must be paid and not just for half the year. What if you cannot pay? Back in the Old Testament the tribes of

Israel entered into this sort of covenant with the Lord. Moses reminded them about the covenant that they'd entered into with the Lord after they were delivered from slavery in Egypt and had crossed the desert and were waiting at the edge of the promised land of Canaan. He reminded them that the Lord promised that they would be blessed that they would be blessed in the land secure from their enemies as long as they were obedient to him. However, they would suffer harm, famine, invasion by their enemies, defeat and even exile if they failed to be obedient. The choice was clear. Obedience and blessing or disobedience and curse.

Chapters 27 to 30 of the book of Deuteronomy describe the formal arrangement of Israel in terms of this covenant.

Moses concluded with these words in chapter 30 verse 15. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him and to keep his commands, decrees and laws. Then you'll live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you're entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you'll certainly be destroyed. You'll not live long in the land that you're crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

[3 : 44] This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life so that you and your children may live.

We live in dangerous, threatening days. More than ever, we are reminded of our mortality.

We're not like the people of Israel on the edge of the river Jordan, but there is another river that we must all cross at some time. What sort of spiritual arrangement with God are you trusting in?

Is your security based upon your obedience to God's commands? James chapter 2 verse 10 says this, Last Sunday morning, We were reminded of a proud, rich young man who was confident that he kept the whole law.

But Jesus convicted him of the sin of living riches more than God, and he left Jesus as a sad man. He was convicted that despite his self-righteousness, he was a sinner and had broken the covenant with God and had broken the covenant with God.

[5 : 43] Deuteronomy would describe him as being under a curse. No wonder he left Jesus as a sad man. Galatians chapter 3 verse 10 says, For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse.

As it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. In Galatians chapter 4 verses 23 to 31, our reading, Paul is warning the Galatians who had once tasted spiritual freedom not to slide back into living under the terms of that old covenant, a covenant of slavery, defeat and condemnation.

Certain men had come into their churches and taught them that extra security lay in them keeping the law of Moses. Effectively, living under the law, like the majority of the people back in Jerusalem pretended to do.

The teachers of the law in Jerusalem, the scribes and the Pharisees, were against the freedom that the Lord Jesus came to bring, the freedom that he proclaimed.

You might remember the confrontation between them and the Lord Jesus, who promised freedom to those who believed in him. In John chapter 3, John chapter 8 verse 33, they answered him, We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been a slave of anyone.

[7 : 31] How can you say that we shall be set free? They lived under the covenant described in Deuteronomy, that Jesus came to sweep away.

That old covenant did have its divine purpose. It was intended to lead us to Christ. It was described in Galatians chapter 3 verse 24 as a guardian or schoolmaster, until Christ came, that we might be justified through faith.

Like a guardian in the Roman Empire, and like a Dickensian schoolteacher, its lessons were strict, severe, and threatening.

Galatians chapter 4 verses 21 to 31 was designed to rein in confused believers who thought they could live as those that Christ had freed, and at the same time observed the Mosaic covenant.

Spiritual freedom was bought by the sacrifice of Christ. You remember that when we join in communion, the wine is taken to reminders of the new covenant in the blood of Christ.

[8 : 52] Now the new covenant is not like the old. It's not like an insurance document, or a covenant between a landlord and tenant. It's more like a last will and testament.

When a will is made, the recipient merely receives the benefits, even though he or she might be unworthy. The new covenant is like this.

In Hebrews chapter 8, the Lord said, His covenant was not like the covenant he made with those that he led out of Egypt.

He proclaimed several important provisions of his new covenant, including, I will forgive their wickedness, and I will remember their sins no more.

There were no ifs and buts, just statements of his intentions to those who believed in Christ. Gentile Christians did not have a spiritual understanding of the early books that made up our Bible any more than the Pharisees and the teachers of the law that opposed Jesus.

[10 : 12] They failed to comprehend that the Old Testament scriptures spoke of Christ. Do you remember how Jesus, immediately after his resurrection, spoke to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus?

Luke chapter 24, verse 27. Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.

Galatians chapter 4, verse 21. Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

The first five books of the Bible were often called the law by the Jews, but the law in that sense was much wider in scope than merely giving laws to live by.

These books spoke about Jesus. This is what Jesus told his disciples on the road to Emmaus. In our reading, Paul gave the Galatians a lesson on the meaning of the books of the law.

[11 : 28] When you read the Old Testament, whether it's the books of the law or the prophetic books, you're meant to see they point forwards to Jesus. The Galatians had failed to fully recognise this.

You will also get into difficulties if you do not look for Christ in all the scriptures. In reading the Bible, you must also remember another principle.

In Romans chapter 2, verse 28, Paul said, A person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.

No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.

The proud, persecuting Jews were not Jews inwardly. They'd receive the ritual, but not the new heart that only God gives.

[12 : 44] You might remember that Jesus said to Nicodemus, the celebrated Jewish teacher, that he must be born again. Towards the end of his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything.

What counts is the new creation. Jesus told the two on the road to Emmaus that the law and the prophets spoke about him.

One of the most famous prophets was Isaiah, who lived hundreds of years before the events in the New Testament. Verse 27 is a quotation of Isaiah.

Isaiah preached to the people of Jerusalem. It would be a great mistake to think that all the people of Jerusalem received him, any more than much later when they listened to Jesus.

Jerusalem had always contained those who were Jews indeed, in the spiritual sense, and those that persecuted and killed the prophets. Isaiah preached to both, but not all believe him.

[14:06] In Isaiah chapter 53, verse 1, he wrote, Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

Verse 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind. You might think of the words of Jesus. Broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it, but small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.

Those who are poor in spirit find it. Those that mourn for their sins find it. Not many understood in Isaiah's day.

Few understood it in Jesus' day. He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. Jerusalem was like a barren woman without children.

The faithful in Jerusalem were but a few. In the whole city, there were only about 120 believers mentioned in Acts chapter 1 and verse 15. Now look at Galatians chapter 4, verse 27 again.

[15:21] It's a quotation from the book of Isaiah chapter 54, which immediately follows the chapter that speaks of the despised, suffering servant who was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.

Isaiah went on to say, Out of the unrecognised suffering servant and his people, many will be saved, not only in Israel, but Galatia, Europe, Africa.

This verse was the inspiration of William Carey and the modern missionary movement. The gospel brought liberty to the nations, enslaved by sin, guilt, evil superstitious practices and hopelessness.

The gospel is the power of God and a salvation to anyone who believes its promises. The law could not do this.

It only brings condemnation, guilt and hypocrisy among those who cannot fulfill its demands, reducing men to spiritual slavery.

[17:13] What about the intriguing reference then to Hagar? She was described as being a slave woman.

She was a slave of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. You might remember back in Genesis 15 that the law promised to the old man Abraham, husband of Sarah, beyond childbearing age, look up at the sky and count the stars.

If indeed you can count them, so shall your offspring be. Genesis 15 is all about the covenant that the Lord pronounced to Abraham.

It involved a promise that could only be fulfilled by a supernatural act of God. All Abraham could do was to believe in the promise.

He did, but it was a wavering faith. On a similar occasion, Sarah laughed in unbelief. Before this, she managed to persuade Abraham that he could contribute to the Lord fulfilling his promise by taking her servant Hagar.

[18:32] The result was the birth of Ishmael. Abraham and Sarah lived to regret this basically unbelieving attempt to bring about God's promises.

God's work must be done in his way. Despite her original unbelief and Abraham's wondering, and Abraham's wondering, wavering faith, Genesis chapter 21 opened with the words, Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah, as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he'd promised.

She bore a son to Abraham in his old age at the very time God had promised him. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

They held a great feast, but Ishmael mocked. Sarah, not for the first time, said to Abraham, Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.

The unbelieving act of Abraham and Sarah to bring about God's purposes by mere human ability failed miserably. It failed just like confidence in a works-based righteousness fails.

[20 : 08] Salvation comes from God alone. Persecution of Isaac, the child of promise, came from the child of human effort.

The two children could not live together. Hagar had to be sent away. Had Ishmael remained, there would only have been confusion and possibly the destruction of the child of promise.

This could not be. Hagar and her son were a threat to the well-being of the covenant people, Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac.

In the same way, the presence of the false teachers threatened the covenant people of Galatia. The Galatians had to expel the dangerous heretics.

They had to reject their teaching. Decisive action was called for. Are you equally determined to expel unbelieving thoughts and actions from your life?

[21 : 19] Don't allow your faith to wander from trusting in Christ's covenant alone. Feed your faith. Don't allow other things and ideas to strangle it.

Paul then compared the two mountains of Sinai and Zion. That's the Jerusalem that's above and free. Verse 26.

Sinai is about slavery to the law. Zion is about promise. The children of the covenant of Sinai don't have the liberty to joyfully serve the Lord.

Their slavery in the Jerusalem of Paul's day was apparent to all. He actually said this in verse 25.

Much earlier in John chapter 8 Jesus accused the Jews of being slaves to sin, slaves to lies, slaves to sin, slaves to murderous thoughts, even murder itself.

They murdered him. Paul was perplexed by the Galatians. They had lost their former affection for him.

[22 : 38] some alienation had developed. Were they the children of Sinai? In contrast, Paul asserted in verse 26, Jerusalem that is above is free and she is our mother.

We were born, born anew, as a result of the new covenant. The Galatians needed to come to their senses and recognise they were not children of the slave woman but of the free.

They needed to shake themselves from their shackles. Do you have anything that enslaves you and prevents you from enjoying a relationship with God and making his service your delight?

Get rid of anything that you trust. Christ rather than Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. Our final hymn picks up this theme.

God help the people about .

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