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## *Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ*

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

*“We Are Children of Promise,  
Not Slaves”*

**December 15, 2013**

**Sermon Text:** Galatians 4:21-31

**Scripture Reading:** Genesis 21:1-14

### **Introduction-**

There lingers within every Christian the tendency toward legalism. Our flesh is contrary to the Spirit of Christ and one way it opposes the truth is to oppose the gospel and tempt us with trusting in our own performance to merit God's approval. This will

always end in failure, because no human being will ever be justified by works of any law or code. Condemnation is the only result to be found in the law. As we have learned here in Galatians, the very purpose of God in giving us His Law is so that it would work its ministry of “death” in us. Condemn us. Show us our utter inability to keep that Law and thus our condemned condition before God. And its purpose in all of this is to drive us to Christ.

False teachers who creep into the church are either legalists or libertines. Here in Galatians, Paul is dealing with legalists who had come into the churches he had established and brought the infection of their false gospel of works. Paul counters their evil by reminding us that faith alone in Christ alone is God's way of providing us with a perfect righteousness. In the course of doing so, he also includes this reminder:

Galatians 5:13-14 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but

through love serve one another. (14) For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love emanating from a heart regenerated by Christ will fulfill the Law because this is what the Law has always required – heart obedience. We practice an “evangelical” or “gospel” obedience to the moral law of God, not a “legal obedience.” This evangelical obedience is a product of the gospel because Christ produces in us hearts that love God and love others.

Listen now to this statement that Paul made to Timothy –

1 Timothy 1:3-11 As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, (4) nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. (5) The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (6) Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, (7) desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are

saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. (8) **Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, (9) understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient,** for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, (10) the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, (11) in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

This is a very significant Scripture for us and we must all know it very well. God’s Law is not given for the just, for the righteous! God’s Law is not intended for the Christian. It is given for the lawless and the wicked. And its purpose is so that the wicked will see how wicked they are and how they are condemned by God.

Now, the problem is that there were people in Paul’s day, just as there are today, who do not understand this. These “certain persons” desire to be teachers of God’s people, but they do not understand the purpose of the Law, so they lay it upon the righteous, making it a supposed means of getting

right with God. Or of somehow gaining a “holier standing” with Him. That is what was going on in these Galatian churches and it is what goes on today in most all churches. It is a false gospel. You can build entire, apparently thriving “churches” on this false gospel of the law. It appeals to the flesh. Rome is a prime example, but evangelical churches are by no means immune to this infection. Some are just as Roman Catholic as Roman Catholics because they embrace the law as their “gospel.” (See Romans 2:1-3).

It becomes essential then that we understand how to discern God’s Law and God’s Gospel, and how to properly apply each. The Scripture before us this morning addresses this very subject.

Let me begin with some very good comments from a Lutheran theologian, Wilhelm Walther, a German who led the establishment of the Lutheran Church here in America, fleeing the liberalism back in his homeland. He and his group settled in Missouri and today they are known as the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. [The larger Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is much more liberal and certainly not a group we would recommend to anyone].

Listen then to these great comments from Walther:

Now, of all doctrines, the first and foremost is the doctrine of justification. However, immediately following upon it—and almost equally as important—is the doctrine of how to distinguish between Law and Gospel. Let us now focus on this distinction between Law and the Gospel—a task to which we want to apply ourselves diligently....

It is not my intent to give a systematic treatment of the doctrine of Law and Gospel in these lectures. Rather, my aim is to show you how easily we can inflict great damage on our hearers when we mingle Law and Gospel—despite their fundamental differences—and thus defeat the purpose of both doctrines....

Had the Law not been written on the human heart, no one would listen to the preaching of the Law. Rather, everybody would turn away from it and say, “That is too cruel; nobody is able to keep Commandments such as these.” But, my friends, do not hesitate to preach the Law! People may despise it, yet they do so only with their mouths, because the things you say when preaching the Law are the same things that their own conscience preaches to them every day. Nor could we convert anyone by preaching the

Gospel to them, unless we preached the Law to them first....

The second point of difference between Law and Gospel is indicated by the particular contents of each. The Law tells us what to do [to be justified before God]. No such instruction is contained in the Gospel. Rather, the Gospel reveals to us only what God is doing. **The Law speaks about our works, whereas the Gospel speaks about the great works of God.** In the Law we hear the tenfold summons: “You shall.” Beyond that, the Law has nothing to say to us. The Gospel, on the other hand, makes no demands whatsoever.

What if someone says, “But the Gospel demands faith!” Well, just picture someone who is hungry. You tell him: “Come, sit down at my table and eat.” That hungry person would hardly reply, “Who are you to boss me around?” No, he would understand and accept your words **as a kind invitation.** That is exactly what the Gospel is—a kind invitation to partake of heavenly blessings....

...Law and Gospel differ by the promises held out by each doctrine. What the Law promises is just as great a blessing as what the Gospel promises, namely, everlasting life and salvation. But there is a huge difference: All the promises of the

Law are made on certain conditions, namely, that we fulfill the Law perfectly. Accordingly, the greater the promises of the Law, the more disheartening they are. The Law offers us that food, but not close enough for us to reach it. The Law offers us salvation in about the same manner as refreshments were offered to Tantalus in the hell of the pagan Greeks.

[Tantalus's punishment for his act, now a proverbial term for temptation without satisfaction (the source of the English word *tantalise*<sup>[18]</sup>), was to stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree with low branches. Whenever he reached for the fruit, the branches raised his intended meal from his grasp. Whenever he bent down to get a drink, the water receded before he could get any. Over his head towers a threatening stone like the one that [Sisyphus](#) is punished to roll up a hill. This fate has cursed him with eternal deprivation of nourishment].  
Wikipedia

Indeed, it [the law] says to us, “I will quench the thirst of your soul and satisfy your hunger.” **But the Law is not able to accomplish this because it always adds: “All this you will have, but only if you do what I command.** How different is the lovely, sweet, and comforting language of the

Gospel! It promises us the grace of God and salvation—without any condition whatsoever. It is a promise of free grace. And it asks nothing of us but this: “Take what I give, and you will have it.” **This is not a condition, but rather a kind invitation.**

When [questioned] by the self-righteous scribe in Luke 10:26-28, Christ raises the counter-question: “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” The scribe answers correctly: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And then Christ says to him: “Do this, and you will live.” On this particular occasion the Lord testifies that, were salvation to come by way of the Law, the only way to obtain salvation would be to keep the Law perfectly. But even if people were to do the will of God and were to receive salvation as a reward for their merit, that, too, would be thanks only to the goodness of God. But those “strings” attached to the Law hurl us into despair. Mark 16:15–16; Rom. 3:22–24

When the Lord wished to instruct the disciples as to what they should preach, He said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:15–

16). Thus no condition whatsoever is attached to the Gospel; it is solely a promise of grace. Furthermore, we read in Romans 3:22–24: “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

Ephesians 2:8–9 states: “For by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Unconditional promises of grace and salvation—that is what we find in the Gospel. What a precious difference! **When the Law lays us low, we can cheerfully walk upright again because there is another doctrine beyond the Law that makes no demands of us whatsoever.** If we were to ask Christ, “What is expected of me so that I may be saved?” He would answer: “Certainly not works! I have already accomplished all the works that had to be done. You need not drink one drop of the cup I had to drink.” And if you would only reflect on this, my dear friends, you, too, would jump for joy that these glad tidings have been brought to you as well.

But anyone who continues to despair—despite this message—anyone who keeps on brooding and says, “I am a despicable person; there

is no forgiveness for me,” does nothing less than reject the Gospel. This person rejects Christ.

And even if I had committed the most dreadful sins and had to say like Paul, “I am the foremost sinner,” even if I had committed the sin of Judas or the sin of Cain, nevertheless I need to receive the Gospel because it demands nothing of me.

[Another] difference between Law and Gospel relates to threats. The Gospel does not contain any threats whatsoever—only words of consolation. Whenever you come across a threat in Scripture, you may be assured that the passage is Law....

On the one hand, the Law does indeed produce feelings of contrition by conjuring up the terrors of hell, death, and of the wrath of God. But it has not one drop of comfort to offer the sinner. **Consequently, if the Law is the only teaching that is applied to people, they must despair, die, and perish in their sins.** Ever since the fall, this is the only effect the Law can produce in people.

The effects of the Gospel are of an entirely different nature. In the first place, while the Gospel demands faith, at the same time it also offers and gives us faith. When we preach to people: “Believe in the Lord Jesus

Christ!” God gives them faith through our preaching....

Finally, there is [another] difference between Law and Gospel, relating to the persons to whom either doctrine is to be preached. **In other words, there is a difference in the objects, that is, the people, to whom Law and Gospel must be applied.** The persons on whom either doctrine is to work are completely different—just as the goals of each doctrine are different.

**Preach the Law to “secure” sinners, yet preach the Gospel to alarmed sinners.** While at other times both doctrines must indeed be preached, at this point the question is: To whom must I preach the Law rather than the Gospel, and vice versa? 1 Tim. 1:8–10 In 1 Timothy 1:8–10, Paul writes: Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine. **To all persons who fit this bill, then, preach only the Law—and not one drop of the Gospel.** As long as people are at ease in their sins, as long as they are

unwilling to quit some particular sin—in this situation you must preach only the Law, which curses and condemns them.

**However, the moment they are frightened about their condition, administer the Gospel to them promptly, for from that moment on they can no longer be classified as secure sinners.** Conversely, as long as the devil still keeps you in bondage with even one individual sin, you are not yet a proper object upon which the Gospel can operate. In this situation, as pastors, you should preach only the Law to such a person.

Ferdinand, Carl; Wilhelm Walther (1905-07-02). Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible (Kindle Locations 1939-1956). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

And here are some quotes on the same subject from Martin Luther (quoted by Walther)-

By the term “Law” nothing else is to be understood than a word of God that is a command, that enjoins upon us what to do and what to avoid, that requires from us some work of obedience....Law is anything that refers to what we are to do. On the other hand, the Gospel, or the Creed, is any doctrine or word of God that does not require works from us and does not

command us to do something but bids us simply to accept as a gift the gracious forgiveness of our sins and the everlasting bliss offered us...

... The difference, then, between Law and Gospel is this: The Law makes demands of things that we are to do; it insists on works that we are to perform in the service of God and our fellow human beings. In the Gospel, however, we are summoned to a distribution of rich alms that we are to receive and take: the loving-kindness of God and eternal salvation.

Here is an easy way of illustrating the difference between the two: In offering us help and salvation as a gift and donation of God, the Gospel bids us to hold the sack open and have something given to us. The Law, however, gives nothing. It only takes and demands things from us. Now, these two, giving and taking, are surely far apart. For when something is given to me, I am not contributing anything toward that. I only receive and take; I have something given to me. Again, when in my profession I carry out commands, likewise when I advise and assist my fellow man, I receive nothing but give to another whom I am serving. Thus Law and Gospel are distinguished as to their formal statements: the one promises; the other commands. The Gospel gives and bids

us to take; the Law demands and says, "This you are to do."

Ferdinand, Carl; Wilhelm Walther (1905-07-02). Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible (Kindle Locations 1995-2003). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

THIS is what Paul is dealing with here in Galatians, and it is what he was warning Timothy about in regard to men who use the Law wrongly. I believe that this wrong use of the Law is a plague today in our conservative churches, just as libertinism is in more "free and liberal" ones. We must strive to avoid either of these false gospels if we are to experience the true freedom Christ has effected for us.

Follow along now as I read 4:21-31—

Galatians 4:21-31 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? (22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. (23) But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. (24) Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. (25) Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia;

she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. (26) But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. (27) For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." (28) Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. (29) But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. (30) But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." (31) So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

Once again, Paul takes us to the very Law that these legalists were striving to enslave the Galatians to – "...do you not listen to the Law?" He takes us back this time to the Old Testament account of Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael to demonstrate that our justification before God and adoption as His sons and heirs was never intended to come through the law, but through the Promise:



Genesis 16:1-5 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. (2) And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. (3) So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. (4) And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. (5) And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!"

You will remember that Isaac was the promised son of Abraham and Sarah's old age. In contrast, Ishmael was the product of Abraham's flesh, by Hagar the slave. Isaac, you can say, was God's doing while Ishmael was man's doing. And this is the point that Paul picks up on, telling us that "this may be interpreted as an allegory." [Allegory is a literary device in

which characters or events in a literary, visual, or musical art form represent or symbolize ideas and concepts].

Here are the points of Paul's argument, taken from the law itself:

1. Both of these sons were fathered by Abraham. By physical descent, they were his sons.
2. Isaac's mother was a free woman. Ishmael's mother was a slave.
3. Ishmael was born as a son "according to the flesh." Isaac was born as a son "through promise."
4. Sarah is a symbol of the Church, of the Jerusalem above, and thus of all who are free from the Law, products of the Promise.
5. Hagar represents the earthly Israel, all people in the Old Covenant, under the Law, symbolized by Mt. Sinai where that old covenant was enacted.
6. Just as Sarah brought forth children who are free, and as Hagar brought forth only children who are slaves, so it is with the Law and Gospel.
7. Christians, like Isaac, are products of God's own Promise. Of His doing. Those who still embrace the law as a means of earning God's approval

remain in slavery, and never obtain the inheritance. They are the product of man's works.

*All a false gospel of works will ever produce is slaves. It can never produce sons who are heirs.*

### Cast Out the Slave Woman

Listen once again to the closing verses of Paul's argument here: (we will take some more time next week to consider Paul's application of Isaiah 54 in verse 27) -

Galatians 4:28-31 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. (29) But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. (30) But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." (31) So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

So also it is now. We must expect legalists to persecute genuine Christians. I could preach an entire sermon series on this principle because the Bible is filled with it from Genesis to Revelation. Cain killed Abel simply because Abel was righteous. Ishmael

mocked Isaac. Esau hated Jacob. Rome hated Martin Luther and the Reformers. The religions of man hate the religion of Christ. The Jews of Paul's day persecuted the early church. They were born only of the flesh, not of the Spirit. This enmity must be expected today.

We can expect conflict. We can expect to be hated if we are sons of God by faith alone in Christ alone. And the ones who hate us the most fervently are those who practice a false Christianity, preach a false works-based gospel, and hate it that they cannot bring us into slavery to them. Let me close with these words from Luther:

As long as we preach Christ and confess Him to be our Savior, we must be content to be called vicious trouble makers. "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar," so said the Jews of Paul and Silas. (Acts 17: 6, 7.) Of Paul they said: "We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." The Gentiles uttered similar complaints: "These men do exceedingly trouble our city." This man Luther is also accused of being a pestilent fellow who troubles the papacy and the Roman empire.

If I would keep silent, all would be well, and the Pope would no more persecute me. The moment I open my mouth the Pope begins to fume and to rage. It seems we must choose between Christ and the Pope. Let the Pope perish. Christ foresaw the reaction of the world to the Gospel. He said: "I am come to send fire on the earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled?" (Luke 12: 49.) Do not take the statement of our opponents seriously, that no good can come of the preaching of the Gospel. What do they know? They would not recognize the fruits of the Gospel if they saw them.

The Holy Ghost contemptuously calls the admirers of the Law the children of the bondwoman. "If you do not know your mother, I will tell you what kind of a woman she is. She is a slave. And you are slaves. You are slaves of the Law and therefore slaves of sin, death, and everlasting damnation. You are not fit to be heirs. You are put out of the house." This is the sentence which God pronounces upon the Ishmaelites, the papists, and all others who trust in their own merits, and persecute the Church of Christ. Because they are slaves and persecutors of the children of the free woman, they shall be cast out of the house of God forever. They shall have no inheritance with the children of the promise. This sentence stands forever. This sentence affects not only those popes, cardinals

bishops, and monks who were notoriously wicked and made their bellies their Gods. It strikes, also, those who lived in all sincerity to please God and to merit the forgiveness of their sins through a life of self-denial. Even these will be cast out, because they are children of the bondwoman. Our opponents do not defend their own moral delinquency. The better ones deplore and abhor it. But they defend and uphold their doctrine of works which is of the devil. Our quarrel is not with those who live in manifest sins. Our quarrel is with those among them who think they live like angels, claiming that they do not only perform the Ten Commandments of God, but also the sayings of Christ, and many good works that God does not expect of them. We quarrel with them because they refuse to have Jesus' merit count alone for righteousness.

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 2629-2640). . Kindle Edition.

Finally, notice very plainly how we are to deal with these who would make us slaves- cast them out. Such people are false sons, they are not going to be heirs with us in Christ. They do not belong in Christ's church. Cast out the Law which is the mother of such, and cast out all her slave children.