

LOSING MY RELIGION

"THE LEGALISM BULLY" GALATIANS 4:21-31

This Week's Core Competency

Salvation by Grace – I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

In the body of Paul's letters, the apostle typically addresses *doctrine* in the first part and *practice* in the second, thereby linking behavior to belief. He does this in his letter to the Galatians. A situation on the ground in the churches he and Barnabas planted in the Roman Province of Galatia prompts him in chapters 2-4 to correct the doctrinal error promulgated by the Judaizers. In chapters 5-6, he then explains the practical implications of right thinking for right behavior. The transition from the first part of the body to the second likely begins in 4:12 with the appeal, "become like me." Then 5:1 begins with the words, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

The title of this week's lesson is "The Legalism Bully." How appropriate! The following comments are helpful when it comes to understanding *legalism*:

"'Legalism' is both a belief (philosophy) and a practice. As a belief, legalism is the conviction that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by keeping rules. Often the rules in view are those imposed by man, not those required by God. However, misapplying biblical laws is also a form of legalism. In a larger sense, legalism is the belief that we can make ourselves acceptable to God by our good works. Of course, the only thing that makes us acceptable to God is our trust in Christ's good works. He satisfied God's demands for us. *We are*

saved by good works, but it is Christ's good works, not ours. 'Nomism' is the belief that we need to make law the ruling governor of our lives. It sees law as the most important factor in people's relationship with God. Nomism focuses on law, whereas 'legalism' focuses on rules. As a practice, legalism is the keeping of rules with a view to gaining merit with God.

'Legalism is one of the major problems among Christians today. We must keep in mind that legalism does not mean the setting of spiritual standards; it means worshiping these standards and thinking that we are spiritual because we obey them. It also means judging other believers on the basis of these standards.'

'Some run from rules, claiming it is legalism. It is not. Legalism is not the law. There has always been law in the world. Since Moses, there has always been law in the Bible. Even in the New Testament, we have law. As believers, we operate under 'the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2). The commands of the New Testament provide this code for us. And this law is good and beneficial for us, since it comes from God. So, legalism is not the presence of law or moral code. Legalism is an attitude. Legalism exists when you conform to a rule or code with the motivation of exalting yourself. You may pretend it helps sanctify you. For instance, you could claim a vegan diet accelerates our personal spiritual growth. On the outside, that may seem plausible. But because your motivation is wrong and you have exalted yourself, you actually stunt growth'" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Galatians," 2015 ed., 61, www.soniclight.com, italics added).

Denominations have their traditions and their

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expectations regarding behavior becoming for a Christian, many of which are not actually found in the Bible. Judging others' spirituality based on whether they follow such traditions or meet such expectations often leads to ugly misguided exchanges in an attempt by those on one or both sides to bully the others into compliance.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Galatians 4:21-31

21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.

24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written:

"Be glad, O barren woman,
who bears no children;
break forth and cry aloud,
you who have no labor pains;
because more are the children of the
desolate woman
than of her who has a husband."

28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." 31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Cf., another translation

21 Tell me, you who want to live under the law, do you know what the law actually says? 22 The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons, one from his slave wife and one from his freeborn wife. 23 The son of the slave wife was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. But the son of the freeborn wife was born as God's own fulfillment of his promise.

24 These two women serve as an illustration of God's two covenants. The first woman, Hagar, represents Mount Sinai where people received the law that enslaved them. 25 And now Jerusalem is just like Mount Sinai in Arabia, because she and her children live in slavery to the law. 26 But the other woman, Sarah, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. She is the free woman, and she is our mother. 27 As Isaiah said,

"Rejoice, O childless woman,
you who have never given birth!
Break into a joyful shout,
you who have never been in labor!

For the desolate woman now has more children
than the woman who lives with her husband!"

28 And you, dear brothers and sisters, are children of the promise, just like Isaac. 29 But you are now being persecuted by those who want you to keep the law, just as Ishmael, the child born by human effort, persecuted Isaac, the child born by the power of the Spirit.

30 But what do the Scriptures say about that? "Get rid of the slave and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not share the inheritance with the free woman's son." 31 So, dear brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman; we are children of the free woman. (NLT)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "law" in v. 21 (2x).
- * Underline "the" in v. 22.
- * Box "but" indicating contrast in vv. 23, 26, 30, 31.
- * Circle "figuratively" in v. 24.
- * Underline "covenant" and "Hagar" in v. 24.
- * Bracket "present city of Jerusalem" in v. 25.
- * Box "because" indicating reason in v. 25.

- * Underline "her children" in v. 25.
- * Bracket "Jerusalem that is above" in v. 26.
- * Underline twice "for it is written" in v. 27.
- * Highlight v. 30.
- * Bracket "get rid of" in v. 30.
- * Box "therefore" indicating result in v. 31.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. To whom does "you" refer in verse 21?
2. Paul uses "under the *law*" and "the *law* says" in verse 21. To what does "law" refer in this verse?
3. Identify the two sons of Abraham referred to in verse 22.
4. Explain the *contrast* between their two mothers and why it matters.
5. Explain the *contrast* between the two sons and why it matters.
6. Identify the two covenants *figuratively* represented by the two women.
7. Explain the *contrast* between the citizens of the "present city of Jerusalem" and the "Jerusalem that is above."
8. Read verse 30. Put what Paul wants his readers to do and why in your own words.
9. **Discussion:** Verse 31 prompts the question, "So what?" Talk about your answers to that question.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The point of Galatians 4:21-31 comes at the very end where Paul says, "Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman." It seems the apostle is responding to the Judaizers, who claimed quite the opposite, i.e., Gentiles are children of the slave woman, and not the free woman. Their claim might explain why he would appeal to the story of Sarah and Hagar at all to make his point. One commentator explains:

"If Paul, in the elementary class of his rabbinical school, had been set an exegetical exercise on the text, 'Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman', the outline of his exegesis would have been predictable: Isaac was the ancestor of the chosen people; the Ishmaelites are Gentiles. The Jews are the children of the free woman; the Gentiles are children of the slave woman. The Jews have received the liberating knowledge of the law; the Gentiles are in bondage to ignorance and sin. The Jews are the people of the covenant; such blessings as the Gentiles enjoy (like the promise that Ishmael would become a great nation) are uncovenanted mercies.

"If the trouble-makers in Galatia appealed to the story of Isaac and Ishmael, that is very much how they would have applied it. True, they would have conceded the Gentiles of Galatia could not be sons of Abraham by natural descent, as Isaac was; yet there was hope for them: they could be adopted into Abraham's family by circumcision and so enjoy the covenant mercies promised to Abraham and his descendants. By accepting circumcision they would align themselves with the church of the circumcised in Jerusalem, the mother-church of the true followers of Christ.

"Paul now inverts the exegesis which would have commended itself to him in earlier days. Now it is the people of the law who are the offspring of the slave woman; the children of the free woman are those who embrace the gospel of justification by faith, comprising a minority of Jews and a rapidly increasing preponderance of Gentiles. To Jews this exegesis must have seemed preposterous" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGNT, 218-19).

Another explains further: "So it seems the Judaizers set up the lines of correspondence as follows: Hagar, Ishmael, and Paul are related to Abraham in some tangential fashion, but Sarah,

Isaac, the Jews, the Mosaic law, Mt. Sinai, Jerusalem, the mother church of Jerusalem, and the Judaizers themselves are directly associated with Abraham and the God-ordained channels for the reception of the Abrahamic promise" (Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 41, *Galatians*, 218).

Paul debunks the Judaizers' position by offering a different reading of the patriarchal narrative.

Galatians 4:21-31 can be divided into three parts. The first part (vv. 21-23) tells the story of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and his sons' two mothers, Hagar and Sarah. The second (vv. 24-27) explains the story "taken figuratively" (v. 24). And the third (vv. 28-31) applies the story taken figuratively to the situation in Galatia.

The first part begins with a question, "Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?" It's a question put to Gentiles who are entertaining putting themselves under the law. Although they are already "observing special days and months and seasons and years!" (v. 10) apparently they have not yet fully adopted the Judaizers' principles and practices. But it may also be a question put to his antagonists. According to one commentator, "He is possibly thinking also of his detractors, for whom the argument of this section [4:21-31] would be even more telling as a counterargument to their theological point of view" (Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT, 204). Following his question, Paul recounts three historical facts recorded in Genesis: 1) "Abraham had two sons," Ishmael, the older son, and Isaac, his junior by fourteen years; 2) their two mothers differed in status: the one, Hagar, was a slave, the other, Sarah, was free; and 3) the two sons differed in how they were born: Ishmael was born "in the ordinary way" (lit., "according to flesh"), while Isaac was born "as a result of a promise" (lit., "through promise").

The second part interprets the historical facts *figuratively* or *analogically*. In Paul's analogy the two mothers represent two covenants. On the one hand, Hagar stands for Mount Sinai, represents the covenant of Moses, and corresponds to the "present city of Jerusalem," Judaism's headquarters, because its citizens, i.e., her children, are in slavery. On the other hand, Sarah represents the promise to

Abraham and corresponds to the "Jerusalem that is above," because its citizens, i.e., her children, are free. In other words, Christians have Sarah as their mother. What's more, Sarah, the once-desolate woman, has more children than Hagar, "who has a husband." On the quotation from Isaiah 54:1, one commentator explains: "Sarah, the wife who formerly 'was barren' and 'had no child' (Gen. 11:30), did 'break into a shout of joy' when she gave birth to Isaac (cf. 21:6f.), and her children through Isaac were more numerous than those of Hagar, who 'had a husband' and bore him a son, Ishmael (cf. Gen. 16). It follows that the Christian Church, which corresponds to Sarah and the Jerusalem above (v. 26), was more fruitful than Judaism, which corresponds to Hagar and 'the

Jerusalem of today' (v. 25); whereas Judaism, in which the law held sway, limited God's people to the Jews, the Church, through the preaching of the law-free gospel, embraced Gentiles and Jews alike within the one chosen people of God" (Fung, 211).

The third part applies the analogy to the situation in Galatia. In the same way Ishmael persecuted Isaac (Ge 21:6), so do the legalistic and nomistic Judaizers persecute those who like Isaac were "born by the power of the Spirit" (v. 29). The only thing to do is what the Scripture says, "Get rid of the slave woman and her son" (v. 30). In other words, expel the Judaizers and their influence from the churches.

The Message of the Passage

Christians, who are children of the free woman, Sarah, have no business living like they are children of the slave woman, Hagar, by putting themselves under the law.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following living questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 21 **law** "Law" is used in two ways here. "It would appear that the readers are addressed as those who wanted or desired to be under law (in context, specifically the law of Moses) as religious principle, while Paul's challenge to them is to become 'aware of' (NIV), and give heed to, what the Pentateuch has to say by way of instruction. This instruction he now draws out for his readers from a portion of the Genesis story" (Fung, 204-205).

v. 22 **the slave woman** Use of the definite article indicates Paul's readers are familiar with the story. "'The wording', as Barrett observes, 'implies that the story is already before the Galatians; they will know that the slave is Hagar, the free woman Sarah. The articles are anaphoric in this sense' (ibid.). The Judaizers had evidently contemporized the Hagar-Sarah story in their argument to prove that since the promises were made to Abraham and his seed, who was Sarah's son Isaac, Gentile Christians had no share in the promise unless they submitted to the Mosaic law given to Isaac's posterity and were circumcised" (Longenecker, 207-208).

v. 24 **figuratively** "Paul then interpreted these events figuratively. Note that he said the story 'contained' an allegory, not 'was' an allegory (lit. 'which things are allegorized'). He acknowledged the historicity of the events. Paul saw in this story an illustration of the conflict between Judaism and Christianity, nomism and spirituality. He was calling allegory what we refer to as analogy. An 'allegory,' as we use that term today, is a story in which the events are not historical" (Constable, 58-59). Since the story was not originally given as an allegory and not meant by its original author to be treated as such, why did Paul so treat it here? Perhaps he did so to respond in kind to some treatment of the same story by his Galatian opponents; perhaps he takes up passages used by them, correcting their interpretations, to show that their prooftexts support his position rather than theirs. (See C. K. Barrett's proposal cited by Longenecker, 210 and by Fung, 219-20.)

v. 24 **covenant/Hagar** The place where the covenant was given, Mount Sinai, refers figuratively (*metonymy*) to the covenant that was given there. "On the one hand, Hagar stands for the covenant derived from Mount Sinai and producing children for bondage: just as the children of a slave-wife (unless acknowledged as true children by the husband and master) were destined to be slaves themselves, so the covenant of law given at Sinai committed all who embraced it to its binding power. Over against Hagar and the covenant of law which she represents (see on v. 25) stands the free woman (v. 22b), with the other covenant represented by her. The unnamed free woman is obviously Sarah while the other covenant, similarly unnamed, is obviously the covenant of faith referred to in 3:17 in contrast with the law (though the latter is not there specifically called a covenant)" (Fung, 206-207).

v. 25 **Jerusalem** As the "headquarters" of Judaism, the expression refers figuratively (*metonymy*) to Jews ['her children'] in slavery to the law. "Hagar stood for the first century city of Jerusalem, a city enslaved to Rome and in slavery to the Law" (Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, 604). "In vv 25 and 26 Paul uses the form [*Ierousalem*] (a fairly close transliteration of the Hebrew), whereas in 1:17f. and 2:1 he has used the Hellenized plural [*Ierosoluma*]. In those earlier references he has the geographical site in view; here the emphasis is more on the religious significance of the city" (Bruce, 220).

v. 25 **her children** "Representing Mount Sinai in Arabia, then, Hagar corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem of Paul's day, which was in spiritual bondage together with her children just as Hagar was in physical bondage with her child Ishmael. Thus the fact of bondage (albeit in two different senses) holds together Hagar and Ishmael, the Sinaitic covenant of law, the present earthly Jerusalem (which stands by metonymy for Judaism, with its trust in physical descent from Abraham and reliance on legal observance as the way of salvation), and her children, that is, all who adhere to the law as the means of justification and the principle of life" (209).

v. 26 **Jerusalem** If Hagar stands for "Mount Sinai" (i.e., the law) and corresponds to "the present city of Jerusalem" (i.e., Jews "in slavery" to the law), then Sarah stands for the promise and corresponds to "the Jerusalem that is above" (i.e., Christians freed from the law). "This Jerusalem, says Paul, is 'our mother'—that is, the mother of those who are Christians" (Fung, 210).

v. 27 **for it is written** "The quotation from Isaiah 54:1 predicted that Israel, which was comparatively barren before the Babylonian exile, would enjoy numerous children in the future. This is probably a reference to the blessings of the millennial kingdom. Paul applied this prophecy to Sarah. She would have greater blessing and more children in the future than in the past, children of the promises, namely, all true believers including Christians" (Constable, 60).

v. 31 **get rid of** The apostle is not directing Gentile believers to expel Jewish Christians from their churches; what he is asking is much more specific. "Paul calls for the expulsion of the Judaizers who had come into the Galatian congregations from the outside . . . the Galatian believers should 'cast out' the Judaizers and their influence from the Christian congregations of Galatia" (Longenecker, 217).

Family Time

Parents, our summer series in *PantegoKids* is called **True or False?** Like the adults, we will be studying the book of Galatians to discover how to live out true faith. *Our kids' lessons, however, will not textually align each week with adult teaching. Core competencies will also likely be different. We will be memorizing Galatians 5:22-26.*

Self-control can be described as the ability to stop and think before acting or the ability to stay goal-directed in the face of temptation. Self-control is an ability that develops over time. It's like a muscle that gets stronger as you use it. Here are a few things to consider as you help your child learn self-control. (1) Help them develop good habits. Things like putting away your toys may not be fun but it develops discipline as you make it a habit. (2) Give your child responsibility. It takes self-control to say no to your favorite show and finish your chores. (3) Enforce limits. When your child has not used self-control, use the consequences to help them remember to make a better choice next time. (4) Teach them to stop and think before responding. Model this skill by not reacting too quickly to them. (5) Teach delayed gratification. Your child does not need the newest video game on the day it comes out. Waiting produces self-control. I'm praying for you as you disciple your kids!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Nehemiah 4

1. Who was trying to keep Nehemiah from rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem?
2. According to verse 8, what were they planning to do?
3. What was Nehemiah's response?

What Do You Think

1. In what ways did Nehemiah exercise self-control?
2. Name some specific times you have exercised self-control.

What R U Going To Do

You will have an opportunity this week to use self-control. Pray and ask God to help you through that situation and then tell your small group about it at church next week.

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Self-Control - I can take charge of myself with Jesus' help.

Memory Verse

Galatians 5:22-26

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.