

Christ Reformation Church

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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.

“In the Fullness of Time”

December 22, 2013

Sermon Text: Galatians 4:4

Scripture Reading: Col 2:13-23

Introduction-

We need not leave Galatians for this Christmas Sunday. Paul wrote one of the most condensed statements of the incarnation of Christ in chapter 4, verse 4 –

Gal 4:4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

Let's consider this important idea of “the fullness of time” in more detail. Here is the context of the verse:

Gal 4:1-7 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, (2) but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. (3) In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. **(4) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,** (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (7) So you are no longer a

slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

The image Paul is using here is plainly that of a pregnant woman who, “in the fullness of time” gives birth to her child. So it was with Mary.

Luk 2:6-7 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. (7) And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Son of God was born a son of a woman. Notice Paul does not say “born of a man and a woman” – the virgin birth, you see.

The Fullness of Time

Now there have been many pages written about this matter of the fullness of time. Commentators have noted:

- Rome had conquered and provided law and order to the civilized world
- Roman roads increased the speed of communication
- Alexander the Great’s prior conquests had brought the Greek language throughout the empire

These things and more certainly did come into play in regard to the time

appointed by God for Christ to be born. Time is presented in Scripture as ordered perfectly by God. His decrees cannot be thwarted. (See 4:2 – “the date set by his father”).

But perhaps what we see Paul emphasizing here in regard to this fullness of time having arrived is this matter once again of the “elementary principles of the world.” Mankind had been enslaved all of those centuries prior, and especially for over 1200 years since the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. Whether it be pagan religion or the Mosaic Law, all of humanity had been living without God and without hope in the world. All of this time the law had been doing its work – convicting, condemning, sentencing to death.

Rom 3:19-20 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (20) For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Another picture of this slavery to the elementary principles of the world is Israel in slavery in Egypt. For over 400 years they were enslaved in a miserable condition with no hope. And

then the time came for Moses to be born – another “fullness of time” you see. Then came the Exodus. So it is with Christ who came to lead His people out of this wicked world into freedom. The Christmas season is a time to celebrate the arrival of our Redeemer.

In the fullness of time, He was born. Born at the exact point in history that God had ordained. A kind of end point to which all history before had been leading up to, every second being ordained by God. At the appointed time, Christ was born in Bethlehem and appeared upon the human scene.

NOTE: There is yet another great “end point” of history coming. One to which all events are leading, and which is also still another appearance of Christ. He came once. He is coming again. The world appears to be total chaos. But it is proceeding according to Plan. One day, at the precise second, Christ is going to appear. If there were angel choirs glorying at Bethlehem, what will it be when Christ comes again for this final time? Paul says that the entire creation (Romans 8) is groaning, awaiting that ultimate end point of history.

Born Under the Law

Here is another very important point for us to understand. The Son of God

came into this world and was *born under the law*. When the Son took on human form so that He became the God-man, He entered into man’s condition. Namely, he came “under the law.” What does this mean? We will let Scripture tell us:

Rom 3:19-20 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks **to those who are under the law**, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (20) For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Rom 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since **you are not under law** but under grace.

Gal 3:23 Now before faith came, we were **held captive under the law**, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

To be “under the law” is to be under obligation to the law. It is to be in a condition of relating to God on the basis of doing what the Law commands or forbids. To be obligated to keep the law.

And this is the condition that the Son of God entered this world in – under the Law. William Hendriksen writes:

“Born under law...in the sense not only of being under personal obligation to keep that law, but also of being duty-bound...vicariously to bear the law’s penalty and to satisfy its demand of perfect obedience.”

Now, why was it so vital that Christ be born *under the law*? Paul tells us –

“to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons”

Christ came as the second and last Adam. That is to say, He came as the Head and representative of His people – of His elect. Just as the first Adam represented all humanity, so Christ represents this new humanity – His flock. By being born under obligation to the Law, He was able then to obey the Law and meet all of its demands – for us! He removed the curse:

Gal 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--

So we have seen, the Law curses everyone who is under it. Not one single person in all of history has ever been justified by the law. The law is only in the business of cursing and killing, not giving life. But Christ, because He was born under the Law,

not only kept the law perfectly, He took the Law’s demands – the curse – fully and completely upon Himself and died to pay our debt. This is redemption. In Christ we died and therefore the Law’s demands upon us have been completely met. Thus, *we are no longer under the Law*. And that means we are no longer cursed. We are free.

Foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you! Why would you ever want to go back to a condition of being cursed?

And yet, WE can be the foolish Galatians if we are careless and fall for the schemes of false teachers who creep in among us and want to enslave us so that we give them our praise.

Redeemed to be Sons

And here is the point of this redemption from the law and its curse – *sonship and inheritance*.

Gal 4:6-7 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (7) So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Remember? God gave the Promise to Abraham. Abraham believed it, and his faith was counted to him as

righteousness. In the same manner, we are righteous before God by faith in Christ and become sons of Abraham. Sons are heirs. Heirs of everything Abraham possesses – and that means, we are heirs of the Promise. We are joined to Christ, the Seed of Abraham, and by this union through faith, we are Abraham’s offspring. Mere physical descent as a Jew does not create the real sons. Isaac was born by God’s doing according to God’s Promise, and so are we.

So there it is. That is the glory of Christmas. Not only that in the fullness of time, Christ was born – but that Christ was born under the law so that He could redeem us from the curse of the law.

Col 2:13-14 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, (14) **by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.**

Don’t Go Back to Egypt

We have many warnings in the New Testament that we take care to never again look to the law and our works as a means of being set right with God.

You’ve heard it here in Galatians, and you have heard it this morning in Colossians:

Col 2:18-23 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, (19) and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. (20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-- (21) "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings? (23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

If God saw it to be necessary that we be given repeated warnings about looking to our own works for justification, and that we be warned about people who will try to bring us into that kind of bondage, then surely we need to heed these warnings and not be careless.

If we yield to these false teachers (and they come in all sizes and shapes) then we will be returning from freedom back to slavery in Egypt under a cruel taskmaster. The law is cruel. Make no mistake about it. You will find no relief for your conscience there. No rest. Only condemnation, curse, and death.

Let me give you an example. I give it because we need to be very, very clear about what we might call *not permitting the Joy of Christmas to be stolen from us!* If we yield to legalism and go back under the law as our means of relating to God, then the good news that in the fullness of time Christ was sent forth by the Father and born of a woman – will be lost to us.

This past week in the women's study we looked at a program that is being advertised and promoted right now among churches with a really slick marketing campaign. It *looks* so wonderful and Christian and joyful and...yet it is sheer slavery and bondage. Here is the critique I have written about this program which will be published on our blog in early January -

Recently I was emailed promotional material for "**Hope and Help for the Single Mom**" program by Lori Little. It is endorsed by a parade of

evangelical names such as Charles Stanley –

If a single mom will follow these 21 principles, there is no way for her to fail. (Charles Stanley)

Others endorsers featured are Stormie Omartian, Jill Briscoe, Elisabeth Elliot, Neil Anderson, Kay Arthur, Josh Harris, John Trent, and on the list goes. Here is some more information taken from this material:

"Lori Little is the author of the 21 Principles of a Healthy Single Mom which is a DVD curriculum and book (much like Beth Moore) for the church to use as a Sunday morning class, small, home, life or care groups, outreach, mission and evangelism through the church." (Info taken from email brochure sent to me by Lori Little)

I am learning that very, very often these kinds of programs/kits/how-to's are the typical way that man-made traditions are created that are not biblical, *but which are passed off as being Bible truth.* So when I see a statement by someone like Charles Stanley, claiming that here is a step by step way to achieve certain success, my radar starts flashing "Incoming!!" Sure enough, this series fires 21 incoming missiles of false information and in some cases just plain damaging teaching.

I wish that I had the time to review and critique all 21 of the "principles" Little presents in this program. It would take hours and hours. But here are just three of them that I think in themselves will be adequate to enable our readers to see the damage this series will do. They are taken directly from the promotional info sent to me. I will insert a few comments about each immediately following each one:

Principle 8: The Principle of SPEAR THROWING

You must forgive, get along with, speak blessings over, build up and pray for your children's father. Never teach your children to take up your offense.

Speaker: Lori Little

Tell me, does God Himself "speak blessings over" His enemies? Does He tell us to LIE to our children by "building up" their abuser father? Guess what? An abuse victim's children, in a very real sense, DO need to take up their mother's (or father's, if the wife is the abuser) offense! And where in the world are we told that we have to "get along with" our unrepentant, abuser/tormentor! This is not Bible truth. These are man made traditions that enslave and oppress and endanger.

Principle 9: The Principle of PURPOSE

Let God create a new plan that will enable you to live a life that is both on

purpose and successful in all areas of your life.

Speaker: Tammy London (Lori's personal Life Coach)

"Successful in all areas of your life." Isn't this starting to sound like some sales promotional? What exactly does this mean? A single mom, if she follows these 21 steps, can absolutely be assured that she is going to be successful in all areas of her life? Is that what the book of Ecclesiastes tells us? Isn't this the very theology of Job's "friends" who the Lord was so angry with? This is tradition, not Bible. And it is legalism. *Just do these rules and God will bless you.* Where is the Lord Jesus Christ and HIS righteousness in all of this? [I don't have time to explain at length how the series begins by treading essentially totally around all of that nasty business of sin, and God's judgment, and how we all need to believe in Christ and repent if we are to be justified before God].

Principle 21: The Principle of REWARD

Your reward will be to see the sweet fruits of the Holy Spirit in your children's lives. They will bless you and praise you for the virtues you lived out and poured into them.

Speaker: Dr. John Trent

In some ways this last principle is the most vicious of all. Yes, vicious.

THEY WILL BLESS YOU AND PRAISE YOU. *Your children WILL do this! This WILL be your reward.* I say again, this is sheer legalism. Do this, don't do that, and you *will* merit God's blessing. This is just plain false. It is a lie. This is saying that WE can save our children. Abuse victims know full well how the lies of their abusers so often turn their children against the victim. And sometimes - even with some regularity - that alienation *never ends*. So what in the world is going to happen if a mother buys into this 21 principle nonsense, pours herself into it, and it doesn't work? I can tell you what is going to happen. Devastation. False guilt. Maybe even a turning her back on Christ.

Now that is just one example, but we are exposed to myriads of these kinds of systems that would bring us back under the law.

Let's identify some typical characteristics of these kinds of false teachers and their programs that occur over and over again. By watching for them, we can better be on guard:

1. One major personality is identified and promoted.
2. The teachings of that major personality are published in an unreal number of books and other media.

3. Other celebrities jump in and praise the major personality as being just short of Christ himself.
4. The false teacher offers books and teaching on just about any subject of life you can imagine.
5. And very often, they will inevitably publish X Steps to Freedom and the Joyful Life.
6. Bible verses will be sprinkled all through these teachings, each being given very, very superficial treatment.

Conclusion

Now, contrast all of that to Jesus our Lord. How did He enter this world?

...born of woman, born under law...

In a barn. In poverty. Ultimately despised, rejected, condemned and killed.

And contrast all of these systems of "do not handle, do not taste, do not touch," with the good news of Christ's gospel.

We are about to come to chapter 5 of Galatians. This chapter is one of the clearest statements of "the key to joyful and victorious living in Christ" that exists. It doesn't have 21 steps. It doesn't even have 10. In fact, it has just one –

Gal 5:16-18 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (17) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

In the fullness of time, Christ entered this world. He became a curse for us and died so that we could die to the law and thus have all of its demands upon us met. He obeyed that law perfectly for us. He raised us up with Him and made us new creations.

And here He tells us – *walk by the Spirit*. My Spirit is in you, leading you. All you have to do is walk in My Spirit, and you will have victory over sin. You are not under the law any longer.

Let me close with just a few pertinent quotes from Wilhelm Walther:

We must guard with special care, so that these two doctrines may not be mingled with each other, or Law be made out of the Gospel. This mingling hides the merit of Christ and robs troubled consciences of their comfort, which they otherwise have in the Holy Gospel when it is preached genuinely and in its purity. The Gospel supports

them in their most severe trials against the terrors of the Law. If these two doctrines are not kept separate, the merit of Christ is hidden. For if I am afraid of the threats of the Law, I have forgotten Christ, who says to me: “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Ferdinand, Carl; Wilhelm Walther (1905-07-02). *Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* (Kindle Locations 3372-3382). Concordia Publishing House. Kindle Edition.

That is the glory and joy of Christmas. Peace on earth, because the good-will of God Himself is upon men in this Son born of a woman, born under the law.