

Words of Life

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Paul was beside himself. He felt like a father who was losing his children. There is no greater loss in life than the death of a child, let alone the number of sons and daughters in the churches of Galatia. Paul was bonded to them, being used of God to bring about their new birth, their rebirth. I have been with my wife when all four children were born. The joy of that moment is unspeakable. When God uses you to bring a person to Jesus, when you pray with that person or people to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, there is immense joy, the joy of the Lord. Witnessing a birth as such is something you never forget.

Paul was beside himself in deep anguish because these newborn Christians were accepting the lies of the false teachers. On the road to Damascus when Paul saw the Lord Jesus in a vision, Jesus convinced Paul that salvation, being born again, was all a work of God. It is God's work that saves us. It is all God's work period. The false teachers added the Old Testament law as part of the equation for salvation. In other words, the false teaching went like this. God's grace plus following the Law equals salvation. This could not be more wrong. The righteousness that God requires of us to be saved forever is a gift given to us by grace through faith. Jesus paid for it in full (in what?) in full on the cross. We add nothing to the work of Christ. By faith in Jesus the work that He did on the cross makes us acceptable to God, forever. No person has ever been saved by following the 613 laws of the Old Testament, or the ten commandments or the two greatest commandments. No not one.

These false teachers were putting the burden of the law on these newborn babes in Christ. How would you as a parent feel if someone came into your home and started feeding your baby poison? I do not think you would be grateful. Even with the formula shortage, poison is never the answer.

Galatians chapter four is all about showing the church where their belief system has taken a wrong turn. It reminds me of why we left the ELCA. There is a specific belief system in the ELCA that we could not live with, poison in the ranks. And when it comes to calling a new pastor, he or she will have to fit into the belief system of the Bible that we adhere to. Biblical Christianity is the only true religion. God performed the first wedding bringing together Adam and Eve, God's model for marriage. Yes, there was a Noah, an ark, and there was a flood. Abraham actually lived and is a true historical figure. The miracles in the Bible are not myth but took place in real history. Jesus truly is the Son of God and God the son. There are such things as angels and demons. There is a place called hell. Not all people will end up in heaven. Jesus never sinned. Salvation is by grace through faith, through Christ alone, through faith alone, through grace alone. Jesus is coming again, and we will all get caught up in the air to be with the Lord forever and ever. We do not need some unbelieving pastor in our midst. This would grieve God. The poison of unbelief saves no one. I never take it for granted that when I meet a pastor that he or she is a Christian. There are many false teachers to this day and that is not someone you want on staff. It is important for the call committee to be theologically astute. If you have any questions about this, please speak to Bob Yarbrough. He knows all of this far better than I do especially since the staff is not a part of the process due to the independence of the call committee.

Paul points out their error. **Galatians 4:10-11 (NLT2)** *“¹⁰You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years. ¹¹I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing.”* Paul is speaking as a father doing his best to get the children to turn around in the direction of Christ and grace. Paul continues, **Galatians 4:12-16 (NLT2)** *“You did not mistreat me when I first preached to you. ¹³Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News. ¹⁴But even though my condition tempted you to reject me, you did not despise me or turn me away. No, you took me in and cared for me as*

though I were an angel from God or even Christ Jesus himself. ¹⁵ *Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then? I am sure you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible.* ¹⁶ *Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?”* When in Galatia Paul had grown ill to the point that it impacted his physical appearance and gave him somewhat of a repulsive appearance (Warren W Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, pg. 708). We do not know what the illness was. Some believe it to some sort of eye infection or problem. Others think malaria. Whatever the difficulty, the people treated Paul as if he were an angel or even Christ Jesus Himself. The love they had for Paul is what I call supernatural, a God-given love that spurs on spiritual growth.

Galatians 4:17 (NLT2) *“¹⁷Those false teachers are so eager to win your favor, but their intentions are not good. They are trying to shut you off from me so that you will pay attention only to them.”* The false teachers were looking for the acceptance of the people. The false teachers were looking for the praise of the congregation. They were foxes in sheep’s clothing, instruments of Satan. The false teachers teaching was destroying the original joy the believers had in Jesus when they followed the teachings of Paul, the Gospel of grace. There is a hint that the people were beginning to turn against each other. Confusion was in the air.

Galatians 4:19-20 (NLT2) *“¹⁹Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I’m going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.* ²⁰ *I wish I were with you right now so I could change my tone. But at this distance I don’t know how else to help you.”* It is as if Paul is throwing his hands up in the air, “I don’t know what else to do or say. Paul is pouring out his heart with great love as a father to newborn babies. Dr. Wiersbe writes, “We parents never see to outgrow our children. When they are little, they are a handful; when they are grown, they are a handful. When they are little, they step on your toes but when they are grown, they step on your heart” (ibid. pg. 708).

In the next 9 verses Paul uses the Old Testament story of Abraham fathering a child through Hagar, Sarah's nursemaid. God had promised Abraham a son, but years had gone by and nothing had happened. So, Abraham and Sarah took things into their own hands and tried to accomplish the Lord's will outside of God's will. Friends, you and I can walk in the flesh, or we can walk in the Spirit as we live for Christ. To walk in the flesh is to try to do what is right in God's eyes all on our own without God's help, strength, or wisdom. We do it on our own. Or as the child says, "I want to do it myself." And when we do, this burnout occurs rather quickly and we learn the hard way that our way without God doesn't work. We find ourselves exhausted because we wear ourselves out using our own human strength instead of relying on God. To walk in the Spirit is to accomplish God's will in your life because it is the Holy Spirit empowering you to do so. To walk in the Spirit is the only way to please God. Sometimes we try to do too much for God and this does not please the Lord. The Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God." God is never pleased with our overwrought-ness and sheer exhaustion. Something has to give, or we do ourselves in.

Back to Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. It was the custom in those days that if a child could not be conceived, the wife would give to her husband her nursemaid. They would have relations and that is how a child would be born to them. Friends, just because this world thinks something is okay does not make it right in God's eyes. Roe V Wade does not make abortion right in God's sight. The promise given to Abraham was to be fulfilled by the power of God's Spirit, not the power of the flesh. God makes this point very clear. Later God fulfills the promise in God's way. Abraham and Sarah conceive and out comes Isaac, the son of the promise. And through this son eventually the Messiah would be born. The Christian faith comes through the son of the promise, Isaac, born according to God's plan and not the son of a slave woman, Hagar, born due to the result of the flesh, trying to accomplish God's purposes outside of God's will.

In Paul's words **Galatians 4:23 (NLT2)** 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.* Our gift of eternal life is based on a promise given to Abraham and Sarah and fulfilled according to God's plan. Salvation is only through Christ, the Messiah, whose birth was brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit.

I will end this sermon skipping into chapter five. **Galatians 5:13-15 (NLT2)** ¹³*For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.* ¹⁴*For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* ¹⁵*But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another."*

Yes, we are free from the Law, but God does not want us to abuse our freedom by living out the desires of our sinful nature, by walking in the flesh, where our behaviors are dominated by our dirty, rotten, sinful, human nature. We are free to obey, to walk in the power of God's Holy Spirit living a life that pleases God because we are doing it in God's power, not our own human strength.

One can see in this last verse that the people were turning against one another, eating one another alive so to speak, devouring each other with their misspoken words. Recently I have had some dreadful memories of things I have said that were terribly mean. Going as far back as grade school, I cringe at what came out of my mouth. Junior and Senior high I had a quick tongue and knew how to knock people flat with words. Not only that, I enjoyed inflicting pain on others. One day I will be held accountable to God for each misspoken word.

This has been a tough week with the shootings in Uvalde Texas. I want to use this last verse to make a point. 1. **¹⁵But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.** Be careful what you say to another person. The

mean comments you make to a person adds up and if lots of people put a person down over the years, the anger builds up. Those mean words inwardly destroy and devastate a person's spirit. There is much more that led to this young man's demise, including parents that did not fulfill their God-given role. We are all in deep grief over this. The sadness is nationwide. Every parent who has a child or children in school is impacted in some way or another.

There is something we all can do. We can teach our children not to put other students down, no matter how fun or easy it might be. We can teach each other not to destroy or devour people with our words. We can be like cannibals and eat people alive. Our flesh, our sinful nature lives to put people down, to be highly critical of one another. It is a national sickness. Just listen to the news. Putting down a person for their point of view has become a national past time. Love builds up through God's Holy Spirit. The flesh destroys and is the language of Satan. Lord, please forgive us for speaking words that destroy people. Help us to uplift those who are so discouraged and have been knocked down for years. This we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

When we serve one another in love, with our words and actions, we calm the cries of hurting hearts. Please listen to this video. The speaker explains that this is a video of when his baby was born, named Portland. The video is only a little over 2 minutes so please do your best to listen carefully. The video will speak for itself. Pay attention to what happens to the crying baby when she hears her father's voice.

Note: We were unable to embed the video in this publication. If you'd like to see the video clip, you can go to SMLCDigital on YouTube and watch the service on May 29, 2022.