

Illusions for Solutions

Galatians 4:12-31

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The forces of evil in our universe are good at offering *substitutes* for the real thing.

To draw us away from what pleases God ...

sin gets dressed up to look very **reasonable** and **excusable**, even **appealing** as an **alternative** to what's right.

It tells **small lies**, or **holds back a few facts** to take the place of **truth**.

When a **child isn't wanted**, some substitute **abortion** in place of **adoption**.

They say it's not only for **your good**. They **claim** it's for the **good of the child**.

People make excuses to **substitute sinful things** for the **moral principles** God gave us.

They make **promises** they **don't intend to keep**.

If they're **late** getting somewhere, they **break the traffic laws** -- and hope they **don't get caught**.

If they **don't feel like** getting up to go to **Sunday School**, or to **worship** on Sunday,

it's justified by saying Sunday is a **day of rest**. After all **God is everywhere**, you **don't need to be in church**.

In cases like those, *evil-substitutes* replace what God said is right.

At the **root of the deception** is **putting us creatures over our Creator**.

They see their **own efforts** as what **makes things happen**.

They soak up the glory for good deeds, instead of **giving God the glory**.

They believe that the **way of salvation** is **controlled by the sinner**, not the Redeemer.

God is imagined as just **waiting for our permission** to save us.

Many imagine we earn that by **doing good deeds**, or taking part in **rituals**.

But that's clearly **not** what the **Bible teaches**.

These are **inventions of the lost heart**. It **craves** to be the **center and cause of its own good and success**.

They are **illusions** in stead of **real solutions** for the **challenges and responsibilities** we face.

That's what was happening in Galatia not long after the Apostle Paul left there.

Judaizers had come, and were **confusing** the new believers.

They wanted the **new Gentile Christians** to be **bound** to the **old ceremonies** of Old Israel.

They **confused the Gospel message**.

The **ceremonial laws were never meant to continue** past the coming of the Promised Messiah.

They were to **prepare us** for what the **Christ** was going to accomplish.

The **sacrificial and ritual laws** pointed to the work of the **sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross**.

God's **moral laws** never provided a way to be **made right with God**.

They **defined sin**, and **expose us** as **lost** and **unworthy** of God's blessings. Obeying them is to show **gratitude**.

God's law points out a path no one can follow or even **understand** - **until** God by **grace** changes the heart.

God's promise all along, was to **come as our Redeemer**

to **die** in the place of worthless, fallen sinners unable to do anything purely good.

and to **transform them** into his people by **grace alone** through **Christ alone**.

But the way of the **Judaizers** was to **replace God's promise** with **impossible human effort**.

They **missed the law's message** completely. **Paul deals with this issue from various angles** in this letter.

So, Paul reminded the Galatians about his previous visit with them. Galatians 4:12-16

12. Brothers, I entreat you, **become as I am**, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.

13. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,

14. and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me,
but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

15. **What then has become of the blessing you felt?**

For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

16. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

While the **Judaizers urged** believers to **trust in their own efforts** by the law,

Paul was resting in God's grace and promises. He wanted them to **be like him** in that way.

That was the message he brought to them on his previous visit there.

Paul addresses them as his *brothers*. When he came with that message, they **gratefully received him and his message**.

Paul reminds them that when he **ministered** to them **in did it in spite of a problem of some sort.**

The word for *ailment* in verse 13 is *ἀσθένεια* which means *feebleness, frailty*, or even a *disease*.

Some believe he had an eye problem because of what he said in verse 15 about gouging out their eye to give to him.

But **there's another way** to understand what Paul's saying here.

In his Epistles, Paul uses this word *ἀσθένεια* **12 times**, and a related word **14 times**.

He **often** used these words **to describe his own frailties as a man** during his *sufferings* by *persecutors*.

In verse 12 Paul implies that **some were opposing him**, but it wasn't the Galatians.

This **attack on the gospel** might have **tempted believers to back away, and not stand with him -- yet they did.**

In spite of these persecutions, the Galatians **didn't reject Paul** because of the threats which they might face too.

They would have **given their eyes** for him - a **common proverb for serious self sacrifice.**

That was the respect they had for him **back** when he visited before.

but now he was being portrayed as their enemy by those luring them away from God's true promises.

Paul still cared for these believers, so he was lovingly writing to **remind** them about **God's truth.**

As it says in **Proverbs 27:6**, "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*"

Compassion goes out of it's way to promote the truth - lovingly, humbly, and carefully.

The faithful persist to encourage **God's people to trust in God's promises**, and to **avoid distortions.**

But these others were trying to win over the Galatians, turning them away from the gospel.

17. They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

18. It is **always good to be made much of for a good purpose**, and not only when I am present with you,

19. my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

20. I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

It can be good to "be made much of" someone, but it **isn't in itself a good thing.**

To *make much* of them uses the Greek word "zaelo" (*ζήλω*) from which we get our word "*zeal*"

It means these enemies were **zealous, highly motivated** and **dedicated** to promote their errors.

They were trying hard **to recruit believers** for their misguided cause. It **wasn't for a good purpose.**

They wanted them **to turn against Paul.** They were **pressuring them to abandon God's true church.**

Don't leave zeal to the ungodly. We need to be **zealous for the good things.**

We need to be **highly motivated** to live by, and to promote **God's promises and principles.**

Think of the **examples in the Bible** of people **zealous** for God's truth and ways:

people like Jeremiah, Moses, King David, Ruth, Daniel, Timothy, Priscila, Peter, and Paul himself.

But **if that zeal** to kindly but faithfully stand up **for God's truth and ways is missing** from your life, you should **be very concerned** and make it a matter of **sincere prayer.**

The issue being challenged in Galatia, was the meaning of the Gospel.

21. 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.

Notice how Paul refers to **God's law in two completely different ways** in verse 21.

Some wanted to be **under the law**, but Paul wanted them to **listen to the law.**

The **religious Judaizers** wanted to be **under the rituals, rules, and regulations,**

but they were **not hearing** what **God's law** was *teaching* through those outward forms.

Far from condemning the law in any way, the Apostle **appealed** to God's law.

There was **something** in it they were **missing.** That's why they were **misusing** it.

They took the **message that pointed to Christ** - then turn it around to **point to themselves.**

Their efforts replaced **God's work of Grace** with a **religion of symbols, rituals, and rules.**

So Paul goes **back to a story** they'd all heard many times: **the story of Abraham's two sons.**

In **Genesis 15 Abraham** wondered how he would become a great nation when he **had no sons.**

God told him in verse 5, "*Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.*"

Then he said to him, "**So shall your offspring be.**"

After some time had gone by, Abraham and his wife Sarah still had no children.

They started to wonder about God's promise.

They impatiently decided to have a child another way.

Sarah gave her female servant Hagar to her husband to have a child with her instead.

By custom then the child would *legally* be the heir of Abraham and Sarah, not of Hagar.

They tried to make things work out by their own efforts, rather than by trusting God's promise.

Still more time had gone by when in Genesis 18, Jehovah appeared again to Abraham.

He told him that his wife Sarah would now have the child God had promised.

Sarah laughed at the idea. She was 89 years old and Abraham was 99.

Nevertheless, God repeated his promise in verse 14, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

Here in Galatians 4:22 & 23 Paul compares these two sons.

The son born to Hagar was Ishmael -- a *child of a bondwoman*, born according to the *flesh*.

It was a son born by the **sinful scheme** of Abraham and Sarah.

They were unwilling to wait by faith for the fulfillment of God's word.

The son born to Sarah was Isaac -- the *child of a freewoman* born according to God's *promise*.

Similarly, the *Judaizers* who came to Galatia replaced God's promise with human efforts.

They looked to the ceremonies and rituals of God's law,

but they missed the promise these laws pointed toward.

Instead of seeing God's promise in the rituals,

they looked to their own human efforts to make themselves right with God.

This is the lesson here -- as Paul directly points out in the next verses:

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.

There aren't two separate covenants of God here.

There are two perceptions of God's covenant: one view of it was *wrong*, and other one was *right*.

The one was just an illusion - It taught that human effort is the way to get right with God.

They thought they could perfectly keep the law's demands on their own,

instead of trusting in a Savior who would keep the law in their place.

The other view of the covenant is the way God intended it: that we wait on the Lord.

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.

The Judaizers claimed to keep God's law, and boasted that they were sons of Abraham.

They only kept the law outwardly. They missed the whole point of it.

And yes, they were sons of Abraham but only physically, like the son of Hagar.

They descended from him, but were not children of the promise.

They knew nothing of the faith of Abraham that learned to trust in all God says.

Sarah was barren for a time, but she was destined to become fruitful by God's promise.

She and Abraham were wrong to try to fulfill that promise by their sinful efforts.

God's church and God's people, no matter how barren things may seem at the time,

should press on based on God's promise, not resorting to alternatives which offend God.

Religion born of man's efforts is an illusion.

Those who believe they **can earn God's blessing**, actually **forfeit them**.

The contrast the Bible shows us here is **between *doubt* and *trust*** in God's Promises
God honors the faithful, those who patiently **rest in the ways revealed** in Scripture.

This same principle guides us still today.

God calls us to **trust him** and to **do things his way**.

Until Christ changes our hearts we live under the impression that **in some way our own efforts save us**.

But that's **exactly what Paul points out as wrong here**. **Jesus** taught against this error too.

The **real promise** is the **opposite** to the message of the **Judaizers**.

It's the message of false religion all through history, and of most religious groups today.

The price has been paid on that Cross. We are simply called to **trust in that fact**.

Tell your struggling neighbors and friends **the truth**, as Paul lovingly told the Galatians.

The principle of faith goes beyond just this message of Salvation.

We need to **trust God** about **how we should live daily** in this world he made.

Some **abandon God's ways for substitutes**.

To deal with **inner stress and problems**, and to **satisfy** what they think they need for **pleasure and needs**
some **give in to immoral or sinful things**.

God tells us **how we should provide for our real needs**.

To honor God we need to **work diligently, honestly, and follow God's teachings in all things**.

We're to do **all for God's glory**, not just for personal gain.

We need to **resist** the **temptations** that look to **substitutes** for **God's promises and instructions**.

The ways so popular in the lost world are not **supposed** to be **our ways**.

The blessings of God's promises are not found in substitutes. They're **not solutions**. They're really **just illusions**.

The **lost soul** is **bound** by the **chains of sin**, and isn't even able to recognize the chains.

He wants things that he believes will **satisfy himself**, and he wants to **get them his own way**.

The **bondage of his mind and heart** to sin **hold him captive**, and he **doesn't even see the real problem**.

Freedom isn't the ability to **believe whatever we want**, or to **do whatever we want**.

Real freedom is being **loosed** from those chains, so we can **live for God's glory** and **trust his promises**.

When **alternatives** replace the one way that works, God's way, **the results are tragic**.

When God's **promises are trusted** with patience and confidence, **God will not fail us**.

Note: Bible quotations are from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

Galatians 4:12-31

ESV

12. Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.

13. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,

14. and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

15. What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

16. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

17. They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

18. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you,

19. my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

20. I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

21. 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.

Greek

12. Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ, ὅτι κἀγὼ ὡς ὑμεῖς, ἀδελφοί, δέομαι ὑμῶν. οὐδέν με ἠδικήσατε·
13. οἴδατε δὲ ὅτι δι' ἀσθενείαν τῆς σαρκὸς εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν τὸ πρότερον,
14. καὶ τὸν πειρασμὸν μου τὸν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε, ἀλλ' ὡς ἄγγελον Θεοῦ ἐδέξασθέ με, ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.
15. τίς οὖν ἦν ὁ μακαρισμὸς ὑμῶν; μαρτυρῶ γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι εἰ δυνατὸν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑμῶν ἐξορύξαντες ἂν ἐδώκατέ μοι.
16. ὥστε ἐχθρὸς ὑμῶν γέγονα ἀληθεύων ὑμῖν;
17. ζηλοῦσιν ὑμᾶς οὐ καλῶς, ἀλλὰ ἐκκλεῖσαι ὑμᾶς θέλουσιν, ἵνα αὐτοὺς ζηλοῦτε.
18. καλὸν δὲ τὸ ζηλοῦσθαι ἐν καλῷ πάντοτε καὶ μὴ μόνον ἐν τῷ παρεῖναι με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.
19. τεκνία μου, οὓς πάλιν ὠδίνω, μέχρις οὗ μορφωθῆ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν·
20. ἠθελον δὲ παρεῖναι πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἄρτι καὶ ἀλλάξαι τὴν φωνήν μου, ὅτι ἀποροῦμαι ἐν ὑμῖν.
21. Λέγετέ μοι οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι· τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε;
22. γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι Ἀβραάμ δύο υἱοὺς ἔσχεν, ἓνα ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης καὶ ἓνα ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρας.
23. ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης κατὰ σάρκα γεγέννηται, ὁ δὲ ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρας διὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας.
24. ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα· αὗται γὰρ εἰσι δύο διαθήκαι, μία μὲν ἀπὸ ὄρους Σινᾶ, εἰς δουλείαν γεννῶσα, ἣτις ἐστὶν Ἄγαρ.
25. τὸ γὰρ Ἄγαρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ, συστοιχεῖ δὲ τῇ νῦν Ἱερουσαλήμ, δουλεύει δὲ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς·
26. ἡ δὲ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐλευθέρα ἐστίν, ἣτις ἐστὶ μήτηρ πάντων ἡμῶν.
27. γέγραπται γάρ· εὐφράνθητι στεῖρα ἢ οὐ τίκτουσα, ῥῆξον καὶ βόησον ἢ οὐκ ὠδίνουσα· ὅτι πολλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐρήμου μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα.
28. ἡμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, κατὰ Ἰσαὰκ ἐπαγγελίας τέκνα ἐσμεν.
29. ἀλλ' ὥσπερ τότε ὁ κατὰ σάρκα γεννηθεὶς ἐδίωκε τὸν κατὰ πνεῦμα, οὕτως καὶ νῦν.
30. ἀλλὰ τί λέγει ἡ γραφή; ἔκβαλε τὴν παιδίσκην καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς· οὐ γὰρ μὴ κληρονομήσει ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἐλευθέρας.
31. Ἄρα, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐσμὲν παιδίσκης τέκνα, ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐλευθέρας.

NKJV

- 12 Brethren, I urge you to **become like me**, for I became like you. **You** have not injured me at all.
- 13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.
- 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject,
but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.
- 15 **What then was the blessing you enjoyed?**
For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.
- 16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?
- 17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.
- 18 But **it is good to be zealous in a good thing always**, and not only when I am present with you.
- 19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,
20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.
- 21 Tell me, you who desire to be **under the law**, do you not **hear the law?**

22 For it is written that **Abraham had two sons**: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman.
23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh,
and he of the freewoman through promise,
24 which things are **symbolic**. For these are the two covenants:
the one from **Mount Sinai** which **gives birth to bondage**, which is Hagar ---
25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to **Jerusalem which now is,**
and is in bondage with her children ---
26 but the **Jerusalem above is free**, which is the mother of us all.
27 For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband."
28 Now **we**, brethren, as Isaac was, **are children of promise**.
29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh
then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.
30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son,
for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."
31 So then, brethren, **we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.** [BLANK]

Notes:

Luther, "Those who seek to be justified by the Law grow weaker and more destitute right along. They are weak and bankrupt to begin with. They are by nature the children of wrath. Yet for salvation they grasp at the straw of the Law. The Law can only aggravate their weakness and poverty. The Law makes them ten times weaker and poorer than they were before. I and many others have experienced the truth of this. I have known monks who zealously labored to please God for salvation, but the more they labored the more impatient, miserable, uncertain, and fearful they became. What else can you expect? You cannot grow strong through weakness and rich through poverty. People who prefer the Law to the Gospel are like Aesop's dog who let go of the meat to snatch at the shadow of the water. There is no satisfaction in the Law. What satisfaction can there be in collecting laws with which to torment oneself and others? One law breeds ten more until their number is legion."