



My Beloved Ones,

In this Sunday's Epistle, St. Paul writes the Christian community in Galatia to settle a dispute that was very important to the Church. After Christ gave His Apostles their Great Commission, it was then necessary to determine whether those Gentiles who turned to the Lord would necessarily need to become Torah observant Jews. This debate was often a difficult one, for there were those who held their own customs close and wished that others would observe Mosaic Law as well.

St. Paul makes his position on the matter clear through an allegory. Using Old Testament figures, he positions that those who would wish new Christians to become Jews, are like Hagar: the servant of Sarah who was entrusted to bear Abraham's child. And just as Hagar represents following the Law, Sarah giving birth to Isaac represents the fullness of God's plan.

It is for this reason that St. Paul refers to Hagar as one who is "*...in slavery with her children*" (*Galatians 4:26*). Abraham may have acted according to what he imagined was best, due to both his and his wife's ages, but it was clearly not God's plan—for, as St. Paul says, "*...the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise*" (*Galatians 4:22*).

This is not to suggest, as many of the scribes and Elders did, that Christianity represented an abolishment of the Law. We of course still observe The Ten Commandments; and our Lord Himself said, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets*" (*Matthew 22:37-40*). By selecting this passage during the Nativity season, the Church Fathers wish to show how the Law was meant to prepare God's people, until such time as He could demonstrate Himself—as the Incarnate Son of God—how His Way depends even more on grace, mercy, and forgiveness: love of both God and neighbor.

Therefore, as St. Paul says, we should rejoice! For now, we are able to call ourselves free children of God. We are not compelled to worship Him through rules, but we are able to freely choose Him, or reject Him, as His gift of free will allows each of us to do. This Nativity season, when our Lord shall come to reconcile man and God, let us give thanks to our Father that He loves His creation, not as a king respects his subjects, but instead, as a father loves his children.

+ALEXIOS
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