

CONCERNING THE WAY

October 16, 2012

LESSON 144: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS



Chapter 3

Now that Paul has defended his authority as an apostle and established who he got his message from, he's going to use that authority to give the believers in Galatia a serious tongue-lashing. The Galatians were thinking they needed to add works to faith, to keep the Mosaic Law in addition to placing faith in Christ as the way of acceptance by God. The Judaizers were teaching the Galatians that they would get a more complete salvation and a greater sanctification if they would obey the Law. But, Paul argued, if you try to add to the work of Christ you just end up making His death useless and unnecessary. There can only be one way of salvation, and that is by faith in Christ alone.

Galatians 3:1-3 (NASB) You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? (2) This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

- Paul had preached the doctrines of salvation by grace and Christian liberty so clearly when he had first visited these churches that it was hard for him to understand how they could so quickly and easily be led into false doctrine.
- If anything this is even a bigger problem today than in Paul's day. Professing Christians are being "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14), not only with legalism but also with evolutionism, emotionalism, and many other unscriptural heresies. Many people, like the Galatians, have been "bewitched" by false teaching from pastors, authors, professors, and their own selfish desires. The Greek word for "under a spell" is used only this once in the New Testament, and doesn't necessarily mean witchcraft as such. The meaning is "captivated" or "deceived."
- Notice Paul does not question their salvation, but asked them if they received it and the Holy Spirit by faith or by their good works. Of course they received it by faith, when they originally heard Paul's message. These were mostly Gentile churches anyway; most of them wouldn't have even known much about the Mosaic Law.
- There's important doctrine in these verses, and I used the NASB to get the clearest translation from the Greek. Paul is speaking of receiving the Holy Spirit here. Does verse 2 and 3 seem to be describing salvation or sanctification (in the sense of a separate work of grace by receiving the Holy Spirit at some later time after salvation)?
- Paul is speaking of both salvation ("Having begun by the Spirit") and sanctification ("being perfected") in verse 3. It is clear from these verses that we receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of our placing our faith in Christ for salvation, not at some other point afterwards. And our sanctification begins at the moment of salvation as well, and is a process ("being perfected"), not something that happens all of a sudden. This speaks strongly against the Arminian (both "Holiness" and "Charismatic") teachings of "Entire Sanctification" or "Christian Perfection". And to top it off, Paul is saying clearly that our sanctification has nothing to do with us. Like our salvation, it is a sovereign work of God.
- The way of justification and sanctification were (and are) the same. The Galatian believers probably

thought that keeping the old Law would help them in their spiritual lives, but it does not.

Galatians 3:4-5 Did you suffer so much for nothing? (If it really was for nothing!) (5) Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you because you do the actions of the Law or because you believe what you heard?

- Paul warned the Galatians in Acts 14:21-22 at the end of his first missionary journey that they would have to go through tribulations to reach the Kingdom of God. They must have been persecuted after this, and that's what he is referring to here. We know miracles were done there from Acts 14:3, 8-11), and it does not say they happened because of their good works, but because of their faith.

Galatians 3:6-9 In the same way, Abraham "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (7) You see, then, that those who have faith are Abraham's real descendants. (8) Because the Scripture saw ahead of time that God would justify the gentiles by faith, it announced the gospel to Abraham beforehand when it said, "Through you all nations will be blessed." (9) Therefore, those who believe are blessed together with Abraham, the one who believed.

- The Judaizers thought they had the scriptures on their side (the Old Testament), and thought of Moses as their teacher. But Paul, quoting Genesis 15:6, goes further back in history and pointed out that Abraham, the father of the Jews, was saved by faith, not works. Abraham had faith that God would deliver on His promises. That's what made him righteous, not anything good he did or law-keeping. And that was before he was circumcised, which was one of the things the Judaizers insisted a man had to do to be saved.
- This is amazingly good news for us! Paul is saying that we are saved in the same way that Abraham was, and we are descended from him spiritually if we have that kind of faith. That means we get to experience the same blessing that was promised to Abraham, that is, acceptance by God.
- Paul quotes Genesis 12:3 in verse 8, showing that God always planned to provide a way of salvation for the whole world. Of course, to make this happen, Christ had to come into the world to redeem it. Since the promise was for all nations, and since this was long before Israel became a nation, Abraham had to understand the promise was universal.

Galatians 3:10-12 Certainly all who depend on the actions of the Law are under a curse. For it is written, "A curse on everyone who does not obey everything that is written in the Book of the Law!" (11) Now it is obvious that no one is justified in the sight of God by the Law, because "The righteous will live by faith." (12) But the Law has nothing to do with faith. Instead, "The person who keeps the commandments will have life in them."

- Now Paul is going to show that depending on the Law, or good works to save you does not make sense. The Law could not justify; it could only condemn. In verse 10 Paul quoted Deuteronomy 27:26 to show that the Law demanded perfection and that anyone who failed to keep any part of it was cursed. Breaking only one command even once brings a person under the curse; and since everybody fails at some time, everyone is under the curse.
- In verse 11 Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to show that even in the age of Law, obedience to the Law did not make you right before God, only faith could do that. Martin Luther made that verse a slogan of the Reformation.
- In verse 12 Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 to show that you can't combine faith and the Law. He's reminding the Galatians that if you're going to try to obey the Law to gain God's favor, then you have to obey all of it. Only perfect performance could win God's approval under the Law, but since that was impossible,

the Law could only condemn us.

Galatians 3:13-14 The Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, "A curse on everyone who is hung on a tree!" (14) This happened in order that the blessing promised to Abraham would come to the gentiles through the Messiah Jesus, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

- More amazing truth from Paul here that we receive the blessing promised to Abraham because of Christ. How did Christ redeem us?
- The quotation from Deuteronomy 21:23 refers to the fact that in Old Testament times criminals were executed (normally by stoning) and then put up on a stake or post to show God's divine rejection. When Christ was crucified, it showed that He had come under the curse of God.

Galatians 3:15-16 Brothers, let me use an example from everyday life. Once a person's will has been ratified, no one can cancel it or add conditions to it. (16) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his descendant. It doesn't say "descendants," referring to many, but "your descendant," referring to one person, who is the Messiah.

- An objection the Judaizers might raise would be that the coming of the Mosaic Law changed how a person was to be saved. But Paul wipes out that argument by stating that it can't be cancelled or changed, the promises of God are unchangeable. The promises given to Abraham are fulfilled in Christ and are in effect forever.
- In verse 16 Paul is just saying that the promise (in Genesis 22:17-18) was always meant to come through one person, the Messiah (see also Matthew 1:1)

Galatians 3:17-18 This is what I mean: The Law that came 430 years later did not cancel the covenant that God ratified previously. The promise was never nullified. (18) For if the inheritance comes about through the Law, it no longer comes about through the promise. But it was through a promise that God so graciously gave it to Abraham.

- There seems to be some confusion among scholars on when these 430 years began and ended. The best view is that the period began with the final confirmation of the covenant to Jacob (given in Genesis 46:1-4) when he took his family to Egypt. This seems to fit best with Exodus 12:40, which says the Israelites spent 430 years in Egypt, and then the Law was given after they left. Paul is just reiterating that the Law could not nullify the promise given to Abraham.

Galatians 3:19-20 Why, then, was the Law added? Because of transgressions, until the descendant came about whom the promise pertained. It was put into effect through angels by means of a mediator. (20) Now a mediator involves more than one party, but God is one.

- So if all that Paul has said is true, the common question is, why did things change at Mt. Sinai? Why did God add the Law? It was to be a restrainer of sin by showing the Israelites behavior that would bring God's judgment (see 1 Timothy 1:8-11). But it was always meant to be temporary, until the Messiah came (the descendant, or seed promised to Abraham), and it would no longer be needed (Matthew 5:17).
- Paul also mentions that the Law was inferior because of how it was given. The promise to Abraham was given directly to him by God. The Law was given to the people through mediators, God → angels →

Moses → the people (Exodus 19:9-25, Deuteronomy 33:2, Acts 7:53). Why is that a big deal? Using a mediator implies that there are responsibilities for both parties, which there were in the Mosaic Covenant. There was no mediator with the Abrahamic Covenant, showing that God alone had the responsibility of fulfilling it.

Galatians 3:21-22 So is the Law in conflict with the promises of God? Of course not! For if a law had been given that could give us life, then certainly righteousness would come through the Law. (22) But the Scripture has captured everything by means of sin's net, so that what was promised by the faithfulness of the Messiah might be granted to those who believe.

- Here's another potential objection Paul answers. The Law and the promises of God are not in conflict. Each had different purposes. The Law was never meant to give life. If people could have kept it perfectly maybe it could have, but that was never going to happen and God knew it (Romans 8:3-4).
- Verse 22 can be difficult to understand, but he is basically saying that the Law and the promises work together. The Law has caused the whole world to be trapped and under the dominion of sin (Romans 3:9, 23), and that prepared the way for the gospel. When people recognize this fact and give up trying to please God by their own works, there is a way out from that bondage to sin through faith in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:23-26 Now before faith came about, we were held in custody and confined under the Law in preparation for the faith that was to be revealed. (24) And so the Law was our guardian until the Messiah came, so that we might be justified by faith. (25) But now that faith has come about, we are no longer under a guardian. (26) For all of you are God's children through faith in the Messiah Jesus.

- The original Greek here implies the kind of relationship a young person in ancient times had with his "schoolmaster", or tutor. A young boy was placed under the authority of this guardian, who was usually a harsh disciplinarian, until he was old enough to enter into his inheritance and assume the privileges of his sonship. That's what it is like with us, being under the Law until Christ came, and now we have all the privileges of being a child of God. So the Galatians were trying to put themselves back under that harsh guardian and give up their rights as children of God.

Galatians 3:27-29 Indeed, all of you who were baptized into the Messiah have clothed yourselves with the Messiah. (28) Because all of you are one in the Messiah Jesus, a person is no longer a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a male or a female. (29) And if you belong to the Messiah, then you are Abraham's descendants indeed, and heirs according to the promise.

- What wonderful promises these are to us! Baptism INTO Christ is what happens when we trust Him for salvation (read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). This union with Him means we are "clothed with Christ" – when God looks at us, He doesn't see our sin, but the righteousness of Christ.
- This does not mean these human distinctions Paul listed don't mean anything – they all have a place, but he is saying that these distinctions don't have anything to do with our position in Christ. No one is spiritually superior to each other or ranks higher than another. We are all equal in Christ. Race or sex or class does not matter.

- Because Christ is THE seed of Abraham and we are in Christ, then we are Abraham's descendants also and heirs of the promise to him. This does not mean we are Jews – we are not the natural seed, but the spiritual seed. The natural seed who have believed in Christ will receive the national promises given to the nation of Israel during the Kingdom (Romans 9:6, 8).

Chapter 4

Galatians 4:1-7 Now what I am saying is this: As long as an heir is a child, he is no better off than a slave, even though he owns everything. (2) Instead, he is placed under the care of guardians and servant managers until the time set by the father. (3) It was the same way with us. While we were children, we were slaves to the basic principles of the world. (4) But when the appropriate time had come, God sent his Son, born by a woman, born under the Law, (5) in order to redeem those who were under the Law, and thus to adopt them as his children. (6) Now because you are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to cry out, "Abba! Father!" (7) So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if you are a child, then you are also an heir because of what God did.

- Even though the Galatian churches were primarily Gentile and never under the Mosaic Law, the principle is the same. Before Christ, we were slaves to the pagan philosophies of the world.
- The "appropriate time" was when the Roman civilization had brought peace and a system of roads which greatly improved travel (in order to spread the gospel quickly); when there was a language (Greek) which was adopted as the common language of the empire (to make the gospel easier for everyone to understand); and when the Jews had spread throughout the Mediterranean world, and wherever they went established synagogues that taught belief in one God and a coming Messiah (to provide a framework of knowledge of who Christ was when He came).
- "Abba" is the Aramaic word for "father" (but is more like "papa" or "daddy"). Because we are God's children, He has given us the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts, and through the Spirit we can use this intimate but respectful name for our heavenly father. It was actually the expression used by Jesus as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). See also Romans 8:15.
- Because of Christ, we have been adopted as God's children, and have full rights of sons and heirs.

Galatians 4:8-10 However, in the past, when you did not know God, you were slaves to things that are not really gods at all. (9) But now that you know God, or rather have been known by God, how can you turn back again to those powerless and bankrupt basic principles? Why do you want to become their slaves all over again? (10) You are observing days, months, seasons, and years.

- Before coming to know Christ, the Galatian gentiles worshipped false gods like Zeus and Hermes. They didn't realize that they were turning back into religious slavery again.
- Under the influence of the Judaizers, the Galatians were observing special days (weekly Sabbaths), and months (new moons), and seasons (seasonal festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles), and years (sabbatical and jubilee years). They thought that would get them more favor from God. But Paul had already made it clear that good works could not be added to faith for either justification or sanctification. Those things were for the Jews under the Law, they were not effective any more. They were only types and shadows of the Messiah, who fulfills them.

Galatians 4:11-14 I am afraid for you! I don't want my work for you to have been wasted! (12) I beg you, brothers, to become like me, since I became like you. You did not do anything wrong to me. (13) You know that it was because I was ill that I brought you the gospel the first time. (14) Even though my condition put you to the test, you did not despise or reject me. On the contrary, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, or as if I were the Messiah Jesus.

- “become like me, since I became like you” – become like a Gentile, no longer living under the Law.
- “I was ill” – we don’t know what the illness was, but the Galatians treated him very well anyway. Verse 15’s reference to “eyes” may mean he had some kind of eye disease, which may be the “thorn in my flesh” he mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:7.

Galatians 4:15-18 What, then, happened to your positive attitude? For I testify that if it had been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. (16) So have I now become your enemy for telling you the truth? (17) These people who have been instructing you are devoted to you, but not in a good way. They want you to avoid me so that you will be devoted to them. (18) (Now it is always good to be devoted to a good cause, even when I am not with you.)

- The Judaizers wanted the Galatians to stop listening to Paul and follow them. They probably told the people things they wanted to hear, things that would make them popular. But Paul was telling them the truth, and that was making him unpopular. This situation still happens today in Christianity. Those who speak the truth are often unpopular. The ones who are great speakers and give messages that make you feel good about yourself and the world are very popular and build great followings.

Galatians 4:19-20 My children, I am suffering birth pains for you again until the Messiah is formed in you. (20) Indeed, I wish I were with you right now so that I could change the tone of my voice, because I am completely baffled by you!

- Paul was very worried that these people were being deceived by the false teachers, so much so that he was suffering “birth pains”. The phrase “until the Messiah is formed in you” is speaking of our growth as Christians until we become like Christ. This is God’s ideal and purpose—for Christ to live His life in and through each believer. Paul was concerned that the Galatians’ growth was being stunted.

Galatians 4:21-26 Tell me, those of you who want to live under the Law: Are you really listening to what the Law says? (22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. (23) Now the slave woman's son was conceived through human means, while the free woman's son was conceived through divine promise. (24) This is being said as an allegory, for these women represent two covenants. The one woman, Hagar, is from Mount Sinai, and her children are born into slavery. (25) Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to present-day Jerusalem, because she is in slavery along with her children. (26) But the heavenly Jerusalem is the free woman, and she is our spiritual mother.

- Paul now uses an illustration from Old Testament history to wrap up his point about justification by faith. He uses this story as an allegory, which he tells us clearly he is doing. That means we mustn’t think that this story was not real history. He’s just using a real event to illustrate a truth. When there is

allegory in the Bible it is normally made obvious by the author. We should always assume scripture means what it says unless there is a clear indication that it is allegory.

The Allegory of the Two Sons		
	Grace (Freedom)	The Law (Slavery)
	Christianity	Judaism
The sons:	Isaac – son of the promise	Ishmael – son of slavery
The mothers:	Sarah – the free woman	Hagar – the slave woman
The conception:	Divine Promise	Human means
The covenants:	Abrahamic Covenant	Mosaic Covenant
Jerusalem	The New (heavenly) Jerusalem	Present day Jerusalem

- So Paul is saying that we as Christians are like Isaac, we are children of the promise, of the Abrahamic Covenant. We have been set free from slavery, we have been born again from above, and our destiny is the New Jerusalem which will one day come to earth (Revelation 21:2).
- The heavenly Jerusalem is where the Lord Jesus is right now preparing a place for us (John 14:3). It is the “city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Hebrews 11:8-10)

Galatians 4:27-31 For it is written, "Rejoice, you childless woman, who cannot give birth to any children! Break into song and shout, you who feel no pains of childbirth! For the children of the deserted woman are more numerous than the children of the woman who has a husband." (28) So you, brothers, are children of the promise, like Isaac. (29) But just as then the son who was conceived according to the flesh persecuted the son who was conceived according to the Spirit, so it is now. (30) But what does the Scripture say? "Drive out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman must never share the inheritance with the son of the free woman." (31) So then, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman.

- Paul is quoting Isaiah 54:1 here which is a prophecy of the future restoration of Israel and Jerusalem when the New Jerusalem comes from heaven to earth. Paul applied this passage (he did not say it was fulfilled) in this context to Sarah, who though she was barren, was later blessed with a child, and who would ultimately have more descendants than Hagar. This will ultimately be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom.
- Just like Isaac was persecuted by Ishmael, those who trust in salvation by grace alone will be persecuted by those who want to impose legalism (add other requirements to salvation).
- The point in verse 30 (quoting Genesis 21:10) is that the church should not allow false teachers to influence its belief and behavior. This was spoken directly to the Galatians who were allowing the Judaizers to teach heresies in their churches. But it can also apply to the foolishness of allowing false (unbiblical) doctrine of any kind to be taught in the church.
- Paul concludes that he and the Galatian believers were not children of the slave woman who was driven away and was denied a share in the inheritance. Instead, all believers are children of the free woman, “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).