Galatians Lesson 3 (2024)

**FROM BONDAGE TO SONSHIP THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST**

Galatians 3:15-4:7

Key Verse: 4:6-7

“Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our heart, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So, you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.”

In the letter to the Galatian Christians, the Apostle Paul expresses his deep concern about safeguarding their freedom in Christ Jesus. He vehemently opposed the legalistic teachings of Judaism prevalent at the time, emphasizing that salvation is sorely a gift received through faith in Christ Jesus. He faced significant challenges not only from external sources but also from fellow Jewish leaders. Paul wasn’t just fighting against others; he also had a battle inside himself. To explain how he tried to live by faith and by works, he testified, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (2:20) His spiritual battle was a big, ongoing one. If he hadn’t fought for it, we might still be stuck in religious rules and legalism, missing the freedom offered by Jesus Christ.

In our reading today in 3:15- 4:7, Paul reinforces his central point: salvation is achieved solely through faith in Jesus Christ. He does this by comparing the Law and the Promise (3:15-29) and explaining the ideas of being bound under the law and becoming sons and daughters based on God’s promise, referring to the Old Testament context (4:1-7).

To begin, let’s direct our attention to verse 15. “Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.” Before presenting his argument, Paul establishes the foundation by employing a familiar example from human relationships. He illustrates that once an agreement is established, no one has the authority to cancel it or add new conditions arbitrarily.

In verses 16-18, Paul elaborates his point about salvation through faith in the covenant, particularly in the Old Testament, focusing on events in Genesis. Please turn to verses 16-18. “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person who is Christ. What I mean is that: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.” In these verses, Paul discusses how the promises were made directly to Abraham and his descendants. It’s essential to understand that when God made this promise, he used the singular term ***“seed,” not “seeds,”*** pointing to one specific person, who is Christ Jesus.

In verses 17-18, Paul stresses that the Law, given 430 years later, doesn’t change or cancel God’s original covenant with Abraham. The promise remains unchanged. The inheritance, symbolizing the blessings God pledged, was generously given to Abraham through his promise, not contingent on following the law. Once again, Paul emphasized that salvation is a divine gift for all who believe in Christ Jesus. It’s free and unconditional, like when a company offers a gift with ***“No strings attached.”*** (Pic#1a)

Some might ask, ***“If the promise was already there, why did God give the law?”***  It’s a thoughtful question worth pondering. Look at verse 19a. “Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.” Here, Paul clarifies that the law wasn’t meant to replace the promise but was given as a response to human transgressions. It served as a temporary measure until the promised Seed, who is Christ, arrived. In simple terms, it’s like a mirror, showing us our sins and reminding us of our urgent need for God’s salvation through his promise. However, the law's limit is that it doesn’t have the power to fix us (Pic#2). That reminds us of Paul’s cry in Romans 7:24-25, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Paul’s argument continues in verses 19b-20. “The law is given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.” These verses might seem tricky, but at least we understand that when the law was given to the people of Israel, Moses served as the mediator between God and them. However, no mediator was involved when God made the promise to Abraham. It was directly given to him, and Abraham received it through faith, as we discussed in 3:6, “So also Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

In verses 21 and 22, Paul circles back to his point, presenting a slightly different question in verse 21. “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?” This question is crucial because any apparent contraction between the law and God’s promise might cast doubt on the consistency of God’s overall plan. It especially raises the concern: “***Is God contradicting himself?”***

In verses 21b and 22, Paul emphatically responds. Let’s examine verses 21b and 22. “Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.” In essence, Paul restates that the law doesn’t oppose God’s promises. Instead, while the law has its role, it falls short of providing the ultimate solution found through faith in Christ Jesus. It’s important not to misunderstand Apostle Paul’s view of the law of God. Was he against the law itself? No. He was addressing the limitations of the law.

In verses 23-25, Paul elaborates on the positive role of the law in God’s plan of salvation in an intriguing manner. Look at verses 23-25. **“**Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.So, the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” In these verses, Paul uses an illustration familiar to all his readers – ***“A guardian***.” In many affluent Roman households, well-educated servants escorted children to and from school, watched them during the day, taught, protected, prohibited, and occasionally disciplined them. This was the essence of Paul's message: the law was like a guardian. According to Paul, the role of a guardian was to prepare for the child’s maturity.

During the centuries of Jewish history, approximately about 15 centuries, the law played a preparatory role for the arrival of Christ. The demands of the law were a constant reminder that people needed a Savior. Therefore, the law fulfilled its purpose. Now that the Savior has come, the guardian is no longer required. The era of law had ended, making way for a new era of faith in Christ Jesus. It reminds us of what Christ Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his messianic ministry in Galilee: “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk. 1:15)

In verses 26-29, Paul talks about the incredible richness of having faith in Christ Jesus. In verses 26-29, he said, “In Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Here, Paul highlights how our faith in Christ is not only personally enriching but also transcends racial, gender, social, and cultural differences, fostering unity and equality among believers in God’s family. Located strategically, Galatian Christians had much potential for their spiritual growth in Christ. Yet, Paul was deeply concerned about those who strayed from the gospel truth and embraced legalism, pressured by legalistic Jewish believers.

Legalism, even among sincere believers, can be subtle and misleading. It typically involves an excessive focus on adhering strictly to rules and regulations, often neglecting a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. One tragic aspect of legalism is its ability to appear as spiritual maturity, while in reality, it regresses believers into a kind of ***“second childhood.”*** The core of legalism often lies in the belief that securing a better place in heaven is contingent on good deeds. This mindset can lead individuals to become self-righteous and judgmental toward others. However, it’s crucial to remember that our status as God’s children is solely a result of his mercy and steadfast love, unaffected by our behavior or religious achievement. Addressing and recognizing legalism remains an ongoing challenge for individuals and religious communities.

In the following passage, 4:1-5, Paul once again clarifies to the Galatian Christians their profound transition from bondage to sonship through faith in Christ, employing the metaphor of guardians and trustees. Look at verses 1-5. “What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is not different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.” In these verses, Paul introduces the concept of believers’ adoption into God’s family. Paul compares an heir who is underage to a slave despite owning the entire estate. This heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the predetermined time set by the father. Likewise, believers were once under the guardianship of the law, like being in slavery to the elemental spiritual forces of the world. However, with the appointed time, God sent his Son, born under the law, to redeem those under it, granting them adoption to sonship.

Redemption involves liberating through payment, and Jesus secured our freedom by paying the ultimate price on the cross. Returning to the law undermines the profound work accomplished by Christ. His purpose was not to acquire enslaved people but to facilitate a transformative process, endowing us with the freedom and full rights of God’s children. In the era of the law, we resembled children; however, under grace, we assume a mature stance as adults within God’s family. The adoption by God is not contingent on our perfection; it surpasses our imperfections, demonstrating his limitless love and mercy.

The apostle concludes this section in verses 6 and 7. Let’s read verse 6. “Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’” In this verse, Paul emphasizes the intimate relationship between believers and God through the Holy Spirit. The term *“Abba, Father”* holds deep significance, as “***Abba”*** is an Aramaic expression for father that carries a more personal and affectionate tone, like ***“Daddy”*** or ***“Papa.”*** God sent Jesus for our redemption and the Holy Spirit for dwelling within us, emphasizing the intimacy and familiarity between believers and God.

In essence, verse 6 highlights the transformative role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, establishing a close bond between them and God. Despite the challenges of living in a broken world, believers can experience continual renewal and transformation through the indwelling of the Spirit. As adopted children, they enjoy full rights in the heavenly realms, blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3-10).

As God’s children and inheritors, we possess incredible spiritual wealth. Imagine a scenario where an IRS agent questions a humble Christian man about his taxes. *“Sir, what property do you own?”* inquired the tax collector. The poor Christian responded, *“How did you know I am very wealthy.”* With a big smile, he listed his treasures – everlasting life, a heavenly mansion, joy, peace, God’s love, a supportive family, friends, and the anticipation of the crown of life. “Should I pay a lot of taxes?” he asked. The tax man closed his book, saying, *“Truly, you are rich, but your property is not taxable.”*  Christians may not always feel blessed in a materialistic world, but we possess immense spiritual wealth. While our complete adoption awaits Christ’s return, we are already rich in heavenly treasures and exempt from paying taxes for them.

As I prepare to conclude my time as a pastor, I take a moment to reflect on the countless blessings God has graciously showered upon me during my missionary journey in the US. Over 12 years in Chicago and 30 years in New York City, I have witnessed the hand of God at work in numerous lives, experiencing his abundant grace. I openly acknowledge that I am rich with spiritual treasures, all of which are tax-free. Stepping down from my role is not the end of a chapter but a transition – a window of new opportunity to embrace the challenges and joys ahead. With gratitude for the past and hopeful anticipation for the future, I pray to navigate this journey of faith faithfully, entrusting my steps to the One who has called me.

Let me close the sermon today. In the passage we explored, Apostle Paul illuminated the liberating power of the gospel, emphasizing the stark contrast between the Law and the Promise. The transition from guardianship to full sonship in Christ underscores that our status as God’s children is not something earned but graciously given through Christ’s redemption. The gospel encourages a life marked by faith rather than being compelled by works. Reflecting on our faith journey, we recognize the importance of remaining vigilant against legalism, resisting self-righteousness, and consistently crucifying our selfish tendencies. In a world growing more unpredictable and unsafe, regardless of external circumstances, may we persist in our journey of faith within the freedom of sonship. Let us live out our faith with gratitude, humility, and unwavering trust in God’s promise. Let us also embrace our identity even more as cherished sons and daughters of God. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ profoundly shape our lives, relationships, and journey with the Spirit.