

October 29, 2023

“Freedom as an Heir”

Galatians 3:23-4:7

Lesson 4

Intro

Today's lesson continues Paul's explanation to the Galatians of the superiority of grace to works. Some who objected to Paul's preaching did so because they thought he was contradicting what the OT law taught. Instead, Paul shows the purpose of the OT Law as a forerunner to Christ. In 3:15-22 (just before our passage today), Paul shows that God gave a promise to Abraham 430 years before giving the law to Moses. The promise given isn't annulled by the law which came afterwards. Paul's focus on the Law is to show that it has limitations, that it cannot give righteousness or life to those who follow it.

Read Galatians 3:23 – 4:7

1. vs. 23: Before faith came to us, says Paul, we were “held in custody under the law”
 - The law was a restrainer to our behaviors
 - It showed us where we came short compared to what was needed/required
 - Every person has been confined to “death row” because of the guilt of sins committed

 - The words “this faith” and “the faith” both refer to doctrinal truths to be believed
 - They aren't referring merely to a personal response
 - These truths about the faith are the gospel
 - The law kept people “safe” under it until the gospel came

2. vs. 24: Paul compares the law to a guardian
 - A guardian's role here is to be both a tutor and a mentor
 - It oversees one's development until the youth achieves adult status
 - The law is a guardian in the same way
 - It serves as a guide, a tutor
 - It shows that it's purpose wasn't to provide salvation
 - It showed the people's need of the Savior to come
 - Jesus was the fulfillment of the law, accomplishing what it could not do

3. vs. 25: The Galatians are struggling with a “both/and” concept of salvation
 - Many of them believe they need faith in Christ and following the law to be saved
 - But here Paul says, “we are no longer under a guardian” with the coming of faith
 - Once Christ has come, the law is no longer needed
 - Coming to Christ shows that we have achieved “maturity”
 - We no longer need the guardian to be our tutor

4. vs. 26: Paul uses a phrase here that would have riled up the Jews who oppose him
 - He told the Galatians, “in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith”
 - The phrase “children of God” previously was said only about the Jews
 - They were God's “chosen people”, and they followed the Law of Moses
 - Paul is now saying that both Gentiles and Jews are God's children “through faith”
 - Not just the Gentiles, but Jews also, aren't required to follow the Law!

Through faith in Christ's redeeming work, all can be called "children of God"
God's promises to Abraham showed that Israel was the first and the conduit
The promises were not ever intended to stop with Israel alone

5. vs. 27: Paul here identifies the things that show someone is "with Christ"

They have been baptized

John preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"

Post-resurrection, those who are baptized receive the Holy Spirit as well

Both of these are present when a person becomes one with Christ

This is what Jesus said about baptism in Matt. 28:19

They have clothed themselves with Christ

The daily clothes we wear allow us to look different from each other

But we all wear the same spiritual "clothing" if we are in Christ

It's not a robe, or a tie, or a certain style, but that which identifies us as Christians

We act more like him day by day and year by year

Things which divide on earth are done away with in Christ, as the next verse shows

6. vs. 28: Paul hits three potentially dividing categories in vs. 28

Neither Jew nor Greek

Ethnic and cultural distinctions are not the standard

The Law of the Jews is no longer binding, on them or on the Greek converts

Physical circumcision is no longer a covenant sign of being God's people

Neither slave nor free

The institution of slavery was present and needed in the Roman empire

In God's empire, salvation declares all in Christ to be free

Slaves are equal to slave owners when both are Christians

Nor is there male and female

Access to salvation isn't determined by being male or female

In the Greco-Roman world, women did not typically inherit property

In God's world, everyone has the same opportunity to inherit salvation

7. vs. 29: The word "you" here is plural, and refers to all baptized believers who are in Christ

"Abraham's seed" previously referred only to physical descendants

Now, Paul says that all in Christ are Abraham's seed

Being in Christ grants full access to the promises given to Abraham

8. vs. 4:1-2: Paul uses an analogy to explain the connection between the law and grace in Christ

The law is like the tutor a child has when he is underage

He will eventually become an adult, and move into the maturity of that life

Until he's ready, the tutor controls what he does; the heir is a slave until that time

9. vs. 3: Paul continues the analogy, noting that Christians were the slaves prior to this time

The "elemental forces" are those "elements" that controlled what was done

Following the law and all its requirements

Until the time of Christ, all people were "underage", not able to obtain the ultimate plan

10. vs. 4: “When the set time have fully come” refers to the time when the OT prophecies were fulfilled
Paul says this time has come when “God sent His Son”
Christ is the fulfillment of all the OT was setting up
He was born under the law, and lived according to the law
If Christ fulfilled the law, as Paul says, then the OT requirements are in the past
No Christian, Jew or Gentile, needs to follow the law anymore, but Christ
The Judaizers are trying to follow a law which is no longer in effect
11. vs. 5: The word redeem in this verse means “to buy back”
First Christ paid the price the law required for a sin offering, for our sins
He who made us bought us back again, redeemed us from the debt we owed
Then he adopted us into His family
We who were separated from Him by choice were made part of His family!
We now get to receive all the blessings and promises of that relationship
The word “sonship” here doesn’t exclude women
There is no longer male or female in Christ (Gal. 3:28)
12. vs. 6: Sending the Spirit to us is the same language as sending His Son to us in vs. 4
The Spirit has been sent to our hearts, the center of our wills and emotions
The Spirit transforms our hearts by reshaping our desires to be more like Christ
Our adoption gives us a true family
We can now call God “Abba, Father”
Abba is the same as us saying “Daddy!”
It’s a term of endearment, showing a close and intimate connection
13. vs. 7: Paul here summarizes the point he’s developed
We aren’t slaves to the law anymore, but adopted children in God’s family
Because we are His children, we are also heirs to His promises for eternity

Application: We are loved by our Father God, redeemed by Christ’s work, and empowers by the Spirit’s work and presence in our lives. Because of Christ, we are no longer to be slaves to a mentality that says we have to work to earn our salvation. Nor are we to be slaves to traditions or cultural practices or anything that restricts our relationship to Christ. We are free through faith in Christ.

Prayer: Father God, forgive us for the times we act as if you are not enough. Thank you for our redeemed identity in Christ. Help us to live by faith in the promises that you have given us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.