

**GALATIANS - SERMON 17**  
**GALATIANS 4:1-7 — TRANSITION OF COVENANT COMMUNITY, PT 2**  
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INTRODUCTION:

Read Galatians 4:1-7

A summarization of the transition from the historical minority of the covenant community to its historical majority is read in verse 7 - *therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*. The phrase *no longer a slave* refers back to verse 1 - *now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child does not differ at all from a slave*. Under the old covenant the covenant community of God was in its childhood and as such did not differ from a servant. But now there has been a progress or transition from child to son. The two words are different. The one word  $\nu\eta\pi\iota\omicron\varsigma$  refers to a very young child, an infant. The other word used here for *son* is  $\upsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma$  which refers to an adult son. What has happened is that the covenant community as minor children had the status of slaves, but having come to its historical maturity, now has the status of sons. Having described that transition, Paul now makes application of that transition as it relates to Gentiles and to their teachers, vv 8ff.

Before moving to the application section there is need for some further study of the historical transition from old covenant to new covenant community. The significance of understanding these two covenants and the transition from one to the other is apparent in the understanding of the Scriptures in various other places. Sorting out this material will be a great help in understanding and interpreting the Word of God. We need to know how the covenant community was historically transformed when it went from its historical infancy to its present maturity.

OUTLINE:

- I THE COVENANT COMMUNITY WAS TRANSFORMED AS TO ITS MAKE-UP. (this sermon)
- II THE COVENANT COMMUNITY WAS TRANSFORMED AS TO ITS NATURE. (next sermon)

I THE COVENANT COMMUNITY WAS TRANSFORMED AS TO ITS MAKE-UP.

- A The make-up of the covenant community of God was changed in two ways.

First, it went from being made up of both saved and unsaved people under the old covenant to being made up of exclusively saved people under the new covenant.

Secondly, it went from being made up of strictly Jews under the old covenant to being made up of both Jews and Gentiles under the new covenant. These are two pivotal transformations that occurred during this transition from old to new covenant, from infancy to maturity.

Notice that the initial make up of the covenant community of God consisted of both saved and unsaved people. From the time of Abraham forward the covenant community was not defined simply in terms of those who were saved, but in terms of those who were circumcised. When God redeemed Israel out of Egypt and made with

them the old covenant in Exodus 19:1-8 there was no requirement that those who entered into the old covenant were saved people.

#### Exodus 19:1-8

*In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.*

The terms of this covenant are found in the ten commandments, the ceremonial / civil laws, and in Exodus 24 the covenant was ratified by the sprinkling of blood. There was no requirement in these terms that a member of the covenant be saved, simply that they agree to keep the terms and laws of the covenant.

#### B WHO WAS INCLUDED IN THE OLD COVENANT?

The answer is all of those who came up out of Egypt as a part of the nation of Israel regardless of their salvation status. The covenant was perpetuated through natural childbirth. All who were born were to be circumcised and thereby included in the covenant community. Natural childbirth was the method of inclusion and circumcision was the sign of that inclusion. It was precisely because the old covenant community was composed of both saved and unsaved individuals that the Old Testament prophets were continually evangelizing the covenant members more so than the heathen nations which surrounded Israel. The prophets preached to the Israelites the necessity of salvation. In fact, at one point in the history of this old covenant community during the time of the prophet Elijah, there were only 7000 people who had not bowed the knee to Baal. There were more than two million Israelites at that time who were a part of the covenant community of God but only 7000 were, in fact saved. By and large the testimony of the Scriptures regarding the covenant community of God in the Old Testament is a description of the covenant members as being stiff necked and uncircumcised of heart. Mostly they conducted themselves as unconverted people though by circumcision they truly were included within the covenant community. The old covenant community was one in conflict, some were saved and some were not. It is for this reason we can see in the history of the old covenant community that there were times when the nation advanced in godliness then later declined in it. This had to do with which segment of the community had the ascendancy, saved or lost. If the ruling king was saved the nation moved against the foreign gods, but when the king was not saved the nation would drift towards paganism, adopting the false religion of the surrounding nations. Eventually the decline was so bad that the Lord was provoked to send the nation into captivity.

The problem in the old covenant community of having both saved and unsaved members was not to be perpetual. There was to be a remedy provided by God. That remedy would be the new covenant as recorded in the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:31 -34

*" Behold, the days are coming (not present but forthcoming), says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt (old covenant), My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

- C This new covenant is in contrast with that old covenant which was made at Mount Sinai. Notice the contrasts highlighted by this passage:
- 1 The law was not in their inward parts.
  - 2 Most of its members did not know the Lord.
  - 3 Most of them did not have their sins and iniquities forgiven.
  - 4 They were constantly having to say to their neighbors (fellow old covenant members), 'you need to know the Lord'.

Through Jeremiah the Lord is saying that the new covenant is going to be radically different in its make up and nature from the old covenant community. In the new covenant community the members of that community will have the laws of that covenant in their hearts. This speaks of regeneration. What was merely external for the members of the old covenant community will be internal for the members of the new covenant community. This will be the evidence that the heart of stone has been replaced by the heart of flesh. *No more shall every man teach his neighbor* - there will be no more evangelism within the new covenant community for all shall be converted. Whether they are old or young (*from the least of them to the greatest of them*) they shall *know the Lord*. All who are in this new covenant community are saved people for the Lord says of them, *their sin I will remember no more*. This will be a grand change from the old covenant to the new covenant community.

- D How was this transition accomplished.  
The nation was transformed at the time of the institution of the new covenant. There were three steps in this transition.

1 THE PRUNING PHASE

In Romans 11 we have the analogy of the fig tree. The fig tree is Israel or the Abrahamic covenant.

Romans 11:17-20

*And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I*

*might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.*

If the olive tree is Israel, then this passage teaches that some were broken off from that nation and covenant community.

Why were they broken off? . . . *Because of unbelief they were broken off.* The old covenant community is likened to an olive tree with branches, some are saved and some are not. Some of the branches believed and some of the branches did not believe. In the pruning phase John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ removed the unbelieving branches from the nation. The separation or pruning was based upon belief and unbelief. The unbelieving branches are removed from the tree (nation - covenant community). They cut off the bad branches in that they called out a body of baptized disciples out from the Jewish nation. In His ministry Jesus Christ went to the house of Israel, to the Jews.

Matthew 10:5-7

*These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"*

Initially, Jesus and His disciples went only to the nation of Israel, to the Jews first. They were calling out of that nation a body of baptized disciples (John 4:1-2). As they went to the nation, some would believe and others would not believe.

John 1:11

*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*

Matthew 15:24

*But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

John 4:22

*"You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews."*

It is plain that the Lord Jesus Christ went to the Jews first calling them to believe.

What happened to those Jews who did not believe?

They were broken off from the covenant community.

Acts 3:22

*"For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me (who was Jesus Christ) from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'"*

The Lord Jesus Christ had the very same message.

Matthew 21:33-43

*"Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?' "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it."*

Herein see that membership in the covenant community was taken away from those of national Israel who were unbelieving.

This was phase one the pruning phase.

## 2 THE RECONSTITUTING PHASE

The constitution under which Israel originally functioned was the old covenant or the Mosaic covenant. God determined to give to them a new covenant which He spoke of in Jeremiah 31. Having pruned Israel, Jesus makes the new covenant and instituted it in the upper room at the Lord's Supper, *this is the new covenant in My blood.*

Hebrews 8:7, 13 (vv 8-11 - a recitation of the Jeremiah 31 passage)

*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.*

*. . . In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

There was a problem with the first covenant. Its problem was that it included both saved and unsaved. Due to this there was constant turmoil within the covenant community. Hence, the replacing of the old covenant by the new covenant. In the replacing of the old covenant there was the removal of all its ceremonies, rituals, and temple worship. Shortly after this time the Romans came and destroyed the temple (70 a.d.).

In this reconstituting phase with the pruned Israel, Jesus makes this new covenant in the upper room just before His death. Remember that in that upper room were only saved Jews. (Judas having been previously dismissed). The Lord's supper was instituted which replaced the Passover (baptism having replaced

circumcision.) The first day of the week Lord's Day replaced the seventh day of the week Sabbath. Also given to the new covenant community were the gifts and filling of the Holy Spirit of which the old covenant community knew nothing (because they were composed of lost and saved).

Notice that the new covenant was made with Israel! (Hebrews 8:10). The new covenant was made with Jews. On the day of Pentecost 3000 Jews were brought in and days later an additional 5000 Jews was included. The new covenant community began with eleven converted Jews. By Pentecost there were 120 believing Jews in the upper room praying until later that day when 3000 more were added (Acts 2), followed by the 5000 - all Jews.

This was the reconstituting phase.

### 3 THE INGRAFTING PHASE.

From Acts chapter 1 through chapter 9 we see the inclusion into the new covenant community Jews or those of Jewish background (Samaritans). With the vision in Acts chapter 10 (the sheet with unclean animals) God tells Peter that he is not to call any man common or unclean. Peter then goes to the home of Cornelius a Gentile and preaches the gospel to him. Cornelius receives the Holy Spirit and he and his household are incorporated into the new covenant community.

In Romans 11 stated that Gentiles were grafted into Israel (the Olive tree) when they believed. [The Dispensationalist disagrees with this biblical point. For them Gentiles were not ingrafted into 'Israel' but rather a new and previously unknown entity is created - the Church. Ultimately, by Romans 11 the Dispensationalist believes that there exists two distinct and separate bodies and expressions of the people of God - Israel and the Church. In no sense do they allow the biblical premise that the elect of God is the Israel of God. ] There was a warning given in that passage about becoming high minded by one's ingrafting. The ingrafting was because of belief. Those cast off by unbelief may at any time be grafted back in if they believe. The ingrafting is not due to their national heritage or physical relationship with Abraham, but the result of repentance and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is how the new covenant community grew. First it grew by the covenant which was made with Israel and was instituted by Jesus Christ in the upper room - Jews only. Subsequently the Gentiles were grafted in, but by the same - means faith in Christ.

Initially this was a very confusing period for the Jews. Hence, the Jerusalem council of Acts 15 where it was determined that becoming a physical Jew (by rite of circumcision) was not essential to becoming a member of the new covenant community.

HOW CAN GENTILES BE BROUGHT INTO THE NEW COVENANT COMMUNITY WITHOUT FIRST BEING MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND THE HOUSE OF JUDAH?

The answer to this important question is answered for us in Galatians chapter 3.

Galatians 3:26-29

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

The Galatians were Gentiles and they were believers. Paul tells them that they are truly children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, *for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. The remedy of the problem of inclusion into the new covenant community of Gentiles is found in verse 9 *if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*. The reason why Gentiles can be included under the new covenant is because the minute they receive Jesus Christ, at that moment they become Jews, the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Abraham's physical descendant was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has descendants, but not physical ones by natural birth, but spiritual ones by spiritual rebirth.

#### Conclusion:

Therefore, if you have receive Jesus Christ you are truly a descendant of Abraham through Jesus Christ and heir to the same promises.

#### Ephesians 2:11-20

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands -- that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation (old covenant), having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances (old covenant - not the ten commandments), so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. . .*

This mystery is further discussed in Ephesians.

#### Ephesians 3:3-6

*. . . how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel. . .*

This inclusion of Gentiles into the new covenant community was something stunning and foreign. Gentiles were now grafted into the new covenant community because they were spiritual descendants of Abraham rather than physical ones. They had a circumcision of the heart rather than a circumcision on the body.

Israel never stopped existing. However, it was pruned and all its unbelieving members were removed, given a new constitution, and Gentiles were grafted in upon the basis of belief in Christ. Gentiles who believe are Israelites indeed.

Romans 11:1

*I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not!*

Though He did not cast of those whom He had foreknown, He has worked a radical transformation in the covenant community.

Romans 2:28-29

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*

The biblical definition of who is a true Jew is radically different. The true Jew in our day is the one who believes in Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:1-3

*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. . .*

Who is the new Israel? The new Israel is composed of those who worship God in the Spirit, who rejoice in Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. The new Israel are those who believe in Jesus Christ and are saved.

This is how the covenant community was transformed. We live in the historical era of the new covenant. We live under the terms of the new covenant. We must, in order to be admitted into the new covenant community, believe on Jesus Christ, have the circumcision of the heart and filling of the Holy Spirit. This is why only saved individuals are admitted into the church and granted the initiatory rite of the new covenant which is water baptism. Unsaved people have no place in the new covenant community.

This is the reason why we do not have to evangelize the members of the new covenant community for all true members are converted already. If it is discovered that a participating member of the new covenant community is not saved, that being recognized, he or she is excommunicated from the church. They are to be treated thereafter as heathens and publicans (Matthew 18:17). How do we know that they are unconverted? We learn this by their fruits, there is no repentance after repeated admonition.