

GALATIANS - SERMON 18

GALATIANS 4:1-7 – THE CHANGE IN THE COVENANT’S NATURE

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INTRODUCTION:

Read Galatians 4:1-7

In this chapter we have a record of the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant with respect to the people of God. The old covenant community was composed of saved and lost. The prophets of the Old Testament were sent to evangelize the lost members of the old covenant community. This arrangement was ultimately not a good one and another covenant was promised, the new covenant. In this new covenant the members were all to be saved individuals. There would no longer be a need to evangelize within the covenant community itself. The promise of this better covenant can be read in Jeremiah 31:31-25 and again in Hebrews 8.

The transition from the old covenant to the new covenant community involved three phases.

First there was a pruning phase during which the Lord Jesus Christ cut off from the covenant community any who would not receive Him (Acts 3:23 & Matthew 21:43). Only believing Jews were initially allowed to be members of the new covenant community.

Second, a new covenant was constituted at the upper room at the Lord’s Supper. It was, at this place, a Jews-only community. This was a new covenantal arrangement.

The third phase was the ingrafting of the Gentiles into the new covenant community as true Jews by spiritual rebirth, Philippians 3:1-3, Ephesians 2:11-20, 3:3-6, and Galatians 3:26-29. Previously the covenant community was enlarged by physical birth among Jews and physical circumcision. No longer would this be the way of admission into the covenant community of God. Henceforth, spiritual regeneration, belief in Christ, and baptism were the means of entrance and acceptance into the covenant community of God.

OUTLINE:

I THE COVENANT COMMUNITY WAS TRANSFORMED AS TO ITS MAKE-UP. (last sermon)

II THE COVENANT COMMUNITY WAS TRANSFORMED AS TO ITS NATURE. (this sermon)

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The covenant community went from being a physical community to a spiritual community. This change of nature was with respect to three particulars.

A The principle of growth went from physical to spiritual. The old covenant community was expanded by physical birth. The offspring of covenant members were included in the covenant and thereby added to that community. Covenant parents produced covenant children. Physical birth was the defining means of the growth of the covenant community. With the advent and inauguration of the new covenant and the

new covenant community the principle of growth is changed from physical to spiritual birth from Jesus Christ. Entrance into the new covenant community was by regeneration in Jesus Christ.

John 3:3-7

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"

This was a new concept for Nicodemus. It was also a very perplexing one for him, "how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" It had been his impression and exposure that admission into the kingdom of God was through physical birth. But Jesus Christ is saying that simple physical birth is not the way to become a member of the kingdom of God. Spiritual birth, the new birth, not of parents, but of the Spirit is the accepted and approved method of entering into the kingdom of God.

The principle of descent from Abraham was physical; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve . . . and all of these were included into the covenant community. However, with the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ we have a new head of the covenant community. From that time onward it will only be those born of Him who will be included in the covenant community. That birth which comes by Jesus Christ is not a physical one, but a spiritual one. The fact that Jesus Christ has children is indisputable from the Scriptures. The children born of Jesus Christ are those born of the Spirit, not according to His flesh.

Matthew 18:3

(Jesus) said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Mark 10:24 Jesus referred to His disciples as His children.

And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!

John 13:33

"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you."

John 21:5

Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answered Him, "No."

Isaiah 53:10

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

Hebrews 2:13-14

And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: Here am I and the children whom God has given Me." Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. . .

This is the new principle of growth. Paul can, therefore, say

1 Corinthians 4:14-15

I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

The new covenant emphasis is not upon the physical offspring of believers, but upon their spiritual offspring by means of the gospel.

Philemon 1:10

I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains...

Along with the new principle of inclusion (spiritual birth) there is also a new sign of inclusion, water baptism rather than circumcision. And only those who are actually members of the new covenant by spiritual birth are to receive the outward sign of inclusion, baptism.

- B The principle of worship goes from physical to spiritual. Under the old covenant the principle of worship was largely physical. There was a temple made of stones. There were physical sacrifices. There was a physical altar. (Leviticus).

Under the new covenant there is a spiritual temple. Instead of physical sacrifices we have now a spiritual sacrifice.

1 Peter 2:1-5

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes (born again babes - spiritual babes), desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- 1 Spiritual temple: The new covenant temple is composed of believers, rather than real physical stones. The stones composing the new covenant temple are living stones, believers. The new covenant temple, like the old covenant temple is the place where God resides, the place of His presence.

Matthew 18:20

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

- 2 Holy priesthood: According to the 1 Peter passage, not only do we now have a spiritual temple in place of a physical one, but we are also said to be a *holy priesthood*. Under the old covenant the priesthood was a physical one descending from a particular lineage from Abraham. The old covenant priesthood was perpetuated by physical birth within the family of Levi. Only a portion of the members of the old covenant community were priests. But now under the maturity of the new covenant community all of the Lord's people are priests because all are related to the great High Priest the Lord Jesus Christ who was a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Revelation 1:6

. . . and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 5:10

. . . and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Revelation 20:6

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

- 3 Spiritual sacrifices: Under the old covenant the sacrifices consisted of loaves, pigeons, grain, or calves and sheep. These physical things were brought to the physical priest who would offer them to the Lord in the physical temple. Now under the new covenant the sacrifices we as priests bring are spiritual ones. Our sacrifices, in comparison, are intangible.

Hebrews 13:15

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

In gathered worship the offering of our corporate praises to God is viewed as a spiritual sacrifice to God.

The elaborate rituals of the old covenant worship have become simplified and they are spiritual. We have only two instituted rituals in new covenant worship; the Lord's Supper and baptism.

Ephesians 2:19-22

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, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Here we have the image and imagery of the old covenant temple, but applied spiritually to the members of the new covenant. The temple is no longer a physical plant in a physical location. The temple is now the gathered community of the people of God in the Church.

This makes church a very special event. We must come to church prepared for a special meeting with God. It is such a special gathering that God issues dreadful warnings to any who would corrupt the meeting of the church.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Do you not know that you (plural) are the temple of God (singular) and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (plural)? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God (singular) is holy, which temple (singular) you (plural) are.

Defiling the new covenant *temple of God*, the church, includes offering false doctrine or wicked practices. Hence, the worship of the new covenant church is to include only those things which God has prescribed. It must exclude any man made inventions of worship. The use of forms and actions of worship which are not authorized by God defile His temple. There is much responsibility placed upon the one who leads the church even in our day.

John 4:21-24

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

The Lord Jesus Christ states that the new new covenant worship will be a spiritual worship in accordance with the truth (Word of God). New covenant worship is to be primarily focused in the inner man rather than in external altars, ceremonies, and rituals. It is the internal condition of the heart that is at the center. This is the spiritual aspect of the worship. But new covenant worship is also to be according to *truth*. This refers to the Word of God as the regulative principle of the worship offered. For this reason those accepted practices which compose new covenant worship are giving, singing, reading of the Scriptures, and the preaching of the Word of God.

- C The principle of nationhood went from physical to spiritual. Under the old covenant, the nation was defined as the physical descendants of Abraham, ethnic Jews. But under the new covenant the nation of God is defined in terms of the spiritual descendants of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen (electos) generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

The new covenant community is no less a nation than was the old covenant community. Whereas they were composed of the physical offspring of Abraham, the new covenant community is a nation whose members are the spiritual offspring of Jesus Christ. Included in this new nation are those and only those who have been *called out of darkness into His marvelous light*. Only those who have undergone an effectual calling are members of the new *holy nation*.

- 1 The principle of nationhood has gone from physical to spiritual. The nation is now made up exclusively of believers, the recipients of God's mercy.
- 2 The land which was promised to the old covenant community in the Abrahamic covenant has been transformed. It has gone from the limited confines of Palestine to include the entire world as expressed in the new heavens and the new earth. The land is heaven.

Exodus 20:12

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you."

God had given Abraham Palestine. Obeying one's parents carried the promise of a long life in that land. Notice the change to that command under the new covenant.

Ephesians 6:1-3

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

Note the change from land to earth.

Matthew 5:5

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Under the new covenant the promise of the land has been expanded to include the whole world which we will fully inhabit and rule over in the new heavens and the new earth when the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

- 3 The national method of warfare has changed along with the weapons used. Previously the method of warfare was physical armies and physical weapons conquering physical nations and possessing a physical land. Now under the new covenant our warfare is spiritual.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. . .

Warfare is now inside the spiritual realm involving the conquering of imaginations and thoughts in order to bring them into submission to King Jesus.

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints -- and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The new armor includes truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. These are the weapons we are to use in order to conquer the kingdom of Satan and to bring people into the kingdom of light.

- 4 The method of government has changed. We have a heavenly king rather than an earthly king. In Deuteronomy 18 God instituted that Israel was to have a physical earthly king to rule over them. They were later judged for the king Israel wanted because they wanted a king like the surrounding nations, rather than like God. They had an earthly king. Under the old covenant the state and church were combined.

Under the new covenant we have a heavenly king, King Jesus. Over the nation of God in the new covenant no man is to set himself up as king or head. Only Christ is the Head of the church.

The state and the church have been separated. They are no longer combined. Both are to be under the authority of God, but yet independent of one another. This is not to be the separation of the church and state in the modern sense in which the state is completely separated from God and engages in the oppression of the church. Under the new covenant church and state are two separate institutions, both under the law of God.

- 5 The sanctions go from physical to spiritual. Under the old covenant those sanctioned from the covenant community were stoned to death. By birth they entered the community and by death they were eliminated from it. Now under the new covenant members come in by a new birth and they are eliminated by excommunication.

Matthew 18:15-18

" Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Conclusion:

This, in summary is the transition that occurred from old covenant to new covenant with respect to its nature. Paul has employed all this material in order to overthrow the doctrine of the Judaizers who urged the people of God to return to the old covenant rituals for acceptance in the new covenant.