

New Creation Teaching Ministry

Galatians Week 7

Galatians 3:23-4:7

This passage explains and illustrates the function of the Law on the one hand, but then indicates the great positive outcome of God's plan and purpose on the other. Paul brings us to see the almost inexpressible truth that through Christ, we receive the full rights of sonship, and the full relationship with him as our Abba, which is our inheritance.

To be 'under the Law' is not a benign place to be!

- (1) The passage at hand must be understood against the background of two things
 - Firstly, to be under the Law is to be under a curse (Gal. 3:10-13)
 - Secondly, the object of God's purposes in salvation history is that we would receive the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14).
 - These two positions are mutually exclusive. One cannot receive the promise by the Law, and one cannot live by the Spirit if one wishes to return to the Law (cf. Gal. 5:4-5)
- (2) Therefore, the to be under the Law is not a 'benign' place! Paul uses some forceful vocabulary to make the point.
 - Gal. 5:22 'shut up' = 'imprisoned'; NIV = 'Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin'; NJB = 'scripture makes no exception when it says that sin is master everywhere'; NRSV = 'scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin'
 - Gal. 5:23 has a double emphasis, where we see both 'imprisoned' and 'held captive', emphasising that there is no escape. 'Kept under guard' and 'locked up', with no exit!
 - Gal. 5:24 introduces the word *paidagogos*, variously translated as 'tutor', 'guardian', 'schoolmaster', 'disciplinarian'.
 - The term refers to the practice in the ancient Greco-Roman world of giving the children of a household over to the care of a slave, while in their minority (between 6-16).
 - The *paidagogos* had strict supervision of the children, and exercised a strong external compulsion over them, as they could do nothing without his permission. In effect, they experienced life as a slave (hence 4:1).
 - Gal. 4:2 indicates that the life under the law was closely supervised 'guardians' and 'managers'. These are different words from those previously used, and indicate that the child was instructed in what to do, and that decisions were made for him. They emphasise that the child was not a free agent.
 - Gal. 4:3 indicates that we were held in bondage (slavery) to the 'elemental spirits'; 'elementary principles'; 'elemental things'; 'basic principles' of this world.
 - The same word (*stoicheia*), is used in Gal. 4:9, where it is linked to the pagan gods and their associated spiritual powers (Gal. 4:8).
 - In other places the *stoicheia* are linked with works righteousness (e.g. Gal. 4:9 cf. Col. 2:8; 20ff.), indicating that living 'law way' actually brings us

into the bondage of spiritual forces of evil. All idols command their worshippers 'law way', as does all superstition

§ Therefore, too, when a church walks 'law way' the deeds of the flesh (including spiritual deeds such as idolatry and sorcery!) are present.

(3) So to be 'under Law' is to be in a terrible place of spiritual captivity, bondage, and slavery.

- It is the place from which we must be *redeemed* (Gal. 3:13 cf. 4:5).
- And this is universal: not simply Jews who had the Mosaic Law, but Gentiles as well...all were under the lock and key of the Law and the *stoicheia*.

The Goal is Redemption

(1) The purpose of this state is not that we would be held eternally in the grip of the guilt of the Law, our works righteousness, or the slavery to disciplinarians, guardians, and basis principalities and powers! Rather, there is a purpose: to enclose us up to the coming of the Son.

(2) This is spoken about in a number of ways:

- Gal. 3:23 Being shut up to the faith that was to be revealed
- Gal. 3:24 Paidagogos leads us to Christ (Note the sequence: it leads us to *Christ* that we may be justified by faith! I.e. no justification outside of Christ, so we preach Christ and him crucified, ever more than we preach the doctrine of justification *per se*.)
- Gal. 3:25 The faith (or faith) has come, therefore we are no longer under lock and key
- Gal. 3:26-27 we have believed in Christ and thus we have 'put on Christ' in baptism
 - No difference between belief and baptism in the New Testament!
- Gal. 3:28 indicates that the old situation where the Law maintained strict distinctions between races, cultures, societal ranks etc, was now all transformed!
 - Did any slave owners serve their slaves at the Lord's Table?
 - Did Jews eat in Gentile homes?
 - Did males and females sit under the same word and minister with the gifts of the Spirit distributed to each according to his will?
- Gal. 4:1-2 indicates that there is a time for the rule of the guardians to pass away. It is spoken of in terms of a coming of age, by which the sons enter into the inheritance of all the estate.
 - In this case, the estate is that of the God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth!

(3) The means of this liberation is a *redemption*, in which the Incarnate Son of God is under the Law, so that he might redeem those also under it.

- He is 'through woman' (Gal. 4:4), i.e. born of Mary, but the word indicates reserve in speaking about the conception. This is not a birth like any others that had occurred in the line of faith before. See, for example the unusual ways the birth is spoken of in other parts of the New Testament (e.g. Rom. 1:3; Phil. 2:7). Where we translate 'born of a woman, born under the law' in Gal. 4:4, the word used is very different from the normal word (as seen, for example in Matt. 11:11).

Means 'became', 'came'...the Son comes to us from the Father...he is not generated from below

- He comes as a man, under the Law (not simply in terms of obedience to it, but ultimately bearing its curse, as in 3:10ff).
- He became curse for us, taking on all the principalities and powers that attacked him as he bore the guilt of our sin (See Col. 2:13ff.)

The Goal of Redemption, That We Might Receive the Promise i.e. Adoption by the Spirit!

(1) The redemption is not an end in itself. So also in the Old Testament exodus events 'Israel is my son, my first born...let Israel go that he might worship me'. He bore his son up on eagles' wings and brought him to himself!

- Everything in this passage is in accord with the timing and predetermined plan of God the Father. He sends forth the Son, at the time when he has prepared all things 'the fullness of times', so that the redemption is the *Father's* gift to us, in his Son.

(2) Here the matter is expressed in terms of the Promise

- This has been Paul's point all the way through this chapter: the Spirit is received by grace through faith. He is the Promised gift to the nations (Gal. 3:1f. cf. 3:14).
- Thus, being imprisoned under sin was so that the Promise could come to all who believe (Gal. 3:22 cf. the account of preaching to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10, as mentioned in earlier sermons).

(3) The Promised Spirit is the Spirit of the Father, who has set us free, at a date he has set, and through the ascended Christ he has poured out the Spirit upon us (Acts 2:33)

- The *cry* (*krazo*) of the Spirit is Abba! (cf. Mark 14:36)
 - The emphasis is as much on the verb as the noun!
 - The status of 'adopted' is as legal and forensic as that of justification, but it is also deeply personal and relational.
- This cry is at once our eternal security, and the highest manifestation of human dignity. It is that for which we have been created.

(4) The security of that Promise should give us great hope. The end point of the adoption is the glorification of us as the sons of God. "God's peer community" to use Geoff's phrase.

- We **are** his heirs. We **will be** conformed to the image of the Son, which will be our glory. The unity, security, depth and faithfulness of the Son **will be** ours. The battle in which we currently live (in the 'current evil age') **will be no more!** There **will never again** be in us any propensity to sin, or **any desire** for impurity, greed, envy or any selfish action, motivation or thought!
- This **is all by Promise, not by works of the law...therefore it is secure!**

Galatians 4:8-20

The Nature of the Old Testament Exodus

(1) Paul has made much of the theme of promise in the preceding chapter, especially as seen in the promises made to Abraham.

- Embedded in the promises to Abraham is the promise of a future deliverance of his captive children (Gen. 15:12-16)
 - It is not just that there is a promise, but the context in which this is given is the Lord's guarantee that he would fulfil the promise.
- (2) The wider context bears some examination at this point
- In Gen. 14 Abraham has been met by Melchizedek, the king-priest of Salem. He has blessed Abraham in the name of the Lord, the 'possessor of heaven and earth'.
 - Preceding this was an event in which Abraham's nephew had ended up in captivity: the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (as well as three others: Admah; Zeboiim; Zoar) had been defeated by four other kings headed up by Chedorlaomer, king of Elam (for 'king' read 'local war lord').
 - The meeting took place as Abraham was on the way back from his victory over Chedorlaomer, and Abraham recognises the greatness of the king-priest, Melchizedek by paying him tithes (a point that the writer to the Hebrews later takes up in Heb. 7).
 - In addition, he had refused any riches from the king of Sodom on his way from the defeat of the local war lords who had taken Lot captive, so that he would not be indebted to them in any way (Gen. 14:23...did he make this oath while he was paying his tithes to God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, through Melchizedek??)
 - § No doubt Abraham was also very well aware of the nature of Sodom (Gen. 13:13 cf. 18:20). Indeed, most of these five places become symbols of God's wrath on human wickedness (e.g. Deut. 29:23 cf. Hos. 11:8)
 - § He could accept great wealth, and find a settlement in the land, but the manner of it would be in accord with the promises of God, and it would 'tie him in' to the world systems and their idolatry.
 - So in Gen. 15, in the vision in which God came to Abraham, his first words are 'do not fear'...and promises that he will be his 'shield' and 'reward'.
 - But all is dependent upon an heir! So from whence will this heir come? By a 'legal' route i.e. through the closest relative, in this case Eliezer of Damascus?
 - No, the promises would indeed come from one born of Abraham's own loins (Gen. 15:4), by divine gift, according to the promise.
 - The 'cutting of the covenant' ceremony is fulfilled by God, as Abraham is put to sleep, and God himself passes through the pieces of the cut animals
 - § Cf. Jer. 34:18 where it seems a high handed, self-motivated (by the enemy at the gate!) covenant renewal ceremony has taken place, along the same lines, but with human beings as the enactors!
 - So the whole event indicates not simply that there is a promise, but that the whole picture would be fulfilled by means of the promise: God being faithful to his word, rending himself to keep the covenant secure.
 - The event alluded to in the Gen. 15 passage, is the event of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and into the land, which was also part of the promise, and (like the fulfilment of the promise of an heir) it would be brought about solely by the mercy and grace of God.

(3) The exodus was not just a delivery from the physical slavery and hardship suffered by God's people, but even more it was a spiritual release

- See, for example, Ex. 12:12 cf. Numb. 33:4
- It was the God of Heaven and Earth overthrowing the power of the god of this world (Pharaoh)
- But the final deliverance was by means of a sacrifice: the Passover lamb
 - This is all a pre-figuring of the coming of *the* Lamb of God; see John 12:30-31 cf. 13:1ff; 14:30f.; 16:11; 1 Cor. 5:7.

(4) Moreover, it was God's personal action that brought Israel out from Egypt. Though he sent Moses and Aaron, it was he himself who brought them out.

- Thus see Deut. 4:37 'because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with *his own presence*, (*paniyim* = 'face') by his great power';
 - Jesus is Immanuel "God with us"...so if we have seen him, we have seen God (John 14:9)

(5) But God's personal action was that they would *know* him and be brought into his presence.

- Ex. 19:4 "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you up on eagle's wings and brought you to *myself*." 'Israel is my Son, my Firstborn, let Israel go that he may serve/worship me' Ex. 4:22f., and thus the Lord brought them to *himself* at Horeb i.e. Mt. Sinai (e.g. Deut. 4:10)
- And his presence went with them in Tabernacle and Temple.

The Galatians' Exodus

(1) The reference in Gal. 4:8f. to the gods to which they were held in slavery, connotes the slavery of God's people in Egypt.

- We have seen the repeated emphasis on the enslavement of the Law earlier in the letter (e.g. Gal. 3:22, 23, 24; 4:1, 3, 7 etc. cf. 5:1).
- Later we see that Paul develops his argument in terms of coming to the mountain (the allegory of 4:21-31), and the difference between coming to Sinai (where the Law meets our sinful flesh to enslave us) and the Jerusalem above: which is free!
 - Cf. the similar use of the 'mountains' in Heb. 12:18-24.
- We also see the repetition of the concept of 'redemption' e.g. Gal. 3:13; 5:5, 7), which is the language of exodus (i.e. 'deliverance')
- And this through the personal action of God in the Son (Gal. 1:3ff.; 4:4 etc.).
 - New exodus language appears elsewhere (e.g. Luke 9:31)

(2) The Son's action of redeeming us is no less than God the Father bringing us to himself

- Cf. Gal. 4:5ff.
- This is by union with the Son, in whom we dwell in God the Father (e.g. 1 Thess. 1:1)
- And all according to Promise!

(3) The bulk of the section before us refers to the shared experience of Paul and the Galatians (4:12-20), and this serves to underline his statement in verse 11.

- See parallels here between the Galatians and Israel in the wilderness wanderings, longing for Egypt

- Also see parallels with Moses: interceding for them in love!
- Note in passing the manner of the Galatians' troublemakers' 'ministry': exclusivity so that envy is produced!
 - Gal. 4:17ff
 - Cf. Paul's ministry to them in Gal. 4:212ff.
- Law-way robs God's people of their joy and blessing (Gal. 4:15)

Galatians 4:21-31

The Structure of the Allegory

(1) Paul makes it clear that he is speaking allegorically (Gal. 4:24).

- It is possible that this was in response to the argument of the troublesome teachers among the Galatian churches, who may have used the fact that there were two sons born of Abraham to suggest that Paul was inferior (i.e. he was like Ishmael...See F F Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 218f.).
 - In rabbinical interpretation, the message would have been Isaac = Jews; Ishmael = Gentiles; Jews = child of free woman and Gentiles = child of slave woman; Jews = liberated by knowledge of Torah and Gentiles = in bondage to sin; Jews = people of covenant and Gentiles receive mercies (like Ishmael) but stand in no covenant relation to God. Paul turns this entirely on its head.
 - This curious passage, then, may in fact be the heart of the matter from Paul's opponents' point of view.
- Allegory is a technique for conveying meaning, using stories or figures to convey truth beyond themselves. An allegory = 'a story, play, poem, picture, etc in which the characters represent moral or spiritual ideas or messages' (Chambers Dictionary).
 - We see Jesus using allegory in some of his parables, and this becomes clear particularly where we see the parable interpreted by Jesus himself (e.g. the sower and the seed).

(2) Behind the entire allegory in this passage (in all its various parts) is this: there is a fundamental and irreconcilable difference between that which comes by promise and that which comes by works of the law (i.e. through the flesh).

- There is an irreconcilable difference between these two positions, and this point has been made in various ways throughout the letter, and will be again (e.g. Fruit of the Spirit vs Deeds of the Flesh).
- This ties in with the dualities that appear in many places in Paul's thinking (e.g. Flesh and Spirit; Darkness and Light; Adam and Christ; Law and Grace; Sin and Grace; Condemnation and Justification; etc.)
- In Particular, the hinge here is that there are two **covenants**. Paul speaks of two mountains, two women, two offspring, and two cities, but all of this hinges on their being *two covenants*. One is therefore linked to Promise, and the other to the Flesh.

(3) Here, Paul's allegory is based on real persons, places and events.

- Hagar and Sarah (Sarai); Ishmael and Isaac; Mt. Sinai (Mosaic covenant) = Jerusalem of Paul's day compared to Jerusalem above (free).

(4) The story may be familiar to us, but needs to be recounted (at least briefly) for us to understand the connections

- The story of Abraham and Hagar's union and the birth of Ishmael, is found in Genesis 16. At a later point, Ishmael and Hagar are sent out of the household, after the birth of Isaac, the record of which can be found in Genesis 21.
- The plan to generate an heir through Hagar had come from Sarai (as she was then called) and similar such arrangements have been attested to in the ANE (see Walton, *Genesis*, p. 445f.)
 - This arrangement was only possible because of Hagar's status as a handmaid to Sarai (i.e. a female slave; albeit she was treated as a 'wife' after this according to Gen. 16:3).
 - § Paul passes no judgement on the arrangement, nor on Sarai's actions (she treated her harshly, see Gen. 16:5; but for her part, Hagar despised Sarah, see Gen. 16:4 cf. 21:9), but simply reports the events, so well known to the people of Israel.
 - Paul's logic is that because the son from through her womb came from a slave, the son was also a slave. By contrast, the son born of Sarai (Sarah) would be free, since she was free.
- The Genesis narrative makes it clear that Ishmael received promises from God and certain prophecies were made about him and his descendants (e.g. Gen. 16:10-13; 21:13, 18, 20), but he was not the promised child through whom the covenant would be fulfilled (Gen 21:12 cf. 17:19, 21; Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18).
 - Indeed, the Promised son would not simply promised in the face of Abraham's age, but Sarah's barrenness (see Gen. 17:15-22). At every turn the circumstances would confirm that the covenant promises would be fulfilled by the Lord, not by any human efforts.

(5) But also here, in the allegory, Paul uses another set of relationships: the mountains of Sinai and Jerusalem (the city set on a on a hill therefore always envisaged a mountain = Mt. Zion)

- We have seen the repeated emphasis on the enslavement of the Law earlier in the letter (e.g. Gal. 3:22, 23, 24; 4:1, 3, 7 etc. cf. 5:1), and here Paul equates the existing Jerusalem of his day, with Mt Sinai, which is the equivalent of being from Hagar's line, as children of slavery, born according to the flesh.
- At each point the converse is implied with the children of Promise. These have no earthly city, and therefore belong to "Jerusalem above". They are pilgrims and wanderers on the earth.
- However, what is of central importance is that this whole mass of images is actually describing *two covenants*.

The New Covenant Supersedes the Old

(1) The very structure of our Bibles tells us that there is a New Covenant.

- The New was prepared for by the Old, and comes out of it, but is not identical with it.
- Both readings (from Galatians and Hebrews) emphasise the newness and finality of the New Covenant.
 - Both situations were dealing with *reversionism* (though in different ways).

- Both emphasise the finality of the work of Christ for the establishment of a new situation (in Hebrews, see, for example Heb. 7:22; 8:6ff.; 9:15ff.; 10:15ff.; 12:24; etc.)
- Both situations see the outcome of the New Covenant as love, and any reversionist tendency will not issue in love (see, for example, Heb. 13:1 cf. Gal. 5:1 in their contexts).

(2) The old covenant (i.e. that formed with the people of Israel, with Moses as the mediator on Mt Sinai) served its purpose (this is the argument of Gal. 3), but did not replace the covenant with Abraham, i.e. the covenant based on Promise.

- The New Covenant is the final revelation of the character of the God of Promise, and the promises of God bound up in the covenant with Abraham are all explicated and confirmed in the New Covenant,
 - Not least, the self-rendering of God the covenant maker (who himself passed through the cut animals in Gen. 15).
 - In the New Covenant the promises to the nations are fulfilled especially as seen in the giving of the Holy Spirit to the nations who believe (as in Gal. 3:14).

(3) The Old Covenant is mostly shown to be insufficient by what it could not do, such as the final cleansing of sin, the opening up of the promises to all the nations, the gift of the Spirit etc. Most of all, it was insufficient because it had not been inaugurated by the Son in his own blood.

- This **is** the new covenant in my blood Luke 22:20:. Covenant of freedom from sin and the knowledge of God (the following chapter is going to tell us more about that freedom), as in Jer. 31:31ff.
- But now that the New Covenant **had** been inaugurated and the nations were the object of the covenant grace.
 - Now the covenant had been opened up to the ends of the earth (as had been promised to Abraham). The national covenant with Israel, under Moses, was necessary, as the husk to the kernel of the seed, but now it had served its purpose.
- In Christ we have come to a new mountain, where God the consuming fire, has consumed our sin!
 - The outcome of that process is the gift of the Spirit for all mankind (cf. Gal. 3:14 and 3:26-29) that we may live in the love that we have received (Heb. 13:1ff. cf. Gal. 5:1ff.)