

Galatians 4 • The Grace & Law, Part II

Introduction

In chapter 3, Paul provides the first three of his arguments to prove that salvation comes by grace and not by law. He provided the personal argument (3:1-5), the scriptural argument (3:6-14), and the logical argument (3:15-29). Here he finishes with three more arguments for the same.

We know that our first enemy is the flesh, and Satan would prefer to render us ineffective by getting us to pursue our own lusts and desires. If that fails, the world as our second enemy is employed to tempt us with the material things and relationships of this world. But when these fail, Satan becomes our direct, third enemy employing deception. He tries to get us to reinterpret and apply God's Word in a manner other than originally intended. Paul spends so much time on the topic of grace vs. the law because it is one of Satan's leading and repeated deceptions in every age of the church to this very day.

¹Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. ³So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

⁸However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. ⁹But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? ¹⁰You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

[Read v.1-11]

Q: What does the phrase "dispensational truth" mean?

A: It reflects the fact that God, at different times, deals in different ways with different people. "Dispensational truth" describes the truth of God's Word as related to His program for the ages of the Jews, Gentiles, and the church.

Q: So how is Paul providing a dispensational argument proving salvation comes by grace and not the Law?

A: The Jews were in their "spiritual childhood" under the Law. The rules and rituals of the Law were the "religious ABC's", so to speak, which they had to learn before they could graduate into their full inheritance. This legalism was bondage to the Mosaic system, what he calls "elemental things of the world". This dispensation of law ran its course, having prepared the way for Christ to set us free.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ...If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees...

Colossians 2:8, 20

Point: Christ was born at the right time, in the right manner, and for the right purpose to set us free.

Q: What was Christ's personal relationship with the Law?

A: He was "born under the Law", obeyed the law, and fulfilled the Law both in His life and death. This not only set the Jews free from their legalistic bondage, but opened the door to fulfillment of the promise of salvation for everyone through Abraham.

Q: What would have happened if Israel as a whole accepted its Messiah?

A: The nation would have transitioned into spiritual adulthood and the blessing would have flowed out to the Gentiles through Israel fulfilling the Abrahamic promises.

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Q: But what came about as a result of Israel's collective rejection of its Messiah?

A: God in His grace provided the blessings to both Jews and Gentiles alike on an individual basis. The Gentiles were not saved through the rise of Israel, but its fall. [See Romans 11:1-12]

Point: Now individuals are adopted as mature, grown-up children in God's family. Believers are sons – not servants – enjoying their full inheritance in Christ.

Q: So what is Paul's conclusion to his dispensational argument?

A: Why do you want to go **BACK** into bondage, into a kind of second childhood? Leave the ABC's and enjoy the full inheritance provided in Christ. Don't continue as slaves, but become sons.

[Read v.12-18]

¹²I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; ¹³but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. ¹⁵Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? ¹⁷They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. ¹⁸But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.

Q: Why might Paul's fifth argument be called "the sentimental argument"?

A: It's extremely personal, the appeal of a loving spiritual servant or concerned father addressing his spiritual children.

Q: What is Paul highlighting as one of the chief differences between himself personally and the Judaizers?

A: Paul has a past history, a personal relationship with them based on love. Their past mutual concern was concerned with each other's personal welfare. Just because Paul is now having to correct them with the truth does not mean that his love for them has changed. In fact, it should be all the more reason they listen to him and reject the Judaizers.

Point: One of the primary purposes of false teaching such as placing an adverse emphasis on the law is to bring division both to the truth and personal relationships. It will test the bonds of Christian love.

[Read v.19-31]

¹⁹My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— ²⁰but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

²¹Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. ²³But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. ²⁴This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. ²⁵Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written,

Q: In using the example of Abraham's two sons (see Genesis 16 and 21), what kind of argument is Paul making to show that the new covenant of grace has superseded the old covenant of the Law?

A: Paul makes an allegorical argument. He uses an event that has an additional spiritual meaning beyond its literal meaning.

Q: How is the old covenant of the Law represented?

1. It's symbolized by Hagar the "bondwoman", the slave-girl. (v.22)
2. Ishmael, a son "born according to the flesh". (v.23)
3. It represents Jerusalem in Paul's day, still in spiritual (and political) bondage. (v.25)

Q: How is the new covenant of grace represented?

1. It's symbolized by Sarah, "the free woman". (v.22)
2. Isaac, a son born miraculously "through the promise" of God. (v.23)
3. It represents the heavenly Jerusalem which is "free". (v.26)

Q: As Christians, whose children are we according to this teaching?

A: We're like Isaac, the children of promise, and therefore children of spiritual liberty. (v.31)

“REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR;
BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR;
FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND.”

²⁸And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. ³⁰But what does the Scripture say?

“CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,
FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.”

³¹So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

Point: God promised Abraham a son long before Ishmael was born. Ishmael was added just like the Law as explained in 3:19. He was the son of the flesh, a slave's son. The old covenant was never God's final plan for Israel. Like Ishmael, it was added and brought bondage and sorrow. God's commandment to Abraham was to cast out Ishmael and Hagar, a representation of the fact that law and grace, faith and works, promise and commandment, can never live in the same household. Essentially what the Judaizers wanted to do was invite Hagar and Ishmael back into the family again.

Q: What is Paul's point for the Jews in quoting Isaiah 54:1?

A: Just as Sarah was barren and had to wait for many years for her son, so the Jews had to wait many years before God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled.

Q: What is Paul's point for the Gentiles in quoting Isaiah 54:1?

A: The deeper meaning of joy in the church in spite of its persecution and suffering. (v.29)

Point: Paul shows that proponents of false teaching where grace and the Law is concerned are not actually God's liberated children of promise, but slave-children to the world. They may represent themselves as being more "spiritual", but in reality they are the ones operating in the flesh.

Epilogue

The danger Paul saw in Galatia is alive and with us today. The flesh loves and craves "religious excitement", religious experiences, and feels gratified when it can keep religious law. There's nothing wrong with church traditions in and of themselves which are tied to Scripture and magnify Christ, but we must constantly be aware of the danger of inviting Hagar and Ishmael back into the family. There can be no mixture of law and grace.