

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

(SB_Galatians_Lsn7_Chapter 4A)

Paul is addressing the doctrine of justification through faith and not works in 3:1 thru 4:7. We have previously studied Paul’s introductory statements in regard to this vital doctrine and we have examined the first two illustrations that he uses to support this doctrine. In today’s study, we will turn to illustration #3.

- Justification is through faith, not works (3:1-4:7)
 - The doctrinal issue is introduced (3:1-5)
 - The doctrinal argument is developed & illustrated – the faith of Abraham vs. the Law (3:6-4:7)
 - Illustration #1 – the faith of Abraham vs. the curse of the Law (3:6-14)
 - Illustration #2 – the covenant of faith vs. the Law of works (3:15-25)
 - Illustration #3 – the heirs of faith are free vs. the heirs of the Law are in bondage (3:26-4:7)

Recap of Paul’s Argument

First, let’s summarize Paul’s major points so far in our examination of this passage of Scripture.

Paul States the Doctrine of Justification by Grace Alone in Christ Alone (3:1-5)

The Main Points of Paul’s Doctrinal Thesis – there are at least two major points to take away from Paul’s doctrinal thesis presented in verses 1-5:

- There is irrefutable evidence among the Galatians that their salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – they had received the Holy Spirit
- The subsequent willingness to accept teaching that refuted what they themselves had experienced was illogical

What was the evidence of the receipt of the Spirit that was so tangible? The sign-gifts were still occurring. Paul had just concluded his 1st missionary journey (Acts 13:1-14:26) when he wrote this letter to the Galatians in ca. A.D. 49. He has yet to make his 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys which included trips to such places as Corinth where Paul later documents that various sign-gifts were still extant, although on the wane.

Illustration #1 – Paul’s First Proof of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone (3:6-14)

The Main Points of This Illustration – there are at least two major points to take away from Paul’s use of Illustration #2 in support of his doctrinal thesis that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

- Abraham was considered righteous or justified on the basis of the Law alone (Gen 15:6)
- Justification by the Law is impossible
 - The Law teaches that men are justified by faith
 - The Law curses those who do not keep it in its entirety (Deut 27:26)

The Law was not the source of “life.” The Law was a means to insure that the source of “life” could come, fulfill the promise and provide “life.” The Law enlightened men’s eyes to man’s sinful condition, spiritual death and need for a Redeemer. The Law (Scripture) disclosed the hopeless condition of sin and separation from the source of “life.” That did not make the Law

contrary to the Promise of God, only complementary to the Promise of God. If a man could do what the Law requires, then he would find life.

Illustration #2 – The Covenant of Faith is not Superseded by the Law of Works (3:15-25)

The Main Points of This Illustration – there are at least three central points to take away from Paul's use of Illustration #2 in support of his doctrinal thesis that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

- God's covenant with Abraham is not invalidated by the Law which was given over 400 years later
- It was not fulfilled prior to the giving of the Law since the promise of the "Seed" was not fulfilled until after the Law had been given thus proving that the covenant promises were still in effect and the Law did not invalidate the covenant
- The Law's purpose was simply to insure that the promise to Abraham would still be accomplished

Illustration #3 – The heirs of faith are free while the heirs of the Law are in bondage (3:26-4:7)

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

4:1 Now 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, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.¹ (Gal 3:26-4:7)

The Main Point of This Illustration – there is one central point to take away from Paul's use of Illustration #3 in support of his thesis that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

- Before Christ, the promised "Seed," came, the path to salvation was a path of bondage; since Christ has come, the path to full inheritance is through God's gracious adoption of us as sons and co-heirs with His True Son.

Let's examine Paul's development of this point in 3:26-4:7. In 3:26-29, Paul makes the following point: we are spiritual "sons" (seed) of Abraham through faith in the "Seed" of Abraham thereby sharing in a common inheritance. We have seen that Scripture uses the "seed of Abraham" concept in four different ways in his letters. The chart to follow reflects these different usages.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

THE FOUR SEEDS OF ABRAHAM IN SCRIPTURE²
<p>Natural Seed All physical descendants of Abraham Genesis 12:1-3, 7; et al.</p>
<p>Natural-Spiritual Seed Believing physical descendants of Abraham Isaiah 41:8; Romans 9:6, 8; Galatians 6:16</p>
<p>Spiritual Seed Believing non-physical descendants of Abraham Galatians 3:6-9, 29</p>
<p>Ultimate Seed Jesus Christ Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 2:16-17</p>

In verse 27, Paul notes that the Galatian believers (as well as all believers of the present age or dispensation) have been “baptized into Christ.” This is one of the several different types of non-water baptisms in Scripture. It is that baptism of the believer into the universal Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (see also Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 12:13). It is distinguished from the baptism with the Holy Spirit by Christ that was prophesied during the Age of Israel in regard to eschatological events associated with the coming of the Kingdom (see Matt 3:11; Lu 3:16). IMPORTANT: Once again, Paul has just introduced a completely new doctrinal paradigm of understanding that was and is completely unique. Never before had the concept of baptism been taught to mean the things Paul was teaching.

In verse 28, Paul makes another dramatic statement that can only be compared to a volcanic eruption of the magnitude of Krakatoa.³ Two thousand years of Jewish-centric doctrinal

² Taken from Dr. Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Galatians,” www.soniclight.com

³ “**Krakatoa** ([Indonesian](#) name: **Krakatau**, [Portuguese](#) name: **Krakatao**) is a [volcanic island](#) in the [Sunda Strait](#) between [Java](#) and [Sumatra](#) in [Indonesia](#). The name is used for the island group, the main [island](#) (also called [Rakata](#)), and the [volcano](#) as a whole. It has erupted repeatedly, massively and with disastrous consequences throughout recorded history. The best known eruption culminated in a series of massive explosions on August 26-27, [1883](#). The 1883 eruption ejected more than 25 [cubic kilometres](#) of rock, ash, and [pumice](#) [1], and generated the loudest sound historically reported — the cataclysmic explosion was distinctly heard as far away as [Perth](#) in [Australia](#) (approx. 1930 miles or 3100 km), and the island of [Rodrigues](#) near [Mauritius](#) (approx. 3000 miles or 4800 km). Atmospheric shock waves reverberated around the world seven

understanding was being turned upside down. Not since the foundation of the Jewish race with Abraham's call by Yahweh had Jews and Gentiles been placed on such an equal footing.

In verse 29, Paul summarizes his main point: we are spiritual "sons" ("seed") of Abraham through faith in the "Seed" of Abraham thereby sharing in a common inheritance. We are essentially brothers of Jesus Christ who is the King and the Redeemer of His fellow co-heirs. We inherit certain blessings of the covenant between God and Abraham in the same manner as did Abraham himself – through faith.

Paul elaborates and develops this idea in more detail in 4:1-7 by alluding to the practice of adoption that was well-understood by Jews and Gentiles under Roman rule at this time in the First Century. Within the Roman empire which was heavily influenced by the laws, customs and practices of the Greek Empire which preceded it, a servant (a *paidagogos* – a tutor or custodian) was given the responsibility of educating, training, and disciplining a boy from the time of childhood to puberty (somewhere between 14-17 years). Paul has already alluded to this practice previously in verses 23-24. The son was a heir of all of his father's domain and earthly wealth, but until he was acknowledged as such through an official rite of passage in which he was recognized as entitled to the inheritance, he was under bondage or a system of instruction that demanded obedience. The symbol of passage into his new status was the donning of a special toga. (The Jews had similar rites of passage).

The English reader will miss the flavor of these verses unless he realizes that the moment of growing up was a very definite one in antiquity and that it involved matters of great religious and legal importance. For instance, in Judaism a boy passed from adolescence to manhood shortly after his twelfth birthday, at which time he became "a son of the law." In the Greek world the minor came of age later, at about eighteen, but there was the same emphasis on an entering into full responsibility as an adult. At this age, at the festival of the *Apaturia*, the child passed from the care of his father to the care of the state and was responsible to it.

Under Roman law there was also a time for the coming of age of a son. But the age when this took place may not have been as fixed as is often assumed (cf. Lightfoot), with the result that the father may have had discretion in setting the time of his son's maturity. If this is so, it leads one to think that Paul is referring primarily to the Roman custom as he observed that a child is under guardians and trustees "until the time set by his father." A Roman child became an adult at the sacred family festival known as the *Liberalia*, held annually on the seventeenth of March. At this time the child was formally adopted by the father as his acknowledged son and heir and received the *toga virilis* in place of the *toga praetexta* which he had previously worn. A sense of the moving nature of this moment can be gleaned from the description of the coming of age of Marcellus in the opening pages of *The Robe* by Lloyd Douglas.

This is the general background (whether of Greek law, Roman law, or both) of Paul's words in these verses. When the child was a minor in the eyes of the law-

times and were detectable for five days^[2]. Near Krakatoa, according to official records, 165 villages and towns were destroyed and 132 seriously damaged, at least 36,417 (official toll) people died, and many thousands were injured by the eruption, mostly from the [tsunamis](#) which followed the explosion. The eruption destroyed two-thirds of the island of Krakatoa. Eruptions at the volcano since [1927](#) have built a new island in the same location, called **Anak Krakatau** (child of Krakatoa)." Quoted from Wikipedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krakatoa>

-it is this word that Paul actually uses--his status was no different from that of a slave, even though he was the future owner of a vast estate. He could make no decisions; he had no freedom. On the other hand, at the time set by his father the child entered into his responsibility and freedom. The application of the illustration is obvious as Paul applies it to the inferior condition of a person under law, both a "minor" and a "slave," and to the new freedom and responsibility that come to him in Christ.⁴

In verse 3, Paul mentions that "we...were in bondage under the elements of the world." It is important to acknowledge the context in order to properly interpret this phrase. Paul is contrasting the state of believers prior to the sacrificial death of Christ and after the sacrificial death of Christ. Paul is addressing the development and unfolding of salvation history, not the history of a given individual who passes from the status of an unbeliever to a believer. This is a dispensational issue, not a personal, individual issue. The word translated "elements" or "elemental" is the Greek word *stoicheion*). This word means to order or arrange in a row, like the alphabet. It was used to refer to basic elements of the universe, whether physical (2 Pe 3:10) or spiritual.

Here, Paul is simply referring to the fact that Jews and Gentiles alike had been in bondage to the Mosaic Law which delineated the path to salvation on this earth prior to its fulfillment in Christ's life and work. The Law governed religious life. The believer who lived under the tutelage of the Law was not free to live by means of the Spirit as was the believer after Christ's fulfillment of the Law. Christ was born under the terms of the Law (v. 4) and He fulfilled all of its requirements, thus He alone is qualified to redeem all who are cursed by the Law and allow them to be accepted as joint-heirs with Him. Through faith in Him, we join him as adopted sons (v. 5) and co-heirs.

One of the evidences of our joint-heir status is the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Now that we are fully adopted sons of God with all the rights and privileges afforded by that status, we are privileged to have an intimate vs. formal relationship with our heavenly Father. We can address Him as "Abba" which very roughly translated into English means "Daddy." In First Century culture, this term was not associated with infancy or childhood, but it was used in one's adult life and was a term of special endearment. It was used by grown children when they claimed the inheritance of their Father.

The Main Point of Illustration #3 (3:26-4:7) – In summary, once again, the main point of this passage and illustration:

- Before Christ, the promised "Seed," came, the path to salvation was a path of bondage; since Christ has come, the path to full inheritance is through God's gracious adoption of us as sons and co-heirs with His True Son.

⁴ Frank E. Gaebelien, *Expositor's Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1976-1992), electronic edition.