

The Church of the Servant King

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

(SB_Galatians_Lsn8_Chapter 4B)

We’ve examined the development of Paul’s argument in support of his thesis (2:16, 21) that salvation is by grace through faith and not works of the law as he unpacks this Truth and illustrates the logic of his case in 3:1-4:7. We examined the three main illustrations that Paul used in support of his argument.

Illustration #1 – The Main Points of This Illustration – *Paul’s First Proof of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone* (3:6-14) – there are at least two major points to take away this illustration.

- Abraham was considered righteous or justified on the basis of faith alone (Gen 15:6)
- Justification by the Law is impossible
 - The Law teaches that men are justified by faith (Deut 30:11-14 cf. Rom 10:6-8)
 - The Law curses those who do not keep it in its entirety (Deut 27:26; 30:17-18)

Illustration #2 – The Main Points of This Illustration – *The Covenant of Faith is not Superseded by the Law of Works* (3:15-25) – there are at least three central points to take away from Illustration #2.

- God’s covenant with Abraham is not invalidated by the Law which was given over 400 years later
- The covenant with Abraham 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. (This fact proves that the covenant promises were still in effect).
- The Law’s purpose was simply to insure that the promise to Abraham would be accomplished.

Illustration #3 – The Main Points of This Illustration - *The heirs of faith are free while the heirs of the Law are in bondage* (3:26-4:7) – there is one central point to take away from Paul’s use of Illustration #3.

- 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.

Scripture can be examined from multiple angles and each angle allows us to discover a new vista into Truth that we may not have considered otherwise. Such is the case with the analysis of Paul’s argument in chapters 2-3 to include the beginning of chapter 4. We studied this passage from the angle of a thesis presented by Paul which is then supported through three illustrations. Another angle is revealed in an analysis of the structure Paul uses in this passage. It is called a “chiastic” structure.¹

- A Promise (Abraham) 3:6-14
 - B Law (Moses) 3:15-22
 - C Faith (Christ) 3:23-25
 - D "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." 3:26
 - C' Faith (Spirit) 3:27—4:7
 - B' Law (*stoicheia tou kosmou*) 4:8-11
 - A' Promise (Sarah) 4:21-31

¹ Taken from Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Galatians,” www.soniclight.com

A chiasmic structure is one in which the themes of the first paragraphs are repeated in reverse order in the subsequent paragraphs. The first half of this chiasm has a Jewish emphasis while the second half has a Gentile emphasis. The chiasmic structure is found very frequently in Scripture and it is used to emphasize a main point with a logical flow of thought leading up to the main point and a logical flow of thought that flows from the main point.

The genius of the Holy Spirit combines with Paul's vast familiarity with Hebrew Scriptures and the issues of his day in this chiasmic structure. Notice how Paul leads his readers through a logical flow of thought that proves that justification by faith alone apart from works of the Law is nothing new and is something that should be accepted by Jews on the basis of precedent and the fulfillment of promise. The precedent is found in the faith of Abraham – the father of the Jews – and in the fact that the requirements of the Law did not supersede the promise that was believed by Abraham. God's faithfulness to His promise to Abraham is supported by the fulfillment, in part, of that promise through the coming of the "Seed." All of this logic builds to a crescendo as Paul highlights another central point – "we are all sons of God through faith in Christ." Of course, the next development in Paul's logic is to extend this principle to the Gentiles which he does in the remainder of the chiasmic structure.

You will note that the chiasmic structure outlined above includes a gap in the verses presented (4:12-20). That is not uncommon and is usually the result of the writer inserting a parenthesis in his flow of logic to deal with a tangential item or issue that has been raised. In our case, Paul deviates from his logical thought flow to make an appeal to the Galatians. He then returns to his logical flow in 4:21-31.

The Law – Do Not Turn To Legalism (4:8-11)

8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. **9** But 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? **10** You observe days and months and seasons and years. **11** I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.²

Paul's point in this passage – Do not turn back to that which has held you in bondage and guilt since it had no power to deliver. Do not turn back to a system of guilt. Rather, embrace life and freedom that is yours through Christ's provision.

Paul uses an interesting combination of Greek words for "know" in verses 8 and 9 that is worthy of our attention. In verse 8, Paul uses the Greek word *oida* which means to perceive or understand. However, in verse 9, Paul shifts to the use of *ginosko* which is a more intimate form of knowledge as it embraced all forms of understanding (i.e. sensory, the mind, experience, etc.). It was perception of things as they really are rather than just an opinion about them.

So, the contrast Paul is emphasizing here is that between awareness and personal, intimate relationship. Before the Galatians had even come to an awareness (*oida*) of God, they were involved with gods of this world, e.g. Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14:11-13). Once Paul had introduced them to the true God through faith in Jesus Christ, they had come to know (*ginosko*) God intimately.

Now, the Galatians were in danger of turning back to the "worthless elemental things" of this world, thus re-enter a life of bondage. Evidently, the Galatians had quickly begun to observe

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

the ritualistic traditions of these false belief systems since Paul mentions the fact that they were observing “days and months and seasons and years.”

Paul has already mentioned the danger and error associated with the “elemental things” of this world in verse 3. In that verse, he had the Mosaic Law in mind. 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.

As we have seen in our study of verse 3, Paul was 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.

In our verse (4:9), Paul applies *stoicheion* to the religious traditions and observances practiced by the Gentiles. Under the influence of the Judaizers, the Galatians had at evidently begun to observe traditions and ritual associated with the Mosaic Law that were based upon the calendar. They kept **special days** (weekly sabbaths), **and months** (new moons), **and seasons** (seasonal festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles), **and years** (sabbatical and jubilee years). They observed these special times, thinking that they would thereby gain additional merit before God. But Paul had already made it clear that works could not be added to faith as grounds for either justification or sanctification.

Paul’s point in this passage – Do not turn back to a system of bondage and guilt since it had no power to deliver. Rather, embrace life and freedom that is yours through Christ’s provision.

Paul Departs from His Chiastic Structure and Logical Flow to Make a Personal Appeal to the Galatians (4:12-20)

An Appeal To The Galatians to Remember Their Relationship With Paul (4:12-16)

12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I *am*, for I also *have become* as you *are*. You have done me no wrong; **13** but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; **14** and 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*. **15** Where 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. **16** Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth?

The contrast that Paul makes in this passage is stunning in its simplicity as it is profound in its implications. Paul had become like a Gentile, like the Galatians, and did not live under the Law as he embraced freedom and life in Christ. On the other hand, the Galatians who had been led to freedom and life in Christ by Paul were now turning to the very system that would enslave them to bondage and guilt.

We can only speculate as to the nature of the illness that Paul may have suffered in the presence of the Galatians, but we do know that the Galatians had received Paul in spite of it. Whatever it was (e.g. unsightly boils, something that would have made him “unclean” under the Law, etc.), it did not hinder their reception of him or his message.

An Appeal to Consider Paul's Attitude Toward Them (4:17-20)

17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them. 18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— 20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

In verses 17-19, Paul is simply saying that the Judaizers sought the Galatians for their own selfish purposes. The Judaizers sought to isolate them from Paul so that the Galatians might actually seek the Judaizers for answers. Paul says it is indeed good to be sought; however, it must be based upon proper motives, not improper motives.

Paul viewed the Galatians as his children *tekna* for whom he was responsible until they had morphed into Christ reflected in them (cf. Phil 2:6-7). This expression describes the Christian life as a kind of reincarnation of Christ in a believer's life.