

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
February 5, 2017

Lesson Text: Galatians 3:26-4:7
Lesson Title: Heirs of the Promise

Introduction

The Epistle of Galatians opens with the word "*Paul*" (Galatians 1:1,) the apostle's Gentile name. Galatians is addressed to "...*the churches of Galatia*," a reference to the churches founded on Paul's first missionary journey (Galatians 1:2). Paul's greeting in Galatians 1:3, "*Grace*" is the Greek word "*charis*," meaning "grace to you." "*Peace*" was also a part of Paul's greeting and is a word the Hebrew's used in their greetings meaning "prosperity, quietness, and rest.

At the time of Paul's writing, the Galatian churches were about two years old in the Lord and composed mostly of Jewish people. Paul was concerned about their spiritual growth, especially considering the false teachings introduced by the Judaizers. These Judaizers, or trouble-makers as Paul called them, insisted faith in Christ alone was not sufficient for salvation (Galatians 5:10). While Paul did not wish to divide loyalties within the congregation of the Galatian churches, he was not hesitant to confront the false teaching and maintain his call and commission to do so was from the Lord (Galatians 1:11-20).

One issue causing trouble among the Jewish Christians in the churches was related to those who believed the Law was necessary to receive the promise made to Abraham and his seed. God promised in Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). In the first fourteen verses of Galatians 3, Paul argued from the Old Testament that God's plan of salvation left no room for the works of the Law. But the fact Paul quoted six times from the Old Testament (Galatians 3:6-14) raised a serious problem: If salvation does not involve the Law, then why was the Law given in the first place? Paul quoted from the Law to prove the insignificance of the Law. However, if the Law is now set aside, then his very arguments are worthless, because they are taken from the Law.

The questions by the Jewish Christians were understandable to some degree when you consider the fact when God made the promise to Abraham, the Law had not been written. The Galatians assumed since the Law was given after God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham, keeping the Law must be a part of being an heir to the promise. In other words, the Law nullified the earlier faith agreement. So, from the time of the Law forward, God would justify by faith plus works. The Jew might ask, "Why else would God have given the Law if it were not part of justification?" It is important for Paul to defend the doctrine of justification by faith because the Judaizers had used the Old

Testament to try to establish justification by works. What follows in Galatians 3:15-18 and Galatians 4:1-7 is Paul's defense and his response to their questions. In his defense and response is the glorious truth that both Jew and Gentile who have believed the gospel are heirs of the promise.

Heirs of the Promise and Our Position (Galatians 3:26-29)

Verse 26

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” is a firm statement by the Apostle Paul defining a true child of God. “Children” is the Greek word *huios* {wee-os} which means “legitimate offspring of God.” While everyone is a child of God in the general sense because He created us (Acts 17:24-28), only those who have placed “faith in Christ Jesus” are His “children” in the true sense of being God's spiritual children. It is through “faith” in Christ Jesus sinners are set free from the bondage of the law.

Commenting on this verse, Doctor John Phillips writes, “Paul is drawing here a deliberate contrast between the state of an adolescent, who is still under the restraints and restrictions of the Mosaic Law, and the believer's emancipation by virtue of his sonship in Christ.” (*John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Galatians: An Expository Commentary.*)

Previously in verses 23-25, Paul had been speaking in the first person “*we*.” He now switches to the second person “*ye*” in verse 26, indicating he is no longer talking only to the Jew, but is speaking of Jew and Gentile (Colossians 3:11). The word “all” stresses the equal standing of all believers before God. There are no class distinctions in God's family!

Verse 27

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Being “baptized into Christ” is a common experience of every child of God, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul is not speaking about water baptism, which cannot save. Water baptism by immersion comes after repentance and salvation, and identifies the repentant believer with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The “baptism” Paul is speaking about here is the repentant believer being immersed or placed into union with Christ (Romans 6:3-4). At the moment of salvation, the believer is immersed into Christ's death, burial, resurrection, into His presence, into His power and into oneness with Him.

“Have put on Christ” sent a powerful message to those who had previously attempted to clothe themselves with the righteousness of the Law. To “put on Christ” means when God looks at us, He sees Jesus and is satisfied because He sees Christ’s righteousness, not ours.

Doctor Donald Campbell captured the true meaning of this phrase when he wrote, “In the Roman society when a youth came of age he was given a special toga which admitted him to the full rights of the family and state and indicated he was a grown-up son. So the Galatian believers had laid aside the old garments of the Law and had put on Christ’s robe of righteousness which grants full acceptance before God.” (*Donald K. Campbell, The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Galatians: Word Books, 1990, p.149*).

Verse 28

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This verse does not deny racial, social, and sexual differences among Christians. The Apostle Paul clearly recognizes role distinctions between men and women in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-36; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). Being a Christian does not mean we have give up our personal identities.

This verse teaches the Lord does not view one believer above another with respect to nationality, status, race, gender, or social standing. Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection abolished forever the Jewish monopoly on the things of God. Every true believer is “one in Christ Jesus” and makes up the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Every believer, “Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female” is equally justified by faith (verse 24); equally free from the bondage of legalism (verse 25); equally children of God (verse 26); equally clothed with Christ (verse 27); equally possessed by Christ (verse 28); and as we will see in verse 29, equally possessed heirs of the promises to Abraham.

Verse 29

“And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

“If ye be Christ’s” refers to all who are saved by grace. Every person who belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ through faith make up “Abraham’s seed.” As Paul previously stated, Christ is the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16); therefore, being in Christ makes a believer a part of “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

The natural seed of Abraham are the twelve tribes of Israel, the sons of Jacob. In verse 29, “Abraham’s seed” refers to the spiritual seed of Abraham who are

not Jews. These are Gentiles who have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ and become “Abraham’s seed.” While Scripture never teaches that Christians become spiritual Jews, or spiritual Israel, Christians do become “heirs” or inherit the promise of justification by faith as God promised Abraham. To interpret verse 29 to say Gentile Christians and the church inherit the national promises of Israel is not biblical.

Heirs of the Promise and Our Privileges (Galatians 4:1-7)

In Galatians 4 Paul continues to present his case that the Law is not required for salvation. Before Christ came, the Law served an essential purpose in God’s economy. However, it never replaced faith. Paul illustrated this truth by showing resemblance to some familiar practice or custom. In Galatians 4:1-7, Paul uses a truth that remains in every generation. A child is not an adult until he or she grows up and matures. A wealthy child cannot enjoy adult responsibility to invest his wealth until he grows and becomes an adult. It was time for the Galatians to grow up and enjoy the wealth they had in Christ.

The Galatians wanted to grow and go forward for Christ; but they were going about it in the wrong way. Their experience was not too different from Christians today who get involved in various legalistic movements, hoping to become better Christians. Some teacher or preacher gives them a list of a few things to do or not do and they think that makes them more righteous in the sight of God. They measure their spirituality and relationship with God on external performance.

Verse 1-2

“Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

To illustrate the truth of the foolishness of wanting to live under the Mosaic Law after coming to Christ, Paul reminded the Galatians of how a minor child and servants related to being an heir in the Jewish family.

“Child” is the Greek word *nepios* {nay-pee-os}. It refers to a child without understanding. It is a child who must be carried, fed, and watched closely. A minor “child” might inherit a large amount of wealth or property, but as long as he remained “a child,” he could never possess his inheritance. He had no more rights in his father’s house than a “servant” or slave. He was assigned a “tutor” to train him and watch over him. He was also appointed a “governor” to function as a steward or manager of his wealth until “the time appointed of the father” or the time he was ready to receive his inheritance.

There was at some age in every culture a time when a young boy became a man. For the Jew, it is called *bar mitzvah* and is held on the young man's thirteenth birthday. The Greek child was under his father's control until his eighteenth birthday. So, with this culture practice in mind, Paul's Galatian readers knew exactly what he was talking about.

Verse 3-5

“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

“Even so we” is a connection phrase to verse 1-2. “We” refers to Jewish believers. Paul is connecting and comparing the spiritual maturity of the Galatians to that of the minor child he has just described in verse 1-2. Like a child, said Paul, “we...were in bondage under the elements of the world.” The “elements of the world,” is a reference to the Mosaic Law (Colossians 2:8, 20). These “elements” were the ceremonies and sacrifices performed to gain divine acceptance. It refers to the ABC's of something. The elementary part of something. The basic beginning.

Paul is saying, “When we Jewish Christians were minors in the faith, we were kept like slaves under the rules of the Law.” Old Testament believers were the children of God, but they were under age spiritually speaking, and as such could not enjoy their inheritance until the “time was come.” Paul wanted them to understand that God in His own time would deliver them from bondage and make them full-grown sons ready to enjoy their inheritance in Christ. That is exactly what happened when “the fullness of time was come...”

The incarnation of Jesus Christ was not by chance or man's choosing. “When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son...” Paul wanted the Galatians to understand God would not leave them living under the Law without hope. At just the right “time,” God intervened. He “sent his Son” to “redeem them that were under the law...”

The “time” for Jesus to enter the earth was determined by the Father and the “time” set for His children to move from being a “minor child” to “spiritual maturity” is set by the Father. Time is nothing to God. He is a purposeful God as demonstrated in His dealing with the Galatians and in His dealing with us! For the Jews and the Gentiles, everything came together when God “sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

“Sent forth” means God commissioned His Son to come to this earth to do something to bring our salvation (John 1:16-17). Christ was “sent forth, made

of a woman.” “Made of a woman” magnifies the truth Christ was fully man, and fully God. “Made under the law” means Christ came into this world and voluntarily placed Himself under the same law that held every sinner in spiritual bondage. Like every Jew, Christ was under obligation to live under the law and to obey the law. But unlike every Jew, He lived a sinless life and completely satisfied the law’s demands and pleased His Heavenly Father (Hebrews 4:15).

Christ came into the world “to redeem them that were under the law...” The Greek word for “redeem” is *exagorazo* {ex-ag-or-ad-zo}. It means “to pay a ransom to secure someone’s freedom.” The truth of redemption should humble us and create in us a desire to mature in faith and enjoy our inheritance in Christ. Evidently the Galatian church failed to focus on Christ’s incarnation and His redeeming work on the cross. They wanted to go back to the old system of ceremony and law keeping. They wanted to be minor children again. In addition to redemption comes “the adoption of sons.” “Adoption is the act of bringing someone who is the offspring of another into one's own family. Since unregenerate people are by nature children of the devil, the only way they can become God's children is by spiritual adoption (Romans 8:15, 23; Ephesians 1:5).” (*The MacArthur Study Bible.*)

When sinners become children of God through the new birth, we are called adopted sons of God. All adoptive children of God are “*heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ*” (Romans 8:17) and will receive their full inheritance at the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18).

Verse 6

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

God confirms the “adoption of sons” by sending “the Spirit of his Son” into the “hearts” of every believer, “crying, Abba, Father.” “Abba” is an Aramaic word for father. It is like our English word, daddy or papa. The word is used here to denote an intimate trust a child has in his or her father. When a father-child relationship is what it should be, the child is able to call upon their father for any need.

The Holy Spirit, referred to here as “the Spirit of his Son,” who brings believers into this unique relationship with the “Father.” Jesus used the same language in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed, “*Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee...*” (Mark 14:36) His words expressed His total trust in God.

Paul is saying to the Galatians, “Do you want to go back to the Law? How will the Law treat you when you fail? If you stay with Christ, He will treat you with intimate love. When you fail, you can cry Abba Father!”

Verse 7

“Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

“Wherefore” introduces Paul’s concluding statement. Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, believers, Jews or Gentiles, are “no more a servant.” That means they are no longer under servitude to the Law or under obligation to the Mosaic ceremonies and rituals.

Those who are under the Law are “servants.” Those who are under grace are “sons.” Those who are “sons” are also “heirs.” Just as it was in the ancient laws of adoption, so it is in the family of God. Sonship means heirship! Sonship means the believer has full rights as an heir to God’s infinite treasure. Thank God for amazing grace!

Conclusion

Jewish Christians in the first century viewed themselves as having an advantage on Gentile Christians. The gospel does not recognize a spiritual advantage based on race, social states, or sex. Everyone who comes by the way of the cross is welcomed in God’s family. Everyone is an heir of the promises of God.

If you feel you are entitled to special treatment by God based on your race, social status, or sex, ask Christ to forgive you today. As you mature and grow in grace, understand we all have our differences and deficiencies, but we are all one in Jesus Christ.

Amen.