

Paul's Letter to the Galatians  
Lesson 2

At the close of our last lesson, Paul was perplexed by how quickly the Christians in the three Galatian churches had been deceived. Jewish spies had crept into the churches and secretly convinced them that they had to return to the Law to insure their salvation. Paul made his point that he too had once been held under the bondage of the Law, but now he was redeemed from that Law by his faith in Christ Jesus. These Galatians were Gentiles and not Jews. Why were they led astray by the Jews who were still tied to the curse of the Law? Did they not understand the reason for Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension? Paul is the one who established these churches and he knew first hand the gospel that had been preached to them and the circumstances of their conversion to Christ. Where had the Galatians gone wrong? Who had influenced them in such a devastating way? Who had bewitched them to think they had to live under the bondage of the Law?

**Galatians 3:1** You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

These foolish Galatians are going to be without excuse if they have in fact been bewitched. Paul knew that Christ had been publicly portrayed to them as crucified. The picture of Christ's crucifixion had been graphically explained to them in detail.

**Galatians 3:2** This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? **3** Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? **4** Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? **5** Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Here is the point of Paul's letter to the Galatians ... "did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law or by the hearing with faith?" Now Paul knew that they had begun by the hearing with faith and not the Law. They were Gentiles and knew nothing of the Law. The Law was for the Jews and the Gentiles were living their lives apart from the law before Paul presented the Gospel to them.

We need to understand what the text means by the phrase "hearing with faith." Faith is not something we do. Faith is something we release from ourselves, or rather it consists of something we do not do. Faith is not trusting in our beliefs and ability. Faith is releasing our beliefs and abilities and placing our reliance in "something" or "someone else." In this case the Gentile Galatians put their reliance in the gospel that they heard presented by Paul on one of his missionary journeys. Their reliance was not on the Law that the Jews followed but on the simple gospel dealing with Christ's crucifixion that they had heard ... Christ had died for them! Their conversion was by the Spirit, a spiritual conversion. They did not have to do one single thing to enter into the family of God except let go of themselves and put their trust in Christ. They did not have to jump one single hoop of the Jewish Law to have their lives changed for all eternity. Why do they need to jump those hoops after their conversion?

When they came to Christ, the unbelieving Gentiles that lived around them persecuted them for putting their reliance and trust in Christ. They had left the religions of the world and the practices of idolatry. They had crushed their idols and changed their routines. Was all this change because they had kept the Law or because they had entered into a relationship with God that had miraculously changed their lives? It was because of the miracle of God that transpired because they had believed in the gospel that had been presented to their ears by Paul!

**Galatians 3:**<sup>6</sup>Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. <sup>7</sup>Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup>And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU." <sup>9</sup>So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

We must understand a fact that many believers miss today when interpreting this passage. Abraham was not under the Law. The Law would not be given to the Jews through Moses for another 430 years after the death of Abraham. Abraham heard the voice of the Lord and put his reliance in that hearing. Abraham's trust was not in himself but in the Lord. Abraham let go of his desires and put his belief in the Lord God. It was his faith, or reliance in the Lord that caused the Lord to look upon Abraham as a righteous man. Abraham was not without his sin and faults. Abraham was a man of war. He fought with the kings of the land of Canaan. He sinned in his natural behavior, yet his trust was in the Lord. Because of his trust Abraham was promised a blessing from the Lord.

**Galatians 3:**<sup>10</sup>For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM." <sup>11</sup>Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." <sup>12</sup>However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM." <sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"-- <sup>14</sup>in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Abraham was not cursed by the Law because he was not under the Law. As Christians we do not want to be under the Law either. We want to live by placing our faith and trust in the Lord, just as Abraham did. Regardless of what the Jewish brethren want to think, they cannot be saved by the Law. In addition, the Law does not bring righteousness to a man. The Law is in place to curb the actions of man by placing restrictions on man. These restrictions never secure salvation for a person. Salvation only comes when you have put your trust in the gospel you have heard. The gospel frees us from the curse of the Law. Christ was the blessing promised to Abraham. The Gentiles received the blessing of Abraham when they believed in what they had heard.

**Galatians 3:**<sup>15</sup>Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is *only* a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions

to it. <sup>16</sup>Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Paul wants the Galatians to understand that this covenant was only for one man and that was Abraham. This is not a blessing and a covenant to any of the rest of God's creation. It is a covenant with Abraham and it has never been changed. The promised covenant to Abraham that would result in a blessing to every nation was "the seed" who is Christ Himself. The rest of creation would be blessed by the covenant with Abraham but they can not claim the covenant because it does not belong to them. It belongs to Abraham alone.

Galatians 3:<sup>17</sup>What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. <sup>18</sup>For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. <sup>19</sup>Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. <sup>20</sup>Now a mediator is not for one *party only*; whereas God is *only* one.

Why was the Law given 430 years after the death of Abraham? It was because the chosen people of God, the people through whom the promise to Abraham would be revealed, were sinners. They were transgressors. They needed to know how to live properly as God's people. They needed to know how to live in the world but not be sinners like the rest of the world. The Law was a mediator until the proper time was ready in the world for Christ to appear. The Law was given so that the world would see that the descendants of Jacob were different than the rest of the sinful world. God created everything in this world and it was all created for a purpose. God created man with ability to choose or reject God. Boundaries were set by God. Those who rejected God would live their lives in one way. Those who accepted God's call would live their lives in another way. The Law was for all as a mediator to show the differences between the two. It all had to do with how the people of the world accepted the One Living God.

Galatians 3:<sup>21</sup>Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. <sup>22</sup>But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. <sup>23</sup>But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. <sup>24</sup>Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. <sup>26</sup>For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>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.

The Law is in place to “shut up all men under sin.” The Law cannot bring salvation as some would think and believe. The Law is in place simply to show a man his sinfulness. The Law teaches man his sinfulness. Salvation does not come in the Law but in a person’s reliance found only in Christ. That reliance in Christ and Christ alone is called “faith.” All who join in the faith are part of one body and there is no distinction between any, regardless of their heritage.

**Galatians 3:29** And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Regardless of your heritage, if you belong to Christ, then you have become part of the promise of Abraham. Whatever nation you are from, when you enter into a relationship with Christ you have become an heir of the promise of Abraham.

**Galatians 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.

Here Paul makes an application by giving the example of a child and a slave in a family home. In those days the slaves were treated as well as children and even considered by most owners to be part of the extended family. They were fed and clothed and cared for just like a biological child. The biological child is like the slave child in that adult supervision is given to them in the same way that a slave is supervised. The only exception is the fact that the biological child actually owns all the property and the other slaves. As a child they are under the same restrictions of the household; however, one day they will be released from those restrictions and quite possibly set new restrictions as they see fit and deem necessary for how they wish for things to be run in their household. So too, under the Law is bondage, but under Christ there is freedom.

**Galatians 4:4** 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.

At the proper time, when all was ready, Christ came to redeem the world and place all the slaves of the world, including all the Jews and Gentiles who would put their trust in Him into a program of adoption as sons. No longer are those bound by the world or in bondage to the Law slaves to the Law or the World. Now they are heirs of God just as we are heirs of the promise of Abraham.

**Galatians 4:8** 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?

<sup>10</sup>You observe days and months and seasons and years. <sup>11</sup>I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

Without Christ, the Galatians were slaves to the idols of the world. Today this might be the toys of the world for which we lust. Perhaps it is the ball games on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays that take time away from the family. Perhaps it is the lease that rules the calendar during hunting season. Perhaps it is the lodge that comes before anything else in the family. How about the boat, or the big screen, or the sewing machine, or the car, or the little league, or the house, or the furnishings? How about the shopping mall? All of these things are examples of things that are not bad in themselves but they become gods in our lives as we trudge through the world without God. But the Galatians have Christ! Why would they want to trudge through the bondage of the Law which Paul is referring to as a “weak and worthless elemental thing?” Part of Paul’s worry is over the Gentile Galatians observing the special days of the Jewish calendar year. These were days that should have been reorganized centuries before, yet the Jews did not listen to the messenger of God.

Zech. 7:5-6 "Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?' <sup>6</sup>And when you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves?"

Zech. 8:18-19 Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me saying, <sup>19</sup>"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.'

Sadly, the Jews never transitioned the fast days into feast days. They were so sinful in their religion that the words of Zechariah went unheard. Even today, in Judaism these days are still observed as days of mourning and fasting. Nothing was different in the days of Paul. The days were observed just as they are today in difference to the fact that God never instructed these days to be observed in such a manor. These were the creation of man, not God.

Galatians 4:<sup>12</sup>I beg of you, brethren, become as I *am*, for I also *have become* as you *are*. You have done me no wrong; <sup>13</sup>but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; <sup>14</sup>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*. <sup>15</sup>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.

Appealing to the history between Paul and these churches, Paul reminds them of their closeness at one time and how much he once felt their love for him. Something had happen to Paul that caused him to lay over in the province of Galatia in the first place. Paul was on his journey somewhere and evidently this medical problem caused him to be in Galatia for an extended period of time. Paul’s statement, “you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me,” is a clear indication that Paul’s medical problem had to do with his eyes. Very seldom do we think about Paul being blind but he was in his later years. This was his thorn in the flesh.

The Galatians were not bothered by the blindness, in fact they accepted him with open arms and received his message of the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Galatians 4:<sup>16</sup>Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth? <sup>17</sup>They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them. <sup>18</sup>But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. <sup>19</sup>My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you-- <sup>20</sup>but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul senses that he has become an enemy to the Galatians because he is pointing out their error in embracing the Law. He is perplexed by their position. He wishes that he could change his tone with them and commend them once more, but at this time in the Paul's writing they are far from receiving an approval from him.

Galatians 4:<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. <sup>23</sup>But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. <sup>24</sup>This is allegorically speaking: for these *women* are two covenants, one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup>Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. <sup>27</sup>For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND." <sup>28</sup>And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup>But 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. <sup>30</sup>But 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."

In this passage of Scripture Paul is used by the Lord to do two things. First, he uses this example to influence the Galatians to flee from the bondage of the Law. The example consists of the stories of the two sons of Abraham. One of the sons will be the father of the Jewish line. The other will be the father of the Arab line. The Arab line will be in under bondage forever, the Jewish line will be free because of Christ Jesus.

Second, this example has played out as a prophecy of the struggle between the two boys. The Arab line will ultimately come into the bondage of the Muslim system of faith, a works based and law based system. The child of the barren woman will lead to the freedom in Christ Jesus. It is the children of the child born to the flesh, Ishmael, that is persecuting the child born to the Spirit, Isaac. While we worry about Islam, more are the children of the barren woman today.

Galatians 4:<sup>31</sup>So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.