

LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works

Part fourteen - Teaching #2157

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HOW CHRISTIANS CAN BE DRAWN BACK INTO BONDAGE

Galatians 4:1-11 - "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 fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, {5} so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. {6} 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. {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."

These difficult verses will make more sense when they are connected to the thought Paul was just tying up in **Galatians 3:29 - "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise. - IPAD TEXT**

Paul is continuing his line of thought that there was something God was doing through Abraham that was bigger than these Jewish false teachers were telling. There was a wonderful future plan of redemption and adoption and spiritual life that was ***promised*** through Abraham, but would only find fulfillment in Christ Jesus, Abraham's Seed - **Galatians 3:16 - "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say "and to seeds," as though referring to many, but referring to one, and to your seed, who is Christ." - IPAD TEXT**

This is the picture Paul is going to be working with in today's text. He is going to unpack this imagery of an heir and his inheritance. But this time he will tailor his argument in a more ***negative*** fashion. He's going to ***warn*** these Galatians about the false teaching they're just beginning to listen to. He's going to use this inheritance image negatively to describe how people ***miss*** their inheritance in Christ:

- 1) **PAUL PAINTS THE PICTURE OF THE FOOLISHNESS OF AN HEIR WHO TURNS FROM THE ONLY PATH HE HAS FOR INHERITANCE**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:1-2 - "Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything. [2] Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his father."

This is a picture of a potential heir to the family estate. But the heir is still only **waiting** for an inheritance that has been **promised**. He hasn't come into the inheritance for himself yet. While no human illustration is perfect, Paul takes this simple picture and tunes it to portray the two great promised works of God in both **redeeming** and **adopting** a people unto Himself:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:4-5 - "When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

The whole Old Testament era - the whole era of the law - was designed to bring the heir into the rightful inheritance. Look at the insight in **Galatians 4:1-2 - "Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything. [2] Instead, he is under guardians and stewards until the time set by his father."**

Paul is pointing out the contradiction of these Jewish false teachers from Jerusalem. These Judaisers were using their possession of the law as proof of their maturity and exclusiveness before God. But Paul lays that claim to waste by showing that what the law proved was exactly the opposite. The law wasn't a sign of **maturity** and **readiness** before God, but a sign of **immaturity** and **unreadiness**.

That's Paul's whole point. The law was given as proof of *immaturity*, not *maturity*. The law was the guardian to point to Christ. The law wasn't the inheritance. As long as people lived under the law they weren't ready for the inheritance. The inheritance didn't come through the law. The inheritance came through Jesus Christ.

This is not a text about ancient history. This is a crucial message in terms of today's church and its approach to cross-cultural missions and evangelism in a world full of religions.

The inheritance God has for mankind is justification, redemption, and adoption as sons and daughters of God. All of this is accomplished in Christ Jesus. To turn *away* from Christ, and back *to* the law (or any other system of religious observance as a substitute or supplement for Christ) is not just a slight *mistake in theology*. It is to come up *empty-handed before God*. It is to miss out entirely on the inheritance promised through Abraham.

Then, in the next verse, Paul makes a sudden and striking change in the illustration:

2) **HOW RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS CAN BE USED BY THE DEVIL IN THE PRODUCTION OF BONDAGE FOR MANKIND**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:3, 8-11 - “In the same way we also, when we were children, were *in slavery under the elements of the world*....[8] But in the past, since you didn’t know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods. [9] But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you *turn back again to the weak and worthless elements*? Do you want to be *enslaved to them all over again*? [10] You are observing special days, months, seasons, and years. [11] I am fearful for you, that perhaps my labor for you has been wasted.”

These are incredibly difficult verses to deal with. Most churches never look at them at all. The problem comes from the way Paul describes the process of bondage for these Galatian Christians. Twice he states that, before they were saved, these people were held in bondage by the “***elemental things of this world***” (3 & 9). And that word “***things***” is very vague.

It is usually taken in one of two ways. Either Paul means elemental ***principles*** (such as basic rules of moral conduct and behavior found in the regulations and rituals of the law) or, as some translations reflect, elemental ***spirits*** (as in Satanic or demonic powers).

In other words, the issue is this. Is Paul saying these people were in bondage to the law, with its rules and regulations? Or is he saying they were actually bound by demonic powers of darkness? And the plain answer is, Paul doesn't clearly say. He just uses that term ***"things."***

But I want to tell you why I think there is good reason to think Paul was actually talking about demonic powers rather than mere principles and regulations. Primarily, I believe Paul is talking about demonic powers because if he were talking here about the law, his words would have very little application to these Galatian Christians, most of whom were Gentiles. And these Gentiles never had the law before their conversion.

But there certainly are other passages of Scripture that describe the kind of ***spiritual bondage*** people are in without Christ. And they describe this world's dilemma in very stark, strong, spiritual terms:

IPAD TEXT - Ephesians 2:1-2 - "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins [2] in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, *the spirit now working in the disobedient.*"

IPAD TEXT - 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 - “But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. [4] In their case, *the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*”

I believe this consistent picture of the bondage of the unsaved is exactly the idea Paul is laboring over in Galatians chapter 4. But there's another problem to consider. It has to do with the description Paul gives of this bondage in **Galatians 4:10 - “You are observing special days, months, seasons, and years.” - IPAD TEXT**

If you're following me carefully I think you can see the problem, because when Paul describes the ***visible manifestation*** of their spiritual bondage, he describes it in a fashion that sounds more like bondage to ***the law and its regulations*** than to ***demonic powers***. How shall we put these two things together?

It's right at this point that I want to address perhaps the most neglected aspect of spiritual warfare in the church today. I'm convinced that we are in great danger of missing the real battle completely. We've become so inundated with the dramatic and the sensational that the deeper spiritual battle is rarely addressed.

Please observe. When Paul sees these Galatian believers turning back to dietary laws, seasons and new moons, regulations that were proclaimed as earning the satisfaction and appeasement of God, he saw **demonic powers** at work.

True, these people weren't holding seances. They weren't running around in the tombs, foaming at the mouth. They weren't speaking out in other voices. They were pursuing righteousness through the law. They were all passionate **monotheists**. But they were using their religion to avoid Jesus Christ and His Cross.

I want to ask you, **do you see the Devil at work in that?** Or have you become tolerant to the modern plurality of faith and religion that sees all claims to divine truth equal? Why does Paul bristle at this kind of demonic activity while we fiddle around rebuking the demons of poverty and headaches, and marching against Halloween?

Paul said that Satan did his most damaging work, not as a raging attacker of suspicious people, but as an **angel of light - 2**

Corinthians 11:14 - "...And no wonder! For Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." - IPAD TEXT

I think we frequently miss the import of Paul's words here. This is not just a description of the **appearance** of Satan. It is much more than that. This is a description of the deceptive **activity** of Satan among saints. What Paul is saying is that Satan's most destructive work is done when he doesn't seem to be doing anything visibly satanic at all.

And Paul's whole point in our text in Galatians is that demon powers delight in having people pursue perfectly righteous goals, even religious goals, if he can use their religion to divert them from Jesus Christ and His Cross.

Do you see it? Did you think Satan's only goal was to **hinder** you from keeping the law of God? Did you realize he is probably even happier if he can encourage you to **obey the external rituals of religion without relying on God's grace in Jesus Christ?**

Again, what do you see as this country of ours fills up with Christ-rejecting religions? Do you just see open-minded seekers of truth. Do you just see polite neighbors? Do you just see each person with their own attempt to reach God as he or she feels best?

What do you see? The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul saw the God of this world working to produce trendy acceptance of false ideas, blinding the eyes of the lost to the truth. Paul saw Satan at work, not boiling goat's blood in a caldron, but in university classes, on computer networks, on new age television talk shows, in varied religious institutions that dot the landscape. This is what we are called to pray about and confront with the gospel of truth.

I have a growing concern about the casualness with which Biblical truth is being adapted and modified by many professing Christians today. I encounter regularly professing Christians who feel perfectly free telling me they love Jesus and forgiveness and heaven and love but can't agree with Isaiah's statements about God's wrath or Paul's clear statements on homosexuality.

These people seem perfectly content explaining the less culturally acceptable teachings of the Bible as merely the thoughts of those particular writers and the understanding they had at that time. And there are scores of progressive writers and bloggers giving these people all the ammunition they need to build their arguments against culturally challenging divinely revealed truth.

The problem is the Bible won't give you that license - **2 Peter 1:19-21**
- **“So we have the prophetic word strongly confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dismal place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. [20] First of all, you should know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, [21] because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”**

There is only one dominant idea poking into our minds from the Holy Spirit's words through Peter in this text. ***The writers of Scripture - any and all Scripture - weren't just sharing their own thoughts when they wrote.*** That's what Peter means when he says those powerful words - ***“No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation....”***

And right before Peter wrote those words he introduced them with the words - ***“First of all, you should know this....”*** That's the Holy Spirit's way of telling me I can't be right about anything else in my Christian life until I get this right first.

Something else. ***Remember, Paul didn't volunteer for his ministry. And he didn't create his own message. Jesus called Paul. Jesus commissioned Paul. And Jesus endorsed Paul.***

Long ago I came across these words from **Vance Havner**. I never realized how prophetically true they would prove to be: ***“The devil is not fighting religion. He’s too smart for that. He is producing a counterfeit Christianity, so much like the real one that good Christians are afraid to speak out against it. We are plainly told in the Scriptures that in the last days people will not endure sound doctrine and will depart from the faith and heap to themselves teachers to tickle their ears. We live in an epidemic of this itch, and popular preachers have developed “ear-tickling” into a fine art.”***

3) **HOW THE GOSPEL BRINGS FREEDOM AND PEACE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:4-7 - “When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. [6] And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” [7] So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir.”

“when the time came to completion....”(4). This phrase is designed to take us back to Paul’s opening illustration: **Galatians 4:1-2 - “Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything. [2] Instead, he is under guardians and trustees *until the time set by his father.*” - IPAD TEXT**

Clearly, the coming of Jesus Christ is set forth as being God’s time to issue the full inheritance of justification and adoption as sons and daughters of God. Jesus came ***“when the fullness of time”*** had come in the Father’s good pleasure.

Paul is going to describe two ***“sendings”*** by Father God:

- a) First, God sent His Son (4:4). There is high Christology in these words. We are instantly reminded of the Prophet Isaiah’s words - **Isaiah 9:6 - “....For a child will be *born* for us, a son will be *given* to us....” - IPAD TEXT**

The Child is **born**, but the Son is **given**. The life of the Son didn't begin in the manger at Bethlehem, or the womb of Mary. When Paul says God "**sent forth His son**" he means the Son came from one place to another place. The Apostle John said the "**Word became flesh....**"(John 1:14). The Word was already there with the Father. The Word **became** flesh in the Incarnation.

There is a uniqueness to the **Sonship** of Jesus Christ. Contrary to what the Mormons and others teach, we will never be sons of God in the same sense as Jesus Christ. He is the **eternal** Son. He is **God the Son**.

Then Paul says that Jesus was "**....born of a woman, born under the law....**"(4:4b). "Born of a woman" speaks of the full humanity of Jesus Christ. "Born under the law" speaks to the kind of bondage to sin revealed by the law in all our hearts. This is immediately spelled out in the very next verse:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:5 - "....to redeem those *under the law*, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

These words remind us that there are **two fundamental works** in justification. First, we are **redeemed**. This speaks of the **bondage** from which we are delivered. Then, second, we are **adopted as sons**. This speaks of the **status and inheritance** that we receive.

- b) Second, in addition to sending forth His Son, God also sends His Spirit into our hearts - **Galatians 4:6 - “....And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” - IPAD TEXT**

What wonderful words! God sends His Son into our **world**. And He sends His Spirit into our **hearts**. I want to close this teaching with an urgent question. Do you know of **both** these sendings of Father God? We're reminded so powerfully that it is never enough to have an **external** knowledge of the hardware of religion - even the Christian religion. Something has to come from the outside. The Spirit of God must enter the human heart. Divine energy and regeneration is needed.

Paul has come full circle in this challenging passage. Just as those outside Christ Jesus are bound by more than just their bad habits or low self-image, but are bound by powers of darkness and the god of this age, so people can never be set free apart from the work of God's Holy Spirit, applying the work of Christ on the Cross, deeply within their hearts.

This is how the reality of being an *heir* rather than a *slave* takes effect. Only the Spirit of God in your heart can make you a son or daughter of Father God - **Galatians 4:6-7 - "And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" [7] So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir."** - IPAD TEXT

I pray that is your experience too.