



FREEDOM
in CHRIST

*Avoiding the
Religious Trap
of the Law*

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Freedom in Christ: Avoiding the Religious Trap of the Law

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“Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. 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” (Galatians 3:19-21).

INTRODUCTION

Law, Religion, and the Believer

The relationship between the Law and the believer continues to be a source of great confusion in the church today. A review of commentaries and books on this topic would show that most do not have a proper biblical perspective. Many reputable Christian teachers consider the Mosaic Law to be the present-day rule of life for the believer.

Most take the position that the Law, or at least part of the Mosaic Law, is binding upon the believer today. Heresies and error that creep into the evangelical church usually do so because people are not accurately handling the Word of God. They do not, of course, deny the truth of God's Word, but rather claim that they are more clearly explaining the truth.

A prominent example of this today is centered on the meaning of the Gospel. The message of the Gospel is being adjusted today. It is no longer focused on Christ's coming to suffer and die for sin and guilt before a holy God. Now it is focused on the results that the Gospel can bring to the person. People are encouraged to come to Christ today because He'll solve their problems and provide personal fulfillment.

Seeker churches teach that life without Christ is not fulfilling. Nothing is wrong with that message on the surface. However, like all heresies, at the beginning, they have a strong element of truth embedded in their teaching. Clearly there is fulfillment, peace, and joy in Christ. But, this is not the basic issue addressed in the Gospel of Christ. They have taken the biblical truth of the Gospel and distorted it. They have blown it out of a proper biblical balance, adjusting it to meet the needs of people

in our society.

People want fulfilled lives. They want to be happy. They want happy marriages. They want children who have no problems or rebellion. They do not want grief, pain, and difficulty. Thus, Christ is presented as the One who will solve the problems in their marriage, and help them deal with their teenager issues. People place their faith in Christ because they want a better life, not because they have a sin problem and need a Savior.

This same distortion exists with the role of the Law and the believer. Some teach that the Law must be preached for someone to come to faith in Christ. The thinking goes that once the Law is rightly used to bring people to the knowledge of sin, then the Gospel can be preached so people will be in a position to embrace the truth. The Law must be preached first so that people are then prepared to hear and believe the gospel.¹

Others teach that believers are under the Law as a means of sanctifying the believer. It is common today to divide the Mosaic Law into three parts: the Moral Law (or the Ten Commandments), the Civil Law, and the Ceremonial Law. While there is nothing wrong with making these distinctions, the Jewish people never made such distinctions. To them, the Law was the Law.

James wrote that if anyone breaks one area of the Law, he is guilty of breaking the whole Law (James 1:17). You cannot divide the Law into what you should obey, and what you do not have to obey. According to James, either you obey it all or you are guilty of all.

This is important because some will say that it is obvious believers are not under the civil law (which governed the political life of Israel) or the ceremonial law (which governed the sacrificial system of Israel). However, they will say that followers of Christ are still under the moral law as a present-day rule of life.

Religious people are fond of saying that if they keep the golden rule and do not break any of the Ten Commandments, God will surely accept them into His heaven. Others have set up religious systems built around the “do’s and don’ts.” Surely God will accept the person who does these

¹ Ray Comfort in his book *The Way of the Master* (Bridge-Logos Publishers, April 2006), encourages people to use the Ten Commandments to show the lost that they are sinners; once they see that they are sinners, then the Gospel can be presented.

things and doesn't do those things. Such thinking is all predicated on the notion that people are under the moral Law.

However, either people are under the entire Mosaic Law, or they are not under any aspect of it. Believers are not under the moral aspect of the Law any more than they are under the ceremonial aspect of the Law.

This confusion has made its way into the church, which makes it necessary to carefully study this topic. Does the Law play a role in leading someone to Christ? What role, if any, does the Law have in the life of the believer? If it does not have a role, then why was it given in the first place? The answer to these and other questions will be the focus of the remainder of this booklet.

PART ONE: THE HISTORY OF THE LAW

CHAPTER 1

The Law and the Abrahamic Covenant (Galatians 3:15-18)

The Mosaic Law

The Law is more formally known as the Mosaic Law since it is the Law of Moses. This Law is part of the Mosaic Covenant—a covenant between God and the nation of Israel.

The nation of Israel was in bondage to Egypt for 400 years. Through divine intervention, God enabled Moses to deliver the nation from their bondage. Shortly after their release, while they were traveling in the wilderness, God had Moses go up on Mount Sinai where He gave him the Mosaic Law.

The Ten Commandments are a concise summary of the Mosaic Law. God only entered into this covenant with, and gave this Law to, the nation of Israel. Exodus 19:5 says, “Now then, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all the peoples. For all the earth is mine.” Amos 3:2 says something similar: “You only have I chosen of all the nations.”

The Mosaic Law was to govern the life of Israel as the chosen nation of God. It gave judicial instructions, it gave social responsibilities, and it gave religious guidelines—all intended to govern the earthly nation of Israel.

Thus, any attempt to try and place the church under the Law is in conflict with its original intention. This, of course, does not mean that there are not things that the church can learn from the Law—such as truths about God, His character, and His righteous standards—but this does not mean the Law is to govern the life of the believer.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Before the Mosaic Covenant and Law of Moses came into existence, another covenant had already been established by God. This covenant is called the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant was entered into by God 430 years before the Law was given. It is a covenant that is unconditional—that is, it is a covenant that is not dependent upon man to be fulfilled. Unlike the Mosaic Covenant, mankind does not have to do certain things or follow certain guidelines for God to fulfill the promises contained in this covenant.

The Abrahamic Covenant is made up of three essential promises (Genesis 12:1-3). These three are:

1. **The promise of land** (Gen. 12:1). This promise is reiterated in Genesis 13:14-18, and the dimensions of the land are given in Genesis 15:18-21. The land aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is also expanded upon in Deuteronomy 30:1-10.
2. **The promise of a seed** (Gen. 12:2). God promised Abraham that He would make a great nation out of him. Abraham, who was 75 years old and childless when this promise was made, was promised many descendants. This promise is mentioned again in Genesis 17:6, where God said that nations and kings would descend from Abraham. This promise was expanded upon in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:12-16), indicating that the ultimate fulfillment of this promise would be through Jesus, who would sit on David's throne.
3. **The promise of blessing** (Gen. 12:3). God promised to bless Abraham and the families of the earth through him. This promise was amplified in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Heb. 8:6-13), and anticipates the forgiveness of sin and the provision of salvation available to all.

Some today say that the promises made in this covenant are to be

fulfilled in the church rather than Israel. Others would say that these promises are no longer valid for either the church or Israel. Still others would say that the Law supersedes the Abrahamic Covenant, and has taken its place. Galatians 3:15-18 explains the relationship between the Law and the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Law and the Abrahamic Covenant

By way of an overview, Paul's argument in Galatians 3:15-18 goes like this: God made promises to Abraham. God is an unchanging God who keeps His promises. As a result, nothing can change or alter the promises God made to Abraham.

Galatians 3:15

Paul wrote: "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." The word "brethren" indicates that Paul was speaking to believers. He may have had some serious concerns about their spiritual condition, but he viewed them as fellow believers.

Paul stated that he was speaking to them "in terms of human relations." He gave the Galatian believers an illustration from everyday life. His illustration was: "Even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it is has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it." In human relations, a properly ratified, validated, legal document is binding on all parties involved. This is true for wills, mortgages, and similar documents used today.

The word translated "covenant" is a word that was consistently used in New Testament times for wills and last testaments. Legally ratified human documents are binding on the involved parties. Once they are made, they cannot be changed or altered.

Paul used this simple illustration to get at the heart of the issue as it clearly shows the difference between his position and that of the Judaizers.² The analogy that Paul used was to compare a human covenant with

² Background on Paul and the Judaizers: People in Galatia, primarily Gentiles, had come to salvation through the preaching of the Apostle Paul. Judaizers, however, were false teachers who misused the Law and caused a great deal of confusion in the Galatian churches. The Judaizers were not denying the need to believe in Christ, nor were they denying that Jesus was the

the Abrahamic Covenant. Like a human covenant, once the Abrahamic Covenant was established, it could not be altered or changed, no matter what subsequent events or circumstances took place. God established this covenant with Abraham and his descendants. God ratified this covenant. And the Mosaic Law, which came 400 years after the ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant, could not in any way alter or change the provisions or promises made in this covenant. It is an unconditional covenant, and its provisions are not dependent upon anything that Abraham or his descendants would do.

The Judaizers, however, said that keeping the Mosaic Law was necessary for salvation. This runs contrary to the gospel and to the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant, where salvation is dependent solely on God, not on people doing certain things.

Galatians 3:16

The next verse in this passage says: “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’s argument against the Judaizers hinged on whether the word “seed,” as used in Genesis, is singular or plural. God had a specific purpose in using the singular in this passage.

It is true that the singular can be used in a collective sense, thereby referring to all of the descendants of Abraham. Paul, in fact, used it this way later in this third chapter of Galatians: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants” (verse 29). The word translated “descendants” is the Greek word “seed” in the singular—all those who believe the promises of God are collectively Abraham’s seed.

It is, however, used numerous times in the Scriptures to refer to a single, specific individual. It was used this way, for example, in Genesis 22:18 in speaking of Isaac, a specific individual through whom the promises of God would be realized.

Messiah. What they were saying, however, is that in addition to faith in Christ, people must also submit themselves to the requirements of the Mosaic Law to be saved and experience all of God’s blessings. Paul wrote Galatians to show the error of these false teachers and to encourage believers to stand firm in their faith.

This single, specific, individual usage is what Paul used in verse 16. The realization of all these promises made to Abraham comes through one specified person, one specific seed—Jesus Christ. The blessing of justification by faith, for example, could be accomplished only through the seed, Christ.

This covenant made to Abraham and to his seed is based on promise. God promised something, and nothing would prevent His promise from being fulfilled. Nothing can invalidate this covenant, not even the unfaithfulness of Abraham or his seed.

Galatians 3:17

The Abrahamic Covenant stands in stark contrast with the Mosaic Covenant. Rather than being based on promise, it is based on performance. Paul wrote, “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.”

The Law, as Paul said, came 430 years³ after the covenant was made with Abraham. It provided Israel with a guidebook of things they must do. God made it clear that He would bless the nation if they obeyed, and would punish or curse the nation if they disobeyed His Law.

In turn, the Apostle indicated that “the Law does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.” The Judaizers did not understand the purpose of the Law, nor do many today.

³ There is an issue about the 430 year time frame. The crux of this issue is this: 1) The exodus from Egypt occurred in 1445 BC; this is also the date the Law was given to Moses at Mount Sinai; 2) The Abrahamic Covenant was given in 2000 BC, which is 655 years before the Law was given. So how could Paul say the Law was given 430 years after Abraham, when the Covenant was given 655 years before? Good question! Following the math, if the Law was given in 1445 BC, then 430 years earlier would take us back to 1875 BC, which is exactly where Paul took us in Galatians 3:17. The covenant was originally given to Abraham in 2000 BC. However, it was later confirmed, or ratified, with his son Isaac. It was then later ratified with Isaac's son Jacob. This was the last ratification of this covenant, and is recorded in Genesis 35. The date of this ratification—that is, the date of Genesis 35—is 1875 BC. Obviously, it is this final ratification that Paul has in mind when he wrote Galatians 3:17. As a further side note, after the covenant was ratified, Jacob journeyed for about 30 years before settling in Egypt in 1845 BC. As the Scriptures indicate (cf. Gen. 15:13, 16; Acts 7:6), Israel would be in Egyptian captivity for 400 years, or until 1445 BC. And 1445 BC, of course, is when Israel was led from captivity by Moses, and was then given the Law on Mount Sinai.

It was not given to alter the Abrahamic Covenant; it was not given to change any of the provisions of this covenant. Instead, it was given for the purpose of dealing with sin.⁴

Paul's logical argument is fairly simple to follow. No matter what the purpose of the Law is, it cannot in any way make any changes or alterations to the Abrahamic Covenant. It is also important to note that this covenant was ratified by God; it was not ratified by God and Abraham. God alone is declaring His promises and their certainty.

The phrase, "so as to nullify the promise," applies the illustration Paul gave in verse 15. Even a human agreement, once it is properly ratified, is binding. God has, therefore, bound Himself. Even He cannot change this covenant, or take back its promises. He has obligated Himself to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The question is often asked: What promises of the Abrahamic Covenant are still valid for today? Based on what Paul said in this passage, all of the promises are valid for today. Nothing has changed! The promises to physical Israel for physical land cannot be changed. The addition of the Mosaic Law cannot alter the promises of the covenant.

Galatians 3:18

Paul concluded this passage by stating: "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." The Judaizers were saying that the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant—especially the promise of justification by faith—was conditioned by people keeping the Law. They said people had to be circumcised and follow the Law if they were going to benefit from the Abrahamic Covenant.

Based on what Paul said in this passage, this cannot be. The Abrahamic Covenant has not changed. No additional requirements have been added to it. Keeping the Law is not required to experience the blessings of this covenant.

With Abraham, it was just a promise. In this covenant, God said what He would do. Abraham did not need to do anything for God to do

⁴ The purpose of the Law will be developed in Chapter 2 of this booklet.

what He promised.

The word that Paul used for “promise” in this verse is the Greek word “charis”. A form of that Greek word means “grace.”

The Law and grace are opposed to each other. For that matter, the Law and faith are opposed to each other. The Abrahamic Covenant cannot both be based on a promise and on the Law.

God had freely given the promises of this covenant to Abraham by grace. If He granted these promises to Abraham by works—that is, by keeping the Law—then the promise would no longer be by grace; grace would no longer be grace. It was not what Abraham did that enabled him to obtain the promise. Rather, it was simply his response of faith to what God promised that allowed him to obtain his inheritance.

The verb Paul used for “granted” in this verse is in the perfect tense, meaning something happened in the past and results continue to the present. This tense denotes permanence, something that is unchanging. God has granted it by grace, with the present reality that it is still granted by grace.

The promise of justification by grace through faith is still available today because of the promise God made in the Abrahamic Covenant. At the heart of this covenant is God’s provision of salvation by faith. This blessing, originally made to Abraham, is still available today to all who will believe. And this reality has not been changed because of the addition of the Law.

PART TWO: REFUTING THE USE OF THE LAW BY FALSE TEACHERS

C H A P T E R 2

The Purpose of the Law: To Reveal Sin (Galatians 3:19-21)

Paul stated in Galatians 1:6-7 that he was amazed that the Galatians were “so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel.” The churches of Galatia were in danger of deserting Christ. He did not literally think that they were deserting Him, but he was concerned about the influence the false teachers were having on believers.

Rather than deny the Scriptures, these false teachers told believers that they could be more faithful and more righteous if they not only believed in Christ, but if they also submitted themselves to the rest of Scripture, specifically the Mosaic Law. Those believers who followed this teaching were, according to Paul, deserting Christ; they were abandoning the gospel.

In verses 15-18 of Galatians chapter 3, Paul had shown that salvation is by faith apart from works. The Abrahamic covenant was given by promise. Abraham believed this promise and he was justified, or declared righteous, by God. The Mosaic Law, which came 430 years later, did not alter in any way the provisions of this covenant.

In essence, Paul’s argument was that the Law was not necessary for righteousness. His argument was so strong that some might conclude

that the Law had no purpose. What good was it? Why was it given in the first place? In this next section of Galatians 3, Paul answered these questions. In doing so, he clarified the whole issue of works as it pertains to salvation, because if you cannot be saved by keeping the works required in the Mosaic Law, you cannot be saved by any kind of works.

Galatians 3:19

In this verse, Paul said: “Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.” All parties would agree—whether they were a Judaizer or not—that God gave the Law. But why did He give it?

According to this verse, “it was added because of transgressions.” Sin is the reason for the Law. The Law was given to magnify sin, to reveal sin. In short, it was given to make Israel aware of how sinful they were, and ultimately, to show how much they needed the grace of God. Romans 3:20 corroborates this point: “For through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

People were sinners before the Mosaic Law was given. What the Law did, however, was show the greatness of their sin. Before the Law, people were doing wrong but it was not clearly defined. Once the Law was given, it was clear to all when a law was broken. The Law, with its 600 plus commandments, made it clear how serious man’s condition was, how hopeless he was in his depravity and sin.

Therefore, the Law was given to reveal the sinfulness of man. The Law was never given to provide a means of righteousness. As Galatians 3:19 said, it was added because of transgressions. It was “added” meaning it came later, after the “promise” (of the Abrahamic Covenant) was made.

The text also indicates that the Law was temporary. It was added “until” the seed would come. The Law had a terminal point, an ending point. Specifically, it was “added until the seed would come.”

The “seed” is a reference to Christ. In the context of this verse, Paul wrote, “to your seed, that is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). The Abrahamic Covenant, with the promise of justification by faith, had its prime focal point

in Jesus Christ—He is the promised seed. All the promises of this covenant can be fulfilled because of Christ.

Thus, the Mosaic Law began with Moses on Mt. Sinai and would last until Christ came. Its purpose was to show the people of Israel how sinful they were so that they would see their need for a Savior.

Paul went on to tell us how the Law was given: “Having been ordained through angels.” The Law itself does not say much about how it was given. But there are a number of other passages that corroborate what Paul said:

- Psalm 68:17—”The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness.” The “chariots of God” is a reference to angelic beings. The psalmist is stating that angels were present when the Lord met with Moses to give him the Law at Mt. Sinai.
- Acts 7:53—Stephen, speaking before the leadership council of Israel shortly before his stoning, referred to the Law as being “ordained by angels.”
- Hebrews 2:2—The writer refers to the Law as the “word spoken through angels.”

The testimony of Scripture is consistent that the angels had a role to play in the giving of the Mosaic Law.

Paul took this one step further in Galatians 3:19 when he said, “Having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator.” Moses is the mediator; he stood between God and the people. “Then the people said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die’” (Exodus 20:19). God spoke to Moses, and Moses brought the words of God to the people.

The fact that there needed to be a mediator makes the Mosaic Covenant a conditional covenant. It was conditioned upon the agreement of two parties (God and Israel), and was mediated by Moses. God, who is the source of the Law, gave the Law to angels, who in turn gave it to Moses, who then gave it to the people of Israel.

This shows the inferiority of the Mosaic Covenant to the Abrahamic

Covenant. In the Abrahamic Covenant, a mediator was not necessary. God spoke directly to Abraham, who accepted what God said by faith.

Galatians 3:20

Paul continued on his thought about a mediator in this next verse. It is very brief; there is an abruptness to it. “Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.” Literally, this verse says, “Now a mediator is not for one; whereas God is one.”

When a mediator is necessary, you obviously have more than one party involved. You have two parties trying to come to an agreement with the help of a mediator. In this case, God gave the Law through the angels to Moses, who in turn, as God’s mediator, gave the Law to Israel.

However, “God is one,” meaning that in His character, the promise of salvation, as given in the Abrahamic Covenant, is a unilateral activity on God’s part alone. The redemption promised in this covenant rests on God totally and completely. No mediator was necessary.⁵

Paul used God’s character to show that the Mosaic Covenant (and the Law) was never a salvation covenant because redemption is always a work of God alone. The salvation that God provides must exclude any works of man, as this would violate His character. “We maintain that man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law” (Rom. 3:28).

Galatians 3:21

Paul’s argument is so strong that he asked the question “Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God?” Is the Law opposed to the promises of God? Are they in war against one another? Do they contradict each other?

Paul’s response is the strongest negative he could give: “May it never be!” The Greek phrase here is *may ganoito* meaning “God forbid.” Such a thought is inconceivable; it is impossible.

⁵ Some might say that 1 Timothy 2:5 (“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”) contradicts this point that no mediator is necessary for salvation to take place. However, since God exists in three persons, the second person of the trinity is mediating between God and man. Jesus, of course, is not a mediator like Moses who is, of course, not God. Thus, this verse is saying that the Word was God who is our mediator; God is still dealing directly with us in salvation.

His response is so strong because God gave the Law at Mt. Sinai. Before that, He gave the covenant to Abraham. Thus, to say that the Law opposed the promises of God is to pit God against Himself. Since God was behind both the Law and the Abrahamic Covenant, clearly the Law could not oppose the promises of this covenant. This would mean that God is opposing Himself, which is not possible.

The Apostle explained himself in the next phrase: “For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.” This is a second class condition in the Greek. It is a contrary to fact condition. Paul made an impossible statement to show what could not happen, not what could possibly take place.

“If a law had been given which was able to impart life”—and this is impossible, however if it had happened—”then righteousness would have indeed been based on the law.” This, of course, could not happen; it is impossible. The Law was given to reveal sin, not to impart life. Paul will expand upon this point in the next two verses, which will be the focus of the next chapter of this booklet.

CHAPTER 3

The Powerlessness of the Law: Not a Means of Salvation (Galatians 3:22-23)

Paul has established a couple of foundational truths regarding the Law: 1) it is part of the Mosaic Covenant, which is a covenant between God and the nation of Israel; 2) the Mosaic Covenant is a conditional covenant, conditioned upon the agreement of the people as mediated by Moses; and 3) the Law was given to guide and regulate the conduct of the nation of Israel.

The Law was not, however, given to provide a means of salvation. Paul told us in Galatians 3:19 that it was given to reveal the sinfulness of the people Israel. The Law was powerless to save.

Galatians 3:22

Given the powerlessness of the Law to save, Paul told the Galatians that the “Scripture has shut up everyone under sin.” The Scripture refers to the Law. The Law points to sin. Most of the sacrifices required by the Law point to the same thing—sin. People had the constant reminder that they were sinners, and that the penalty for their sin was death.

The Scriptures demonstrate that all people are sinners. As soon as it is established that all people are sinners, it rules out the possibility of being saved by what someone does. The reason for this is that as a sinner, people are condemned—“the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Since people are already condemned, it means they are too late to do anything about their condition themselves. Keeping the Law—even the whole Law—will not help because it is too late to reverse the consequences of

their condemnation.

The word “shut up” that Paul uses is a strong word. It means to imprison, to confine. All the Law could do was imprison Israel; it locked them up in their sin. Indeed, the Law is powerless to save.

Why did God shut up everyone under sin? Paul explained this in the next phrase: “That the promise of faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” God’s purpose was to show Israel that they were sinful. The hope was that Jews would realize that they could not rectify their sinfulness and would thus eagerly look for their Messiah. Instead, they became all the more self-righteous, much like people do today. They put everything on a scale and think, “Surely the good I do will outweigh the bad; God will certainly be pleased with me as a result.”

The Law was not in conflict with the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. Rather the Law showed the necessity of the promise. The Law showed Israel they could not be righteous by the things they did. Every time they disobeyed the Law and offered up a sacrifice for their sin, they were admitting that they could not become righteous on their own. They were instead declaring that they were a sinner, condemned to die.

Galatians 3:23

Paul began this verse by stating, “But before faith came.” This is a reference to the coming of Christ. He talked about this previously at the end of verse 19, “Until the seed would come to whom the promises had been made.” Paul was not talking about faith in general. Rather, he was talking about a definite faith. In fact, in the Greek, he used the definite article “the” twice in this verse: “Before the faith came”; “Being shut up to the faith.”

The Apostle referred to a specific faith. It is the faith he referred to in verse 22: “The promise by faith in Christ Jesus might be given to those who believe.” It is the faith that would come in its fullness when Christ came, when the fullness of revelation took place. Abraham believed God but he did not recognize the fullness of the promises of God. This was true of his descendants as well. It was true until Christ came and made available the provision for sin.

Faith has come, which is another way of saying that Christ has come.

Faith came in Christ in that He is the provision that enables God past, present, and future to declare righteous those who believe in Him. Before faith came, that is before Christ came, people were kept in custody under the Law. Before Christ, Israel was confined in prison without hope.

Paul next wrote: “We were kept in custody under the law being shut up to the faith.” The word translated “being shut up” is the same word he used in verse 22: “The Scripture has shut up everyone under sin.” Its meaning is very similar to the word translated “kept in custody” in this verse. It means to confine, to put in prison. The word depicts military guards watching over those who had been imprisoned.

This is the same situation for those who are under the Law. They are imprisoned and guarded by the Law. The Law revealed the magnitude of their sin and their guilt before God. However, under the Law, there was no escape. All it could do was condemn everyone who did not do everything that the Law demands.

Paul then said that those who were kept in custody under the Law were also “being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.” The Law confined Israel until the faith was revealed. The word for “revealed” is the word “apocalypse,” which means revelation. What was revealed? The faith was revealed, which is a reference to the person and work of Christ.

Thus, the Law confined Israel until Christ came. It did not save them, or declare them righteous in God’s eyes. Rather it imprisoned them. Thankfully, the Law was only designed to be temporary. It was designed to last only until the faith was revealed. This is the same point Paul made at the end of verse 19—the Law would last until the seed came.

The Law was powerless to save, but in addition to revealing sin, it also served the purpose of disciplining Israel, which the Apostle will discuss next.

CHAPTER 4

The Provision of the Law: To Discipline Israel (Galatians 3:24)

The Law did have a purpose. It showed Israel its sinfulness and kept them under its authority until Christ came. An additional provision of the Law is also found in Galatians 3:24. This verse is probably the most misunderstood verse in regards to the Law in the entire New Testament. Thus, a careful study of it is necessary to properly understand what Paul wrote.

The Apostle began with the word “therefore.” The word denotes a connection between what he has been saying with what he was about to say. It is important to understand that he was not moving on to a new topic, but rather he was still building on what he has been talking about.

The King James Version translates the verse this way: “Wherefore the Law became our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.” Because of this translation, people have developed the notion that the Law was like a school teacher, teaching the things that were necessary for someone to come to salvation in Christ.

The New American Standard Bible translates the verse this way: “Therefore, the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ.” This translation is not much better. The words “to lead us” are not in the Greek text. By adding these words, the translators allowed many to come to the conclusion that the Law plays an instrumental role in bringing people to Christ.

What was Paul trying to say in this verse? The word for “tutor” is

the Greek word *paidagogos*, from which we get the word “pedagogue.” Literally, this word means a child leader, or simply, one who leads a child. It could be better translated as an “authoritarian guardian” or a “discipline enforcer.” It is important to note that *paidagogos* is different than the Greek word *dedasgolos*.

Dedasgolos is the Greek word for teacher. However, a *paidagogos* was not a teacher. They had a custodial and disciplinary function in the rearing of a child, but did not have an educative or instructional role. In other words, he had authority over the child and he disciplined the child. He might have even been responsible for making sure the child was brought to his teacher. He did not, however, teach the child.

As a household slave, the *paidagogos* was entrusted with the responsibility of the freeborn son, or the son born to the slave’s owners. The son was under the authority of the nursemaid or nanny until about six years of age. The *paidagogos* then took over and had authority over the son until he was sixteen years old. His role was to discipline and keep the son in line until the parents took over when he turned sixteen.

Therefore, remembering that the words “to lead us” do not appear in the Greek text, this verse literally says, “the Law has become our *paidagogos* to Christ.” With a clear understanding of what the role of the *paidagogos* was in the Greek culture, it is easier now to better understand what Paul was trying to say in this verse.

The Law, serving as a *paidagogos* to Israel, had as its purpose to discipline and keep Israel in line until Christ came. The point of this analogy is to show that the Law was temporary and inferior to Christ in its role of confining Israel until He came, much like the child under the *paidagogos*. The Law did not teach Israel; rather it disciplined her.

Paul concluded this verse by saying: “so that we may be justified by faith.” The Law was never for justification, a point Paul consistently made in his letter to Galatians. The Law served a purpose by using its authority over Israel to discipline them until Christ came. Once He came, people could then be justified by faith.

Salvation had always been by faith, but once Christ came, the fullness of the provision of the Messiah as the crucified Savior was clearly

evident. Christ became the focus of faith, both for Israel, as well as for us.

Thus, the Law was not a teacher or a tutor to bring people to Christ. Rather, the Law was an authoritarian and a disciplinarian to confine and restrain Israel until Christ came. Now that Christ had come, Israel was no longer under the tutoring of the Law. The same is true today. It is not necessary to bring people under the condemnation of the Law before they can believe the gospel. The Law cannot bring people to Christ, either in the past with Israel nor today with Gentiles.

By the grace of God, He provided the Law for Israel so that they would be disciplined by it, and be kept in line until Christ came. They would then ultimately be prepared to receive Christ by faith once He came.

PART THREE: FREEDOM IN CHRIST

CHAPTER 5

Freedom from the Law and Religion (Galatians 3:25)

At the end of Galatians 3:24, Paul said that Christ came so that we might be justified by faith. The apostle picks up on and amplifies this theme in the next verse: “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

Paul, in no uncertain terms, again indicated that the role of the Law is complete; it is done. In essence, he said that now that faith has come in the person of Christ, the Law no longer had a role to play. It did not have a role in salvation before Christ, and it certainly does not have one now. In Christ, believers are free from the “tutor;” they are not under the burden that the “tutor” brought to Israel.

The phrase “faith has come” speaks to the fullness of God’s revelation in Christ. The provision God made to deal with the issue of sin was Christ, not the Law. The Law simply served to remind Israel that the penalty for sin is death, and to show them the need for a sacrifice for their sin.

For centuries, Jews had sought justification by keeping the Law. They carried the burden of trying to do enough good works as a means of procuring God’s favor. This, of course, did not work.

The Law, with its authority, sought to “tutor,” confine, restrict, and discipline the Jewish people. But it never brought the people to righ-

teousness.

The Judaizers misled people into thinking that they needed to continue to do the works of the Law even after people accepted Christ. This only served to keep people in the bondage and discipline of the tutor, rather than allowing them to experience the freedom of faith in Christ.

Not much has changed since the Law was done away with. People through the centuries have continued to seek justification by good works. They carry the weight and burden of trying to do enough good to outweigh the bad, but without ever having the assurance that they have done enough. They just hope that, in comparison to others, they are good enough; they think that surely God will accept them. This, of course, is a false hope, an empty hope, a hope that does not bring any real peace.

However, with Christ, people can find true freedom. They are freed from the oppressive, disciplinarian supervision of the Law. Strictly on the basis of what Christ has done on the cross, and not on the basis of obedience to the Law and religion, people can be declared righteous in God's eyes.

Now that faith has come, when someone believes in Him, they become a son of God by faith in Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:12). The Law is no longer required to be kept as a demonstration of Faith for those that love God. Faith is now evidenced and demonstrated by believing in Jesus Christ and submitting to His rule in our lives.

CHAPTER 6

Freedom Brings Spiritual Equality (Galatians 3:26-29)

Galatians 3:26

Having concluded that the Jews were no longer under the tutorship of the Law because faith—meaning Christ—had come, Paul continued by writing: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). The preposition “for” indicates that the Apostle was continuing the thought he started in the previous verse, showing that the role of the Law has been completed; its purpose is over.

The word “all” in this verse is emphatic. Literally the Greek text reads, “All for sons of God you are.” The Greeks could order their words with a lot more freedom than is permissible in English. Thus, when they wanted to put emphasis on a certain word, they would put it first in a sentence.

Paul’s point is that all believers are sons of God through faith in Christ. Not just Jews. Not just Gentiles. Every believer, regardless of nationality or background, is a son of God by virtue of their relationship to Christ through faith.

Galatians 3:27

Continuing to develop this theme, Paul penned the following: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27). This verse has created a great deal of controversy in the church, especially as it pertains to the means of salvation. However, a careful examination of this verse in its context will provide a clear

understanding of what Paul wrote.

Paul began with the word “for,” which again indicates, as it did in verse 26, that the Apostle continued to develop the point he began in the previous verse. The use of “all of you” serves to connect this verse with the phrase he used in verse 26, “you all are sons of God.” All of you who are sons of God have also been baptized into Christ. Having faith in Christ and being baptized into Christ are basically referring to the same event.

The word “baptism” here cannot refer to water baptism. This would be an exegetical impossibility. Previously in the Book of Galatians, Paul argued that physical circumcision cannot be a requirement for salvation. The Judaizers said that circumcision was a requirement, but Paul had carefully shown why this could not be.

Therefore, for Paul to argue that physical circumcision is not a requirement for salvation and then to come along and argue that physical baptism is a requirement would be ludicrous. In fact, though it is clearly not the case, you could make a stronger case for circumcision being a requirement for salvation than you could for water baptism being a requirement.

Earlier, Paul had argued that you cannot add or take anything away from the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal. 3:15-16). Abraham believed God and God credited this to him as righteousness. Therefore, circumcision could not be required for salvation because this was part of the Mosaic Law, which came after the Abrahamic Covenant. Obviously, the same could be said for water baptism.

Thus, if water baptism is not in view in this verse, what was Paul talking about? He was talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 12, a passage whose context is very similar to the one here in Galatians 3, Paul wrote, “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (verses 12-13). This passage even uses some of the same wording that Paul used here in Galatians 3:27-28.

Therefore, the baptism in Galatians 3:27 is a reference to Spirit baptism, which occurs when a believer is placed into the Body of Christ. In Romans 6, Paul further developed this point. “We have become united with Him in the likeness of death” (verse 5). Baptism of the Spirit, according to this verse, is the work of the Spirit of God in identifying the believer with Christ in His death on the cross and in His burial and resurrection to newness of life. Water baptism is a physical representation of this reality, not a requirement for this to become a reality.

Paul had talked about the provision of the Spirit for the believer earlier in the third chapter of Galatians. “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?” (verse 2). Breaking into verse 5, Paul said, “He who provides you with the Spirit.” At the end of verse 14, the Apostle said, “that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Jumping ahead to chapter 4, “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts” (verse 6). The ministry of the Spirit pervades Paul’s message to the Galatians.

Therefore, when Paul said in Galatians 3:27 that “all of you who were baptized into Christ,” he was talking about the moment the Holy Spirit takes residence in the person who places their faith in Christ. In doing so, the Spirit confirms that the believer has been placed into the Body of Christ.

The next phrase in Galatians 3:27 is “clothed yourselves in Christ.” To cloth yourself in Christ is to identify yourself with Christ. If you wear His clothes, you are identified with Him, and His character becomes your character. Paul talked about this back in chapter 2 verse 20: “I have been crucified with Christ.” How was he crucified with Christ? When he believed and was baptized by the Spirit, God united him with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. “It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me.” Christ’s life is now Paul’s life. “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” This is the life Paul now had—it is Christ’s life lived in and through him.

Thus, those who are clothed with Christ are identified with Him. They are clothed with the character of God, having been baptized into

Christ the moment they believed in Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection.

Galatians 3:28

While verse 27 has caused some controversy, verse 28 has been extremely controversial. Many have taken this verse out of context and used it to support all kinds of political, social, and ideological agendas. Again, a careful study in its context will yield clarity as to what Paul was saying in this verse.

Continuing his theme of what it means to be free in Christ, Paul said, “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 context of this verse is that the Mosaic Law is no longer necessary. As such, all that is necessary for salvation is faith alone in Christ alone.

It does not matter if a person is a Jew or a Gentile. Jews do not have a leg up because they keep the Law. Gentiles do not need to keep the Law to be fully saved, as the Judaizers were teaching. Nationality does not play a role, and is certainly not an issue, in salvation. Both Jews and Gentiles are sinners. Therefore, both only find salvation through faith in Christ.

Furthermore, this applies to one’s social standing as well. Whether a person was a slave or a free man, salvation was only by faith in Christ. The same can be said for one’s sexual identity. Whether a person was a male or female, it did not change the fact that salvation was still only by faith in Christ, and the result of salvation was still being placed into the Body of Christ.

No distinctions can be found in justification. There is not one kind of Gospel for the Jews, another way of salvation for the Gentiles, and yet another depending on whether you were a slave, a man, or a woman. When this verse is kept in its context, it is plain to see that Paul focused on salvation being available to all people regardless of race, social standing, or whether they were a man or woman. They are all equal in that they all can become members of the same Body in the same way. Differences exist in the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13-14), thus equality clearly does not mean sameness.

Trouble comes, however, when people take this verse out of its context and use it to support their view that men and women are not only equal, they are the same. Problems also occur when others take this verse to say that there are no distinctions in the Body of Christ, or that there are no differences in the roles of men and women in the Body.

This is not what Paul talked about here. In fact, these views conflict with what he wrote in other places. Some admit that there are conflicts with what Paul writes elsewhere, but they say that Galatians 3:28 should be the foundational verse. However, you cannot play Scripture against Scripture. Either it is all true or it is all wrong. You can't say that Paul was right here in Galatians but was wrong in the other passages he wrote. You can't say that his Rabbinic background colored his thinking when he wrote that women weren't allowed to lead or teach men (see 1 Timothy 2 or 1 Corinthians 12 and 14), but then say he was right on when he wrote Galatians 3:28.

Indeed, great damage is done when people use Scripture to prove their agenda, rather than submitting their agenda to Scripture. As Paul said to conclude this verse, "you are all one in Christ Jesus." This is a great and wonderful truth. Believers do not make this unity; it is not manufactured or created by man's efforts or ideals. Rather this unity is only produced by the Spirit when He places believers into the Body of Christ.

Salvation has the same outcome for all who experience it. All believers are placed into only one Body. They are united by this common faith, and are rooted together in the common commitment to the Scripture as the truth of God.

Galatians 3:29

Paul concluded this passage by stating, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." This verse is a first class condition in the Greek—it assumes what is said to be true.

"If you belong to Christ"—and Paul believes they do in spite of all that he has said to them in his letter—"then you are Abraham's descendants." The word for "descendant" is "seed," the same word that was

used of Christ in verse 16 of this chapter.

Thus, those who belong to Christ also are Abraham's seed. As such, they are "heirs according to promise." All believers are in line to inherit what was promised to Abraham, because all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant find their focus in Christ. All believers have been truly grafted into the line of Abraham (cf. Romans 11) if they belong to Christ.

This does not mean, of course, that the only promises of the Abrahamic Covenant that will be fulfilled are spiritual promises. Physical promises, such as the promise of land, to the physical descendants of Abraham will also be fulfilled. Paul's whole argument in Galatians would collapse if this covenant could be altered to only having its spiritual promises fulfilled and not its physical ones. Indeed, the Abrahamic Covenant cannot be altered, by the Law, or by the church; its promises—all of them—will be fulfilled.

Freedom in Christ truly brings spiritual equality to all who believe:

- There is only one way of salvation for all people—"you are all sons of God" (Gal. 3:26)
- The baptism of the Spirit places all believers into the Body of Christ—the reason God can declare a person righteous is because at the moment of faith in Christ, the Spirit of God identifies him in His death, burial, and resurrection (Gal. 3:27)
- There is only one Body to which all believers belong—"you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28)
- All who belong to Christ inherit the promise—the promises made to Abraham in his covenant with God (Gal. 3:29).

CHAPTER 7

Freedom and Sonship in Christ (Galatians 4:1-5)

No issues are more important than those that relate to the matter of salvation. How can a person have their sins forgiven? How can a person be brought into a right relationship with the Eternal God? How can a person settle for time and eternity their eternal destiny?

Many think that there are a variety of ways to resolve these issues. They think that there are many roads amongst the many religions that will all ultimately end up in the same place—heaven. Some do teach that you must believe in Jesus Christ, but they also teach that there are other ways, or there is something else you also need to do besides a simple belief in Christ.

Paul dealt with this same issue in Galatians. The Judaizers were teaching that people needed to believe in Jesus for their salvation. However, they also taught that people needed to believe and keep the Law. Today, people teach that in addition to believing in Christ, people also need to keep the Ten Commandments, or be baptized, or give a tithe, or any number of other things to be saved. Any additions, of any kind, to the simple message of faith alone in Christ alone are not minor deviations. This deviation or addition has eternal consequences.

The purpose of the Law—to show Israel their sin and to discipline and keep the Jewish people in line—ended with the coming of Christ. Those who believe in Jesus can leave the bondage of the Law and good works and find freedom in Christ. In addition to being free from the Law and religion (see Gal. 3:25), believers also can experience a free-

dom in Christ that brings spiritual equality (see Gal. 3:26-29).

In Galatians 4:1-5, Paul taught believers how their freedom in Christ enables them to experience sonship in Christ. In verses 1-3, he gave a picture of bondage during a time of immaturity, and then in verses 4-5, he showed how the realization of freedom and sonship is carried out in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4:1-3

“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” (Gal. 4:1). Paul made a similar point to what he made in Galatians 3:23-25. The picture is of one who is under the authority of someone else. In Galatians 3, the Jews were under the authority of the Law, their tutor. In this verse in Galatians 4, the picture is the same, but with a little variation.

In Galatians 4:1, the picture is of a child, a young boy. He is the heir to the family fortune—all that the father has. However, as a young child, in his state of immaturity, he lives under the rules and authority of others. This is no different than the slave who also lived under the rules and authority of others in his household.

Paul then wrote, “But he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father” (Gal. 4:2). This is similar to the analogy he gave in Galatians 3:24 with the paidagogos having the authority and being the disciplinarian in the child’s life from ages six to 16.

In Galatians 4:2, the guardians and managers are those who have responsibility for the property that the young child will inherit. They have authority over the boy’s inheritance until the child reaches a certain age (probably 16, as was the norm in the Greek culture). This is similar to parents today who buy a car for their 15-year-old son. He can look at it, he can walk around it, and he can even sit in it. But until he turns 16 and gets his driver’s license, he cannot drive it or take ownership of it.

Paul gives the application of this simple illustration in the next verse: “So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world” (Gal. 4:3). When Paul used the word “we” in Galatians, he was talking about himself and other fellow Jews (cf. Gal. 2:14-15, 3:23). Thus, Paul was talking about the Jewish people in

this verse—”we” Jews were held in bondage.

Paul’s point was that when Israel was under the authority of the Law, it was a time of immaturity and childhood for the Jews. Like the young child who was under the authority of guardians and managers, so, too, were the Jews during the time they were under the Law. It was a time of childhood, immaturity, and bondage.

During this period, Israel was servants of, or under bondage to, the “elemental things of the world.” The word “elemental” appears seven times in the New Testament. It means the basic principals or the foundational elements. Today, this would be a reference to basic principles (i.e., the ABC’s). These are basic, beginning elements.

Peter used this same word in 2 Peter 3:10, 12, where he used it twice to refer to the basic elements of the physical world that will be burned up in the final remaking of the earth.

The other five uses of the word “elements” (or “elemental”) in the New Testament all refer to the Mosaic Law. Of these five times, four occur in Galatians (the fifth is in Colossians 2:8):

- Galatians 3:23—”But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law.” “Under the Law” is translated from the word used for “elemental”—we were kept under the elemental things.
- Galatians 4:5—”So that He might redeem those who were under the Law.” Again, “under the Law” is the same word referencing the elemental things.
- Galatians 4:9—”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?” The elemental things in this verse is a reference to the staple elements of life under the Mosaic Law—observing certain days, months, seasons, and years.

The fourth use of elemental things in Galatians is, of course, in Galatians 4:3. All five of these references, including Colossians 2:8, depicts the Mosaic Law and its instructions concerning the elemental responsibilities that the Jews had in keeping certain days, months, seasons and years. These instructions pertained to the responsibilities the nation had

in the physical realm—responsibilities that all referred to perishable things in the physical world.

Therefore, in the context of Galatians 4:3, the rules and regulations of the Mosaic Law were viewed by Paul as having authority during Israel's childhood or immaturity. It was, thus, maddening to Paul that the Judaizers would teach that believers had to come under the authority of the Law to be fully saved.

During this time of bondage, the Jews were kept under the authority and discipline of the Law. This was a time of immaturity and childhood that was to be temporary. At an appointed time, they would be able to receive their inheritance and enter into the adulthood of sonship that God had planned and prepared.

Galatians 4:4-5

In these two verses, Paul gave a tremendous statement of God's work of redemption. God's plan of redemption and its results are clearly and concisely stated in this passage.

The apostle begins with the phrase, "But when the fullness of time came." Many suggestions have been made as to what Paul had in mind. Some have suggested that this refers to the Roman Empire and its system of roads that facilitated the carrying of the Gospel throughout the Empire. Others have suggested this as a reference to the Greek language as being the language of the world, enabling people to travel anywhere and easily communicate with others. While these things were undoubtedly part of God's plan, is this what Paul had in mind?

In the context of this passage, Paul was referring to what he talked about at the end of Galatians 4:2—the young child is "under guardians and managers until the date set by the father." It is that date set by the Father that Paul has in view here. The time was full, or ripe, because it was the time that God had appointed, in His sovereign plan, for Christ to come. Or, as Paul put it: "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law" (Gal. 4:4).

At the appointed, predetermined time, God sent forth His Son.⁶ How

⁶ It is important to note that God sent His Son, which clearly presents the deity of Jesus Christ. The pre-existence of Christ is implied here, but is more clearly taught in other passages (cf. Col. 1:15-16 for one example).

did He send Him? He sent him “born of a woman.” This is a normal Jewish expression for human birth. This phrase expresses Christ’s humanness.⁷ God’s Son had been born into the human race; He had become identified with humanity.

In addition to being “born of a woman,” Paul also said that Jesus was “born under the Law.” Not only was He a man, He was a Jewish man. As such, He was born under the authority of the Mosaic Law. The Apostle stressed this point because he wanted to show that those who lived under the Law needed redemption, thereby negating the teaching of the Judaizers who said people had to live under the Law to be saved. Living under the Law cannot be necessary for redemption, because those who lived under the Law needed redemption.

Why was Christ born under the Law? The answer is found in the next phrase: “So that He might redeem those who were under the Law” (Gal. 4:5). This is a purpose statement indicating the reason He was born under the Law—in order that He might redeem those who were also born under the Law. Why did God send His Son? Why did Christ come? So that He might redeem.

The Greek word for “redeem” in this verse is *soterios*, from which we get our word *soteriology*—the biblical doctrine of salvation. The purpose of God sending His Son was to redeem. Specifically, He was to redeem “those who were under the Law.” Clearly Paul was talking about the Jews, as only they were under the authority of the Law. The Romans weren’t under the Law. The Gentiles didn’t live under the Law. Only the Jews were under the Law. Only the Jews needed a Savior to come and redeem them from the curse of the Law and its authority in their lives.

Ultimately, because of the universal promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, the provision of redemption would also become available to Gentiles. However, Paul’s point in this context—keeping in mind his need to refute the teaching of the Judaizers—was that Christ came to redeem the Jews who were under the guardianship (verse 2) of the Law. If living under the Law was necessary for salvation (as the Judaizers taught),

⁷ Some take this as a reference to Christ’s virgin birth. While He was obviously born of a virgin, this is not in view in this verse. The phrase “born of a woman” is a common Jewish phrase for talking about the birth of human beings (cf. Job 14:1; Matt. 11:11).

then how is it that those living under the Law (the Jews) needed deliverance from the Law? Clearly, their teaching was illogical, and so is any teaching today that states that the Law has a role to play in the life of the believer.

Paul expressed two purposes in God sending His Son. First, as was stated in the first half of verse 5, God sent His Son to redeem believers—specifically Jews in this context, but ultimately all people. The second purpose, God sent His Son, is found in the last half of verse 5: “That we might receive the adoption as sons.” God redeemed believing Jews so that they might be placed as sons. They could not enter into the fullness of their position as sons until they were set free from their bondage and obligation to the Law.

Full rights of sonship are available to those who are adopted as sons. Israel was called God’s chosen people—His sons—in the Old Testament (when they lived under the Law). During this time of immaturity, they did not have their inheritance yet (Gal. 4:1). They did not have all the rights and prerogatives that came with sonship. They were under the guardianship of the Law (Gal. 4:2-3). It was not until God’s appointed time (Gal. 4:4) that He sent His Son—who was fully human and fully divine—to redeem His people and to adopt⁸ them as His sons, finally allowing them to enter into all the fullness and prerogatives of sonship (Gal. 4:5). They moved from immaturity to adulthood, from bondage to freedom. How was this possible? As it was then, it is still true today that someone can move from bondage to freedom only by faith alone in Christ alone. Nothing else, including submitting to the Law, is ever necessary for salvation.

⁸ This work of adoption is founded in God’s work of election. In Ephesians 1:4, Paul wrote that God chose (Greek word for “election”) those who would believe in Christ before the foundation of the world. In the next verse Paul wrote, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.” Therefore, it was God’s purpose and plan in eternity past that believers—both Jews and Gentiles—would be blessed with the full prerogatives and rights of sonship in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 8

Freedom and an Heir in Christ (Galatians 4:6-7)

Picking up on the concept of sonship, Paul will elaborate on what he meant by this term. He has provided the external evidence of sonship in Galatians 4:5—his clear statement that God will adopt all believers as His sons. Now the Apostle will turn his attention to the internal confirmation of sonship. Not only does a believer know that he is a son of God because of what the Scriptures say, but he also knows this is a reality because of the inner work of the Spirit of God that testifies and confirms this truth in his heart.

Galatians 4:6

“Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts” (Gal. 4:6). Paul moved from the first person plural (“we”) he used in verse 3—“while we were children”—and verse 5—“we might receive the adoption as sons”—to the second person plural (“you”) in this verse. The “we” indicates that Paul is speaking as a Jew, identifying himself with his fellow Jews. The “you” refers to the believers Paul has been addressing in his letter to the churches of Galatia.

“You are sons” is a major point. Since believers are God’s sons, they do not need to submit to the Mosaic Law; it has no purpose or role in their lives. Instead, as an heir, believers are able to partake in the applicable promises God made to Abraham. Nothing is gained by going back under the Law.

Next, Paul told the Galatians that “God has sent forth the Spirit of

His Son.” It is important to note that the Apostle was not setting out a chronology or order of events. He was not saying that first, a believer becomes a son, and then after this event, at a later time, He sends His Spirit. Rather these are simultaneous events—salvation is given as a complete package; nothing is added or comes later. People become sons of God by faith in Christ. At that moment of faith, the Spirit of God works in the believer’s heart, accomplishing all of the work of God to justify, sanctify, regenerate, indwell, baptize, and seal. All these works of the Spirit take place at the same time in the life of the believer.

Thus, what Paul said is that the Spirit is given to those who are sons. This is the internal evidence of sonship. In Romans 8, Paul called the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of adoption” (verse 15). The work of the Spirit is essential if adoption as God’s son is to take place.

While the Holy Spirit is clearly the focus of this verse—“God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son”—all three members of the triune Godhead are mentioned. God, the Father, has sent forth the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, of His Son, Jesus Christ. In the work of salvation, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all play a role.

The Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of His Son.” Paul showed the close connection between Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and believers, the sons of God. Jesus, of course, is the only begotten, unique Son of God—a Son in the way no one else will be a son. However, when a person is saved and becomes a son of God, they are joined with Christ as an heir of all that God has promised to His Son (cf. Rom. 8:17).

Paul indicated that God had sent forth the Spirit “into our hearts.” This begs the question: when did a believer receive the Spirit into their heart? Was it at some point after they believed, as some teach?

According to the context and details of Galatians, the answer to this question is not difficult. A believer receives the Holy Spirit the moment they believe. “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). If someone is a son of God through faith in Christ, as stated in this verse, then according to Galatians 4:6, this person received the Spirit at the moment of salvation—“Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit.”

A person receives the Spirit into their heart the moment they believe in Christ. “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?” (Gal. 3:2). Paul went on to say, “That we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:14). Earlier he wrote, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 2:16).

People become sons of God by faith. They receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby they are called sons of God, when they place their faith in Christ. This is all part of the package a person receives at the moment of salvation. A believer will not at some point in their life need more of the Spirit, or need to enter into the “fullness” of the Spirit. They already have all of the Spirit at the time they were saved.

God the Father, who is the One who does the action of sending the Spirit, sends His Spirit into the heart of the believer. The heart refers to the inner-most being of a person. It is the center of their moral and spiritual being. In contrast to their physical body, the heart captures the essence of who one truly is as a person.

Thus, the Spirit of God comes into the inner-most being of the believer. This signifies the intimacy and closeness that is established. He has joined the believer spiritually to Christ in a permanent, unending relationship. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19). The physical body is His temple.

This is why sin is uglier and more repulsive in a Christian than it is in a non-Christian. Sin is sin, no matter who commits it. However, it is viler and more repulsive when committed by a Christian. Why? The Holy Spirit of God dwells within the believer. When an unbeliever sins, his body is not a temple. The Holy Spirit does not dwell in them. Of course, they are guilty before the Living God and are rebelling against Him. However, when a believer sins, he is polluting and corrupting what belongs to God.

The close relationship between a husband and wife is beautiful and wonderful. However, a believer can never have a relationship with anyone else in the way they are related to the Spirit of God. A depth exists

in this relationship that only God can bring. This is why Paul wrote: “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:6).

The word “Abba” is simply the Aramaic word for father. The word for “Father” is the Greek word for father. Thus, Paul is using two different languages to express the word “father.” “Abba,” however, was often used by children in addressing their father. Therefore, some say that the word “Daddy” could be used here instead. This, however, misses the writer’s point. The word “Abba” connotes intimacy, not infancy or immaturity.

The Apostle used this word to show that an intimacy had been established between the believer and God the Father. Believers are sons of God, and this is not some kind of formal designation that has been bestowed upon them. Rather this is a reality that brings with it a relationship of intimacy that is closer than any other relationship that could be established.

This phrase, “Abba, Father” is used three times in the New Testament. Once it is used by Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal, expressing the closeness and intimacy that He shared with His Father. In addition to Galatians 4:6, Paul also used this phrase in Romans 8:15: “For you have not received the Holy Spirit who would take you back under the Law. But you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”

In Galatians 4:6, the Spirit cries out “Abba! Father!” However, in Romans 8:15, believers are crying out. They are, in response to the work of the Spirit in their lives, expressing confidence and assurance of the intimacy and closeness they have with God the Father. This is seen in what is said in the next verse: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16).

The internal confirmation of sonship comes from the Spirit and His indwelling presence in the life of the believer. This is not some sort of abstract designation bestowed on believers, but rather an intimate reality of the relationship shared between God and the sons of God.

Galatians 4:7

Verse 7 summarizes all that Paul said in the first six verses of Galatians chapter 4. In fact, in many ways, this verse summarizes all that he said from Galatians 3:1 through Galatians 4:6. He wrapped it all up in two statements.

First, “Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son.” Paul moved from the first person plural (“we”) to the second person plural (“you”) in verse 6. Now, in verse 7, he shifts again, this time to the second person singular. His focus in this verse is on each individual believer. In essence, he was saying to the individual believer in Galatia, “Now you, personally, are no longer a slave but a son. Therefore, don’t let anyone confuse you. Don’t let the Judaizers take you back under the bondage of the Law. You personally are God’s son. What more do you need?”

The second statement the Apostle made in this verse is, “and if a son, then an heir through God.” This statement addresses the crux of the issue in Galatians. The Judaizers said that it was great that people came to believe in Christ. However, if they wanted to fully be an heir of Abraham and all that God had promised, then they had to keep the Law.

In rebuttal, Paul said that when someone became a son of God, he also at the same time became an heir. Doing something else, as the Judaizers asserted, was not necessary to experience more in Christ or to become an heir in Him. This, too, was part of the “salvation package.” The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is an assurance and a guarantee of this reality (cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:13).

Thus, the Holy Spirit that God sends into the heart of the believer to confirm their sonship, also enables them to understand and enjoy the intimacy of a relationship with God the Father. His residency guarantees that the final inheritance will come to pass as promised. Those who have the Holy Spirit belong to Christ and are sons and heirs of God. Those who do not have the Holy Spirit do not belong to Christ and are not His sons or heirs. The issue is simply this: is the Spirit of God in you?

CHAPTER 9

Freedom and the Danger of the Law and Religion (Galatians 4:8-11)

In this section of Galatians 4, Paul will personally express his concern and frustration with the Galatian churches. The Galatians are turning from Christ to go back to a form of paganism and he cannot understand it. If these people could turn down a road that ultimately leads to paganism, then perhaps they never did understand and trust Christ as their Savior. The Apostle will show the Galatians that to place themselves under the authority of the Mosaic Law was no different than being back under the control of their pagan religion.

Paul started this section by saying, “However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods” (Gal. 4:8). “However” indicates a contrast, a strong contrast, from what he was just writing. In verse 7, Paul wrote about being a son and heir of God. Now he writes about a time when they did not even know God.

By not knowing God, the Apostle was not saying that they had no knowledge of Him. Rather, he was talking about a time when they did not know God in a personal relationship of intimacy with Him. In Romans, Paul, using the same word for “know” that he used in Galatians 4:8, said, “Even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks” (Rom. 1:21). In Galatians 4:8, Paul wrote about the time when the Galatians might have known about God, but did not have a personal relationship with Him.

In addition to not knowing God personally, Paul also indicated that he was writing about a time when they were “slaves to those which by nature are no gods.” Before salvation, the Galatians were in a position of slavery. The Jews were in slavery to the Mosaic Law, and the Gentiles were in slavery to their religion. The word “nature” indicates what one is in their very being. In essence, the Galatians were in bondage to make-believe-gods, counterfeit gods, pretend gods, gods which were not really gods at all. The gods of their religion were worthless and empty (cf. Rom. 1:21-25; 1 Cor. 8:4; 1 Cor. 10:19). Prior to their salvation, Galatians were involved in all kinds of worthless paganism.

Paul made it clear in the next verse as to why he took them back to this period of time before they were saved. “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?” Paul let his readers know the important issue in their salvation, not that they know God, but that God knows them. John wrote something similar in his first letter: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10).

To be “known by God” is equivalent to being chosen by Him. This comes out of Old Testament usage of this phrase. In Amos 3:2, God said to Israel: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” Israel was the only nation that God had known out of all the nations on the earth. Isn’t God omniscient? Doesn’t He know everything? Yes He does, however, Israel is the only nation that God has chosen for Himself. As such, Israel is the only nation that He has known.

Thus, to be known by God emphasizes God’s divine initiative in salvation. Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul was always cognizant of the fact that God, in His sovereignty, chose him, and not the other way around.

In light of this glorious truth, Paul is dumbfounded as to how the Ga-

latians could choose to be enslaved all over again by the very things that were worthless to save them previously. They have experienced freedom in Christ so how could they now want to go back to slavery?

The elemental things Paul mentioned in this verse was a reference to the Mosaic Law, as was the case when he used it back in Galatians 4:3. He talked about some of these elemental things in verse 10: “You observe days and months and seasons and years.” He characterized the Law and its observances as being weak and worthless. They are powerless, in that they were unable to provide salvation and secure the riches of God’s inheritance.

Paul was mystified as to why his readers would even have a desire to be enslaved⁹ to anything, let alone to those things that were powerless to save them previously. To put themselves under the Mosaic Law again was tantamount to returning to slavery. The same could be said about a believer today who came out of a Catholic background but chose to return to the rituals and practices of that religion. To leave the Catholic Church to find Christ, and then to return to the Catholic Church to find a fuller spiritual life would not make sense to Paul. Following these “elemental things” could not save the Jews, nor can following the “religious things” save anyone else. All these “things” lead to is bondage and futility, hence the reason they are weak and worthless.

In Isaiah 1:10, the prophet wrote that Israel was not better than Sodom and Gomorrah—they were vile and polluted in the eyes of the Lord. Why? “‘What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?’ says the Lord. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, the fat of fed cattle. I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts?’” (Isa. 1:11-12). The prophet told Israel that when, in their obedience to the Law, they brought their sacrifices to God in the temple, they were defiling His temple.

The prophet continued: “Bring your worthless offerings no longer.

⁹ Note that the verbs “desire” and “be enslaved” in Galatians 4:9, and the verb “observe” in Galatians 4:10 are in the present tense. The process is already underway for the Galatians; they had already begun to adopt some of the Mosaic practices. As such, they were going right back into slavery, or desiring to be enslaved.

Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me, I am very weary of them” (Isa. 1:13-14). This is very similar to Galatians 4:10—”You observe days and months and seasons and years.” Like the Jews, the Galatians were choosing to observe these things in hopes of securing righteousness before God. These elemental things of the Law do not bring about salvation, and as such, God is weary of these rituals.

The sacrifices, feasts, and observances are a form of paganism. The Jew thought that if he offered these sacrifices in obedience to the Law and did these good works in obedience to the Law that he would become righteous. In the same vein, the modern-day person thinks that if she goes to church, follows these routines, and does these good works, she’ll become righteous. Both of these follow the same pattern of thinking: good works and right acts will lead to righteousness. Both forms of religion are paganism.

What, then, is the solution to this paganism? Isaiah said, “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool”” (Isa. 1:18). What is needed? According to the prophet, it is the cleansing of the heart through faith in Christ. The message has not changed: salvation has always been by grace through faith.

Paul, knowing that the gospel message has not changed, expressed his concern for his readers: “I fear for you that perhaps I have labored over you in vain” (Gal. 4:11). A sense of despair in the heart of the Apostle is evident. When some of the Galatians started turning down a road that was incompatible with faith alone in Christ alone, he began to wonder if they ever understood the gospel and believed in Him.

The word for “labored” in Galatians 4:11 means to toil, to struggle, to work hard. Paul had poured his life into these people; he had worked hard in the ministry to see them come to Christ and disciple them. “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor”—same word used in Galatians 4:11—”striv-

ing”—from the Greek word *agenitzo*, (the word “agonize” stems from this word)—“according to His power which mightily works within me” (Col. 1:28-29).

For Paul, the service of the Lord is toil and struggle and agonizing work done in the power of the Holy Spirit that mightily worked in him. This is why he had such a serious concern for the Galatians. His whole purpose was to bring them the gospel so that they might believe in Christ. Now their actions were raising doubts and causing him to think that perhaps all of his hard work was for naught, that it was all done in vain. If they continued down this path toward thinking that they needed to submit themselves again to the Law, it would be like he never came—a prospect that was very frustrating for Paul.

To summarize this passage, it can be said that:

1. The unsaved have no personal knowledge of God—“when you did not know God” (verse 8). There may be an innate recognition that there is a god. People might go through some religious activities. But there is no personal knowledge of the true and living God.
2. The unsaved are enslaved to counterfeit gods—“you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods” (verse 8). Why do people partake in all forms of religious activity around the world? It is because they are enslaved to counterfeit gods.
3. Salvation is the work of God—“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God” (verse 9). The gospel could be preached as clearly and as powerfully as possible. People can be begged to come to Christ. Ultimately, however, only God can bring a person to salvation.
4. All good works done to secure the favor of God are a form of paganism (verses 9-10). All forms of religious activity—even noble activities such as going to church, giving money, and working hard—that try to secure God’s favor and His salvation are paganism.
5. Religious ritual is a cause of great concern—“I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain” (verse 11). They had experienced freedom in Christ, but were facing the danger of returning to the same religious activities that had enslaved them. When the

form of worship becomes more important than the object of worship,
concern should naturally follow.

CONCLUSION

Paul's Testimony: Nothing But the Gospel Brings Salvation

Having seen the problem that faced the Galatian believers—Judaizers enticing people to place themselves under the Law to be more fully saved—it is easy to see how this same problem ensnares people today. These people heard the gospel from none other than the Apostle Paul, yet they were prone to wander from the truth he taught. How much more is this the case today?

Churches maintain an evangelical emphasis on the importance of faith in Jesus Christ, but subtly transform the reasons why one should pursue such a faith. Rather than warning the unrepentant about the damnation awaiting their eternal soul if they should reject Christ, the gospel is presented as a means of finding personal fulfillment and satisfaction. This teaching leads to a wide variety of religious activity, for how else can people fill the void in their souls and feel good about themselves once they have “found Christ?”

But have they really found Christ? Their newfound church life and church activities would suggest so. But is this what they are basing their assurance of salvation on? Is the basis of their salvation a faith in Christ plus their church activities? Is this how they hope to gain God's favor and obtain His righteousness?

For many, unfortunately, this is the case. Like the Galatians before them, they are adding something to faith alone in Christ alone. A simple faith in Christ, so the thinking goes, cannot be enough; there must be something more to it. As was the case in Galatians, people want every-

thing God wants them to be and to have everything He wants them to have. The path the Galatians chose, however, was to not only believe in Christ but also to faithfully keep the Law.

The fact that Paul was writing to the same people he led to Christ made this choice all the more perplexing. This teaching was not what he had taught, and it certainly was not what he believed. For him, nothing but the gospel brings salvation. Adding anything else is anathema to him.

Paul's own personal testimony backs this claim. In 1 Timothy 1:12-17, he said:

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,

¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;

¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

¹⁶ Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul knew that Jesus Christ alone put him into service and entrusted him with the gospel. He strengthened, or enabled and empowered, him to serve. He kept this in mind because he knew that he was such a vile sinner. Every time in Scripture he repeated his testimony, he always mentioned how unique he was because of how sinful he was. He never lost sight of the grace of God in his life.

Paul was amazed that God would entrust him with the gospel, especially considering who he was before his salvation. He was “formally a

blasphemer, a persecutor, a violent aggressor” (verse 12), and yet he was shown mercy. He was the worst kind of person, the vilest of sinners. He spoke against Christ. He did all he could do to destroy the testimony of Christ. He was an arrogant bully who persecuted and killed people who followed Christ. Yet, in spite of this despicable background, God showed him mercy—both in saving him and in entrusting him with the gospel.

Forgiveness and salvation through faith in Christ is available for the worst of sinners. However, forgiveness is not available to even the mildest of sinners who take the knowledge of the truth and defile it, corrupt it, and sin against it (cf. Num. 15:22; Acts 3:14-19; Heb. 10:26).

For Paul, all he could talk about was mercy and grace. He was shown mercy (verse 13), which then enabled him to experience the abundant grace of God (verse 14). He talked about the abundance of his sin, but now he saw firsthand that the grace of God was even more abundant.

This grace of God brought with it faith and love (verse 14). His former life was characterized by unbelief and hatred. Now in Christ, his life was characterized by genuine faith and non-hypocritical love. Only faith alone in Christ alone—the crux of the gospel message—could have brought about such a radical transformation. A transformation that comes from the fact that Christ was now Lord of his life.

Paul’s trustworthy statement (verse 15)—a statement that deserves full acceptance and goes without saying—is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Christ came to deal with sin. The gospel cannot be presented without dealing with the issue of sin—Paul knew this which is why he emphasized it in his testimony. No one is ever genuinely saved who does not come to face the reality of their own sin and guilt.

Indeed, Christ left glory for the purpose of saving sinners. This is why coming to Christ is a humbling thing. A person must recognize he is a sinner, worthy of condemnation, and deserving hell. Having no hope or resources of his own, all he can do is cast himself on God’s mercy and believe on Him.

That is Paul’s testimony, hence the reason he wrote: “But God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). The overwhelming emphasis of Scripture is that peo-

ple are sinners. It's the emphasis of the whole Old Testament sacrificial system—because people are sinful, a substitute must be offered to pay the penalty. It is the emphasis of the Gospel as well.

Paul knew that he was the worst of sinners and was in need of a Savior. He knew that he could not do anything to make himself more acceptable before God. All he could do was cast himself on His mercy, ask for forgiveness, and place his faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross.

When Paul did this, his life was never the same. In fact, as he recalled this in his testimony, he broke out into spontaneous worship: “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (verse 17). What else can be said about a God like this? All he can do is declare His praise and bow down in adoration and worship.

Indeed, Paul's testimony is that nothing but the gospel brings salvation. Only Christ can deal with the issue of sin. Religious activity cannot. Of course, no one knows whether your life will feel better or not when you come to Christ. No one knows whether things will get easier or harder, or whether you'll get a better job or perhaps lose your job. No one knows whether you'll be healthier or contract cancer next week. All that is known is that when someone comes to Christ, they will be forgiven. Christ came into the world to save sinners—this is the Gospel, nothing more and nothing less.