

Galatians—Grace Above the Law
Our Freedom in Christ

Lesson 5—Galatians 3.15-4.7

Continuing from our last study...

Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insights and wisdom in understanding it. Then read through the entire passage two or three times.

Scripture Meditation/Memorization

One of the most fundamental and rewarding Christian disciplines that pays back in full spiritual dividends is Bible meditation/memorization. It is an absolutely fundamental in the formation of your spiritual development, spiritual walk and faith growth. In Psalm 1:1-2 (NLT), the Psalmist warrior, King David said,

*“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.
But they delight in the law of the Lord,
meditating on it day and night.”*

Use the suggested verse(s) to meditate on during the course of this week's study.

Memory Verses

“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.”—Galatians 3:24 (ESV)

“[6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”—Galatians 4:6-7 (ESV)

Galatians 3:15-22—*The Law and God’s Promise*

Paul anticipates the Judaizers argument that while Abraham and those before the Law was given were saved by faith, but after Moses received the Law in Sinai the basis for salvation changed. Paul makes the point that God’s promise or covenant never changes.

1. What do we learn about the covenant in the following verses in Galatians 3?
 - a. Verse 15 (its permanence?)

- b. Verse 16 (who or what is the central figure of the promise?)

- c. Verse 17 (the chronology—which came first and takes precedence?)

- d. Verse 18 (on what basis do we receive our inheritance?)

2. If it couldn’t bring about salvation, why was the law given?
 - a. Galatians 3:19 (this verse is easier to understand in the Amplified or New Living Translations).

b. Romans 3:19-20

c. Romans 7:7-13

3. Is the Law in opposition to God's promises (grace)? See Galatians 3:21-22.

Galatians 3:23-29—*Sons and Heirs*

J. Vernon McGee in commenting on this passage says the Law is like a mirror. When you look in the mirror you can see the smudge of dirt on your face which you wouldn't have noticed without the mirror. Yet beyond the mirror's ability to reveal the smudge it is helpless to remove it.

1. What is the purpose of the Law? See Galatians 3:24 for the clearest most concise answer in the New Testament.

2. The Judaizers argued that even after turning to Jesus for salvation we need to remain under the care of a tutor (that is under the Law). How does Paul respond to that in Galatians 3:25-29?

3. What is the role of the Law of Moses in the life of a believer in the 21st century?

4. One of the first things I noticed when I began attending small group Bible studies was the level playing field for all the members of our group. How is this in complete agreement with Galatians 3:28-29?

Cabbage Patch Kids

I awoke last night to find virtually every light on in the house except the one in my bedroom. Startled, my initial thought was that our home was being burglarized, but I discovered our youngest daughter up studying for her final exam in chemistry the next morning. It brought back lots of memories, mostly bad ones, of cramming for final exams while in school. Charles Schulz, creator of the cartoon Peanuts, once said, "As long as there are final exams there will always be prayer in public schools."¹ His comment, while humorous, shows the anxiety created by the final examination.

From an earthly perspective, we will all take a final exam; however, from a heavenly perspective it is more of an entrance examination. You have likely seen one or more of the endless jokes in which Saint Peter asks prospective heavenly

¹ http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/209672.Charles_M_Schulz?page=4

inhabitants questions to determine whether or not they are worthy of entrance into heaven. Once again in this week's passage of Scripture, Paul reminds us that our heavenly entrance exam will consist of one, and only one, question: "What did you do with My Son?" Expounding on the thought, God will ask, "When Jesus stood at the door of your heart and knocked, did you believe and ask Him to come into your life as Lord and Savior?"

Paul once again reminds the Galatians, in no uncertain terms, that on that day they won't be asked if they kept the Sabbath, Passover, or any of the other requirements of the Law. Reliance on self-righteousness and our works not only robs us of joy in the short term, but insults God and blocks the path to salvation. The writer of Hebrews says it well: "*How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*" (Hebrews 10:29, ESV).

God's disapproval of self-righteousness didn't start with this epistle; Isaiah wrote, "*And all our righteousness are like filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6. NKJV). Warren Wiersbe points out the danger of legalism creeping into our doctrine: "One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when in reality it leads the believer back into a second childhood of Christian experience."²

Paul's use of slavery in explaining our redemption would have been easy for anyone living in the first century to understand, as nearly 60% of the population were slaves. For a slave to have anyone pay their ransom and give them freedom would be an incredible gift, but to be ransomed and adopted into the family of their redeemer was an indescribable blessing. In Roman law, an adopted son had the full legal rights of any member of the family.

For years my wife and I have been teaching kindergarten Sunday school; it's a lot like doing men's study, only with smaller chairs. While chatting with the children as we do crafts, I am always so impressed that most of the kids want to be just like their father when they grow up. They also share many of the things they do to make their dads happy and proud. This is in marked contrast to the impact of fathers seen in Hollywood's sit-coms such as the inept Homer in *The Simpsons* or Archie Bunker in *All in the Family*, which claimed to be the first to show the family as it really existed. Fortunately our spiritual reality is anchored in the truth of God's Word and not in the fabrications of Hollywood. Because of the atoning

² Warren Wiersbe *Be Free* Chariot Victor Publishing Colorado Springs, 1979 pg. 129

sacrifice of Christ, those of us who accept Jesus as Savior can now cry out to God, “Abba, Father,” a term of intimate endearment. Just like the students in our Sunday school class, we should naturally love Him, emulate Him, and seek to please Him. It is because of this new relationship that external rules and regulations should no longer be necessary, or as St. Augustine said, “Love God and do what you please.”

Galatians 4:1-7—Adoption as Sons

Everyone in the audience could easily relate to Paul’s comparison of those under the Law with an heir who was under the age of adulthood. Greek, Jewish, and Roman cultures each had a rite of passage that marked the transition from childhood to adulthood. For Jews, the ceremony called a bar mitzvah today was held at age 12 and involved the youth uttering a public prayer announcing responsibility for his actions before man and God from that point onward. For the Romans and Greeks, the age varied anywhere from 13 to 18 years old and involved offering a childhood toy to the gods followed by assuming adult clothing (*toga virilis*). In all of these cultures, the minor was subject to the authority of their guardian (often a high-ranking slave) until reaching adulthood.

1. According to verses 1–3, the child, although potentially very wealthy, was in fact a slave until they reached maturity. Paul makes an analogy between a child under authority and the Galatians (Paul includes himself using the word we in verse 3). What comparisons can you draw between the two?

2. Verses 4 and 5 lay out God’s plan of salvation. What do you learn about the following?

- a. His timing? (For timing in the life of Jesus, see John 7:30 and for the timing of God’s plan see Daniel 9:25–27)

- b. His method? (Verse 4 and 5 describe the manner in how God’s plan came about)

c. His purpose? (See verse 5)

3. In verse 6, we see all three members of the Trinity present. According to this verse and Romans 8:14–16 what is the role of the Holy Spirit?

4. *Abba* is an Aramaic term of respect and endearment for one's father. Jesus used it Himself in addressing the Father in Mark 14:36. Looking at this passage and verse 7, what does it mean to you and your relationship with God to be able to address Him as *Abba, Father*?

5. *What's the difference between being justified and being adopted?³

6. *How should the new identity of a follower of Christ affect his or her battle with sin?⁴

³ Question taken from Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary—Galatians, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tenn., 2014

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- a. *Why should the doctrine of adoption inspire greater prayer and deeper worship?

Lesson 5 Summary/Take Away

If one of your friends at work or a neighbor were to ask you what you did on Tuesday, you would tell them you went to a Bible study. The next question would likely be, “What did you learn?” We often summarize an entire athletic contest or a movie in a few brief sentences and easily convey the essence of the event. Now apply these same skills to give a summary of the passage in a sentence or two. Then, in an additional sentence or two, describe what impact this passage will have on how you live.

Memory Verses

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Key Words/Phrases

Write out the definition of these key words. You can use a regular dictionary or go to one of the Greek sources listed in the Tool Box at the end of the study. You may also use a concordance to see where else and how the word is used in the Bible. *How would these phrases instruct or encourage us today?*

The Law Was Our Tutor (Galatians 3:24)

Baptized Into Christ (Galatians 3:27)

Abba, Father (Galatians 4:6)
