

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS - PART 4

Paul sees the terrible effect of religious teaching as being like a witch's spell being cast on the Galatian Christians. He remembers where they had started from. He had preached the cross of Christ to them but he had also illustrated that message, not by good living by the Law, but simply by the fact that someone with his murderous record could be forgiven and free. He asks them to think back. How had the Spirit come into their lives, as a reward for being good, or by faith which received Him, following their repentance? Why then would they not continue by faith in the Spirit to live in them? Why would they now think that, of themselves, they could keep the Law?(3:1-5)

The Jews regarded themselves as sons of Abraham. What was the basis of Abraham's standing before God, his own effort, or faith?(Gen.15:6) God had always planned that the whole world could be blessed on the same basis as Abraham was.(Gen.12:3) Thus those who are saved by faith are his spiritual sons.(3:6-9)

Paul's description of those who insisted on living the Christian life by the Law as accursed,(1:8,9) is not a matter of being nasty. It is simply the way the Law itself had already described them. The pass mark to live under the Law is 100%.(Deut.27:26) The Old Testament had also taught that the only way to receive 100% is by faith.(Hab.2:4) With the Law it is all or nothing.(Lev.18:5) We cannot have it both ways.(3:10-12)

But there is a way out for the failures, the cursed. The Law had hinted how this would happen. To hang on a tree was to be cursed.(Deut.21:23) Jesus did that for us on the cross,(I Pet.2:24) and by doing so He took our curse on Himself as our Redeemer. He paid the price to set us free and to make it possible for us to receive the Spirit, not as a prize for scoring 100% but by faith like Abraham.(3:13,14)

Even in human society we regard a contract as binding and unalterable except by the agreement of both parties. With God this is even more obvious. God's covenant with Abraham was to him and his 'seed'.(Gen.15:5) Paul points out that 'seed' is singular and can therefore only refer to Christ. All the blessing God promises, which can be received only by faith, is centred on Jesus Christ. 'For as many as are the promises of God, they find their 'yes' in Him.'(II Cor.1:20) To live by faith is to be an heir of Abraham, a beneficiary of the covenant God made to bless the world in His 'seed'. The Law given 430 years later could not invalidate that contract.(3:15-18)

If everything was agreed between God and Abraham, why then was the Law introduced? It was God-given through Moses not man-made. It was necessary to show man the extent of the problem of sin. Law and faith are not contradictory. The first is a help to appreciate the second.(3:19-22)

When we were children we needed teachers and tutors who in Paul's day were often educated slaves who took pleasure in exposing the ignorance and stupidity of their master's children, like some old-fashioned school teachers. The Law acts like them. Every time we read it our sin becomes obvious. The result is an awareness of our need of Christ. It makes all the more exciting the prospect of growing up in Christ to become a mature son, depending on Him in faith, not a child needing constant correction by the Law.(3:23-26)

As adult sons of God by faith there are some dramatic changes. No longer do we have to wear the school uniform of wayward children who fail to score 100%, but by faith we wear the righteousness of Christ as our clothing.(Eph.4:22-24) As adults the old divisions of denomination, race, social class or gender disappear. All those prejudices melt away in the marvellous oneness

that comes from being in Christ. We are free now to enjoy all that is promised to the heirs of Abraham. Why go back to the classroom?(3:27-29)

Before going on, review your titles from chapter three to see if you can improve on them. In chapter 4 Paul again illustrates, this time first from family life and then from one Old Testament story. My suggestions for dividing this chapter are as follows:- verses 1-7; 8-11; 12-20; 21-31.

Section 1 – (4:1-7)

Q.1 What picture does Paul use here to describe being first under the Law and then under grace? What is the condition of a young child? How does that correspond to our state under the Old Testament Law?

Q.2 How did the coming of Jesus set us free from that previous condition? What is our new condition? What are its characteristics? How can we tell which condition we are in?

Section 2 – (4:8-11)

Q.3 What even lower picture of our previous state does Paul now use? To what were non-Jews enslaved? And what about Jews living under the Old Testament Law? Did either way work?

Q.4 To what kind of slavery are the Christians to whom Paul is writing returning? Does this mean we should not observe Sunday or Easter? What is the real problem with such traditions? What is the alternative to living by such traditions? Why does Paul feel he might have wasted his time teaching the Galatians?

Section 3 – (4:12-20)

Q.5 What was Paul's state of health when he first arrived to preach the gospel in Galatia? Why might this have put them off his message? How did they respond to what he told them? Why was it that God had not healed the bodily illness of a Christian with as great a faith as Paul's? Rather than being put off by his appearance how did the Galatians receive him? What does all this have to do with Paul's point about living by faith not by the law?

Q.6 What by contrast had been the approach to the Galatians made by those who preached a false gospel of law? What outward appearance do you suppose they presented? What is the real motive of the false teachers beneath their impressive outside? What does this tell us about how our outward appearance should be? Is it important how we look when we preach or witness?

Q.7 What strange illustration does Paul use in verse 19? What possible comparison could there be between Paul's ministry and the lady he refers to? How does this picture beautifully explain the real answer to those who think it is necessary to have laws to make young Christians behave properly?

Section 4 – (4:21-31)

Q.8 What illustration does Paul use from the life of Abraham? Compare Genesis 16 and 21 and relate the two stories to the choice between Law and grace. How did the consequence of each birth underline the contrast between the two ways of life?

Q.9 To what two mountains and two cities are the two women now compared? Explain the comparisons? Again what real life differences in the two approaches to life are brought out by these pictures?

Q.10 Look up the source of the quotation in verse 27. What is its Old Testament context? How does the context explain the reason for Paul's use of this reference? Once again, what does this have to do with the way we live the Christian life?

Q.11 What warning is there in verse 29 about what we should expect from those who insist on living by the Law? What according to the next verse should be our response? Does this mean we should give legalists a hard time? What then does it mean?