Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

Chapters 3-6

### Introductory Notes:

**Overview of Galatians 3:1-5:1:**

The line of argument in these chapters is complex, dense, and sometimes difficult to follow. The following brief summary provides a preview and overview of the discussion.

Paul begins with an appeal to the Galatians’ experience of the Spirit (3:1-5) and then turns to a complicated exegetical argument (3:6-29), seeking to show that scripture defines “Abraham’s offspring” in a way very different from what the Missionaries have claimed. In 4:1-11, Pau returns to the experiential argument, asserting that the experience of the Spirit confirms his interpretation of Scripture: The “fullness of time” has come, and the Galatians are God’s children apart from any observance of the Torah. Their failure to recognize this is leading them to consider turning back the eschatological clock and returning to a state of slavery (4:8-11). The next section (4:12-20) is a brief interlude in which Paul reminds the Galatians of their past affection for him and urges them not to be swayed into infidelity by the blandishments of the Missionaries. Finally, Paul concludes his counterarguments by returning to the Abraham story and proposing a provocative interpretation of the figures of Hagar and Sarah as symbols for two different ecclesial communities characterized by slavery and freedom (4:21-31). The argument builds to a climax in 5:1 with Paul’s urgent appeal to the Galatians: “Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

paidagwgo.j

NAS **Galatians 3:24** Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.

NIV **Galatians 3:24** So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

NRS **Galatians 3:24** Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

“The paidagogos (lit. “child leader”) was a slave in the Greco-Roman household who supervised and guarded children. His responsibility was to walk them to and from school, to see that they behaved properly and stayed out of harm’s way. The paidagogos, however, was not a member of the family, and when the child grew to a certain age, his services were no longer required. The Law was like that for Israel, Paul Proposes. It had a certain necessary role in confining, guarding, and disciplining God’s people during the interval between Moses and Christ, but that interval has now come to an end. This metaphor allows Paul to affirm that the Law once had a constructive role to play in God’s overall plan, while at the same time insisting that its role is now at an end.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Paul's use of Scripture in Galatians 3:6-18 and 4:21-31.**

Paul repeatedly turns to Scripture for proof that justification comes through the hearing of the promise by faith and not by the doing of the law. He uses the example of Abraham to show that Abraham also believed the promise before receiving the law. He uses Old Testament references to cursing and hanging on a tree to find their fulfillment in Christ's death on the cross. He points to the singular "offspring" of Abraham as a sign of its fulfillment in the one man Christ. Finally, in an argument almost unique in the New Testament, he resorts to an elaborate allegory about Sarah and Hagar and their two children, one born according to the promise and freedom, the other born according to flesh and slavery. Most of these intricate arguments will seem tricky, forced, or even unsatisfying to the contemporary readers. The key is to note that they follow common practices of biblical interpretation in the ancient world, but more important, that in all of them Paul is reading from his conclusion. They rest on the conviction that the children of Abraham are those who in Christ are born according the promise of the Spirit and not according to the flesh and the law.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Bible Study:

**Read Galatians 3:1-5**

In this passage Paul lifts up the experience of the Holy Spirit that comes in faith not by completing the works of the law as evidence that Paul’s interpretation of salvation is correct.

Discuss the Holy Spirit. What do you know about the Holy Spirit? How do you know if you are experiencing the Holy Spirit?

**Read Galatians 3:6-4:11**

Is it appropriate for Paul to say that Jesus is a “curse”? (v13) What does he mean in this argument?

Paul makes an argument that the Law is not longer necessary. (see Paidagogos above)

- What do you see as the purpose of God’s laws?

- Follow Paul’s argument in this section – what role does Abraham play?

-What distinctions can be made among us?

-What is our relationship to Abraham (v29)?

-What might it look like for people who have been freed by Christ to fall back into slavery?

-Why does Paul feel that his efforts with the Galatians may have been wasted? (4:11)

**Read Galatians 5:1-6:10**

Martin Luther used Paul’s writing here & from Romans to develop his argument in “Freedom of a Christian”:

**A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.**

Discuss the purpose of freedom according to what you have read.

Paul contrasts the works of the flesh vs the works of the Holy Spirit as a way to explain what he means in 5:13.

-What are the fruits of the Spirit as they are listed here?

-Are Galatians 6:2 and Galatians 6:5 in conflict?

“ The logic of Galatians 6:1-5 runs as follows:

(1-2) In the present time we are called to help and support one another in the church through mutual counsel and admonition; by bearing each other’s burdens, in this way we embody Christ’s reconfigured Law.

(3-4) In correcting one another, we must exercise appropriate humility and scrutinize our own work,

(5) for at the last judgment each of us must bear our own load; that is, we will be called to account not just by one another, but by God.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

6:9-10 – How do YOU seek to live for the good of all?

1. Hayes, Richard B. New Interpreters Bible Commentary XI, pg 249 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid pg 269 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Boyce, James A. www.enterthebible.org [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hayes, Richard B. New Interpreters Bible Commentary XI, pg 335 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)