

# Gal. 2:15 – 4:11

By Ashby L. Camp

Copyright © 2006 by Ashby L. Camp. All rights reserved.

## IV. Flaw in Judaizers' Gospel: Law Cannot Justify (2:15-21)

### A. That's why *Jews* have come to Christ for justification

1. Paul and other "natural" Jews who possessed the law came to Christ for righteousness because righteousness is in Christ, not in the law. If the law was the means of righteousness, they would have been made righteous without Christ because they had the law.

2. Paul simply asserts, without explanation, that no one, Jew or Gentile, will be made righteous by works of the law. The reason becomes clear later in Galatians and in other letters: the requirements of the law, the prescriptions and prohibitions, will not justify anyone because no one fully performs them.

### B. Response to charge this makes Christ a servant of sin

1. But if while seeking to be made righteous in Christ, we also (like the Gentiles) were found (by the circumcision group - see, Lk. 23:2; Acts 24:5 for this use of "found") to be "sinners" (violating food regulations by eating as and with Gentiles, like Peter), does that mean Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!

2. For the sinning would come if I obeyed the law (by segregating from Gentiles) after having already recognized its inapplicability (by eating with them). For I tore down the barrier between Jew and Gentile by dying to the law, which freed me from its demands (Rom. 7:1-4; Eph. 2:11-21).

### C. Contrary view renders Christ's death meaningless

1. The implicit assumption in 2:21 is that salvation by means of the law is achieved through works and is thus incompatible with salvation by means of grace which is received through faith (Gal. 3:11-12; Rom. 4:1-8, 11:5-6). It's an either/or proposition.

2. Therefore, to insist that Gentile Christians come under the law in order to be saved is to make the law the means of justification, and to do that is to nullify God's grace and render Christ's death meaningless.

## V. Foolishness of Their Defection to Judaizers' Gospel (3:1 - 4:11)

### A. Received Spirit by accepting his gospel (3:1-5)

1. Paul calls them foolish for having been lured from his gospel by the Judaizers. He is so astounded that they fell for it, he asks who "bewitched" them, meaning who confused their minds. It's like someone hypnotized them into believing something that was patently false.

2. They knew they had received the Spirit, complete with miracles, when they accepted Paul's gospel, before they began listening to the Judaizers. That should tell them that the gospel is the way to go, that it's God's path. We know we have received the Spirit by God's word and experience (interpreted by his word).

3. Paul asks if they are so foolish that, having begun their Christian lives with the Spirit, they are seeking the completion or perfection of those lives on the lower plane of the flesh, that is, by mere human effort (which is how he saw works of law).

4. It is not clear what the Galatians suffered, but that suffering was in vain if they continued in the Judaizers' doctrine. As Paul says in 5:2-4, those seeking to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ.

#### B. Abraham's example of faith (3:6-9)

1. Abraham's righteousness was by faith, so those of faith are sons of Abraham. Works of law do not enter the picture. This may have been a correction of some teaching of the Judaizers.

2. In fact, God revealed in advance that this sonship by faith would also extend to Gentiles when he declared to Abraham, "All nations will be blessed in you."

#### C. Reliance on law yields a curse (3:10-14)

1. Those who rely on the law for righteousness are under a curse because they do not continue to do everything written in the law as required.

2. Scripture makes clear that no one will be justified by law because it says "The righteous man shall live by faith" and the law is not based on faith; rather, it is based on performance: "The man who does these things will live by them."

3. Paul probably quotes a stock Jewish Christian confession when he says Christ redeemed the Jews ("us") from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, the implication being that Christ cannot properly be used to bring Gentiles under the law. Having employed this stock confession, Paul focuses in v. 14 on the reference to Christ's death rather than on the reference to Jewish redemption from curse of the law. The death that redeemed the Jews from the curse was died in order to extend the blessing of Abraham, which is by faith (vv. 7-9), to the Gentiles; it was died so that all nations, Jew and Gentile ("we"), might receive the promise of the Spirit through

faith. It is inconsistent with this purpose to make the law an essential part of salvation, because the law is not based on faith (vv. 11-12).

#### D. Promise to Abraham not affected by giving of law (3:15-18)

1. God promised blessings to Abraham and to his seed. Rather than referring to all of Abraham's physical descendants, Paul explains that "seed" referred specifically to Christ. Thus, the beneficiaries of the promise are those who are Abraham's descendants in faith (not flesh) through Christ's line, i.e. Christians.

2. This promise was made and ratified 430 years before the law was given to Moses.

3. Just as a human will cannot be altered after it has been ratified (made irrevocable in some sense, presumably by death), neither can God's ratified promise be altered by the subsequent introduction of the law. Thus, the claim that obedience to the law is essential to receive the previously promised inheritance is false.

#### E. Giving of law is consistent with Paul's gospel (3:19-29)

##### 1. Why given (3:19-20)

a. Paul's comments about the law would raise the question of why God had given it. His answer is simply that the law was added (after the promise) "for the sake of the transgressions."

(1) This is not as clear as we would like because Paul was not writing a theological treatise on the reason for the law. His immediate concern was to deny that the law was given for salvation, and his statement is adequate for that purpose.

(2) Judging from Romans, he probably means that the law was added to convert their wrong conduct (that which violated the law of the sound heart - Rom. 2:14-15) into "transgressions," i.e., the conscious disobeying of specific commandments (Rom. 4:15; like Adam - Rom. 5:14), so that they would not be deceived about their sin (Rom. 3:20, 7:7). It may also have served to incite new transgressions for the same purpose (Rom. 5:20).

b. The law not only was added after the promise but was intended to be in effect only until the coming of Christ (Jesus being the seed to whom the inheritance has been promised - Gal. 3:16). This temporality implies that the law is inferior to the promise.

c. The law was ordained through angels by means of a mediator.

(1) There are only hints in the O.T. of an angelic role in the giving of the law (Deut. 33:2; Ps. 68:17), but it is mentioned in nonbiblical Jewish writings and at several

places in the N.T. (Acts 7:38, 53; Heb. 2:2). Paul probably mentions this to again suggest the inferiority of the law to the promise; the promise was delivered directly by God to Abraham.

(2) The mediator of the law was Moses. This title was commonly assigned to him in the Judaism of Paul's day. Paul's point seems to be that that which comes from God through a third-party mediator (the law) is inferior to that which comes directly from God (the promise) because such a mediator does not represent only God; he represents more than one, but God is only one. (This criticism would not apply to Christ's mediatorial role because he is God.)

## 2. Not opposed to the promise (3:21-22)

a. Having stated or suggested that the law and the promise are mutually exclusive (3:18), that the law produces transgressions, and that the law is inferior (3:19-20), Paul anticipates that some will argue that he is claiming that the law of God is opposed to the promise of God. He flatly rejects that conclusion.

b. The law would only be opposed to the promise if a law had been given that was able to impart life. In that case, justification would have been based on the law and not on the promise (as he said in 3:18).

c. But God's law is not able to impart life because the requirements of Scripture, such as Deut. 27:26 referred to in Gal. 3:10, brought all people under sin and, consequently, under the curse. In other words, the law does not impart life because it is not completely obeyed (see, Rom. 8:2-3).

d. This fact preserves the harmony of God's law and God's promise as presented by Paul.

## 3. Custodial function until Christ (3:23-25)

a. The law served a temporary function. They were in its custody, bound by its requirements, only until Christ was revealed.

b. During this time the law served as their paidago, „goÃs.

(1) A paidago, „goÃs was usually a slave who had charge over one or more of the minor sons in the family. He was not a formal teacher but a trainer and disciplinarian. He reared the child according to the directives of the father.

(2) The law was analogous to this function in that it controlled or supervised their behavior during their minority, during the period before Christ was revealed. The ultimate objective of that supervision was that they be justified by faith in Christ. The law served that objective by preparing them for Christ in many ways (knowledge of sin, condemnation of sin, holiness of God, need for a sacrifice, etc.).

4. Since Christ, only faith in him has salvation relevance (3:26-29)

a. With the coming of Christ, all people relate equally to God through faith in him. All who are in Christ are covered by the same blood; they are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.

b. The clear implication is that the Judaizers' attempt to maintain the Jew-Gentile distinction among those who have put their faith in Christ is bogus.

c. This does not rule out differing obligations and responsibilities among Christians. For instance, slaves must still serve their masters and women are forbidden to preach in the assembly. It "just" means that none of these differences affects one's standing before God (contrary to the Judaizers' position).

d. Notice the close connection between "faith in Christ Jesus" in v. 26 and "baptized into Christ Jesus" in v. 27. The reason they are sons of God through faith in Christ is that they clothed themselves with Christ by being baptized into him.

F. Submitting to law is a return to slavery (4:1-11)

1. Christ freed them from their former enslavement under the "elements of the world" (4:1-7)

a. Having stated that all who are in Christ are heirs, Paul analogizes the experience of these heavenly heirs to the experience of earthly heirs.

b. Though an heir owns the entire estate, during the period of his minority he is like a slave in that he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. Jewish and Gentile Christians, the heirs, were like this in that they were in slavery under the *stoicheia tou kosmou* (*lit.* elements of the world) until the time set by God, i.e., until the coming of Christ.

(1) The basic point seems simple enough: Jews and Gentiles were in slavery under their respective cultic requirements, which for Jews was the law, or under the spiritual powers that enforced those requirements or both. Jesus came at the time set by the Father so that they, Jew and Gentile, might receive full sonship rights, i.e., be freed from their slavery. This has occurred, as evidenced by their receiving the Spirit by whom they cry "Abba, Father."

(2) The precise role of vv. 4-5 in this is less clear.

(a) Vv. 4-5 possibly are another stock Jewish Christian confession (see, Longenecker, 166-72). If so, its sole referent is Jews. The "we" of v. 5b is then construed to include Gentiles in v. 6.

(b) If vv. 4-5 are not a pre-existing Jewish Christian confession, then v. 5a ("ones under the law") is a reference to Jews and v. 5b ("we") is a reference to the Gentile Christians of Galatia (with whom Paul is identifying). The idea is that, at the time set by God, he sent Jesus to redeem those under law (Jews) and also to adopt the Gentiles. This follows Paul's sequence of "Jew first and then Gentile" (Rom. 1:16, 11:17-24; see also, Lk. 24:46).

2. How can they return to slavery by accepting the Judaizers' gospel? (4:8-11)

a. Gentile slavery under the "elements of the world" was distinct from that of the Jew in that it involved pagan deities, which are not really gods at all (perhaps demons - see, 1 Cor. 10:18-22)(4:8).

b. Yet, for a Gentile Christian to submit to the law is for him to return in principle to his former enslavement. The law, rendered weak and beggarly (outdated) by the coming of Christ, has points in common with the pagan cultic requirements that formerly enslaved them, particularly the observance of days, months, seasons, and years. Having been freed by becoming Christians, by having been known by God, how can they possibly return to that slavery by submitting to the law? (4:9-10)

c. Paul is concerned for their spiritual welfare, that they will be devoured by the heresy (4:11; see, 5:3-4).