

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON FIFTY-THREE)

“THE FULNESS OF TIME”

GALATIANS 4:4-5

(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

*4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son,
born of woman, born under the law,*

*5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might
receive adoption as sons.*

In the first 3 verses of chapter 4, Paul expands on his analogy in verses 24-26 of the previous chapter, of a child's coming of age. He contrasts the lives of the believers in Galatia before they were saved, with their lives after they were saved. He compares them, before they were saved to children and servants, and to adults and sons after they were saved. Both his Jewish and Gentile readers would have understood this imagery, since the Jews, Greeks, and Romans all had ceremonies to mark a child's coming of age.

In verses 1 and 2, he writes,

*1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a
slave, though he is the owner of everything.*

*2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his
father.*

In order to illustrate the spiritual immaturity of those who live under the Mosaic Law, or any other system of rule keeping for that matter, Paul informs the Galatian believers of certain characteristics of an heir as a minor, in contrast with an adult. He explains that even though the heir may be the owner of an entire estate by virtue of his birthright, as a child, he is nevertheless in a subservient condition in that he enjoys no freedom and can make no decisions. In fact the heir, as a child, is under guardians and managers, “*until the date set by his father.*”

The word “*until*” is time sensitive. It specifies that something happens, or is put in place until an appointed time. When the appointed time arrives there is a cessation of whatever was happening, or was put in place during the period before the appointed time. In this context, what ceases is the subjection of the child to the guardians and managers.

In verse 3, he writes, “*In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*” The Greek word translated “*children*” is used figuratively to refer to a person who lacks experience, is untried, ignorant or simple-minded. The word refers to an immature person, intellectually and morally.

The Greek word translated “*enslaved*” is in the perfect tense which indicates that this is the continuous state of every human being in Adam, before salvation places them “in Christ,” as a result of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In short, all persons before they are saved, are in a continuous state of slavery to the elementary principles of the world.

The phrase, “*elementary principles*” is the translation of a Greek word which describes something orderly in arrangement. In most of its uses, it denotes an elementary or fundamental principle in a subject or discipline. It refers to the first principles of something, for example, the basics or fundamentals of Christianity. The “*elementary principles of the world*” probably refers here to the first principles of non-Christian humanity; in the case of the Jew, it is a reference to the symbolic and ceremonial character of Judaism and its legal enactments, and in the case

of the Gentiles, it is a reference to the ceremonial and ritualistic observances of the pagan religions.

In verses **4** and **5**, Paul writes,

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Brothers and sisters, it is important for us to understand that God is sovereign over every event in time and eternity. When the “*fullness of time*” came, it was the time which had been predetermined by the will of God the Father from eternity past. Jesus Christ came the first time in the fullness of time, and He will return in the fullness of time, not a moment before or a moment after!

Commenting on verse **4**, **Warren Wiersbe**, wrote the following:

“The expression ‘*the fullness of the time*’...refers to that time when the world was providentially ready for the birth of the Saviour. Historians tell us that the Roman world was in great expectation, waiting for a Deliverer, at the time when Jesus was born. The old religions were dying, the old philosophies were empty and powerless to change men’s lives. Strange new mystery religions were invading the empire. Religious bankruptcy and spiritual hunger were everywhere. God was preparing the world for the arrival of His Son.

From the historical point of view, the Roman Empire itself helped prepare the world for the birth of the Saviour. Roads connected city with city, and all cities ultimately with Rome. Roman laws protected the rights of citizens, and Roman soldiers guarded the peace. Thanks to both the Greek and Roman conquests, Latin and Greek were known across the empire. Christ’s birth at Bethlehem was not an accident, it

was an appointment: Jesus came in 'the fullness of the time.' (And, it is worth noting, that He will come again when the time is ready.)"

The Greek word translated "fullness" is **pléróma**: (**play'-ro-mah**), which describes a full measure or abundance with emphasis upon completeness. The idea is of that which is fulfilled or is completed without any gap. The phrase, "the fullness of time" is an idiom for the totality of a period of time, with the implication of proper completion. Paul uses the word here to refer to the moment which completed the period of time designated by God that should elapse before the incarnation of the Son of God. When that moment arrived, "God sent forth His Son."

There was a remnant of Jews who were anticipating the coming of Messiah. We have evidence of this in **Luke 2:25-38**:

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law,

28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

29 "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation

31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed

35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,

37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Sadly however, the vast majority of the Jews did not recognize the “fullness of time,” for in **Luke 19:41-44**, we read the following:

41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,

42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side

44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Paul says, “*God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.*” The words “*sent forth*” are a translation of the Greek word **exapostelló**: (**ex-ap-os-tel’-lo**), which properly means, “to send away from oneself.” **Kenneth Wuest** explains that,

“The word **apostello** refers to the act of one who sends another with a commission to do something, the person sent being given credentials. Our word apostle comes from it. The prefixed preposition **apo** means from, off. This means that the person sent is to represent the sender. He is his ambassador...But not only was our Lord sent **off** from the presence of the Father, but as the other prefixed preposition **ex** signifies, He was sent **out** from His presence.”

Jesus proceeded out from God Himself. God sent Jesus with full authority on the mission of redemption. God intervened in the “*fullness of time,*” by sending His Son so that we might become joint heirs with Him and be set free from the Law. This statement clearly implies that Paul believed in the preexistence of Christ, for how could He be sent forth out of the Father’s presence if He did not preexist with the Father as God?

In **Isaiah 48:16** we read, “*Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.*” And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.”

In **John 6:32-42**, Jesus speaks very clearly about the One Who sent Him and where He was sent from:

32 Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

34 They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

In chapter **17**, in His prayer to His Father He says,

3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

8 For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Our Lord was sent from God and He was “born of a woman.” The deity of Christ is referred to in the words, “*God sent forth his Son,*” while the phrase, “*born of woman,*” is a clear reference to His humanity. Not only was He sent forth from Heaven, but He became incarnate in the human race through the virgin birth. Not only did He become incarnate, but He was born “*under the law.*” Our Lord was born and lived His life previous to His death on the Cross, under the Mosaic Law. He was subject to the Jewish legal economy just as any Jew was subject to it.

Pastor **Tim Keller** of “**Redeemer Presbyterian Church**” in Manhattan rightly observed that Christianity is unique among all religions for it alone is about God’s pursuit of sinners to draw them to Himself. In every other religious system, people pursue their god, hoping that through good behaviour, the diligent practice of rituals, good works, or other efforts they will be accepted by the god they pursue.

Why did God the Father send forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law? He did so, “*to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*” The Greek word translated “*redeem*” is **exagorazó**: (**ex-ag-or-ad’-zo**), which means, “to redeem i.e. by payment of a price to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off.” It is estimated that there were about 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, and persons could purchase slaves in any Roman city, either to keep for themselves, or to set them free. Jesus came to do both. He came to redeem us **for** Himself and to deliver us **from** the bondage of sin, Satan and the Law. He did not purchase us to make us slaves, but to make us sons! Under Law we were merely **children**, but under grace, we are **sons** of God with an adult standing in God’s family.

The implication of us being “*under the Law*” was also of us being under the curse. Like all persons, Jesus was obligated to obey God’s law. Unlike every other person, however, He obeyed the Law perfectly. But even though He kept the Law perfectly, He was crushed by God the Father on the Cross of Calvary. Why? For our sakes.

In **Galatians 3:13**, Paul writes, “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”*”

Now His perfect obedience is credited to us, and thus, God the Father regards us as having kept the Law perfectly in Christ!

In **2 Corinthians 5:21** we read, “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*”

Kenneth Wuest explains that,

“The Lord Jesus was born under the law, lived under the law, and died under the penalty of the law which we broke, and in paying our penalty, He delivered us from any claims which the law had against us. He died under law, and in His resurrection, was raised into a realm where law as a legalistic system does not exist. This He did, in order that He might not only deliver us from the law but also raise believers with Himself into a realm where law does not operate. Instead therefore of being children... under law, we became adult sons...under grace. We received the adoption of sons. This expression in the *Greek* is literally, ‘in order that we might receive the adult son-placing.’ We could paraphrase it ‘in order that we might be placed as adult sons.’ Thus, we have presented to us the status of a person under grace as compared to that of a person under law. The latter is in his minority, the former in his majority, the latter treated like a minor, the former like an adult.”