

Commentary on Galatians 3:15-18; 4:1-7

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, February 19, 2012

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, February 19, 2012**, is from **Galatians 3:15-18; 4:1-7**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse by verse **International Bible Lesson Commentary** below. The **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, which are also available on the **Bible Lesson Forum**, will aid teachers in class preparation and in conducting class discussion. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive **International Bible Lessons Commentary Index**. The weekly **International Bible Lesson** is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at **<http://InternationalBibleLessons.org>** and in **The Oklahoman** newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Galatians 3:15-18

(Galatians 3:15) Brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life: once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it.

Once again, Paul addresses those in Galatia as members of the Christian family — they all share the same Father God and the same Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. Our heavenly Father has made a covenant or “will” with respect to those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior because they are His children. Our heavenly Father ratified this covenant or “will” so no one can change or cancel it. Our Father has promised us an inheritance as His children that no one can add anything to or change.

(Galatians 3:16) Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, “And to offsprings,” as of many; but it says, “And to your offspring,” that is, to one person, who is Christ.

God the Father made promises to Abraham and to one of his descendants, Jesus the Messiah. God promised them both that many would be blessed through them both. First, Abraham's descendants would be so numerous that he would not be able to count them, just as he could not count the number of stars in the sky, and they would also possess the land God promised. Second, through faith in Jesus Christ, His descendants would be saved, justified, sanctified, and blessed spiritually; they would receive the gifts of eternal life in heaven and eternal life on the new earth. These gifts and others would be part of the inheritance of God's children. Jesus' spiritual descendants would be more than any human being could count.

(Galatians 3:17) My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

To Abraham, God promised blessings that Abraham believed, and God told Abraham that believing God and trusting in His promises was the way to live (he lived by faith). Later, in the time of Moses, God created a government with laws and leaders so those who had formerly served Pharaoh as slaves could learn how to live according to the laws of God rather than live fearfully under the capricious commands of a despotic ruler. God announced the rewards for obeying His laws, the punishments for disobedience, and God created a system of sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins that pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of His Son, the Messiah. When God created this government for the benefit of His people; to teach them the moral law of God (a law of love suited to their nature and relations as created by God in His image), God did not cancel or fulfill the promises He had made to Abraham and his offspring, Jesus Christ, Who would fulfill the law of God.

(Galatians 3:18) For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

Neither Jews nor Gentiles will receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life through obeying the government and laws that God established through Moses. The inheritance God promised will be given to those who believe God and the promises He made to bless them through believing and acting as Abraham acted, who acted with faith in God by believing God's promises.

Galatians 4:1-7

(Galatians 4:1) My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property;

Paul continues his example by illustrating the implications of a person's will with respect to a minor child (which he began in Galatians 3:15). A slave is told what to do and what he can and cannot do, and he must obey or be punished. A slave has no freedoms or independence. Paul argues that a "minor child" (one not old enough to make responsible decisions for himself, or one not recognized as an adult prepared to manage his property or inheritance) will someday take actual possession of the property of his deceased father (as such, he is the owner of his deceased father's property, but not its manager, to do with as he likes). Until the minor child is old enough to manage his property (hopefully wisely), he must follow the rules of his guardians, and be rewarded or punished based on his compliance.

(Galatians 4:2) but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father.

A will respecting a minor child will take effect when his father (or his parents) has died. The will of his father may state that he is the owner of his deceased father's property, but also set certain restrictions. The father's will may state that his child will remain under the authority of guardians or trustees and not come into possession of his property until the minor child is of a certain age or has fulfilled certain requirements set by the father (for example, has completed school or shown responsibility by completing other tasks). The father hopes and plans for his child to mature to the point that he does not need the laws of guardians and trustees, but has gained the wisdom to do what is right and best for all concerned with the property he has inherited.

(Galatians 4:3) So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world.

While we were minors (before believing in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and being freed by Him), as a result of our sins, we were enslaved to "the elemental spirits of the world." God did not enslave us; by disobeying, we enslaved ourselves to habitually repeating the same and even worse sins. The laws of God would help us learn right from wrong and live while enslaved, but the laws of God could not free us from our slavery to sin and the demonic powers that tempted us, nor could the laws of God empower or enable us to live wisely and rightly with consistency. Rather, the laws of God showed us that we needed more than laws, we also needed a Savior to save us from slavery to sin and the elemental spirits. We needed freedom from slavery, but we also we needed the Holy Spirit of God within us to help us use our freedom wisely and rightly.

(Galatians 4:4) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

God decided the right time to send the offspring, Jesus the Messiah, that He had promised to send. God sent the Messiah, born of the virgin Mary, as His offspring in the line of Abraham and David (their offspring). He sent Jesus when He decided that believers in Jesus Christ would no longer need the guardians of the rules of Moses (the regulations, the festivals, the sacrifices of Moses' government, which was subservient to Roman rule). By believing in Jesus, even though under Roman rule, His children could live wisely and love God and others as God their Father intended all people to live.

(Galatians 4:5) in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

Jesus came and fulfilled the law of Moses under which He was born. He obeyed the law of God perfectly. He became the perfect sacrifice (that the sacrifices God instituted through Moses pointed toward). He made the supreme sacrifice for our sins. He died a substitutionary death for us. He suffered and died in our place to redeem believers and save us from the eternal consequences our disobedience deserves. He rose again from the dead and freed us from our slavery to the

elemental spirits of the world that tempt us to sin. By His death and resurrection, He has adopted believers as children of God; we are adopted into God's family and will receive an inheritance as His children.

(Galatians 4:6) And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God; believers in Him are adopted children of God. When we believe God and believe in Jesus, when we believe God the Father sent Jesus as He promised to accomplish His blessed will for us, then we become adopted children of God our heavenly Father and we receive an inheritance as His children. In addition to forgiveness and cleansing from sin, receiving the Holy Spirit into our hearts is the first part of the inheritance that God gives us as His children. The Holy Spirit is similar to a down payment that assures us of our future inheritance. God graciously sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts as a consequence of our believing in Jesus as the Messiah, our Lord and Savior. He is a gift and not a possession we have earned because we have obeyed the laws of God (because we have not obeyed the laws of God; we have disobeyed them). The Holy Spirit inspires us to call upon God as our heavenly "Abba! (Daddy) Father!" Those filled with the Holy Spirit call God their "Father," and this is a sign they are adopted children of God.

(Galatians 4:7) So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Now, as a result of believing God, the Holy Spirit in our hearts frees us from slavery to sin and the elemental spirits of the world. We now have the power of God within us to overcome temptations and take the way of escape that Jesus shows us when we are tempted. We have the power of God to say "NO!" to sin and temptation and to do what we know to be the right and loving thing in every situation. We now have the Spirit of God to lead us according to the Word of God, the Bible, that the Holy Spirit also helps us interpret. We no longer need the rules of Moses' government in order to obey God's moral law (to love God and others). We now love God and others in the power of the Holy Spirit, including Jews and Gentiles within the circle of God's love.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How does God adopt a child into His family? How can we be adopted into the family of God?
2. What are some of the gifts a child of God will inherit from their heavenly Father?
3. Give some reasons why the inheritance of God's children cannot come to them from the law?

4. Why is being under the law similar to being a minor child under a guardian or trustee?

5. In these verses, what major blessing or gift does Paul say the Spirit of God will bring to believers when He comes into their hearts? Why is this gift of the Holy Spirit so meaningful and valuable?

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