

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## GALATIANS 3-4

*Have you ever taken a spin class? You go to the gym and jump on an exercise bike. Then you watch a video that creates the illusion you're rolling along a rocky coastline, or through a New England countryside.*

When you go uphill, you shift into a higher gear to create resistance. It's called "pushing..." When you go downhill you shift into a low gear to reduce resistance. It's called "spinning..." "Pushing" works the legs. "Spinning" keeps up the cardio. It's a good work-out.

But here's what you learn about riding a bike - *It's all about shifting gears! And so is the Christian life...*

Under the Law you perform in high gear - there's pressure - you're "pushing" - working to be righteous.

But a Christian shifts into **the grace gear**. The Christian life is "spinning." The pressure to push is off.

Jesus pushed up a hill called Calvary. On the cross He *paid the price and did the work*. Now we leave Calvary downhill. Calvary provides its own momentum. We trust Jesus! Now it's all about *cardio*, keeping our heart toward Him. Both Law and Grace take effort, but of a different sort. *Law is a grind. Grace is a breeze.*

And the key to success, is shifting gears - *from Law to Grace - from works to faith - from the flesh to the Spirit*. And that's what Paul discusses in Galatians 3-4.

We begin on an ominous note, verse 1, "**O foolish Galatians!**" The Greek word translated "**foolish**" means, "**empty headed**" - literally, *air-heads or space cadets*.

Here're a few other translations of verse 1 - the NEB, "**You stupid Galatians.**" The AV puts it, "**O you poor and silly and thoughtless and unreflecting and senseless Galatians.**" *The Amplified always lives up to its name.*

My favorite rendering is the Philips translation, "**You dear idiots...**" This was not *naivety*, but *stupidity*.

Paul continues, "**Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?**"

This was not a situation where the Galatians had been improperly taught. The sufficiency of the cross was "**clearly portrayed.**" Faith in Jesus is all they needed to be right with God - *so why the confusion?*

Paul asks, "*who has bewitched you?*" It's as if the legalists had come in and cast some kind of spell...

Realize, legalism is seductive. It strikes a chord in our fallen thinking. Everything around us says it's our performance that matters. We hear it from parents, and teachers, and coaches, and bosses. "*Just do it*" is the Nike slogan - *this is certainly the way of the world...*

The whole notion that we can do something to earn God's favor plays to our pride. It can "*bewitch*" us!

Christianity's message on the other hand liberates. It isn't "*Just do it,*" but "*The work is done, and you can't add to it.*" The real Gospel humbles us and requires repentance. You can't *buy* or *barter* for a free gift.

In verse 2, he asks, "*This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*" The Holy Spirit is given to *believers*, not *achievers*. By faith we receive from God.

"*Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?*"

The Galatians got off to a good start. By grace through faith the Spirit was living His life through them. Joy and victory flowed not because of their elbow grease, but something supernatural was happening!

Yet they failed to shift gears. Rather than spinning in faith they geared back under Law and started pushing.

**Some people want to be a *muscle* rather than a *vessel*.** A *muscle* flexes and forces. It's my strength on display. But a *vessel* occupied by the Holy Spirit is all about God's power. This is *the flesh* versus *the Spirit*.

Realize the flesh is **me** - not just the evil in me - but *my* good, *my* righteousness, *my* energy, *my* ingenuity.

After we're saved we should say *goodbye* to *my*... And rely on the Spirit to grow us and make us fruitful!

Under the Law we "**conform.**" We fit the mold and follow the formula. But under grace, the Holy Spirit "**transforms.**" The Spirit changes us from the inside out.

From the Law to Calvary it's an uphill ride. It's a lot of pushing. But post-Calvary it's now downhill. The power of what Jesus achieved creates some steam. It's no longer *grinding*, but *coasting*. The Spirit empowers us.

But to take advantage of the change in terrain you've got to shift gears. In business,

sports, education - the emphasis is on performance - *grit, and grades, and very little grace*. But that's not the way we function as Christians. It's now *all about faith and grace and Spirit*.

Paul's argument is if you begin in the Spirit, don't try to progress in the flesh. Keep it in the grace gear!

Paul asks another question, "Have you suffered so many things in vain - if indeed it was in vain?"

When they received God's grace they came under attack from legalistic Jews. They paid a price to embrace grace. Now, if they capitulate to the pressure and revert back, their initial sacrifices will be wasted.

Verse 5, "Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? -" When Paul healed the lame man in Lystra, he didn't chalk it up to his outstanding prayer life or impeccable purity.

*Not at all.* He credited the miracle to grace.

Miracles and healing from God aren't doled out on the basis of merit. They don't "go to the *goodest*." When God works a miracle it's because of His grace.

*If people play a part it's due to their faith.* Mark Twain said it best, "Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out, and your dog would go in."

*Got a joke for you...* Did you hear about the Patriarch Abraham wanting to upgrade his computer?

His son, Isaac, told him, "Pop, I hate to burst your bubble, but you can't run the new operating system on your old hard drive. You don't have enough memory."

But Abraham, a great man of faith, was unfazed. He replied calmly, "Don't worry, God will provide the RAM."

When I recall the story of Abraham, I think, "In a day of breakthrough technology, and computer-chip wizardry, what could we possibly learn from a man who lived 4000 years ago?" Well, the answer is "*plenty!*"

Though the world has changed and knowledge has increased - God stays the same! And the terms by which man relate to God are the same today as they were in the days of Abraham! *Paul is about to prove it!*

Chapter 3:6 quotes Genesis 15:6, "Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith

are sons of Abraham.” Paul points out that long before God delivered the Law to Moses and seventeen years before Abraham was circumcised - God declared Abraham *“right in His sight”* - and why?

Because he *“believed”* in God's promise of salvation!

This means what God did in saving and favoring the Galatians wasn't new. It has always been by faith!

This is his conclusion in verse 8, *“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”* God saves everyone, as He did Abraham... by faith!

*“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”* The Jews treated the Law of Moses like a *spiritual smorgasbord*. They picked the Laws that were convenient for them to keep.

But here Paul tells the Galatians if you live by any of the Law; then you have to keep the whole enchilada.

And everyone fails and falters at some point.

*“But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.”* If salvation came by the Law, why did the OT prescribe a different remedy? For here Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4.

This verse is actually quoted three times in the NT, and each time the emphasis is on a different word.

In Romans 1:17 the focus is on *“just”* - we're made *just* or right with God, by faith. In Hebrews 10:38 the stress is on *“faith”* - we've got to continue in our faith.

But here in Galatians 3:11 the thrust is on *“live.”* We're not just *saved by faith*, but *live by faith*. We stop trying to earn God's favor, and we shift gears to faith.

Verse 12, *“Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.”* In other words, it's either law or faith - toil or trust. On a bicycle you can't *push* and *spin* simultaneously. It's one gear at a time.

The same is true in relating to God. You either *trust in your work for Him* or you *trust in His work for you*.

Verse 13 sums up Paul's case for grace. *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”),* This is from Deuteronomy 21:23.

According to the Law the worse disgrace was to die on a tree. On a dead tree at Calvary - a cross - Jesus atoned for that *disgrace* to bring *God's grace* to us.

The cross insured, "that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

The blessings of Abraham - membership in God's family - is conveyed **not** by *Law*, but *by faith*. Even the blessings of the Holy Spirit are received by faith.

And the rest of Chapter 3 is a commentary on God's covenant with Abraham... I'm sure you've heard the phrase, "*cut a deal*," but I bet you don't know its origin?

In ancient times when covenants were sealed animals were sacrificed, and cut in cross-sections from head to toe. The pieces were aligned in a corridor.

Both parties in the contract walked together through the animal halves - committing to their side of the deal.

After God promised to bless him, Abraham prepared to finalize the covenant. He waited all day for God to come, walk through the animal parts, and ratify the deal. Abraham almost dozed off, when suddenly God appeared as a burning torch and a smoking oven.

God walked through the carcasses by Himself.

This wasn't a tag-team effort, or a joint-venture. This wasn't *God's part* and *Abraham's part*. God walked down the corridor by Himself. The work was God's, and His alone. All Abraham did was wake up and believe.

And 4000 years later this is still the way God relates to people. Jesus has accomplished all the work for us. Our part is to look on and believe. It's simple faith!

Paul begins to draw lessons from the Abrahamic Covenant in verse 15, "**Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.**"

He's saying, if people take **their** promises seriously, how much more will God be faithful to His covenant?

Here's another point, "**Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.**" Paul sees huge theological significance in a single letter "**S**." God's covenant with Abraham's family wasn't to **seeds** (plural) but to **Seed** (singular).

The ultimate heir of the covenant wasn't the nation that would come from Abraham's loins, but a single descendent, Jesus. The Jews thought they were God's salvation to the world. It wasn't **the Jews**. It was **A Jew**.

Realize, the world's philosophy is *pluralism*, but God is into *singular-ism*. Our hope of salvation is singular. It's found in one person. The only way is Jesus!

“And this I say, that the law, which was 430 years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.” The faith-grace covenant God made with Abraham was firmly entrenched before the Law came along. The Mosaic Law was never intended to take the place of grace - not even for a brief season.

“For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.”

Again, law and grace, works and faith are mutually exclusive. You can't ride in the same gear at the same time... *It makes you wonder why God gave the Law...*

And Paul anticipates that question in verse 19, “What purpose then does the law serve?” Here's his answer, “It was added because of transgressions...” The Law exposed our sin. It was never intended to expunge it.

In fact, the Law was needed, only “till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made...” The Jewish Law exposed our sin and our need for a Savior, but once Jesus took over it was no longer necessary.

Recently, I ran across some laws that are still on the legal dockets - though their purpose is now obsolete.

“In San Jose, California sleeping in your neighbor's outhouse without permission is a violation of the Law.

Eating peanuts in church is illegal in Massachusetts.

In Atlanta smelly people aren't allowed on streetcars.

In North Carolina singing out of tune is prohibited.”

Here's my point, it's possible to have laws on the books that are interesting, but are practically obsolete.

And this is what Paul says about the Law of Moses. After the work of Jesus the Law became unnecessary.

The commandments are still on the books, but when you embrace the Savior, they're no longer required.

Verse 19 makes another point about the Jewish Law, “And it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.” The Law was conveyed second-hand. It came from God to Moses by angelic intermediaries.



In contrast, verse 20, “Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.” The Law leaned on mediators, but recall the covenant with Abraham!...

When God walked through the animal parts He did it all by Himself. There were no go-betweens. God's promise - grace and faith - is firsthand. It puts us in touch with God personally. It's better than the Law.

Verse 21, “Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not!” The Law serves several purposes, but making us right with God is not its objective.

“For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.” If the Law could save it would've spared Jesus the cross. “But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” The Law confirmed our inability to save ourselves, and proved our need for a Savior.

“But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.” The Law helped keep our noses clean. It taught us right from wrong - kept us out of trouble, until the time came for Jesus to save us and give new life.

“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

The Law was like a nanny that helped raise God's kids. But when a child comes of age, the nanny is no longer needed. This is the case with a Christian.

A spiritual mature believer no longer needs to be told to do what's right - it's his utmost desire. Now that they know Jesus, their heart has changed. I no longer **have** to obey God - *I now want to obey Him - I get to obey Him*. It's been said, our “want to's” have changed.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” For a Christian the Savior's nature beats in our breast as loudly as in our own heart. We're miracles of grace - how can we add to what Jesus has already done? We need to rely on His' finished work!

Which leads to a truth, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Since salvation is no longer based on our own achievements, the categories that use to define us are gone - we're all one in Christ. All that distinguishes us now is whether we're *in Christ* or *apart from Christ*.

Verse 29, “And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Membership in Abraham's family no longer requires a Jewish pedigree. We can leap-frog that requirement by embracing Abraham's heir, Jesus. *It's not what you do, but who you know.* I'm accepted by faith in Jesus!

Now the first seven verses of Chapter 4 continue this analogy of the Law as a nanny, or tutor. In the Roman world, before a son came of age, he was under the care of a nanny - sort of a male Mary Poppins.

The son was heir to the family fortune, but in his younger years he was treated like a hired-hand. Until he developed some maturity, he couldn't be trusted.

*He had to learn the ropes before he got the reins.*

This is the background leading into Galatians 4...

“Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.” A wise dad expects his son to work in the family business before he takes it over. A future *employer* should first be an *employee*.

Employees are **graded** on results. They're **groomed** by rituals. They're **guided** by regulations. And they're **guarded** from recklessness. This is vital training. For after the son becomes the owner there's nobody to *grade, groom, guide, or guard* him. He functions on his own instincts... And this applies to life under the Law.

The Law was our tutor until Christ came. Now the Law is written on our hearts. We walk in God's Spirit.

Paul says in verse 3, “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” Legalism is a nanny religion. It's the ABCs of morality and ethics. The word “*elements*” means *basics*. The Law was a version of right and wrong.

Buy here's Paul's point... **legalism is for babies!**

Boundaries and rules are easier than walking by faith. *Religious formulas* are just *formula* compared to a relationship with God.. The false teachers in Galatia spoke of the Law as the path to true enlightenment.

But religion is just kid's stuff - it's infantile - it's “*look at me*” religion. We grow *by grace and through faith*.

For a time God kept mankind under the Law...

Verse 4, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we



might receive the adoption as sons.”

Note, in *“the fullness of time”* - when history reached a crescendo. At a pre-planned moment *“God sent forth His Son...”* Roman peace, Jewish prophecy, and God’s sovereignty combined to make it the right time.

And Jesus was born under the Law. He lived up to its demands. He became our sinless sacrifice and redeemed us to God. He’s even adopted us as sons.

I think it’s wonderful that every adopted child has one great blessing - come what may, they always know they’re wanted. *If you were adopted you were wanted.*

Adoption is no accident! And since Jesus has adopted you it means He loves you, and wants you.

*“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”* God’s adoptions are legal. He *“redeems”* us by satisfying our debts. He takes legal custody of us.

But His adoptions are not just on paper. *There’s more to a divine adoption.* For He puts His Spirit in us, so the instinctive cry of our hearts is *“Abba or Daddy.”*

There’s a relational intimacy between God and us.

Verse 7, *“Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”*

There’s a shingle over the doorway in heaven that reads, *“God and Sons.”* We’re heirs of His blessings!

Verse 8, *“But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?”* *This was Galatia’s betrayal.*

The church was made up of previous pagans, and former Jews. Both religions chained its adherents to impossible codes and laborious ceremonies. The grace of God was a breath of fresh air - a cup of ice-water on a hot summer’s day. *Why return to “beggarly” religion?*

They’d been to the mountain top of grace. They were now God’s kids, why stoop to worthless religion?

Verse 10, *“You observe days and months and seasons and years.”* Why think a holy God would be satisfied by *keeping festivals* instead of *having faith?*

Paul writes, *“I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.”* If they continue

down the path of legalism all they've received so far will be negated.

Understand, legalism is not benign. Most pastors are quick to rebuke a person who carries his freedom too far, but tolerate a legalist. That's a fatal miscalculation.

I've heard it put, "[The more religious a man becomes the further from God he gets.](#)" It's true! Paul worries the legalism of the Galatians will unravel everything grace had weaved together. His work in them will be "*in vain.*"

Verse 12, "[Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all.](#)"

Paul laid aside the Jewish Legalism with which he was familiar, and lived by faith like a Gentile believer.

*He worshipped on Sundays, mowed his grass on the Sabbath, ate bacon at the Men's Prayer Meeting...* And he's now asking the Galatians to mimic his example.

In verse 13 Paul begins a new thought, "[You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first...](#)" When Paul and Barnabas landed on the Turkish coast, they didn't stay long. They left the tropics for the dryer mountains of Galatia. *And what motivated them?* He says it was a "*physical infirmity.*"

And he recalls how the Galatians received him, "[My trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.](#)" The Galatians held Paul in high esteem. They treated him as a messenger of God.

His illness in no way lessened their respect.

["What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me."](#) Here's how much the Galatians loved Paul. They would've plucked out their eyes and given them to him if it were possible.

And here's a clue as to the nature of Paul's illness - it was probably some sort of infectious eye disease.

Some folks believe Paul contracted trachoma. It was the "[thorn in the flesh](#)" he spoke of in 2 Corinthians 12.

The warm, humid tropical climate had caused a flare up of his condition, and caused him to move to the cooler, dryer highlands of Galatia. Paul remembers the Galatians' sacrificial loyalty... *But what had happened to their love?* Someone had turned them against him.

He says in verse 16, "[Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the](#)

truth? They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.” Paul is referring to the legalistic false teachers - the Judaizers.

Paul spoke the truth, but they *pampered* more than *pastored*. They told people what they wanted to hear.

“But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.” The Galatians had stood up for God’s grace when Paul was around, but once he left town they dropped their guard.

He now rebukes them. They need to be consistent.

He says in verse 19, *My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you...*”

Paul wanted to see the Galatians mature, and exhibit the character of Christ. He says his soul labored with birth pangs - *like an expectant mom Paul contracted with concern* to see these Galatian’s grow in Christ!

“I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.” Paul is worried the Galatians could be deceived by legalism.

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?” Paul is about to use an OT story to teach a NT lesson. “For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman (or Hagar), the other by a freewoman (that would be Sarah).

Sarah was the gal who bought bikinis with her social security. She was an ageless knock-out... Hagar was a maid Abraham met in Egypt. And these two women became embroiled in a severe case of sibling rivalry.

“But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise...” God promised Abraham and Sarah a son. Sarah was 65 years-old. Abe was even older. And at 65 God’s promise seemed far-fetched... Then when nothing happened for 25 years, and God still repeated the promise... a 90 year old Sarah laughed.

And it was shortly thereafter that God got the last laugh! Amazingly at the age of 90 years old Sarah had a son. She named him “Isaac” which means “laughter.”

But that’s just half the story. In her darkest days of barrenness, Sarah grew weary of checking her temperature, counting days, rushing home from parties to do the deed because she might be ovulating...

The ancients had a short-cut around all this family planning. You could recruit a surrogate mom. Arrange a night - let the husband have his jollies - and the baby that resulted would go to the wife who tolerated it all...

That's how Hagar gave birth to her son, Ishmael.

Here's how Paul tells the story... Sarah had a son *"through promise."* Isaac was the miracle baby. He was God's work from start to finish - *like our salvation*.

Whereas, Ishmael *"was born according to the flesh."*

Remember, *"flesh"* is me - my efforts, my ingenuity, my ability - *just like our efforts under the Jewish Law*.

Verse 24, *"which things are symbolic."* This tale of two sons has spiritual implications. It's an analogous...

*"For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar - for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children..."* Hagar represents the legal code given to Moses on Mount Sinai - which was later associated with another mountain - Mount Moriah, or the Temple Mount, in the heart of Jerusalem.

The system of relating to God that Paul opposed in Galatia - righteousness that depends on Law, and works, and flesh - is epitomized in Hagar and Ismael.

Yet to the contrary, Paul says, *"but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all."*

The *"Jerusalem above"* is heaven. This is where the power originated that impregnated Sarah. It's also the source of our salvation. Heaven bestows favor freely - *by grace, through faith, in the power of the Spirit*.

Which is exactly how we relate to God under the NC.

So Hagar and earthly Jerusalem represent the Law, while Sarah and the Jerusalem above represent grace.

Verse 27, *"For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.'" This is Isaiah 54:1.*

It speaks of the *two covenants* as these *two women*.

The covenant that starts out barren will produce many more children than the covenant that claims to be fertile. Which means in the end Jerusalem above (or the NC) produces many more offspring for God than the Jerusalem below (which is the Mosaic Law).

The point is, grace is more fruitful than Law.

In verse 28 Paul explains it, *"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of*

promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.”

Abraham’s *foray in the flesh* resulted in *friction at home*. Hagar needled Sarah constantly. And after dig after dig, insult after insult, she had all she could take.

Verse 30, “Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? (Paul quotes Genesis 21 - Sarah’s ultimatum)

“Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” These two women were going to be in conflict as long as they lived. Honey Hagar had to go!

And the same was true of these two ways of relating to God. You can’t do both ways. They’re incompatible. It’s *grace or Law, faith or works, the Spirit or the flesh!*

And Paul concludes, “So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.” Be a person who *lives by faith*, rather than *trusts in me*. And if you’re not such a person, it’s time to shift gears!