**ABRAHAM’S SEED ARE THOSE IN CHRIST**

***23Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.***

***26You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27******for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.28There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,******for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise***

 **Galatians 3:23-29 (NIV)**

With this section and the next (4:1-7), Paul will bring the first argument from scripture (3:1-4:7) to its two-fold conclusion. Having established on the basis of their experience of the Spirit that righteousness is based on faith and not on doing the Law (3:1-5), Paul concluded that appeal in 3:6 by citing Genesis 15:6, that Abraham also *‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*.’ He then argued through a series of steps that Abraham’s true heirs are those who have faith like Abraham’s (3:7-9) and that it has nothing to do with the Law, since these are mutually exclusive options (3:10-14). He then spoke about the Law itself, since this was the crucial issue. First, he argued that a covenant of promise could not be annulled or added to, and that the Law was unrelated to the promise (3:15-18). This led, second, to the crucial question of ‘why the law at all?’ since it was incapable of giving life. The answer is that it served the useful function of ‘hemming people in’ while they were under sin’s power, until the promise was fulfilled in Abraham’s true seed, Jesus Christ (3:19-22).

Paul now sets out to tie together the loose ends with these two final sections (3:23-29 and 4:1-7). Both sections begin with the imagery of the Law as our pedagogue; both conclude with our being heirs; and the key imagery in both is sonship as opposed to slavery. 4:1-7 is really an elaboration or explanation of the present section. This section (3:23-29) asserts that the Law is a pedagogue; the next (4:1-7) spells out what that means. This section asserts ‘*You are all sons of God’* while the second explains how that happened.

Despite their similarities, their function is different in terms of the whole argument. The present section, which begins as an elaboration of 3:19-22, at the same time ends by tying together several earlier points: (a) Christ is the key to present salvation (b) salvation is by faith in Christ and (c) through Him Jew and Gentile together are Abraham’s *seed* and therefore heirs of the *promise.*

3:23-29, by way of 3:19-22, ties together all the matters taken up in 3:6-18 that Gentile believers are among Abraham’s heirs. 4:1-7, also by way of 3:19-22, then ties the issue of sonship to the redemptive work of the Son and to the experience of the Spirit of the Son.

‘*Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24**So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25**Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law’* (3:23-25). These three sentences (three in English but two in Paul’s writings) are a transition between 3:19-22 and 3:26-29. Paul begins with an elaboration of the points he made in 3:21 and 22; but then in 3:24 he shifts the imagery from ‘imprisonment’ to ‘pedagogue’ which serves his present purposes better. All of this, he says, has as its ultimate purpose that ‘*we might be justified by faith’* (3:24). This has been the goal of the entire argument. The shift is from the basic pre-Christ role of the Law (to hem people in) to its ultimate purpose now revealed in the present age (to serve as a pedagogue for Christ); all of which has as its final goal that ‘*we might be justified by faith’* (3:24). 3:25 then sums all this up.

‘*Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed’* (3:23). Before the time of ‘*this faith*,’ we were detained under the Law. The imagery is of the basic use of prisons by the Romans of holding people in custody until their case went to trial. Paul uses the pronoun ‘*we*,’ not the inclusive way of 4:14 where it referred to Jew and Gentile together, but now from the perspective of a Jewish believer in Christ (i.e. ‘we Jews’).

‘*So the law was put in charge* *to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith’* (3:24). This is the third time the theme of the Law holding us in custody is repeated but this time with a change of image. The NIV’s ‘*put in charge to lead us to Christ*’ is more literally: ‘the Law became our pedagogue unto Christ.’ A pedagogue in the Greco-Roman world was a trusted slave, usually better educated than the majority of free men, whose primary function was the care of the son in the family who would eventually become heir. A pedagogue was responsible to guide the son to and from school, and to watch over his conduct so that this son was well equipped to someday take over the duties of the household. For Paul the role of the Law as a pedagogue was to ‘guide’ God’s people and watch over them until the coming of Christ. In this way it served as a pedagogue ‘unto Christ.’

Picking up on this last thought of the Law’s role in our coming ‘unto Christ,’ Paul states ‘*that we might be justified by faith’* (3:24). This is by way of contrast with the end of 3:21: if there was such a thing as ‘life-giving’ Law, then justification would be based on the Law. Paul saw the Law serving a different function: as a pedagogue to guide us to Christ, ‘*that we might be justified by faith.’*

*‘Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law’* (3:25). As a pedagogue, the Law served to lead us to Christ, which means that with the coming of ‘*faith’* (literally ‘the faith’), the pedagogue has no further function. The clear implication is that the Law has no further role in the lives of those who are in Christ. This means the Galatians Gentile Christians are under no obligation to the Law at all.

‘*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus’* (3:26). This verse is the first of three explanatory clauses (v.26, v.27, v.28b) that conclude with a final result clause in 3:29. The shift from ‘*we’* in 3:25 is to ‘*you’* (plural). The emphasis is at the beginning and the end of his sentence: ‘*You all … in Christ Jesus.*’ As you are in Christ Jesus you are sons of God through faith. Paul’s emphasis is on the believer’s new position (being ‘in Christ’) that has come about ‘through the faith’ (Paul’s wording). By being ‘*in Christ Jesus’* you are ‘*sons of God’* and this comes about ‘*through faith*,’ by trusting Christ and not by doing Law.

The source of the Galatians new life is ‘*in Christ Jesus’* and the means of gaining that new life is ‘*through faith*.’ The standing of the Galatian believers is that they ‘*all sons of God,’* both men and women. The reason for the choice of ‘sons’ is two-fold. First, Abraham’s true descendants, his ‘sons,’ live by faith in Christ. Second, we ourselves become ‘sons’ because the ultimate ‘son’ of Abraham’s lineage is Christ Himself (4:4,6) who is God’s Son. The ultimate significance of this sentence is that Paul is here addressing Gentiles, who by being in Christ Jesus through faith, are thereby among the true heirs of Abraham, the man of faith – and this completely apart from any adherence to the Law.

‘*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.28There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female …’* (3:27,28a). Paul will now explain what it means for them to be ‘in Christ,’ and at the same time, how they can know with full certainty that they are God’s children without going backwards to doing (parts of) the Law. He reminds them of their point of entry into the Christian community – their baptism in water. Two points need to be made. First, their baptism served for them the role circumcision served for the Jewish community, as the rite of passage, for the Galatians into the Christian community. Those who by faith are now ‘in Christ’ have by their baptism ‘into Christ’ ‘put on Christ.’ Christ Himself is the centre of their new identity as children of God.

Second, while the Jewish ‘rite of passage’ was reserved for males only, in the new community of God’s people, entered into by faith in Christ and experienced by the coming of the Spirit, the ‘rite of entry’ was available to all. This is very much in Paul’s thinking, shown by the clause that follows where Paul singles out the three most obvious ways people are ‘distinguished’ from each other and so separated – ethnicity (*Jew* and *Greek*), social status (*slave* and *free*) and gender (*male* and *female*). All have now been made ‘one’ in Christ. The very thing that excluded women from full participation in Israel, the fact that they were ‘female,’ and could not be circumcised, has been set aside in Christ. ‘*All of you’* were baptised into Christ and so ‘*all of you’* have had the same ‘rite of passage.’

Paul saw water baptism was the common entry point into the Christian community for everyone, irrespective of race, social status or gender. He assumed all had been baptised and that their baptism was by total immersion. He knew no other kind of baptism and aligning it with burial (Romans 6) only made sense if immersion was in view. He saw that a baptised believer was uniquely identifying himself or herself with Christ in His death and resurrection. Paul never explicitly related regeneration to water baptism; regeneration was a separate work of the Spirit.

In the culture in which Paul is speaking, position and status prevailed in every way. One’s existence was totally identified with and circumscribed by, these realities. Position and status gave advantage to some over others and in Greco-Roman culture there was little chance of changing status. In Paul’s day the top of the ladder belonged to a ‘free, Gentile male,’ while a Jewish, female slave would be at the bottom.

Because Gentiles had all the advantages over Jews, Jews took refuge in their relationship with God, which they believed reversed the tables and gave them advantage before God over Gentiles. The hatred was deep and mutual. Likewise, masters and slaves were consigned to roles where all the advantages went to masters. The same was true for men and women. Women were dominated by men and consigned to childbearing. Against this background, Paul asserted that when people come into the fellowship of Christ, significance is no longer to be found in being Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female.

Paul is not saying that people cease to be any of these, but that the in Christ the old significance of these distinctions and the values based on them, is now maintained. In Christ no one of these has any advantage over any other. This helps us understand why, in the context of this letter, Paul reacted so strongly against circumcision. It kept the old boundaries in place at two crucial points – ethnicity and gender. Gentiles were through circumcision being forced to become Jews while women were excluded from privilege altogether.

‘*For you are all one in Christ Jesus’* (3:28b). ‘*You are all’* picks up the preceding emphasis: ‘*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female …’* (3:27,28a). ‘*For you are all one …’* In Christ Jesus we no longer find our basic values in what differentiates us from each other, but in the unity that Christ alone can bring. This is unity and not uniformity. We are one people together, united in our common life ‘*in Christ*.’ And finally, you are all God’s children ‘*in Christ Jesus*.’ They are one people because what they have in common is that they exist together ‘*in Christ Jesus*.’

Everything Paul has said excludes the necessity of these male Galatian believers being circumcised. The common denominator to their new existence is the same ‘*faith’* (3:26) and the same baptism (3:27). Women and men are equally included in what God has done in Christ. But because for Paul’s opponents, everything goes back to Abraham and the covenant of circumcision, he concludes with: ‘*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise’* (3:29).In 3:16 he had narrowed the seed to Christ. Now he expands it to include these Gentile believers, since they are ‘in Christ,’ in Abraham’s seed. Not only so, they are his true heirs in keeping with the promise God made to Abraham.

But the argument is not finished, because what has not been sufficiently picked up on is the reality that they are ‘heirs’ because they are ‘sons.’ This is the concern Paul will now turn to, to bring the whole issue to its ultimate conclusion.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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