

Gal. 4:1-7, Law and Faith (Second Panel)
December 3, 1988
H. Van Dyke Parunak

A. Overview

1. Overall Structure

The book has two parts: ch.1-2, dealing with Paul's qualification, and 3-6, dealing with the error confronting the Galatians. This latter part in turn has three sections.

- a) Each section includes a personal appeal to the Galatian's past experience and faithfulness (marked by a cluster of 2nd person plural pronouns), and also develops a contrast that shows the error with which they are being confronted. In the first and third sections the personal paragraph introduces the one developing the contrast. In the second, the personal paragraph is in the middle.
- b) The characterization of the error moves from abstract to concrete as we progress through the three sections.
 - 1) 3:23-29 (first section) focuses on shift from law to faith; introduces idea of sonship.
 - 2) 4:1-7 (second section) focuses on sonship; introduces idea of bondage and freedom (4:5, "redeem").
 - 3) 4:8-9, 22-5:1 (still second section) develops idea of bondage, with an impassioned interjection by Paul in 10-21, and introduces the idea of flesh/spirit developed more fully in chs.5-6.
 - 4) 5:2-6:10 (third section) draws two applications from the flesh/spirit contrast:
 - a> Circumcision is not needed;
 - b> The same carnal tendencies that drove the judaizers to demand circumcision also threaten Christian life.

2. First section

- a) Overall theme: contrast of *works/law* with *faith/promise*.
- b) Structure: personal + contrast.
 - 1) 3:1-5, personal rebuke to Galatians
 - 2) 3:6-29, We get what Abraham was promised.
 - a> 3:6-14 Superiority of faith to law: synchronic
 - b> 3:14-22 Diachronic: superiority of promise to law
 - c> 3:23-29 Diachronic: law yields to faith.

3. Second section

- a) Overall theme: contrast of *bondage* with *freedom*.
 - 1) Bondage in Galatians
 - a> Objective of the false brethren in 2:4
 - b> Does not exist in Christ, acc. to 3:28
 - c> 4:3, our status as children
 - d> Instances in 4:9-5:1: 4:9, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 5:1.

- e> No others.
- 2) Freedom in Galatians
 - a> 2:4 and 3:28 again
 - b> In 4:9-5:1: 4:22,23,26,30,31,5:1
 - c> 5:13 as last instance.

b) Transitional material

- 1) Introduction: Though 4:1-7 has the same structure as 3:23-29, it shifts key words suddenly; there is nothing here of faith or promise. Also, it begins the theme of freedom and bondage developed more fully later in this section. Thus it is transitional in nature.
- 2) Conclusion: "flesh-spirit" vocabulary begins to appear in this section, though often not in the ethical sense used later.

c) Structure: contrast + personal + contrast

- 1) 4:1-7 has almost none of the soteriological keywords (law, promise, faith, works, flesh, spirit). The emphasis is more our transition from the bondage of children to the freedom of sons.
- 2) 4:8-20, personal appeal
- 3) 4:21-5:1, Allegorical argument for freedom over bondage

4. Third Section

a) Overall theme: contrast of *flesh* with *spirit*.

b) Structure: personal + contrast

- 1) 5:2-12 On the basis of 5:7 (compare 3:1), this qualifies as a personal section. First addresses the issue of their circumcision, which is the real issue (as it comes out in 6:12-13). But 6:12-13 make another point that is also developed earlier: the circumcisers' motive (self-aggrandizement) is one to which the Galatians are also subject, even if they succeed in rejecting the Judaizing tendency.
- 2) 5:13-6:10, flesh and spirit: the proper use of liberty

5. Now focus in on 4:1-7.

Like 3:23-29, two major parts: past (4:1-3), and present (4:4-7). The "past" part is actually doubled, appearing once in the metaphor (4:1-2), and a second time in personal application (4:3).

B. Past, 4:1-3

1. Metaphor, 4:1-2. Derives from Graeco-Roman customs of maturation.

a) "The heir:"

- 1) We were talking about heirs in the last verse; now we will learn some of the implications of being an heir.
- 2) Generic article (D&M p. 144). Establishing a fact that

is true of heirs in general, as a class.

- 3) Invites us to imagine a prosperous family, with their own villa in the midst of pleasant gardens along the *cote d'azure*, enjoying every comfort that money can buy. In their midst, we see "the heir," the boy who will one day be lord of this delightful estate.

b) "as long as he is a child." Greek words translated "child" in the NT:

- 1) *nhpios* (here) Etymologically, one without speech, thus without understanding. Drinks milk in Heb. 5:13. Used here in the sense of a "minor". We are now told that the boy we see playing in the garden is not yet of age. In our society, less than 18. Then, Roman law had a child under a tutor until the age of 14, then under a guardian until 25.

- 2) *huios* (3:26) properly "son." Title of relationship, not of age. Continues to be true of someone even as an adult, and in fact, in the legal sense is not established until maturity.

- 3) Others to check out sometime:

a> *brefos* can be fetus (Luke 1:41) or newborn, drinking milk (1 Pet. 2:2)

b> *pais* can also mean "servant"; includes the children in Bethlehem 2 years old and under.

c> *paidion*

d> *paidarion*

e> *teknon*

f> *teknion*

- c) his status: just like a servant. No rights to rule others. In fact, slaves are appointed over him. Recall the excerpt from Plato's *Lysis* 208 c: Socrates is talking with a young boy.

Are you your own master, or do they not even allow that?

Nay, he said, of course they do not allow it.

Then you have a master?

Yes, my *paidagwgos*, there he is.

And he is a slave?

To be sure; he is our slave, he replied.

***Surely, I said, this is a strange thing, that a free man should be governed by a slave.

In Gal., two kinds of rulers are over the heir during his minority:

- 1) Tutors, *epitropoi* "guardians," also used for manager, governor, steward. Supervisor.

- 2) Governors, *oikonomoi*, stewards. Slaves responsible for household management; like a senior secretary or administrative assistant.

In other words, he is like any other part of the household, and any slave with responsibility over the household is

higher than he. So our boy playing in the vineyard of the villa may find himself switched by a slave if he steals some cookies or forgets his lessons!

- d) "until the time-appointed-by the father." Though the law fixed the age of majority, a father might in some cases set up care-takers for a special purpose (see Burton 214, citing passages in Maccabees that Paul may have known). The difference between our lad by the seaside and one of the slaves is that the boy will grow up to rule over the slaves, and indeed, over the entire estate.

2. Application, 4:3. Two points of contrast, leaving a third unspecified:

- a) "We, when we were children." There was a time when we were "speechless," without understanding, and unable to carry out our own affairs.
- b) "we ... were in bondage under the elements of the world." Big question: what are "the elements of the world"?
 - 1) Usage:
 - a> Here, clearly refers to the law (cf. 3:23,24).
 - b> In 4:9, includes the false gods to which the Gentiles were subject.
 - c> Col. 2:8, // to the "traditions of men."
 - d> Col. 2:20, something we died away from in Christ. Exemplified as "ordinances," such as "touch not, taste not, handle not."
 - 2) General meaning: elements, then rudimentary instruction. Fits well with the notion of a young boy trapped in school!
 - 3) Christianity has its elements too (Heb. 5:12). How are these different? They are called "worldly," yet certainly the OT law is not worldly. Two possible senses:
 - a> Worldly = physical, emphasizing that both the OT law and heathen religion emphasize manipulations of physical things, while Christianity's laws are more spiritual. (But baptism? Lord's Supper?)
 - b> Worldly = common to the world, as is clear from the repetition of the term in v.9 w.r.t. the Gentiles. The law and pagan religion have in common a basic morality of "thou shalt not." Before you teach a child what to do, you teach him what not to do. This is necessary to restrain sin, but it is a bondage, since we cannot keep it (cf. prison imagery in 3:23). Christianity on the other hand is a morality of obligation, not of prohibition.
- c) Leaves us asking, "What in our case is the 'time appointed by the father'? That brings us from the past to the present, and into the next verse.

C. **Present, 4:4-7**

As the time comes when a child outgrows prohibitions and undertakes obligations; moves from being ruled to ruling; so God has appointed a time of our majority, and it is inaugurated in Christ. The section has three independent clauses, indicating respectively the *cause* of our sonship, its *evidence*, and its *consequences*. The first two both have the form, "God sent forth X," where the one sent is first his Son, then his Son's Spirit. Thus we have once again the Triune God, the Father planning our sonship, the Son procuring it, and the Spirit proclaiming it.

1. 4:4-5, The Cause of our Sonship.
2. 4:6, The Evidence of our Sonship.
3. 4:7, The Consequences of our Sonship.
 - a) "No more a servant," which was virtually our state before, 4:1b.
 - b) "Heir of God through Christ"
 - 1) Heir: recall 3:29. We are the ones who receive the promises.
 - 2) Of God: he is the source of the promise, the giver of the inheritance. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:4.
 - 3) Through Christ: He is the promised Seed, and it is only through our membership in him (recall 3:27) that we enjoy the promises.