

LSB Galatians 4:1 - 7 The Law = physical world. Grace = spiritual world

1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and stewards until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were enslaved under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Some times I can feel overwhelmed by a passage of scripture. I can see the theme, see the idea, see the big picture, but can I unpack it so that you can understand it?

The question isn't your abilities to comprehend, the question is my ability to relay what is here in a way that you'll understand.

In the context of the entire polemic of this letter, the theme of this letter, we have a discussion of which is better, law or grace. Paul continues to try to help the galatians look at law vss grace.

In this paragraph, Paul steps back and looks at the two possibilities, law and grace, and he looks at the overall big picture. The purpose of the law, and the better purpose of grace.

In another letter written to the church at Corinth about slightly different matters (but actually the same in a way) Paul writes these words;

10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child. When I became a man, I did away with childish things.

That idea is the very essence of what Paul argues for here as he seeks to clarify this problem of these folks actually embracing a childhood, the law, that was never theirs in the first place.

You've gone backwards into something that, even for those to whom it was given, and designed, was only a steering mechanism for children. Let's pick it up in vs. 1; Remember our context now. Law keeping to accomplish salvation (if that were possible) or grace.

I Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and stewards until the date set by the father.

There are less children these days, it seems to me, in overall ratio than in times past. But we're blessed with some on our street. 7 - 10 year olds that we witness zooming around on the sidewalks on various wheeled vehicles.

How would they survive if suddenly every adult was snatched away by space invaders and the world was left to 10 year olds? Would there be a problem? No adults, all that's left is 7 - 10 year olds. Chaos would ensue, right? Pandemonium. After a few hours the power grid shuts down. All the candy is eaten. Then what?

Children have the latent ability but it's impractical for them to care for themselves.

Paul's example for his metaphor is a wellborn child who will inherit wealth and position. Latently he is owner of everything. On the day Charles III was born he was already the heir apparent. Everyone recognized the potential wealth and position that he had been born into. Everyone but him.

He was a baby in poopy diapers, and then a somewhat normal kid. A very indulged spoiled kid. No clue, really. In his case I suppose there was an army of caregivers. A staff of nanny's and later on, tutors. Here is what

you can do and this is the limit of how far you can go. Always there are walls, fences, barriers.

How often have stories been written of children who grow side by side, the slaves child just happens to be perfect age and temperament and becomes like a brother to the heir. As 7 year olds there is no concept that one will be a slave and the other will be a prince. They're just kids.

The law of God is a parallel. It's a guardian. A caregiver for children who need continual care. It is a barrier of safety. A garden wall. An estate boundary. Safety inside the barrier. Danger outside.

There is grace and love within the law of God. God gave it as a loving father to protect his beloved children. A wise king sets up the best caregivers and guardians and teachers in a protected and safe environment to nurture and bring his heirs to full adulthood.

But the expectation is adulthood. Freedom from the boundaries into fully blossomed adulthood. And that's Paul's metaphor. You were fully functioning adults with everything. Why would you go backwards into childhood with governors and caregivers and boundaries. Backwards from the freedoms of a wise responsible adulthood into a slavehood like children with laws and limits.

Let's push the metaphor a bit. What happens when all the adults have been whisked away by space invaders, only the 7 - 10 year olds remain, and the cotton candy machine is fully loaded. There's carrots and fruit, or cotton candy. What will happen. Kids will eat cotton candy until they vomit.

There's no sense. No self limits. No one to balance the cotton candy within safe limits and ensure healthy things are also in the balance. Children without boundaries will eat cotton candy until they die in a world of vomit. Welcome to our culture in 2023. That's a different sermon.

Paul is arguing, law versus grace. When we were children, we had to have

the boundaries and limits of the law. Otherwise we would ultimately drown in our own vomit. God gave the law as a grace to protect His beloved children until they were adults. The law is a pedagog. A steward. A teacher. A caregiver.

But the metaphor is this. To go back under the stewards and governors and boundaries and limits and rules is to go backwards from adulthood into some kind of childhood. Adults understand a diet of only cotton candy will lead to certain death. Adults are supposed to set sensible healthy limits for themselves without all the boundaries of the law.

But Paul isn't talking about physical things. He uses a metaphor, but Paul is arguing big picture reality. Spiritual reality. Knowing God. Relationally knowing God.

The law can offer safe boundaries and protection spiritually, but it can never deliver the adulthood of knowledge of God. You were born an heir, a child of God. The law is a safe environment but that's all it is. Knowing God is the adulthood that the law safely protected and prepared us for.

It would be abnormal for full blossomed adulthood to go backwards into childhood. Hold that thought. Paul says, that's irrational. Go from the freedoms of fully orbited adulthood back into the slavery of someone else setting the protective boundaries that are only limits, not the real.

Listen to vss 1,2 again. *1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and stewards until the date set by the father.*

The argument is law versus grace. Spiritual realms. Protective custody of the law, or full orbited adulthood, knowing God, our redeemer. By grace alone. Don't go backwards into protective custody. That's irrational. Crazy. It's a picture of adulthood but it isn't the reality.

*3 So also we, while we were children, were enslaved under the **elemental***

things of the world.

Here Paul leaps into the spiritual realities of the world we were born into. In this metaphor, to be a child is to be without God. To not have God. To be in a godless world. To be in the elemental world, without God.

Welcome to 2023. In 40 years our world has successfully abandoned any possibility of an all powerful Creator God. We are almost completely secular.

In this verse Paul explores a world that is without God. A godless world. With God erased, removed, eliminated, what is left? That's what the term *elemental things of the world* . . . means. World only physical. Only seen. Only observed with our senses.

Like children in a room with no adults and a cotton candy machine. Without God, that's who we are. We are enslaved by the elemental things of the world. What does that mean.

Well, look around you in our godless world, and it doesn't take long to see all of the elemental things that have enslaved everyone around us. Surely, some are more deadly than others, but without God, which poison have you selected.

I keep seeing these pop up commercials where some pretty young girl or boy says, vaping took my freedom away. Something in the physical world enslaves us. Often many things. Godless worldly things.

I copied a piece of a news story this week for illustrative purposes only. A single dead end road in the elemental world, taken to it's empty limit.

In Florida, across the street from the magic kingdom, Disneyfront property. A neighborhood called Golden Oaks. If you are heir of a greater than usual fortune perhaps this is a choice in the elemental world that you could make if you are very very privileged. Properties in that neighborhood range in

the tens of millions. The story was about one ladies property. I'll call her ms. S. I quote:

Ms. S "bought a 2.52 million home in the Orlando Florida community a few years ago after feeling dissatisfied with her life in her suburban neighborhood in Edmond, Oklahoma. Now, she spends her days riding roller coasters, attending nature conservation programs at Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park, and traveling to destinations such as Antarctica on Disney cruises." Her house, "is filled with Disney memorabilia including a figure of the witch from Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs. At Golden Oak, Ms. S says "she has found the best life imaginable."

In a world without God, a world reduced to elemental things, a world reduced to our 5 senses, touch, smell, hear, see, taste, if that's all there is, what is the best life imaginable.

Well, if you inherited the Hershey fortune, perhaps living across the road from the magic kingdom in a make believe perfect world (that's really really expensive) is as good as it gets. There's a property available right now, bought in 2018 for 10 million, you can have it for 19 million. Fireworks every night. Happiness every day.

Or if you're very wealthy, maybe a floating paradise, a yacht might be the ultimate possible in the elemental world. It goes downhill from there. With no God, it's slavery to something. Gorgeous slavery if you're very wealthy, or for others, slavery of numbing reality every day on a bar seat. Either way, it's slavery to the physical world. A spiritually empty world.

For most people, it's a slavery somewhere in the middle. The empty reality of a godless world that is limited to elemental things. What's your best life, without God. This is all there is. Whatever path you chose, if it's limited to the elemental things of this world, without God, you're enslaved to it.

It's worth our time to take a look at this somewhat unusual word that Paul uses here. elemental things.

stoicheion (stoy-khi'-on). ABC's. Rudimentary building blocks is what the word means. Things we can find out scientifically. Physical things. The physical world. Everything there is, without God.

The word is used a few other places in scripture. In Colossians 2, Paul uses the same word, in basically the same argument, albeit, in their case it wasn't going backwards into Moses law that was elemental, it was going sideways into this world's empty philosophy.

Col. 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Don't become a slave of elemental things. What a word for the modern church. Same problem. The christians taken captive by what? What the world says. So called science for instance.

We don't want the world to label us as fools, so we coalesce and say, perhaps Genesis chapters 1 - 11 is only hebrew poetry. Fables. Let's not rule out something that sounds so much more "scientific" in scare quotes, as evolution.

Maybe those days, that God was careful to describe as evening and morning earth revolving 24 hour days, maybe those were billion year eon's. Maybe DNA happened by accident over trillions of years. Maybe we can find enough common ground here that we don't have to appear as idiots to the world.

Paul said the galatians had been bewitched. In Colossae the same thing happens but Paul calls it being taken captive. By what? The limits of smart men who observe sight, sound, smell, touch, hearing and concoct smart sounding fables??

Without a God who reveals Himself, that's all you've got. 5 senses and

whatever story someone concocts. Traditions of men. Sounds real smart. But it's godless. Empty. Foolishness. DNA happened by accident. Right, I want to look smart to my godless neighbors, so I'll take *that* to the bank!

Listen to our word, used again, in Colossians 2. elementary things. rudimentary things. Things discoverable, without God;

20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees: 21 "Do not handle, nor taste, nor touch"? 22 Which deal with everything destined to perish with use, which are in accordance with the commands and teachings of men; 23 which are matters having, to be sure, a word of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Elementary principles. Godless truths, and fictions, of the world. Things destined to perish. Things limited to this world. Ultimately, useless in the big picture of eternity. Perishable things. Building blocks of this world.

Hebrews 5 has a fascinating use of the word stoicheion (stoy-khi'-on). ABC's.

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

The same word to describe not the world's ABC's but spiritual ABC's. The writer of Hebrews is scolding these christians. How is it that you've been a christian for 40 years and you're like a little baby who can only drink milk and get his diaper changed.

After 40 years you need someone to begin at the beginning and teach you the ABC's????!! How is that possible?? Not the world's building blocks in this use. Spiritual building blocks.

The final use of stoicheion is by Peter. Wait until you hear what Peter has to say about the world's ABC"s. The elementary things of this world that the galatians want to go backwards into.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be found out. 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens burning will be destroyed, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

A day is coming when this physical world and the heavens with it, will be destroyed. The elemental things, the physical world, burned up. A new heaven and a new earth will be created. Same word for elemental things.

In this case, science is our helper. Scientists cannot explain what it is that holds the worlds building block elements together. Atoms. With a negative charged nucleus and orbiting positive charged electrons. Why do they orbit. What holds the elements from flying apart.

Science can't find it out. But we know who holds all things together. Right? Hebrews 1:

*1 God, having spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days spoke to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds, 3 who is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and **upholds all things by the word of His power**; who, having accomplished cleansing for sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

The ABC's of this world, the elements, the atoms if you will, are held together by the Word of God. He spoke them into existence, and some day, Peter informs us, He will speak them out of existence.

Law versus Grace goes deep. Law is elementary building blocks of this world that cannot remain. Grace is knowing the God who holds all things together by His word.

Paul's argument is, it's illogical and irrational to have taken hold of God, by grace, and then to go backwards into non God, worldly elemental things. Do you want the ABC building blocks, or do you want to know the One who holds the building blocks together.

The law was the boundary fence given by God for His chosen nation. But why go back inside the fence when you can have God Himself! Listen to Paul's argument again from the beginning and see if it doesn't make sense.

1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and stewards until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were enslaved under the elemental things of the world.

Before grace, the law was the best case scenario in this world. It was our tutor, our guardian that taught us and delivered us intact to our inheritance, which is forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God as fellow heirs, with Christ.

But law is law, and grace is grace. The law can only kill us. Grace purchases us out of sin and death that the law brings. Keeping God's law was the best case scenario in this world possible, until grace was fully realized.

4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,

The law was our guardian until grace arrived in the 'fulness of time'. Why did God wait for a specific time. We cannot know. All we can know is that God's timing according to His purposes is perfect. God's timing is way

above our pay grade.

What we can know, with 20-20 hindsight is that from the moment the fall happened and God came looking for Adam and Eve in their, and our, predicament, a promise was given, and a plan began to unfold.

Genesis 3:13 *Then Yahweh God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 14 And Yahweh God said to the serpent,*
"Because you have done this,
Cursed are you more than any of the cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you will go,
And dust you will eat
All the days of your life;
15 And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel."

That promise, on the first day after the fall, a promised one, the promised seed of the woman, who would crush Satans head while Himself being bruised.

Notice Paul is careful to say, *4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,*

Son of God, son of a woman. Just like Yahweh said to Satan 4000 years earlier. The rightful owner of this world, the Creator and sustainer of this world, born of a woman, born under the law.

The fulness of time. The patriarchs. The children of Israel. The law given to Moses. The promised One waited for. God glorifies Himself all through time as He plans and orchestrates redemption. The purchase for Himself,

of many sons, according to His will.

Christ was born of a virgin. He is the single Son of God, born outside of Adam's seed and lineage, born of God and of a woman. The virgin birth of Christ, outside of Adam's race, Adam's sinful seed. Born in the fulness of time, under the law.

Centuries of revelation from God, through Moses and the prophets. At the exact time, according to the promise, with the law in place, Christ is born.

Paul is arguing law versus grace. The law was our tutor. The law was our boundary, our helper, our caregiver. The law was our pedagogue. Our steward. And the law was our death sentence. The law didn't kill us. It showed us that we, if all we have is Adam's seed, are born dead. If all we have is the law, the situation is hopeless.

But in the fulness of time, God sent grace. God always extended grace for any who repented of indwelling sin. But in the fulness of time, God sent us grace, in a body. The Lord, Jesus. The Christ.

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

The law exposed us as sinners. Rebels all. Hopelessly born into a rebellion. God doesn't welcome rebellious sinners. Redemption is necessary. Jesus removes our sin. He paid the debt of sin in full. He clothes us with His righteousness. God adopts us, cleansed in Christ, to be His sons.

6 And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Paul says, why on earth would you want to leave sonship, fellowship with the Father as His adopted children, members of His household, outside this

physical world, beloved adopted sons, leave that behind and go back into the slavery of this physical world, under laws that were protective, to be sure, but which was a slavery to this world.

Next week, if God permits us, I want to spend time developing the doctrine of adoption. There is so much more to unpack in vss 5 - 7 that I feel frustrated that I haven't harvested even the low hanging fruit here. So let's begin here next week and just saturate ourselves a bit in the wealth that is ours.

In Christ. In Him, by His indwelling Spirit, full adoptions so that we cry out; Abba Father. Daddy, Father. Our dad is the creator and sustainer of the universes, both seen and unseen. He has adopted us and made us heirs of everything. In Christ. We have been adopted into an unspeakably wealthy family. In Christ, we are truly God's beloved sons and daughters.