

### Handout: Galatians Lesson 3

*See to it that no one captivates you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ.*

Paul's Letter to the Colossians 2:8

The Greek word *paidagogos* in 3:24 means a “tutor,” “custodian,” “disciplinarian,” or “guide” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon). Paul uses this word twice in his letters: here in Galatians 3:24 and again in 1 Corinthians 4:15. It refers to a person in Hellenistic society (usually a male slave) appointed by a father to take charge of his son and heir to supervise his conduct and to protect him from immoral influences.

In 4:1-3 it is Paul’s argument that the period in salvation history from the Law of Moses until the coming of the Christ was a time of minority for the children of God who lived under limited freedom like a slave/child in his minority. During that period we *were enslaved to the elemental powers of the world* (verse 3; also see verse 9). The Greek word is simply “elements,” and in Scripture the same word was used to refer to:

1. The stars and other heavenly bodies that were deified by the pagans (Dt 4:19).
2. The spirits/gods that pagans believed controlled the cosmos and were worshipped by them (Wis 13:2).
3. The basic principles of education or religion (Heb 5:12).
4. The physical elements of the world (2 Pt 3:10).

In this passage Paul is probably referring to life under both paganism that worshiped the elements of nature as well as the Law that taught the rudimentary principles of religion and was based on a lunar calendar that constituted a state of slavery under cosmic forces from which Christ has freed us.

Galatians 4:10, *You are observing days, months, seasons, and years.*

This is a reference to the Galatians being encouraged by the Judaizers to celebrate the festivals of the Sinai Covenant governed by a lunar liturgical calendar. Under the old Covenant the people were command to observe days, months, seasons and years:

1. The weekly Sabbath on the seventh day of the week (Ex 20:8-11; Num 28:9-10).
2. The monthly festival of the new moon (Num 28:11-15).
3. The seven annual/seasonal remembrance festivals that recalled the Exodus experience (Lev 23; Num 28-29).
4. The periodic festivals of the Sabbath and Jubilee years (Lev 25:1-22).

After using several theological arguments to urge the Galatians to return to the Gospel he taught them and to reject circumcision, in Galatians 4:12-20 Paul changes course and makes an emotional and personal appeal to the Galatians to remember his past close relationship with them:

1. He urges them to imitate his life of faith and obedience (verse 12a).
2. He reminds them of the closeness of their former relationship (verse 12).
3. He warns them about the motives of the outside agitators (verses 16-17).
4. He expresses parental concern for their spiritual wellbeing (verses 18-20).

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In 4:21-31 Paul presents an allegory on Christian Freedom by using the contrasts between Sarah and Hagar and their sons by Abraham (see Gen 11:31; 16:1-4, 15; 17:15-21; 18:9-14; 21:1-7):

1. Sarah was Abraham’s legal wife and Hagar was her Egyptian slave girl.
2. Hagar’s son by Abraham was named Ishmael. He was conceived in the natural way.
3. Ishmael was not the legitimate heir, nor was he “the son of promise.”
4. Sarah was barren until the birth of her son Isaac. Sarah’s son was born through God’s divine intervention.
5. Isaac was the heir and the “son of promise” through which the covenant between God and Abraham was to continue (Gen 17:15-21).

In his allegory, Paul quotes from two passages from Old Testament Scripture in 4:27 and 30:

1. *For it is written: “Rejoice, you barren one who bore no children; break froth and shout, you who were not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the deserted one than of her who has a husband.”* In verse 27, Paul quotes from the Septuagint Greek translation of Isaiah 54:1 and applies the passage to Sarah “the barren one” who, by God’s intervention, became the mother not only of Isaac but of all those who believe in Jesus and are the “children of the promise” (verse 28).

2. *But what does the Scripture say? “Drive out the slave woman and her son! For the son of the slave woman shall not share the inheritance with the son” of the freeborn.* In verse 30, Paul quotes from Genesis 21:10 and applies the passage about Hagar to the Jews who want to hang on to the old Law but must be “driven out” because the inheritance of God blessings in Christ Jesus belongs to the sons of daughters born by divine will through the Sacrament of Baptism.

In Paul’s allegory the two sons and their mothers represent the present Jerusalem contrasted with the heavenly Jerusalem: Hagar represents the city of Jerusalem and Temple worship that taught the commands and prohibitions of the Sinai covenant and bound the children of Israel in a kind of slavery to the Law. In contrast Sarah and her son Isaac, the “son of promise”, represent the promised freedom of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ and the new Jerusalem “above”, “our mother” from which children are born into the New Covenant Church—born supernaturally like Isaac “from above” or “again” through water and the Spirit in Christian Baptism (Jn 3:3-5). Ishmael was a threat to Isaac and his inheritance, just as the Jews have become a threat to Christians (verse 29) who are the heirs of the covenant promises like Isaac.

Hagar Old Covenant worship/earthly Jerusalem	Sarah New Covenant worship/heavenly Jerusalem
Hagar was a slave/the Old Covenant worship was a form of slavery to the Law.	Sarah was freeborn/the New Covenant offers freedom in Christ Jesus.
Hagar’s son was born naturally (“of the flesh”) as the son of a slave.	Sarah’s son was born from God (supernaturally) as the freeborn son and heir of the covenant promises made to Abraham.
Circumcision under the Old Covenant only yields “children” bound by an earthly covenant under the old Law.	The Sacrament of Baptism yields “children” who are born supernaturally as heirs of the covenant promises made to Abraham*.

\*the covenant promises made to Abraham were a nation/kingdom, many children, and a world-wide blessing, all of which was fulfilled in Christ and His Kingdom of the Church (Gen 12:1-3).