

- 1 Now I say, *That* the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;
- 2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.
- 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:
- 4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
- 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.
- 6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.
- 7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.
- 8 ¶ Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.
- 9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

The key to this passage is verse 3: What is meant by the “elements of the world”? For a time the idea of “a,b,c’s” was popular—that the Jews were under the first principles of religion; then “elemental spirits of the world,” --the “spirits that ruled the ancient religions” came into vogue. I do not believe that either of these ideas do justice to this passage because it must apply to both Jews and Gentiles. The abc’s of true religion would not apply to the Gentiles; and elemental spirits would not apply to the Jews. I think that Hendrickson has the best explanation:

Hendrickson: Rules and regulations, by means of which, before Christ’s coming, people, both Jews and Gentiles, each in their own way, attempted by their own efforts, and in accordance with the promptings of their own fleshly (unregenerate) nature, to achieve salvation.

All men are under the delusion that they are accepted of God by the religious or moral things that they do. Even if they are under the rule of divine revelation, they will still live under this delusion. Both Jews and Gentiles were under this delusion. Men are only delivered from this delusion by the Spirit of God working faith through the Gospel.

Let us look at this passage to see what the Apostle is saying:

- Vs. 1,2. The figure is of a child, who is under a tutor. The child is little better than a servant until the time appointed of his father.
- Vs. 3. When the time came of the Father, the son passes to freedom, out of the tutelage of the servant.
- Vs. 4,5. The time; is when Christ is Incarnate. We are counted as sons after the coming of Christ. This is the key: the coming of Christ, born of Mary in the village of Bethlehem.
- Vs. 6: The evidence that Christ is come is the Spirit: we become sons of God because we have received the spirit of adoption.
- Vs. 7: Those who have received the Spirit are not longer servants, but are heirs of God—we receive the same inheritance that Abraham received.
- Vs. 8,9: After Christ is come, shall we return to those religious principles that directed us before—shall we return to bondage? The answer is “Of Course not.”

So what is the application: There are two major ideas:

1. That Paul is speaking historically, in terms of the history of the world; Calvin takes this view. There is some truth to this view, and it is true that God’s dealing with the world has drastically changed since the coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is also true that those who lived before the coming of Christ—even those who lived in Israel, had only the most primitive knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Promises of God. We live in the glorious light of the Gospel, and it is hard for us to understand the darkness of those days. Even the prophets and kings have desired to see and the things that the disciples of Christ did, but they were not able to. The problem I have with that view exclusively is that the language of 4-7 speaks of personal Christianity—and the giving of the Spirit of adoption.
2. The better application is this: “The elect, though, they are the children of God from the womb, yet, until by faith they come to the possession of freedom, remain like slaves under the law; but, from the time that they have known Christ, they no longer require this kind of tutelage.” Who wrote this: John Calvin. He rejects this idea and takes the first view, but he stated the true view very clearly. This first view would have us treat all of the Old Testament saints as children or slaves, when in reality, many of the Old Testament saints became great and godly people, filled with the Spirit, and free in Christ because of the Promise, as we saw over the past few weeks.
3. Probably the best is a combination of the two. We are going to see that Paul takes the Old Testament as history, but a history that is a type of biblical truth. This is a proper way to interpret the history of Redemption. The deliverance from Egypt is typical of our deliverance from the bondage of sin and the devil. The journey through the wilderness is typical of

our journey to heaven. Canaan is typical of the Promised land of Heaven and eternal life. In the same way, the history of the world before Christ is typical of our bondage to primitive religious ideas—even the Jews were in bondage to those ideas—the idea that our works could merit eternal life. Those who believe such things make much of ceremonies and moralities and they look down on others who do not do the things that they do.

But enough of this.

This is the substance of what this passage means:

The coming of Christ changed the world. The world began to grow up, when Christ came into the world. He made all the difference. And when Christ comes to you, it is the most maturing event that can happen to you. Religious ceremonies and practices do not mean nearly as much as they used to mean. You will begin to see the silliness and the folly of so much around you. The laughter and gaiety of the world will seem so childish and futile. Having been given a glimpse of heavenly eternal things, earthly things which are temporary and changing will not seem so important to you. You will see the Bible not so much as a manual of duties and regulations, but you see Christ on every page. The Bible sets Christ before us as:

1. Our Savior, who suffered to take the curse.
2. Who has given us His Spirit, to teach us to love Him and to love one another.
3. This spirit is the Spirit of Adoption. We have received the Spirit because we have been adopted into the family of God. We belong to Jesus Christ, and because we belong to Jesus Christ we are partakers of His Sonship—we are given a new nature, a nature that is not after the old man who is disobedient like Adam; but a new nature—one that is obedient like Jesus was obedient.
4. This is of grace. This renewal and transformation is not because of the works we do, but it is because we have been justified by faith. We believe that Jesus died for us and took our sins away. This is the most revolutionary and transformational truth in the world—and it sets us free from the old law of sin and death—wherever we received that law—the idea that our good deeds will gain us favor with God. We do not gain this favor by the things that we do; we believe that Jesus died for our sins, and by faith we have access into the grace wherein we stand.

This is what Paul meant in Philippians 3:7-9:

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith....

How precious is the gospel, greater than anything in or of the world. Amen and Amen. God bless you.