

Galatians 4

Introduction

1. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God, and Galatians 4 has many (Luke 4:4).
2. This chapter is understood, like any chapter, by remembering its context, which is Paul's rebuke of Judaizing heresy in the churches of Galatia and his exhortation to hold to free justification by Christ.
3. False teachers corrupted these Gentiles by adding circumcision and the Law to Christ for justification.
4. The Jews treated the poor Gentiles (in what is now modern Turkey) as second-class kingdom citizens.
5. Knowing that the true worship of God had been Jewish for a long time, it was easy to be so deceived.
6. Our Bibles have two testaments, one for Jews under the Law, the other for Christians under Christ.
7. For about 1500 years, God kept His people under bondage of Law to help them love Christ (3:19-25).
8. The chapter may be easily divided into three sections following three different arguments Paul used.
 - a. The first section (4:1-7) compares the two covenants by a metaphor of adoption and inheritance.
 - b. The second section (4:8-20) appeals to the Galatians on a personal level to return to former zeal.
 - c. The third section (4:21-31) uses the story of Ishmael and Isaac to confirm their place by promise.

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;

- A. Having introduced the idea of a schoolmaster (3:22-25), he followed a similar metaphor here.
- B. However, he did move to a new slant, away from Abram and toward adoption, by *now I say*.
- C. The Bible is full of similes and metaphors, and Paul used a child heir and his inheritance, which uses natural reasoning from the practices of men to explain the two covenants (3:15).
- D. A child may be heir to great wealth, but he is treated like any servant until he comes of age.
- E. Paul contrasted God's treatment of elect believers under the Old and New Testaments: the O.T. saints were treated as servants; the N.T. saints as children with an inheritance.

2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

- A. Wise fathers do not transfer estates to a child, for it would quickly be wasted in his folly.
- B. The tutors and governors here, appointed by the father, prepare the son for the inheritance.
- C. During this period of time, the child is brought from infancy to maturity by slow instruction.
- D. How long is the time of preparation? According to the father's will, not the child's desires.
- E. God's people, primarily Jews, were under the schoolmaster or tutors of the Law (3:23-25).
- F. And the length of time, about 1500 years, was by the independent and sovereign will of God.

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

- A. Continuing the metaphor here, Paul compared the Jewish situation to that of the child heir.
- B. He uses the first person *we* to represent Jews and any Gentile proselytes among them, for the verse would not apply to Gentiles at large, who were never under the Law (Rom 2:12-16).
- C. Before the time appointed of God the Father to bring forth the promised blessing, the nation of Israel was kept under the schoolmaster and tutors and governors of the Law of Moses.
- D. They did not get to partake of the blessings, but were daily instructed in their own sinfulness, for the Law controlled them and showed them their wickedness (Heb 10:1-3; Rom 7:12-13)!
- E. What are the elements of the world? The elementary and rudimentary requirements of Moses.
 1. *Elements* is to be understood as elementary education by the schoolmaster and tutors.
 2. The Law of Moses was beggarly, carnal, and weak aspects of learning and worship (4:9).

3. Paul also used *rudiments* for rudimentary instruction and knowledge of Law (Col 2:8,20).
4. Why are they elements *of the world*? Because they were carnal and fleshly in their design and weakness (3:3; 4:23,29; 6:12-13; Eph 2:11; Phil 3:3-6; Heb 7:16; 9:10; 11:16), very different from heavenly, spiritual, and profitable promises God planned for His people.

4 *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,*

- A. Continuing the metaphor introduced here, God the Father also had a set time for His children.
 1. When God the Father believed His children knew enough, He sent the promised blessing.
 2. The blessing was Jesus Christ, the promised Seed of Abraham and the Saviour from sin.
 3. This period of time in its beginning, end, and related events was entirely by God's choice.
 4. He was under no obligation from any quarter to reduce or extend this period of time.
- B. The Son of God was begotten in Mary's womb and sent forth from there, with eternal generation and eternal sonship no more intended than with John Baptist (Luke 1:35; Jn 1:6)!
- C. *Made of a woman* describes the glorious and miraculous incarnation of Christ (Luke 1:26-38), which by Mary's lineage made Him the promised Seed of Abraham biologically, and by Joseph's lineage the promised Seed of Abraham legally (Matt 1:1; Luke 3:34).
- D. *Made under the law* describes Jesus as subject to the Law and condemned by it for us, for He both obeyed its every precept and died as a perfect substitute under its penalty (3:13).

5 *To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

- A. As Paul had already taught, Jesus because a curse for those under the Law's curse (3:13).
- B. What does *redeem* mean? It means to buy back. From what? The curse of God's holy law!
- C. What do the elect inherit? Jesus Christ, sonship, heaven, and God Himself (4:7; Rom 8:17).
- D. These are amazing concepts, given that men are lowly rebel enemies of the most high God.
- E. There is a huge difference between being a servant under the tutors and governors of the Law of Moses and the freedom and liberty of being the sons of God by promised salvation!
- F. The adoption here, by its association with Christ's redeeming death, is legal adoption as sons.
 1. God's elect were predestinated to adoption as the sons of God (Romans 8:29; Eph 1:3-6).
 2. Jesus Christ came in human form to pay the legal price for our adoption (Heb 2:14-17).
 3. Then the Holy Spirit imparts a new nature created like unto God (John 1:12-13; 3:3-6).
 4. We believe and obey the gospel to conform our lives like sons (I Jn 3:10; Rom 8:14-16).
 5. A final adoption will occur when our bodies will be glorified (Romans 8:23; I Pet 1:3-5).
- G. Paul has not left his metaphor, for he is still comparing a son coming of age for inheritance.

6 *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

- A. Note the shift here from Paul and Jews under the Law by *we* to the Gentiles in Galatia by *ye*.
- B. The Galatians easily knew they were God's sons by the Spirit's witness, which brought them into the same group as the redeemed Jews of the previous verse (Rom 8:14-17).
- C. The gift of the Spirit in any of His operations is conditioned and dependent on Christ's work, for the vital work of regeneration cannot and will not be applied to a person not yet justified.
- D. Because of legal adoption through Christ's death, God sends the Spirit for further blessings.
 1. Regeneration of a dead human soul could not occur without that soul purchased legally.

2. There is no need here to limit the work of the Spirit to regeneration, for the argument is not so narrow by Paul, and he has already referred to other works of the Spirit (3:2-3,5).
 3. Not only is there evidence in the context, but there is evidence elsewhere that Paul is referring to the Spirit given after conversion for assurance (Rom 8:13-17; Eph 1:13-14).
- E. This giving of the Spirit is an important part (the earnest) of our inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).
- F. *Abba* is another variant of father, expressing a son's tender affection and trust (Mark 14:36).

7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

- A. Returning to his metaphor of a child heir, Paul told them they were sons and heirs of God.
- B. The elementary and rudimentary bondage and constraints of the Law have been lifted for full enjoyment of God as Father, with heaven and all spiritual blessings realized or coming soon!
- C. Paul had already introduced the Spirit's presence being superior to the Law (3:2-3,5,14); and he will return to it again, for it was profoundly different than the Law (5:5,16-18,25).
- D. Paul ended his metaphor by declaring that Gentile Galatians, with the presence of the Holy Spirit, and assurance of adoption, and as heirs of God, were no longer servants under Law.
- E. Instead of being slaves to a "Do this! Do that!" covenant of works, these Gentiles were now sons of God by gracious adoption and guaranteed an inheritance through a Father's promise!

8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

- A. This verse begins the second section of the epistle with a personal appeal to their conversion.
- B. By way of transition, Paul uses *service* here to refer to the servitude they once endured as servants (4:7) of false religion and its gods, which always demands more than God's religion.
- C. These Gentile saints once worshipped idols, which was a worse past than a schoolmaster, for the Gentiles did not know the true God at all, and the Jews did through the ceremonial veil.
- D. The use of *then* is modified and explained by *when*; it is not referring to any previous verse.
- E. They did service – they had ordinances of worship that required acts in the flesh in order to secure the blessings of these pagan deities – going even so far as child sacrifice (Jer 32:35)!
- F. Every religion has service for their gods, which keep men in bondage to that religious system through their fear of death and corruption that controls our race (Heb 2:14-15; Rom 8:15,21).
- G. Consider the endless sacraments, holy days, fasts, rules, penance, division of sins, and rites of Roman Catholics. Watch a widow thumb her pagan rosary and spend her estate for candles and masses to fill the coffers of the church to get her poor husband out of purgatory!

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?

- A. But now, after conversion to free grace in Christ, why return to fleshly acts of service?
- B. Enjoy and love the voice of the verb *to know* that Paul plays with here for comfort and glory!
 1. Reject any man that tells you or acts as if the very words of scripture are not important.
 2. Paul makes a simple little argument here that our salvation is primarily God knowing us!
 3. The whole Christian world often asks, "Do you know God?" Let's keep first things first!
 4. We know God's knowledge of us is more important from other places as well (John 10:14,27; Rom 8:29-39; I Cor 8:3; Eph 1:6; II Tim 2:19; Matt 7:23).

- C. These Gentiles had been pagan idolaters, were converted to Judaism as proselytes, then converted to the gospel of Christ by Paul, and were now returning to Jewish legalism again.
 - 1. There is nothing in this epistle about these Gentile converts returning to pagan idolatry.
 - 2. The context of the book drives our interpretation that they returned to Moses' Law, not to pagan idolatry, for the whole theme is a blast against circumcision and Jewish legalism.
 - 3. The weak and beggarly elements are fleshly rites of the Law (4:3; Col 2:8,20; Heb 9:10).
 - 4. You think they would be sick of carnal rites of worship after all they had been through!
 - 5. Whether pagan religious service or rites of Moses' Law, why seek bondage again?

10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

- A. These are the days, months, times, and years of the Jewish calendar taught in Moses' Law.
- B. These are not days, months, times, and years of pagan deities – proven by the book's context.
- C. The SDA and Worldwide Church of God and other manmade cults love to bring Old Testament days, feasts, and other celebrations forward into the New Testament. God forbid!
- D. There is a revival today among Charismatics to dote on the tabernacle, furniture, and days.
- E. Such days are matters of liberty: they cannot be required or connected to justification.

11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

- A. Paul feared that these saints returning to Moses' Law would waste his ministerial efforts.
- B. Paul did not fear them losing their eternal, legal, vital, or final phases of salvation at all, for he refers to them throughout this epistle as blood-bought and regenerated children of God.
- C. He feared them losing practical salvation – conversion to assurance, peace, rest, and truth – which are the gospel benefits lost when God's elect do not believe or obey the truth revealed.
- D. Lazy ministers or lazy hearers cost men the full benefits of the gospel (I Tim 4:16; I Cor 15:2), but neither can cost a single one of God's elect sheep his place in heaven (Jn 6:38-39).
- E. The finished legal work of Christ is never in vain, though practical ministerial work may be.

12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.

- A. Paul appealed personally to the Galatians to show mercy toward him like he had shown them.
 - 1. Notice the title of *brethren* that he calls them, which certainly softens other words (3:1)!
 - 2. And rather than demanding, he beseeches them, which is a mark of wisdom (Prov 15:1).
- B. The brief language here is somewhat obscure, but if we look around we can find some hints.
 - 1. The salutation and appeal shows a different tack than further doctrinal argumentation.
 - 2. The reference to personal injury adds further to the personal intentions of the language.
 - 3. The description of their once tender relationship and unity confirms this intent (4:13-16).
 - 4. Therefore, we take these words as Paul's appeal for them to love him and be united to him personally as he loved them and was united to them personally.
 - 5. Jehoshaphat foolishly used this language to express love and unity to Ahab (I Kgs 22:4).
- C. Paul did not feel personal injury by the Galatians, for their conversion was higher than that.
 - 1. Anger or intensity a minister feels or shows against sinners is not personal, but spiritual.
 - 2. Only hirelings or false teachers make their personal injury their greatest appeal to sinners.

13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

- A. Observe Paul return to their first meeting, when he preached the gospel for their conversion.
- B. We are not told exactly what affliction Paul endured while preaching among the Galatians.
- C. He did face (1) persecution, (2) ministerial weariness, and (3) a thorn in the flesh from God.

14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

- A. Whatever this infirmity of the flesh was, it could have caused them to despise or reject him.
- B. This is not natural, if it were his eyesight; but it might have been something like stooping!
- C. He had an infirmity in his flesh to keep him humble after great revelations (II Cor 12:1-9).
- D. Consider how some of the Corinthians despised him (II Cor 10:1,10; 11:6; I Cor 2:1-4).
- E. In spite of this detracting temptation in the flesh, they received Paul as a mouthpiece of God.
- F. They once loved Paul as their liberator from the yoke of bondage of the Law (Ac 13:46-48).

15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

- A. What happened to the relationship we once had? Is there a valid reason for the great change?
- B. You rejoiced to hear the gospel from my mouth, but now you have turned to another gospel.
- C. On what basis have you made such a drastic return to the bondage I delivered you from?
- D. Do you remember how thankful you were for my gospel and me? You would have given me your dearest possession, if I had needed it or requested it.
- E. While some may think that poor eyesight was Paul's thorn in the flesh and the reason for this statement, there is also the common use of eye as a dear object (Matt 5:29; 18:9; Ps 17:8).

16 Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

- A. Is this divide that has come between us because of the truth? Why should the truth do such?
- B. Men show the depravity of their souls and the pride of their hearts when they hate or resent ministers for correcting them, rebuking them, or teaching them something they do not know.
- C. One of the great lessons of Proverbs is the trait of wisdom that loves correction and teachers.
- D. God grant the noble spirit of the Bereans to all His saints to receive instruction (Acts 17:11).

17 They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

- A. **Affect.** 1. To aim at, aspire to, or make for; to seek to obtain or attain. 2. To be drawn to, have affection or liking for; to take to, be fond of, show preference for; to fancy, like, or love.
- B. This and the following verse are best understood as seeing "affect" as affection or love.
- C. The false teachers in Galatia put passionate affection into pursuing and winning the Galatians, which is why warnings are given about flattering teachers (I Thes 2:5; II Pet 2:18).
- D. This false affection is not to be compared to Paul's honest and sincere affection for them.
- E. Their zealous pursuit of the Galatians was not good or right, for they sought to take them back to Moses to glory in their flesh and reduce the offence of the cross (5:11-12; 6:12-13).
- F. The intent of these false teachers was to exclude the Galatians from Paul's influence and teaching in order to obtain for themselves the affection and loyalty of the Galatians.

18 *But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you.*

- A. Affectionate zeal for a good thing is good, and it should be kept constant without change, which these saints had lost for the apostle Paul and the gospel he preached.
- B. The key word is *always*, because the line of reasoning is their turning from Paul (4:12-18).
- C. While he was with them, the Galatians were very affectionate and zealous; but now in his absence they were being seduced and bewitched from him by false teachers. God forbid!

19 *My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,*

- A. Paul again affectionately sought to save these Gentile converts through tender gentleness.
- B. He calls them his little children, because he had been their first teacher in the gospel, under whose ministry they had been converted to Christianity, like the Corinthians (I Cor 4:14-16).
- C. It is possible to lose Jesus Christ and need to have him formed in you again – in your knowledge and understanding. This language has nothing to do with losing eternal life.
- D. Paul had converted these Gentiles to full trust in Christ for eternal salvation, and now he was laboring to do it all over again, since they had fallen for the bewitching lies of heretics.
- E. Though *birth* is used here, the new birth or regeneration is not under consideration at all, for Paul does not fear the loss of vital salvation by these brethren, only their understanding (5:4).
 - 1. He did not regenerate them the first time, and he could not do it again (John 1:13; 3:8)!
 - 2. If anyone forces regeneration into I Corinthians 4:15, bring them here, which requires them to preach regeneration, un-regeneration, and regeneration again by a mere man!

20 *I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.*

- A. When I was with you, I had great joy in seeing your reception and love of the true gospel.
- B. The rumors I received about you say that false teachers have bewitched you from the truth.
- C. I hope that these rumors are false or you have heeded this epistle to take away my fear about your conversion and understanding of the gospel.

21 *Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?*

- A. Here is the third section of the chapter: Paul used Ishmael and Isaac to defend his doctrine.
- B. Note again the singular theme of the book – opposition to false teachers promoting the Law.
- C. There is no strong reason to take any of the preceding verses as a return to idolatry (4:8-11).
- D. Paul now appealed directly to the source document of the Law – the Bible's Old Testament.
- E. If they want to be under the Law so much, then he will use the Law to overthrow them!

22 *For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman.*

- A. *For it is written* is Paul's new argument based on the history of Genesis recorded by Moses.
- B. Abraham, the father of the faithful and the illustrious hero of Jews, had two principal sons.
 - 1. Paul ignored Keturah's six sons, for they did not affect his argument, thus teaching a lesson that verses must be used carefully for other than their primary intent (Gen 25:1-6).
 - 2. These words are not written exactly, but generally in two places (Gen 16:1-16; 21:1-8).
 - 3. Hagar was a slave concubine, a bondmaid, and Abraham named her son Ishmael.

4. Sarah was a free wife from Abraham's relatives, and Abraham named her son Isaac.
5. Slavery is no more wicked by its name and concept than are families and nations.

23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

- A. Both children were born of physical *flesh*, as far as delivery from their mothers' womb, but Paul is going after a much more important point than merely pregnancy, delivery, and birth.
- B. Ishmael was born of a carnal, *fleshly*, and foolish plan by Abraham and Sarah to help God out and build their seed outside the promises and power and revelation of God.
- C. Isaac was born by the spiritual power of God according to the covenant promise of God.
- D. The difference between these two sons is enormous – one merely a product of the flesh without any relation to the covenant promises of God, and the other the direct result thereof.
- E. The “souls saved” by human means and decisional regeneration are as fleshly as Ishmael.

24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

- A. These two women and their sons are an allegory of the two competing covenants of God.
 1. An allegory is a lengthy metaphor, where one thing is explained by using another thing.
 2. God revealed to Paul by the Holy Spirit that an allegory could be taken from this history.
 3. The two covenants are the covenant of grace in Abraham and the one of works of Moses.
 4. Hagar is to be understood as representing Mt. Sinai and the Law of Moses, for that covenant holds men in bondage, just as Hagar was a bondservant concubine of Abraham.
- B. The allegorical tool of interpretation must be used with great caution and spiritual wisdom.
 1. Unless the Bible declares so or the conclusion is unavoidable, history is not allegorized.
 2. Those who regularly allegorize for preaching have no idea what they affirm and cannot prove it to anyone either; they might as well preach their dreams or Aesop's fables.

25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

- A. Paul confirmed that Hagar represents Mt. Sinai in Arabia, where God gave Israel the Law.
- B. But he then added that she further represented the then-existing Jerusalem with its temple worship according to the Law, which religious system held its devotees in legalistic bondage.
- C. Since the Jerusalem in our day is not even a third cousin to the Jerusalem that was in Paul's day, Paul separates present Jews in Jerusalem even farther from Gentile believers in Christ!
- D. The bondage here is not the Roman rule, which was true, but spiritual bondage by context!
- E. Anyone who traced his religious worship to Jerusalem was in bondage (John 4:20-24).

26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.

- A. The heavenly Jerusalem, the kingdom of Jesus Christ, is free like Sarah was a freewoman.
- B. And it is that heavenly city that is the uniting place of all believers – both Jews and Gentiles.
- C. Abraham sought this city and believers of every race have come unto it, for it is the heavenly Jerusalem of spiritual significance, the Zion of Christ (Heb 11:10; 12:22-24; 13:14)!

27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

- A. This glorious application of Isaiah 54:1-5 to Gentile conversions is by the Holy Spirit of God.
- B. Those who accuse us of “replacement theology” or “Augustinian allegorization” can eat their hearts out, because we have our brother Paul applying this verse to New Testament saints!
- C. The gospel kingdom of Jesus Christ did not have God as her husband for 1500 years, while God was the husband of earthly Jerusalem; but now the barren city has many more than the married one – the heavenly Jerusalem has many more children than the earthly city of Israel.
- D. The Gentiles did not have God as their husband for 1500 years, while God was the husband of the Jews; but now the Gentiles through faith in Christ far outnumber Jews under the Law!

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

- A. Leaving the two mothers, Paul argued that Gentile Galatians were to be compared to Isaac!
- B. Believers in Jesus Christ are the children of promise by the evidence of their faith in Christ.
- C. How do we prove ourselves to be like Isaac? By faith and baptism in the Lord Jesus Christ.

29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

- A. There is a further aspect of comparison – the flesh hates the Spirit and saints even as then.
- B. Ishmael persecuted Isaac by envy, and so the Jews persecuted the Christians in Paul’s day.
- C. The false teachers out of Jerusalem ridiculed those who trusted Christ without the Law.
- D. While arrogant Judaizers gloated in their presumed superiority, God had something to say ...

30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

- A. What is the comforting lesson of the allegory? God rejected Ishmael to receive Isaac! Glory!
- B. Paul again appealed to the Jewish scriptures to reinforce the power and validity of his point.
- C. Though grievous to Abraham, God did not want Ishmael around any of the great inheritance.

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

- A. Ho, you Gentiles! Rejoice! In God’s sight we are not second-class children like Hagar and Ishmael! We are the heirs of God as the children of the freewoman Sarah by promise!
- B. It is the Jews in Jerusalem serving the temple with their ordinances that are like unto Ishmael.
- C. It is the Gentiles in Galatia with simple faith in God’s promises in Christ that are like Isaac!
- D. The arrogant Jews loved to teach that Gentiles were inferior! Paul made the Jews inferior!

Conclusion

1. In these last days of the world – the New Testament era – those who believe on Jesus Christ and are baptized in His name are the true children of God with an earnest of their eternal inheritance in hand.
2. A minister should never become your enemy because he corrects you, for he is doing it out of love for God, the truth, and you; it is only fools or scorners who resent the man who tries to teach them truth.
3. So far from Gentile believers being second-class citizens, they are the true children of promise by God’s election, and the forsaken Jews still trusting in the Law of Moses are the rejected Ishmael.

For Further Study:

1. The web document, “[When Were You Saved?](#)” divides among five phases of salvation for right understanding.