

## Galatians – Chapter 4 (NASB)

### *Sonship in Christ*

*4:1 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 managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.*

The final verse in Galatians 3 says that we are heirs according to a promise. Since the Galatians are new Christians then they are children and not grownup Christians, so Paul explains what the Jewish law says about heirs that are children. He says that if you are a child and you inherit wealth from your parents then you are nothing more than a slave. You can't do what you want. Since you are a child and have inherited wealth, you are under the control of guardians and managers until an age set by your father. They help you make decisions regarding your inheritance.

“In both Jewish and Greek cultures, there were definite “coming of age” ceremonies where a boy stopped being a child and started being a man, with legal rights as an heir.” (Guzik)

The Jewish people have a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah 13 yrs old. So while we are children then we are held in bondage by how little we know.

The phrase ‘elemental things’ is the Hebrew word ‘stoicheia’. It is also used in Hebrews 5:12-14. Paul is pointing out that as children we can only understand or take in simple or elementary things. Paul is continuing to feed the Galatians the Gospel message and cannot move into deeper teachings.

“Paul told the Galatians to go beyond this “ABC of the universe” into an understanding of God’s grace. Grace contradicts this “ABC of the universe,” because under grace God does not deal with us based on what we deserve. Our good cannot justify us under grace; our bad need not condemn us. God’s blessing and favor are given on a principle completely apart from the “ABC of the universe.” His blessing and favor is given for reasons that are completely *in Him*, and have nothing to do with us.

*4:4 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 Because you are sons, God has 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 “*But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.*” (NLT) Paul is pointing out that Jesus is fully God and fully man.

The phrase “Born of a woman” may be a veiled reference to the Virgin Birth, because Paul never says that Jesus was born of a man. “The more general term ‘woman’ indicates that Christ was born a true man. Paul does not say that Christ was born of man and woman, but only of woman. That he has the virgin in mind is obvious.” (Luther)

Paul says Jesus came to redeem us (NASB) which is the same as buying us (NLT) because we are under the law. When I think of redemption, I think of the old hymn “Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe”. Once we are redeemed by the blood of Christ, then we are adopted as sons/daughters. Paul takes us back to the first verses in this chapter. Since we are the Children of God then we need guardians and managers to help us. Our helper is the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26 says, *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”* Jesus tells the disciples that God will send the Holy Spirit to teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus used the term “Abba Father” when asked for the cup to pass from Him. Paul tells us that we can use the same term when crying out to God.

“We have access to the same intimacy with God the Father that God the Son, Jesus Christ had. Jesus addressed God the Father as “Daddy” when He prayed, *Abba, Father* as recorded in Mark 14:36.”

Since we are full children of God through the Holy Spirit then we become joint-heirs with Jesus. Romans 8:17 says, *“and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”*

*4:8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.*

In verse 8, Paul is speaking to the Gentiles. Before they became Christians, they didn't even know God or He didn't know them. He singled them out because the Jews knew or at least thought they knew God. Another way to think of it, if the Jewish Christians backslid they still worshiped God and if the Gentiles backslid they worshiped NO god or some idol. I assume that God knows everyone. The NASB says *“rather to be known by God”*. This makes me think of Matthew 7:21-23 which ends with *‘I never knew you; depart/away from Me’*. In verse 9, Paul takes them back to his example regarding the heir in verse 3. Again, he speaks of the *“elemental things”* (NASB) but the NLT calls them *“simple things”*. This time he makes sure they know that they are weak and worthless (NASB).

Stott paraphrased the thought: “If you were a slave and are now a son, if you did not know God but have now come to know Him and to be known by Him, how can you turn back again to the old slavery? How can you allow yourself to be enslaved by the very elemental spirits from whom Jesus Christ has rescued you?”

Verse 10 in the NLT says *“You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years.”* As Christians, we know that Paul is just pointing out that they cannot be saved by works. Paul tells them that he has a genuine concern for their salvation. Paul has reached a point in his letter where he says “I think I wasted my time sharing the Gospel with you.” You can sense the frustration in his words.

*4:12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; 13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. 15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. 16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?*

“Paul knew well that he wasn't sinlessly perfect. He wasn't standing before the Galatian Christians, saying, “Look at how perfect I am. Don't worry about following Jesus, just follow me.” He simply

wanted them to follow him as he followed Jesus. Instead, Paul knew the Galatian Christians should imitate his *consistency*. The Galatians started with the right understanding of the gospel because Paul led them into the right understanding. But some of them didn't *stay* there like Paul did, and in that way, they should become like Paul." (Guzik)

When Paul said that he became like them, he was saying what he did in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. He became like one under the law to win those under the law or he became like one not having the law, so as to win those not having the law.

"Apparently, Paul was compelled to travel into the region of Galatia because of some type of physical infirmity he suffered while on his first missionary journey. The book of Acts doesn't tell us as much about this as we would like to know, but we can piece together a few facts." (Guzik)

Evidently, while Paul visited the Galatians the first time, he was sick. The Galatians could have sent him away but chose to take care of him. He says they treated him as if he was an angel or Jesus Christ. Paul is saying that they treated him so well that they would have taken out their own eyes and given them to Paul. Throughout the letter to the Galatians, Paul has rebuked them. Here he wanted to know where was their sense of blessing (NASB) or joyful and grateful spirit (NIV). In verse 16, Paul asks them if he has become their enemy because he told them the truth. This is a complete turnaround from what they thought when he first gave them the gospel message.

*4:17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. 18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— 20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.*

Paul says that "They eagerly seek you out" (NASB), "THEY" are the legalists (Judaizers) or false teachers (NLT). Their intentions are NOT good (NLT). They are turning the Gentiles away from Paul so that the Gentiles will have to get their information about God from the false teachers.

"Do you Galatians know why the false apostles are so zealous about you? They expect you to reciprocate. And that would leave me out. If their zeal were right they would not mind your loving me. But they hate my doctrine and want to stamp it out. In order to bring this to pass they go about to alienate your hearts from me and to make me obnoxious to you." In this way, Paul brings the false apostles into suspicion. He questions their motives. He maintains that their zeal is mere pretense to deceive the Galatians. Our Savior Christ also warned us, saying: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing" (Matt 7:15). (Luther)

In verse 19, Paul calls them children again. This time he questions their salvation because he says he feels as though he is in labor. He is saying that they are not even babies, they aren't even born again yet. He wishes that he was present with them and apologizes for the tone of the letter and he doesn't know how else to help (NLT) them.

### ***Bond and Free***

*4:21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. 23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 24 This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25 Now this*

*Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.*

This chapter started with Paul using Jewish law to explain how we are heirs as children of God. Now he is using an allegory or illustration about the sons of Abraham to explain it. "An allegory is a spiritual or symbolic interpretation of a story that also has a literal meaning." (Anders) Ishmael is the son born to the bondswoman and Isaac is the son born to the free woman. Ishmael was born of or through the flesh and Isaac was born through a promise. The two women represent two covenants from God. The mosaic covenant is represented by Hagar. This covenant gave the Jewish people the law which enslaves them. This corresponds to the current location of Jerusalem which is on earth. Sarah is our mother and represents the New covenant mediated by Jesus. It frees us from the bondage of the law. It gives us salvation and everlasting life. It corresponds to the future location of Jerusalem which is in heaven. Paul explained that we are spiritual children of Abraham and Sarah. From what Paul is saying, I think of a scripture that was on a T-shirt from our church, Matthew 8:36. It says, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (NIV)

*4:26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 27 For it is written, "Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For more numerous are the children of the desolate Than of the one who has a husband."*

*28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the Scripture say?*

*"Cast out the bondswoman and her son, For the son of the bondswoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondswoman, but of the free woman.*

Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 which prophesies that there will be a time when there are more Christians than Jews. This prophecy has obviously been fulfilled. As children of Abraham then we are free. Paul quotes Genesis 21:10 to say that we and the Galatians are to cast out of the law. Guzik says "Law and grace cannot live together as principles for our Christian life." Throughout this chapter, Paul contrasts Christianity and legalism. Guzik identified six differences.

### ***The "Ishmaels" - Legalism vs. The "Isaacs" - True Christianity***

Slavery and bondage vs. Freedom  
Ishmael born according to the flesh vs. Isaac: born by God's promised miracle  
Coming from the earthly Jerusalem vs. Coming from the heavenly Jerusalem  
Many children vs. Many more children  
Persecuting vs. Persecuted  
Inheriting nothing vs. Inheriting everything  
Relationship based on law-keeping vs. Relationship based on trusting God