

## Galatians 4 – Chapter Study

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- II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE Ch. 1:6-7
  - STAY LOYAL TO THE GOSPEL OF GRACE
- III. MESSAGE Chs.1:8-6:10
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Paul ends ch. 3 saying that the promise God made to Abraham extends to his spiritual descendants – that is, all those who've come to faith in Jesus.

Therefore, they are Abraham's *heirs* – the recipients of the promised blessings.

He's going to elaborate on this idea of being an heir now & deal with the continuing question of how believers are to relate to the Law.

#### **b. heirs of God 4:1-7**

**4:1 Now I say *that the heir, as long as he is a child,***

Meaning a *minor*, hasn't reached legal age -

**does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, <sup>2</sup> but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.**

In the ancient world there was an age at which a child transitioned from being a minor to an adult.

This was marked by a ceremony that differed from culture to culture.

In Roman society, a son became a man when his father thought he was ready.

When Paul at the end of v. 2 says "until the time appointed by the father" he's referring to this custom.

It was at this point a Roman exchanged his toga from the one worn by a child to the *toga virilis* – the adult garment.

On this day as of transition from child to adult, both men & women would go to one of the Roman religious shrines and leave their favorite toy to show that they had "put away childish things."

Paul's point here is that while the child is a minor, they have no legal standing.

They share the same rights as a slave.

But because they will one day become an heir & the family name & fortune will be transferred to them, they're groomed while a minor for that day.

**<sup>3</sup> Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**

Last week as we saw in ch. 3, the law was a tutor that brought us to Christ.

It made the presence & problem of sin crystal clear.

But having brought us TO Christ, it could do no more.

Just as the Roman father watched his minor son and saw his progress under his guardians & tutors, he knew when the time was right to announce the son's acceptance as an heir – so in God's perfect timing, He knew the time was right to send the Redeemer to complete what the law began.

It's by faith in the work of the Son that we become heirs of the promises of God, not by the law.

Again – the law only prepares us for the Son, so we can become sons & daughters of God.

Could a tutor in a Roman household make a child an heir? No.

Only the father could do that.

But the father employed the tutor to the end of preparing the child to be an heir.

This is what God intended by the law.

When Paul speaks of our sonship being by adoption at the end of v. 5, he's using another well known Roman custom.

Father's had the power of absolute rule over their household and all it's members – including his wife & children – even adult children.

And son wasn't either an adult or heir until the father said so in a public ceremony.

Some natural-born sons were never recognized/affirmed by their fathers because the father saw some kind of glaring moral flaw in him.

If that were the case, the father would select an heir from among the many fatherless men of his area.

He'd adopt him and in a public ceremony announce this adopted son as his heir.

From that moment, that son was no different from a natural-born child.

He was given a new name to signify his new identity, a new toga & a ring with the family crest on it.

All of that is in sight here when Paul says we are the adopted sons & daughters of God.

**6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"**

*Abba* is not the 80's musical group – it's an Aramaic endearment meaning – *Daddy*.

Paul is still contrasting the difference between the law & grace.

Salvation by grace through faith brings us into the warmest, most intimate & endearing kind of relationship with God – so that it's like the little child who crawls up in his dad's lap and snuggles in.

The law can never produce that kind of warm, safe closeness.

It produces a cautious, concerned timidity that's always walking on eggshells. With God, fearful we've done something to upset Him.

Or – it produces a foolish, self-righteous arrogance that's too proud & stuffy to snuggle with God.

The other night, my daughter who's just started her senior year of high school, was mouthing off, so I took her down on the carpet in the family room.

It was fun breaking out some of the old wrestling moves.

We howled with laughter as we rolled around on the floor.

Later, as I was thinking about it, I was reminded of Jacob wrestling with God in Gen. 32.

They went at it all night!

We usually think about that story from Jacob's angle; he just couldn't get anywhere but he held on and refused to let go.

Think about it from God's perspective. There was no contest for Him – just as there was no contest the other night with Karesse.

All she could do was pinch when I let a hand get free.

But I enjoyed the moment so much, the closeness & fun of it all, I stayed engaged and let her get an occasional tweak in there, while I tied her up in knots the rest of the time.

I really believe that's what God did with Jacob.

Jake was really struggling, but God was digging the closeness, the fun of tangling with his boy.

Christian, what's your idea about God? How do you see Him?

Is He a distant, lofty deity who's so busy He doesn't have time for you?

Look at it again -

**6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying**

out, “Abba, Father!”

**7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**

So—all that is God’s is made over to you & I because of the finished work of Jesus.

**D. Concern for the Galatians 4:8-31**

**8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature [in reality] are not gods.**

Before the Gospel came to this region, they worshipped cruel idols who demanded a lot from them.

**9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God,**

This is a nod back to v. 5 where Paul speaks of our adoption by God -

**how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?**

No son, having been adopted by a wealthy Roman patrician & made the heir of a fortune would go back to live in the streets as a pauper.

No son, declared an adult by his dad would go back to his tutor.

Yet that’s exactly what the Galatians were doing by heeding the false teachers & turning to the law.

**10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.**

The Judaizers were all about the keeping of religious schedules, the Sabbath day & all the feasts.

**11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.**

Paul often likened preaching the Gospel to giving birth; that’s the idea here.

He so much had God’s heart for the lost that when he preached it was like labor.

His concern with the Galatians was that his work there would be like a still-birth or a miscarriage.

If they forsook the Gospel of grace in favor of works, then it would forfeit all he’d done.

**12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you.**

Context is crucial here.

It was their inconsistency that was the problem – so Paul calls them to imitate his constancy.

They’d heard a little from the false teachers on why they ought to keep the law as the way to please God.

Paul had heard it ALL – and rejected their teaching for the silliness it was.

For goodness sake – Paul had been one of the premier scholars of his day on the Law of God and few were more devoted to it.

That’s what he means when he says he’d been like them.

But he’d come to see that the way to God is only through grace by faith in Christ, *not* the law.

**You have not injured me at all.**

Paul’s been using some strong words with them.

But he wasn’t just lashing out because they’d hurt him.

What & how he wrote was prompted by his love & concern for them.

As we’ve mentioned in previous studies, the people who’d settled the region of Galatia were refugees from Gaul.

While physically strong & industrious, they weren’t very bright.

They tended to be stubborn and blunt – so Paul speaks to them now in terms they’d understand.

**13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.**

He reminds them of their shared history.

While Acts 13 tells us of Paul’s visit to this region on his first missionary journey, it doesn’t say WHY he went there.

Here we learn why; apparently he’d had plans to go somewhere else but a physical ailment had altered his itinerary & he & Barnabas had gone to Galatia.

Though his affliction was an obvious cause of concern, the Galatians hadn’t judged him for it but had rather listened & responded to the message he preached, treating him as a divinely appointed messenger.

**15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would**

## **have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.**

So dear had Paul become to the Galatians that in the midst of his suffering, they showed such concern for him it was as if they would have taken it upon themselves if only to relived his pain.

And parent who's held a child with a toothache or earache knows that kind of love.

Paul reminds them of this because by giving heed to the false teachers they were pulling the plug on their relationship with Paul. He *couldn't* believe they would do that.

## **16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?**

The Judaizers called Paul a false teacher & said they ought not listen to him anymore.

So Paul says, "Am I now your enemy because I'm *still* preaching & teaching *the same message* I brought you back at the first? The one that saved you, filled you with hope, and God validated so mightily by miracles & healings galore?"

## **17 They [the false teachers] zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.**

The Judaizers were legalists who said they could only please God by doing good works.

But then they kept raising the ante on what & how many good works they needed to do.

This kept the Galatians jumping through man-made religious hoops.

And it kept the Judaizers firmly in their position as the authorities on what to do.

Legalism is just one more power-trip frauds use to con people.

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

The Galatians were industrious & fervent. Once they set their minds to a think it got done.

They'd been fervent for the Gospel at first, then the Judaizers arrived & appealed to the natural can-do attitude of the Galatians.

They swung their zeal from the Gospel of grace to the law.

## **19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, <sup>20</sup> I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.**

Paul had already suffered the travail of child-birth with these guys and here he is again.

He knows his written words may not be carrying the same sense of kind-hearted urgency that he feels for them and wants them to know that if he was speaking this to them face to face they'd see his love & tender-hearted compassion.

## **21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one [Ishmael] by a bondwoman [the Egyptian Hagar], the other [Isaac] by a freewoman [his wife, Sarah]. <sup>23</sup> But he *who was* of the bondwoman [Ishmael] was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman [Isaac] through promise, <sup>24</sup> which things are symbolic.**

Let's quickly recap that story.

Abraham was an old guy & without a child. His wife Sarah was way past child-bearing age.

Yet God had promised them massive blessings including many descendants.

So they concocted a plan to help God out – Sarah's servant Hagar became her surrogate.

Hagar conceived by Abraham and had a son named Ishmael.

But that wasn't what God intended. He was *waiting* till neither Abe *nor* Sarah could have kids.

He wanted their child to be a miracle so that Abraham & all his descendants would forever realize that the blessing God is dependent upon His work & power, not ours!

Isaac wasn't conceived until both Abe & Sarah were past the age of child-bearing.

Paul's point was that even that far back, it was about grace through faith, not the works or effort of man to secure God's blessing.

Paul then shows how Ishmael & Isaac become figure-heads for 2 different covenants.

**For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— <sup>25</sup> for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—**

It was at Sinai that God entered into the covenant of the law with Israel.

The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem still tried to come to God on the basis of that covenant.

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

The Jews believed that just as the earthly *temple* was a copy of the *throne room* of heaven, the city of *Jerusalem* was simply a *model* of heaven itself.

And heaven was both the origin & goal of creation.

Why Paul says all this will become clear in a moment.

**27 For it is written:**

He quotes Isa. 54:1 -

**“Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.”**

Here’s the point –

God promised Abraham amazing blessings, including lots of descendants.

Abraham tried to help God by devising his own plan to have kids.

The result was Ishmael who ended up having quite a few descendants of his own.

But Ishmael *wasn’t* God’s plan – *Isaac* was; the miracle child of faith.

And Isaac ended up having *way more* descendants than Ishmael– because the descendants of the promise far outnumber those of the flesh.

Isaac & Ishmael prove that the blessing of God is for those who look by faith to grace, not to the works of the law.

**28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.**

Ishmael was 13 when Isaac was born & when he saw how Abraham doted on his new son, he despised & mocked him.

And so it has *always* been between those who trust in the flesh & those who trust in Christ.

The Christian loves the lost & wants to see them come to repentance.

But the lost, those who dig in their heels & determine to be good enough for God on the basis of their own works despise, mock, & argue endlessly with believers.

They do so because their self-righteous legalism is provoked by grace.

Legalism is *allergic* to grace – it provokes a reaction.

**30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.**

When Sarah saw Ishmael mocking her son Isaac, the son of promise – she told Abraham that Ishmael and his mama had to go.

You see, Sarah understood, finally!

There can be no mixing of grace & works, faith & flesh.

Abe was bummed because Ishmael was his boy, but God told him, “Listen to your wife; do what she says.”

Paul used this OT story to tell the Galatians what they needed to do with the Judaizers – disinvite them.

They needed to be sent packing – right now!

Because there’s no mixing grace & works, faith & flesh.

And so it is for us here tonight.

**Feed My Sheep**

**Feed My Sheep**