

Galatians Chapter 4

Verses 1-7: Paul expands on the analogy of a child's coming of age (3:24-26), contrasting believers' lives before salvation (as children and servants), with their lives after salvation (as adults and sons). Both Paul's Jewish and Gentile readers readily understood this imagery, since the Jews, Greeks, and Romans all had a ceremony to mark a child's coming of age.

Paul uses the Roman practice of tutela impuberes, "guardianship for a minor," to illustrate man's temporary subjection to the law. A Roman father appointed guardians to manage his child's affairs until 25 years of age, at which time the heir came of age. Similarly, man's earlier period of spiritual immaturity under the law is contrasted with the Christian's new freedom of adult Sonship in Christ.

Galatians 4:1 "Now I say, [That] the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;"

"Child": The Greek word refers to a child too young to talk; a minor, spiritually and intellectually immature and not ready for the privileges and responsibilities of adulthood.

We see in this, that Paul is still speaking of the same things that he did in chapter 3, but with a slightly different slant. Some servants were entrusted with the wealth of the family. This was the case with Abraham. His trusted servant was even sent to bring a wife for Isaac.

A small child will inherit his father's fortune, if the father dies. When he is small, he is not capable of handling the affairs. In a case such as this, the trusted servant would care for the inheritance for the child, until he became of age. It may all belong to him, but he cannot take possession, until he is more mature.

The child must be in obedience to his father the same as the servant, until he is of age.

Galatians 4:2 "But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father."

"Tutors and governors" or "Guardians and managers". "Guardians" were slaves entrusted with the care of an underage boy, while "managers" managed their property for them until they came of age. Along with the tutor (3:24), they had almost complete charge of the child – so that, for all practical purposes, a child under their care did not differ from a slave.

This is reverting back to the schoolmaster in the chapter before. A brand new Christian cannot really handle his own affairs, until he is schooled in God's ways. It is really not for us to decide when we are ready to be released from training. Only God knows when we can begin to teach, instead of being taught.

Galatians 4:3 "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:"

“When we were children ... in bondage”: Before our “coming of age” when we came to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

“Elements of the world”: “Elemental” is from a Greek word meaning “row,” or “rank,” and was used to speak of basic, foundational things like the letters of the alphabet. In light of its use (in verse 9), it is best to see it here as a reference to the basic elements and rituals of human religion (see note on Col. 2:8).

Paul describes both Jewish and Gentile religions as elemental because they are merely human, never rising to the level of the divine. Both Jewish religion and Gentile religion centered on man-made systems of works.

They were filled with laws and ceremonies to be performed so as to achieve divine acceptance. All such rudimentary elements are immature, like behaviors of children under bondage to a guardian.

“We ... were in bondage under” means “we ... were subject to.”

“The elements of the world” refers to elementary religious teachings and practices. For the Jew, it was the law. For the Gentile, it was the truths of the law written in his heart (Rom. 2:14-15). Before Christ, man was as it were, spiritually immature. Therefore, he was subject to the rudimentary teaching of the law.

The battle raging for a Christian is the battle between the flesh and the spirit. When we are first saved, habits still call out to our flesh, and put us under bondage of the desires of our flesh. As we grow in the Lord, our spirit becomes stronger and takes over control. When the spirit reigns, sin no longer has us under bondage. We overcome the world and the flesh, and live for Jesus.

Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,"

“The fullness of the time” In God’s timetable, when the exact religious, cultural and political conditions demanded by His perfect plan were in place, Jesus came into the world. This corresponds to “the time appointed of [by] the father” (in 4:2).

“God sent forth his Son”: As a father set the time for the ceremony of his son becoming of age and being released from the guardians, managers and tutors, so God sent His Son at the precise moment to bring all who believe out from under bondage to the law. A truth Jesus repeatedly affirmed (John 5:30, 36-37; 6:39, 44, 57; 8:16, 18, 42; 12:49; 17:21, 25; 20:21).

That the Father sent Jesus into the world teaches His pre-existence as the eternal second member of the Trinity (see notes on Phil. 2:6-7; Heb. 1:3-5; Rom. 8:3-4).

“Made of a woman” (or, “born of a woman”): This emphasizes Jesus’ full humanity, not merely His virgin birth (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20-25). Jesus had to be fully God for His sacrifice to be of the

infinite worth needed to atone for sin. But, He also had to be fully man so He could take upon Himself the penalty of sin as the substitute for man (see Luke 1:32, 35; John 1:1, 14, 18).

“Under the law”: Like all men, Jesus was obligated to obey God’s law. Unlike anyone else however, He perfectly obeyed that law (John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:54). His sinlessness made Him the unblemished sacrifice for sins, who perfectly obey God in everything. That perfect righteousness is what is imputed to those who believe in Him.

This stresses Jesus’ humiliation at leaving His pre-existent glory and becoming man; without having done so He could not have died for our sins. “Made under the law” (or, “born subject to the law”): He was born a Jew under the law, in order to free those under the curse of the law (4:5).

In heaven, Jesus was the Word of God. At a time appointed of the Father, the Son of God was sent to this earth in the form of man to save His people. The Holy Spirit hovered over Mary, and she conceived of the Spirit of God. The flesh of the Lord Jesus was as a man. It was a flesh body. It (the body of Jesus), was made under the law.

Mary was a natural woman. The body of Jesus was natural man. The Spirit, within that body, was God the Son, or God the Word. Jesus was made of the woman and not of man (in Genesis 3:15), this had been promised.

Genesis 3:15 "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The Father of Jesus was not Joseph. The Father of Jesus was God. This plan had been made from the foundation of the world.

Galatians 4:5 "To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

“Redeem” (see note on 3:13).

“Them . . . under the law”: Guilty sinners who are under the law’s demands and its curses (see notes on 3:10, 13) and in need of a savior (see note on 3:23).

“The adoption of sons”: “Adoption” is the act of bringing someone who is the off-spring of another into one’s own family. Since unregenerate people are by nature children of the devil (see note on 3:26). The only way they can become God’s children is by spiritual adoption (Rom. 8:15, 23; Eph. 1:5).

The Greek word *huiotes* would have denoted Sonship by birth. But the word rendered “adoption of sons” is *huiotesia*, which means Sonship conferred. Through Christ believers have become God’s sons by adoption.

The reason that all must be redeemed from the law is the fact that by the law all are condemned to die. The law brings death.

Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin [is] death; but the gift of God [is] eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Every Christian has been redeemed by Jesus Christ with His precious blood and been adopted into the family of God. We are the adopted sons of the Father, if we accept Jesus as our Savior Redeemer.

Galatians 4:6 "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

"Because ye are sons:" Every child of God was divinely given the Holy Spirit the moment he was adopted by God. "Abba" is an Aramaic domestic term by which the father was called in the affectionate intimacy of the family. It corresponds to our "daddy" or "papa." The Spirit gives us an awareness that God is our Father.

"Abba"; An Aramaic term of endearment, used by young children to speak to their fathers; it is the equivalent of the word "Daddy" (see note on Rom. 8:15).

"Spirit of his Son": It is the Holy Spirit's work to confirm to believers their adoption as God's children (see note on Rom. 8:15). Assurance of salvation is a gracious work of the Holy Spirit and does not come from any human source.

Only Jesus and Jesus' followers can call the Father Abba. It is actually the Spirit of Jesus within us that cries out Abba. The Holy Spirit within us reveals the fact to us of our sonship. This Spirit of the Risen Christ within us opens our understanding to this.

Galatians 4:7 "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

"Thou art no more a servant" is Paul's way of concluding that the believer is no longer under law. He is instead "a son", that is, a full-grown adult son who does not need the law's elementary instruction and guidance.

Our inheritance is in Christ and we are His inheritance as well.

1 Peter 1:4 "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,"

We must not lose sight of the fact that Paul is explaining to these Galatians the benefits of the grace of God over the law. The Judaizers were trying to put them back under the law. Christians receive sonship through the Spirit of Christ within them.

Verses 8-11: While salvation is the free gift of God (Rom. 5:15-16, 18; 6:23; Eph. 2:8), it brings with it serious responsibility (Luke 12:48). God requires believers to live a holy life because they are children of a holy God and desire to love and worship Him (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:15-18).

That obligation was to the unchanging moral and spiritual principles that forever reflect the nature of God. However, it did not include the rituals and ceremonies unique to Israel under Mosaic law as the Judaizers falsely claimed.

Galatians 4:8 "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods."

“When ye knew not God”: Before coming to saving faith in Christ, no unsaved person knows God (see notes on Eph. 4:17-19; 2 Cor. 4:3-6).

“By nature are no gods”: The Greco-Roman pantheon of non-existent deities the Galatians had imagined they worshiped before their conversion (Rom 1:23; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 10:19-20; 12:2; 1 Thess. 1:9).

“Howbeit then” means “although at an earlier time”, and refers to the Galatians’ pre-Christian, pagan past. They “did service” to, or served, false gods.

Many of the Galatians had been heathen people, before they received Christ as their Savior. They truly had not known what, or whom to worship, until they received the Truth through Jesus Christ.

The creation of God is not to be worshipped. Anything that you can see with your natural eye is not God. The things of nature can glorify God, but they are not God and should not be worshipped. They worshipped things which really were not God.

Galatians 4:9 " 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?"

“Are known of God”: We can know God only because He first knew us, just as we choose Him only because He first chose us (John 6:44; 15:16), and we love him only because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

“Turn ye again” (see notes on 3:1-3).

“Weak ... beggarly elements ... again ... bondage” (see note on verse 3).

“But now” refers to the recipients’ Christian present. The question raised by “how”, contains a prohibition, by which Paul says, in effect, “Don’t you dare turn again to the weak and beggarly elements!” (i.e., the law).

As unbelievers, the Gentile Galatians were formerly under law in that its truths were written in their consciences (Rom. 2:14-15). The law (“elements”) is described as “weak” because it cannot save, and it is depicted as “beggarly” (poor) because, as a system, it is inferior to the New Covenant.

Paul is speaking directly to the Christians in Galatia now. We will never know God in the fullest sense, until we are in heaven with Him. He knows us though. How can they even think of turning away from the freedom they know in Christianity and go back to the bondage of the law?

Galatians 4:10 "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years."

“Days ... years”: The rituals, ceremonies and festivals of the Jewish religious calendar which God had given, but were never required for the church. Paul warns the Galatians, as he did the Colossians (see notes on Rom. 14:1-6; Col. 2:16-17), against legalistically observing them as if they were required by God or could earn favor with Him.

The Galatians were beginning to “observe” that part of the law least repugnant to them, the calendar: “days” (Sabbath, fast, and feast days), “months” (new moons or feast days beginning with each month); “times” (Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles); and “years” (sabbatical years, and the Year of Jubilee).

This was very much a part of the law. This observance of days had to do with the Sabbath and with the feast of the law. There are some religions today that are doing like these people in Galatia were doing. On one hand, they wanted the benefits of Christianity, but they were very much caught up in the law.

This is one of the reasons the Christians celebrate Sunday instead of Saturday for their holy day. The Christians are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. The others are living in the law.

Galatians 4:11 "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain."

“Labor ... in vain”: Paul feared that his effort in establishing and building the Galatian churches might prove to be futile if they fell back into legalism (3:4; 1 Thess. 3:5).

“In vain” means “without saving result.” Should the Galatians completely embrace the law and the Judaizers’ message of salvation by works; it would show their profession of faith in Paul’s gospel to have been merely outward and not real.

Paul is feeling as if they have forgotten everything he taught them. To observe all of the law would be to say that Jesus' sacrifice was not sufficient to fulfill all of the law. Paul says, perhaps, I have wasted my time on you.

Verses 12-20: Having sternly rebuked the Galatians, Paul changes his approach and makes an appeal based on his strong affection for them.

Galatians 4:12 "Brethren, I beseech you, be as I [am]; for I [am] as ye [are]: ye have not injured me at all."

“As I am, for I am as ye are”: Paul had been a proud, self-righteous Pharisee, trusting in his own righteousness to save him (Phil. 3:4-6). But when he came to Christ, he abandoned all efforts to save himself, trusting wholly in God’s grace (Phil. 3:7-9). He urged the Galatians to follow his example and avoid the legalism of the Judaizers.

“Be as I am”, is an appeal to the readers to be free from the law as Paul is. “I am as ye are”, signifies that Paul, though a Jew, regards himself as free from the law’s bondage in the same way that the non-Jewish Galatians are.

“Ye have not injured me at all”: means Paul’s severe language of (verses 8-11), is not due to their offending him. To the apostle, this remark serves as a motivating factor for the Galatians: “Since you have not previously injured me, do not do so now by refusing my request” (of verse 9).

Though the Jews persecuted him when he first went to Galatia, the Galatian believers had not harmed Paul, but had enthusiastically received him when he preached the gospel to them (Acts 13:42-50; 14:19). How, he asked, could they reject him now?

Paul had to face this very thing himself. He had been taught from his youth the law. He had even observed some of the same things he is speaking against here. Paul says, look, I have overcome that. Paul realizes that you cannot practice the law and grace at the same time. We must choose between the two.

Paul is trying to make them understand that everything was taken care of in Jesus Christ. They had not caused him to fall away from grace.

Romans 8:38-39 "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come," "Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Galatians 4:13 "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first."

“Infirmity of the flesh”: Some think the illness Paul refers to was malaria, possibly contracted in the coastal lowlands of Pamphylia. That could explain why Paul and Barnabas apparently did not preach at Perga, a city in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13-14).

“Through infirmity of the flesh” means “because of bodily illness.” Evidently physical sickness led to Paul’s earlier ministry among the Galatians. Perhaps he had not planned to evangelize Galatia, but illness altered his itinerary, thus leading him there.

The cooler and healthier weather in Galatia and especially at Pisidian Antioch (3,600 feet above sea level), where Paul went when he left Perga, would have brought some relief to the fever

caused by malaria. Although malaria is a serious, debilitating disease, its attacks are not continuous; Paul could have ministered between bouts with fever.

We know that Paul had an infirmity of the flesh. He did stay with them for a while and preach, in spite of his infirmity. "Infirmity", in the verse above, means feebleness of body or mind. It could, also, mean malady, frailty, disease, sickness, or weakness. It was an effort on Paul's part to bring them the message.

Galatians 4:14 "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."

"Received me" The Galatians welcomed Paul in spite of his illness, which in no way was a barrier to his credibility or acceptance.

"Christ Jesus" (see notes on Matt. 18:5-10).

In contrast to any supposed Galatian mistreatment of Paul (verse 12), this verse reveals how well they treated him. "My temptation which was in my flesh" might be paraphrased, "that which tried you in my body." Paul's physical ailment (verse 13), may have been repulsive to the Galatians who viewed it.

Nevertheless they "despised not, nor rejected" him because of this illness, but accepted him "as an angel of God." Paul's statement implies the question: "Having treated me so well when physically offensive, will you now mistreat me by embracing a false gospel?"

Whatever the problem that Paul had, did not cause these people to reject hearing the message of the gospel to them. There are all sorts of speculation as to what the problem was, I will not add to that confusion by guessing. If we were supposed to know, the Lord would tell us. They had overlooked the infirmity and received him as a ministering spirit from the Lord.

If we minister the way God would have us to, we do not speak of ourselves. We allow the Lord Jesus to minister through us. This was the case with Paul. Paul opened his mouth and the Lord Jesus Christ spoke through him to the people. The people accepted the message, knowing that Christ was speaking through Paul.

Galatians 4:15 "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."

"Blessedness" means here "gratefulness." It indicates that the Galatians considered themselves fortunate for having been under Paul's earlier ministry. They were so grateful that they would have given him their own eyes had it been possible. The apostle's question implies that the Galatians, vacillating between grace and law, may no longer be grateful for his previous ministry.

Blessing can also be translated “happiness,” or “satisfaction.” Paul points out that the Galatians had been happy and content with his gospel preaching (Acts 13:48), and wonders why they had turned against him.

“Plucked out your own eyes”: This may be a figure of speech (Matt. 5:29; 18:9), or an indication that Paul’s bodily illness (see note on verse 13), had somehow affected his eyes (6:11). In either case, it reflects the great love the Galatians had initially expressed for the apostle.

Paul is disturbed, because they had turned away from that first message they had so readily accepted. He says, you believed every word I said and you would have done anything to help me. Why have you changed your mind about the gospel of Christ? Paul is trying to explain to them that Truth never changes. Where did your love for the message I brought go?

Galatians 4:16 "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"

“Your enemy”: The Galatians had become so confused that, in spite of their previous affection for Paul, some had come to regard him as their enemy. The apostle reminds them that he had not harmed them, but merely told them the truth, a truth that had once brought them great joy (see note on verse 15).

This verse contrasts the Galatians’ previous and current attitudes toward Paul. They used to esteem him highly (verse 14-15); but now, as the Judaizers turn the readers’ affection from Paul, they are beginning to regard him as an opponent because he speaks “the truth” of the gospel, pointing out their erroneous ways.

The problem is that while Paul was away, the enemy crept in. Paul had brought the Truth, but while he was away, they began to believe a lie. They had even turned against Paul, because he is telling them the Truth. Paul loves them and wants to be their friend, but more than that, he wants them to accept the Truth.

Galatians Chapter 4 Questions

1. The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a _____.
2. What Old Testament person entrusted the choosing of a wife for his son to his servant?
3. He is under tutors and governors until when?
4. What must a brand new Christian do before he can handle his affairs?
5. Who knows when someone is ready to teach instead of being taught?
6. In verse 3, what were these children in bondage under?

7. What is the battle that rages within a new Christian?
8. When did God send His Son?
9. Jesus was made of a woman, made under the _____.
10. What was Jesus called in heaven, before He came to the earth as Savior?
11. Jesus' body was as a natural man, what was within that body?
12. Who was Jesus' Father?
13. What does verse 5 say, Christians were redeemed from the law to receive?
14. The wages of sin is _____.
15. Who can call the Father Abba?
16. What reveals the fact of our sonship to us?
17. Who were trying to put them back under the law?
18. What had many of the Galatians been, before they received Christ?
19. The things of nature can _____ God, but are not to be _____.
20. What things had they been observing?
21. Paul felt that he had bestowed labor on them in _____.
22. To observe the law would be saying what?
23. What was Paul's infirmity?
24. How had they received Paul at first?
25. What terrible extent would they have gone to for Paul at the first?
26. Why had they started believing something that Paul had not taught them?