

Galatians Chapter 4 Continued

Galatians 4:17 "They zealously affect you, [but] not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them."

“They”: The Judaizers.

“Zealously affect you” (or, “seek your favor”): With a serious concern, or warm interest. The same word is used (in 1:14), to describe Paul’s former zeal for Judaism. The Judaizers appeared to have a genuine interest in the Galatians, but their true motive was to exclude the Galatians from God’s gracious salvation and win recognition for themselves.

The Judaizers are wooing the Galatians, “but not well,” that is, with improper intentions. The heretics want to “exclude” or cut them off from Paul, so that the Galatians will then court the Judaizers’ favor.

The problem that we have been dealing with in this is, that the Judaizers had been trying to put these Galatian Christians back under the Law of Moses. This to me, means that they have worked hard at getting them to go back under the law. They were even threatening to have nothing to do with them, if they did not keep the law. This is separation of the wrong kind.

We are supposed to live wholesome lives after we receive salvation, but to go back to sacrificing and circumcising the men, would be denying that Jesus fulfilled the law for all believers. It would really be denying Him to be the Christ, the Messiah.

Galatians 4:18 "But [it is] good to be zealously affected always in [a] good [thing], and not only when I am present with you."

“Not only when I am present with you”: Paul encouraged the Galatians to have the same zeal for the true gospel of grace that they had once had when he was with them.

It is good to be sought after (wooed, courted), when those doing the courting do so with pure motives. Paul seeks to prevent the readers from thinking that his remark (in verse 17), means he wants to monopolize them: “I do not wish to have you all to myself,” to paraphrase the apostle. “I am glad others are fond of you, provided it is with honorable motives.” This is not the case with the Judaizers.

Paul is saying here, that it is a good thing to work hard for things that are right. The main thing is that Paul wants them to be strong in their belief, whether he is with them or not. He wants them to grow up in the Lord, so they will not be influenced to believe a lie. Paul cannot be with them all the time. He wants to know that they will be able to walk the Christian walk, even when he is not there.

Galatians 4:19 "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,"

“My little children” Paul’s only use of this affectionate phrase, which John uses frequently “My little children” (1 John 2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21).

This reveals that Paul’s concern for them (verse 18), is like that of a parent for his children. “I travail in birth” is the Greek word *odino* used of a woman suffering labor pains. It discloses the anxious concern, hard work, and pain experienced on his part for his converts.

This labor lasts “until Christ be formed in you,” that is, until Christ’s life, character and virtues are fully cultivated in their lives. Therefore, Paul is not speaking of their conversion but of their growth as Christians. *Odino* denotes not merely the anguish and exertion for giving birth, for formation of the embryo precedes labor pains.

Rather, a mother’s concern and labor extend from birth until her child reaches adulthood. So it is with Paul in his pastoral concern for the Galatians. But “again” indicates they failed to reach spiritual maturity following conversion, owing to this false gospel. So, the writer is “again” laboring to bring them to full growth.

Paul is trying his best to get them into the Truth and then keep them in the Truth. Paul calls them his little children, because they came to Christ under his ministry. He calls them little children, because they had not grown up in the Lord. They were still feeding on milk and honey. He wants Christ to be so fully in their lives that they will not get off the Truth again.

Galatians 4:20 "I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you."

“I stand in doubt of you” is another way of saying, “I am perplexed [disturbed] about you.” The verb means “to be at wits end.” (verse 6).

Paul is concerned that they have gone back into the teaching of the law. He believes if he were there, speaking directly to them, they would be stronger in the Truth.

“Verses 4:21 – 5:1: Paul continuing to contrast grace and law, faith and work; employs an Old Testament story as an analogy or illustration of what he has been teaching.

Galatians 4:21 "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?"

“Under the law” (see note on 3:10).

Paul had spoken to them of his love for them, but now he changes to a reprimand. Those who are determined that it is necessary to keep the law of Moses are the ones he is specifically speaking to in this verse.

Galatians 4:22 "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman."

“Two sons”: Ishmael, son of Sarah’s Egyptian maid Hagar (Gen. 16:1-16), and Isaac, Sarah’s son (Gen. 21:1-7). “The one” Ishmael, “by a bondmaid” slave woman, in this case, Hagar, “the other Isaac “by a freewoman” (Sarah).

We see in this a very good argument for not going back to the law. We have discussed in a previous lesson how the law symbolized the flesh, and grace symbolized the Spirit. The law brought bondage to them. Grace had brought freedom.

Galatians 4:23 "But he [who was] of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman [was] by promise."

“Born after the flesh:” Ishmael’s birth was motivated by Abraham and Sarah’s lack of faith in God’s promise and fulfilled by sinful human means. Ishmael was born in the ordinary manner, natural physical generation. But Isaac’s birth was “by promise,” in other words, as the result of divine promise. Contrary to nature, God enabled his parents to conceive in old age.

The comparison here, is in the natural birth of the nation of Israel and the law. They were symbolic of the bondwoman's children. This was a religion of works of the law.

The freewoman's son was the son the promise of the redeemer would be fulfilled through. The free woman was the mother of the son the promise to Abraham would come through. We have shown over and over in these lessons how the seed spoken of in the promise to Abraham was Jesus, and through Him His followers.

Galatians 4:24 "Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Hagar."

“An allegory” goes beyond certain surface parts of a historical account and draws out deeper meanings seemingly not inherent in that account.

The Greek word was used of a story that conveyed a meaning beyond the literal sense of the words. In this passage, Paul uses historical people and places from the Old Testament to illustrate spiritual truth.

This is actually not an allegory, nor are there any allegories in Scripture. An allegory is a fictional story where real truth is the secret, mysterious, hidden meaning. The story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac is actual history and has no secret or hidden meaning. Paul uses it only as an illustration to support his contrast between law and grace.

Paul is saying: “These things lend themselves to the following figurative explanation.” Paul makes Hagar represent the Mosaic covenant (i.e., the law) “which gendereth to bondage” (or, “which begets children for slavery”). As Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, sharing her same social status of slavery, so the law puts those subject to it in spiritual bondage.

“Two covenants”: Paul uses the two mothers, their two sons, and two locations as a further illustration of two covenants. Hager, Ismael, and Mt. Sinai (earthly Jerusalem), represent the covenant of law; Sarah, Isaac and the heavenly Jerusalem the covenant of promise.

However, Paul cannot be contrasting these two covenants as different ways of salvation, one way for Old Testament saints, another for New Testament saints, a premise he has already denied (2:16; 3:10-14, 21-22). The purpose of the Mosaic Covenant was only to show all who were under its demands and condemnation their desperate need for salvation by grace alone (3:24), it was never intended to portray the way of salvation.

Paul’s point is that those, like the Judaizers, who attempt to earn righteousness by keeping the law receive only bondage and condemnation (3:10, 23). While those who partake of salvation by grace, the only way of salvation since Adam’s sin, are freed from the law’s bondage and condemnation.

“Mount Sinai”: An appropriate symbol for the old covenant, since it was at Mt. Sinai that Moses received the law (Exodus 19).

“Hagar”: Since she was Sarah’s slave (Gen. 16:1), Hagar is a fitting illustration of those under bondage to the law (verses 5, 21, 3:23). She was associated with Mt. Sinai through her son Ishmael whose descendants settled in that region.

We see in these two covenants, the law and the grace. The law covenant was made to the physical house of Israel, and the covenant of promise (grace), was for the spiritual house of Israel (all believers in Christ).

The strange thing is that the covenant of the law had to be, before there could be the covenant of grace from the law. The law brought bondage upon the people. Hagar was the mother of the son of the flesh (Ishmael).

Galatians 4:25 "For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children."

“For” further explains the link between Hagar and Sinai. “Hagar is mount Sinai” means, “Hagar stands for Mount Sinai.” Hagar “answereth” [corresponds] “to” the then current “Jerusalem” (i.e., Judaism). Paul viewed Hagar and Judaism in the same way, for as Hagar and her offspring were in social bondage, so Judaism and her adherents were in spiritual slavery to the law.

“Answereth ... Jerusalem”: The law was given at Sinai and received its highest expression in the temple worship at Jerusalem. The Jewish people were still in bondage to the law.

Galatians 4:26 "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."

“Jerusalem which is above is free”: Heaven (Heb. 12:18, 22). Those who are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), are free from the Mosaic law, works, bondage, and trying endlessly and futilely to please God by the flesh.

“The mother”: Believers are children of the heavenly Jerusalem, the “mother-city” of heaven. In contrast to the slavery of Hagar’s children, believers in Christ are free (5:1; Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18; John 8:36; Rom. 6:18, 22; 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:17).

Christianity is represented by “Jerusalem which is above,” that is, the heavenly city. This Christian community is described as being “free,” that is, not under the law.

This is speaking of the New Jerusalem. This is the Jerusalem where Christ reigns. New Jerusalem and the Christians are sometimes spoken of as the same. Of course, the New Jerusalem spoken of as the bride of Christ and the believers in Christ being the bride of Christ is what I am speaking of.

Galatians 4:27 "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 a husband."

Paul applies the passage from (Isaiah 54:1), to the Jerusalem above.

The “barren” woman is Christianity; “she which hath a husband” is Judaism. Initially the latter had many adherents and the former had few. But Christianity “hath” will have “many more children” (i.e. followers), than Judaism.

This has to be a spiritual statement. This could not be in the natural. This is speaking of the Christians, who are saved, being so many that they are impossible to number. The Jews, or physical Israel, is small in comparison to that.

Galatians 4:28 "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise."

“Children of promise”: Just as Isaac inherited the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 26:1-3), so also are believers the recipients of God’s redemptive promises (1 Cor. 3:21-23, Eph. 1:3), because they are spiritual heirs of Abraham (see note on 3:29).

“Now” begins to apply the figurative manner of explanation. Paul views Christians as “children of promise.” That is, as Isaac was born in fulfillment of divine promise, so the Galatians’ status as God’s “children” rests neither on physical descent nor on meritorious works, but on faith in God’s “promise.”

Believers in Christ (Christians), are the children of promise, through Jesus Christ. Isaac was the spiritual son of Abraham. He was the son of promise, not the son of the flesh. Our blessing is from the right hand. The right hand blessing is the spiritual blessing.

Galatians 4:29 "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him [that was born] after the Spirit, even so [it is] now."

“He that was born after the flesh”: Ishmael (see note on verse 23).

“Persecuted him that was born after the Spirit”: Isaac, who Ishmael mocked at the feast celebrating Isaac’s weaning (see Gen. 21:8-9).

“Even so it is now,” says Paul; those seeking salvation by works trouble those seeking divine favor by faith in God’s grace (5:10).

Ishmael’s descendants (Arabs), have always persecuted Isaac’s (Jews). So, unbelievers have always persecuted believers (Matt. 5:11; 10:22-25; Mark 10:30; John 15:19-20; 16:2, 33; 17:14; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; Heb. 11:32-37; 1 Pet. 2:20-21; 3:14; 4:12-14).

The war has always been between the flesh and the Spirit. Christians are born of the Spirit of God. We are not of the flesh.

John 3:5-6 "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Paul is warning them here that there will never be peace between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh wants to put you under bondage. The Spirit frees.

Galatians 4:30 "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."

“Cast out the bondwoman” (quoted from Gen. 21:10), to illustrate that those who are attempting to be justified on the basis of keeping the law will be cast out of God’s presence forever (Matt. 8:12; 22:12-13, 25:30; Luke 13:28; 2 Thess. 1:9).

Paul continues applying the allegory by citing (Genesis 21:10-12), where Abraham was advised to send Hagar and Ishmael away from Sarah and Isaac. The Galatians are to excommunicate the Judaizers from their ranks. Why? Legal bondage (justification by works), and spiritual freedom (justification by faith), cannot coexist.

Jesus is the Way to heaven. There is only one way to get there. Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ makes heaven your home. It is not possible to believe in Jesus, and not believe Him all at the same time. (Romans 10:9-10), tell what you must do to be saved.

Romans 10:9-10 "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

This leaves no doubt at all. The son of the flesh denies the Lord Jesus. The son of the freewoman believes. His faith is counted unto him as righteousness.

Galatians 4:31 "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

“We are not children of the bondwoman” (see notes on 4:24, 26).

Christians are not of the flesh, but are of the Spirit. We are righteous, with faithful Abraham, because we have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is saying one more time, stay free and do not go back into the bondage of the law.

Galatians Chapter 4 Continued Questions

1. What have the Judaizers been attempting to do?
2. What would it be saying to go back to sacrificing?
3. What was it good to be zealous about?
4. Who does Paul call them in verse 19?
5. Why did he call them this?
6. Why is Paul concerned about them?
7. Who is Paul specifically speaking to in verse 21?
8. Who were Abraham's 2 sons by?
9. What symbolized the flesh?
10. What is the comparison in verse 23?
11. What was the law a religion of?
12. Which woman's son was the line the redeemer would come in?
13. What two covenants is this about?
14. What name was the bondwoman and her son called by?
15. Where was the law given?
16. What did Hagar and this mountain have in common?
17. What city is called the mother of us all?
18. Who, or what, is the bride of Christ?
19. We are children of promise like _____.
20. What is the right hand blessing?

21. The war has always been between the _____ and the _____.
22. What did the Scripture say to do with the bondwoman?
23. What two Scriptures tell us how to be saved?
24. Faith is counted unto him as _____.
25. Which woman are we of?