

Galatians 4

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Galatians 4:1-2

“But I say that so long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bondservant though he is lord of all; but is under guardians and stewards until the day appointed of the father.”

Paul is expanding on what he said in chapter 3:24:25 which reads, “So that the law is become our tutor (to bring us) unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 *But now faith that is come, we are no longer under a tutor”.* Those who live under the old law were in effect under the guardianship of the law of Moses. The heir in this context is anyone who is a Christian which we see from the last verse of Galatians 3 which reads, “*And if ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise”*. Paul is using an underage human child who is heir to his father’s possessions to illustrate the transition of heirs to Abraham’s promise under the law of Moses to being heirs of the same promises under the law of Christ. Those who lived under the law of Moses are illustrated here as the underage children.

An underage child in a first century household had no legal rights that would supersede the authority given by the master of the house to the bondservants who were in charge of the child’s safekeeping and upbringing. But even though this underage child was under the authority of the bondservants, he was still lord over them at the same time. This arrangement continued until the time appointed by the child’s father where he would then be taken out of the oversight of the bondservants, guardians, or tutors and given his rightful place as the heir to the father’s possessions.

The parallel with the law of Moses is that God put in place the law of Moses to serve in the capacity of guardian and steward until such time that the underage child which represents the Israelite nation reached that point where they could be taken out from under the law of Moses and placed directly under Christ. It was at this point when going from the old law to the law of Christ that Christians received the long awaited blessing of Jesus Christ which had been promised through Abraham to all nations of the earth.

Galatians 4:3

“So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world:”

Paul is now explaining why the bondage of the law of Moses preceded the blessings of the gospel. The old law was used for the purpose of development similar to the way an underage youth is trained to manhood. It is the will of the child’s father that he be subject to the authority of the appointed guardians until he matures to the point that he can then inherit the estate and subsequently take on the responsibilities associated with it. The “rudiments of the world” is a reference to the various laws under which mankind lived none of which were able to justify anyone before God.

To the Jews, this would have been the law of Moses. For the Gentile, this could be a form of patriarchal law under which the believing Gentiles lived. An example of this would be Cornelius who was a God fearing Gentile prior to his conversion. Cornelius did not live under the law of Moses. Consider the city of the Nineveh which was in danger of being destroyed by God when Jonah arrived and preached to them. This nation did not live under the law of Moses, when they repented of their evil, they did not turn to the law of Moses. They were living under God's law under some other system.

To further illustrate, let's consider Romans 2:12-15, *"For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law 13 (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)."*

In other words, when the Gentiles lived by the basic tenants of God's laws on right and wrong from their hearts, they show that they are trying to be good and honest people and they became a law unto themselves, just like the Gentiles in Nineveh who repented and returned to God's basic rules on right and wrong.

The rudiments of the world which Paul referred to here could be a reference to more than just the law of Moses. It could be a reference to whatever system of right and wrong the Gentiles lived under which governed their actions. Neither the law of Moses, the Patriarchal law or any other natural law of the Gentiles Paul mentioned in Romans 2:12-15, could provide freedom from sin like the new covenant could. Only the law of Christ can bring about the freedom of sin and the justification of man.

Galatians 4:1-3 (paraphrase)

To illustrate what I am saying: When children which will inherit all that their father owns are underage, they are still subject to those in service to the father who are his appointed guardians. At this time in their lives it doesn't matter that they will own everything that belongs to their father. While they are yet underage, they must obey those who are chosen to be their guardians. But when they reach the age the father set, they are released from the authority of their guardians. It is the same for us who have become Christians. We were once like underage children, living under the bondage of the earthly laws set in place by God which could never free us from the bondage of sin.

Galatians 4:4

"but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,"

The phrase "fulness of time" carries the meaning of 'at God's appointed time'. God sent Jesus into the world when the time was just right. There were several conditions and circumstances which made it the perfect time for Jesus to come. Some of them are:

1) Sin had become fully identified as the transgression of God's will. Widespread rebellion against God had brought universal suffering and condemnation upon mankind with no hope for salvation except through Jesus Christ. Psalms 14:1-3, *"The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. 2 The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. 3 They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one."*

- 2) Both Jew and Gentile had been taught that they cannot save themselves. Jeremiah 10:23, *"O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps."*
- 3) Rome had given most of the known world an orderly system of civil law.
- 4) Rome had constructed a network of roads which facilitated travel.
- 5) Rome had established an empire which allowed people to travel from nation to nation without encountering closed borders.
- 6) Rome ruled over the known world which was presently for the most part at peace.
- 7) The universal language of the empire was for the most part Greek due to the Hellenizing efforts of Alexander the Great and his successors.
- 8) The Septuagint, which was a common Greek translation of the old testament scriptures in Hebrew, was available and understandable by the vast majority of the literate citizenry of the Roman Empire.
- 9) Morality was at a distinct low point, even among the Jews. Conscientious people knew there had to be a better way and would therefore be more likely to respond to the high standard of the Gospel.
- 10) Pagan religions were at an all time high, their perversions and atrocities were obviously evil to anyone capable of rational thought. Many were able to perceive the foolishness of their idolatrous practices and were searching for something real and something better.

"God sent forth his Son, born of a woman,"

Jesus had a sonship relationship with God the Father. He also had a sonship relationship with mankind at the same time. That is why He is referred to in scripture as both the Son of God and the Son of Man. This is one of the huge advantages that the gospel through Christ has over the law of Moses. Paul has been reinforcing this point over and over again trying to get his readership to understand this one very vital point. The only thing the law of Moses could do was to keep people in the bondage of sin. But when the time was right, God, the Father, sent God, the Son, to earth who was born of a woman which means He was not only the Son of God, but He was a human being. The gospel system of faith was delivered by God directly to mankind on a face to face level.

Born of a woman means that no man had anything to do with the conception of Jesus Christ. This was also in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy some seven hundred years prior as recorded by Isaiah in 7:14, *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."* The name "Immanuel" means *"God With Us"* as recorded in Matthew 1:23 where the inspired writer quoted Isaiah 7:14 as proof of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. This is the method God chose to usher the savior of all mankind into the world, and is evidence of the authenticity of Jesus Christ and of the gospel. If Christianity were a religion devised in the minds of men, it is not likely the arrival of the savior of all mankind onto the earth would have been under the circumstances by which Jesus Christ arrived.

"born under the law"

In the previous verse, Paul referenced the bondage of the various law systems He had in place for both the Jews and Gentiles. Here, Paul identifies which one of these systems Jesus was born under.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born at a time when the law of Moses was still in effect. When Jesus became a physical man, He obligated Himself to the law of Moses until such time that He fulfilled it and brought it to an end on the cross. We learn from passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15; 7:26, 1 Peter 2:22 and 1 John 3:5 that Jesus never sinned. It was necessary for Jesus to live under law in order to live a sinless life. Jesus was born under the law of Moses which kept people under the bondage of sin. He lived under this law perfectly, thus qualifying Himself to be the perfect sacrifice for the sin of all mankind. Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life under a law system that was incapable of justifying anyone. And He did that so that He could usher in the gospel system of faith which was capable of justifying anyone who obeyed it.

Galatians 4:5

“that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Jesus was born under the law of Moses so that He could redeem those who had lived and were living under the same law. The fact that He lived under it perfectly and sinlessly is what made Him uniquely qualified to accomplish this redemption. No other man living on the earth could have accomplished this. Everyone who had ever lived under the law of Moses needed redemption because the law of Moses was incapable of accomplishing this. Paul has repeatedly pointed out to his readership the inadequacies of the law of Moses in regards to the justification of mankind, now he is touching on what Jesus Christ did for them. The best the law of Moses had to offer was to serve as a guardian and protector of those living under it. Those living under the law of Moses, both alive and deceased, were still in the bondage of their sin and needed the redemption Jesus Christ accomplished. The Hebrew writer teaches us that this redemption for the souls who had lived faithfully under the law of Moses was accomplished at the cross, Hebrews 9:15, *“And for this reason He [Jesus] is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”*

“that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

There were two groups of people in Paul's view in this verse. The first group was those who had lived faithfully under the law of Moses who still needed redemption. Now this group, receiving the *“adoption of sons”*, is representative of those living under the gospel. Christ accomplished the redemption of the faithful children of God who lived under law of Moses, and at the same time made it possible for those who lived after the cross to receive the *“adoption of sons”*. In other words, the faithful are adopted into the family of God directly because of the sacrifice of Jesus. This is another point that Paul is bringing against the law of Moses. The Judaizers were teaching that one could not be in the family of God, or recognized as a child of God unless they were circumcised according to the law of Moses. The Jews thought they were the exclusive children of God by birthright and that anyone who wanted to be a part of the family of God with them had to adhere to certain aspects of the law of Moses in order to do so. Paul is telling them that this is not true and that Jesus Christ accomplished this entrance into the family of God for them separate and apart from the law of Moses. In John 14:6, Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* That statement by Jesus included those who lived under the law of Moses as well.

Galatians 4:6

"And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

This is not a reference to the manner in which a Christian receives the Spirit of God. The literal eternal Spirit of Jesus does not cry Abba Father from our hearts for us. This is a contrast between the law of Moses and the law of Christ. Concerning this same thing, Paul teaches in Romans 8:15, *"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The "spirit of adoption" in Romans 8:15 is the same thing as the "spirit of His Son" in Galatians 4:6. Under the law of Moses they were kept under the bondage of sin, under the law of Christ they are sons of God and joint heirs to the promises with Christ: Romans 8:17, "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."*

Paul is saying here that because they are sons of God and not servants laboring under the bondage of sin, God sent the spirit of sonship into their hearts. The promise was: (Jeremiah 31:33), *"I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people"*. When Christ died, the new covenant was confirmed and His laws were then written in the hearts of the faithful and they were no longer servants under the bondage of sin for which the old covenant could not justify them. The spirit of fear under which those who lived under the law of Moses served was replaced by the spirit of love. Those living under the law of Christ do not need to fear the condemnation of sin because justification from sin is possible where under the law of Moses, it was not. Paul is illustrating another advantage of the law of Christ over the law of Moses.

Galatians 4:7

"So that thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Under the law of Moses, bondservants labored under the bondage of sin the penalty of which was death. Under the law of Christ, bondservants labor under the freedom from the condemnation of sin. Paul teaches in Romans 8:12 that *"we are debtors"*. We still owe our lives to Jesus Christ but it is far better to owe one's life to Christ than it is to be condemned to death with no hope which is all the law of Moses could offer without Christ. Far better to be the bondservant of Christ and live than the bondservant of death and be lost. Paul wrote concerning this in Romans 6:22, *"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life."* The Greek word for slave in this verse means a bondservant. Paul is not telling his readership that they are no longer bondservants of anything or anyone, rather he is telling them they are no longer bondservants of a law which was unable to save them.

"but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God"

In Romans 8:17, Paul wrote, *"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"*. Paul is stressing the fact that those who live by the law of Christ are the sons of God. This is a direct contradiction of what the Judaizers had been teaching. They had succeeded in convincing the Christians in Galatia that one had to be identified as a Son of Abraham through the law of Moses in order to be considered a child of God. Paul is teaching them that they are the sons of God without the law of Moses.

"then an heir through God"

Those who are the sons of God are an heir to the promises given to Abraham through Jesus Christ. This statement by Paul here is an affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ. A Christian is an heir of the promises given to Abraham by virtue of sonship and union with Christ. The Christian's sonship to God is a result of his unity with Christ. Unity with Christ is the same thing as being "in Christ". Paul wrote in Galatians 3:27 that one is baptized "into Christ". When one is in Christ, one has become a joint heir with Christ of the promises given to Abraham. The sign for being identified as a child of God under the law of Moses was circumcision.

The Judaizers were teaching the Christians in Galatia that they had to be circumcised according to the law of Moses in order to be a child of God. Paul is teaching them here that the way into sonship with God is not through the old law of Moses. Rather it's through joint sonship with Jesus Christ which is the same thing as being "*in Christ*". Those who are in Christ have become sons of God through Christ and thereby inherit the promised blessings given to Abraham. In short, Paul is telling them they don't need the law of Moses in order to be a child of God. Baptism into sonship with God through Christ has replaced circumcision as the way of admission into the family of God.

There are many among those who claim Christ as savior who believe that baptism is not as essential element in one's salvation. Those who make such claims need to study the larger context of Galatians 3:27 and provide an explanation on how one can be in the family of God if they are not in a joint sonship union with Jesus Christ.

Paul's concern over the Apostasy of the Galatians

Galatians 4:8

"Howbeit at that time, not knowing God, ye were in bondage to them that by nature are no gods:"

The King James Version renders this verse thus: "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. "Then" was before the coming of the Galatian Gentiles to Christ. The pagan society in which the Galatian Christians lived was predominantly poly theistic. The worship of the Greek Gods we know of today in Mythology was prominent along with several others as well. Paul is telling his readership here that they were in bondage to a bunch of idols who were not gods.

Galatians 4:9

"but now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again?"

Before Paul preached the Gospel to them, the Galatian Christians did not know God, nor were they known by God in the sense of being a child of God. Earthly parents have a different kind of relationship with their children than they do with those who are not their children. We are aware of other children and we know of them, but we do not have the kind of relationship with them that we would if they were our own children. Paul has been previously telling them that they were joint heirs with Christ and as such were in the family of God as His sons. So his reference here is that of someone who is on a much more familiar basis than just an acquaintance. There are many many people out there today who know of God, but as a stranger from the new covenant, don't know Him like they should or could.

How do Christians know whether they just know of God, or if they know God in the sense of a family relationship? 1 John 2:3-5 tells us how we can put that to the test, "*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His*

commandments. 4 *He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* 5 *But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

Paul also said, "or rather to be known by God". This family relationship is a two way thing. Not only did the Galatian Christians come to know God as His children, God came to know them. Paul wrote concerning this in 2 Timothy 2:19, "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." God knows who His children are, just like we know who our earthly children are.

It is just as important to be known by God in the family sense as it is to know God in a family sense. Jesus Christ spoke of those who called on Him but were never known by God in the family sense Paul has been speaking of here. *Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* Those who call on Jesus as Lord but do not obey Him are liars when they claim to know God. Jesus said in Matthew 7:23 that those who did not do the will of God were never known by God. Both aspects of knowing God and being known by God are all centered around our obedience to God's will. For the Galatian Christians and Christians living today this means obedience to the new covenant, otherwise known as the gospel, and the law of Christ. Anyone who desires to be in that close family relationship with God where they know Him as their Father and He knows them as His children must be obedient to the will of God.

The "weak and beggarly rudiments" in this verse must be the same as the "rudiments of the world" mentioned in verse 3 which was a reference to various belief systems which governed the actions of men and were completely powerless to justify anyone in the sight of God. The point Paul is making here is very important. He has been contrasting the law of Moses with the law of Christ throughout this letter. He has been elevating the law of Faith over the law of Moses, and now, he is doing something different. Now he is lowering the law of Moses into the same bracket as the laws of the world. The significance of this cannot be overstated. The law of Moses had a purpose which Paul explained earlier, but now that this purpose is over, the law of Moses is nothing more than a rudiment of the world, no better than any other natural law of man. It is worthless as a means of justification and Paul wants to know why after they had become the children of God under the system of Faith, that they would throw that away and turn back to a system which was incapable of accomplishing this kind of relationship with God.

"whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again"

Why would anyone want to be in the kind of bondage to sin that the former systems were incapable of dealing with? Why would anyone want to be a child of God and then forfeit that for the bondage of the old law of Moses? Paul is making a statement here that is a precursor to something coming up later in this letter. Paul continues to build the case for the law of Christ and against the law of Moses. Each point he makes builds on the next and reinforces each successive thought in the over all case he is presenting to his readership. when Paul has finished his case against the law of Moses, it will be clear that not only do those who try and follow after the old law desire to be in the bondage of the rudiments of the world, they will be under the bondage of this law. And not just under the bondage of sin either, they will be obligated to follow the whole old law and as a result will fall from the grace of God.

Galatians 4:10

"Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years."

Earlier in this study we observed that the Judaizers were trying to bind much more of the law of Moses than just circumcision on the Galatian Christians. Here is the proof of this in that they were teaching them to keep the religious holy days, months, seasons and years pertaining to the law of Moses. These could have included the Sabbath day, the feast days such as the Passover, Pentecost, the feast of the new moon, the feast of weeks, the feast of the trumpets, the feast of ingathering and numerous other special Jewish religious occasions such as the year of the Jubilee. The Judaizers did not stop with just circumcision. By the time Paul wrote this letter, their infiltration into the Galatian congregations had reached the point where they were binding all sorts of additional elements of the law of Moses upon them.

it should be noted here that the Galatia was not the only place where the Judaizers were at work. Paul makes a reference to this in Colossians 2:16-18, where he wrote by inspiration, *"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind."* The keeping of the Sabbath day was an exclusive element of the law of Moses, so when we see a reference to that, it is a reference to those who would bind that law on others. Paul was instructing his readership in Colossi to disregard the teachings of those who would judge them for not observing holy days under the law of Moses. Within this was included an unmistakable warning about losing their reward if they heeded the Judaizers which takes us to Galatians 4:11.

Galatians 4:11

"I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain."

Paul has made several references to the consequences for allowing the Judaizers to influence them and here is yet another. Each time he mentions this, the point gets a little stronger. Here, Paul expresses fear for their souls and concern that he had exposed them to the teachings of the gospel for nothing. The labor he mentions here is the work required by all Christians which is benevolence (Matthew 25:31-46, evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20), and edification (Romans 15:1-2). Paul is concerned that because they had submitted to the doctrine of the Judaizers that the work of a Christian that he had committed to them and that they had been doing was for nothing and that they would all be lost anyway. In other words, they were no better off now than they were before Paul arrived because they had accepted what the Judaizers were teaching.

The KJV and the ASV render this verse as "bestowed labor upon you". Most of the other modern English translations render this verse as Paul saying he had labored for them in vain. The actual order of the words in the original language is *"I am afraid of you lest in vain I have bestowed labor upon you."* Many modern translations appear to go out of their way at any opportunity to shift the language away from there being any commitment for a Christian to work. In either event, it makes no difference whether it was Paul's labor or the Galatian Christian's labor which was wasted. The end results are the same. If Paul's labor was for nothing, the Galatians became Christians for nothing. Likewise, if the Galatian Christians labor was for nothing, they became Christians for nothing. The consequences under both translations are the same which is loss of salvation and eternal condemnation from the presence of God.

Galatians 4:12

"I beseech you, brethren, become as I (am), for I also (am become) as ye (are). Ye did me no wrong."

This is an expression of a painfully agitated, loving and affectionate heart. The word "beseech" carries the meaning of to 'plead' or 'beg'. Paul is genuinely afraid for their spiritual well being. Paul's state of mind here is one of agony and great anxiety over the souls of his Galatian brethren.

"become as I (am),"

Paul had abandoned the law of Moses completely along with all the Jewish rites and customs. He is begging them to do the same thing. We must acknowledge and bear in mind Paul's emotional state while writing this. He is agonizing over them, begging with them, pleading with them to abandon these things just as he had. Their eternal well being is hanging in the balance here.

"for I also (am become) as ye (are)."

To the degree possible, Paul had also abandoned some of his own customs and practices in order to save them. In other words, Paul assimilated himself into their culture going so far as to adopt some of their customs or behavioral mannerisms in order for them to be comfortable with each other. This is not the only time Paul has made mention of this practice of his, 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."* Paul would go to great lengths to preach the gospel, even so far as observing their customs and practices which obviously did not transgress the will of God. It would be an abuse of this text to try and say that Paul routinely did what he was condemning in his letter to the Galatian Christians in order to gain an audience with them in hopes of teaching them the truth later on. What Paul was saying to his readership here is that he tried to become like them to the degree possible that they were comfortable with one another in order to facilitate the spreading of the gospel.

"Ye did me no wrong:"

We need to keep in mind here that Paul has been using some very strong language in this letter. He had just finished telling them in so many words that he was afraid they had become Christians for nothing. One does not lightly use such language with no expectations of a negative response. You don't just tell someone their Christianity is vain and worthless and expect them to receive such a message with great joy and thanksgiving. Paul wants his readership to understand that he is not saying these things out of anger or in retribution because of anything hurtful they may have done to him. He is assuring them that his motives with these strong words are of genuine concern for their wellbeing.

Galatians 4:13

but ye know that because of an infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you the first time:

Not only does Paul want them to understand that he was not writing out of personal anger over some prior treatment and holding a grudge over something, he gives them an example of a great kindness they had shown him previously.

Paul had some kind of infirmity of the flesh which was very obviously visible and of such a nature that it could even be a cause for rejection by some people, yet they chose to overlook it with Paul and accept him and his teaching whole heartedly. Paul is telling them that not only had they accepted him, they accepted him with his handicap and did not hold it against him. His motive for bringing this up is to demonstrate to his readership that he was not writing to them out of anger for past poor treatment.

Galatians 4:14

"and that which was a temptation to you in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but ye received me as an angel of God, (even) as Christ Jesus."

Paul's physical infirmity was such that it would compel many to despise and/or reject him outright. Many have been the speculations as to exactly what his handicap was. The Bible never comes out and specifically tells us what his handicap really was, but there are a number of clues which have led many to the conclusion that Paul's eyesight was just a little better than outright blindness. We know that Paul requested through prayer on three occasions to have it removed and was denied (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). We know from Acts 19:11-12 that while Paul spent 2 years in Ephesus, many special miracles were worked at the hands of Paul. It is interesting to note that Paul never used his miraculous abilities for self serving measures. His miracles of healing were such that his handkerchief or napkin could be taken to someone sick and they would recover, yet his own handicap remained with him.

Galatians 4:15

Where then is that gratulation of yourselves? for I bear you witness, that, if possible, ye would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

The New American Standard Bible translates this more properly as *"Where then is that sense of blessing you had?"* The Galatian Christians had received Paul with great enthusiasm and were very excited about their new found Christianity. Paul wanted to know what had happened to their spirit and fervor that had energized them when he first preached the gospel to them.

"for I bear you witness, that, if possible, ye would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me"

The depth of feeling the Galatians showed Paul was such that if it had been within their power, they would have torn their own eyes out and given them to him. This is the strongest evidence we have in all of scripture as to the nature of Paul's infirmity. In either event, it is obvious that they had run from one extreme to the other. When Paul first preached the Gospel to them, they embraced it, and Paul, with open arms fervently and with great enthusiasm. Now, they had received the teachings of the Judaizers and had abandoned Paul's teachings altogether. Paul wants to know what happened to their great enthusiasm over having been accepted into the family of God. He wants to know where that excitement went and he gave them an example of just how much he had meant to them. This not only served to call to their minds the events surrounding his original preaching, it also served to demonstrate that Paul had no reason whatsoever for being angry with them. He wants them to fully understand that his motives behind his chastisement of them for their defection from Jesus Christ was not fueled by any hard feelings on his part.

Galatians 4:16

"So then am I become your enemy, by telling you the truth?"

The Judaizers had been successful in their efforts to bring the Galatian Christians under some form of the old law of Moses. They accomplished this in part by attacking Paul's credibility and apostleship thereby convincing the Galatians that Paul was an imposter. They managed to persuade the Galatians to accept the idea that Paul had not been preaching the truth to them all along. Paul is writing this letter in response to these claims by the Judaizers. He is directly confronting and refuting everything the Judaizers had tried to teach them about any part of Judaism. He wants them to understand that he is not their enemy. This entire epistle to them has been all about following after the system of faith in Christ and rejecting the law of Moses.

Some people just don't want to know the truth. And when confronted by it, have a negative reaction and consider the messenger to be their enemy instead of someone who is looking out for their best interests. No one likes to be told they are wrong. Paul preached the truth to the Galatian Christians in the beginning. They later allowed the Judaizers to lead them astray into a variant form of doctrine which would cost them their fellowship with God and ultimately their salvation. They were the real enemies the Galatians needed to beware of. Paul preached the truth of the gospel to them, and now in their time of apostasy he is teaching them the truth about the consequences for leaving the faith of Christ to embrace the old law of Moses. Paul is most certainly not their enemy and he wants them to know that.

Galatians 4:17

"They zealously seek you in no good way; nay, they desire to shut you out, that ye may seek them."

The Judaizers were fervent and eager in their pursuit of the Gentile Christians but there was nothing good that would come of it. Their strategy was to convince them that Paul was not an authentic apostle and that he was not teaching them the whole truth. When Paul said their desire was to "*shut you out, that ye may seek them*" his meaning was that he stood in the way of their designs. The Galatians were truly attached to Paul, and in order to accomplish their ends it was necessary to convince the Galatians to abandon their trust and devotion from him. The Judaizers knew that if they could succeed in convincing them that Paul was not who he said he was, then they would stop seeking the counsel of Paul and seek after theirs instead.

Galatians 4:18

"But it is good to be zealously sought in a good matter at all times, and not only when I am present with you."

Being zealously sought after is a good thing if those who are doing the seeking are genuinely acting in the best interests of others. But that is not the case in this instance. The Judaizers were intent on bringing the Gentile Christians under the bondage of the old law of Moses and Paul has repeatedly told them that this was going to result in the condemnation of everyone involved both Judaizer and Christian alike.

By saying this, Paul is letting them know that he was not merely jealous of the attention the Galatians were getting from others. He wants them to know that being sought after by anyone is a good thing so long as they are being led in the right direction. And he wants them to know they need to be zealous for the truth whether he is there or not.

Galatians 4:19

"My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you"

Paul shows his affection of them by addressing them as his little children. Indeed, Paul had been the chief overseer of the planting of the Galatian congregations of the Lord's church. As an apostle of Christ, he was personally directing the mission. Paul loves them like a father would love his children and addresses them in such a way as to

communicate his love for them. Paul had used some harsh words previously, and now he using kind words so that his readership will know how he feels about their relationship.

"of whom I am again in travail"

Two things are evident in this:

(1) Notice the word *"again"*. There had been an agony of travail, like that of a woman in childbirth, on Paul's part at the founding of those churches. Acts 13 and 14 document many of the details of his sorrows and hardships during the time of their evangelism.

(2) He was going through the same deep anxieties over them again at the prospect of losing them to the Judaizers. Paul's emotional state is just as bad for them now as it was when he was trying to evangelize them.

"Until Christ be formed in you" ...

Their acceptance of Judaism had blurred and distorted the image of Christ in their hearts, and Paul wishes their knowledge of Christ to be perfectly formed within them. This is what the issue with the Judaizers was about. They were inserting Moses where Christ ought to have been exclusively. Concerning this very thing, Paul wrote in Romans 10:4, *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes"* (NKJV). When Christ is fully formed within, there is no room for Moses, or the law of Moses, or anything else the Judaizers were trying to push over onto the Gentile Christians.

Galatians 4:20

"but I could wish to be present with you now, and to change my tone

Paul expresses his desire to be with them personally. He knows how much more effective he could be against the Judaizers if he were present. He also letting them know by telling them this how important they are to him. He wants them know this, especially in this letter because he has said some harsh things. Paul felt that if he were there in person, perhaps the harshness of the letter could have been avoided.

"and to change my tone; for I am perplexed about you."

Here Paul admits to his readership that the tone or manner in which he is communicating is severe. It needs to be. The things he has been telling them are serious indeed. Their acceptance of the Judaizing doctrine will cost each and every one of them their souls if they let it continue. Paul obviously does not like using this kind of tone with them and he wants them to know that. Paul is practicing what he preached concerning this very things in Ephesians 4:14-15, *"that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ –"*(NKJV).

The Allegory of the Two Covenants

Galatians 4:21

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

Let us keep in mind Paul's background as a Pharisee. His entire letter to this point has been all about contrasting the law of Moses and the law of Christ. The main issue advocated by the Judaizers has been their claim that Gentile Christians had to become a son of Abraham before becoming a child of God. Paul, being a Pharisee and a former student of law under Gamaliel, he possessed a considerable knowledge of the law of Moses. The Judaizers had been pulling things out of the law of Moses in order to promote their doctrine, now Paul is about to use the very law they were advocating to illustrate the point he has been making about the bondage of the old law and the freedom we have in the law of Christ under the gospel. To make this distinction, he chooses two sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael to make his point. It was no accident Paul chose the sons of Abraham for the lesson he was about to present to his readership. He chose the sons of Abraham in order to make a point against the claims by the Judaizers that Gentiles had to become sons of Abraham first before coming to Christ.

Galatians 4:22

"For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, one by the handmaid, and one by the freewoman."

First we need to understand from verse 24 that Paul is using the account of Isaac and Ishmael to illustrate the contrast between the bondage of the law of Moses and freedom of the law of Christ. He is laying out the facts that he is going to use to make his comparison. The freewoman in Paul's illustration here is Sarah, the wife of Abraham as recorded in Genesis 17:15, *"Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name'"* (NKJV).

The handmaid here is Sarah's Egyptian slave, Hagar, who is identified in Genesis 16:1 and following. Abraham's wife, Sarah had been unable to bear Abraham a son so in her grief over this predicament she decided it would be a good idea to have Hagar bear Abraham a son in her stead. Hagar did bear Abraham a son, Ishmael, and Sarah was unable to cope with the results of this arrangement and Hagar ended up being cast out of Abraham's household.

Galatians 4:23

"Howbeit the (son) by the handmaid is born after the flesh; but the (son) by the freewoman (is born) through promise."

Polygamy has always been wrong in God's eyes. This arrangement between Abraham and Hagar was not the means God had in mind in order to keep his promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the earth. Abraham already had a wife when he took Hagar as another one (Genesis 16:3). Ishmael was born out of a union not sanctioned by God, therefore his existence came about as a result of a fleshly arrangement.

Isaac, who was later born by Sarah was the son God intended for Abraham all along and the son God had in mind when He made his initial promise to Abraham. So the key figures in Paul's illustration here are Hagar, an Egyptian slave who bore Abraham a son in bondage. And Sarah, who was Abraham's legal wife, who was not a slave and bore Abraham another son. Paul has now provided the characters and the circumstances pertaining to the case. Now he moves on to define who these characters represent in his illustration.

Galatians 4:24

"Which things contain an allegory: for these (women) are two covenants; one from mount Sinai, bearing children unto bondage, which is Hagar."

Paul now uses Sarah to represent the new covenant, the gospel of Christ, and Hagar to represent the old covenant which was the law of Moses.

Galatians 4:25

"Now this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia and answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children."

The law of Moses was given on Mount Sinai. Paul used Abraham's slave, Hagar to represent the old law of Moses. Her children are those who are still living under the law of Moses and they are living under the bondage of the old covenant. The "*Jerusalem that now is*" is contrasted with the "*Jerusalem that is above*" in the next verse.

Galatians 4:26

"But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother."

The two covenants are represented by Sarah and Hagar. There are two Jerusalems mentioned in Paul's illustration. The old law of Moses pertains to the "*Jerusalem that now is*" mentioned in the previous verse. The Jerusalem that is above is contrasted here and represents the children of that covenant who are free. The Hebrew writer makes mention of the heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews 12:22-23, "*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect*" (NKJV). This Jerusalem that is above in Paul's illustration is representative of the body (church), of Christ.

"which is our mother."

Paul is using the imagery of the new covenant being the mother of the church in order to be consistent with the illustration of Sarah and Hagar who were mothers. Hagar, as the old law of Moses had children which lived under bondage. Sarah, as the new covenant had children which lived under the freedom of the law of Christ, also referred to as the law of liberty by James in 1:26 and 2:12.

It should be mentioned here that the liberty Christians enjoy under the new covenant system of faith does not provide the freedom to live our lives as we please. The liberty Christians enjoy is the liberty from the bondage of sin which the law of Moses was unable to achieve.

Galatians 4:27 *For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; Break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: For more are the children of the desolate than of her that hath the husband.*

Paul here quotes Isaiah 54:1 and by so doing he ties the account of Sarah and Hagar to Isaiah's prophecy. The children of the desolate are obviously the children of Hagar in that she was exiled from Abraham's house over the birth of Ishmael. Paul's reference to "her that hath the husband" must therefore be Sarah who was the legal wife of Abraham under the law of God. Notice that Paul said the children of the desolate would out number the children of "*her that hath the husband*". Paul is letting his readership know that they are definitely going to be in the minority and such as has been the case ever since. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14, "*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*"

Galatians 4:28

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

We learned from the end of Galatians 3 that all Christians are the sons of Abraham and heirs to the promises given to Abraham without having to go through the law of Moses in any way. Now Paul is reinforcing what he had already taught with his illustration of Sarah and Hagar. Isaac was the child God promised to Abraham. Isaac was the child by which all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Isaac was the child promised whose seed would be Jesus Christ. And Paul makes the statement here that "we" meaning all Christians everywhere are the sons of Abraham just like Isaac was.

The Galatian Christians did not have to first become a son of Hagar before they could become a son of Abraham like Isaac was. Paul used this illustration to help his readership understand that as a Christian, through Christ, they already are the sons of Abraham, or the children of promise.

Galatians 4:29 *But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him (that was born) after the Spirit, so also it is now.*

Genesis 21:8, *"So the child [Isaac] grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing" (NKJV).* Ishmael, the son of Hagar was the first born. Evidently there was a contention over who was the rightful heir of Abraham because of the circumstances surrounding the entire affair.

"so also it is now"

Isaac who was the child of promise was persecuted by Ishmael who was born after the flesh. We need to keep in mind that Paul's entire illustration is between those living under the old law of Moses and those living under the law of Christ. In particular here, the Galatians were being persecuted by those who insisted on living under the law of Moses. They were being told they really were not Christians and could not be until they first became sons of Abraham. Paul is telling his readership that the Judaizers were persecuting them by telling them they had no birthright with Abraham just like Ishmael did.

Galatians 4:30

"Howbeit what saith the scripture? Cast out the handmaid and her son: for the son of the handmaid shall not inherit with the son of the freewoman."

Paul called the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael to the attention of his readership by referencing the account in Genesis 21:8. He then went on to directly quote Genesis 21:10 where Sarah said to Abraham, *"Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac" (NKJV).* Notice that Sarah said *"for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son".* Sarah wanted no part of Ishmael having any inheritance whatsoever with her son Isaac. She wanted no joint inheritance of any kind. She wanted Isaac to have it all. And as a result of this, Hagar and Ishmael were exiled and banished from Abraham's house completely. The application we can draw from this is unmistakable. The children of Hagar would receive no inheritance from Abraham whatsoever, likewise those living under the law of Moses would receive no inheritance from Abraham whatsoever. Just like Ishmael was cast out and cut off from Abraham's inheritance, so to are any who try and live under the law of Moses.

The conclusion is clear. Those who wish to be the sons of Abraham must cast off the old law and embrace Jesus Christ wholly, completely and exclusively. And this cannot be done by any adherence to the law of Moses in any way

shape or form.

Galatians 4:31

"Wherefore, brethren, we are not children of a handmaid, but of the freewoman."

Paul makes the summary statement here that contradicts what the Judaizers had been claiming all along. Christians are not the children of the handmaid with no inheritance in Abraham's blessings. Christians are the children of Sarah, the children of promise and the children of Abraham without any part of the handmaid which represented the law of Moses in Paul's illustration.

The conclusion here is a reinforced restatement of what Paul said in Galatians 3:26-29, *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (NKJV).

Paraphrase:

Now, to further illustrate what I have been saying, an heir to his father's house is subject to the oversight of the household bondservants as long as he is underage. The fact that he will one day be the master in his father's estate does not make any difference in the authority his overseers have over him. He lives under the authority given to them as his guardians until the time his father says he can take over his role as a mature member of the household.

Now, just like the underage child in my illustration, we were in a similar bondage under the guidance of God's law in the world whether it was the law of Moses or God's laws of right and wrong which the Gentiles lived by. But when the time came for us to take on our roles as mature members of God's family, God sent Jesus Christ to the earth as His physical Son, having been born of an earthly woman and born under the rule of the law of Moses. He did this in order to purchase those under the laws of God back from the bondage of sin so that we all could receive adoption into sonship with God the Father. And now because we have entered into a sonship relationship with God, we now have the disposition of Jesus within our hearts by which we worship Him fervently and earnestly. So now we are no longer the bondservants of a law which could only bring condemnation. Through Jesus Christ, we are now the sons of God and because of that, we are the heirs of eternal life.

Before obeying the gospel, you did not know the one true and living God and you were slaves to gods who were not real. But now that you know God as his children and God now knows you as a part of His family, why do you desire to return to a system which was weak and worldly? Do you really want to be in bondage to a system which cannot make you a child of God?

You are observing Jewish holy days and months and seasons and years which are part of the law of Moses. I am afraid that the work I have committed to you was for nothing and that you have wasted your time and efforts. Brethren, I am pleading with you to become like me as I have rejected the traditions of the law of Moses, and I embraced many of your customs and practices to become more like you. Please don't think I am speaking out of anger here because you have never done me any wrong. You did not even reject me because of my physical infirmity when I came to you at first, but received me like you would have welcomed an angel of God or even Christ Jesus Himself.

Where is the joy you had when I first came to you? I can say without a doubt that you would have done anything to help me. If it had been possible, you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me. Now, have I suddenly become your enemy because I am telling you the truth? The Judaizers are zealous to persuade you to their doctrine. But nothing good can come of that. They are trying to come between us so that you will seek their counsel and not listen to me anymore. It is always good to be zealous in things that are right. But you need to be zealous for the truth whether I am there or not.

My little children, I find myself laboring like a woman in childbirth over you all over again and I will continue to do this until you have the knowledge of Christ fully formed within you. I wish I could be there with you now so that perhaps I would not have to be so harsh with you, but I am sincerely concerned for you about this.

Those of you who desire to live under the law of Moses, tell me, do you even know what the law teaches? It is written in the law that Abraham had two sons. One of them was born of Hagar, a slave and the other was born by a Sarah who was Abraham's wife who was not a slave. The child born of the slave was born according to a fleshly arrangement between Abraham and his wife. But the other son, born by Abraham's lawful wife was the child God previously promised to Abraham.

I'm using this account to illustrate to you the difference between the law of Moses and the law of Christ. Hagar, the bondwoman of Sarah represents the law of Moses given on Mount Sinai while Sarah, the free woman and wife of Abraham represents the new covenant which is the mother of us all. For the prophecy of Isaiah says, "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".

Now we, brethren, just like Isaac, are the children of promise. Now Ishmael who was born according to a fleshly arrangement persecuted Isaac who was born according to the plan of God. The persecution of the Judaizers is like that and going on even now. But don't let that bother you because the scriptures say "*Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.*" So then, brethren, we are not children of the law of Moses represented by the bondwoman. Rather, we are children of the new covenant which was represented by the free woman.

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