

**FROM SONS TO SLAVES, or**  
**Why is prison so appealing?**  
*Galatians 4:8-31*

It is an amazing thing that someone who is given so much could go back to their former way of life. It would be like finding a prince, who could have the best meals imaginable, looking through garbage cans in search of table scraps. And yet we are all tempted to do just that, sometimes by Satan's false promises, or simply by the fact that the old way of life has a comfortable familiarity about it. It may be a life of bondage, but in times of weakness, we go back to it because we know it so well. Paul pleads with the Galatians in this passage not to go backwards - to "just say no" to a life of slavery.

**THE PROBLEM (4:8-11)**

*<sup>8</sup> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? <sup>10</sup> You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup> I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

**In verse 9**, "principles" ("stoichea" in Greek) is a term that was often used to describe the basic elements of life, stars, astrology. It points to the things we can know about life without relation from God, and the lifestyle we develop when we have no source of life other than ourselves.

**Where do people tend to look** for meaning in life when they don't know God?

**Study Colossians 2:16-23.** How does it relate to the problem the Galatians are having?

## THE PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP (4:12-20)

<sup>12</sup> I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. <sup>13</sup> As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. <sup>14</sup> Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. <sup>15</sup> What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. <sup>16</sup> Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? <sup>17</sup> Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. <sup>18</sup> It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. <sup>19</sup> My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, <sup>20</sup> how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

See **verse 19**. "Formed" is the Greek term used to describe the development of an embryo.

From the language Paul employs, what sort of emotions do you detect in him regarding the Galatian Christians?

Does this fit with the image you previously had of the Apostle Paul? (What does **1 Thessalonians 2:6-8** add to this picture?)

Have you ever had those kinds of feelings for another Christian, perhaps someone you led to Christ?

Did someone care for you in your early days as a believer, the way Paul cared for them?

## THE ALLEGORY (21-31)

<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. <sup>23</sup> His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. <sup>24</sup> These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." <sup>28</sup> Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. <sup>30</sup> But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." <sup>31</sup> Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Read **John 8:31-47** and see what light is sheds on the importance the Jews placed on being physical descendants of Abraham.

How does Paul use **Isaiah 54:1** in this passage (verse 27)?

See if you can complete the form below - hopefully it will help make sense of the contrasts Paul is making in this passage.

ABRAHAM	ABRAHAM
	Sarah
human effort	promise
	Isaac
natural	
Old Covenant	
	heavenly Jerusalem
Judaizers	Galatians
flesh	
slavery	

Sometimes people come to the erroneous conclusion that Christianity is a "balance" between law and grace. This is not true! Christianity is grace (if we understand grace properly). The way of grace is often a balance between legalism and license, as we shall see in the next chapter.

In his book The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, Roland Allen wrote that legalism is one of Satan's favorite plans to subvert the growth of Christians. Obviously Satan would prefer that no one come to Christ, but once they do, he sometimes uses legalism to derail them. **How does legalism** stunt the growth of a Christian?

<b>LIFE RESPONSE: Questions for Reflection and Discussion</b>
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Personal:

*"Do I understand grace in my mind, but revert to legalistic heart-habits when it comes to living it out?"*

*"Do I really want a father-child relationship with God, or am I secretly more comfortable with a warden-prisoner arrangement?"*

Relational:

*"Am I treating my brothers and sisters in the Body graciously, or am I judging them by the way I want them to perform?"*

*"Do I allow them to be in a process with God or do I expect them to be a finished product?"*