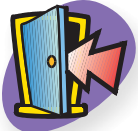


Galatians



"No Longer a Slave, but a Son"

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

It took us two lessons to cover all of chapter 3 of Galatians, so rich was it in content. Before moving on in the epistle, let us review the high points of those lessons. St. Paul's goal was to assure the Galatians that what he had preached to them when he first met them was, indeed, the "gospel truth." That is, he had told them that they could have a life with God which would wash away their sins and give them the Holy Spirit by putting their faith (trust) in God's promises, made available and confirmed in the Person and work of Jesus, His Son. Their baptism initiated them into that life. There was no need, therefore, for them to believe they needed to become Jews, through circumcision, to be pleasing to God. St. Paul used their own experiences with the Holy Spirit, the example of Abraham, and Old Testament Scriptures to prove that he was right. He revealed to them what they perhaps did not understand—that the Mosaic Law could not give life. It had curses attached to it that any violation, however slight, would incur. He showed them how the covenant God made with Abraham was superior to the one He made with Moses, since it was entirely gracious. The Law had a purpose, of course, but the *goal* of the law, which was to restrain and reveal sin, preparing Israel for a Savior, had been realized in the coming of Christ. St. Paul undercut the appeal of the Judaizers by masterfully demonstrating that everything they were being promised through circumcision (being true sons of Abraham and true sons of God) was theirs already, *without* circumcision.

You might think that St. Paul's numerous arguments against circumcision in chapter 3 would have put the issue to rest. Does he need to say anything more to convince the Galatians to accept his teaching? Yes indeed! He is not finished yet. In chapter 4, he will elaborate on a truth that was implicit in his discussion of the law in chapter 3. That is, God's promise to bless "all nations" through Abraham was fulfilled in stages. Each stage ushered in an expansion of the fulfillment of that promise, culminating in the coming of Christ and the building of the Church. He will attempt to show the foolishness of going backwards, exchanging one stage for an earlier one (4:1-11). We will have an opportunity, in this chapter, to see the kind of personal relationship Paul had with the Galatians (4:12-20). And then, in one final burst of energy to validate all that he has taught the Galatians about the Old Covenant, he will temporarily transform himself in Rabbi Saul, speaking urgently to those who once again "desire to be under law" (4:21-end).

Read through this chapter all at once, then answer the questions that follow.



GALATIANS 4

1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; 2 but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. 3 So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. **4 But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.**





GALATIANS 4 (cont.)

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; 9 but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? 10 You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! 11 I am afraid I have labored over you in vain.

12 Brethren, I beseech you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong; 13 you know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first; 14 and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. 15 What has become of the satisfaction you felt? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. 18 For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! 20 I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

21 Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. 23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. 24 Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in travail; for the children of the desolate one are many more than the children of her that is married.” 28 Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. 30 But what does the scripture say? “Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” 31 So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.



Questions on the Text

CHILDREN COME OF AGE READ GAL. 4:1-11

1. ***During the time of the custodianship of the law, the Israelites were children of God, but how was that period no different from being slaves?***

Note: In vs. 3, Paul says that during the period of custodianship, they were “enslaved to the elemental powers of the world.” This refers to the fact that the entire Jewish system of sacrifices and religious festivals was based on the calendar—new moons, days, weeks, and months of the year. So it was really these elements of nature (“elemental powers”) that moved them through their liturgical year, and because the sacrificial system so tightly regulated their lives, it could be said that they were “enslaved” by it.

2. ***In vs. 4, what do you think the phrase “when the time had fully come” means? (For a very helpful teaching on the relationship between God and time, read the third chapter of 2 Peter)?***
3. ***Why does Paul describe Jesus in the way he does in vs. 4?***
4. ***If the Israelites, even during the custodianship of the law, were children of God, why does Paul say, in vs. 5, that they received “adoption as sons” only through Jesus?***
5. ***How does the Holy Spirit prove that a person’s relationship with God has changed from being a slave to a son (vs. 7)? What other part of Paul’s letter does this remind you of?***





Questions on the Text (cont.)

6. *In vs. 8, Paul speaks to the Gentile Christians about their lives before they knew God. What does he mean when he says they “were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods”?*
7. *See how Paul re-phrases himself in vs. 9? Why is this re-phrasing so important to Paul’s way of thinking about the Christian life?*
8. *In vs. 9, when Paul says, “how can you turn back again...”; he isn’t referring to reverting to pagan practices, because that’s not at issue here. The issue is circumcision, a Jewish practice. What do pagan practices and the Jewish ceremonial works of the law have in common? (Hint: see note after question 1.)*
9. *In vs. 10, does Paul condemn the Catholic practice of holy days, feasts, and liturgical seasons? Some would most definitely say “yes” to this question, so what would you say in response? Read 1 Cor. 5:6-8 before answering.*
10. *What is Paul worried about in vs. 11? What does this concern say about the possibility of losing one’s justification?*
11. *In this section of his epistle, Paul seems shocked that anyone would be tempted to exchange the joy of a Father-son relationship for that of a master-slave. What must a Christian keep in clear focus to preserve the joy of sonship and not let it turn into the fear that comes with slavery?*

A TENDER APPEAL

READ 4:12-20

12. *Vs. 12 is a strange, seemingly convoluted appeal by Paul. What do you think it means?*
13. *Paul recalls his initial relationship with the Galatians (vss. 13-16). How was it characterized?*
14. *Why, in vs. 17, were the Judaizers showing an interest in the Gentile Christians?*
15. *Paul shows the full extent of his love for the Galatians in vss. 18-20. To what does he compare himself? To whom does he long to give birth?*
16. *Paul agonized over feeling that he had become an enemy to his friends by telling them the truth. Have you ever had that experience? If so, what was that like?*

PAUL PULLS RANK

READ 4:21-31

In this last section of **chapter 4**, before he turns his attention to a new theme, Paul tries one more method in his amazing assault on the idea that Gentile converts need to become Jews. In **vs. 21**, when he writes, “Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law?”, he is saying, “Look, for those of you who want to become Jews, would you like to hear distinctly Jewish teaching on this issue?” At this point, he makes use of his training to become Rabbi Saul, using a methodology for teaching Scripture that was very common among the rabbis of his day.

To understand this passage, you will need to know that Abraham had a son, Ishmael, by Hagar, the Egyptian slave of his wife, Sarah (see **Genesis 16**). This was done at Sarah’s suggestion since God had promised Abraham a





Questions on the Text (cont.)

son, but Sarah, for a time, remained barren. Ishmael would have been a “child of the flesh,” since he was conceived in the natural human way. Later, Isaac was born to Sarah. He was the one God always intended to be Abraham’s heir and was a “child of promise,” because his conception in a barren woman of advanced age could only have happened through a miracle. It was, in that sense, a supernatural birth.

17. **What does Paul say the two women in Abraham’s life represent (vs. 24)?**
 18. **By using a play on words, a technique very common among Jewish rabbis of Paul’s day, he identifies Hagar with Mt. Sinai, where the law was given. “Hagar” is also a name of a region near Mt. Sinai. Mt. Zion, upon which Jerusalem is built, is also in that region. Why would Paul say the present Jerusalem is “in slavery along with her children,” as he does in vs. 25?**
 19. **Sarah corresponds to the “Jerusalem above,” which is “free” and “our mother” (vs. 26). What does this mean?**
- Note:** Read **Gen. 21:9-13**. There you will see that Sarah urges Abraham to send Ishmael and Hagar away from their home. Jewish rabbis traditionally taught that Ishmael was taunting or teasing Isaac over his status as the second-born son. In other words, by birthright and by being physically bigger and older than Isaac, he was bullying the younger boy.
20. **Paul says that Ishmael, “the child of the flesh” in vs. 29, persecuted “the child of the spirit.” He says the same thing is happening among the Galatian Christians. How can he make that analogy?**
 21. **Continuing the analogy, what would be the appropriate response of the “children of the spirit” to the “children of the flesh” (i.e., the Gentile Christians to the Judaizers), in vs. 30?**
 22. **In an earlier lesson, we considered the similarities between the Blessed Virgin Mary and Abraham. In this passage, there is good reason to think about the similarities between Sarah, the “free woman,” and Mary. What are they?**
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Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God’s word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text in the lesson. Or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these:

1. **Examine your life to see what power fear has in it. Do you have a servile fear of God, afraid that He won’t love you if you don’t perform well? Or do you have filial fear, which is the fear a son has of disappointing his Father? Ask God to purify fear in you so that it is healthy, fruitful, and appropriate. Either too much or too little can be dangerous.**
2. **St. Paul wanted Christ to be formed in the Galatians, meaning that they were to move beyond the first thrill of new life in Christ to maturity. What will Christian maturity require of you this day?**
3. **Is there anyone in your life whom you have made to feel like an enemy because he told you a truth you needed to hear but didn’t want to? If so, what can you do about it?**





Opportunities for Additional Study

For the student who wishes to reflect more deeply on the passage in the lesson, consider these:

Points to Ponder

It is not out of sentimentality that St. Paul reminds the Galatians that it is the reception of the Holy Spirit which enables a man to cry, “Abba! Father!” To move from a way of life that is marked by fear of God (as Adam and Eve were afraid when they heard the sound of Him in the Garden) or indifference to Him (as Cain was when he callously asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” after he murdered Abel) into one which has this heart-cry can *only* happen through divine intervention. St. Paul counts on the power of this experience which he knows the Galatians have shared to get them back on track. It is worth pondering this for a moment.

If we go back to the Garden of Eden to think about what it means to be God’s son, we will want to look closely at the moment of temptation to see how things went wrong. When the serpent begins talking to Eve, we should immediately ask this question: Where was Adam? It was Adam whom God put in charge of the Garden, to work and guard it (**Gen. 2:15**). We know that Adam must have been very close by when Eve ate the fruit, since she appears to have been able to give him some without having to go find him. So why didn’t he speak up? And if he had spoken up, what should he have said? If we freeze-frame this moment and think carefully about it, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that, at the very least, Adam should have said, “Father, what about this? Who is this serpent? Why is he here, and what should I do now?” Instead, there is absolute silence on Adam’s part. Was the silence out of fear or confusion? Did the serpent appear to Adam as a rival to God’s authority? When we stand as observers to this episode, we can hardly restrain ourselves from crying out, “Ask God for help, Adam! Don’t do anything until you ask your Father about it!” But Adam and Eve did not turn to God in their time of temptation, and they fell. Their sonship was not the kind that would make their hearts burn *first* to know what God expects of them, especially in a time of conflict and danger. It was a creaturely sonship. They had the ability to obey, but they did not have the heart.

In **Rom. 5:14**, St. Paul tells us that Adam was a type of Jesus. What does this mean? Just as Sarah was a type of Mary, whose life pointed towards a supernatural fulfillment, so Adam’s life was a preparation for something better. The one thing Adam *didn’t* do in the Garden was precisely what Jesus *did* do in His own Garden of temptation. Although He felt the natural human fear of suffering and death, His response was to cry, “Abba! Father!” As we find in Hebrews, “In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear. Although He was a Son, he learned obedience through what He suffered; and being made perfect He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (**Heb. 5:7-9**). He is the Divine Son, whose first love and loyalty is for His Father’s will. His obedience is the remedy for Adam’s disobedience. The supernatural fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer, one who has been initiated into Christ through faith and baptism, is this same outburst of love and loyalty to the Father. Miraculously, the believer knows in the deepest part of his soul that God is his Father and that he can turn to Him in his hour of need. For St. Paul, that inner witness of the Spirit is incontrovertible proof that a man is not a slave but a son of God. He is no longer simply Adam’s son but God’s true son, as Jesus was. And that changes everything.

Catechism Connection

Gal. 4:1-7 – “The New Law is called a *law of love* because it makes us act out of the love infused by the Holy Spirit, rather than from fear; a *law of grace*, because it confers the strength of grace to act, by means of faith and the sacraments; a *law of freedom*, because it sets us free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Old Law, inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity and, finally, lets us pass from the condition of a servant who ‘does not know what his master is doing’ to that of a friend of Christ—‘For all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you’—or even to the status of son and heir.” (1972)

Gal. 4:4 – “God sent forth His son, but to prepare a body for him, He wanted the free cooperation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of His Son, a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, ‘a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

name was Mary’: The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life. “ (488)

“Jesus’ circumcision, on the eighth day after His birth, is the sign of His incorporation into Abraham’s descendants, into the people of the covenant. It is the sign of his submission to the Law and his deputation to Israel’s worship, in which He will participate throughout His life. This sign prefigures that ‘circumcision of Christ’ which is Baptism.” (527)

“From the beginning until ‘the fullness of time,’ the joint mission of the Father’s Word and Spirit remains *hidden*, but it is at work. God’s Spirit prepares for the time of the Messiah. Neither is fully revealed but both are already promised, to be watched for and welcomed at their manifestation. So, for this reason, when the Church reads the Old Testament, she searches there for what the Spirit, ‘who has spoken through the prophets,’ wants to tell us about Christ.” (702)

Gal. 4:5-7 – “Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte ‘a new creature,’ an adopted son of God, who has become a ‘partaker of the divine nature,’ member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.” (1265)

Gal. 4:6 – “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit. ‘God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’ This knowledge of faith is possible only in the Holy Spirit: to be in touch with Christ, we must first have been touched by the Holy Spirit. He comes to meet us and kindles faith in us. By virtue of our Baptism, the first sacrament of the faith, the Holy Spirit in the Church communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son.

“Baptism give us the grace of new birth in God the Father, through His Son, in the Holy Spirit. For those who bear God’s Spirit are led to the Word, that is, to the Son, and the Son presents them to the Father, and the Father confers incorruptibility on them. And it is impossible to see God’s Son without the Spirit, and no one can approach the Father without the Son, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of God’s Son is obtained through the Holy Spirit.” (683)

Gal. 4:19 — “Christ’s disciples are to conform themselves to Him until He is formed in them. For this reason, we who have been made like to Him, who have died with Him and risen with Him, are taken up into the mysteries of His life, until we reign together with Him.” (562)

Gal. 4:26 – “The Church... which is called ‘that Jerusalem which is above’ and ‘our mother,’ is described as the spotless spouse of the spotless lamb. It is she whom Christ ‘loved and for whom He delivered Himself up that He might sanctify her.’ It is she whom He unites to Himself by an unbreakable alliance, and whom He constantly ‘nourishes and cherishes.’” (757)



Summary

Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

1. The religion of Israel was a true but “elemental” religion. It was like a tutor, training and preparing children for their maturity. Because it did not enable the people of Israel to receive God’s blessing, their status under it was not much better than that of slaves. They remained in bondage to their sinful natures and under the law’s condemnation.
2. St. Paul tells the Galatians that to submit to circumcision and to return to the Mosaic law would be like taking a step backwards. They would be exchanging their freedom as sons of God for slavery.
3. He reminds them that their experience of love for the Father, of knowing they could turn to Him for whatever they needed, was not something that came to them through circumcision but was theirs through faith and baptism.
4. St. Paul was deeply perplexed over the willingness of his friends to turn away from what he had taught them and to see him as an enemy. He experienced the pain of rejection from people who had once loved and trusted him.
5. In one last effort to pry them away from the error they were tempted to embrace, he shows how a rabbi, looking at the story of Abraham, would recognize in the women with whom he fathered children an allegory. Hagar, the slave woman, would represent the covenant with Moses, producing children who are born in the natural way (as Ishmael was) and thus being in bondage to sin, as are all the children of Adam and Eve. The earthly Jerusalem is their mother. Sarah, the free woman, represents the covenant with Abraham, producing children born in a supernatural way, who are free from the law and free from sin. Sarah is a type of Mary and the New Covenant, established by Jesus. This covenant produces children in the supernatural way (by water and the Spirit), and the heavenly Jerusalem is their mother. These children (Christians) are true sons of Abraham and true sons of God.

A Message from the Authors

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Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

