

**Studies in Galatians**  
Chapter Four  
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**Gal 4:1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,**

**Gal 4:2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.**

**Gal 4:3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.**

**Gal 4:4 But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,**

**Gal 4:5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**

**Gal 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"**

**Gal 4:7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.**

Paul gives us about 3000 years of history in a few sentences! This process also applies to us now. We have experienced about 5000 years of spiritual history in the time from our physical birth until the day that we were reborn into the family of God. We, the children of God, were chosen before the foundation of the world. But before our rebirth we had to go through the same process as did all of His children. Before our rebirth we were nevertheless chosen heirs of the Father. However before the time of our rebirth we were kept under bondage as were all the chosen children. We were held in a prison of the world and under the tutelage of those who were teaching us the spiritual aspects of reality. But first we learned the Law and say that we could never obey the Law to receive righteousness before Holy God. All the people Paul taught in Galatia were taught the Gospel by first showing them that they could not on their own achieve peace before God. But God had chosen some of them and the Holy Spirit was sent to them to bring about their rebirth as children of God and then they could call Holy God "Abba and Father". Then they were no longer slaves to sin and lost under the requirements of the Law but now they had the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to their accounts so that they now were without sin and with righteousness. Then God did then unthinkable: He adopted them into His family as His children and heirs of His kingdom!

Satan used the Law to enslave people by letting them impose their human desires for control so that they thought that they could earn peace with God on their own efforts. It takes very little effort on his part to lead us into a situation where we think that we are in control. We are naturally self-centered and overly optimistic of our abilities to do anything and certainly we can obey those Ten Commandments. But God intended the Law as a vehicle to lead us to Him. By our inability to obey those commandments we were slowly led into the realization that we could not save ourselves. God's timing was perfect so that when the proper time came (the fullness of time) He sent His son into the

world to live a perfect life, to take our wrath on His head, and then to be resurrected and ascend into heaven. The fullness of time is really remarkable as we can look back at many events that led to this perfect time for Jesus to come.

- Rome had arisen to a world power and controlled the Jews.
- Rome had built marvelous highway systems throughout the region.
- The Greek language and culture had built something like a cohesive society.
- The old Greek and Roman gods were losing their hold on society.
- Society was hungry for a meaningful “religion”.
- The Law of Moses had held the Jews in captivity to make them yearn for freedom that is afforded only through Christ for those with ears to hear and eyes to see.
- The Jews were longing for the Messiah to set them free from Roman enslavement.

At this time God then sent His son as the promised Messiah but He was not in the mold of the expected Messiah of the Jews. God also sent the Holy Spirit into the world to guide the chosen people to the Father through Jesus.

**Gal 4:8 “However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.**

**Gal 4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?**

**Gal 4:10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.**

**Gal 4:11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.”**

At the fullness of time the people were still slaves to their own religion and the Jews even thought that they were in service to God even though they were still serving their father, Satan. Even though God had done all that was needed to set these people free they still were enslaved to their self-centered egos and sought ways to do something themselves to add to their perfection. Paul is certainly correct in that God knew them first but when the false teachers came to them they were quick to revert to their faulty consciences. They went back to the old customs as well as trying to obey the Law for their peace with God. After seeing how much they had diverted from the truth Paul is even wondering if they had miscarried in birth.

In our history we know of many people who were outwardly religious but who were still trying to earn their peace with God. John Wesley is an excellent example for he had even been a missionary to Georgia before he was born again. How dedicated he was to his religion but he was still lost until God worked in his life to give him a new beginning. In his words, he was brought to a point where “I trusted in Christ and in Him only for my salvation”.

The key for us to live the Christian life is to vividly remember who we were before God caused us to be reborn. An excellent example in this regard is John Newton. He was not a “religious” man before God changed him. He was a very evil man involved in slavery and God changed him during a terrible storm on one of his slave ships and he was never

the same. He was so convicted of who he was before his salvation that he had the following put over the mantle in his study:

*Deut 15:15 "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today."*

This verse would be a good one for all of us to put somewhere that we can easily see it many times each day as we praise God for His work in our life. Except for His work in my life I would be still under His wrath and would remain so forever:

*John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

In fact, I believe it would be very good for us to put both of these verses in a prominent place in our space. When we truly understand these two verses there should be no temptation to try to add anything to our redemption.

**Gal 4:12 "I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong;  
Gal 4:13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time;  
Gal 4:14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself."**

We see in these verses Paul as the loving pastor. Paul is begging them to make the reality of the Christian life their way. Of course nobody can do that alone, as he well knew. He was not asking them to do more but to do less. He was begging them to depend only on the work of Jesus Christ to make them as he is. He made a similar statement before King Agrippa:

*Acts 26:28 "And Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."*

*Acts 26:29 And Paul said, "I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.""*

He lets them know that he still appreciates that they treated him well when he was with them. Remember that when he went to preach to the Galatians he had come away from a path he had been taking because of some illness. At this point Mark went away from him and Paul went into the cool mountain area leading into the Galatia region. Most people think that he became infected with Malaria in the swampy regions of Pamphylia.

*Acts 13:13 "Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem."*

The symptoms of malaria can be very extreme. My dad caught the disease when he was in New Guinea during WWII. He had already served several years there and he had to then return to the U.S. to recover. He was affected by the symptoms for many years. I do not know of any disfiguring that he suffered but the sweats and nightmares could be very frightening to the people in his new area. But the people did not stay away from him. They treated him with respect and helped him regain his health. They treated him as an angel and in one meaning of the word, “a sent one”, he indeed was an angel. Certainly he was not really an angel but they treated him with great respect. We can treat God’s messengers with great respect but we do not worship angels.

**Gal 4:15 “Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.**

**Gal 4:16 Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth?**

**Gal 4:17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them.**

**Gal 4:18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.”**

After reminding them of the wonderful way that they treated him at first he now asks them why they have departed from that treatment. The malaria can certainly affect eyesight and apparently his eyesight was affected because he reminds them that they were even willing to give him their physical eyes if they could. They certainly had treated him with great kindness and respect. Now, even after telling them the true Gospel, they now are treating him as their enemy since they are rejecting his teaching. He tells them that the goal of the false teachers is not for their good but for their selfish purposes. False teachers generally are seeking self-worship as they try to steer people away from the true Gospel. The Gospel points only to Jesus and not to any human. We must be very careful ourselves in reading the Bible. The teaching of the apostles is the teaching of God. We have to accept all of it. We cannot just treat him as an angel when we like what he is teaching. We cannot treat him as an enemy when we do not like what he is teaching. Of course we have seen much of such differential treatments of the apostles’ messages over the years. People have called Paul a woman-hater when they read some of his messages about women in the church. But then they have called him a great man of God in other of his teachings. Either the apostles can be thoroughly trusted as messengers of God or thoroughly rejected. Lately people have been doing the same dissecting of the teachings of Jesus so that they are throwing away some of His writings and worshiping other portions of His writings. People still want to make themselves the judge of who God is.

Christians are not in subjection to any human teachers. We are in subjection to God. Whenever someone tries to turn Christianity into a set of rules and regulations for the achievement of righteousness they are trying to turn the people into subjection to them as their teachers of what they must do.

**Gal 4:19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you--**

**Gal 4:20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.”**

Paul now is using a mother image for himself but not in the context of any control factor but as the person who was responsible for helping bring them into existence as children of God. Of course only God can cause someone to be born again but He does usually use people in the process. In these cases God used Paul as the person who brought the Gospel message to them. He longs to see Jesus formed in them. The verb that he uses here has meaning in the context of the birth of a child in that it means the formation of the embryo. It could be that he is fearful that they are representative of the third category of people in the story Jesus told of the seed and the ground. (In the following I have added the four categories. Note that only category 3 represents people who were born again.)

*Mark 4:14 “The sower sows the word.*

*(cat 1)Mark 4:15 “And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.*

*(cat 2)Mark 4:16 “And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; Mark 4:17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.*

*(cat 3)Mark 4:18 “And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,*

*Mark 4:19 and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

*(cat 4)Mark 4:20 “And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”*

He is indeed very frustrated at the situation involving these people. He wishes that he could be with them now to see them and to interact with them in a manner to try to fully understand what has happened to them.

**Gal 4:21 “Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?**

**Gal 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.**

**Gal 4:23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.**

**Gal 4:24 This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.**

**Gal 4:25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.**

**Gal 4:26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.**

**Gal 4:27 For it is written, “Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For more are the children of the desolate Than of the one who has a husband.”**

**Gal 4:28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.**

**Gal 4:29 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 also.**

**Gal 4:30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman."**

**Gal 4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman."**

If they say that they want now to be under the law they need to really listen to what it has to say. They said:

*John 8:39 "They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham."*

But Jesus said:

*John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies."*

Paul could see the Galatians falling into the same trap as did the Jews so he then goes back to Abraham rather than to Moses and teaches them their true origin. This is really a brilliant argument. There certainly are people today who call themselves Christians but think that to enter heaven they must adhere to some set of regulations and traditions. Such people are in bondage to those sets of rules. Paul points them back to Abraham and they should have known that the promises to Abraham included the land and a blessing for all nations. The promise included the number of descendants to be as numerous as the number of stars in the sky and sand on the beaches. They needed to understand that being a descendent of Abraham was a spiritual occurrence rather than a physical event. Jesus said:

*Matt 3:9 "and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."*

Paul sees this teaching in the sons of Abraham for he had two sons. One son was only a physical birth but the other was a miracle and thus a spiritual birth. Ishmael was born into slavery but Isaac was born into freedom. The two women then stand for the two covenants: the old covenant and the new covenant. Hagar stands for the earthly Jerusalem at that time and Sarah stands for the heavenly Jerusalem of promise. Since Abraham was the father of both sons, it is not enough to say that we are of our father Abraham. We must also be of our mother Sarah. Ishmael was fourteen years older than Isaac and he really gave Isaac a hard time. It is also true in the church today that the works-based church ridicules the faith-based church. Our half-brothers, the nominal church, still persecutes the true church. God established his covenant with Isaac and

through Ishmael out of the area (Gen 18:17-21). Ishmael became the father of the Arabians and Isaac became the father of the Jews.

We need to remember that we are children of God and born into freedom, not into a works-based religion.

### **References**

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