

## Galatians 4

- In scripture, it's common to find comparison between earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father, and between earthly children and the children of God
  - The comparison is useful and instructive, even if it falls short of fully describing our relationship with the Lord in many cases
    - Fathers are to be loving caretakers over their children
    - Fathers are to be teachers instructing their children
    - Fathers are to be disciplinarians and guardians over children
    - And fathers are to be authority figures over children
    - While children are to be respectful, obedient, and honoring of their fathers
    - Concerned with pleasing their father and winning his approval
  - And as we'll see today, even the bond between fathers and children pictures the relationship between God and His children
    - Paul uses this analogy extensively in the first half of Chapter 4 to complete his thought on the relationship between the church and Christ
    - This analogy – and the way Paul applies it – will form his teaching on ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church
  - So far in his response to the Judaizers, Paul has substantiated his authority and message
    - He has defended salvation by grace alone
    - And he has set forth the true purpose on the Law
      - He will return to these topics in time
  - But as we ended last week, Paul was transitioning out of a discussion of the law and into the proper understanding of our relationship to the Father
    - He used an analogy of a child growing up under the care of a guardian

[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 fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,

[Gal. 4:5](#) so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

[Gal. 4:6](#) 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.

[Gal. 4:8](#) However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

- As I taught last week, Paul is teaching on two levels in this comparison
  - First, Paul is describing the individual's experience in moving from under a state of law and into a position of sonship by grace
    - Before we come to faith, we are like children in a household
    - We are held in a form of enslavement
  - Paul says that bondage was under the elemental things of the world
    - Elemental things means basic principles
      - As in the fundamental truths of the world
    - Like children bound by their guardians, before we came to faith we were restricted from access to the kingdom and our inheritance
  - What were these elementary things that bound us as unbelievers?
    - That thing differed depending on whether we are Jewish or Gentile
    - In the case of the Jew, the bondage was to the Law given to limit the Jew's sin and point them to Christ
      - Notice Paul makes reference to "those under the Law" in v.5 and says "we" might receive adoption as sons
      - The reference to "we" is a reference to Paul's Jewish brethren who were under Jewish Law

- Then notice also in vs.6-8 Paul addresses Gentiles in a similar way
    - Paul says “you” and says the Gentiles in Galatia are no longer slaves either
    - But in v.8 Paul clarifies they were in bondage to that time when they did not know of God at all
    - They were slaves to idols and pagan rituals, which were no gods at all
- So while the Jew and the Gentile might have experienced that bondage differently, they arrived at the same result
  - As unbelievers, both Jews and Gentiles were in bondage to something prior to coming to faith
    - Like Bob Dylan sings, “everyone has to serve someone”
    - Jews served the Law in works of flesh, while Gentiles served pagan idols
  - But then Paul says in v.6 that because we are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts
    - Paul is describing the moment of our salvation
    - It is the arrival of the Spirit in our hearts that brings us to the moment of salvation
    - Remember, Paul says in 1 Corinthians

[1Cor. 12:3](#) Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is **accursed**”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

- As a result of the Holy Spirit coming into our heart, we respond by calling out to our Father in Heaven
    - The word “Abba” is Aramaic for father, and it is a very personal intimate form of father
    - It is the word used by someone who knows the father like a child knows his daddy
- Did you notice the chain of events in v.6?
  - Paul says our salvation moment came about because we are sons of God

- Doesn't that seem backwards?
- Don't we become a child of God because of our confession of faith and the arrival of the Spirit?
- Paul answers that question no
  - Paul said we did not become a child of God because we confessed Christ and received the Holy Spirit
  - Paul says we confessed Christ and received the Holy Spirit because we were a child of God
- Paul is referring to God's election of His children before the beginning
  - Notice the analogy Paul has chosen to use has a child living under bondage
  - The analogy says we were always a child of God
    - God knew it and God planned it
    - But we were unaware of that plan and were in bondage under elementary world principles
    - But we were always a child because God had determined to call us into faith on an appointed day
  - Paul describes this truth in Ephesians

**[Eph. 1:3](#) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,**

**[Eph. 1:4](#) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love**

**[Eph. 1:5](#) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,**

- Notice again in this passage that Paul is calling the believer a child or son of God
  - In this case, he says we are adopted sons of God
    - And that adoption was something God planned from before the foundation of the earth
    - And He placed us in His family as a result of the kind intention of His will

- God chose us, Paul says, we didn't choose Him
- This truth fundamentally destroys the Judaizers' argument
  - You were chosen by God to know and follow Him, to become an adopted son or daughter of God
  - Then what possible value are your works in bringing you into the Kingdom?
  - The Law or the pagan rituals we observed prior to salvation are part of that process
    - In fact, Paul says they were the barrier that kept us under bondage and away from our Father
- But our Father knew us and chose us and when the time was right, sent His Holy Spirit into our hearts
  - And when the Spirit was sent to us, we received the gift of faith
  - And by that faith, we came to know Jehovah as God and Father
  - Therefore, we cried out to the Father, calling daddy as only a true child can
  - The chain of events begins with God and leads us to follow Him
- So the first way Paul is using the analogy of a son under a guardian is to describe our individual experience of leaving bondage to law and entering salvation by faith
  - But there is a second application implied in this analogy
    - As we discussed last week, there is a giving way of one dispensation to another
    - In the time of Law, the Jew was under bondage to the Sinai covenant while the Greek was excluded from the promise
    - This was a time when God was laying the groundwork for His Son's arrival
  - Then notice in v.4 Paul says everything changed in the fullness of time, when Jesus was born of a woman
    - That moment wasn't the moment of our personal salvation
    - That was a moment when a dispensation was changing

- The phrase "fullness of the time" means at the completion of an age
      - So when the age of Law had come to its end, then the next age began
      - This was the age of grace in the face of Christ
    - That is why the Law is no longer the primary instrument to lead men to Christ
    - Now men are called by the proclamation of the Gospel
- This leaves us at the end of v.8 with Paul having laid out his arguments against the Judaizers
  - He has argued that scripture and experience taught the Galatians that faith alone brought them to God
    - He dispelled the power of Law to save
    - He showed its purpose to convict and send us to Christ
    - He explained that the church is not an entity of Jew and lesser members, that such distinctions no longer matter
    - And he has demonstrated that our very adoption of sons and daughters was the result of an act of the Lord according to His will
  - After piling up all that evidence in his corner, Paul then turns to admonishing the church for their failure to apply these truths

**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.

- The Galatian believers had transitioned away from a state of bondage and into a state of sonship by which they knew God and called Him Father
  - So Paul asks why if they have come to know God would they ever want to go back to weak and worthless things?
    - Notice Paul catches himself and adds a correction
    - He says you have become known by God

- This further confirms that Paul is teaching that this church didn't find God
- God found them
- And therefore since God found them, why in the world would they prefer to live as someone who had yet to know God fully?
- And Paul says this return to the Law was a voluntary submission to re-enslavement
- How were they returning to slavery? Paul lists the ways in v.10
  - The church in Galatia was observing days, months, seasons and years
  - Each of these time periods was a shorthand way of describing an aspect of regular Jewish observance under the Law and tradition of Israel
    - Days refers to observing all the restrictions of the Sabbath day observance
    - Months refers to the monthly new moon festival
    - Seasons refers to the Jewish festivals associated with the Spring and Fall harvest seasons
    - And the years refers to the New Year, sabbatical year and jubilee yearly observances
- Paul is unequivocal in his critique of these observances
  - He says to make a lifestyle of observing these patterns is a return to weak, worthless things
    - They are weak with respect to mitigating our sin
    - And they are worthless in bringing us righteousness
    - Furthermore, they represent a form of slavery that is entirely unnecessary in light of Christ's arrival in our hearts
  - Elsewhere in Colossians Paul says we have liberty to observe the Sabbath, festivals and new moons as we choose

**Col. 2:16** Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day –

[Col. 2:17](#) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- The observance of such things were intended as shadows of Christ
  - But once the real thing has arrived, the shadow is no longer necessary or even preferred
- But taking this together with Paul's teaching in Galatians, we see that liberty doesn't give us the right to confuse other believers – or even ourselves – concerning their meaning
  - In a sense, we can sin by observing the Law too much
  - In that our observance confuses the purpose of such things and causes immature believers to be confused over the Law
  - We don't have liberty to use our lives to testify to the wrong things
  - Living a testimony that the Law has value and should be a part of our daily life is wrong, Paul says, and therefore it is sin
- So in v.11 Paul expresses concern for what he is hearing

[Gal. 4:11](#) I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

[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.

[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](#) So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

[Gal. 4:17](#) They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will 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.

[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 fears he labored over them in vain, meaning his work achieved nothing

- Now at first glance, we might think Paul worried his work had failed to convert them to Christianity
  - That perhaps their behavior was proof they weren't actually Christian
  - But Paul himself said earlier that the Galatians (like all men) came to faith because of God's work, not Paul's and not even their own will
- Notice in v.19 Paul says he is again laboring for them until Christ is formed in them
  - And also notice he still calls them "my children"
  - Later in v.28 he will refer to them as the children of the promise
  - So Paul isn't questioning their faith or salvation
- Paul is referring to his work in maturing them into enjoying the freedom of their liberty
  - He is concerned that all his teaching and modeling for them has been in vain
  - And instead, they are choosing to remain in the bondage that their faith freed them from
- Furthermore, notice Paul's call to the church: be as I am
  - Paul is saying become free of these things as I have become
    - Ironically, Paul is saying to Gentiles "You should act like me, a Jew who no longer keeps the Law"
    - Rather than being Gentiles trying to act like Jews
  - He adds they should become like him as Paul himself became like them
    - He means in the way he willingly adopted a Gentile lifestyle while living among them in Galatia
    - That was Paul's style to become all things to all men to win a few
- And now Paul's argument becomes intensely personal based on their past history together
  - At the end of v.12, Paul says to the church you have not wronged me

- In other words, Paul is saying that the church has not offended him or lost his support and affection
  - Then notice the next verse begins with the word “but”
  - Paul then reminds the church of how they first became acquainted
- Apparently, Paul was suffering from some physical ailment
  - It may have been an illness to his eye, since he mentions the church wishing to transplant their eyes for his sake
  - According to v.14, it was also difficult for some others to be around
    - Paul says it was to the church’s credit that they did not loathe him, which is a strong word
  - In any case, this ailment led to the opportunity for Paul to preach the gospel for the first time in Galatia
    - Perhaps it placed Paul in an infirmary or local home from which he began to preach
    - The occasion of his illness was the means God used to bring the church the Gospel
  - At that time, Paul says they received him as an angel, because the Lord opened their eyes and showed Himself to them through Paul’s teaching
- He asks where has their sense of blessing from Paul gone?
  - He’s asking them why they no longer receive his teaching and authority as a source of blessing?
  - Why do they treat his teaching with so little regard and in its place accept the teaching of the Judaizers?
  - Why not continue to receive Paul’s teaching for the blessing it is?
- So then based on their history Paul asks, what’s changed?
  - How had Paul suddenly become their enemy simply for teaching them the truth?
    - Of course Paul knows exactly what’s happened

- His question was intended to lead them to that same conclusion
    - The arrival of the Judaizers were to blame for the church turning their backs on the very man who had delivered so much blessing in the first place
  - So in v.17 Paul points out the true motives of the Judaizers
    - Paul says these men are seeking the church but not commendably
      - In this context, to seek means to win men over to a point of view
      - The Judaizers were seeking to convert the Galatians to their point of view
    - But it wasn't commendable because their motives weren't honest and righteous
      - Paul says they want to shut the Galatians out so they will seek after the Judaizers
      - The term shut out is *ekkleio* which means excluded
    - The Judaizers wanted to exclude the Galatians so that then the Galatians would seek after them
- In that statement, you find the key to understanding almost all Christian cults, legalistic false teachers and the like...including Messianic Christian movements
  - The true motivation for the Judaziers imposing Law and the obscurity of Jewish practice, custom and regulation upon the Gentile was a matter of power
    - Knowledge is power, and these men were interested in honor and power
    - They knew that by teaching that Law was required, they could set themselves up as Pharisees over the church
    - Then those in the church would feel a need to seek after them for access to that wisdom and approval
    - Of course, these men would not give up their secrets and approval easily

- And that's where their opportunity to obtain power and control came from
- Knowing this will give you an invaluable defense against legalism and those who propagate it in the church
  - Those pushing rules, regulations and the like on the church are seeking control through the power of knowledge
  - And for any who have bought into such things, it's very hard to ever let go of that false teaching
    - Because in doing so, it renders all our work and effort to amass that knowledge useless
    - We would first have to admit that our pursuit of that knowledge and our conformance to the rules was a wasted effort
    - It's a matter of pride and it's tough to back away from such a pattern
  - That's what makes legalism in any form so dangerous in the church
- In contrast to the Judaizers, Paul says he has sought after the Galatians in a commendable fashion
  - Paul had pure motives and intentions and he spoke with the truth
    - Paul sought after them first for the sake of their salvation
    - And then he sought for their maturity in the faith
    - And now he seeks for their benefit from a distance, he says
  - Paul says in v.19 that he knows he is again laboring for them
    - The term for laboring literally means giving birth again
    - Paul is saying he is willing to endure the painful birth process a second time for their sake if it means bringing Christ to development inside them finally
    - He is working to rescue them from the clutches of these false teachers

- And he wishes he could be in their presence to make the case in person
- Furthermore, he wishes he could speak in a better tone
  - Already he has called them foolish
  - And now he says he's perplexed by their behavior

[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 NUMEROUS 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.

- I mentioned in an earlier lesson that Paul develops his teaching in a loosely structured chiasm
  - Here we see Paul having taken his turn and he's working his way back out
    - We've left the topic of ecclesiology and returned to the topic of Israeology, or the doctrine of Israel and the Law
    - And Paul comes back to this topic with a provocative question

- Tell me, you who want to be under the Law, do you not listen to the Law?
  - Notice how Paul words that question
  - He says you who “want” to be under the Law...
  - If Christians were truly under the Law, then Paul wouldn't have said “want”, he would have said “you who are under the Law”
  - Clearly, Paul is indicating that these believers are not truly under the obligations of the Law, though they have a desire to believe it
  - It's all in their heads
- Then he follows with the question “do you not read the Law?”
  - What Paul means is do you not see what the Law itself teaches concerning its purpose in God's plan
  - If a student of scripture reads the Law carefully, he or she will see that the Law itself never portrays itself as an instrument of righteousness
- To prove his point, Paul uses an allegory taken from Genesis
  - Paul says this is the “Law” because to a Jewish mindset, the Law was the entire book of Moses, which is the first five books of the Bible
    - So in the Law, that is Genesis, Paul find this allegory to prove that the Law was never intended to be a lifestyle for obtaining righteousness
    - The example is of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac
  - In v.24, Paul says this is an allegory, so that means we must take each player in the story and draw a comparison to spiritual matters under review in Paul's argument
    - For example, Abraham is a representative for every believer
    - And Abraham received a promise from God, just as every believer receives a promise from God in the New Covenant
    - The question of the allegory is how does the believer obtain the fulfillment of that promise from God?

- In Abraham's case, he tried two different options
  - In the case of the first option, Abraham tried to bring about the promise of God through his flesh, that is by human works
  - Specifically, Abraham tried to conceive the promised son by lying with his concubine Hagar
  - The result of that liaison was Ishmael
- In the end, both Hagar and Ishmael were cast out of Abraham's family
  - His works amounted to nothing lasting
    - And they certainly didn't amount to the promised child
    - They merely counterfeited the promise in a way that could not stand God's scrutiny
    - Ishmael was forever a reminder of Abraham's sin
  - The allegorical application to believers is clear: we have our promise, but how can we obtain what God has promised in Christ?
    - Are we to obtain it through our works?
    - Whether by works of the Mosaic Law or any set of rules, we will arrive at the same place as Abraham
    - We will only produce further condemnation, because our works will merely serve to remind us how far we fall short of the Lord's standards
    - Any product of those works will be cast out, because they will pale in comparison to the work of Christ
- The second option is to rely on faith in God's promises, for both Abraham and for us
  - And Paul develops the rest of the allegory with five sets of pairs
    - These pairs apply the contrast of Abraham's two options
    - The pairs are of the wives, the sons, the covenants, the mountains and the cities
  - Each of these pairs represents an aspect of the contrast between relying on works vs. trusting in God's promises

- First, Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant, while Sarah represents the Abrahamic Covenant
  - Hagar was a wife of Abraham's works
  - While Sarah was the woman God promised would bear Abraham's son
- Ishmael represents the product of works, while Isaac represents the product of faith
  - Ishmael was a source of anguish and a reminder of sin for Abraham
  - While Isaac was a blessing and reminder of God's faithfulness
- Mount Sinai represents the place of bondage, while Mount Calvary represents the place of freedom
  - At Mt Sinai God's people entered into the bondage of the restrictions of the Law
  - While at Mt. Calvary the Lord purchased the believers' freedom with His blood
- Present Jerusalem represents the destiny of those held in bondage, while the New Jerusalem represents the destiny of those of faith
  - The Jerusalem of Paul's day was in bondage to Roman soldiers and filled with unbelieving Jews under penalty of the Law
  - The New Jerusalem is prepared for those who know Jesus, and offers a destiny of glory
- Paul's application is obvious in v.28
  - We are like Isaac, the child of the promise
    - We are on the path of faith and blessing, relying on promises and not making the mistake Abraham made
    - We don't need to supplement God's work with our own worthless and weak methods

- But realize that because we are children of the promise, we will experience the things that God's children have always experienced
  - We will suffer persecution at the hands of those who are not God's
  - Just as Isaac suffered at the hands of Ishmael, so should we expect to be persecuted by unbelievers
- And in the case of the Galatian church, the persecution they are experiencing is the persecution of the Judaizers
  - As these false teachers attempted to place a burden and yoke on the brethren, they were unintentionally proving the allegory true
  - They were like Ishmael persecuting Isaac
  - This proved both that they were false and that their interests were not commendable
    - There was nothing the Judaizers could offer that would add to what the church had already by faith
  - As Paul concludes in v.31, we are not children of the flesh and works
    - We are children of freedom
    - Of liberty, not Law
- The liberty we have in Christ permits us to live in a variety of ways short of sinning
  - But only to the degree it doesn't compromise our witness concerning the meaning of such things
- We may need a sabbatical from the Law to remind ourselves we don't depend on it, we depend on Christ alone