



## SERMON STUDY GUIDE

### Galatians 4:1–20

Questions for the Week: What beliefs, feelings, and ideas structure our lives? Do those beliefs, feelings, and ideas reflect the fact that we know and are known by God? What beliefs, feelings, and ideas do we cling to that are based on a reality that assumes God does not exist or care about us?

READ THE TEXT – Galatians 4:1–20

#### The Structure

1. From Slavery to Sonship (Gal 4:1–7)
  - 1.1. Heirs while children are no different than slaves (4:1)
    - 1.1.1. Under guardians and managers (4:2; see 3:24–25)
    - 1.1.2. Until the time set by the father (4:2)
    - 1.1.3. We were children enslaved under the “elements of the world” (Gal 4:3; see Gal 4:9; Col 2:8, 20)
  - 1.2. God sent his son (Gal 4:4–5)
    - 1.2.1. When the fullness of time came (Gal 4:4; Mark 1:15; Eph 1:10)
    - 1.2.2. Born under a woman (4:4)
    - 1.2.3. Born under law (4:4)
    - 1.2.4. To redeem those under law (4:5; Gal 3:13; 1 Cor 6:20)
    - 1.2.5. We might receive the adoption (4:5; Rom 8:15, 23; Eph 1:5)
  - 1.3. God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts (Gal 4:6–7)
    - 1.3.1. Because you are sons (Gal 4:6; see also 3:26)
    - 1.3.2. Crying “Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15)
    - 1.3.3. You are no longer a slave but a son and an heir through God (Gal 4:7)
2. The Galatians’ Desire to Return to Slavery (Gal 4:8–11)
  - 2.1. Formerly (Gal 4:8; see also Eph 2:1–3; 4:17–18)
    - 2.1.1. when you did not know God (as Gentiles see also 1 Thess 4:5)
    - 2.1.2. and you were enslaved to things by nature not gods (Gal 4:8; see also 1 Cor 8:4; 12:2; 2 Chron 13:9; Isa 37:19; 44:9–20; Jer 2:11)
  - 2.2. Now (Gal 4:9)
    - 2.2.1. You have come to know God (Psalm 79:6; Jer 9:3; 10:25)
    - 2.2.2. To be known by God (1 Cor 8:3; 1 Cor 13:12; Jer 1:4)
  - 2.3. Question: How can you turn back to the worthless elementary principles of the world whose slaves you want to be once more? (Gal 4:9)
    - 2.3.1. Observing days, months, and seasons (4:10; see Col 2:16–23)

2.3.2. Paul's fear "Labored in vain" (4:11; see 1 Thess 3:5)

### 3. Paul's Personal Appeal to the Galatians (Gal 4:12–20)

3.1. Exhortation: "Become like me, because I also became like you, you did me no wrong" (Gal 4:12; see also 1 Cor 11:1; 9:21–23)

3.2. Reminder of the Past (Gal 4:13–15)

3.2.1. Paul preached because a weakness of the flesh (Gal 4:13; see also 1 Cor 2:1–5; Acts 14:19–23)

3.2.2. Galatians received him as an angel, as Christ (Gal 4:14)

3.2.3. What happened to your blessing? (Gal 4:15; see Matt 10:40–42; John 13:20)

3.3. Problem of the Present – the Troublemakers (Gal 4:16–18)

3.3.1. Rhetorical question: Have I become your enemy by telling the truth? (4:16; see 2:5; 5:7)

3.3.2. Troublemakers Zeal vs Paul's Zeal (Gal 4:17–18)

3.3.2.1. They are zealous to shut you out so that you are zealous for them (Gal 4:17; 6:12–13)

3.3.2.2. I am zealous for you even in my absence (Gal 4:18; 2:5)

3.3.3. Appeal as a Father (Gal 4:19–20; see also 1 Cor 4:15; Phlm 10)

3.3.3.1. Paul in labor pain until Christ is formed in the Galatians (4:19; 1 Cor 4:14)

3.3.3.2. Paul's desire to be present and change his voice but he is perplexed (Gal 4:20)

#### Questions this Week:

The meaning of the phrase *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* [τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου] is difficult to translate as seen in the differences among common translations: "the elementary principles of the world" (ESV), "the elemental spiritual forces of the world" (NIV), "the elemental spirits of the world" (NRSV).

- The phrase *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* occurs only in Gal 4:3, 9 and Col 2:8, 20.
- Typically, in Greco-Roman literature, *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* refers to the most basic parts of the physical world: air, fire, water, and earth.
  - According to ancient cosmology, the animation or motion of these elements is caused by "souls" or "spirits."
  - Paul is describing more than mere physical elements because he personifies these elements as enslaving.
  - Paul specifies that these elements are "by nature not gods" (Gal 4:8)
  - Jewish texts describe how Gentiles identify gods and souls moving the elements of the cosmos:
    - "For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works; <sup>2</sup> but they

supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world.

<sup>3</sup> If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. <sup>4</sup> And if people were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them. <sup>5</sup> For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. (Wisdom 13:1–5, NRSV)

- Philo of Alexandria, interpreting Genesis 6:2 explains: “It is Moses' custom to give the name of angels to those whom other philosophers call *daimones*, souls that is which fly and hover in the air. And let no one suppose that what is here said is a myth. For the cosmos must needs be filled through and through with life, and each of its *primary elementary divisions* contains the forms of life which are akin and suited to it. The earth has the creatures of the land, the sea and the rivers those that live in water, fire the fire-born, which are said to be found especially in Macedonia, and heaven has the stars. For the stars are souls divine and without blemish throughout, and therefore as each of them is mind in its purest form, they move in the line most akin to mind—the circle. And so the *other element, the air*, must needs be filled with living beings, though indeed they are invisible to us, since even the air itself is not visible to our senses. Yet the fact that our powers of vision are incapable of any perception of the forms of these souls is no reason why we should doubt that there are souls in the air, but they must be apprehended by the mind, that like may be discerned by like.” (*On Giants* 6–9)

- Paul’s desire for the Galatians is that “Christ be formed in you.” How does that happen in our lives? How is Christ formed in us?

#### Weekly Questions:

- What does this passage say about God?
- What stood out to you from the text this week?
- What does this text say about the Lord’s reign and what it means to be his set apart people?
- Who are the characters of this story?
- What does this passage invite us to:
  - Do?
  - Think?
  - Feel?
- How did the sermon or passage encourage you to Love God and Love People?
- Which characters do you identify with most in the story? Why?