

Galatians 4

Good evening and thank you for joining us. We're in Galatians chapter 4 tonight if you would please turn in your bibles there. We're now at the halfway point of this powerful epistle, which is all about the trappings of religion and legalism, and the better way of walking in God's grace.

The title of tonight's message is FREE
Let's pray

One of the most heartbreaking things we see in our society is the vast numbers of unwanted children. Every abortion that takes place reveals the difficult truth that the child was unwanted.

SHOW PIC It's rampant in our society to the point where places have baby drop off's for babies who were just born who aren't wanted **CLOSE PIC**

Of course this is bigger than just newborns-how many countless kids today are unwanted by their parents, so their parents just throw them in front of a screen to entertain, and assume the schools will raise their kids. It's a travesty and difficult to watch unfold all around us.

But there is no such thing as an unwanted child with God. This is the overarching theme we'll see in these verses as Paul continues the case for faith over the Mosaic Law by citing an illustration from family life.

1-2

1 Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

Back in chapter 3 Paul had compared the OT law to both a prison warden and a child guardian. Now he compares the law to a trustee or manager who was appointed to care for a young child and their property.

SHOW PIC Even if a child may be the heir of a vast billion dollar inheritance, that young child is still under the direction and care of others until the appointed time when they're mature enough.

CLOSE PIC

The purpose of all three comparisons was to clarify the spiritual immaturity of those living under the Mosaic Law with the spiritual maturity of those living by faith in Christ. Have you ever noticed that man made rules and boundaries are easier to follow than by walking by faith?

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. The phrase "elements of the world" refers to the law. Why is the law referred to in this way? Because the basic building block of any society must be the law. Any society that ignores the foundational principles of law will crumble and be destroyed from within.

Of course, as we've discussed, the problem with the law is that it tells us what to do, but the law can't give us the power to do it.

Yet the Jewish false teachers in Galatia spoke of the Mosaic Law as the path to true holiness and righteousness. They emphasized keeping a list of to-do's and rights and wrongs. They were placing the Christians of Galatia back under bondage.

4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born^[fn] of a woman, born under the law, Notice, in “the fullness of time” - when history reached a crescendo. At a pre-planned moment “God sent forth His Son...” Roman peace, and Jewish prophecy, and God’s sovereignty all combined to make it the exact right time for Jesus to be born.

And sometimes we forget that Jesus was born under the Law. He lived up to its demands. Jesus became our sinless sacrifice and redeemed us to God because He fully kept ALL the law!

5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because Jesus is God, He has the power and the resources to redeem us. Because Jesus is man, He has the right and the ability to redeem us. Jesus came to purchase us out of the slave market, from our bondage to sin and the elements of the world.

But here’s what’s staggering-we’re not only set free, God in His love through Jesus has even adopted us as His kids.

Every adopted child has one great blessing-they always know they’re wanted. If you were adopted you were wanted. Adoption is no accident!

And since Jesus has adopted you it means God loves you, and wants you with Him. This can be hard to fathom because I gotta tell ya there's plenty of times where I don't even like myself. But God wants me, and He wants you. He died for us!!!

In a world that is filled with rejection, and hatred, and vitriol, I'm wanted just as I am by my heavenly father.

Now it's one thing to help a person, I bet we've all done quite a bit of that haven't we-you know lend a helping hand. But after we help a stranger, what do we do-we part ways right-maybe we keep in touch. But not God. God not only helped us by saving us, He's adopted us into His family, which means we are His heirs!!!

6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" God redeems us by satisfying our debts and He takes legal custody of us. But His adoptions aren't just on paper. He puts His Spirit in us, so the instinctive cry of our hearts is "Abba" or Daddy.

And this is so often what we miss in our Christian walk. We have access to the same intimacy with God the Father that God the Son, Jesus Christ had. Jesus addressed God the Father as "Daddy" when He prayed **Mark 14:36 And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."**

God creates a relational intimacy between Him and us. And this is to be our motivation for all we do for Christ!

Grace does not produce lazy Christianity. On the contrary, as James would write, true faith works **James 2:17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

Why? It's not because we have to, but because we get to.

It's amazing what love will do for someone else. Suddenly our priorities aren't as important as the one we love.

It's important we remember we don't have to go to church, we get to worship the Lord as a congregation. We get to start our day with morning devotions. We get to tithe and be free from our own greediness. We get to work for others and bless them. We get to share our faith. We don't have to do any of those things. We get to.

The reason faith is revealed in works is not to fulfill a requirement of the law, it's a response to an incredible love.

See the law says you have to do these things-and it makes us slaves

7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Sons are never slaves and slaves are never sons in their father's house. Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the prodigal son. **Luke 15 14 But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And**

he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’

20 “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring[fn] out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

The son was determined to return to his father as a slave — but the father refused, and would only receive him as a son.

There is a beautiful progression in these verses. First we are set free from slavery. Then we are declared sons and adopted into God’s family. Then, as sons, we are made heirs.

Heirs inherit something and the Bible makes it clear just what we inherit: **an heir of God through Christ**. We inherit God Himself.

Our release from slavery, our sonship, the Spirit of Jesus in our hearts, and our status as heirs of God are all birthrights given to us in Jesus. We receive them through Christ.

These are things we should be living in and enjoying every day of our Christian life.

8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. Just like he did earlier, Paul reminds his readers of their enslaved condition prior to coming to faith in Christ.

We know before they came to know the one true God, the Galatians believed in other beings (gods such as Zeus and Hermes.) Perhaps that was what Paul was referencing.

Or it could simply refer to them serving the pleasures and pursuits of life that so easily change from being our possessions to possessing us.

9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? By writing “turn again”, Paul shows that the Galatians were not turning to a new error, but coming back to an old one; the idea of a works relationship with God. As Christians, we can place ourselves under the bondage of a works based, “cause and effect” relationship with God — but this is moving backward, not forward.

Warren Weirsbe said “One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in reality, it leads the believer back into a ‘second childhood’ of Christian experience.” And this is what Paul had previously mentioned—the immaturity.

10-11

10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain. The false teachers demanded the observance of days and months and seasons and years and other legalistic matters, and acted as if this would lead them into a higher plane of spirituality. Yet all these weak and beggarly elements of legalism did was to bring them into bondage.

Paul despaired that they were going backward, and he was afraid his labor for them had been futile. They were not acting like heirs of God

Legalism is so attractive because it caters to our flesh by putting the focus on what we achieve for God, not on what Jesus did for us. The liberty of Jesus gives us status as sons and a rich inheritance, but it doesn’t cater to our flesh.

I’ve heard it put, “The more religious a man becomes the further from God he gets.” It’s true! Paul worries the legalism of the Galatians will unravel everything grace had weaved together. His work in them will be “in vain.”

Now in the NT we see that Paul himself observed the Jewish feasts after his conversion. So is this a contradiction here? No, because it comes down to the motive.

Paul didn't observe them because God expected him to do so but in order to evangelize effectively, not to gain acceptance from God.

1 Corinthians 9 19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law,[fn] that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God,[fn] but under law toward Christ[fn]), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as[fn] weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

And the Bible is clear on this issue in Romans 14

Romans 14:5-6 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord;[fn] and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

So if a person says you know what, I want to go to church on Sabbath, which is Saturday. Great-have at it. But that doesn't mean God loves them anymore than He loves me or you. Nor does it improve your standing with God-it's personal preference.

12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. Paul had become as his readers were in the sense that he had lived among them as a Gentile, not a Jew under the Mosaic Law. So now he's lovingly calling them to live independent of the Law as he did.

13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. When Paul and Barnabas landed on the Turkish coast, they didn't stay long. They left the tropics for the dryer mountains of Galatia. And what motivated them? He says it was a "physical infirmity."

14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. The Galatians held Paul in high esteem. They treated him as a messenger of God. Paul's illness in no way lessened their respect for him.

15 What^[fn] then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Here's how much the Galatians loved Paul. They would've plucked out their eyes and given them to him if it were possible. And here's a clue as to the nature of Paul's illness that he mentioned back in verse 13- it was probably some sort of infectious eye disease.

Now there's debate among scholars-is Paul referring to his thorn in the flesh here? We don't know for sure.

Paul remembers and reminds the Galatians' of their love and loyalty to him. But something happened. Someone had turned them against him

16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? The Galatians who at one point were willing to give Paul their eyes had turned their backs on Paul. Few things hurt as much in life as betrayal.

17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. The word exclude here in the Greek means to lock you up. Paul's legalistic opponents wanted to draw the Galatian Christians away into their own divisive group. They actually wanted to exclude the Galatians from other Christians and to bring them into the "super-spiritual" group of the legalists.

This is what happens with legalists. The love and loyalty they display is often more for the group itself, than for Jesus Christ. Though they name the name of Jesus, in practice the group itself is exalted as the main focus, and usually exalted as the last refuge of the true "super-Christians."

18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. The Galatian Christians were no doubt impressed by the zeal of the legalists. The legalists were so sincere, so passionate about their beliefs. And that's part of the

draw. We see the legalists and their zeal in the name of the Lord and say, well how can they be wrong? Look how dedicated they are!

Remember Paul knew all about zeal because before he became a Christian, he had plenty of zeal-he persecuted the church.

19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, Paul felt as if he was going through labor pains again for them. He had agonized for them before, when he had evangelized Galatia, but now he had to repeat his laborious work for them.

This verse is significant, because this is the only time in Paul's writings does he appear in the role of a mother. Not only that, a mother who willingly undergoes the ordeal of pregnancy and delivery all over again in order to secure the well-being of her children.

20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you. Paul wished he could be present with the Galatians personally in order to communicate the nuances of his feelings better. You know how it is an email is never as good as a face to face when trying to discuss a hard topic

Paul is about to use an OT story to teach a NT lesson.

21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? Paul challenged his readers who claimed to value the Law so highly to consider what it is the law actually taught.

22-23

22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, Back in Genesis, God promised Abraham and Sarah a son. Sarah was 65 years-old. Abe was even older. And at 65 God's promise seemed pretty far fetched...

Then when nothing happened for 25 years, and God still repeated the promise, a 90 year old Sarah laughed. But it was shortly thereafter that God got the last laugh! Amazingly at 90 years old Sarah had a son. She named him "Isaac" which means "laughter."

But that's just half the story. In her darkest days of barrenness, Sarah grew weary of waiting. **Genesis 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.** Hagar gave birth to a son named Ishmael.

In their flesh they had Ishmael, yet through God's promise, later on Isaac was born. Isaac was God's work from start to finish - just like our salvation. Whereas, Ishmael "was born according to the flesh."

Remember, "flesh" is me - my efforts, my ingenuity, my ability - just like our efforts under the Law.

24-26

24 which things are symbolic. For these are the[fn] two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. The system of relating to God that Paul opposed in Galatia - righteousness that depends on the Law, and works, and flesh - is epitomized in Hagar and Ismael. Yet to the contrary, Paul says, “but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

The “Jerusalem above” is heaven. This is where the power originated that impregnated Sarah. It’s also the source of our salvation.

Heaven bestows favor freely - by grace, through faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Which is exactly how we relate to God under the New Covenant. So Hagar and earthly Jerusalem represent the Law, while Sarah and the Jerusalem above represent grace

27 For it is written:

“Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children

Than she who has a husband.”[fn]Paul is quoting Isaiah 54:1. And it speaks of the two covenants as these two women. The covenant that starts out barren will produce many more children than the covenant that claims to be fertile.

Which means in the end Sarah or Jerusalem above (the NC) produces many more offspring for God than Hagar or the Jerusalem below (which is the Law of Moses).

Here’s the point-Grace is more fruitful than Law. And to demonstrate Paul drew three applications from his illustration in the next 3 verses :

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.

Christians are similar to Isaac in that we experience a supernatural birth and are part of the fulfillment of God's promise. Therefore we should not live as enslaved children.

29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Like Ishmael persecuted Isaac. Legalists oppose those living in liberty.

30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”[fn] As Abraham cast Ishmael out of his household, so the Galatians were to cast the Judaizers out of the church.

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free." Legalism is one of the major problems among Christians today. We must keep in mind that legalism does not mean the setting of spiritual standards, it means worshiping these standards and thinking that we are spiritual because we obey them. It also means judging other believers on the basis of these standards.