

Galatians 4:1-18 – Identity: You are Now an Heir with Abraham!
Community Group Galatians Lesson 8

I. Review Galatians 1-3

- A. 1:1-10 – God sent me to correct you from distorting the gospel by adding to it.
- B. 1:11-24 – My gospel came from Christ Himself and was authenticated by the apostles.
- C. 2:1-10 – Fourteen years later, my gospel was verified again by Jerusalem apostles.
- D. 2:11-21 – Even Peter and Barnabas for a short time fell from the gospel by adding a type of works-righteousness and had to be reminded that we are saved by faith alone.
- E. 3:1-14 – The gospel justifies everyone by faith in the promise, just like Abraham was.
- F. 3:15-29 – The law tutored us to faith in Christ and by it, we share Abraham’s inheritance.

II. No longer a slave, you are now a son and an heir

Galatians 4:1-7

The Christian is now an adopted heir alongside Jesus Christ and no longer needs to be under the restriction and limit of elemental things like the law (Jews) or of idols (Gentiles).

- A. The ‘infant’ is an heir who is like a slave because he is managed by guardians. 4:1-2
- B. Likewise, when we were managed by ‘elemental things’, we were not free. 4:3
- C. But when God decided the time was right, Jesus came, and freed us from Law. 4:4-5a
- D. Now adopted sons with the Spirit, and if we are a son, then we are an heir. 4:5b-7

In 4:1-3, Paul draws a parallel between a cultural infant (“young child who can’t speak intelligibly”) and those who are spiritually under the bondage of either the law (*Jews*) or the idols of non-Jewish religions (*pagans*, see v. 8). *Cultural* infants are under the confines of a slave-guardian and are treated like propertyless slaves by those who themselves are slaves. Similarly, Jews and pagans are brought up under the stricture and demanding expectations of a system of requirements administered by those who themselves are under such requirements.

In 4:4-7, Paul reminds them that God waited for the right time (e.g., *Viae Romanae, Pax Romana, lingua franca of Greek, synagogues throughout*) to send Jesus. In Roman society, “adoption” was a step of official recognition of a natural son – transition from under guardian to adulthood. It happened when the father determined that it was time for that young man to be promoted. Jesus came and freed Jew and Gentile from the demanding taskmasters (law and idols) they had been under. Verses 6-7 repeat the idea we see in Romans 8:17: Sons and if sons, heirs. Not only freed by redemption, but adopted as sons with “full rights thereto appertaining.” We are heirs of the promise, along with Abraham (3:29) (See Heb. 11:8-16).

By the way, when he says that Christ “might redeem those who were under the law (v. 5),” Dr. Donald Campbell points out that is not referring to redeeming them from its curse (penalty) of breaking the law as in Galatians 2:16 and 3:8-9. He is referring to redeeming them from “bondage” to the law. That means He is freeing them from constantly having to think of how far short they fall; thinking of your guilt constantly is to be bound to the law.

III. Don’t go back to slavery

Galatians 4:8-11

Since you escaped the dominance of idols in favor of knowing Christ, why would you ever want to return to the control of such a thing – or in this case, the law?

- A. Before you came to know God, you were slaves to idols. 4:8
- B. After knowing Christ personally, why would you wish to be enslaved again? 4:9
- C. You’re enslaved by days, months, seasons, and years – have I wasted my time? 4:10-11

Most of the Galatian believers had been idolaters before. He reminds them that they were in bondage to doing certain things to appease the idols, but then they heard and believed on Christ and the message of freedom. Why take on a new master – i.e., the law’s demands?

Days likely refers to Sabbaths, *months* likely refer to “new moon feasts” which were common in the Middle East, *seasons* likely refer to Jewish feasts that were proscribed at certain seasons of the year, and *years* probably referred to Sabbath years (every 7 years and each 50 - Jubilee).

Have I wasted my time just means, “has the time I have spent with you failed to produce lasting fruit in your lives?” The Greek word means, “labored to the point of exhaustion.” After all my efforts to fan into flame what the Holy Spirit gave you, was it not worth holding onto?

This has become a personal struggle for me at times, as it has for many parents. You teach and train and discipline and love – all the things Paul did – and then you often see your children eschew all that instruction (or your spiritual children or those in whom you invest). We wonder, “what more should I have done?” Paul has given all he knows to give according to the truth given to him. So instead of evaluating his efforts, he asks the question out loud that many of us think privately about our efforts: *Has it come to nothing? Was it a waste of time?*

Most of us can’t identify with idolatry like the Pagans. Some of us can identify with legalism that might have been like the Jewish system. Some of us can identify with religious traditions that are familiar. But all of us should be able to identify with life before Christ when we were sinners and lived for ourselves and were bound to something, experiencing shame and the consequences of our sin. For us, it might be as if Paul is saying, “*Was the life you had before you believed the gospel really better such that you want to be in bondage again?*” The “weak and worthless elemental things” (v. 9) simply refers to whatever they were controlled by – laws and regulations or the expectations of their idols. In our case, what controlled us before Christ?

I was raised in a traditional Catholic home which had many good elements. But the teachings I was under caused me and many like me to fear God, to know He was merciful, to see our sinfulness, but to believe that any real connection with God needed to be interpreted and mediated by more knowledgeable men. Most important, it never offered to set me free from sin’s penalty and power. Once I understood the gospel of grace, why would I want to go back to a system of controls by men who themselves are under controls and which does not free?

IV. Live free!

Galatians 4:12-18

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| A. Become as I am! | Gal. 4:12 |
| B. When I first preached to you, you would have changed places with me. | Gal. 4:13-15 |
| C. Have those who deceived you convinced you I am the enemy? | Gal. 4:16-18 |

Paul urges them to join his example in celebrating the freedom that is in Christ that does not live according to “do not _____” and “be sure to _____” (see Colossians 2:20-23).

He reminds them (v. 12) he became like them (like Gentiles with regard to not requiring the law). He also reminds them how quickly they joined in with his teaching. So much so, when he suffered a physical malady (likely his eyes, see 4:13-15, 6:11, 2 Cor. 12:7-10) that could have induced them to turn away from him in revulsion, they instead accepted him as from God (v. 14). To so great a degree they would have “given their eyes” for him (v. 15).

As the Galatians have turned towards the Judaizers, they have turned away from Paul. He wants to know if his giving them the truth deserves being made to be their enemy (v. 16). He points out that the Judaizers are zealous for the Galatians – but not for good reason (v. 17). They want to block the Galatians from Paul and from the truth, so that they might imprison them in bondage.

V. Discussion

- A. Why in the world does Galatians spend the first three chapters defending the gospel as being of faith alone in Christ alone (2:15-16)? Why so much of the book?
- B. When have you heard people say that “if some particular behavior or attitude is lacking” or “if a certain behavior or attitude is present,” you are looking at a non-Christian?
- C. How do Christians share in the inheritance of Abraham?
- D. If we understand the Roman idea of adoption being a formal recognition of a natural child as an adult, explain how that relate to people no longer needing the confines of the law?

VI. Homework

- A. Please read chapter 4 every day this week.
- B. Please write a one-two paragraph summary of the book of Galatians so far that you could share with family and with your group next week.