

Sons and Daughters of God

Galatians 4.1-16

Introduction

Under the Old Law, Jews were like minor children under the control of a tutor until the Seed would come. Through a response of faith in Jesus, all people can reach spiritual maturity in a relationship with God. In Chapter 4, Paul stresses a sinner's inferiority under the Law. He will use three arguments to appeal to the Galatian Christians. One is an appeal to practicality (4:1-7). Through faith, they were now sons and daughters of God, with full rights to the inheritance promised by God. The second argument, 4:8-16, appeals to his audience on an emotional level. The Galatians once had welcomed him and demonstrated warm hospitality. Now they had cut off their relationship with him. Paul urges them to renew their relationship with him once again.

Galatians 4:1-7 (CSB)

1 Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything.

2 Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.

3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements of the world.

4 When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

5 to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

6 And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"

7 So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir.

Galatians 4.1-7 – Sons and Heirs

Before the death of Jesus, the Jews as minor children who possess and control nothing. It would be like a person under guardianship, or a slave. When Christ came and they accepted the gospel message, they were set free. No longer were the Jewish Christians obligated to the rigors of the law. Why would the Jews want to return to bondage? Why would the Gentiles seek to leave behind a system they had embraced for an inferior plan that removed them from the influence that shared the gospel with them?

In verse three, Paul uses a term that he expressed in the letter to the Colossians in 2:8, 20: *elemental things of the world*, NASU. Before Christ, both Jews and Gentiles were enslaved to various rules and regulations that did not bring salvation in and of themselves. The Law was a good thing. However, the Jews had turned it into *the* means of salvation, tacking on various traditions and rigid requirements. In essence, the law had become a tyrant that they were bound to. With the Gentiles, pagan worship requirements were not the way of God. In their own way, Jews and Gentiles sought to use these elements to achieve salvation. Their efforts were useless. They needed to

leave these things behind, or resist the desire to go back to them, and trust in Jesus for salvation.

When reading 4:4, we often think of the virgin birth of Jesus. The virgin birth is not necessarily in view here. Some commentators feel that this wording is used to stress the humanity of Jesus, and His preexistence before the foundation of the world. When the appropriate time came, God sent Jesus to die for our sin. Why was Jesus sent in first century? It was a time when the Greek language was the world language. There was a sense of “peace” with the Romans across the known world. Transportation and communication were effective in ways like they had never been before. Because of the Romans and the empires before it, the Jews were spread through the known world. Their acceptance of Christ would be instrumental in the formation of the early church. This verse is especially powerful in reminding Paul’s readers that Jesus was born a Jew and under obligation to keep the Old Law. Hebrews 4:15 is just one verse that testifies He kept this law perfectly to be the perfect sacrifice for mankind. The Jews needed to understand only Jesus could keep the law in every point.

Why did Jesus come? *To redeem those under the Law.* Because of Jesus, they were adopted as sons and daughters of God through grace. This was something the Law could never do. They were no longer under “minority” status, but full heirs of a spiritual inheritance. Not only were Jews made sons of God, but the Gentiles were as well. In fact, all who trust in Jesus become part of God’s family. 2 Corinthians 8:9 is a good verse that contrasts our former state with the new: *for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich,* NASU.

In 4:6 Paul mentions that sons and daughters of God have received the Spirit. There has been much controversy concerning the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. How does he dwell in us? Is there a personal “force” within each Christian? Probably the best answer is that we receive the spirit through the revealed word of God. When we take in God’s word and implant it in our mind, we have received and are governed by the Spirit. In our text, Paul teaches that through the revelation of the inspired word, we can recognize our new place with God and have the privilege of knowing Him as our Father.

Before concluding his argument, Paul presents a strong contrast between a person’s spiritual condition before knowing Christ with how he is afterward. Christians are no longer under bondage and able to experience every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 1:3. We are sons and daughters of God and now with every expectation, look forward to our inheritance in heaven. All of this was accomplished through Jesus and not through works of human origin.

Galatians 4.8-16 – Stay in the Doctrine of Justification by Faith

Galatians 4:8-16 (CSB)

8 But in the past, since you didn't know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods.

9 But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elements? Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again?

10 You are observing special days, months, seasons, and years.

11 I am fearful for you, that perhaps my labor for you has been wasted.

12 I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have not wronged me;

13 you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh.

14 You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself.

15 Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

16 So then, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth?

Before Christ, the Galatian Christians did not know God. They were engaged in pagan worship and were vainly seeking salvation through items of the creation that had no spiritual or divine power. After becoming acquainted with Paul and accepting the gospel, they entered a relationship with God. Through Christ and the revelation of His gospel, they got to know the Creator of the universe! Why, after entering fellowship with God, would they desire to go back to the condition they were in before?

They were literally *in the process* of embracing the Jewish system. This is seen 4:10-12a. They were already observing Jewish feast days and required traditions of the Mosaic system. If they continued to trust in this way for salvation, they would be lost. Paul exhorts them not to go this direction and to instead be like him. He had rejected the Law and its requirements, and they needed to do so as well.

Galatians 4:12b starts off a new thought in an abrupt manner. Paul recounts the time he first came to them preaching the word of God. They accepted him with gladness and warmth, despite his being hindered by a physical infirmity that appears to have been embarrassing and debilitating. Paul alludes to the intense nature of his ailment while in Galatia, when he recounts many of his experiences as an apostle in 2 Timothy 3:10. That it was severe is all we know. Through the years there have been all sorts of guesses as to what Paul suffered from, from malaria to epilepsy or seizures brought on by being stoned, or problems with his eyesight. Was this the thorn in the flesh that Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 12:7? We can only guess, although it seems very plausible. Even though Paul's condition was bad, the Galatians had fully accepted him and his doctrine. In fact, he says they accepted him as an *angel of God*, with great joy and thanksgiving.

Now, sadly, things had changed. The Galatian, if they could have, would have *plucked out their eyes* for Paul. In other words, they would have gone the extra mile to sacrifice for him. From 4:15, some have taken these words to ascertain Paul had a problem with his eyesight. And he could have. 6:11 could be a clue. Paul says, *see with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand*. While these words offer clues, we know only what is written. It is safe to say that Paul

battled some great physical difficulty, but that is not his point in 4:15. The Galatians were once willing to do whatever was necessary to extend fellowship to and accommodate him. This was no longer the case.

Because of the influence of Judaizing teachers, Paul had become alienated from them. Did some of them not respond kindly? Because he was a Christian, apostle, and brother in Christ, Paul had the responsibility to tell them the truth – no matter the consequences. Some of his hearers may have not been receptive. This no doubt would have pleased the Judaizing teachers who were doing their best to keep Paul away from the Galatians. If the Judaizing teachers could isolate the Galatians from Paul, then the Galatians would be more dependent on them. Of course, it is hard to see these things when you are in the middle, and the Galatians needed to change their attitude toward Paul.

For Thought and Reflection

1. To what were the Jews likened to before coming to know Christ?
2. What are the *elemental things of the world*?
3. How was the setting of the first century the perfect time to spread the gospel?
4. How do we receive the Holy Spirit?
5. To what extent had the Galatians departed from the truth? See 4:10-12a.
6. What was the illness Paul suffered from?
7. How far had the Galatians been willing to accommodate Paul? 4:15
8. Describe the personal nature of Paul's relationship with the Galatians. How had it been changed by the Judaizing teachers?