

# Galatians 4

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## Abraham's Heirs (3:23-3:29)

23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

- From 3:23-4:7, Paul used first-century adoption to illustrate our placement as heirs into Abraham's inheritance. Paul already told us the blessing promised to Abraham in Genesis 12 is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This blessing includes the Messiah, justification by faith apart from the works of the Law, and receiving the indwelling Spirit. Now, from 3:23-4:7, Paul expounded upon this idea using Greco-Roman adoption to depict what it means to be Abraham's heirs.
- To fully understand Galatians 3:23-29 and 4:1-7, you need to be grounded in Greco-Roman adoption in the first-century. I'll summarize it here. But if you want more information about this, please see my book *The Eternal Blueprint*.
- Greco-Roman adoption had three phases.
  1. *Placement into the family*

If the father didn't have an heir, he would bring an adult son into the family from outside the family.
  2. *Preparation for the inheritance*

The designated heir, whether natural-born or from outside the family, would be placed under a child trainer, who would groom him for heirship through intense training.
  3. *Placement into the inheritance*

When the designated heir was fully trained and prepared, the father would place him as the legal heir of the inheritance, giving him the full rights of sonship.
- The phrases "kept in custody under the law," "the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ," and "we are no longer under a tutor" describe the Law as a child trainer in the adoption process. Before Christ came, the Law was a child trainer to lead God's people to the Messiah and justification by faith.
- How was the Law a child trainer? The Law pointed out our sin, our depravity, and the impossibility of justification by the works of the Law. Because of our sin nature in our unredeemed bodies and the self-centered nature in our souls, humanity could never be declared righteous in God's sight by keeping all 613 commandments. Even if we obeyed every commandment externally, it would be impossible to keep them internally because of the condition of our hearts.
- The Law prepared God's people for justification by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. But now that faith has come, Paul argued, we are no longer under a tutor. We are no longer under the Law.

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

- With Abraham's inheritance in mind, Paul said we are like sons who receive the full inheritance of their father. The Law has groomed us for justification by faith. The Law has prepared us to receive the blessing of Abraham, which is the indwelling Spirit.

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- We are now like fully prepared sons for Abraham's inheritance.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

- Here Paul was referring to our baptism into Christ's body. Not about water baptism. Though water baptism is a symbol of our baptism into Christ's body.
- Paul had in mind what we see in 1 Corinthians 12:13, when he said, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."
- Our clothing with Christ is both positional and experiential. Verse 27 describes our legal position. When the Holy Spirit came to dwell within us, He baptized us into Christ's body and clothed us in Christ. Romans 13:14 describes our living condition of putting on Christ daily. Both our legal position and our living condition are vital. We want Christ's life to envelop our entire inner man—spirit, heart, and soul.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- When we were born again, we were baptized by the Spirit into Christ's body. This baptism eliminated the distinction between Jew and Greek. Slave and free man. Male and female. All barriers based upon gender, race, social class, and nationality were torn down by the finished work of Christ on the cross.
- As I write these notes, George Floyd's murder has fueled protests around American and the world. It has brought the issue of racism to centerstage. Rightly so.
- I could say so many things about racism, but for now, I will stick with the immediate text. Before expounding upon this, please know that I am absolutely for any legislation and social reform that will help end racism and injustice. I wholeheartedly agree with Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can stop him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important." I am all for any reasonable law that helps end discrimination against blacks.
- But here's one thing Galatians teaches us. External laws can never transform the human heart. External legislation, political solutions, or reforms in our justice system cannot change the inner condition of our souls. Only God's Spirit can transform our desires, thoughts, emotions, and beliefs.
- As Paul said, "If a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law" (Ga. 3:21). "If righteousness," could come "through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21).
- Ultimately, racism goes much deeper than the color of one's skin. Racism is mostly about the nature of one's heart.
- Racism manifests from the cancerous pride lurking in every human heart. It is a belief that my race or tribe is better than another group of people because of certain traits or characteristics, such as the color of my skin. So, while I am all for social and legal reform, this alone will never eradicate racism.
- In the first century, Jews and Gentiles despised one another. In all of human history, nothing compared to the animosity, hatred, and violence between Jew and Gentile prior to Christ.

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- A first-century Jew looked at “uncircumcised” Gentiles—whether Roman, Greek, Syrian, Asian, or African—as less-than-human dogs (Matt. 15:6-27). In the first-century Jewish mind, God handpicked the Jews to be His chosen people and the pagan Gentiles were demon-worshipping sons of the devil.
- On the flipside, Gentiles viewed the holier-than-thou Jews with spite and envy. Their mouth watered at the thought of conquering the Jews and capturing their holy land. They waited for the Jews to disobey the Law so the Lord’s firewall of protection would come down. This would allow them to successfully attack, oppress, and conquer them. This happened with Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome.
- The racism between Jew and Gentile was so deeply ingrained the Lord had to speak three times to Peter in an open trance, telling Peter He was welcoming the Gentiles into His family. Even after this dramatic experience, the Lord had to tell Peter, “Go downstairs and accompany them [the Gentiles] without misgivings” (Acts 10:20, emphasis mine).
- When the Lord poured out His Spirit on the Gentiles, it shocked Peter and the rest of the Jewish church. Because of Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross, God removed the barrier between Jew and Gentile. The Law, which had separated Jews from Gentiles until Messiah came, was crucified with Christ on the cross (Eph. 2:14-15). The result: The Holy Spirit made “the two into one new man, thus establishing peace” (Eph. 2:15).
- Jesus said they “will know that you are My disciples” by your “love for one another” (John 13:35). Citizens in the Roman Empire were astonished as they watched hated enemies now eating together, working together, and taking care of one another. All dividing distinctions were erased. A classless, raceless, genderless group become one spiritual family in Jesus Christ.
- Paul said, “Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God” (1 Cor. 10:32). Based upon this statement, early Christians referred to themselves as the “third race.” The church of Jesus is an entirely different race.
- When I use the word *church*, I am not referring to a building, an event, a service, a message, music, or ministry. I’m referring to the people who have Christ’s indwelling life and are now part of His body. This church is a new creation—a new race of men and women without racial, social, and gender divide.
- This body of Jesus Christ, His very body in the earth, is meant to organically express Christ in this world. We have a heavenly calling to demonstrate to a world inflamed with racial discrimination what it looks like when black and white, male and female, and American and Asian become one spiritual family in Christ.
- The church is a new race of men and women—comprised of every skin color, nationality, tribe, and tongue. The church is called to embody the every-tribe-and-tongue reality of heaven right now in the earth (Rev. 7:9). The church should have “no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman” (Col. 3:11).
- This obviously doesn’t mean a Jew is no longer Jewish or a Gentile is no longer a Gentile. Nor does it mean a man is no longer a man or a woman a woman. The same could be said about blacks and whites and every other national and social distinction. Rather, it means a Jew doesn’t have greater favor with God just because he is Jewish. Nor is a Gentile less favored by God because he is not a natural descendant of Abraham. The same is true with men and women, black and white, etc.
- In God’s eyes, Jew, Gentile, slave, free man, male, and female are all the same. He doesn’t show partiality with any. We are all members of Christ’s body and are therefore one in Him. Jesus Christ, the most unifying person in history, is the only lasting solution to racism—or any *ism* for that matter, including racism, genderism, nationalism, etc.

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29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

- The Law, as our tutor, leads us to justification by faith in Jesus Christ. We are like mature sons who have been placed into Abraham's inheritance. As a result, we have received the blessing of Abraham, which is the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- Thus, all who are members of Christ's body, whether Jew or Gentile, are Abraham's descendants. We are "heirs according to promise."

## Abraham's Heirs Restated (4:1-7)

1 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,

2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.

3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

- Paul was clearly using first-century adoption as a metaphor to describe our placement into Abraham's inheritance.
- Before Christ came, the Law was the child trainer. God's people were not yet fully mature sons placed into their father Abraham's inheritance. Even though the child is the heir and owns everything, there's no difference between them and the slave.
- Guardians and managers were grooming the child for son placement, preparing his character to handle the family inheritance without squandering it.
- Paul used the phrase "the elemental things of the world" to describe obedience to the Law. The Law was merely a shadow. Observing "the weak and worthless elemental things" were following "days and months and seasons and years"—the shadows in the Law that pointed to Christ (Gal. 4:9-10).
- The Law held us under bondage as children until Christ came.

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

5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

- "The adoption as sons" is placement into Abraham's inheritance.
- Because you have been adopted as sons, are Abraham's heir, and have been placed into his inheritance, "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son" into your heart. Now you are a child of God, born of the Spirit. Now God is your father. You are no longer a slave to the Law. You are a child of God and an heir of Abraham.
- Galatians 3:23 – 4:7 is summarized below:
  - Abraham is our father and he has an inheritance.

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- His inheritance is justification by faith and the indwelling Holy Spirit.
  - The Law served as a child trainer to lead us to Jesus Christ.
  - Before son placement, we were like children who don't differ from a slave, even though the inheritance is reserved for us.
  - Now that Christ has come, He has delivered us from the Law. The Law, as a child trainer, is no longer necessary because of Christ.
  - We have been adopted as sons and placed into Abraham's inheritance. This means we are Abraham's heirs and have received justification by faith and the indwelling Spirit.
- One note of clarification. There are two inheritances for the believer: 1) The inheritance of Abraham and 2) The inheritance of Jesus Christ. We have been placed as a son into Abraham's inheritance and have received justification by faith and the indwelling Spirit. But we have not yet been placed as a son into Christ's inheritance. This will not happen until the resurrection of the dead when Jesus returns (Rev. 20:6). Romans 8 and Revelation 2-3 describe Christ's inheritance and the grooming process that prepares us to be placed into His inheritance.

## Enslaved by the Law (4:8-11)

8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

- Before the Galatians came to faith in Christ on Paul's first missionary journey, they were enslaved to idols. In the first-century, there was an elaborate Greco-Roman system of religion that enslaved most pagans. This is what Paul meant when he said, "Which by nature are no gods."
- Behind these idols were demons, who shackled the Galatians with lies, deception, and every perverse sin associated with this system of idolatry.

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?

10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

- The Galatians had graduated from the school of sonship unto adoption. They were no longer under the Law as a child trainer. They had already received Abraham's inheritance of justification by faith and the indwelling Spirit. Now, for some reason, they wanted to go back under the child trainer.
- Paul was bewildered by this. Why? Why do you want to be "enslaved all over again?" Why do you want to go back under the child trainer when you have already received the inheritance? Why do you want to be shackled by "the weak and worthless elemental things"—things like observing days, months, seasons, and years contained in the Law. This was a clear reference to observing the Sabbath and the feasts of Israel in the Law as a means of justification and sanctification.
- Paul called these observances "weak and worthless elemental things." These were but mere shadows that pointed to Christ. But Christ Himself is the substance of the Law.

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## Paul Recounted His First Trip (4:12-15)

12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong;

13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time;

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.

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.

- Paul begged his spiritual children not to become enslaved to the Law. He appealed to them, "Become as I am."
- Paul recounted his first visit with them. During this time, Paul preached the gospel to them while he had some type of bodily illness. It was likely an eye condition. Paul said the Galatians received him as angel, even as Christ Himself.
- Though Paul had some type of eye issue, the Galatians loved him so much they would have plucked an eye out and given it to Paul if that would have helped.

## Paul Viewed the Galatians As His Spiritual Children (4:16-20)

16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them.

18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.

- The Judaizers told lies and preached lies. Paul told the truth and preached the truth. The Judaizers proclaimed a false gospel that was accursed. Paul proclaimed the true gospel that was the blessing of Abraham.
- The Galatians began to view Paul as their enemy because he spoke the truth to them.
- The Judaizers' ultimate motive was for the Galatians to "seek them." Lurking underneath the Judaizers' proclamation of a false gospel was a desire to be the Galatians' spiritual overlords. They wanted to shut them out from the true gospel and make the Galatians dependent upon them.

19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—

- Paul did not want to be the Galatians lord. He wanted to be their spiritual father. He viewed them as his children in the faith.
- Paul labored over them, both in intercessory prayer and proclaiming the true gospel, until Christ was formed fully within them.
- This statement revealed the goal of all ministry and labor—that Christ would be formed in the hearts and souls of His people.

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- God's eternal purpose is to conform His people in the image and likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29).

20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

- Paul finally admitted what was already so obvious. Throughout the whole letter, Paul had a tone of frustration and bewilderment. He was baffled the Galatians were so quickly abandoning his gospel of grace to be enslaved by the Law.
- Paul said, "I am perplexed about you."

## Do You Want Bondage or Freedom? (4:21-31)

21 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?

22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.

23 But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.

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.

25 Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

26 But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.

- The Galatians faced a dilemma pictured in the Law. They wanted to be under the Law, but the Law itself foreshadowed two covenants. Paul was clearly speaking allegorically.
- In summary . . .
  - Hagar is the mother of those under the Law. She symbolizes Mount Sinai in Arabia. She corresponds to present Jerusalem in bondage to the Law. She represents the Old Covenant of Moses.
  - Ismael is the child born according to the flesh. He pictures all the Jewish people in Jerusalem in bondage to the Law.
  - Sarah depicts the heavenly Jerusalem. She is the mother of all who are born of the Spirit in Christ. She represents the New Covenant cut by Christ.
  - Isaac is the child born according to the promise by the Spirit. He typifies the spiritual descendants of Abraham.
- The Jerusalem above is the new Jerusalem. We see snapshots of this heavenly city, comprised of the spiritual descendants of Abraham, both Jew and Gentile, in Hebrews 12:22-24, Revelation 12:1-5, and Revelation 21-22.

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."

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- Paul quoted Isaiah 54:1.
- There's a tremendous amount of revelation in Isaiah 54 related to the new Jerusalem, earthly Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom, and Abraham's spiritual and natural descendants. But it would take way too much time to fully develop here.

28 And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.

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.

- All who are in Christ and born of the Spirit are like Isaac. They are children of promise. They are children of the Spirit. They are Abraham's descendants and his heirs according to the promise. These are Abraham's spiritual descendants, the stars of heaven he saw when God cut covenant with him.
- The Judaizers and those still under the Law are like Ismael. They are children of the flesh. They won't have the full inheritance of their father Abraham.
- Just as Ismael persecuted Isaac, the Judaizers and those under the Law persecuted those born of the Spirit. The same is true today. Legalism and religion still persecute the work of the Spirit.

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."

31 So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

- The only solution between religious legalism and the freedom of the Spirit is to cast out the bondwoman and her son. The two can never coexist.
- Just as Abraham instructed Hagar and Ismael to leave him, Sarah, and Isaac, those shackled by legalism, dead religion, and the Law can never fellowship with those following the Spirit. There's way too much friction, hostility, and animosity. The only remedy is to separate from them. The flesh and the Spirit can never coexist together.
- In essence, Paul told the Galatians, "If you want to continue in Christ, you must break all ties with these Judaizers who want to be lords over you and control you. You can't have anything to do with them. You must be like Abraham was with Hagar and Ismael. Cast out the bond woman and her son. The two are incompatible. You must choose one or the other. You can't have both."