

# Ministry of Grace Church

## Galatians Chapter 4

### Introduction

Last week in our study of Galatians chapter 3, we learned a number of new things. For instance, we learned that Christians are the only people in God's plan for the ages who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And - we're the only people referred to in the Bible as the "children of God."

We also learned a bit more about the covenant that God made with Abraham. There were three parts of the covenant: a promise of a land, a promise of descendants, and a promise that one of Abraham's descendants would be the Messiah. We talked about the night that God told Abraham to look up at the night sky and recount the story contained in the stars. The end of the story was that the Messiah would come and rescue mankind. After Abraham recounted the story, God said "So shall your seed be," meaning that the Messiah would be one of Abraham's descendants.

At the end of chapter three, Paul said that before faith came, we were held captive by the Law. But, now that faith has come, we are no longer under that guardian. In Christ Jesus we are sons of God. That means that we are full-grown heirs, not children any longer. Notice that Paul said we are "sons of God" not "children of God." That is significant and we will discuss it further.

### Sons and Heirs

#### **Galatians 4:1-7**

**<sup>1</sup>I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, <sup>2</sup>but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. <sup>3</sup>In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. <sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.**

#### Notes:

As we just said, part of Paul's lesson to the Galatians was that Christians are sons of God and, because of that, we are heirs. He uses the analogy of a child growing to maturity. While the child is underage, he is on the same level as a slave. Actually, he is on a slightly lower level than a slave, even though one day he will inherit everything.

Before we elaborate on this analogy, however, let's look at the rules for "coming of age." In both the Hebrew and Greek societies, a child became an adult at a specific age. For Jews, this is the age of 13. On the thirteenth birthday, a Jewish boy has a Bar-Mitzvah, which is a celebration that he has become a man. In Roman society, however, there was no specific age at which a child becomes an adult. This age is determined by his father.

Based on Paul's writing here, he is apparently referring to the Roman tradition. Paul says:

but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. (Galatians 4:2)

Until the date set by the father, a son was under the authority of one of the family slaves. He would be the master of the slave one day, but for the time being he was "beneath" the slave.

Paul then makes the point that before the age of Grace, we were all like underage children. We were enslaved to the "elementary principles of the world." But what does that mean? When we were children, we were taught the ABC's so that we could read and write. We were also taught some of the basic laws of life so that we could live as adults. These "elementary principles" were things such as "cause and effect," "life is not fair," "what goes around, comes around," "you only get out of it as much as you put into it." So, basically, we learned that we get what we deserve; when we are good, we deserve a reward and when we are bad, we deserve punishment.

Paul goes on -

"But when the fullness of time had come ..." In other words, when the time determined by the Father for the passing from childhood (under the law) to adulthood (under grace), Jesus came into the world.

Notice what Paul says about this transaction:

- He is the Son of God.
- He is also human (born of a woman)
- He was under the Law (and He perfectly fulfilled it)
- He was sent to redeem us

The word redeem is a special word. It is *exagoradzō*. The word *agoradzō* means "to purchase something in the marketplace (called the *agora*). With the *ex* added, it means "to purchase something in the marketplace and take it out of the marketplace, so that it can never be sold again." This is a word that is typically used of slaves.

And – the Father did more than just purchase us and take us out of the slave market, He then adopted us as His sons. In the first century, Jews did not have any adoption laws and the Greek adoption laws were based roughly on the Roman laws of adoption. In Rome, one could not adopt a person unless that person was a Roman citizen. Slaves could not inherit from their owner and a slave could not be adopted unless he was first made a free Roman citizen. Typically, only boys were adopted. Sometimes girls were adopted, but that was primarily so that they could later be used to form alliances with other important families through marriage. However, when a girl was adopted, she had no rights of inheritance. But when a boy was adopted, he had all the rights and privileges of a natural-born son. In addition, *he could never be disowned*. In Roman society, boys were often adopted by a father who had no natural-born sons so that his family name, property, and titles could be passed-on through his heir, his son.

Notice that Paul did not just say that we were adopted, he says that we were adopted "as sons!" Ladies, you may think it a bit weird that you are adopted as a son of God. But it is no more weird than Christian men considering themselves part of the "bride" of Christ. Both of these are metaphors to help us understand God's intent.

Now, because we are sons, we have the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit of God) residing in our hearts. And - because of the presence of God's Spirit, we not only have the desire, but also the authority to call God Abba, Father. Abba is an Aramaic word that entered into the Jewish vocabulary while the Jews

were captive in Babylon. In Jewish life, it is the most endearing term that a child can use for his or her father. In the New Testament it is always used in reference to God and is always followed by the translation. And, notice that according to Paul, we don't just calmly acknowledge God as our Abba, Father. It is an expression that we cry out.

What Paul is saying is that when mankind was under the Law, we were less than slaves. But when we believed the Gospel message, we were adopted as sons of God and we are now able to grow to spiritual maturity. However, these Galatian Christians had gone back to a legalistic religion that was "stunting" their growth.

According to Warren Wiersbe:

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.

## **Paul's Concern for the Galatians**

### **Galatians 4:8-20**

**<sup>8</sup>Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup>But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? <sup>10</sup>You observe days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup>I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. <sup>12</sup>Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. <sup>13</sup>You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, <sup>14</sup>and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. <sup>16</sup>Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? <sup>17</sup>They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. <sup>18</sup>It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, <sup>19</sup>my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! <sup>20</sup>I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.**

### **Notes:**

Paul now tells the Galatian Christians that before they got saved, they were slaves to substitute gods, not the real God. And now that they have come to know the real God, it amazes Paul that they would even want to turn back to the false gods, that is the "elementary principles of life" that no longer have any meaning.

In Acts chapter 13 we learned that after Paul and Barnabas left the island of Cyprus, they came to Pamphylia, where John Mark left them, but they didn't stay there very long. Pamphylia is a coastal town on the Mediterranean that is very marshy and was known for the high incidence of Malaria among the people who lived there and those who travelled there as well. I explained previously that the reason Paul and Barnabas didn't stay in Pamphylia very long was because they needed to get out of there, most likely because of Paul's infirmity.

He makes mention of that infirmity here in Galatians chapter 4,

You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first ([Galatians 4:13](#))

Then, he makes a statement about his eyes. He says,

For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. ([Galatians 4:15b](#))

This appears to be one more piece of evidence that Paul had malaria. One of the side effects of Malaria is an eye disease called retinopathy, a condition that makes it harder to see clearly. Is this what Paul had? We don't know for sure, but the evidence given may point to this possibility.

This malady may also be why Paul said this to the Christians in Corinth:

... for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ([2 Corinthians 12:7-9](#))

One of the commonalities of those who teach the necessity of obedience to the Law (or church rules, for that matter) is that it takes away our liberties. It requires us to submit to the teachers instead of submitting to Christ. And, it does so, not for our benefit, but for the benefit of the false teachers. That's what Paul means when he says:

They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. ([Galatians 4:17](#))

## **Example of Hagar and Sarah**

### **Galatians 4:21-31**

<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup>But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. <sup>24</sup>Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup>Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup>For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband." <sup>28</sup>Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup>But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. <sup>30</sup>But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman." <sup>31</sup>So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

### **Notes:**

Paul now launches into one of his frequent uses of metaphor. He talks about the two sons of Abraham (Ishmael and Isaac). One of them, Ishmael, being a slave (born of the flesh) and the other, Isaac, being a free man (born of the promise). He then compares them to two covenants. The first, he refers to as Mt. Sinai, where the Law was given, and the Law of Moses brought us under slavery. This, he says, is

comparable to Hagar, the slave woman who bore Ishmael to Abraham. He also compares her, as a slave, to the earthly Jerusalem.

But Isaac was not a son of the slave, he was the son of Sarah, the free-woman. Isaac was the promised son who was born after Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children. He is compared to the covenant of grace that Paul has already taught us about. Remember, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Isaac was not born because Abraham did all the right things (in fact, he did the wrong things by getting Hagar pregnant). Isaac was miraculously born by the grace of God because Abraham was righteous (not by his deeds, but by his faith). And, whereas Ismael was compared to earthly Jerusalem, Paul compares Isaac to the “Jerusalem above,” This is a reference to the Heavenly Jerusalem spoken of in the book of Revelation, as part of the new heaven and new earth:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1-2)

Paul then summarizes this metaphor, by saying that like Isaac, Christians are sons of promise and we will inherit all that God has promised to us. Those who follow the Law are children of Hagar and will not inherit God’s promises, just as Ismael did not inherit anything from Abraham.

## **So What?**

It’s amazing to me how many Christians rely on “works” to please God. They battle to find time each day to pray, they struggle to find a consistent time of the day when they can read their Bible. They put immense effort in trying to live up to the teachings of Jesus as outlined in the four Gospels. They study the letters of the apostles so they can know what good Christians are supposed to be like. Does this describe you? Are you trying to please God by all the things you’re doing, all the things you think you’re supposed to be doing?

Back in Illinois, we had a good friend who was dying of cancer. Years earlier she had confessed Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. And yet, more than once during the final months she said, “I hope I’ve done enough to get into heaven.” You see, she believed that you could lose your salvation if you weren’t a good enough Christian. But, according to Paul, once we are an adopted son of God, we can’t be disowned. (Can you say “eternal security?”)

As I have said before, I grew up with a number of friends who were Catholic. They all wore their St. Christopher medals. A few of them faithfully prayed the Rosary every day (whatever that means). All of them went to catechism classes to learn how God (or the church) wanted them to live. Some of them even went to mass - every Sunday. But – I never got the sense that any of them were glad they did these things. They did them because they were supposed to, to please God (or perhaps to avoid chastening from the nuns at their school).

Even genuine “Born Again” Christians tend to live out their faith by doing the things a Christian is supposed to do. These are people who have accepted the death of the Son of God on the cross as full payment for their sins and who have been declared “righteous” by God the Father because of their faith. They’re doing the things all Christians are supposed to do to please God. Now, if we’re honest with ourselves, every one of us occasionally gets caught in the trap of thinking that we have to do certain things to please God.

Why do we do these things? Why do we pray and read our Bibles? Think about this for a few seconds. Why do *you* pray and why do *you* read your Bible? None of us do these things as often as we should. But why do we do them at all? For most of us, it's because these things are what Christians are supposed to do, right? Good Christians do those things regularly, don't they? Good Christians pray when they want God to do something for them or for those they love. And really good Christians don't just ask God for things, as if He was a Genie in the Bible, they actually thank Him for all the blessings He has bestowed on them. And we all want to be good Christians just like them, don't we?

One of the problems with all this is that we can't do it. Well, not all the time. Occasionally we put on a good show. Even doing so much that we start to believe that God is pleased with all the things we do for Him. But it doesn't last, does it? No matter how many times we try to do "God's will," starting off with the best of intentions, we end up tripping over our sin nature because we become so focused on doing what we think He wants, that we actually end up just doing what we want Him to want us to do. Or we just simply get tired of trying to be Mr. or Mrs. "Goody Two Shoes."

Oops, I think I just dated myself.

We get tired of trying to do all the right things to please God, so we get frustrated and decide to just go and have some fun. And – then we feel guilty. And the guilt makes us feel like God doesn't think we're trying very hard. It makes us feel like He's not pleased with us in spite of all we're doing for Him. Sometimes the guilt motivates us to try harder, but eventually the guilt makes us want to give up. Many of us spend our days (and sometimes our nights) laboring under the weight of our guilt. We feel guilty because of what we've done, or what we haven't done.

Incidentally, getting rid of the guilt is really pretty easy. It's called "confession," that is, agreeing with God that whatever it was that you did was wrong.

So, let me ask you, are you a good Christian? Are you even a good enough Christian? Is God pleased with all the things you do? Or is God displeased with you because you don't do enough for Him? Let me tell you, no matter which side of that equation you come out on you are trapped. You have become a prisoner of legalism!

"Wait, Pastor! Are you saying that we shouldn't even try to be a good Christian? Are you saying that God doesn't want us to be good Christians? Are you saying that we don't have to keep any of the commandments?"

No, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that there are two commandments that all genuine Christians should keep. You know what they are: 1) Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind –and- 2) Love your neighbor as yourself.

But what about all the other things that Jesus taught? What about all the things the writers of the New Testament teach us to do. Don't we have to do them?

The answer is "yes" and "no." Listen very carefully. In God's record book, what we do is not nearly as important as why we do it. Do you remember what Jesus told His disciples?

**If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)**

Our motivation for being the kind of person God wants us to be, is love. God doesn't need, or even want, our acts of service. He wants our heart. He wants a relationship.

I can still remember sitting in the church choir about 50 years ago. I was sitting behind this cute girl who was obviously sold-out to the Lord. I wanted to get to know her better. So, I talked to her and listened to what she said. I learned that she was attending a business college. I also learned that she worked at Pietro's Pizza. So, after I got off work (around 10:00 or 11:00 at night) I would go over to Pietro's so we could be together when she took a break. Eventually, she worked up the nerve to ask me out. But - that's another story.

We have been married now for almost 50 years and I still look for ways to impress her, to show her how much I love her. I open the car door for her every chance I get, not because I have to or because I'm supposed to. I do it because I love her.

That's the kind of relationship that God wants to have with you and me. Yes, we should be reading and studying our Bible regularly. But we should do these things because we love Him and want to get to know Him better. Yes, we should pray to Him regularly. You can't build a relationship without 2-way communication. But we don't pray to God because we have to. We pray to God because we love Him and want to build a relationship with Him. And, as we study his Word we learn about the amazing things that He has done for us, like declaring us to be righteous, like adopting us as His sons, like promising that He will never leave us and He will never forsake us. When we see how much God has done for us, even though we're sinful and unlovely so much of the time, it only makes us love Him more.

## **Now What?**

The bottom line is this. In our relationship with God, we can either trust in what we can do to make ourselves right before God, or we can trust in Christ to do for us what we are unable to do.

You see, under legalism, it is what *we do for God* that makes us right before Him. Under the grace of God, it is what *God has already done for us in Jesus Christ* that makes us right before Him. And, it's realizing that it's what *God has already done for us in Jesus Christ* that makes us want to submit to Him and serve Him.

Under legalism, the focus is on *our performance*. Under the grace of God, the focus is on *who Jesus is and what He has already done for us*.

**Let's pray.**

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