

GALATIANS CHAPTER 4

Again the Judaizers had bewitched the Galatians into thinking that the Law would make them better Christians. Their old nature felt an attraction for the Law because the Law enabled them to do things and measure external results – remember Paul warned the Corinthians of this same sinful and prideful habit in *2 Corinthians 10:12*. As they measured themselves and their achievements, that felt a sense of accomplishment and prideful. They thought they were moving forward but actually they were moving backward. Paul said in *1 Corinthians 15:10* – “*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*”

Vs. 1-2 – Paul drew upon the ancient Roman custom of a minor coming of age to be an adult. In ancient Roman society a child had to wait until the proper time determined by the father to inherit what was his. God delayed Jesus’ coming until the right time (*Galatians 4:4*); God left the law for the people until He felt they were ready for Christ’s first coming. The phrase “*As long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all*”- think of a wealthy ancient household with a young boy who is destined to inherit all that his father has. When the boy is just a child, he actually has less day-to-day freedom and authority than a high ranking slave in the household. Yet, he is destined to inherit everything and the slave is not.

Vs. 3 – Remember the law was the “*guardian*” that disciplined the Jewish nation and prepared the people for the coming of Christ (*Galatians 3:23-25*).

When Paul speaks of “*elements*” he is not talking about the earth, sun, moon,

wind, stars etc...he is talking about the ABC's - the elementary knowledge of principles of life. The idea of the "ABC of the universe" is important. If there is any "ABC of the universe" (elementary principle) that we must *break free from*, and that is stressed in pagan religion just as much as Jewish law, it is the principle of *cause and effect as it relates to salvation*. One may call it karma or "you get what you deserve" or something else; yet it rules nature and the minds of men. We live under the idea that we get what we deserve; when we are good we deserve to receive good and when we are bad we deserve to receive bad. At the elementary level that may be true but Paul told the Galatians to go beyond this "ABC of the universe" into an understanding of *God's grace*. Grace is God's unmerited favor – its God's Riches at Christ's Expense. This contradicts the "ABC of the universe" elementary principle because under grace, God does not deal with us on the basis of what we deserve. Our good cannot justify us under grace; and our bad need not condemn us (Read *Romans 8:1*) God's blessing and favor is given on a principle completely apart from the "ABC's of the universe."

Vs. 4 - In God's infinite wisdom He *predetermined* the *perfect time* before the foundations of the earth for the *first coming of Jesus* and this is what Paul is alluding to when he says, "*When the fullness of the time had come.*" Notice the text did not say when the fullness of time had come but it says when the

fullness of *the time had come*. The definite article “*the*” before time speaks of a specific time. So what made “*the time*” Jesus came the perfect time for His first coming? Well, “the time” was right Religiously: The Jews were free from idolatry, they were looking for the Messiah...they had finished the writing of the Old Testament, and they had created a system of synagogues and religious schools. All of this made spreading and sharing the message of the coming Messiah much easier. “*The time*” was right Culturally: The common language of the day was *Greek*. It was a very expressive language, known all around the then known world so even though they did not have mass marketing and advertising tools like: billboard, Facebook, twitter, instagram, or TV – BUT, *they had a language in which everyone could understand and receive the Gospel message*. “*The time*” was right Politically: The Roman empire was the dominate power of that era...and the Romans had built a highway system that spread throughout the then known world...they mixed in enough grace in regards to religion that it allowed the early missionaries and preachers the opportunity to travel freely throughout the Roman Empire which made the time perfect to spread the Gospel. Now also notice in vs. 4 the noun “fullness” – it carries the image of a container filled to the brim – and this fullness suggests nothing further is to be added; and *so it is with our redemption and our Salvation – Jesus is the One and Only way unto Salvation - there is nothing*

else, nobody else, no work related task needed to obtain Salvation. Salvation is through Christ and Christ alone. Acts 4:12 says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” So the time was perfect for Jesus to come so that the world would be filled with Hope and the Word to reach people everywhere. Paul goes on to say that *“God sent forth His Son”* – The reason an overwhelming majority of the people did not accept Jesus is they didn’t know who He was...the Jewish people were looking for a conquering king to help them overthrow the Romans and put them in power but Jesus came as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. Church, every human being must answer the question Jesus asked the disciples in Matthew 16:13 - *“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man am?”* The disciples said, *“Some say you are Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets”* and then Jesus asked the disciples a personal question - *“Who do you say that I am?”* Peter got it right when he said in Matthew 16:16 - *“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”* Church, the baby conceived in Mary’s womb, and humbly born in a manger in Bethlehem, was God in the flesh sent by God the Father at precisely the right time! And then vs. 4 says the Son whom God sent at the right time was *born of a woman and born under the law.* The ancient prophecy found in Genesis 3:15 said the Redeemer would be of the woman’s seed and Jesus fulfilled that promise in

Matthew 1:18-25. As God the Son...Jesus was 100% God and 100% man fused together in Holy Oneness. The phrase Jesus being *“born under the law”* simply means *Jesus allowed Himself to be subject to Jewish law*. The cycle of knowing what is right and wrong but failing to do it, and the resulting guilt is a type of slavery. Jesus came to show us *“the law”* was keeping people in bondage because the law could not be fully kept by no human being...Only God the Son was perfect – only God the Son did not sin hence, Jesus came at the right time to free people from the bondage of the law...again, Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill the law...God sending Jesus into the world at precisely the right time was a necessity for humanity.

Vs. 5 - In vs. 4 Paul told us *“when”* Jesus came - *when the fullness of time had come* – vs. 4 also told us *“how”* Jesus came - *born of a woman, born under the law*; and now here in vs. 5 Paul tells us *“why”* Jesus came – to Redeem us that *we might receive the adoption as sons*. Paul said in Romans 6:23 - *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* The word *“Redeem”* literally means *“to buy from the slave market”* – and as it relates to salvation an even more robust definition of redeem means *to buy back from the slave market whereby it does not allow the possibility of the one bought from the slave market to ever be resold or placed back in the slave market again*. In other words, once you have been redeemed by Jesus – once you have

confessed with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart God raised Jesus from the dead you are forever saved. The devil can still tempt you to sin...the devil can still send some storms in your life...but the devil can never *buy you back*...once you are saved; you are *eternally secure* - your name in written in the *Lamb's Book of Life* and no one can "*blot out*" your name from the Lamb's Book of Life. I love the way the songwriter also affirms this when he said Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine - O what a foretaste of glory divine...Heir of salvation, purchase of God - born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Vs. 6-7 – In similar fashion as God has sent for His son in the "*in the fullness of time*" God has also sent forth the *Spirit of Christ* at just the right time for every person who believes in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. As adopted sons of God because of the finished work Jesus performed on the cross called Calvary – we share with Jesus all the rights to God's resources...we are joint heirs with Jesus. We can call our "Lord Daddy" – that is what "Abba Father" references. God promised His *sons and heirs* in *Philippians 4:19*, "*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" Notice the text says, "*crying out, 'Abba, Father!'*" We don't whisper "Daddy" as if we were hesitant to speak so affectionately. Instead, we cry it out.

Fears for the Church (vs. 8-20)

Vs. 8-9 – Paul is showing genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of the people from Galatia as he is appealing to them not to engage in polytheistic worship (many gods). Paul sees it as being absurd to worship things created by human hands verses worshipping the creator and this should be appalling to a devout Jew. The words *bondage* and *elements* refer back to *vs. 3*. Again, Paul is posing the question, “*Is it spiritual progress to be enslaved to weak and worthless rituals?*” The word *know* in the Greek is “*gnosis*” - it means more than mental or intellectual assent. This is a deep and intimate bond that comes from quality time spent with someone (*read Philippians 3:10*). Paul is warning the Galatians to not drop out of the *school of grace* to enroll in the *kindergarten of Law and bondage*.

Vs. 10 – First of all there is nothing inherently wrong with observing the key days mentioned in the O.T. like the *feast days* that commemorate God’s blessing of deliverance like when the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land and of course the Sabbath. When Paul says *days* he is really referring to Sabbaths or special feast days (Passover/Pentecost); when he refers to *months* and *seasons* he is referencing a longer observation like the times in between the Passover and the Day of Pentecost (50 days); and when he says *years* Paul is referencing most likely to the “Year of Jubilee” – the fiftieth year

in which slaves were to be freed, family lands returned to their original owners and the land left fallow (*Leviticus 23-25*). The Jewish people commemorated all these feasts in order to please God. Our evangelical churches have many different kinds of observances and it would be wrong for us to go beyond the word of God in comparing, criticizing, or condemning. The New Testament makes it clear we are not to legislate religious observances for each other as stated in (*Romans 14:4-13*). But know “obedience is better than sacrifice” (*1 Samuel 15:22*). Some of the key observations we acknowledge within the Baptist church are: pastor and church anniversary – Mother’s and Father’s Day...Usher’s Day – Children’s Day – Men and Women’s Day.

Vs. 11 - Paul’s fear was that this attraction to legalism would mean that his work among the Galatians amounted to nothing and would end up being in vain. And regarding the phrase “*in vain*” at the end of this section, Paul set a choice before the Galatians and before us. We can have a living, free, relationship with God as a loving Father based on what Jesus did for us and who we are in Him. Or, we can try to please God by “our best efforts” of keeping the rules, living in bondage as slaves, not sons. Living that way makes the whole gospel in vain.

Vs. 12 – Paul was a wonderful spiritual father; he knew just how to balance rebuke with love. He turns from *spiritually spanking* to *embracing* the Galatians. Paul urges the Galatians to follow his godly example. Paul stated he is aware of the Galatians love for him and his love for them. At one time the Galatians were willing to sacrifice almost anything for Paul; but because the Judaizers had come in and *sowed seeds of lies and discord*, it was as though Paul was their enemy. Paul had abandoned the ceremonial rules and regulations connected with Judaism so that he could freely preach the Gospel of Christ to Jew and Gentile alike in the cities of Galatia. Paul was trying diligently to demonstrate that grace was based on faith while the law was based on works; grace justifies sinful men; the law is incapable of resulting in justification. Grace depends on the power of the Holy Spirit; the law depends on human efforts. Grace centers on the cross of Christ; the law is centered on circumcision. For by grace by faith we are saved; the law cannot save; the law points out we need a savior.

Vs. 13 – Paul has made the point over and over again – the Christian life is a *life of liberty*. Jesus came to set the captives free, not to keep them in bondage or put them in bondage all over again. However, Paul distinguishes between freedom to sin and freedom to serve. *Freedom or license to sin is no real freedom at all because it really enslaves you to Satan, other sinful people, or*

your own selfish sinful nature. Yes, we live in the age of grace; no one can out sin God's ability to forgive but that does not mean you will not have to reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7). In this verse Paul is pointing out that true Christian liberty is the freedom to serve one another in love. It's having an "Abba Father" relationship with God through Jesus Christ that when we sin and the Holy Spirit convinces and convicts us of our sin – we quickly run to Jesus for forgiveness and strength.

Vs. 14-15 – Paul echoing what Moses taught in *Leviticus 19:18* reminds the people the law is summed up by loving your neighbor as yourself. When we are not motivated by love we become critical of others. We stop looking for good in them and see only their faults. Soon the unity of believers is broken.

In *vs. 15* the phrase "*bite and devour one another*" reminds us of a pack of wild animals. That's how the church can act when it uses its "*liberty*" as a platform to promote selfishness. The selfish and loveless life is a life lived on the level of animals, with a concern only for oneself, no matter what the cost to other people. These verses prove the following: the law cannot force people to get along with each other. No matter how many rules or standards a church may adopt, they are no guarantee of spirituality. Unless the Holy Spirit of God is permitted to fill hearts with His love, selfishness and competition will reign.

Both the legalist and the extreme liberty followers were actually destroying the church. *Loving and serving people “trumps” policy and legalism.*

Vs. 16-17 – Paul is teaching the only way to overcome sinful fleshly desires is to surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit. Once we are saved we a “*justified*” declared not guilty – saved from the penalty of sin. But we live the rest of our Christian life on earth in the “*sanctification*” phase we are being saved from the power of sin. It takes a “yielding to the Holy Spirit Christian” to overcome sinful/fleshly desires and temptations. Note also the Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. *He uses the word of God, prayer, worship, and the fellowship of believers to build us up in Christ.* A phrase we better be careful saying so boldly is – “I’m just keeping it real – I don’t mince words.” Well, there is time to be straight and share hard truths. But it is the motivation behind them that determine whether it’s sinful or not. *Just because something is true does not mean it should be said at any time or any place.* Some people would rather say something that could break up and keep a relationship in disarray just because they can instead of exercise meekness and mercy...our words should be most often be used to build bridges and not walls. *Have you ever tried to share the truth with someone who may be living a sexually immoral life and then felt like their enemy afterwards?*

Vs. 18 – In this verse Paul highlights there is a spiritual contest or tug of war between the carnal behavior of man and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit is more powerful, but man has free will (liberty) so he has to surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit to be victorious over the fleshly nature. This passage is similar to what Paul said in *Romans 7:15-25* in which he spoke of doing things he did not wish to do. Furthermore, whereas the law once served to counteract the desires of the flesh, now the Holy Spirit does.

Vs. 19-20 – Because false teaching had infiltrated the churches in Galatia we see a lack in spiritual growth and depth of their understanding of Bible doctrine. Paul calls the Galatian Christians in a tender way his little children. And he again is feeling the labor pains of their birth all over again...in our day and age what Paul is saying would be tantamount to when the pastor has to review in detail a subject that has been covered hundreds of times (salvation – the 3 pillars of salvation for me – Justification, sanctification and Glorification or what does John 3:16 or Psalm 66:18 says). Paul knew that his work of forming Christ in them was not complete until they stayed in a place of trusting Jesus. Paul is having the labor pains, but Christ is being formed in them. Paul desires the Galatians to imitate him as he imitates Christ. In **vs. 20** Paul is saying he wished that he did not need to speak to them in such strong words and he could change his tone. But because they were in danger

of leaving the true gospel that made it necessary for him to have to use strong words and it made Paul's doubts necessary to address. If you saw someone about to walk off a cliff and you had the opportunity to help them you'd do what is necessary to help them.

Vs. 21-23 – “*Under the law*” the focus is on *my performance*. Under the grace of God, the focus is on *who Jesus is and what He has done*. *Under the law* we find fig leaves to cover our nakedness. Under the grace of God we receive the covering won through the sacrifice that God provides. Paul is again stressing people are saved because of their faith in Christ, not because of what they do.

In **vs. 22** the phrase “*For it is written that Abraham had two sons*” - the legalists who troubled the Galatians protested that they were children of Abraham, and therefore blessed. Paul admitted they are children of Abraham, but they forget that Abraham had two sons. Abraham's first son was named *Ishmael*. He was born not from his wife, but from his wife's servant (the bondwoman), from a misguided surrogate mother scheme to “help God” when Abraham's wife Sarah couldn't become pregnant. Every time we try to “help” God we “hurt” self. Paul contrasted those who are enslaved to the law (represented by Hagar, the slave-wife) with those who are free from the law (represented by Sarah, the free woman). Abraham's second son was named *Isaac*. He was born, miraculously, through Abraham's wife Sarah (the freewoman). Isaac

was Abraham's son, and he was the son of God's promise and faith and God's miracle for Abraham. Hagar's abuse of Sarah (Genesis 16:4) was like the persecution that the Gentile Christians were getting from the Judaizers, who insisted on keeping the law in order to be saved. Eventually, Sarah triumphed because God kept His promise to give her a son, just as those who worship Christ in faith will also triumph. Paul explains what happened to Sarah and Hagar is an allegory or picture of the relationship between God and people.

Vs. 24-27 – *“The one from Mount Sinai”*- one covenant is associated with Mount Sinai, the place where Moses received the Law (*Exodus 19-20*). This covenant gives birth to bondage since it is all about what we must do for God to be accepted by Him, it doesn't set us free. It puts us on a perpetual treadmill of having to prove ourselves and earn our way before God. This covenant is associated with Hagar, the “surrogate mother” who gave birth to Ishmael. In **vs. 25** this covenant corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, that is, earthly Jerusalem which was the capital of religious Judaism. This was the way most Jewish people in Paul's day tried to be right with God – by trusting in their ability to please God by keeping the law. In **vs. 26** – *“The Jerusalem above is free”* - Paul will now tell us more about the covenant represented by the heavenly Jerusalem. This covenant brings freedom – it is free. It is free because it recognizes that Jesus paid the price, and we don't have to pay it

ourselves. The phrase in **vs. 26** – “*which is the mother of us all*” - this covenant has many children; it is the mother of us all. Every Christian through the centuries belongs to this new covenant, the covenant of the heavenly Jerusalem. **Vs. 27** affirms every birth under this covenant is a miracle, like the fulfillment of the prophecy from **Isaiah 54:1**. The phrase “*the desolate has many more children*” – This quote suggests that there will soon be more Christians than Jews – a promise that was fulfilled. The abundance and glory of the New Covenant is shown by the fact that it would soon have many more followers than the Old Covenant.

Vs. 28 - As Christians, we don’t identify with Ishmael. We identify with Isaac, as children of a promise that was received by faith.

Vs. 29 – Although there is not specific mention of Ishmael persecuting Isaac, though **Genesis 21:9** says that Ishmael did mock Isaac. Paul may be referring to this mocking be recalling a Jewish tradition, or he may be adding something by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we didn’t know before. One of my favorite Bible commentators James Montgomery Boice said, the persecution Christians face “*will not always be by the world but also and indeed more often by their half-brothers – the unbelieving but religious people in the nominal church (church folk). This is the lesson of history...Today the greatest enemies of the believing church are found among the members of the*

*unbelieving church, the greatest opposition emanating from pulpits and church hierarchies.”(remember **2 Timothy 3:12**). Those who are Muslim, their first loyalty is to the Koran and Allah...when we elect people to Congress as Americans, once a Christian nation...those who are Muslim are loyal first to Islam not the stars and stripes of the American flag...their number one agenda is to Allah/Koran.*

Vs. 30-31 – *“Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son” – well the answer to this problem is clear, though not easy. We must cast out the bondwoman and her son. Law and grace cannot live together as principles for our Christian life. Remember Hagar and Sarah could not live together in the same house (**Genesis 21:8-14**). We could argue all day long whose fault it was, but that isn’t the point. The point is that God told Abraham to send Hagar away. So must every Christian send away the idea of relating to God on the principle of law, the principle of what we do for Him instead of what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. Paul draws a distinction between Christianity and legalism regarding the contrast between inheriting all and inheriting nothing. While the “*Isaacs*” of this world may be persecuted, they also have a glorious inheritance that the “*Ishmaels*” of this world will never know. We are heirs of God through the principle of grace, not works. (read **1 Peter 1:3-5**)*