

Date: Wednesday May 5, 2021 **Scripture:** Galatians 4

Link: [Who are the Galatians](#)

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Introduction

Galatians chapter 4. Growing up in Southern California, I grew up in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. And there was a big celebration that would happen often within the Hispanic households called the Quinceanera. Quinceanera. And the Quinceanera was a celebration of a girl turning 15 years old. It marked the transition from childhood for her to womanhood.

In today's Jewish culture, you've probably heard of a bar mitzvah. The bar mitzvah, which dates back to about the 14th century, it's a coming of age for a boy in which he turns 13, and then he becomes accountable for his own actions.

In America we just have birthday parties, right? For someone who turns 18. We know that they're an adult. But nothing really changes for them, right?

It's same birthday parties that we've always had for our kids. The only thing that really changes for them is that they can now buy stuff that they weren't able to buy before, right? Or if they're tried in a court of law, they're tried as an adult if they commit a crime.

But back in Paul's day, when he's writing to these Gentile and Jewish believers in Galatia, they would have understood the illustration that Paul is using here in Galatians chapter 4. And for us to understand Paul's illustration, we need to understand what was going on back then. What was it like back then? Back then, becoming an adult had great religious and legal implications. The Jewish custom was for a boy, shortly after turning 12, to become a man, imagine that...I have a 12-year-old...he would be a man in the Jewish culture back then. When this happened, he would become a son of the law, a son of the law, because he was now held accountable to the law for his actions as a Jewish man.

In the Greek world, a boy would become an adult around the age of 18, and there was an emphasis that was put on him becoming responsible, now as an adult. No more playing video games in Mom and Dad's basement. You need to be a responsible adult now.

Even under Roman law there was a specific time in which a boy would come of age and then would be held responsible as an adult. It's not known specifically what age this was for these boys under the Roman law. But it was a family celebration known as Liberalia. Liberalia. One commentator says at this time the child was formally adopted by his father as his acknowledged son and heir. This is a formal custom that happened, a formal celebration that would happen between this father and this son.

MacArthur says that at this Roman ceremony, the boys would bring their toys and would offer them as a sacrifice to the gods as a symbol of putting their childhood behind them. Maybe some boys need to do that today when they turn 18.

Take your toys and offer them as a sacrifice. That's what Paul...when Paul says, "*I've put away childish things*" in 1 Corinthians 13:11 that's what he's referring to there, sacrificing the toys.

And so with that background in mind, let's look at our passage here tonight so we can understand what Paul is talking about. We're going to break it down into three points. Chapter 4 we'll break it down into three points.

1. First, we'll see **Paul's argument for sonship** in verses 1-11. Paul's argument for sonship.
2. Second, we'll see **Paul's appeal through relationship**, found in verses 12-20. Paul's appeal through relationship.
3. and the number 3, **Paul's allegory of freedom**. Paul's allegory of freedom, found in verses 21-31.

So let's look at our first point here.

1. Paul's Argument from Sonship.

Look at what Paul says in verse 1.

4:1 "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." (Gal 4:1-2)

Now again we have to understand the customs of becoming a child -- or becoming an adult in those days -- in order to understand what Paul is talking about. Notice what Paul says he says, "*as long as the heir is a child.*" Now, today we understand a child is someone who could be a baby, someone who could be a teenager, or you could even have adult children. But the word that Paul uses here for child is the Greek word *nepios...nepios*, which refers to a small child. Not small enough to be a helpless baby. But this child would be no older than three or four. It's a small child that he's talking about. Some translations say minor. Your translation might say that...a minor. And they translate it that way because Paul's whole point is that this child is too young to take responsibility for the management of the assets or inheritance that are his. They are his, but he's too young to take responsibility for the management of them.

And therefore, Paul says the child does not differ at all from a slave. Notice what he says there. He doesn't differ at all from a slave. Now, the slave doesn't own anything, right? Slave has no ownership of anything. All he does is he works for the father. He works for the father within the home. And this minor child...this little child is no different from the slave. Because although he is promised the inheritance, he doesn't possess anything. There's no possession that he has as a minor child.

Although Paul does go on and say *“he is owner of everything.”* So although the slave has no rights to anything that the father owns, the child does. The child does. But he hasn't obtained any of it yet, because he's still a child. He's still a minor.

And as Paul says, in verse 2, he (that is the child) is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. And what would happen on that date? Well, on this date then that would be set by the father. The father would grant the inheritance over to the son. The son is no longer a child, but the son now becomes an adult, and at the celebration of the son becoming an adult, the father would grant the inheritance over to the son. He no longer has rights. Listen to this. He no longer has rights to the inheritance. But the inheritance is in fact his. He owns it now it's all his. Before as a minor, he had the rights to it. But at this celebration now, he no longer has the rights, it's all his. He owns the inheritance.

Paul goes on in verse 3.

“So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.” (Gal 4:3)

That is, while we were nepios. Notice that word *child* there... while we were children... while we were children (in a spiritual sense). That is while we were unbelieving children, we were held in bondage to the law and sin. We did not possess the inheritance...as unbelievers. We didn't possess it. We were under a system that only condemned us and held us in chains, before we were believers.

Paul qualifies this system here by telling us that it is the elemental things of the world. Notice he says that. What are these elemental things? Many thoughts...you look through the commentaries and there's all kinds of thoughts that Bible scholars have on this...but I believe the best way to understand these elemental things are the rituals of human religion that are controlled by demonic powers. The rituals of human religion.

All false religious systems are under the control of Satan and demons. You realize that? All false systems, every false system that is out there. Everything besides Biblical Christianity is all under the power and the control of Satan and his demons. Satan has these false systems because he wants to distract people from the true saving gospel. That's his whole plan, distract them. He wants to make people think that they can earn their way to heaven...instead of realizing that they can't do it but can only enter heaven through faith in Christ.

Why else do I say that the elemental things are human religion? Because Paul says over in verse 9 he uses the same phrase... elemental things...and there he's clearly talking about a false religious system that the believers were tempted to go back to. The false religious system. Things like observing days and months and seasons and years. He qualifies then what even that false system is --that you uphold days and months and seasons and years. That is - that you would observe the Old Testament law.

And the Judaizers thought that you must keep those in order to be saved. “If you want to be saved, it's faith in Jesus...yeah, we'll give you that...but there is an **and**... you must also do this.

- Observe the law
- seasons and days
- and all these kinds of things

If you really want to be saved.

Warren Wiersbe says “The law was not God's final revelation. But it was the preparation for that final revelation in Christ.” Christ is the final revelation. It's always been about salvation by faith in Christ alone, always for all of time. The Old Testament was just a preparation for that.

And so, Paul goes back in verse 3, when you were unbelieving children, you did not have the inheritance... you were in bondage under a false religious system. All of us were thinking that we were somehow good enough to get to heaven. Every one of us thought that before we were saved. I'm good enough because I'm not like the murderer that's in prison. And so God will welcome me in, right? We all thought that.

That's the false religious system that was holding us down -- that we were in bondage to. But that law and that false system can not save anyone that was never its purpose. Its purpose was never to save anyone.

But the good news comes in verses 4-5. Look at what he says there,

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Gal 4:4-5)

Now what is this? Notice he says *the fullness of time*. What is *the fullness of time*? Well, it's the time of preparation before the Father decided to send His Son. The preparation of the law...of showing people that they could not be perfectly righteous. God put the law before us, so we could hold it up as a mirror and He says...now try. Anybody good enough to uphold this? No, I didn't think so.

The purpose is not for you to uphold this, so that you can be saved. The purpose of this is to show you you can't do it. It's impossible for you to do it. You need a Savior. The law had done its job though. The law had done its job, and it was time then for God to send forth His Son.

Now, why did God choose the time that He did? You guys want to find out why God chose the time that He did? No one knows except God alone. Why did He choose that time? Because that was His perfect sovereign time, as God decrees for things to happen, He says now this is the time in which I'm going to send My Son to come and redeem the world. It was in the mind of God.

God chose that time and He sent His Son born of a woman. Notice that that's His *incarnation*...He was born of a woman... we understand Christ has always been, but it was at that time that he *took on flesh* (born of a woman) and notice this...He says He was born under the law. Born under the law. That is, Christ was born under the law, just like every other man was. Every other man was born under the law and so was Christ, except that Christ was the only one -- He was the only one who was able to keep the law perfectly. None of us could. But He did. He kept the law perfectly. He did what you and I could not do.

And why did He do it? Well, Paul tells us...so that He might redeem those who were under the law. So that He might redeem those who were under the law. He lived the life that you and I could not live, so that He would redeem us.

Now this word *redeem*. What does this word redeem mean? It means *to buy back*, and this word was used in reference to slaves having their freedom purchased. So that when the price was paid, the slave would be totally free. They would have total freedom. He would be redeemed, bought back.

Adoption

But even more than that, they also received adoption as sons. Notice what Paul says there...*adoption as sons*. Adoption means *to place as a son*, and it refers to taking a child who is not a natural son and giving them the status of sonship...which is what happened to us. We were adopted. We talked about that a couple weeks ago in equipping hour. Adoption. That God has adopted us as His children. We were by nature not children of God. In fact, who were we children of? Satan. Of the devil. We were all children of the devil, and all unbelievers are children of the devil. But God redeemed us, through Christ, and He adopted us to be His children -- and now we are called the Children of God. We are His. Because He paid the price for us.

Paul goes on and says in verses 6-7

Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6)

We now have the Holy Spirit living within us. This is something that...notice this... this is something that a natural father cannot do with his son. He cannot give him his own nature. He can't give away his own nature to his own son. He can't do that. But God does that when He redeems us. How? By giving us His Spirit. He puts His Spirit inside of us. He seals us with the Holy Spirit. And now we're able to have a relationship with God that we didn't have before. We're close with Him. We now have an intimate relationship with our Father, and we can call on Him as a child would call on his own father. That's what he means by saying Abba Father.

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

He also says that we're no longer slaves. That is, we're no longer under the law, but we are now children of God and heirs with Christ. That means that everything that the Father has given to His Son, He also gives to us. Do you realize that? He also gives to us. We receive the blessings, the grace, the mercy, and the love that the Father has for His own son. He gives that even to us as well as co-heirs with Christ.

You think about adoption. And you think about foster care. There's a difference between the two. Foster care is kind and compassionate. It's great that there are parents that are out there that are foster parents and will take children into their home. But in the end, that child is only under their care for a little while. But to adopt a child is to give that child the same status and rights as your very own children. And that's what God does with us.

The same status and rights as his very own son through Faith in Christ we are adopted as Children of God and coheirs with Christ. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 8:16-17,

"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." (Rom 8:16-17)

We are fellow heirs with Christ. But Paul goes back to continue his argument and explained to the Galatians their former lives in verse 8. Notice what he says in verse 8.

"However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods." (Gal 4:8)

They were not free before they were saved. A lot of people think that that as an unbeliever they're free to do whatever they want. No, they're not. They're in bondage, they are in bondage to the law that is over them that continually condemns them. It condemns, and it condemns, and it condemns...and I'm sure you probably heard the story of people saying "I don't want to do that Christianity thing because I want to do my own thing. I want to be free. You guys are all about this book and having to do all this stuff, but I want to be free." You're not free. You're in bondage to sin, that condemns you. You're in bondage to the Law of God that continually condemns you and condemns you. We were not free before we were saved.

And the Galatians were not free before they were saved. They were in a religion of works and they were held in bondage to those works that could not save them. They worshipped other gods that were really not gods at all, because as we know what the Scripture says, there is only one God, right? There is one God. So they worship all of these gods who are really not gods because there only is one God.

Paul continues his argument in verse 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..." (Gal 4:9)

And Paul says, why do you want to follow the Judaizers and put yourself back under the law? Why do you guys want to do that? You were set free from the law. But if you go back to that, then you're going back to a works-righteous system that cannot save you.

Now, if someone did do that, what does that mean for them? Someone in the church of Galatia went back to a system with the Judaizers, a system of works. What does that mean for them? Does it mean that they've lost their salvation? No. It means that they were never truly saved in the first place.

They played the Christian card. They did the Christian thing for a while. But they were never truly saved.

I'm sure many of you have seen that happen. People play the Christian life game for a little while, and then all of a sudden they go, "You know what? I'm not. It's not for me. I'm not doing that anymore..." and they walk away. Did they lose their salvation? No, they were never saved in the first place.

We saw an example of that last week as we talked about Charles Templeton. He was an evangelist for many years. But he walked away because he was never truly saved.

And Paul says, *"I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."* (Gal 4:11) Listen to what MacArthur says about this verse...I couldn't have said it any better, so I just quote him. "How sad for such a faithful servant of the Lord to believe that all the life-threatening sacrificial service he had given on behalf of the people of Galatia was worthless. All the travel, illness, loneliness, struggles, even the stoning he received in Lystra, that left him for dead, was for nothing. If they reverted to their old slavery. No wonder this is such an impassioned epistle. The thought of all that effort being void compelled Paul to write as he did."

All the work that he did, all the labor that he did. If they go back to a system of Judaism. As the Judaizers were teaching, it's all for nothing. All that effort for nothing. If they revert back to Judaism -- and this must have crushed Paul to think about this. To think of all the things that I went through, I was stoned to

death. Literally, they left me outside of the city to die because they all thought I was dead. And I did all of that for nothing...If you Galatians, go back with those false teachers.

This must have crushed him to think of this. Which is why he writes -- he goes on and he writes and leads to our second point. Paul's appeal through relationship.

2. Paul's Appeal through Relationship.

This here is the heart of a pastor who loves his sheep. He begs for them to stay in the truth of God's Word, and not to turn away. Spurgeon talks to preachers in his book The Soul Winner and he talks about begging and pleading with people to come to Christ in their preaching. Beg with them, plead with them, come to Christ. A pastor knows that is the best thing for his sheep. To be with Christ. To be committed to Christ.

And Paul here is begging for the Galatians not to follow after the Judaizers and their false teaching, and go back to a system of slavery, to the law.

So look what he says in verse 12.

"I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are." (Gal 4:12)

Paul became as a Gentile in order to win over the Gentiles. Paul was willing to lay down his very own life in order to win them over. And think about Paul growing up...Paul grew up in Judaism. He was a Jew. He was a Jew to the nth degree. He was a Pharisee. He had learned all of this stuff under the Jewish system. Think about all of the things that were ingrained into him...and you know what was ingrained into him? Do you know what the Jews thought about the Gentiles? They're wicked and evil. Stay away from them.

But what does Paul do? He says, I laid down my very life to become even as one of you -- Gentiles, because I love you so much, because I want you to come to know Christ. I did all of that for you.

James Montgomery Boyce says our goal must be to make them like us, when we're witnessing to somebody to make them like us, while the means to that end is to make ourselves like them. Witnessing involves doctrine. But it also involves the most personal involvement of the witness with those to whom he or she is witnessing.

Paul became like the Gentiles. Paul goes on and he says

"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." (Gal 4:12-13)

When Paul first arrived, they welcomed him and they did nothing wrong to him. That's what Paul is saying here. In fact, they cared for him because as Paul came into Galatia, he arrived sick. He comes walking into town sick. It's believed that on his first missionary journey, Paul contracted malaria. That he contracted malaria down in Pamphylia. And then he went up to higher grounds -- to the higher grounds of Galatia to recover -- because it was better for his health up there. And as he arrived, these people welcomed him and they cared for him while he preached the gospel to them. They cared for him physically. He cared for them spiritually.

And what he's saying here is, how can you now just totally reject me after the way that you received me before? How can you guys do this? He continues on his appeal in verse 15:

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. 16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? (Gal 4:15-16)

Paul knew what had happened. Paul knew that the Judaizers had come in and stolen the Galatians hearts away. They stole their hearts away. But Paul is reminding them of the love that they had towards him, and the reception that they had with him. They would have given the most precious part of their body to Paul if he needed it.

Think about how important your eyes are. Anybody willing to give up your eyes for someone else? You have to love someone a lot in order to give up your eyesight for the rest of your life, in order to allow them to see. Paul says that's the kind of love that you guys had for me. And now you're gonna turn your back on me? Really guys?

And Paul asked this heartbreaking question. *Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?* That's all I've done, is I tell you the truth. And now I become your enemy because I love you and tell you the truth of God's Word?

Who's the ultimate enemy of the Galatians? It wasn't Paul. It's the Judaizers. They're the enemies. They're trying to enslave the Galatians back to the law. And Paul is heartbroken here. He says, are you believing their lies -- that I am your enemy? Especially after all I did to show you my love and share the truth with you? Are you turning back on me and denying the faith?

One commentator says, "Nothing tears the heart of a faithful pastor, teacher, youth worker, or missionary so much as seeing someone he has led to the Lord turn away from the faith." It's true. Someone that you have led to the Lord... and you see them fall away. It's heartbreaking.

Paul's question is, have I become your enemy? This is tough in ministry. When all you do is preach the truth and love people and point them to Christ. And they just tear you down and turn against you. This is not easy to go through as a pastor. But he must go on. A pastor must go on and continue to preach the truth. And that's what Paul continues to do.

And he tells them the truth about the Judaizers, and what the Judaizers are doing in verse 17.

They eagerly seek you. (Gal 4:17)

They're after you. That is, the Judaizers are seeking the Galatians and trying to pull them away from Paul and his teaching. And they seem to do it in a commendable manner. As if they were looking out for the Galatians. "Oh look, we're just trying to take care of you guys. We love you so don't listen to Paul. You listen to us because we really love you."

Paul is saying they don't have a genuine love for you. They're only doing it to get more followers for themselves. And you see this happen in many cults today, right? That's what cults are after. They are seeking to win people over so that they can get more followers. They do it for their own personal gain, and the Judaizers wanted to entrap the Galatians back under the law and make a showing for themselves. But this was in Paul's heart.

In fact in verse 18, Paul is saying that even if someone else comes in and preaches the true gospel to you and edifies you, praise God. That's what I want. I don't want the Judaizers coming in because they're

false teachers... and they're going to lead you astray, but if somebody else comes in who is qualified to preach the true gospel, and they come in and they preach the gospel to you, and lead you to Christ, praise God. I'm not the only one qualified to do that. He's OK if somebody else comes in and points them to Christ.

Then Paul gets very personal with the Galatians, as a mother would with their own children. Look what he says in verse 19,

"My children with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." (Gal 4:19)

Paul calls them *my children*. Another way we could say this is *little children*. Again, referring to small children. And the imagery here would be shocking to these Galatians. Notice this. Here is a man talking about being in labor. Pretty shocking, right? A man talking about being in labor. And he speaks to them as a mother speaking to her little children.

And what Paul is getting at here is this... look when I was with you the last time I had labored, and you were given the new birth, but it's as if I have labored all over again, because you are acting like babies who need to be born all over again.

It's like I'm a mother having to give birth to the same baby all over again. That's the picture that Paul is painting there. But here's the thing. Paul is not going to give up on them. He won't give up. How do we know? Because he wants to see what? Christ formed in them. Christ formed in them. He wants to be with them. And he wants to be with them so he could change his tone. Be with them face to face. And then he says,

"...I'm perplexed about you." (Gal 4:20)

That is, he's at his wits end. How could they have been taught the gospel and then abandoned it so quickly? And he gives them this appeal to bring them back. It should shock them. Because he wants to bring them back to the true gospel.

Finally, our third point,

3. Paul's Allegory of Freedom

Quickly we will run through this. Paul lays it out for them in verse 21.

"Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?" (Gal 4:21)

Or another way you could say this is, "tell me you who want to be under the law? Are you not aware of what the law says? Do you not understand what the law says here?" Galatians?

Well, I'm going to use another illustration to help you understand this, and so Paul gives another illustration, and he uses allegory here as an illustration to teach them. In fact, in verse 24 he says

"This is allegorically speaking." (Gal 4:24)

He lays it out for them. What is the illustration that he uses? He uses the story of Abraham. He goes back again to Abraham. And he uses the story of Abraham to convey two ways, two ways. He will contrast

1. law vs grace

2. works vs faith

That's what he's contrasting here. He wants to make it black and white for them. And so he goes on, and he uses Abraham as the illustration. Abraham had two sons by two women. (Gal 4:22-24)

Who were they? Ishmael and Isaac.

By what women? Hagar and Sarah.

Hagar and Ishmael and the Law

One son was by a bondwoman, Hagar. And one son was by a free woman, Sarah. He says there's only one way to be saved. There's one way-- that is by works...and that's the way of Hagar. Allegorically speaking, that's the way of Hagar, who was a bondwoman, and she was a slave of Sarah, and Hagar gave birth to Ishmael because of a fleshly plan. Listen to this, a fleshly plan made up by Sarah and Abraham. It was their own plan...which represents the law. Do it your own way. Don't worry God, I know you gave us the promise, but we'll figure this out. And they came up with their own way with Hagar.

Sarah and Isaac and Faith

But there's another way. That's all about the promise through faith. The promise through faith. This is Sarah giving birth to Isaac. The birth didn't happen because of flesh. It wasn't their own plan, it happened because of the promise of God. That's how Isaac was born. Because of the promise of God. Sarah was barren and God opened her womb at the age of 90. She's an old woman and she gives birth to a son, because it was the promise of God. And it all happened through faith.

Hagar represents the law -- and those who are slaves to the law.

And Sarah represents the promise that is received by faith.

He goes on and he says there's also two Jerusalem's in verses 25 and 26. (Gal 4:25-26)

The Jerusalem here on Earth, which represents the law and all those who are enslaved to the law. And there's the Jerusalem above. That is in heaven. You cannot work your way to this heaven. You cannot work your way into this Jerusalem. The Jerusalem that is above. It can't happen. The only way is through the promise of God by faith. That's the only way to get to the Jerusalem above.

Who did the children of promise through faith belong to? Paul says in Philippians 3:20, *Our citizenship is in heaven.* We belong to heaven. You realize that? We talked about that a couple weeks ago. We don't belong to this world, we belong to heaven, and therefore we will receive the inheritance of heaven.

But those who are under the law, like the Judaizers, they won't. They won't be in heaven. Because they are spiritual children of Hagar and Ishmael. And they will be cast out of heaven, just as Hagar and Ishmael were cast out of Abraham's household. But we as believers are children of the promise. And this promise is received only by faith alone. It's by faith alone. So don't go back to that old system of works. That old system cannot save you. It will never save you. It is by faith in Christ alone, that is how one is saved.

Through (under) the Law (Works)	Through Faith
Hagar had Ishmael	Sarah had Isaac
Mount Sanai in Arabia	Heaven
Entry into Earthly Jerusalem	Entry (citizenship) into Heavenly Jerusalem

In slavery	Free, children of promise
Spiritually dead. Cast out of heaven	Adoption and Inheritance
Judaizers	True people of faith
Eternity apart from God	Eternity with God in Heaven

Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Galatians chapter 4. Lord, we admit that there are some things that are in this that seem kind of confusing. But Lord, we know that it is true. We thank You for the promise of Christ, and we thank You for the promise of eternal life in heaven by faith in Christ alone. Help us to never wander. I pray that no one here would ever wander away from this truth, but we would be fixed upon Christ and the true message of the gospel for Your glory alone. We pray in Christ name. Amen.