

Study 5: Galatians Chapter 4

Introduction

Paul now continues with the “nitty-gritty” issues in the letter. He now moves into further elaboration of the place of the Law of Moses compared to the Law of Christ.

Body of the Study

How does Paul compare an heir and a slave?

So, What are we? Slaves or Sons?

How does Paul contrast their former life with their life as christians?

What is the point that Paul is making in this?

What does Paul mean by days, months, seasons and years?

What is Paul’s appeal to these people?

What happened to Paul when he first came to Galatia?

What does the Law say about itself?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *Paul talks about our former lives serving idols (4:8). What idols do we serve in our society?*
- *Think about the allegory that Paul describes. Read the story in Gen 21. How does God provide for and plan things in ways which are far and beyond man’s comprehension?*
- *What are some of the other allegories in the scriptures that we can see when we truly understand the gospel of Christ?*
- *The continuation of the story of Ishmail and Hagar in Gen 21 shows God looking after them, What are the implications for God continuing to look after the Jews?*

- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 5 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 5: Chapter 4

Introduction

Paul now continues with the “nitty-gritty” issues in the letter. He now moves into further elaboration of the place of the Law of Moses compared to the Law of Christ.

Body of the Study

How does Paul compare an heir and a slave?

He is about to show that through Christ, we become heirs of God. And importantly, that under the Law of Moses, we (the Jews) were under bondage. It was as if they were slaves.

Paul uses the example of a physical heir. Even if he has absolute and total entitlement to the inheritance, whilst he is a child he has absolutely no entitlement to claim any of it. Very often, an inheritance will come into force when a child reaches a certain age (ie maturity). It is often 21, or 25, or sometimes 18. The idea is that he (and of course, she) will be mature enough to be able to deal maturely with the inheritance without squandering it away. The point that Paul wants to make is that whilst he is a child, he is absolutely no better off than a slave. At that point in time, neither of them have any access to the inheritance in any way.

The child may have the right of inheritance, but is still under the control of an adult who provides guardianship and stewardship. He is guided by the guardian, and set limits as to what he can and cannot do.

This is a mirror of the way in which God guides and protects us. We were under bondage – in two ways. First, we were under the bondage of sin, and secondly we were under the bondage of the Law. The point is, that the Law had a purpose. It was our tutor / schoolmaster (3:24) to bring us to Christ. It kept us under its protective custodianship (3:23). It was our guardian, *until such a time as we reached maturity* – the time when the Messiah was to come and give us the inheritance that has been ours all along.

So, even although we were heirs of God all along (if we had faith in Him), under the Law we were really under bondage. And now that we have received the inheritance (by being Christians), then why would we want to go back to being “slaves” or *under the control of the guardian* again? And that is exactly the consequence of conforming to the Law again after we have been freed from it.

So, What are we? Slaves or Sons?

We are adopted as sons! We had no birth-right to claim ourselves as sons. We were separated from God by our sins, and we were reconciled as God’s children through *the Son!* Through the adoption process, and being reconciled to Him, God has shown his approval by sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts.

This is particular significance to the Galatians – who had the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit – how did they get them? Paul elaborates again on the point that he has made in 3:5, that the only way that the miraculous gifts could come was by the action of God. And God would not just give such a gift to anyone, but to those who were “approved of God”. It is worth noting at this time, that miraculous gifts tended to appear at some particular and discreet points of time in human history. They were not the norm. One of those times was when God led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, for example. Another is when the Messiah comes along and performs them himself, and another is in the first century when they were given to enable those who were teaching God’s word to prove that what they were teaching from God (Mk 16:20). (Remember

that the new Testament had not then been written, so we could not know if something was right or wrong by looking it up in the scriptures!)

Now, the Galatians had these gifts. They were not gifts that came along under the Law of Moses. They came from God, and they came *because* of their belief (and obedience) to the Christ.

The point that Paul is making is, that if you are not sure if you are a son of God or not, then have a look at gifts that you have.

How does Paul contrast their former life with their life as christians?

Paul specifically addresses this to the Gentile christians. In the former life, they did not know God. Paul also elaborates, that in fact God did not know them.

This raises a whole lot of interesting questions about God's knowledge. One could construe this to say that God doesn't know man until man conforms to God's will, and at that time God then recognises them – sort of the reverse of the Calvinist position that requires God to “act” on the heart of man before man can recognise God!

But the idea is perhaps best expressed by Isaiah:

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Is 59:1-2 NIV)

This is not to say that God does not know, or that He does not want to know (neither of which position is correct), but rather it is *when man chooses to accept God*. Drawing back to the context (always a good idea), Paul has been talking about the relationship that we have as sons, compared to that as a servant. The question is, *when do we become adopted as sons?* (and Paul has already answered that question for us (3:26-27)). So, when we accept Jesus as the Christ by faith, and express that through our obedience in being baptised into Him, then (and only then) does God adopt us, and then He recognises us as sons – which Paul expresses as “...*being known by God...*”

This is strongly contrasted to the former life (particularly for the Gentiles) who served idols – “...*those who by nature are not gods...*” (4:8) Notice the lack of a capital letter for “gods”, clearly showing that the Greek scholars who translated the text understood that Paul was referring to idols and not the true and living God (– there was not capitalisation in the original Greek text).

What is the point that Paul is making in this?

Paul says that they have gone back again to the things that they left behind when they became christians – “...*the weak and miserable principles...*” (4:9 NIV).

As a consequence, they are happy to be back in bondage. They have become slaves again after they had received the inheritance. What is interesting is that Paul here draws together two things, from two different directions. Those in the world (anywhere) were in one of three categories –

- Gentiles, and totally outside of God, with (essentially) no knowledge of Him, and no recognition by Him,
- Jews who recognised the true and living God, but were in bondage under the Law of Moses,
- Christians who had been made sons of God and received the inheritance and adoption.

Paul says that the state of those who had gone from christianity back into Judaism was the same state that they were in before they became christians - when they did not know God at all!

We need to realise that the Jewish faith was not an alternative way to come to God. Jesus said there is only one way “...*I am the way, and the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me...” (Jn 14:6). The Jewish religion had fulfilled its purpose (of bringing us to Christ). It was no longer needed. It could not make us perfect (neither in the sense of being*

complete, nor of being made right with God). So, to go back from the complete state of being “in Christ” was just as fruitless if they went back to the Jewish religion or the pagan religion.

What does Paul mean by days, months, seasons and years?

Paul is quite explicitly talking about the keeping of the ordinances of the Law of Moses. But, what he says about this is not to the Jews (remember they had nationality issues and it was quite right for them to observe the requirements of the Law – see my study on “Circumcision – Acts Study 22), but to the Gentiles. The problem was that the Gentile Christians were now having the Law of Moses bound on them (he has just been writing about the Gentiles who have left their idol worship to become Christians).

Paul says “...*have I laboured amongst you in vain?...*” (my paraphrase of 4:11). Remember the arguments that Paul has already made to these people – Jesus crucifixion, the Spiritual gifts, the inheritance as Sons – but they have still turned back!

What is Paul’s appeal to these people?

Paul gives his own life as an example of dedication for the Galatians to follow. Sometimes when we consider Jesus, and His example, He is so far removed from what we are that it just seems impossible for us to be like Him (and of course it is impossible – and we can only be “made right” (justified) by God’s grace (not bringing on us the punishment that we deserve). But with Jesus so far above what we can possibly attain, we are often tempted to give up.

But then we see Paul (and not just Paul – there are many others, but he is the one under consideration at this time). He has all of the weaknesses that we have. He has had a life of sin and fighting against God probably more than most of us. But he says – despite all of my weaknesses, God has made me right through the sacrifice of Jesus. “...*I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I, Christ lives in me! And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who lives me and gave himself for me!*” (2:20)

He says “...*follow me, even as I follow Christ...*” (1 Cor 11:1)

What happened to Paul when he first came to Galatia?

He reminds them of what they did for him. It was “...*because of physical impairments I preached the gospel to you at the first.*” (4:13 NKJV)

Many writers think that Paul got malaria when he was at Perga, and that may have been one of the reasons why John Mark left and returned to Antioch, and that Paul then went to the high country of Galatia to escape the heat. And hence he came at first to Pisidian Antioch, and preached the gospel with his physical infirmities. (See also Acts 13:13-14).

When Paul came to them, they accepted him and took care of his needs. He was received just as an angel would have been received – or even Jesus himself.

Next, Paul mentions how that the Galatians would have “...*even plucked out their own eyes and given them to him...*” (4:15) This perhaps gives some hint as to what Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” might have been (2 Cor 12:7), and that he might have had poor eyesight. Paul also writes in 6:11 “...*what large letters I write with my own hand...*” This could be the physical size of the handwriting, or it could be the length of the epistle. Most of Paul’s epistles were written by a scribe. Galatians is one of the shorter letters, yet Paul says it is a “large letter”. In either case, it hints towards Paul having bad eyesight (but of course, we don’t know).

The point that Paul is making, is that when he was there with them they were zealous towards him. Now that he is no longer there, they are turning against him. “...*Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?...*” (4:16)

By way of contrast, look at how the Judaisers were treating the Gentiles. “...*They zealously court you, but for no good...*” (4:17). These people did not have the pure motivation that Paul had. They were trying to lead the Galatians away through lies and deception.

Paul says that he would like to come and sort them out on a face to face basis, and to have a much gentler tone as he addressed them (4:20)

What does the Law say about itself?

Paul presents the law as an allegory. (An allegory is a strange quirk of a parallel example that has an exact fulfilment).

The Jews kept coming back to their heritage as the children of Abraham. So Paul reminds them of the fact that Abraham had two sons:

- The first son was Ishmail, (by Hagar, who was Sarah’s hand maiden).
- The second was Isaac, by Sarah.

Now it was from Sarah that Isaac the son of promise was made. Ishmail came into the world by the usual course of nature (albeit he was born from a relationship with a woman to whom Abraham was not married). On the other hand, Isaac was born by the promise of God. His birth was miraculous, and contrary to the laws of nature. Sarah was unable to bear children, and had passed the age where it was possible for her to have children. But God had promised Abraham that he would have a child through Sarah, “...*and Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness...*”

These two women represent the two covenants. Hagar represents the Law of Moses, and Sarah represents the gospel of Christ. Hagar represents Mt Sinai, where the Law was given, and Sarah represents Jerusalem from where the gospel was sent out.

Hagar was a bondswoman. She was the servant of Abraham’s wife. But Sarah was a freewoman. And the two Laws are in exactly the same likeness. The Law of Moses represents bondage. Those under the Law were bound by its ordinances and the fact that it was incapable of delivering freedom from Sin.

On the other hand, the Law of Christ (the gospel) came by promise, came by divine intervention, and delivers freedom – freedom from the bondage of the Law, and freedom from sin.

Paul next brings them to the conclusion that the Jews had totally missed the point. They were claiming not only descent from Abraham, but descent *through Isaac*. And the true descent through Isaac came through the law of Christ, and not through the Law of Moses.

Paul brings home the final nail. The prophecy of scripture, (Gen 21:8-13). When Isaac was weaned at about 2 years old, Ishmail was about 17 years old. Ishmail began mocking his half brother Isaac, and Sarah demanded that Hagar and her son Ishmail be thrown out of the house, and that they would never share in the inheritance with Isaac.

Because these two sons represent the two covenants, then the implication is that the law of Moses was to be thrown out, and that it would never share with the inheritance that we have from being “*in Christ*”.