

# Galatians

## Chapter Four

### Introduction

Under Roman law, a slave could be set free if someone redeemed him. Through payment of the required price, the redeemed slave became a free man. As a free man, he could also be adopted. The Greek word for adoption is a compound word that literally means "placing [a] son." The former slave, through adoption, was given the status and privileges of a son to someone who was not his natural father. By this honored custom many wealthy but childless Romans would redeem and adopt young slaves, who would trade the bindings of slavery for the blessings of sonship.<sup>1</sup>

It is this custom that the Apostle Paul has in mind when he says, in verse five, that Jesus came to

Galatians 4:5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

You were a slave to the law. It demanded a perfect obedience, in both attitude and action, that kept you bound. Jesus redeemed you by paying the required price - He purchased you with His precious blood, shed on the Cross at Calvary. Having redeemed you He set you free so that the Father might adopt you as His sons and daughters. Through this spiritual adoption you were given the status and privileges of a son of God.

What would you think if a redeemed slave, who now enjoyed the status and privileges of a son, willingly and voluntarily left his adopted father's blessings to return to the bindings of slavery? You'd think something was very wrong; and you'd be right.

That, though, is exactly what the believers in the region of Galatia were doing! In verse nine Paul says,

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<sup>1</sup>MacArthur, *Galatians*, p. 109.

Galatians 4:9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

The Galatians were returning to the rules, rites, rituals, and regulations of the Jewish religion. They were like sons willingly returning to slavery!

Believers still turn to the rules, rites, rituals, and regulations of religion. You've been set free and adopted as sons; but often you submit yourself to some external standard of right living that comes along. When you do, you are a son who is returning to slavery.

This morning we will see these two things in chapter four: #1 As A Redeemed Slave, You Receive The Blessings Of A Son, or #2 As A Religious Son, You Return To The Bindings Of A Slave.

#1 As A Redeemed Slave,  
You Receive The Blessings Of A Son  
(v1-7)

The problem in the region of Galatia was the false teaching of the Judaizers that maturity in the Christian life was to be achieved by keeping certain rules of right living. Using an illustration from Roman culture and custom, Paul shows them that it is a mark of immaturity if you seek to grow by keeping certain rules of right living.

Galatians 4:1 Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all,

Galatians 4:2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

While the heir of an estate was a minor child he was kept in subjection to guardians, who watched over him personally, and stewards, who watched over his estate. Though by birthright he owned everything, he enjoyed no freedom and made no decisions. He was no better off than a slave, until the day appointed by his father on which he would be declared a man and receive all of the freedoms, rights, blessings, and privileges of his sonship.

Paul applies this illustration to the spiritual situation in Galatia:

Galatians 4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

You were a slave, "in bondage under the elements of the world." If you were a Jew, the "elements of the world" were the rules, rites, rituals, and regulations of the Jewish religion. If you were a Gentile, "the elements of the world" were the rules, rites, rituals, and regulations of some pagan religion or belief system. In other words, those who seek to be mature by keeping certain rules of right living are actually immature - like minor sons who differ very little from slaves.

Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

Galatians 4:5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

A Roman father set a certain time for his son to come of age. So did God! At a certain time in human history God sent Jesus into the world. He was God, but born of a woman - God and man, fully God, fully human. He was "born under the law." Jesus alone among all those ever born perfectly obeyed the law in attitude and in action. His unique status as the perfect God-man gave Him the right to offer Himself as the payment of the curse of the law for all mankind. His blood, shed on the Cross at Calvary, was the required price for the redemption of the human race. Jesus bought you out of slavery and set you free so that God could adopt you as His sons and daughters.

Once you are set free and adopted you receive all of the blessings of your inheritance - especially, you receive the Holy Spirit to indwell you and empower you for living the Christian life:

Galatians 4:6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

As you probably already know, "Abba" is a term of intimacy - like calling God "Daddy." You have been set free, adopted as sons and daughters, and can call upon your Daddy any and every moment of the day or night for His grace to supply and sustain you. With this kind of relationship, why go back to religion?

Galatians 4:7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The Galatians were being told that they were immature unless and until they started living up to certain rules of right living. But it is those who live by rules - by religion - who are immature. To go back to religion is to turn your back on relationship; it is to go back to immaturity, not forward to maturity.

We frequently tell the unsaved that faith in Jesus Christ is not a religion; it is a relationship. How tragic if we ourselves - believers - live as though faith in Jesus Christ was a religion. God wants us to enjoy fellowship with Him as sons - not be enjoined by rules, rites, rituals, and regulations that mark the lives of slaves. Remind yourself that your faith in Jesus is a relationship, *not* a religion. You are a redeemed slave, set free and adopted. All spiritual blessings in heavenly places are yours now; everything you need for life and godliness is yours now. The Christian life is not something to be achieved by religious observance; it is something to be received by relationship.

#2 As A Religious Son,  
You Return To The Bindings Of A Slave  
(v8-31)

Christians too often live as if they were religious sons. Having been set free from the binding rules and rituals of religion, they turn or return to them to become more mature. By doing so they go backward, not forward.

Galatians 4:8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.

Galatians 4:9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

Before you receive Jesus Christ, you are a slave to the elements of some powerless religion or belief system - even if it's your own private belief system. Now that you are saved, why go back to keeping rules as the means of living out the Christian life? Take the Roman son as an example. While a minor, he obeys his guardians and trustees. When a son, they obey him! The difference is the declaration of his father.

Your Father has declared you righteous. You are not to go back and try to be made more righteous by keeping a set of rules.

Galatians 4:10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

"Days, months, seasons, and years" were the particular rules of right living that the Galatians were turning or returning to. "Days" were the weekly sabbath; "months and seasons" were seasonal festivals - like Passover and Pentecost; "years" were sabbatic years. Keeping these things, and others like them, are not a mark of maturity. They are a mark of immaturity if you believe that they achieve God's greater blessing in your life.

Throughout our studies in Galatians I have endeavored to keep things current and applicable. As I've said before, not too many of you are seriously thinking about turning to Judaism. But there are pressures out there for you to turn to external rules of right living in order to become more spiritually mature.

I'd like to read a passage from a sermon by Pastor Gil Rugh. He is the pastor of Indian Hills Community Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. He delivered this sermon to his own congregation on the topic of substituting man-made programs for God's glorious plan. In it he discusses Promise Keepers, and here is what he says:

"Promise Keepers say they are interested in producing godly men. But is this honorable motive enough? Or does it matter how one goes about achieving godliness? I hold that true godliness can only be produced in the way God prescribed in His Word... One error of Promise Keepers is its emphasis on extra-biblical or man-made rules... Being a Promise Keeper includes committing to seven promises. But nowhere in the Bible does it tell us to be saved and then follow seven promises so that we can grow spiritually. The Bible is clear that godliness does not come from man-made rules, no matter how good those rules may seem... The promises a Promise Keeper agrees to are of no value because they are fleshly attempts to produce godliness... Today we see Promise Keepers repeating the [Galatian] error all over again. They teach that men will become godly by binding themselves to an agreement of seven promises. But that sets down external criteria for godliness. Godliness can only be produced by the Holy Spirit... The key to godly living is continual reliance upon and obedience to the Holy Spirit... Just as salvation is totally of the Holy Spirit and has nothing to do with our own efforts, so too, the living out of the Christian life must be according to the Holy Spirit and not according to fleshly efforts."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Internet article, p. 13-14.

The issue of promoting godliness is a serious matter. Paul went right after the Judaizers, who were putting believers under external rules in order to produce godliness. Keeping external rules - no matter how good they seem - only binds you in their slavery.

Paul tempers his rebuke with love in these next few precious verses:

Galatians 4:11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Paul was reminding them of all the travel, sickness, loneliness, and even stoning, he endured to set them free from religion with the gospel of grace.

Galatians 4:12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all.

Paul had lived under religion, but Jesus set him free. He now was like a Gentile, no longer living under bondage.

"You have not injured me at all" refers to the time Paul previously spent with them, described in verses thirteen through fifteen:

Galatians 4:13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.

Galatians 4:14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

Galatians 4:15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

It is believed that Paul suffered from an eye disease while traveling. They had lovingly received him; why not now?

Galatians 4:16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

Galatians 4:17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.

The Judaizers had turned them against Paul. How sad that in their supposed zeal for truth they had brought division, strife, and envy. Look at the fruit! There are plenty of people who claim correct doctrine, but who do so in such a way as to reproach the love of

Jesus Christ. Often they "court" you - they come after you to convert you to their particular viewpoint.

Galatians 4:18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.

Galatians 4:19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,

Galatians 4:20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

Paul thought of himself as their spiritual mother. It was by his preaching that God caused them to be born-again. Now they were not growing; Christ was not living His life through them because they were sidetracked by religion. Paul had "doubts"; the word means *perplexed*. He was perplexed that they, who had begun so well, could so easily be sidetracked.

Beloved, people will come to you and court you, seeking to promote their program of right living. If you don't follow them they will mock you and persecute you. *That's not the fruit of the Spirit!* Why would you want to be like them?

In all of his writings Paul was sensitive to the those who were having difficulty understanding grace as it relates to God's revelation of salvation in the Old Testament. He addresses them and their concerns with the illustration that ends chapter four.

Galatians 4:21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?

Galatians 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman.

Galatians 4:23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise,

The Judaizers had high regard for the life and example of Abraham. Paul wasn't afraid to look to Abraham to illustrate the truth he was teaching.

God had promised Abraham a son, and when Sarah wasn't getting pregnant, he decided to have a son by his slave instead.

Abraham's son, Ishmael, was born of Hagar, Abraham's slave. Ishmael was born "according to the flesh." This has two meanings: First, it means Ishmael was conceived in the ordinary way, when both Abraham and Hagar were of reasonable ages; Second, it is a

reminder that Abraham went in to conceive a son by Hagar in order to help God fulfill a promise. It was a fleshly effort, a work of the flesh, to help bring God's blessing into his life.

Abraham's son, Isaac, was born of Sarah, the "free woman" and wife of Abraham. Isaac was born as a result of God's promise. Abraham and Sarah were well beyond childbearing when she conceived. God miraculously fulfilled His promise by bringing life out of Sarah's dead womb.

Paul makes the application to the Galatians and their problem with the Judaizers:

Galatians 4:24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar;

Galatians 4:25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children;

Galatians 4:26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

If you want to follow religion, you are like Ishmael - a slave born to a slave out of fleshly efforts to please God. Better to be like Isaac - miraculously born and free to experience all of God's blessings.

Galatians 4:27 For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband."

Galatians 4:28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.

Galatians 4:29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.

Ishmael taunted and teased Isaac. That is what the Judaizers were doing to the Gentile believers. Yet, according to the quote from Isaiah 54:1, the "barren" one - the Gentiles - would produce more believers than "she who has a husband" - the Jews.

Galatians 4:30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."

Galatians 4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

In the story of Ishmael and Isaac, *Hagar and Ishmael were thrown out of the camp!* The Galatians should expel the Judaizers from their congregation! The believers were forever free from fleshly efforts to help God out by keeping external rules of right living.



Religious sons and religious daughters are not what God has in mind. You do not become more godly by setting up external rules and then promising to keep them. It's not what you promise God; it's what God has promised *you!*

## Conclusion

Redeemed slaves are set free and adopted to inherit by faith the promises of God. Religious sons bind themselves by their own fleshly promises.

Are you a redeemed slave? Or a religious son?