

Knowing Him

Lessons from Paul's Life and Ministry

Lesson 4 Galatians 4

The law could never do what grace has done by making us adult children of God. His grace through our faith allows us the privilege of becoming sons and daughters, uniting together as brothers and sisters in one body. Paul again stresses this point along with the allegory of Isaac and Ishmael, Abraham's two sons, to convincingly prove that justification comes through grace.

Read Galatians 3:26–29 and 4:1–31. Sons and Heirs

At a glance

You are there—one of the recipients of Paul's letter. Using your own words, recap the following from verses 26–29: Now that you belong to Christ . . .

Whose likeness do you bear? (Think about how this makes you feel; please explain.)

What distinctions are no longer present between you and other believers?

Whose true descendant are you? What does that make you by spiritual birthright?

Paul uses a child to illustrate the spiritual immaturity of living under the law. A child may be a full heir one day of everything his father possesses, but for the time being he lives as a servant or a slave, obeying his guardians until the time set by his father to receive his inheritance.

1. Paul includes himself along with the Galatians, saying that before Christ all were under bondage to what? What does this mean? v. 3

2. What was God's answer to man's dilemma of being held captive by the law?
vv. 4–5

3. As each one receives the Holy Spirit, how are we able to call out to God? v. 6

4. Think about it: since you now belong to God, what now belongs to you? v. 7



As far as your inheritance is concerned, what role does the Holy Spirit initially play in your life? See Ephesians 1:14.

Personal: How does this knowledge encourage you as to what is yet to come?

Memory verse: “*And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba Father!’*” Galatians 4:6



Learn to view your circumstances through the lens of God's truth rather than looking at God's truth through the eyes of your circumstances. Practice this with the *In focus* word search below and then with the *Up close & personal* look to follow.

In focus: Write a definition for the following words, using the resources you have on hand (i.e., additional Bible translations, dictionary, Bible dictionary, concordance, etc.).

adoption (Galatians 4:5) _____

“Abba” (4:6) _____

Up close & personal: Remember who *you* are . . . As an heir of Christ, every child of God—through the Word of God—has unlimited access to the reading of the will: *who we are, what we've received, where we're headed, and what we'll become*. There is really no excuse for living beneath our spiritual net worth when we have an abundance of everything that pertains to life and godliness! What are some of the blessings you enjoy today as an heir of Christ?

Galatians 4:8–20 Do You Want to Go Backwards?

Wouldn't it be tragic to realize the richness of your spiritual inheritance only to turn away from it and go back to living like a spiritual pauper? But to forfeit your privilege could only mean one thing—that you *chose* to relinquish it, since it cannot be revoked.

Paul was warning his readers not listen to the false teachers that were seducing them away from their freedom in Christ and back into their former bondage to legalism. His appeal is based upon their former existence prior to salvation.

1. Before the Galatians knew Christ, to what/who were they enslaved? v. 8

We can almost hear the disbelief and exasperation in Paul's voice here in verse 9 (paraphrase): "*But now that you know God—or are known by Him—why would you allow yourselves to listen to false teachers who try to persuade you to relinquish your rightful inheritance and return again to slavery?*" To do so would be a tragic betrayal of God's grace!

2. What there these weak believers attempting to do and why? v. 10

3. What was Paul's growing fear for them? v. 11

After his lengthy discourse, Paul's genuine love and concern for the Galatians becomes evident. Years earlier on his first trip to the region of Galatia, these same people had warmly received him. He refers to that initial encounter and the relationship that developed to help motivate them to return to God's grace. Paul pleads with them as their friend: "*I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are*" (NRSV). He had brought the gospel to them without requiring anything; now he wanted them to become as he was—faithful to God and free from all entanglements.

4. During that earlier visit, how was Paul received? vv. 13–14
 - a. What allowed him to preach the gospel?
 - b. Out of a deep appreciation for Paul, to what extent would these people have gone to care for him (an indication perhaps of what kind of illness he suffered)? v. 15

5. What, then, had caused their attitude to change toward Paul? v. 16
 - a. What were the Judaizers doing to win the people over? vv. 17–18

6. In verses 19–20, Paul reveals his love for his readers. To what does he compare himself?
 - a. What is Paul’s passion for these people?



(Pause and think it over . . .) How sad and self-defeating it is when we allow ourselves to turn from the simplicity of our Christian faith to trust in rituals, rules and routines that are based on our own efforts. What we must learn to desire is less of us and more of Him—we must decrease so that He might increase!

Personal: How can you fan the flame of this godly desire within you? Will you do it? Please share your thoughts.

Finally, Paul wraps up his argument against legalism by sharing an allegory—a symbolic interpretation of a spiritual truth that has literal meaning. He points to Abraham and the ongoing controversy involving his two wives and two sons in order to illustrate the two covenants, one by the law and the other by grace.

The historical account of Abraham’s story covers some ten chapters of the Old Testament and, in case you’re not familiar with it, we will look at the highlights from the perspective of Abraham’s progressive age in years.

- 75 yrs—Abraham is called by God to leave his homeland and go to Canaan where God promises Him many descendants (Genesis 12:1–9).
- 85 yrs—Sarah remains barren for many years and becomes impatient; offers her handmaid Hagar to Abraham to be his wife (Genesis 16:1–3).
- 86 yrs—Hagar becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, Ishmael, and contention develops in the home. Sarah evicts Hagar, but the Lord sends Hagar back with a promise to care for her and her son Ishmael (Genesis 16:4–16).
- 99 yrs—Abraham again receives the promise from God that he will have an heir by Sarah and will call his name Isaac (Genesis 17–18).
- 100 yrs—Isaac is born, creating a rivalry with Ishmael, whom his father dearly loves (Genesis 21:1–7).
- 103 yrs—Isaac is weaned at age 3 with a celebration to mark the occasion. Ishmael, now 17, mocks (persecutes) Isaac; Abraham makes a gut-wrenching decision to have Hagar and Ishmael expelled from the home (Genesis 21:8–14).

While on the surface this seems like the natural troubles blended families go through, the connections these individuals have with one another represent spiritual realities that convey important lessons.

1. Take a moment to read for yourself the account in Genesis 21:1-12 along with Galatians 4:21–31 before answering the following . . .
 - a. Who is the *bondwoman*; who is the *freewoman*?
 - b. What does Paul say about the sons born to these two women?

The two women represent the two covenants: Hagar, the Mosaic Covenant—God’s law—handed down from Mt. Sinai; her children are slaves (v. 25). Sarah represents the Abrahamic Covenant—God’s grace; her children are free (v. 26). Just as the law produces slaves so, too, grace produces freedom.

2. In verse 27, Paul quotes from Isaiah 54:1, contrasting the future ancestry of these two women. What does he say?

In verses 28–31, Paul relates this allegory with the outcome of law and grace in the world today.

3. Like Isaac, who does Paul say the New Testament believers are? v. 28

4. Compare the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael (Genesis 21:9) with the persecution of the early believers by the legalists (Judaizers) Paul mentions in verse 29.
 - a. Applying the quote from Genesis 21:10, what does Paul command the Galatian believers to do? v. 30 Put this in your own words.

Paul says in verse 31, “*So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*” In other words, God has given us in Scripture the guidelines of grace to follow instead of the legalism of the law. Our part is to choose to be free and follow through on that choice by getting rid of all rules, rituals and routines that are based on our own self-effort.

<p>Be transparent What do you see in your life that is of your own self-effort? If nothing is evident to you, ask God to show you. What change(s) can you make to free yourself and follow the path of grace?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
--

“It is doubtful if there is any greater joy on earth than the joy of being free. And the ecstasy is heightened if a person has once been in bondage, held captive by a power that is impossible to overcome. Being liberated from such clutches brings pleasure beyond description.”
Chuck Swindoll

A Clear Perspective

“ . . . It pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me . . . ” Galatians 1:15-16a

As God writes your story, use this page to let Him highlight and clarify what He revealed to you this week. Revisit the points that stood out to you and note your findings below.

1. As you studied God’s Word this week, how did your viewpoint change?

2. What word of truth came into sharper focus for you?

3. In what way have you grown closer to the Lord?

4. What relevance is there between this week’s memory verse and your daily life?

Memory Verse: Write out this week’s verse from memory.
