

# Galatians 4

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*A Translation with Interpretation by James Garriss*

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# Paul Explained Justification

## Galatians 3:26-4:11

### Limits of the Text

The previous section (3:19-25) was about the redemptive purpose of the law. The next section (4:12-20) is a personal appeal to the Galatians, a break from Paul's discussion on justification. Between these two, Paul declared the Galatians to be the sons of God and gave implications on how they should live; sonship is the theme that holds these three paragraphs together.

### Translation

26 For you are **all sons of God** by faith in Christ Jesus; 27 for as many of you as were baptized into Christ allowed yourself to be clothed with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for **you** are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if **you** are of Christ, then you are **the descendants of Abraham**, heirs according to the promise.

4:1 Now *here's what* I am saying: As long as the heir is **a minor**, he is no different from a slave. He is owner of everything, **2 but** he is **under guardians** and house managers until the father's appointed day. 3 And we likewise, when we were minors, were enslaved under basic, spiritual elements. 4 But when the fullness of time came, God sent out his Son, born from a woman *and* under the law, 5 so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. 6 And because you are sons, God sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who is calling, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, **but** a son; and if a son, then *you are* an heir through God.

8 **But** at that time, when you did not know God, you served those who by nature were not gods; 9 but now, having known God (or rather, having been known by God), how can you turn back to the weak and poor elements, desiring to serve them **again**? 10 **You** are observing **days**, months, seasons, and years. 11 **I** fear for you, that perhaps I have struggled for you to no avail.

### Interpretation

From 3:6 through 3:25, Paul's argument about justification was very Jewish and very nationalistic in focus. His train of thought ran from Abraham and the covenant to Moses and the law and then to Jesus. In 3:26, Paul reached a climatic application: The Galatian believers, though Gentiles, were the sons of God through their faith in Jesus. From this point forward, Paul will retrace his argument, but his focus will be less

national and more individual, less Jewish and more Gentile.<sup>1</sup> “If Jews could only be justified by faith alone, how much more so the Gentiles.”<sup>2</sup>

26 Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ·

**26 For you are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus;**

In the first paragraph of this section (3:26-29), Paul gave his climatic statement: The Galatians were the sons of God. What he hinted in the previous sections he made explicit here; the blessing of Abraham and the promise of the Spirit belonged to them because of their relationship with God.

This verse is connected to the previous verse by the connective γὰρ (for). Why did the Galatians have no need of being under the law, the child-guardian? They had no need because they were sons of God. Paul shifted from the “we” of Israel to the “you” of the Galatians. Paul had already identified them as sons of Abraham (3:7); now he identified them more broadly as the sons of God. (The reason why they are sons of God is given in the next verse.) The benefits of being the sons of God are everything discussed so far in the book, particularly righteousness (3:6-7) and the Spirit (3:14).

They were the sons of God by faith. Their good works did not make them the sons of God nor did their adherence to the law, but rather their faith.<sup>3</sup>

They were the sons of God in Christ. (This prepositional phrase modifies the verb “are” not the noun “faith.”) Sonship put them in Christ, which refers to have a personal relationship with him. As Paul said previously, “I myself am no longer living, but Christ is living in me” (2:20).

27 ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.

**27 for as many of you as were baptized into Christ allowed yourself to be clothed with Christ.**

Longenecker suggests that verses 27-28 were an early church quote used in baptismal liturgy.<sup>4</sup> The quote parallels 3:26 and thus supports it, though there are parts that really have nothing to do with his argument (free/slave, male/female). One could remove these two verses and maintain an identical argument.

Like the previous verse, this one begins with the connective γὰρ (for). Why were the Galatians the sons of God? They were the sons of God because they had allowed themselves to be clothed with Christ. As putting on new clothes gives one a new look, so being clothed with Christ (Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε) has the idea of a taking on a new nature, one with the characteristics of Christ. Though the Galatians still had the old

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<sup>1</sup> George, 271.

<sup>2</sup> George, 273.

<sup>3</sup> This is genitive of means.

<sup>4</sup> Longenecker, 154-155.

nature, they could live in compassion, kindness, humility, etc.;<sup>5</sup> this referred to the visible results of their salvation. The verb here is the permissive middle, meaning that the subject (you) allowed someone (God) to clothe them. It's permissive because putting on the character of Christ is not something the Galatians could do; salvation (and its effects and benefits) is of God, not man. Paul may have taken this metaphorical language from the book of Judges where it says, "The Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon" (Ju 6:34), and has the idea of taking control. Being clothed with Christ further describes becoming the sons of God by faith in Jesus in the previous verse.

But not everyone is clothed with Christ, only those who were baptized into Christ. To be baptized into Christ (εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε) literally means to be immersed into Christ; it's a reference to a spiritual event that takes place at the moment of salvation. In 2:19 Paul said he had been crucified with Christ. In Ro 6 he brought of all these ideas together when he said the Romans had been baptized into Jesus and thus were baptized into his death (6:3), were buried with him (6:4), and were alive with him (6:8, 11). The basic idea is that God applied the benefits of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to the Galatian believers at salvation. They received Christ's righteousness, were freed from the power of sin, had their sin penalty paid for, and obtained the promise of resurrection.

If this verse was part of a baptismal liturgy, could "baptized into Christ" refer to water baptism? It is much more likely to be spiritual baptism for these reasons:

1. The Galatians were baptized into Christ, not water.
2. The text in Ro 6:1-11 refers to being baptized into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which must be spiritual, not physical, events.
3. If Paul was referring to water baptism, then he would be requiring salvation by works, which would contradict the entire point of this letter.

There are some, however, who believe Paul was referring to water baptism. Knowing that Paul would never argue for salvation by the work of water baptism, they justify their position by noting that baptism immediately followed salvation, so much so that they were often spoken of as one event, even if they were distinct.

When did the Galatians allow themselves to be clothed? Clothing with Christ takes place at the moment of being baptized into Christ. Every person who has been baptized into Christ has allowed himself to be clothed; there is a one-to-one correspondence. The verb is aorist indicative, signifying an event completed in the past. It is not a present, ongoing event nor a command to do so in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> See the fruit of the Spirit in 5:22-23.

28 οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλλην, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἓστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for **you** are all one in Christ Jesus.

These are references to social inequalities. In the mind of a Jewish man, Greeks were lesser men, slaves were lesser men, and women were less than lesser people. And the Greeks had a similar way of thinking about non-Greeks (i.e., barbarians), slaves, and women. With respect to justification by faith, all of these are inequalities are made equal. Jews, Greeks, slaves, free men, men, and women all must be saved by faith.

Of these three pairs, only the first has anything to do with the context of this chapter: Jews and Greeks are made righteous the same way. So why did Paul include the other two? Perhaps, as Longenecker suggests, this was part of a baptism liturgy, so Paul was simply completing the quote.

[Rabbit Trail: This quote is often pulled out of context to justify all sorts of social changes. Paul was not advocating the freedom of all slaves in the Roman Empires (see liberation theologians). Paul was not advocating an egalitarian family or the removal of male leadership in the church (see feminists and goddess worshippers). Paul was not advocating homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle. The context is justification by faith—everyone is saved by faith alone—which is far more important than any social change.]

Paul said the Galatians were all one in Christ; this is essentially a re-statement of 3:26. Every believer has the same position and standing in Jesus. Jewish Christians are not better than Greek Christians. Free Christians are not better than slave Christians. Male Christians are not better than female Christians. There is a unity of position (sonship and daughtership) in Christ under God (our Father).

To summarize this thought (3:26-28): Christians are the sons of God. Justification creates a fundamental shift in righteousness and freedom from sin (baptized into Christ), and it also gives a new nature (clothed with Christ). This brings unity, because these truths are equally true for all believers.

29 εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα ἐστέ, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι.

29 And if **you** are of Christ, then you are **the descendants of Abraham**, heirs according to the promise.

In this verse Paul summarized the entire chapter. If the Galatians were of Christ (and they were, see 3:26), then they were Abraham's descendants (and they were, see 3:9, 14) and Abraham's heirs according to God's promise (and they were, see 3:14, 18).

4:1 Λέγω δέ, ἐφ’ ὅσον χρόνον ὁ κληρονόμος νήπιός ἐστιν, οὐδὲν διαφέρει δούλου κύριος πάντων ὧν, 2 ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους ἐστὶν καὶ οἰκονόμους ἄχρη τῆς προθεσμίας τοῦ πατρὸς.

4:1 Now *here's what* I am saying: As long as the heir is a **minor**, he is no different from a slave. He is owner of everything, 2 **but he is under guardians** and house managers until the father's appointed day.

In the previous chapter, Paul had written how the Galatians inherited the promise to Abraham (3:9, 14, 29). In chapter 4, Paul continued his argument but turned the focus from the inheritance to the heir. In this paragraph (4:1-7) he illustrated the monumental difference between being under law (3:23-25) and in Christ (3:26-29).

In this illustration, Paul referred to a son “growing up in a patrician household,”<sup>6</sup> who is the physical heir of his father's inheritance. So long as that son is a still minor, Paul said it is as if he is a slave. This is probably hyperbole,<sup>7</sup> but it is still plain to see that he does not have access to all the rights, privileges, and resources that are his.

As a slave has a master, so a minor has guardians and house-managers. A guardian (ἐπιτρόπους) is similar (if not identical) in function to the child-guardian of 3:24-25. A house manager (οἰκονόμους) refers more to administrating the minor's possessions, particularly his inheritance.<sup>8</sup> The minor has no choice but to depend upon others to help him and manage on his behalf until the day his father determines he comes of age.

3 οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὅτε ἦμεν νήπιοι, ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἤμεθα δεδουλωμένοι·

3 And we likewise, when we were minors, were enslaved under basic, spiritual elements.

Paul switched from the “you” of the Galatians back to the “we” of Israel (see 3:26). In a similar manner, the children of Israel were like minors while they were under the child-guardian of the law and imprisoned with respect to faith (3:23-24). They were like slaves whose master was the basic, spiritual elements. Basic, spiritual elements (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) refer to the basic components of something, where the “something” is determined by the context. In a context external to the New Testament, the basic components often referred to the four elements—earth, fire, air, water—from which everything was supposedly composed. In the context of a child, the basic components were those things that constitute the foundation of learning, such as the letters of the alphabet, the notes of a musical scale, and the basic principles of math and logic. In the context of Israel and the law, the basic components referred to an

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<sup>6</sup> Longenecker, 161.

<sup>7</sup> Longenecker, 162.

<sup>8</sup> The unrighteous steward in Lk 16:1-8 was a house manager.

elementary understanding of God's redemptive plan of a crucified Messiah. Previously Israel did not understand God's redemptive plan and did not have access to the Savior. But, as Paul said in 3:25, that time was past.

4 ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξάπεστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον, 5 ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν.

4 But when the fullness of time came, God sent out his Son, born from a woman *and* under the law, 5 so that he might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption.

God sent out his Son. This is the culmination of redemptive history! God initiated (i.e., he chose to reveal himself). God sent himself (i.e., Jesus has always been God). God entered time and space (i.e., he incarnated himself). God came for a specific reason (i.e., to give his life as a ransom for many).

God sent out his Son when the fullness of time came. Fullness (πλήρωμα) has the sense of the end, totality, or completion of some period of time.<sup>9</sup> So what made the time full? Some have suggested that fullness refers to the world conditions at that time which made it ideal to spread the gospel: the *Pax Romana* (the peace of Rome), the common language (Greek), and good Roman roads. While the conditions may have been ideal, this doesn't seem consistent with the sense of a completed period of time. Others have suggested it has more to do with the number 400, which is the number of years from Malachi to John the Baptist.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, but there is no indication elsewhere in Scripture to confirm this number. So the exact reason is unknown. But like a patrician father who set the day that his son was to enter manhood (4:2), God had set the day when his Son would enter the world.

God sent his son, and he was born from a woman.<sup>11</sup> He had a literal, physical mother, just like every person does. This speaks of Jesus' humanity, though not necessarily of his virgin birth. God sent his son, and he was under the law.<sup>12</sup> He was born during a time when the law was still Israel's child-guardian, and he fulfilled this law by obeying it.

Why did God send his son? Verse 5 has two ἵνα (so that) clauses that are in parallel and give two reasons. First, God sent his son to redeem Israel. Redeem (ἐξαγοράσῃ) is the same word Paul used back in 3:13; it refers to God's salvific activity of purchasing freedom. The emphasis here is on God's purpose. Second, God sent his son to adopt

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<sup>9</sup> Swanson, DBLG 4445.

<sup>10</sup> 400 is the number of years the Jewish people were exiled in Egypt (Ac 7:6). 430 is the numbers of years separating the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic Law (3:17).

<sup>11</sup> This is an adverbial participle of means.

<sup>12</sup> This is also an adverbial participle of means.



Israel. Adoption (υιοθεσίαν) is a legal term for the adoption of children. Paul used the term figuratively to refer to “a transcendent filial relationship between God and humans,”<sup>13</sup> focusing on the legal aspect. It is the mechanism by which they acquired the rights and privileges hinted at in 4:1, the status of sonship accorded to those who believe and become heirs with Christ of the Abrahamic promise.<sup>14</sup> The emphasis here is man’s response; adoption must be received.

6 Ὅτι δέ ἐστε υἱοί, ἐξάπεστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν κροᾶζον· αββα ὁ πατήρ.

6 And because you are sons, God sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who is calling, “Abba! Father!”

At this point Paul switched back to the “you” of the Galatians. They were sons (3:26); God’s redemptive plan was for those who believed, whether they were ethnically Jewish or not. Everything Paul said in 4:5 about Israel equally applied to Gentiles.

What was the result of being a son? God sent the Spirit of his son into their hearts. This was the fulfillment of the promise (3:14). The evidence that they had God’s Spirit was that he was calling, “Abba! Father!” Calling (κροᾶζον) can refer to calling out or even screaming, but in this context it refers to fervent (not loud) prayer. The Spirit was calling out to Abba (αββα), which is an Aramaic word for father. Jesus used this term when talking to God (e.g., Mk 14:36). In so doing he spoke to God like a child spoke to his father; it was very personal and intimate. This undoubtedly seemed disrespectful (at least at first) to his disciples, because in Judaism one never spoke on such intimate terms with God. When Paul used this term, he signified that the believer has this same type of intimate relationship with God, like a son has with his father.<sup>15</sup> George cautions us to not over sentimentalize the word; it is not associated with infancy, but rather intimacy.<sup>16</sup> Evidence of God’s Spirit did not come through miraculous works, ecstatic visions, speaking in tongues, or other sensational phenomena<sup>17</sup> but through the privilege of intimacy with God in prayer, something unheard of in Judaistic thought.

7 ὥστε οὐκέτι εἶ δούλος ἀλλὰ υἱός· εἰ δὲ υἱός, καὶ κληρονόμος διὰ θεοῦ.

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

Paul wrapped this paragraph up with a summary. The Galatians were not slaves to the law but sons of God. And since they were sons, they were heirs. This summary is very similar to 3:29, but it adds the truth that the Galatian believers had the full rights,

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<sup>13</sup> Arndt, 115.

<sup>14</sup> George, 305.

<sup>15</sup> Kittel, 1:6.

<sup>16</sup> George, 307.

<sup>17</sup> George, 307.

privileges, and resources of a son of God. There is nothing that God withheld from them; there was certainly nothing additional to be gained from turning to Judaism.

“The guardianship of the Mosaic law was meant to be for a time when God’s people were in their spiritual minority; but now with the coming of Christ, the time set by the Father has been fulfilled and Christians are to live freely as mature sons ‘in Christ,’ not under the law’s supervision.”<sup>18</sup>

8 Ἀλλὰ τότε μὲν οὐκ εἰδότες θεὸν ἐδουλεύσατε τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὖσιν θεοῖς· 9 νῦν δὲ γνόντες θεόν, μᾶλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ, πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα οἷς πάλιν ἄνωθεν δουλεύειν θέλετε;

**8 But** at that time, when you did not know God, you served those who by nature were not gods; 9 but now, having known God (or rather, having been known by God), how can you turn back to the weak and poor elements, desiring to serve them **again**?

In the previous two paragraphs Paul had continued to explain justification; because they believed in Jesus, the Galatian churches were son of Gods and heirs. In this paragraph (4:8-11), Paul became more personal and applicational. This justification he had been talking about wasn’t just theoretical; it had worked a change in them. If they were sons and heirs, they shouldn’t be acting like slaves again.

There was a time when the Galatians did not know (εἰδότες) God. They didn’t have any information<sup>19</sup> or knowledge about God, neither intuitively nor instinctively,<sup>20</sup> and certainly not personally.

When they did not know God, the Galatians served those who by nature were not gods. The verb served (ἐδουλεύσατε) is related to the word slave in verses 1 and 7. It means to act like someone who is in total service to another person.<sup>21</sup> When they didn’t know God, they were slaves to non-gods, the false gods in their pagan culture.

There is a contrast between the “that time” of 4:8 and the “now” of 4:9.<sup>22</sup> At that time they did not know about God, but now they knew God. The verb for knowing (γνόντες) God in verse 9 refers to a personal, experiential knowledge of God. It is not the knowledge of God that one might learn from reading books or listening to a teacher’s lecture; it is the knowledge that comes from spending time with and interacting with someone. A husband *knows about* the President by watching the evening news, but he *knows* his wife personally and intimately by sharing life together. This is the same sort of personal language that Paul used in 3:5, where God was giving the Spirit and working miracles among the Galatians, and in 4:6, where the Spirit calls

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<sup>18</sup> Longenecker, 161.

<sup>19</sup> Arndt, 693.

<sup>20</sup> Zhodiatas, G3608a.

<sup>21</sup> Arndt, 259.

<sup>22</sup> Longenecker, 180.

out, “Abba! Father!”

While it is true that the Galatians knew God, it was more technically precise to say that God knew them. The phrase in the parenthesis is a correction to the previous phrase,<sup>23</sup> a reminder that God initiates and mankind responds.

Paul asked how they could turn back to weak and poor elements. This is the climax of his argument in this paragraph. Having personally experienced a relationship with Jesus, how was it possible that they would want to go back to something comprised of weak and poor elements? Elements (στοιχεῖα) is the same word that Paul used in 4:3. There, as here, it had the context of the law and referred to an elementary understanding of God’s redemptive plan of a crucified Messiah. He further described these elements as weak—the law was powerless to make them righteous—and poor—the law had no spiritual value. These “highly uncomplimentary adjectives”<sup>24</sup> highlight Paul’s inability to understand why they would do this.

When Paul stated that the gods that the Galatians served were not really gods at all, that was not surprising. But when he explicitly compared the Galatians’ enslavement (to non-gods) to the Jews’ enslavement (to the basic, spiritual elements of the law (4:3)), that was very surprising.<sup>25</sup> It must have shocked the Galatians and the Judaizers both, especially since the Judaizers believed they were enhancing faith in Christ with Jewish traditions (see the next verse for examples).<sup>26</sup> Although their respective life situations were very different on one level (the law vs. false gods), it was identical on another level (slavery vs. freedom). Even if this was a hyperbolic comparison, it is true that compared to knowing Jesus, both Judaism and paganism are of no spiritual value.

10 ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτούς,

**10 You are observing days, months, seasons, and years.**

As an example of how the Galatians were in the process of turning to Judaism, he mentioned days, months, season, and years. Although the exact events Paul had in mind are unknown, they probably referred to various times on the Jewish calendar that were of religious significance (i.e., the cultic calendar). Apparently the Galatians were beginning to observe some of these events.<sup>27</sup> Potential events include:

- Days – Sabbath days (Ex 20:8)
- Months – New moon offerings (Nu 10:10)
- Seasons – Passover (Ex 12) and other great yearly festivals
- Years – the year of Jubilee (Lv 25:1-4)

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<sup>23</sup> μᾶλλον δὲ (or rather) introduces an expression or thought that supplements and thereby corrects what has preceded (Arndt, 614).

<sup>24</sup> Longenecker, 181.

<sup>25</sup> He used the same verb (δουλεύω) in both verses.

<sup>26</sup> George, 315.

<sup>27</sup> “Are observing” is in the intensive middle, emphasizing their participation.

11 φοβοῦμαι ὑμᾶς μή πως εἰκῆ κεκοπίακα εἰς ὑμᾶς.

11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have struggled for you to no avail.

Paul ended this section with a note of strong concern: It's entirely possible that the Galatians would apostatize despite all his hard work. If this happened then all his efforts would be wasted. His uncertainty is consistent with what he said later in 4:20b, "I am uncertain about you."

This paragraph can be summarized: Every form of religion, whether total absence of God (paganism) or working to please God (Judaism) is totally worthless for obtaining righteousness, particularly when compared to personally knowing and experience God by means of Jesus. It's shocking to think that someone would trade knowing God for anything else.

## Structural Diagram

For  
you are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus  
for  
as many as were baptized allowed yourself to be clothed

There is neither Jew nor Greek  
there is neither slave nor free  
there is neither male nor female  
for  
you are all one in Christ Jesus  
And  
if you are of Christ  
then you are the descendants of Abraham

as long as the heir is **a minor**,  
he is no different from a slave.

|  
He is owner of everything,  
**but**  
he is **under guardians** and house managers

And  
we were enslaved under basic, spiritual elements

But  
God sent out his son  
so that he might redeem those under the law  
so that we might receive adoption

And  
God sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts

Therefore  
you are no longer a slave  
**but** a son

and  
if a son  
then you are an heir through God

But  
when you did not know God  
you served those who by nature were not gods  
but now

having known God  
how can you turn back to the weak and poor elements

You are observing days, months, seasons, and years.

I fear for you,  
that perhaps I have struggled for you to no avail.

## Tracing the Argument

**External** – Abraham’s faith made him righteous. The law cannot make people righteous, but it can make people aware of their unrighteousness. Both the promise to Abraham and the Law of Moses point people to Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus do not need the law, but they will receive the inheritance promised to Abraham. Having made his argument (3:6-25), Paul then applied it specifically to the Galatians: They were the sons of God, the heirs of the promise.

**Internal** – Paul asserted that the Galatians were the sons of God, the descendants of

Abraham, the heirs of the promise, all because they had faith in Jesus. When they put their faith in Jesus, they took on his character (3:27); they received the Spirit who calls “Abba! Father!” and they had no need to obey the law.

### **Textual Outline**

1. The Galatians were the sons of God (3:26-28).
  - a. They had faith in Christ.
  - b. They were clothed with Christ.
2. The Galatians were the heirs of the promise (3:29-4:7).
  - a. They had been adopted.
  - b. They had received the Spirit.
3. The Galatians were living like slaves (4:8-11).

### **Central Truth of the Text**

Paul wrote Galatians 3:26-4:11 in order to teach Galatians believers the privileges they had as sons of God.

### **Teaching Outline**

God’s people are his children, so today I want to help you live like a child of God. From this text we are going to see 3 behaviors of those who are the children of God.

1. Since you are a child of God, display the character of Christ (3:26-28).
2. Since you are a child of God, relate to your Father (3:29-4:7).
3. Since you are a child of God, don’t try to earn your position (4:8-11).

## Galatians 4:12-20

### Limits of the Text

This section is a break from Paul's discussion on justification, a personal and affectionate appeal to the Galatians. In one sense, it's a huge parenthesis in the chapter, because he'll return to the theme of sonship in 4:21.

### Translation

12 I am pleading with you, brothers, become like me, because I also *became* as you. You did nothing wrong to me; 13 and you know that I preached the gospel to you the first time because of a debilitating illness of the flesh, 14 and you did not treat your trial because of my flesh with contempt or disdain it, but you welcomed me as a messenger of God, as Christ Jesus. 15 Where now *is* your state of blessedness? For I testify to you that if possible you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 So have I become your enemy by telling the truth to you? 17 They are very committed to you, not in a commendable manner, **but** they are desiring to exclude you, so that you might be very committed to them; 18 and *it is* good to always be committed to in a good manner and not only when I am present with you. 19 My children, I am again experiencing birth pangs **for you** until Christ is formed in you; 20 and I want to be with you now and change my tone, because **I** am uncertain about you.

### Interpretation

This section of the book is an abrupt change from what precedes. It's as if Paul took a deep breath and paused from his tongue-lashing. He goes from "you are foolish," "you want to be enslaved by worthless things," and "I'm scared all my work with you was in vain" to pleading for a change. This section (excluding the attack) is almost fatherly (or pastoral or affectionate) in tone; they are "the strongest words of personal affection Paul uses in any of his letters."<sup>28</sup>

12 Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ, ὅτι καὶ γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς, ἀδελφοί, δέομαι ὑμῶν.

12 I am pleading with you, brothers, become like me, because I also *became* as you.

Paul became like the Galatians. There is no verb in this clause; it is picked up from the previous clause. In his efforts to lead them to Jesus, Paul stopped participating in Jewish-law requirements (e.g., dietary laws against pork). He put himself in a position to be able to relate to them effectively, to build relationships and win them to Christ.

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law — though I myself am not under the law — to win those under the law. To those who are outside the law, like one outside the law — not being outside God's law, but under

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<sup>28</sup> MacArthur, 114.

the law of Christ—to win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. (1 Co 9:20-22, HCSB)

There is strong irony here: Paul, a Jew, became like a Galatian, a Gentile, and now the Galatians, Gentiles, wanted to become like the Judaizers, Jews.

Paul pleaded with them to become like him. Paul was pleading (δέομαι); he was begging and imploring. This reveals the depth of emotions, the love and the care, that he had for them. Paul wanted them to become like him (Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ). In what way were the Galatians to be like Paul? This is probably a reference back to 4:9, the position of being free instead of being enslaved. In a larger sense, it probably returns to the theme of the book in 2:16, righteousness is by faith in Jesus alone. Paul wanted them to be justified like he was, to be free from the pride that says, “I can do something and make myself righteous.” Paul’s words here are similar to his earlier words to Agrippa:

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?” “I wish before God,” replied Paul, “that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am—except for these chains.” (Ac 26:28-29 NASB95)

In other letters Paul said, “Imitate me!” a thought that is similar (though not identical) to this verse (e.g., 1 Co 4:14-16, Php 3:17, 1 Th 1:6).

οὐδέν με ἠδικήσατε· 13 οἴδατε δὲ ὅτι δι’ ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν τὸ πρότερον,

[You did nothing wrong to me; 13 and you know that I preached the gospel to you the first time because of a debilitating illness of the flesh,](#)

Having given his exhortation to become like him, Paul once again reminded the Galatians of the past. He recalled that they did nothing wrong to him.<sup>29</sup> When had they done nothing wrong to Paul? When they abandoned their loyalty to the one who called them by the grace of Christ for another gospel (1:6), they have done wrong to both Christ and Paul. Thus Paul was bringing to their minds the period of time before their ongoing apostasy, reminding them how they reacted when he first brought the gospel to them. At that time they did nothing wrong to him; in fact, as the following verses show, they treated him very well.

Beginning in verse 13, Paul reminded them of the time when they did him no wrong. Apparently Paul did not plan to come or to stay in their area, but then he contracted a debilitating illness (ἀσθένειαν). A sickness of some sort incapacitated Paul; it either forced Paul to go to Galatia,<sup>30</sup> or it detained him there. What illness did he have? Was it

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<sup>29</sup> “Did wrong” is an aorist verb, indicating completed action some time in the past.

<sup>30</sup> Longenecker, 191.



related to his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 2:7)? These questions are impossible to answer with the information at hand, but—surprise!—this hasn’t stopped people from guessing. George says the mostly likely three possibilities are malaria, epilepsy, or ophthalmia.<sup>31</sup>

14 καὶ τὸν πειρασμὸν ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε, ἀλλὰ ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ ἐδέξασθέ με, ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν.

14 and you did not treat your trial because of my flesh with contempt or disdain it, but you welcomed me as a messenger of God, as Christ Jesus.

Paul’s illness was not pleasant. When the Galatians took him in, it became a trial (πειρασμὸν) for them, something that revealed their nature and character.<sup>32</sup> Most people would have naturally treated this trial with contempt and disdained it.<sup>33</sup> To treat with contempt (ἐξουθενήσατε) means “to regard another as of no significance and therefore worthy of maltreatment.”<sup>34</sup> To disdain (ἐξεπτύσατε) came from the idea of spitting in a gesture of contempt<sup>35</sup> and means to loathe, reject, scorn, or despise.<sup>36</sup> But the Galatians did not treat their trial this way,<sup>37</sup> their character was revealed, and it was of high quality.

The exact reason that Paul’s debilitating illness was a trial for them is not known. Perhaps they took care of Paul in his illness. Perhaps they had to listen to him preach in such a terrible condition. But whatever the reason, Paul used the occasion to preach the gospel to them. How convicting! Paul realized every situation, no matter how difficult, was a divine opportunity to share the good news of Jesus.<sup>38</sup>

The Galatians welcomed Paul as if he were God’s messenger (ἄγγελον θεοῦ). This part of the verse signals a shift; it’s where Paul reminded them they believed the gospel he had preached. They heard his message, and it was as if Jesus Christ himself was with them.

15 ποῦ οὖν ὁ μακαρισμὸς ὑμῶν; μαρτυρῶ γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι εἰ δυνατὸν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑμῶν ἐξορύξαντες ἐδώκατέ μοι.

15 Where now is your state of blessedness? For I testify to you that if possible you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

Paul used a question to contrast the past with the present: Where now is your state of

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<sup>31</sup> George, 322-323.

<sup>32</sup> Arndt, 793.

<sup>33</sup> These words were used pretty much synonymously (Longenecker, 192).

<sup>34</sup> Arndt, 352.

<sup>35</sup> Arndt, 309.

<sup>36</sup> Swanson, DBLG1746.

<sup>37</sup> Note that the direct object of the verb is trial, not “me” (Paul). Many English translations (including the NET, ISV, ESV, and HCSB) miss this and translate it something like “you did not despise or reject me.” The NASB95 and the LEB get it right. The LEB says, “You did not despise or disdain *what was* a trial for you.”

<sup>38</sup> George, 323-324.

blessedness? State of blessedness (μακαρισμός) refers to a state of happiness resulting from favorable circumstances.<sup>39</sup> It is a term for “the distinctive joy, which comes through participation in the divine kingdom.”<sup>40</sup> They had seen the beauty and the truth of the gospel. They had the peace and contentment and joy and satisfaction that can only come from salvation. Paul wanted to know if what they had with the Judaizers was better than the beauty of the gospel. He perceived (somehow) that they were not still in a state of blessedness. He knew that in their abandoning, they had lost their blessing.

Paul testified that their happiness was so great that they would have torn out their eyes and given them to him. To testify (μαρτυρῶ) is “to confirm or attest something on the basis of personal knowledge or belief.”<sup>41</sup> Paul remembered the way they treated him; he knew personally they would have done anything for him. “Torn out your eyes” is a literary device, probably a hyperbolic idiom. This expression has the same idea as “I would give you the shirt off my back,”<sup>42</sup> but it included the impossibility language of a hyperbole.<sup>43</sup> “I would rip my eyes out and give them to you.” Certainly the meaning is clear enough: The change in their lives was so amazing that out of gratitude they would have done anything for Paul.

16 ὥστε ἐχθρὸς ὑμῶν γέγονα ἀληθεύων ὑμῖν;

16 So have I become your enemy by telling the truth to you?

Paul returned to the present. He asked if had become their enemy by telling them the truth. “Telling the truth” (ἀληθεύων) is a participle in the present tense; he was telling them now what he had told them when they were together. The message had not changed. This verse is a microcosm for the entire paragraph.

George thinks this verse is comparable to the tension that pastors face when correcting errant sheep. On the one hand, they give truth without compromise; on the other hand, they are loving and compassionate as they do so.<sup>44</sup> “But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ” (Eph 4:15, HCSB).

17 ζηλοῦσιν ὑμᾶς οὐ καλῶς, ἀλλὰ ἐκκλειῖσαι ὑμᾶς θέλουσιν, ἵνα αὐτοὺς ζηλοῦτε·

17 They are very committed to you, not in a commendable manner, **but** they are desiring to exclude you, so that you might be very committed to them;

This sentence is a change, both in tone (from affectionate to biting) and in subject (from

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<sup>39</sup> Louw, 1:301.

<sup>40</sup> Kittel, 548.

<sup>41</sup> Arndt, 617.

<sup>42</sup> Longenecker, 193.

<sup>43</sup> This is a second class condition, where the apodosis is omitted and implied. The sense of it is this: “If it was possible to rip your eyes out and give them to me (and we know it’s not possible), (then you would have done so).”

<sup>44</sup> George, 326.

the Galatians to the Judaizers). As Paul recounted the change that came over the Galatians, he remembered the source of these problems, the Judaizers. Paul inserted a short attack on their motives.

The Judaizers were committed to the Galatians. Committed (ζηλοῦσιν) is a verb that can be good or bad. It can mean to “be positively and intensely interested in something,” or it can mean “to have intense negative feelings over another’s achievements or success.”<sup>45</sup> There are a number of nuances to this word (desire, exert themselves, are dedicated, are deeply interested, are concerned, are intent upon<sup>46</sup>) and English translations vary widely (eagerly seek you, zealously court you, make much of you, are devoted to you<sup>47</sup>). Lightfoot notes that the word has a romancing and courting feel to it. They court you, wanting first place in your heart.<sup>48</sup> The word “committed” fits both the immediate context and the larger context. In the immediate context, it aptly describes the Judaizers’ pursuit of the Galatians, and the Galatians’ response back—the same word is used for both. And it also fits in the next verse as part of the maxim—the same word is used there as well. In the broader context of the letter, it gives some idea of the Judaizers’ interactions with the Galatians. Despite the motivational problems Paul pointed out, it seems the Judaizers really wanted to do the right thing, much as Paul did when he was a Pharisee. They were committed to helping the Galatians “complete” their salvation.

The Judaizers were committed but not in a commendable manner. Commendable means to meet “expectations of personal excellence” or “in a manner free from objection.”<sup>49</sup> Their commitment could not be commended because they desired to exclude the Galatians; their motivations were impure. To exclude (ἐκκλεῖσαι) means to remove someone from an association or to separate.<sup>50</sup> From what or whom did the Judaizers want the Galatians to be excluded? Paul doesn’t answer this question directly, but it seems likely that the “whom” is Paul himself.

The Judaizers wanted to separate the Galatians from Paul so that the Galatians would become committed to the Judaizers; the Judaizers wanted to make them dependent upon them. But in Paul’s mind, of course, exclusion from Paul is exclusion from saving truth is exclusion from Jesus (though it’s doubtful the Judaizers would have characterized it that way).

The motives are very different. Paul said “become like me so that you’ll become dependent upon God;” the Judaizers said “become like us so that you’ll become dependent upon us.” And when the Galatians became dependent upon the Judaizers,

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<sup>45</sup> Arndt, 427.

<sup>46</sup> Arndt, 427; Swanson DBLG 2420; Louw, 1:293.

<sup>47</sup> NASB, NKJV, ESV, ISV respectively.

<sup>48</sup> Lightfoot, 176-177.

<sup>49</sup> Arndt, 505.

<sup>50</sup> Louw, 1:449.

the Judaizers would have something to be proud of (6:13). It's the difference between God being praised and men (Judaizers) being praised. Indeed the Judaizers' commitment was not commendable; they were looking for more notches to put on their belt.

18 καλὸν δὲ ζηλοῦσθαι ἐν καλῷ πάντοτε καὶ μὴ μόνον ἐν τῷ παρεῖναί με πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

18 and *it is good to always be committed to in a good manner and not only when I am present with you.*

Paul may have been quoting a maxim here,<sup>51</sup> perhaps something like, "Isn't it nice to feel loved, especially by those who truly have your best interest at heart?" His unstated implication was that the Judaizers didn't actually have their best interest at heart, thus this is another statement about the Judaizers' motives.

If the Judaizers had been committed in a good manner, Paul would find this to be good, even if he was not present with them. Paul would have let the Judaizers' disciple the Galatians if they had the right gospel. He told the Philippians, "Others proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely, seeking to cause me trouble in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just that in every way, whether out of false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed. And in this I rejoice" (Php 1:17-18, HCSB). Paul wasn't looking for groupies; he was looking for the gospel to be preached and lives to be changed accordingly.

19 τέκνα μου, οὗς πάλιν ᾠδίνω μέχρις οὗ μορφωθῆ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν.

19 *My children, I am again experiencing birth pangs for you until Christ is formed in you;*

Paul returned his focus to the Galatians with a term of endearment, calling them his children. He said he was experiencing birth pangs, comparing himself to a pregnant woman in labor, the only place in Scripture he did so. This comparison reveals the intense, emotional anguish that Paul was undergoing for his friends.

Paul was experiencing birth pangs until Christ was formed in the Galatians. This is a dissonant play on words; it means he was experiencing the pains of labor until the Galatians became pregnant with Jesus. This shift in metaphors is jarring, but it reveals the depth of Paul's emotion for his friends.

What does it mean to have "Christ formed in me?" This is perhaps the most difficult portion of the text. The verb (μορφωθῆ) means to take on the nature and characteristics of Christ. It's aorist tense, which means it has a completed aspect. At the grammatical level it's an indefinite temporal clause, which means it's a future event. So at some

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<sup>51</sup> Longenecker, 18.

point in the future the Galatians would (hopefully) complete the event of taking on the nature of Christ.

So what is this future event? Does it refer to justification or sanctification? The answer depends upon whether the Galatians were genuinely saved or not. Suppose the Judaizers were successful, and the Galatians believed their “another gospel.” This would demonstrate that the Galatians were never really justified at all, and so “Christ is formed in you” would refer to justification. But suppose the Galatians are genuinely saved (and thus merely confused), and that after reading Paul’s letter they rejected the Judaizers’ “another gospel.” This would demonstrate that they were really justified after all, and so “Christ is formed in you” would be a reference to sanctification.

20 ἤθελον δὲ παρεῖναι πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἄρτι καὶ ἀλλάξαι τὴν φωνήν μου, ὅτι ἀποροῦμαι ἐν ὑμῖν.

20 and I want to be with you now and change my tone, because I am uncertain about you.

Paul greatly desired to be with the Galatians in person so he could lead them back to Christ, but he could not.<sup>52</sup> He’s been (verbally) beating them up in this letter, and he knows it, and he really wants to change his tone to one of praise. But he could only do that if he was certain they believed. Sometimes Paul wrote as if the Galatians still genuinely believed in Jesus; at other times as if they had apostatized. This verse has the clearest expression of the situation: He just didn’t know for sure. And that was tearing him up inside.

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<sup>52</sup> Perhaps because the Jerusalem council was about to begin.

## Structural Diagram

become like me  
because  
I *became* as you.

You did nothing wrong to me  
and  
you know that I preached the gospel to you  
    and  
    you did not treat with contempt  
    nor  
    d disdain your trial  
    but  
    you welcomed me  
    For  
    I testify that you would have torn out your eyes  
                                    and  
                                    given them to me  
  
    So  
    have I become your enemy  
        by telling the truth to you

They are very committed to you  
    not in a commendable manner  
but  
they are desiring to exclude you,  
    so that  
    you might be very committed to them;  
  
and  
*it is* good to always be committed to

I am again experiencing birth pangs for you  
    until Christ is formed in you;  
and  
I want to be with you now  
    and  
    change my tone,  
because  
I am uncertain about you.

## Tracing the Argument

**External** – This section is a break in the flow of Paul’s argument; the previous and next sections are about sonship.

**Internal** – Paul desired the Galatians become like him, free in Christ. He reminded them of their past (salvation), attacked the motives of the Judaizers, and desired their spiritual maturity.

## Textual Outline

1. Paul reminded the Galatians of their salvation (4:12-16).
2. Paul attacked the motives of the Judaizers (4:17-18).
3. Paul expressed his desire for their spiritual formation (4:19-20).

## Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Galatians 4:12-20 in order to plead with Galatian believers to stay free in

Christ.

### **Teaching Outline**

God's people remain free in Christ; they avoid being enslaved by anything that adds to their salvation. God wants the people of this church to remain free in Christ. From this text in Galatians we are going to see 4 ways to remain free in Christ.

1. Remain free by remembering your salvation (4:12-15).
2. Remain free by listening to truth (4:16).
3. Remain free by avoiding isolation (4:17-18).
4. Remain free by letting Christ be formed in you (4:19-20).

## Galatians 4:21-31

### Limits of the Text

This section is the “allegory” of Hagar and Sarah.

### Translation

21 Tell me, you who desire to be **under the law**, are you not listening to **the law**? 22 For it has been written that Abraham had **two sons**, one by the slave girl and one by the free *woman*. 23 **But** the *son* by the slave girl was born **according to the flesh**, and the *son* by the free *woman was born* through the promise. 24 All this is being symbolized; for they represent two covenants, one from Mt. Sinai, bearing *children* into slavery, who is Hagar. 25 And Hagar is **Mt. Sinai** in Arabia and corresponds to the current Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem from above is the **free woman**, who is our mother; 27 for it has been written,

“Rejoice infertile woman, you who are not giving birth,  
let loose and shout, you who are not having labor pains;  
because many *will be* the children of the desolate,  
more than she who has the husband.”

28 And **you**, brothers, are **the children of promise just as Isaac**. 29 And just as the *son* who was born according to flesh was persecuting the *son who was born* according to spirit then, so *it is* even now. 30 **But** what does the Scripture say? “Throw the slave girl and her son out! For the son of the slave girl will never, ever inherit with the son” of the free *woman*! 31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave girl **but** of the free.

### Interpretation

After his parenthesis, his break for a personal appeal (4:12-20), Paul returned to his main line of thinking. He continued with the idea of sonship, but used a story to make his point. By mirror-reading the text, it seems that the Judaizers had already told the story of Hagar and Sarah to the Galatians and used it as a proof-text to demonstrate the importance of obedience to the law. They would have argued that the children of Abraham through Isaac are the Jews, and they alone inherited the law. To be the children of Abraham, the Galatians should obey the law as well. In response, Paul gave his counter-interpretation of the story, which ended in the crescendo to get rid of the slave woman and her son, a reference to the Judaizers and their teachings.<sup>53</sup>

21 Λέγετέ μοι, οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι, τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε;

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<sup>53</sup> George, 335.



21 Tell me, you who desire to be **under the law**, are you not listening to **the law**?

Paul started a new thought here and addressed those who wanted to be under the law. The Galatians desired to obey the requirements of the law, such as observing days, months, and so on (4:10).

Paul asked them if they were listening to the law. Listening (ἀκούετε) in this context meant more than hearing; it meant to understand and obey.<sup>54</sup> George paraphrases the verse this way: “Do you realize what you are getting into?” Paul asked. ‘Do you really know what is involved in what you are about to do? Then listen more carefully to what the law itself says.’<sup>55</sup>

Paul used law (νόμον) in two slightly different ways in this sentence. “Under the law” (ὕπὸ νόμον) referred to the Mosaic Law, the basis for Judaism. “Listening to the law” (τὸν νόμον...ἀκούετε) referred to the Torah, which included the Mosaic Law, but also included the story of Hagar and Sarah.

The text that follows can be broken down into three parts: The history of Hagar and Sarah (4:22-23), the interpretation of the story (4:24-27), and the application of the story (4:28-31).

22 γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι Ἀβραὰμ δύο υἱοὺς ἔσχεν, ἓνα ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης καὶ ἓνα ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρως.

22 For it has been written that Abraham had **two sons**, one by the slave girl and one by the free *woman*.

In this verse, Paul began to tell the story of the sons of Abraham and his wives and sons. “It has been written” (γέγραπται) typically signifies an Old Testament quote,<sup>56</sup> but in this case Paul gave a summary of the story, just enough to jog their memories. The complete story is found in Ge 16, 17, and 21.

It is interesting that Paul did not begin by naming the characters in the story; in fact, Sarah and Ishmael are never named. This is interesting because the Galatians were not Jewish. How did they know whom Paul was referring to? This seems to indicate that the Judaizers had already told this story to the Galatians, thus they were familiar with the characters.

Paul began by setting up a series of contrasting relationships:

Ishmael	Isaac
Hagar	Sarah
The slave girl	The free woman

<sup>54</sup> See Is 6:9-10.

<sup>55</sup> George, 335.

<sup>56</sup> As it does in 4:27.

23 ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης κατὰ σάρκα γεγέννηται, ὁ δὲ ἐκ τῆς ἐλευθέρου δι' ἐπαγγελίας.

23 **But the son by the slave girl was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman was born through the promise.**

This verse begins with a strong contrast (ἀλλ'). The fact that Abraham had two sons is strongly contrasted with the fact that he only had one heir, the son who was born through the promise from God. Thus Paul tied the story back to his previous discussion, particularly 3:29.

Ishmael, the son of the slave girl, was born according to the flesh. Flesh (σάρκα) can refer to the natural body, as it does in 1:16, 2:20, and 3:3. If Paul used the word this way it would mean that Ishmael was born through natural procreation. But flesh can also refer to sinful desires, as it does in 5:13, 5:16-19, 5:24, and 6:8. If Paul used the word this way it would mean that Ishmael was born as a result of Abraham and Sarah's sinful attempt to help out God's plan. It's difficult to know for sure, but probably the later is more likely, as it casts the birth of Ishmael, an attempt to add to the promise, in a negative light.

Isaac, the son of the free woman, was born through the promise. Promise (ἐπαγγελίας) highlights God's participation in the story. Sarah was too old to have children, yet God intervened and she conceived and gave birth to the son of the promise.

Born according to the flesh	Born according to promise
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24 ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα· αὗται γάρ εἰσιν δύο διαθήκαι, μία μὲν ἀπὸ ὄρους Σινᾶ εἰς δουλείαν γεννώσα, ἥτις ἐστὶν Ἀγάρ.

24 **All this is being symbolized; for they represent two covenants, one from Mt. Sinai, bearing children into slavery, who is Hagar.**

Having ever so briefly giving the story, Paul began to interpret it by saying that this story is being symbolized (ἀλληγορούμενα). Most translations translate this verb as allegory (LEB, NASB95, ESV, NET); others translate it as figurative (NIV), symbolic (NKJV), or an illustration (HCSB). Is the story of Hagar and Sarah an allegory? It depends upon how allegory is defined. In the tradition of Philo, Origen, and others who practiced Alexandrian hermeneutics, this story is not allegory.<sup>57</sup> "Allegorical interpretation seeks to discern a hidden meaning in a given story or text, a meaning that may be entirely divorced from the historical referent alluded to in the narrative itself."<sup>58</sup> "According to Philo, these two women represented two stages in the development of the mind, the one (Sarah) that reaches for the higher wisdom of philosophy and the

<sup>57</sup> Chrysostom and others who practiced Antiochene hermeneutics opposed the allegorical tradition of interpretation.

<sup>58</sup> George, 338.

other (Hagar) that is relegated to the lower learning of more basic studies.”<sup>59</sup> In the modern sense of the word, it is not allegory. An allegory is defined as “a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms” or “figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another.”<sup>60</sup> *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan is an example of this meaning of the word allegory. However, in the sense of Jewish rabbis who were contemporary with Paul, Paul’s interpretation of the story of Hagar and Sarah is an allegory. R. P. C. Hanson explains how Paul interpreted the story in a manner consistent with the rabbis:

“Paul is not here trying to emancipate the meaning of the passage from its historical content and transmute it into a moral sentiment or a philosophical truth...[rather] he is envisaging a critical situation which took place under the Old Covenant...as forecasting and repeated by a situation under the New Covenant. The ‘similar situation’ typology has here been strained and distorted in an unconvincing but highly Rabbinic fashion into allegory.”<sup>61</sup>

Given the modern sense of the word allegory, words like figurative or symbolic are probably a better translation. “It is best to identify this literal, historical account as simply analogous to and illustrative of the spiritual truth that Paul elucidates with it.”<sup>62</sup>

Paul said that this story was being symbolized. This verb is in the passive voice, indicating that someone, presumably the Judaizers, had already been symbolizing the story. So Paul symbolized it again, this time giving the correct interpretation and using it for his own purposes. Instead of contrasting Hagar with Sarah, he contrasted the physical with the spiritual:

Mosaic covenant	New covenant
Mt. Sinai	Mt. Zion
Slave to the law	Freedom from the law

Based upon the context of the letter, Paul implied other contrasts:

Slave to sin	Freedom from sin
Law-centered	Christ-centered
Salvation by works	Salvation by imputed righteousness

25 τὸ δὲ Ἀγὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ· συστοιχεῖ δὲ τῇ νῦν Ἱερουσαλήμ, δουλεύει γὰρ μετὰ τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς.

**25 And Hagar is Mt. Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the current Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children.**

<sup>59</sup> George, 339.

<sup>60</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/allegory>.

<sup>61</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, quoted in Longenecker, 209.

<sup>62</sup> MacArthur, 122.

“For Jews generally, the salvation-historical line of Scripture began with Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, extended on through Moses and the Torah given at Mt. Sinai, and came to focus in the present city of Jerusalem as the epitome of Israel’s hopes regarding the law, the land, and the temple.”<sup>63</sup> This was probably the connection that the Judaizers had made. Paul realigned the relationships, connecting Hagar to Mt. Sinai, the Mosaic covenant, and Jerusalem and saying that all of these are in bondage. “This lineup would have been very disturbing to any patriotic Jew just as it must have been to the Judaizers of Galatia.”<sup>64</sup>

Paul connected Hagar to Mt. Sinai based upon the Genesis account. Abraham sent the sons of his concubines away the east (Ge 25:6). Ishmael and his sons settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt (Ge 25:12-18). According to Jewish tradition, this land was in Arabia, where Mt Sinai was located. He then connected Mt. Sinai to Jerusalem, because the Judaizers claimed their authority was from Jerusalem. Finally, he connected Jerusalem to slavery, because everyone who submits himself to Judaism is in slavery to it. “Just as Hagar and Ishmael were both slaves so also were all those who sought to be made right with God on the basis of the law-observant system centered in Jerusalem in a state of spiritual servitude.”<sup>65</sup>

Arabia (outside the land of promise)	The land of promise
Earthly Jerusalem	Heavenly Jerusalem
Children who are slaves	Children who are free

Based upon the context of the letter, Paul again implied other contrasts:

The Judaizers were slaves	Paul was free
Anyone under the law is a slave	Anyone in Christ is free

26 ἡ δὲ ἄνω Ἰερουσαλήμ ἐλευθέρα ἐστίν, ἣτις ἐστὶν μήτηρ ἡμῶν·

26 But the Jerusalem from above is the **free woman**, who is our mother;

In contrast to the earthly Jerusalem, Paul connected Sarah, the free woman, to the heavenly Jerusalem. The writer of Hebrews makes a similar connection between Abraham and Sarah and the heavenly Jerusalem. He said that Abraham was looking forward to a city whose architect and builder is God (Hb 11:10) and that God has prepared a heavenly city for Abraham and Sarah (Hb 11:16).<sup>66</sup> Paul then called Sarah, the free woman, their mother. Although the Jews were physical descendents of

<sup>63</sup> Longenecker, 213.

<sup>64</sup> George, 342.

<sup>65</sup> George, 341.

<sup>66</sup> See also Rv 3:12 and 21:2.

Abraham through Sarah, Paul asserted that anyone who trusts in Christ alone for salvation is the spiritual descendent of Abraham through Sarah (3:7, 9, 14, 29), but anyone who trusts in obedience to the law for salvation were spiritual descendents of Abraham through Hagar.

“Although the Judaizers may not have seen it in this light, efforts to make circumcision and observance of the law an entrance rite into the Christian faith was nothing less than a futile attempt to reverse the divinely ordained course of redemptive history.”<sup>67</sup> Of course, this history is not yet complete; the heavenly Jerusalem is still heavenly. Paul wanted the Galatians to look ahead, not behind, and look heavenward, not earthward, for their salvation.

Hagar - mother of the spiritually enslaved	Sarah - the mother of the spiritually free
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27 γέγραπται γάρ· εὐφράνθητι, στεῖρα ἢ οὐ τίκτουσα, ῥῆξον καὶ βόησον, ἢ οὐκ ὠδίνουσα· ὅτι πολλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐρήμου μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ἐχούσης τὸν ἄνδρα.

27 for it has been written, “Rejoice, infertile woman, you who are not giving birth, let loose and shout, you who are not having labor pains; because many *will be* the children of the desolate, more than she who has the husband.”

How did Paul know the heavenly Jerusalem corresponded to Sarah (4:27)? Paul quoted from Is 54:1: “Rejoice, barren one, who did not give birth; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the forsaken one will be more than the children of the married woman,” says the LORD (HCSB). The original intent of this verse was to describe Jerusalem as a childless widow whose husband has been carried off into captivity. It was an encouragement, because God was going to help her. The intended audience was the Jews who were captive in Babylon.

Paul made some associations that Isaiah did not:

1. Sarah was barren, so Paul associated her with the “barren widow” of Is 54:1.
2. Sarah’s children, those in the new covenant, are then associated with the “sons of the desolate one,” who will be taught of the Lord (Is 54:13). Spiritual barrenness was removed by the cross, something the Mosaic law could not do.
3. If the current Jerusalem corresponded to Hagar and slavery (4:25), then the city identified here must be associated with the heavenly Jerusalem (4:26), which will be the wife of the Lord (Is 54:5-8). This city will be populated by Sarah’s children.

Only God could have helped Sarah in her barrenness; only God could help the Jews in captivity; and only God could help spiritual slaves become spiritually free.

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<sup>67</sup> George, 342.

28 Ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, κατὰ Ἰσαὰκ ἐπαγγελίας τέκνα ἐστέ.

**28 And you, brothers, are the children of promise just as Isaac.**

In this verse, Paul began to apply the story. The culmination of his realigning of the characters and places is this: Just as<sup>68</sup> Isaac was the fulfillment of God's promise of a son to Abraham, so the Galatians (and all who trust in Jesus) are the fulfillment of God's promise to make Abraham a great nation (3:29).

29 ἀλλ' ὡσπερ τότε ὁ κατὰ σάρκα γεννηθεὶς ἐδίωκεν τὸν κατὰ πνεῦμα, οὕτως καὶ νῦν.

**29 And just as the son who was born according to flesh was persecuting the son who was born according to spirit then, so it is even now.**

Ishmael persecuted Isaac. This is probably a reference back to Ge 21:9: "Sarah saw the son mocking—the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham" (HCSB). Mocking doesn't sound like a very harsh word; nevertheless, a variety of Jewish writings attempt to clarify these actions, saying the sons were arguing and that Ishmael shot arrows at Israel (claiming to do so in jest), etc.<sup>69</sup> Exactly what truth is found in these writings is not certain, but at the least we can say that in the Jewish mindset Ishmael was antagonistic towards Isaac. And as the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to write this sentence, it can certainly be said that Ishmael persecuted Isaac in some manner.

Against this background, Paul made a conclusion: Believers should expect to be persecuted by non-believers. That was true in Paul's time, and it continues to be true in our world today. "Nowhere are Christians commanded to seek persecution or to cultivate a lust for martyrdom. Yet believers who are faithful to the gospel have no reason to believe that they will be exempted from such assaults."<sup>70</sup>

30 ἀλλὰ τί λέγει ἡ γραφή; ἔκβαλε τὴν παιδίσκην καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς· οὐ γὰρ μὴ κληρονομήσει ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἐλευθέρου.

**30 But what does the Scripture say? "Throw the slave girl and her son out! For the son of the slave girl will never, ever inherit with the son" of the free woman!**

When Sarah realized that Ishmael was persecuting Isaac, she told Abraham, "Drive out this slave with her son, for the son of this slave will not be a co-heir with my son Isaac!" (Ge 21:10, HCSB) Paul applied this statement to his readers, commanding the Galatians to throw out the false teachers and expel them from their church. They were not to listen to them any longer. Like the Galatians, every generation must choose to trust in works or faith, law or Jesus. These cannot co-exist together.

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<sup>68</sup> κατὰ is a marker to express equality, similarity, or an example. It is accusative of standard.

<sup>69</sup> Longenecker, 200-206.

<sup>70</sup> George, 346.

In our post-modern American culture we seem to value diversity above all. There are many truths, and none should stand over another. George points out that while Paul strongly valued unity in the church, it had limits. “What [the false teachers] were advocating was a denial of the gospel itself. When this kind of heresy invades the church, there can be no question of compromise or concessions for the sake of a superficial harmony.”<sup>71</sup>

31 διό, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐσμὲν παιδίσκης τέκνα ἀλλὰ τῆς ἐλευθέρας.

**31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave girl but of the free.**

Here is the conclusion to the story and the conclusion of this entire section of the book (chapters 3-4). If righteousness comes by faith (2:16) and those who have faith are Abraham’s sons (3:7), who then are Abraham’s sons? Paul answered that it is those who trust in Jesus, both himself and the Galatian Christians, but not those who teach salvation by works.

In summary, Paul did not introduce any new theological truths in this section; the culmination in 4:28 is a restatement of 3:26 and 3:29. This “allegory” illustrates the truths that Paul has already written about; but it also provides 2 new truths. One, believers should expect persecution. Two, believers should throw out false teachers.

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<sup>71</sup> George, 347.

## Structural Diagram

are you not listening to the law  
For  
Abraham had two sons  
But  
the son by the slave girl was born according to the flesh  
and  
the son by the free woman was born through the promise

All this is being symbolized  
for  
they represent two covenants  
                                  one from Mt. Sinai  
                                  who is Hagar.

And  
Hagar is Mt. Sinai in Arabia  
          and  
          corresponds to the current Jerusalem

for  
she is enslaved with her children  
But  
the Jerusalem from above is the free woman  
for  
it has been written,

Rejoice infertile woman, you who are not giving birth  
let loose and shout, you who are not having labor pains  
because many will be the children of the desolate  
more than she who has the husband

And  
you are the children of promise just as Isaac  
And  
just as the son                   was persecuting the son  
                                  who was born                   who was born  
                                  according to flesh                   according to spirit then,

so it is even now

But  
what does the Scripture say?

Throw the slave girl and her son out!

For  
the son will never, ever inherit with the son  
                                  of the slave girl                   of the free woman

Therefore  
we are not children of the slave girl but of the free

## Tracing the Argument

**External** – After his affectionate interruption (4:12-20), Paul continued with the idea of sonship. In 3:26 Paul called the Galatians the sons of God. In this section, he used the story of Hagar and Sarah to illustrate that they were the sons of God through faith in Jesus, not through obedience to the law.

**Internal** – Paul briefly recounted the story, then interpreted it, and finally applied it.

## Textual Outline



1. Paul recounted the story of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-23).
2. Paul interpreted the story of Hagar and Sarah (4:24-27).
3. Paul applied the story of Hagar and Sarah (4:28-31).

### **Central Truth of the Text**

Paul wrote Galatians 4:21-31 in order to command the Galatian churches to live like children of promise.

### **Teaching Outline**

(Since Paul gave his points of application in 4:28-31, this outline does the same.)

Those who trust in Jesus are children of promise, and God wants us to live like we have received God's promises. From our text in Galatians, we are going to see 3 ways to live as children of promise:

1. Since we trust in Jesus, expect persecution (4:28-29).
2. Since we trust in Jesus, cast out false teachers (4:30a).
3. Since we trust in Jesus, anticipate our inheritance (4:30b-31).

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