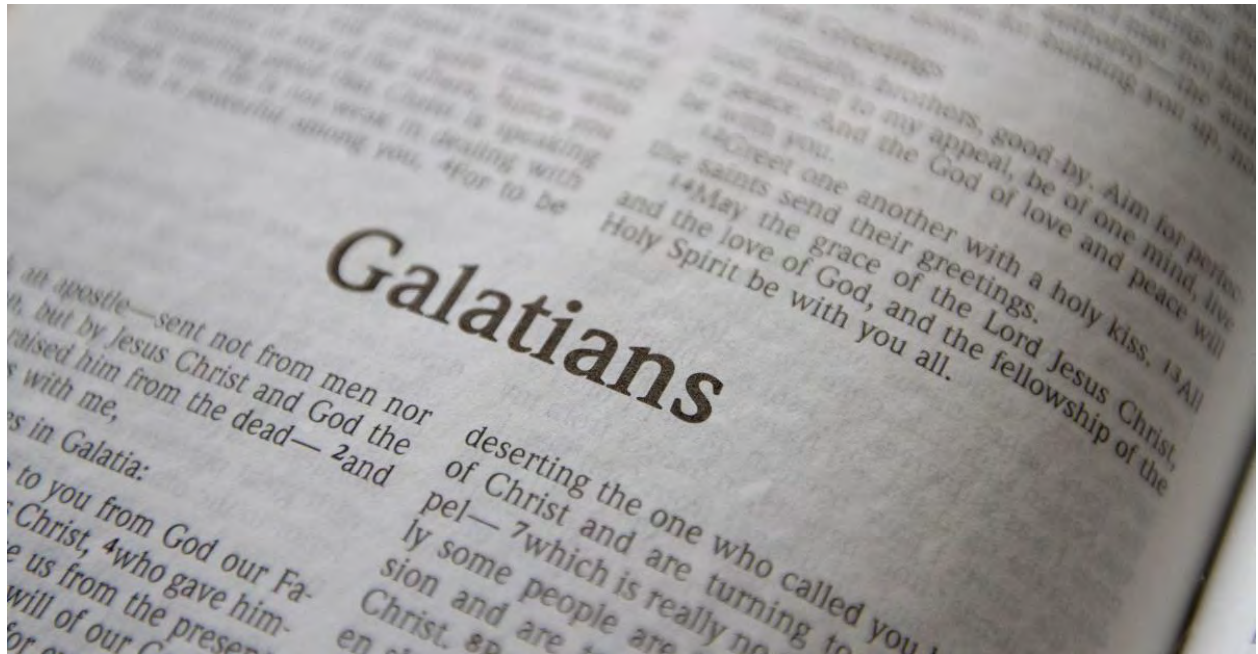


BACK TO BONDAGE?

GALATIANS 4



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Galatians 4

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Galatians 4: Introduction

Bondage is a terrible way to live. It is limiting, oppressive, disagreeable, stifling, and maddening. When we were in bondage to sin, this is how we lived. Nothing ever quite satisfied. Every aspiration seemed just out of reach. All our desires were tainted with self-interest. And we left a trail of guilt and shame which, while we didn't spend much time looking back at it, haunted our every next step.

Apparently, the Galatians had forgotten this. Or they failed to recognize bondage and were beginning to drift back into it.

But Paul was determined this would not happen on his watch.

We hope you find this study of the book of Galatians to provide abundant stimulation for your walk with and work for the Lord.

For His glory and praise!

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1 Elemental Bondage

Pray Psalm 142.5-7.

I cried out to You, O LORD:
I said, “You *are* my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.
Attend to my cry,
For I am brought very low;
Deliver me from my persecutors,
For they are stronger than I.
Bring my soul out of prison,
That I may praise Your name;
The righteous shall surround me,
For You shall deal bountifully with me.”

Sing Psalm 142.5-7.

(Dix: [*For the Beauty of the Earth*](#))

Out of prison lead me, LORD; thanks and praise to You shall be.
Righteous men armed with Your Word will Your grace bestow on me.

Refrain vv. 5, 6

LORD, You are my Refuge strong! O receive my plaintive song!

Read and meditate on Galatians 4.1-3.

Preparation

1. What are we under while we are children?
2. To what were we in bondage then?

Meditation

Here Paul equates keeping the Law to being like a child who is in bondage to external constraints. That’s where we who believe were before coming to faith in Christ.

In the case of the Galatians, their bondage was to the things of God’s Law. This was not a bad thing; it was a necessary thing. Yet those constraints could never take away the Galatians’ sin or keep them from sinning. Rather, the external constraints of the Law acted as guardians and stewards to keep the “children” from going astray and to direct them to Jesus at the proper time.

Paul deliberately equates the constraints of the Law to “the elements of the world” because that’s what the Law was like. It could only constrain and direct the Galatians outwardly; it could do nothing to heal the sickness of sin within them.

We who were not raised in Jewish homes were also “in bondage under the elements of the world.” Just not the same kind of elements and constraints as the Galatians. Parents and teachers shaped and guided us. Worldly distractions captured our imaginations and affections. And the Law of God, written on our hearts—as on everyone’s heart (Rom. 2.14, 15)—also acted as a kind of constraint,

bringing tinges of shame whenever we transgressed it and building up within us a desire to be free from guilt and sin. We may not have recognized or acknowledged that, but it was true, nonetheless. And when confronted with the Gospel, we who have believed were enabled to realize and admit our bondage, cry out for deliverance, and enter the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. “My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed Thee!” (Charles Wesley)

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“When I was a child,
I spoke as a child,
I understood as a child,
I thought as a child;
but when I became a man,
I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13.11).

In that child was the potential to become a functioning adult.

So also, Paul’s description of the child in Galatians 4.1,2:

“Now as 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,
but is under guardians and stewards
until the time appointed by the father.”

In this child there is the potential to become a mature master.

Both children had the potential to metamorphize into something else.

We too, exposed by the Law as needy sinners, have the potential to become the King’s child, an heir in His Kingdom, changed from enemy to son (Rom. 5.8). “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom. 8.16, 17). And “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel...” (Eph. 3.6).

From nobodies to real somebodies.

Joseph rose from being cast into a pit and sold as a slave, by his hateful brothers, to being the second most powerful man in Egypt (see Gen. 37-45). Even in captivity he had the potential to be a great ruler and deliverer. Indeed, as he said to his astonished brothers: ‘I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt... And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt’ (Gen. 45.4, 7, 8). The potential for Joseph’s amazing metamorphosis was in him all along; there, waiting for God’s hand to touch his heart and life. Just like God does when He touches our heart and life.

“If anyone is in Christ,

he is a new creation;
old things have passed away;
behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5.17).

Old, through the guardian and steward of the Law;
to new, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Elemental bondage harboring the potential for freedom and sonship in the King.

Reflection

1. How have you experienced deliverance from elemental things?
2. What are the keys to not falling back into such bondage? That is, what must we do to remain free of bondage to elemental things?
3. Whom will you encourage today to hold fast to the freedom we have in Jesus?

They could not fully understand the meaning of the law as given by Moses. And as that was a dispensation of darkness, so of bondage; they were tied to many burdensome rites and observances, by which they were taught and kept subject like a child under tutors and governors. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Galatians 4.1-7*

Pray Psalm 142.1-6.

Thank the Lord for being your constant Refuge and for the strength He gives you to fulfill your calling day by day.

Sing Psalm 142.1-6.

(Dix: [*For the Beauty of the Earth*](#))

With my voice, O LORD, I cry—hear my plea for mercy, LORD!
My complaint mounts up on high, bringing You my troubled word:

Refrain vv. 5, 6

LORD, You are my Refuge strong! O receive my plaintive song!

When my spirit faints away, You my falt’ring pathway know;
where I take my journey they traps have hidden to my woe.

Refrain

LORD, look to my right and see: None takes notice of my plight.
Is there refuge left for me? Is my soul out of Your sight?

Refrain

Hear my cry, LORD, I am low! They are strong who seek my soul.
Jesus frees from every foe; He will keep and make me whole!

Refrain

2 Redeemed and Adopted

Pray Psalm 105.3-7.

Glory in His holy name;
Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD!
Seek the LORD and His strength;
Seek His face evermore!
Remember His marvelous works which He has done,
His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,
O seed of Abraham His servant,
You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!
He is the LORD our God;
His judgments are in all the earth.

Sing Psalm 105.3-7.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

Glory in God, rejoice in heart, all you who seek His holy part.
Him and His strength and Presence seek; His works proclaim, His judgments speak.

You holy children of Abraham, you chosen ones of Jacob, stand!
He is our LORD, of wondrous worth; His judgments are in all the earth.

Read Galatians 4.1-7; meditate on verses 4-7.

Preparation

1. When did God send forth His Son?
2. How did we become children of God?

Meditation

These few verses are filled with many glances at the glorious works of God! First, God's management of time sets the stage. The "fullness of the time" (v. 4) indicates that all the world conditions were just what God intended for the coming of His Son. Then God sent Him forth as a Baby, born of Mary, born both to keep the Law and to bear the burden of the Law's judgment against the sinful world (vv. 4, 5). By doing so, Jesus redeemed all those chosen children of God that they might "receive the adoption" as sons and daughters of God.

Then, because He chose and redeemed us, He moved to make us His own children, sending His Spirit to apply the work of redemption to all who believe in Jesus (v. 6). We note that the coming of the Spirit *follows on* from our election and redemption and *precedes* our calling out in faith. Indeed, the Greek makes it clear—by attaching the word "crying out" to the Holy Spirit—that the Spirit Himself engages our voice to call God our Father.

And with this "crying out" we are adopted into the household of faith, sons and daughters of the living God (v. 7). We are no longer slaves to the elemental things of the world; we have become children of God.

And all this is the work of God: His sovereignty, incarnation, atonement, redemption, justification, indwelling, and adoption. This is the work of grace by which we are saved for eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“But when the fullness of the time had come,
God sent forth His Son,
born of a woman,
born under the law,
to redeem those who were under the law,
that we might receive the adoption as sons.
And because you are sons,
God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son
into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’
...an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4.4-7).

“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,
and will hold Your hand;
I will keep You
and give You as a covenant to the people,
as a light to the Gentiles,
to open blind eyes,
to bring out prisoners from the prison,
those who sit in darkness from the prison house.
I AM the LORD, that is My Name;
and My glory I will not give to another,
nor My praise to carved images.
Behold, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I declare;
before they spring forth
I tell you of them” (Is. 42.6-9).

“Behold! The Lamb of God
Who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1.29)

“...because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors,
and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Is. 53.12).

“...Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree,
that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness—
by Whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2.24).

If keeping the Law was not important to please God, then why did He send His Son to keep it perfectly?

And then, if He gave us His Son’s Holy Spirit to live within us, wouldn’t He expect the same accomplishment from us?

Of course, we are sinful human beings, in need of a Savior, and in need of that Savior's Spirit to empower us.

But what we are quibbling about is the importance of the Law, and of keeping it as best we can through the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Yes, by grace we are saved.

It is unimaginable to think that Jesus' Spirit within us, the One Who allows us to cry out, "Abba, Father", would want to do anything other than please God by keeping His way pure (Ps. 19.7-11).

And wouldn't Jesus want to please Himself, and make His Father glad? (Prov. 10.1)

And really, would the Holy Spirit lead us in any other way (Jn. 16.7, 13, 14), except straight back to the Law that God gave for all to live by? (Ex. 20.1-17; Matt. 22.37-40)

The perfect keeping of which, because we couldn't, was the reason the Savior died.

We are redeemed and adopted to bear good fruit (Gal. 5.22, 23).

Reflection

1. Jesus is central to *all* the work of God. Explain.
2. How does the Law of God fit into Jesus' work for our salvation?
3. How does the Law of God fit into the salvation we have in Jesus?

In venturing, he says, to call God your Father, you have the advice and direction of the Spirit of Christ; therefore it is certain that you are the sons of God. This agrees with what is elsewhere taught by him, that the Spirit is the earnest and pledge of our adoption, and gives to us a well-founded belief that God regards us with a father's love. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Galatians 4.6

Pray Psalm 105.1, 2, 8-11, 45.

Rejoice in the Lord and in all His works, especially that He has made us His own children. Commit this day to walking the Jesus Path and serving God faithfully in all you do.

Sing Psalm 105.1, 2, 8-11, 45.

(Warrington: [Give to Our God Immortal Praise](#))

Give thanks unto the LORD Most High; call on His Name, before Him cry!
Make known His deeds in every land; sing praise for all the works of His hand.

He will His covenant faithfully guard—His oath, the promise of His Word.
That which He to our fathers swore, He will perform forevermore!

So let us all in our Savior confide, and in His holy Law abide.
Let us observe His glorious Word, and praise our sovereign, faithful LORD!

3 Back to Bondage?

Pray Psalm 106.44, 45, 48.

Nevertheless He regarded their affliction,
When He heard their cry;
And for their sake He remembered His covenant,
And relented according to the multitude of His mercies...
Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, "Amen!"
Praise the LORD!

Sing Psalm 106.44, 45, 48.

(Trust in Jesus: [*Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*](#))

Look upon us, LORD, with favor, see us in our sore distress!
Hear our cries, with love surround us; turn again to heal and bless!
Refrain, v. 48
Blessèd be our God and Savior, evermore His praise proclaim!
Let all those who know Your favor praise Your holy, glorious Name!

Read Galatians 4.1-11; meditate on verses 8-11.

Preparation

1. What were the Galatians beginning to do?
2. What did Paul fear?

Meditation

What difference does knowing God make in our lives? The Galatians had come to know the Lord only because He had first known (loved) them (v. 9). They forsook the idols they had served—which were not really gods—to worship and serve the one true God. Now they were in danger of falling back into idol worship. Because circumcision was just the beginning for the Judaizers. They had a whole regimen of things to do if you really wanted to be saved, including keeping all the familiar Jewish holy days and seasons (v. 10). Paul dismissed these as “weak and beggarly elements” which once held the Galatians in a bondage of salvation by works.

But God set them free of this bondage and had made them His own adopted children. It was irrational and unthinkable to Paul that they, having come to know the Lord, would so quickly return to their idolatrous ways. Paul feared for them, because it was beginning to look as if his labors among them were bearing no fruit and thus had been in vain (v. 11).

I think it's safe to say that Paul was speaking in hyperbole to shock the Galatians into their senses. The Judaizers were teaching faith in Jesus *plus* a raft of works for those who would be saved. Paul preached faith in Jesus *unto* good works, which are the proof of salvation, not the means to it. The Galatians were allowing smooth-talking false teachers to make them forget what Paul taught and embrace what the Judaizers taught.

But to do so would be to return to bondage, to weak and beggarly works and rituals which clamp those who embrace them into bondage to sin. Did the Galatians want to go back to bondage? Do we? Knowing God sets us free from works-salvation unto salvation that works. We need to keep this straight.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“And this is eternal life,
that they may know You,
the only true God
and Jesus Christ
Whom You have sent” (Jn. 17.3).

“That they may know that You,
Whose Name alone is the LORD,
are the Most High over all the earth” (Ps. 83.18).

“For You, LORD, are most high above all the earth;
You are exalted far above all gods” (Ps. 97.9).

Paul wrote that when the Galatians did not know God, they served other ideas and things that most obviously were not gods, and not even nature pretended that it was so (Gal. 4.8)—they were thoughts and items made from silver and gold that couldn’t taste, touch, see, hear, speak, smell, or move. They were useless rubble, and worse yet, those that trusted in them were similarly endowed (Ps. 115.3-8).

Paul’s words about them were truthful and harsh: “I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (Gal. 4.11). These words, were similar to those written earlier in his letter: “Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?” (Gal. 3.4). The Galatians’ mindset was vexing to Paul, and of much concern. And should be to us, as well. Do we want to labor for, or suffer, anything in vain? Or worse yet, cause those who care deeply about us to feel that their work and prayers on our behalf have been in vain?

We would do well to remember the Galatians’ perilous, slippery-slope situation, as a preventative: wrong beliefs and wrong thinking, lead to wrong choices.

And the best way to remember, is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, Who leads us into all Truth through the reading of God’s Word and prayer. “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight...” (Heb. 4.12, 13). The Word and Spirit that live within, the One Who cries out, ‘Abba, Father!’ (Gal. 4.6), is the One that “keeps us from stumbling” (Jude 1.24).

Do we want to go back to bondage? For any reason? No. No, thank you.

“Knowing God sets us free from works-salvation unto salvation that works.”

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;

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I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' Name.

On Christ the solid Rock I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand,

All other ground is sinking sand.

(Edward Mote, 1834)

Reflection

1. What are some “weak and beggarly” elemental things that might tempt you off the Jesus Path?
2. How should you prepare to deal with such things?
3. How can you help other believers to recognize and resist these temptations?

Though our religion forbids idolatry, yet many practice spiritual idolatry in their hearts. For what a man loves most, and cares most for, that is his God: some have their riches for their God, some their pleasures, and some their lusts.
Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Galatians 4.8-11*

Pray Psalm 106.1-6, 48.

Thank and praise the Lord for His patience and His grace. Confess any known sins and commit your day to loving and serving Him.

Sing Psalm 106.1-6, 48.

(Trust in Jesus: [*Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*](#))

Praise the LORD! Give thanks and praise Him! He is good, His love endures!

More His works than can be spoken; let His praise be ever sure!

Refrain v. 48

Blessèd be our God and Savior, evermore His praise proclaim!

Let all those who know Your favor praise Your holy, glorious Name!

LORD, when You Your people favor, help me, O, remember me,
that I may Your blessings savor and in joy and glory be!

Refrain

We have sinned, just like our fathers; we have done iniquity.

Just like them, our hearts have wandered; we have acted wickedly.

Refrain

4 No Other Ground

Pray Psalm 105.1, 2, 8-11.

Oh, give thanks to the LORD!
Call upon His name;
Make known His deeds among the peoples!
Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him;
Talk of all His wondrous works...
He remembers His covenant forever,
The word *which* He commanded, for a thousand generations,
The covenant which He made with Abraham,
And His oath to Isaac,
And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute,
To Israel *as* an everlasting covenant,
Saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan
As the allotment of your inheritance...”

Sing Psalm 105.1, 2, 8-11.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

Give thanks unto the LORD Most High; call on His Name, before Him cry!
Make known His deeds in every land; sing praise for all the works of His hand.

He will His covenant faithfully guard—His oath, the promise of His Word.
That which He to our fathers swore, He will perform forevermore!

Read Galatians 4.1-20; meditate on verses 12-20.

Preparation

1. How did the Galatians receive Paul at first?
2. Why did he have doubts about them?

Meditation

In effect, by listening to the false teachers the Galatians were rejecting Paul. How unlike what they had done when he first came among them! Then they gladly received him, though he was suffering some trial in the flesh (v. 14). They regarded him as a messenger (“angel”, v. 14) sent from God, and they hung on his every word. So blessed were they, and so grateful to Paul, that they would gladly have put themselves in the place of his suffering if he could gain relief thereby (v. 15).

But now, alas: Paul wondered that perhaps he had become their “enemy” because he told them the truth about their situation (v. 16). Truth is not always comfortable or agreeable to hear, but it is always truth, and only the truth in Christ Jesus can set us free from the lies of unbelief and the flesh. He alone is our hope and ground. Paul exposed the false teachers for what they were. And though they were “zealous” to win the Galatians, it was a zeal with “no good” in mind (v. 17). Instead of returning zeal to the false teachers, the Galatians should recover their original zeal, zeal for that “good thing” which Paul proclaimed to them in Jesus (v. 18).

What did Paul desire for the Galatians? Some new form of bondage? Not at all. He longed for Christ to be formed in them, just as Christ was alive in Paul and making him new in Jesus every day (v. 19). Paul regretted that he had to be harsh and unbending with the Galatians, but truth was at stake, and he had his doubts about where they stood, on what ground (v. 20). The Galatians should humble themselves—as Paul was humble among them (v. 12)—and repent of wanting to earn their salvation all over again. They had the cart before the horse, wanting to be saved by keeping the Law.

Only Jesus has the spiritual muscle to rescue us from sin, set us down in Himself, and carry us forward along the path of righteousness. All other ground is sinking sand.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4.16).

The angering truth was this: they could not work their way to heaven.

The church today seems to be suffering from two extremes:

One is that everything, all behaviors, are allowed because God’s grace is sufficient to cover them. Therefore, no one’s life differs much from the world’s. We live like hell because we have a ticket to heaven.

Fire insurance all paid up and all that.

Or the other option: we are unable to accept the gift of grace and so are on track to win our salvation through good works and over-involvement with everything religious. Church activities replace hedonistic practices, but the outcome is the same. Work, work, work, to get what we want. We are the masters of our fate, the captains of our soul (Wm. Ernest Henley).

But how very wrong both options are!

God is saying to us in the nicest possible way: “Chill.
I AM the Master of your fate and the Captain of your soul.
Trust Me. Lean on Me. Let Me love and save you.
You cannot do this yourself. You need My help.”

“Be still, and know that I AM God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!” (Ps. 46.10)

“Be still in the Presence of the Lord GOD...” (Zeph. 1.7).

“Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace, be still!’”

And the wind ceased and there was great calm” (Mk. 4.39; Ps. 89.9).

This is what God wants us to do to be saved: nothing.

He wants us to trust Him completely in His work for our salvation.

Then He wants us to get busy in His Kingdom:

“Praying like it all depends upon Him and working like it all depends upon us” (Pat Hunter).

Have I now become your enemy for telling the truth?

That truth is this: Jesus Christ is The Way, The Truth, and The Life.

No one, not any good or bad person, can come to the Father, or come into His Kingdom, or can

enter His heaven, except through the Son of God, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

But the other piece of that truth telling is this: “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2.10).

Furthermore, at one time we were without Christ...having no hope, and without God in our world. But now in Christ Jesus we who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace... (Eph. 2.12-14).

Chill. Be still. Don't work for it. Work because of it.

“Rest in the LORD...” (Ps. 37.7).

“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” (Heb. 4.9-11).

All other ground is sinking sand.

Reflection

1. Even though we are passionate to do good works, we don't do them to be saved. We do them because we are saved! Take a few moments and just give thanks to God for your salvation and the privilege of serving Him.

2. How do you practice being still before the Lord? What benefit do you gain from this?

3. What is our “rest”? How do we enter that “rest”? What do you experience in that “rest”? How does knowing that “rest” help you in encouraging your fellow believers?

Nothing is so sure a proof that a sinner has passed into a state of justification, as Christ being formed in him by the renewal of the Holy Spirit; but this cannot be hoped for, while men depend on the law for acceptance with God.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Galatians 4.19, 20*

Pray Psalm 105.3-7, 45.

God only is all our glory and rejoicing. Meditate on His greatness. Give thanks for His covenant and promises. Bless and praise Him for Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Then go forth with joy and gratitude to walk the Jesus Path.

Sing Psalm 105.3-7, 45.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

Glory in God, rejoice in heart, all you who seek His holy part.

Him and His strength and Presence seek; His works proclaim, His judgments speak.

You holy children of Abraham, you chosen ones of Jacob, stand!

He is our LORD, of wondrous worth; His judgments are in all the earth.

So let us all in our Savior confide, and in His holy Law abide.

Let us observe His glorious Word, and praise our sovereign, faithful LORD!

5 Children of Promise

Opening Prayer: Psalm 119.25-27.

My soul clings to the dust;
Revive me according to Your word.
I have declared my ways, and You answered me;
Teach me Your statutes.
Make me understand the way of Your precepts;
So shall I meditate on Your wonderful works.

Sing Psalm 119.25-27.

(Festal Song: [Rise Up, O Men of God](#))

My soul clings to the dust; revive me by Your Word!
My ways I have declared to You; teach me Your statutes, LORD!

Make me to understand Your precepts and Your ways,
as on Your works I meditate with wonder and with praise!

Read Galatians 4.1-28; meditate on verses 21-28.

Preparation

1. What “two covenants” does Paul mention?
2. In what way are we like Isaac?

Meditation

This is a difficult passage, especially if we try to make more out of it than what Paul explains. Two “covenants” are mentioned here, but these must not be confused with the covenant of God, as if there were two paths to the Lord. In this context, these are more like “paths”.

Ishmael represents all those who want to be born by the flesh, that is, who seek to earn salvation through the Law. They cannot, however, because they are by nature in bondage to the flesh (vv. 21-23). Shockingly enough, Paul turned this “covenant” into an allegory for the Jews of his day, who were still in bondage to sin and still trying to work their way into the Lord’s favor (vv. 24, 25).

On the other hand, Isaac is the child of promise. He was given by promise and grace and thus represents “the Jerusalem above” which is free and is the source of salvation for all who are *given* salvation. These are all those who, believing in Jesus for salvation—Jews and Gentiles alike (v. 27)—enjoy the freedom from sin that comes with salvation and walk the path that Jesus did, following the commandments of God (1 Jn. 2.1-6). These are the children of promise (v. 28), because they are born by grace through faith, according to the promise to Abraham.

This allegory would have outraged the Judaizers (not to mention the Jews); but it would have signaled to the truly faithful that, as Paul explained in verses 1-7, salvation is entirely at God’s pleasure, in His time, by grace through the gift of faith, and unto obedience and rejoicing in Jesus. We who believe in Jesus are the children of promise, not of the flesh; and we are free in Him from

the bondage sin and the flesh formerly imposed on us.

So don't go back to that "covenant"; it's a dead end.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul is a magician with words. No doubt. The man could turn a phrase and a thought better than just about anyone. Here, the question he poses is masterful:

"Hey you all, you who want to be under the law so badly, so that you can save yourselves by keeping it perfectly, do you hear this law? Are you even vaguely acquainted with the requirements? And are you totally unfamiliar with Jesus' addendum to these laws? That guilt is accumulated by not only actions, but thoughts as well? Are you serious? Have you even stopped to think this through? Let me just process this for a moment: You want to turn your backs on a gift of freedom to return to being in bondage?" (Galatians 4.21EIV-extended imagined version).

Isaiah, an amazing writer with a skill for explicit truth like Paul, wrote of the downfall of God's people then and now: "this is a people robbed and plundered; all of them are snared in holes, and they are hidden in prison houses; they are for prey, and no one delivers...Who among you will give ear to this? Who will listen and hear for the time to come? ...for they would not walk in His ways, nor were they obedient to His law. Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger and the strength of battle; it has set him on fire all around, yet he did not know; and it burned him, yet he did not take it to heart" (Is. 42.22-25).

The Galatians, and the Christians of today need to take God's Word to heart.

He has given us by grace through faith the gift of salvation. Settled.

But He then wants us to live righteously in His Kingdom, to sow seeds of righteousness into our Personal Mission Field, so that others will know of His gracious gift of salvation, will accept the gift, and will have the joy of ministering into their own Personal Mission Field. And all for this reason: to give glory to Him, for His amazing grace. "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever" (The Catechism). And why not? All other ground is sinking sand.

*How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss—
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One,
Bring many sons to glory.*

*Behold the Man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice,
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life—*

I know that it is finished.

*I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart—
His wounds have paid my ransom.
(Stuart Townsend, 2007)*

Children of This Promise—do we hear?

Reflection

1. We are called to do good works. But how do we keep from thinking we're earning something by doing them?
2. How would you explain to a non-Christian that salvation is by grace, not works?
3. How have you seen the Lord at work in you of late, bringing more of His grace to bear through you to the people in your Personal Mission Field?

The heavenly Jerusalem, the true church from above, represented by Sarah, is in a state of freedom, and is the mother of all believers, who are born of the Holy Spirit. They were by regeneration and true faith, made a part of the true seed of Abraham, according to the promise made to him. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Galatians 4.21-27

Pray Psalm 119.28-32.

Praise the Lord, for His promise never fails. Thank Him for Jesus and for the gift of salvation, sent to you from on high. Call on His Presence and strength to help you in this day's work.

Sing Psalm 119.28-32.

(Festal Song: [Rise Up, O Men of God](#))

My soul weighs down with woe, I need Your strength, O LORD!
Remove from me all lying ways; grant me Your holy Word!

I choose the way of truth; Your judgments I proclaim.
Your testimonies I embrace, LORD, put me not to shame!

Command my course, O LORD; Your gracious truth impart.
I cling to You and know You will enlarge my seeking heart.

6 The Two Most Important Questions

Opening Prayer: Psalm 119.65-67

You have dealt well with Your servant,
O LORD, according to Your word.
Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
For I believe Your commandments.
Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.

Sing Psalm 119.65-67

(Open My Eyes: [Open My Eyes, That I May See](#))

You have dealt well with me, O LORD, just as You promised in Your Word.
Teach me good judgment, help me to know all that I need to love You so.
Let Your commandments light my way. Send sweet affliction when I stray,
that I may walk Your holy way and keep Your Word.

Read Galatians 4.1-31; meditate on verses 29-31.

Preparation

1. How do those “born of the flesh” react to those “born of the Spirit”?
2. Whose children are we who believe?

Meditation

Paul must have tired of this. Nearly everywhere he went to preach the Gospel, people responded to the Word of God with joy and rejoicing. They came together to learn and worship. They appointed leaders and began becoming a new kind of community in the world. The evidence of grace was visible on every hand.

Then Paul would move on and, sooner or later, false teachers would arrive and try to lead the believers astray. Word would reach Paul and he would either send someone to set them back in order—as he sent Titus to the Corinthians—or write them an epistle, as he did the Galatians, or both.

But it has always been thus, and it always will be. False teachers prey on people who want to believe in Jesus. They bring all kinds of “Jesus +” versions of the Good News, giving people false hopes and assuring them that the Gospel is really all about them. And when they have made everyone feel real good about themselves, they pass the plate. This is a form of persecution that wicked, deceitful men use to take advantage of people who, like the Galatians, just want to know Jesus (v. 29).

Paul taught us how to keep from falling for the wiles of false teachers. We need to keep asking the most important question: What does the Scripture say? False teachers will twist and contort the Scriptures to justify their false claims, but we must search the Scriptures daily, in their entirety, to hear the voice of Jesus telling us what true discipleship requires (v. 30).

The old objection is true: You can make Scripture say just about whatever you want. And that's what false teachers do. So unless we are firmly grounded, deeply rooted, and growing in familiarity with all of Scripture, we can easily be led astray. Keep reading, meditating, and searching the Scriptures. Test every spirit, confront every temptation, take your every next step according to the teaching of God's Word. For you are free in Jesus and in Jesus only (v. 31). Do not become the slave of any man. Look to the Word of God.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul asked the Galatians the quintessential question: "Nevertheless what does the Scripture say?" (Gal. 4.30)

We can exhaustively quibble about who said what, when, where, why or how—ad infinitum ad nauseum—but the final arbiter of all Truth is the Scripture, the Word of God.

As Jesus said so wisely to the Sadducees about their skewed conclusions: "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22.29).

That is The Mistake that all people make: not believing God's holy Word. Because if we don't believe His Word, His Truth, we will never be able to discern what is right or wrong. And if we are that gullible, anyone can tell us anything, and we will have to accept it. There is no solid basis for reality. Everything is on the table, while chaos and insanity rule the day.

We are not children of the flesh but of the Spirit, and the Spirit will lead us into all Truth (Jn. 16.13).

It is when we forget our heritage that we begin to feel like the psalmist Asaph did: "...my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped...thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You" (Ps. 73.2, 21, 22).

Remembering what the Scripture says is the key to walking safely on the Jesus Path, and never deviating from the Way in which we should go: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3.16, 17).

That is what we long for,
that should be our goal, and
that must be the way we attain it.

That is what the Scripture says.

Reflection

1. Why is this the most important question?
2. If we don't rely on Scripture to guide us in life, where does that leave us? Why is that "sinking sand" ground?
3. Whom will you encourage today to stand fast in the Word of the Lord?

Let us rest our souls on the Scriptures, and by a gospel hope and cheerful obedience, show that our conversation and

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treasure are indeed in heaven. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Galatians 4.29-31*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 119.68-72

Pray that God will ground you more firmly in His Word, that you will delight to read and meditate on it, and that He will teach you how to walk the Jesus Path.

Sing Psalm 119.68-72.

(Open My Eyes: [Open My Eyes](#), *That I May See*)

LORD, You are good, and good You do; teach me that I may do good, too.
Wicked men my true pathway distort; I keep Your Word with all my heart.
Their heart is dark with sin's cruel blight, but in Your Law is my delight.
Let me not turn from Your sweet Light, nor from Your Word.

All my afflictions, LORD, I turn to You that I Your Law may learn.
Teach me to hold Your Word in my heart, never from its true way to part.
Your Law is better far to me than any wealth could ever be;
open my eyes and let me see more of Your Word!

7 Of Bondage and Freedom

Opening Prayer: Psalm 116.7-9

Return to your rest, O my soul,
For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
For You have delivered my soul from death,
My eyes from tears,
And my feet from falling.
I will walk before the LORD
In the land of the living.

Sing Psalm 116.7-9

(Mit Freuden Zart: [*All Praise To God Who Reigns Above*](#))

Full well the LORD has dealt with me; my soul from death He delivered.
My weeping eyes, my stumbling feet, He has redeemed forever.
Forever I before His face shall walk with those who know His grace,
and dwell with them forever.

Read Galatians 4.1-31; meditate on verses 9, 26, 31.

Preparation

1. To what were we formerly in bondage?
2. How is it that we are “children of...the free [woman]”?

Meditation

Bondage is a terrible way to live. It is limiting, oppressive, disagreeable, stifling, and maddening. When we were in bondage to sin, this is how we lived. Nothing ever quite satisfied. Every aspiration seemed just out of reach. All our desires were tainted with self-interest. And we left a trail of guilt and shame which, while we didn't spend much time looking back at it, haunted our every next step.

At least, that was my experience. Yours may have been similar. Sin kept us in bondage from thinking the best thoughts, desiring the noblest outcomes, and valuing the truest priorities. It was a true bondage, like what the Galatians knew, though we may hardly have recognized it as such.

Then Jesus came into our lives and began to live His life in us. Remember the freedom you experienced the first time you cried out to God, “Abba! Father!”? Remember how refreshing it was to confess your sins and have them roll, like Pilgrim's pack, into the eternal gone? Think of how your soul lights up, how it is truly refreshed and renewed, when Jesus speaks to it from His Word. And when you know Jesus stirring in you, stretching out from your soul, using your words to edify and encourage and your deeds to help or guide, don't you know a sense of true freedom, freedom from self and sin?

The freedom of true joy!

Why would anyone want to go back from such freedom? Well, the Galatians were thinking about it,

and you and I will, too. But Paul reminds us that we must always remember that we belong to God, we are His children and heirs, we are the sons and daughters of faithful Abraham, and all the precious and very great promises of God's covenant are ours in Jesus Christ. We are free in Him. And, remembering this, let us not fall back into bondage. Ever.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Slavery is a known, and agreed upon, scourge.

No one wants to be a slave, and no one should propagate slavery of any kind.

Therefore, why would anyone willingly choose to be in bondage?

Especially to this slaveholder: our perpetual enemy—the father of lies, who was a “murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him” (Jn. 8.44).

He does not wish you, or anyone, well; and his lies keep us in bondage.

But the whole truth of Jesus sets us free (Jn. 8.32) when we know it, believe it, and live by it.

The God Who knows and loves us has set us free through Jesus (Gal. 4.9, 26, 31).

“And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness...for holiness” (Rom. 6.18, 19).

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,

God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,

on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us

who do not walk according to the flesh

but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh,

but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8.2-6).

This is the Truth that sets us free to keep God's commandment: “that we should believe on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ and love on another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 Jn. 3.23, 24).

God's preamble to the Ten Commandments sums up the reason to obey Him:

“I AM the Lord your God,

Who brought you out of the land of Egypt,

out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20.2).

He set us free from slavery to become His obedient children.

Why would we ever choose to go back to Egypt?

Reflection

1. How do you experience the freedom you have in Jesus Christ?

2. Why is daily reading and study of God's Word so important to our realizing the freedom we have in Jesus?

3. How can believers help one another to know more of the freedom we have in Jesus?

The heavenly Jerusalem, the true church from above, represented by Sarah, is in a state of freedom, and is the mother of all believers, who are born of the Holy Spirit. They were by regeneration and true faith, made a part of the true seed of Abraham, according to the promise made to him. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Galatians 4.21-28

Pray Psalm 116.1-3, 10-19.

Thank God freeing you from bondage to sin into the perfect liberty of the sons and daughters of God. Call on Him to fill you with His Spirit and guide you by His Word.

Sing Psalm 116.1-3, 10-19

(Mit Freuden Zart: [*All Praise to God Who Reigns Above*](#))

I love the LORD because He hears my cries and pleas for mercy.
Because He bends to me His ear, my prayers shall ever thus be.
The snares of death encompassed me; hell's grip could not unloosened be;
distress and anguish pressed me.

Afflicted, I believe His Word, though lying men would undo me.
What shall I render to the LORD for all His blessings to me?
Salvation's cup I lift above and call upon the God of love
and pay my vows most truly.

How sweet to Him when saints depart—make me Your servant, Savior!
From sin You loosed my wand'ring heart; I praise Your Name forever!
On You I call, my vows to pay; here in Your Presence I would stay
Your praise to offer ever.

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What does it mean to be in bondage to sin?
2. How does Jesus set us free from this bondage? What is it like to be free from the bondage of sin?
3. Why do people fall back into the bondage of sin? How can you keep from this happening to you?
4. How can believers help one another to live in the freedom we have as sons and daughters of God?
5. What's the most important lesson you have learned from Galatians 4?

For Prayer:

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