

About Paul's letter to the Galatians

Chapter 4 if you have a Bible!

We can make this Bible study available if you would like to read along. Just let me know. My sermons, of course are mine, but in the Bible studies I will be sharing information with you from many sources. So do not consider any of this to be original with me.

Paul wrote this letter. His name used to be Saul. He was called Saul until Acts 13:9, when he was first called Paul. He was a *Jewish leader. He used to oppose the Christians. But one day, he met Jesus in a special way. You can read how he became a Christian in Acts chapter 9.

Paul knew about all the *Jewish laws. He used to obey all the *Jewish laws and traditions. But when Paul became a Christian, his life changed. He came to understand the real purpose of God's law. God's law shows people their *sins. So it shows people that they need to trust Jesus. Only Jesus can free us from the punishment for our sins.

So Paul *preached this *good news first to *Jewish people. Later he *preached to the *Gentiles (Acts 13:42-48). Many people became Christians when they heard him. Especially, many *Gentiles became Christians.

The people who received this letter

Galatia was part of the country that we now call Turkey. Most of the people who lived in Galatia were *Gentiles. Paul had visited the region at least twice. He had *preached the *good news about Jesus and many people became Christians. The cities in Acts 14:21 are in Galatia. Paul visited the region again in Acts 18:23.

Why he wrote this letter

The *Gentile Christians in Galatia had believed the *good news about Jesus. But some *Jewish false teachers had visited them. The false teachers may have been ordinary *Jews. But they may have been *Jews who seemed to trust Jesus. However, those *Jews were jealous of Paul and they had spoken against him. They said that Paul was not an *apostle. And they said that the Christians had to obey the *Jewish laws. These laws controlled people. Some of the Christians in Galatia believed the false teachers. Paul was very worried about the Christians. So he wrote this letter to teach them the truth again. He reminded them about the true liberty that Jesus gives.

Chapter 4

You are God's sons, you are not slaves

v1 I will continue what I was saying to you. A young son will receive the property that his father has promised to give to him. But before the son becomes a man, he is no different from a slave. **v2** People look after the child while he is young. People are responsible for his property. This happens until the time that his father has chosen.

Each society has a time for a young boy to become a man. In Paul's days, it was a very important event. As soon as a boy became a man, he had full legal rights. Until that time, other people had to manage a child's personal and business affairs. Young children could not own property, even if their father gave it to them. Young children had no rights. Slaves could not own property either. Slaves had no rights. So young children and slaves were in the same situation. In *Jewish society, a boy became a man soon after he was 12 years old. In *Greek society, a boy became a man at about 18 years. In *Roman society, the child's father decided when the child was ready to be an adult. So Paul was probably using *Roman society as a model in this verse.

v3 In a similar way, we were like young children. We were like slaves to the basic things that people in the world believe.

'The basic things that people in the world believe' probably refers to the *Gentile religions. Paul had already described how the *Jewish law made the *Jews like prisoners (3:23). Most Christians in Galatia were *Gentiles. And they used to obey the rules in their religions. They did not understand what the truth was. So they were like young children. They could not receive what God their Father had promised to them.

v4 But when the right time came, God sent his own Son into the world. He had a human mother. He lived in a society that had to obey the *Jewish law.

God's plan was perfect. He decided how he would free people from their *sins. And he decided when he would send Jesus into this world. Luke 1:26-38 describes how this happened. Jesus was a real man. He had a physical body. He was born into a *Jewish family. Even Jesus had to obey the *Jewish laws.

v5 God sent his Son to free people. He freed the people who had to obey the law. Then we all could become God's children.

'Children' refers to adult sons (verse 1). Jesus came to free people. He could free the *Jews who had to obey God's laws. And he could free the *Gentiles from the religions that controlled them. God could adopt everyone so that they would become his children. Every person who trusts Jesus becomes a member of God's family.

v6 You are God's children. So God sent the Holy Spirit into your lives. The Holy Spirit tells us that God is our father.

In this verse, Paul calls the Holy Spirit 'the Spirit of Jesus'. The Holy Spirit lived in Jesus. He made Jesus alive again after Jesus died. And now the Holy Spirit lives in every Christian (Romans 8:11). The Holy Spirit causes us to say 'Father' when we pray. As we pray to God, we speak to him as 'our Father'. In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus taught us how to pray to our Father God.

v7 Now you are not slaves. You are God's children. So God will give you the good things that he has promised.

This verse ends a long section that Paul started in 3:1. He showed clearly why the false teachers were wrong. The Christians in Galatia were no longer slaves. They were part of God's family. They did not have to obey the rules and traditions of any religion. They were receiving the good things that God promised to Abraham. They received these good things because they trusted Jesus Christ.

Paul is worried about the Christians in Galatia

v8 In the past, you did not know God. You were slaves to gods who really are not gods.

The *Gentiles did not understand anything about God until they became Christians. They were like slaves because they could not trust the real God. Instead, they obeyed their false religions. They used to *worship false gods. Some of these false gods were really evil *angels. In 1 Corinthians 10:20, Paul referred to them as 'demons' (in other words, the devil's servants). Some of the false gods were wooden or metal models of people or animals.

v9 But now, you know God. And it is even more important that God knows you. So I do not know why you are turning again to those weak and poor principles. I do not know why you want to become their slaves again.

God knew us before we were born (Psalm 139:13-15). We love God because he loved us first (1 John 4:19). It is very important that we understand this. God chooses us because he loves us. He does not choose us because of our efforts. The Christians in Galatia thought that their efforts would make them into better Christians. That is what the false teachers taught them. The 'weak and poor principles' refers to their old ways. They had left the old laws of their religions. Jesus Christ had freed them. So Paul could not understand why they wanted to leave this freedom. They belonged to God's family. But they were turning away from God because they wanted to obey rules and traditions again. Now that we are Christians, we have a special relationship with God. We know God as our father. And God knows us as his sons and daughters.

v10 You have special days and months and seasons and years.

This probably refers to the special events in the *Jewish religion. These events are not wrong. But the Christians in Galatia were wrong to turn away from God. They were obeying these traditions instead of trusting God.

v11 I am worried about you. I do hope that my work among you was not in vain.

Paul had told the Christians in Galatia the *good news about Jesus Christ. He helped them to become free. They were no longer like slaves of their religion. He expected them to become mature Christians. So he was very worried about what had happened to them.

v12 Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.

Paul did not write in a very warm way in this letter. He wrote to teach the Christians correctly rather than to praise them. But in the next few verses, Paul wrote about things that were more personal. Paul and the Christians in Galatia were all part of God's family. Paul was a *Jew. When he became a Christian, he often lived with *Gentiles. He did not live like someone whom the law controls. He was free. So he strongly urged the Christians to copy his freedom.

v13 You remember my first visit to you. My body was weak. But I *preached the *good news about Jesus Christ to you. **v14** My illness caused great difficulty for you. But you did not refuse me. And you did not think that I was not important. Instead, you welcomed me as you would welcome one of God's *angels. You received me in the same way that you would receive Jesus Christ himself.

The last sentence links with the next verses. It refers to Paul's first visit to Galatia.

We do not know what weakness or illness Paul had. And we do not know why it caused difficulty for the people in Galatia. But this is not important. However, his illness was the reason why he went there. If he had been healthy, he may not have gone to that area. His illness could have offended the people. They could have thought that he was a nuisance. They could have sent him away. Instead, the people welcomed Paul. God's *angels bring messages from God. The people in Galatia received Paul's message about Jesus Christ. They respected Paul and they gave him honor.

v15 You were so happy. But I do not know what has happened to change this. I know that you would have done anything for me. If possible, you even would have taken out your eyes and you would have given them to me.

Paul *preached the truth when he first went to Galatia. And Paul was writing the truth in this letter. He was telling the Christians that they were wrong. So he probably offended some of them. False teachers often cause Christians to become enemies of the true teachers

v16 I have told you the truth. I hope that I am not your enemy now because of this.

The people had been happy when Paul *preached to them. They were happy that Paul was with them. They wanted to help him in any way that they could. They wanted to help him to become well in his body. Some people think that Paul's illness affected his eyes. But Paul probably used a special form of words that we call an 'idiom'. An idiom is a special phrase. It does not mean what the words say. But it could emphasise what someone means. Paul wrote, 'You even would have taken out your eyes and you would have given them to me.' This may not mean that they wanted to make Paul's eyes better. It just emphasized how much the Christians in Galatia cared about Paul. And it showed how generous they were.

Paul cares about the Christians

v17 Those other people really want you to belong only to them. But this is not for your benefit. They want to separate you from us. They want you to give more attention to them.

Those 'other people' were the false teachers. Their intentions were not good because they were jealous. They did not want the Christians to be loyal to Paul. To 'separate you' also means 'to shut you out'. The false teachers did not really care about the Christians. They did not want the Christians to enjoy their freedom.

v18 It is good to have a sincere interest in something. But it must always be for a good purpose. And this is always true, even when I am not with you.

The false teachers had an interest in the Christians in Galatia. And they wanted the Christians to have an interest in them. But their reasons were evil. They wanted to control people.

The Christians in Galatia used to have a real interest in Christ. That was good. But they should have continued, even when Paul was not with them.

v19 You are like dear children to me. I feel like a mother who will soon have a child. I feel a similar kind of pain as I wait for you to become like Christ.

Paul really cared about the Christians. His intentions were always good. When a mother has a baby, she feels a lot of pain. She suffers a lot because it is a difficult time for her. But she must wait until her child is born. Paul used this fact as a description of his own emotions. He cared so much about the Christians in Galatia that he felt pain in his emotions. He really wanted the Christians to have Christ's nature in them. He was suffering because it had not yet happened.

v20 I really desire to be with you now. Then I could talk to you in a different way. I am so worried about you.

Paul could not understand why the Christians wanted to leave their freedom. It is often very difficult to write what we feel. It is much easier to speak. We can use a loud or soft voice. People understand more when they can hear the tone of our voice. Paul had to write this letter in a rather strict way. He had to explain the truth again. But he wanted to be kind to the Christians too. He could not do this easily in this letter. This is one reason why he was suffering. So he really wanted to go and speak to them.

The difference between Sarah and Hagar

v21 Some of you still want the *Jewish law to control you. But you do not really understand what the law says.

Paul became stricter again in the rest of this chapter. He was a *Jew. He had studied the *Jewish law. He understood it very well. He knew about the law's strict demands on people who obeyed it. The law did not make people better Christians. Instead, it made them slaves. Not all the Christians believed the false teachers. But Paul wanted to make sure that all the Christians understood the truth.

v22 The *Scripture says that Abraham had two sons. The mother of one son was a slave. The mother of the other son was not a slave. She was a free woman.

You can read about Abraham and his two sons in Genesis chapters 15-21. Abraham's name used to be Abram until God changed it. He had a wife called Sarai. But later God changed her name to Sarah. Sarah had a slave called Hagar. Hagar had a son called Ishmael. Sarah had a son called Isaac. In those days, it was important for a man to have a son. If his wife could not have a son, his wife's slave could have a son for the man. Slaves had no rights. Sarah considered that Hagar was her property. Sometimes a man would marry a second wife. Their society allowed these actions. God had not given his laws at that time. Now we know that God wants a man to have only one wife (Exodus 20:14; Matthew 5:31-32). A man should stay with his wife even if she cannot have children.

v23 The slave had her son as a result of a natural process. The free woman had her son as a result of God's promise to Abraham.

Abraham could make Hagar have a baby. He had sex with Hagar, the slave. Hagar's body worked properly. Ishmael was born 9 months later. This all happened in the normal way. But Hagar and her son were slaves. Abraham and Sarah had sex in the usual way for married couples. Sarah was not a slave but her body did not work properly. They were married for a long time but Sarah never had a baby. One day, God promised Abraham that Sarah would have a son (Genesis 17:15-17). Sarah was 90 years old.

It was impossible for her to have a baby at that age. Abraham could not make Sarah have a baby. But God made it happen because of his promise. Sarah and her son were not slaves. They were free people.

v24 These two situations help us to understand something else. These two women are similar to the two agreements that God made. Hagar is like the agreement that God made on Mount Sinai. Her children were born as slaves. **v25** Hagar is like Mount Sinai, which is in the region called Arabia. And you can compare Mount Sinai to Jerusalem. Jerusalem and all the people there are like slaves.

Paul wanted to explain again the difference between the law and freedom. He compared it to Hagar and Sarah. He used the principle rather than all the details.

Ishmael's sons and their families lived in the region called Arabia (Genesis 26:18). Mount Sinai is in Arabia. Moses had to climb up Mount Sinai to receive God's laws. But the people who obeyed the law were slaves to the law. Hagar was a slave. When a slave has children, they are slaves too. A slave can never have children that are free. In a similar way, the people who received the law could never be free.

Jerusalem was the capital city of the *Jewish nation. So in verse 25, Jerusalem refers to all the *Jews. They are slaves because of the *Jewish law. They wanted God to approve of them. They always tried to please God by their own effort. So they remained as slaves. They could not become God's true children.

People who try to obey the law may belong to Abraham's natural family. Ishmael too belonged to Abraham's natural family. But Ishmael was not the child that God promised to Abraham. And so, nobody who tries to please God by his own effort is a real child of God.

v26 But the city of Jerusalem that is in heaven is free. This Jerusalem is like our mother.

Revelation 22:2 refers to Jerusalem that is in heaven. This Jerusalem refers to all Christians who have trusted Jesus Christ. This Jerusalem is free. So everyone who belongs to God's family is free. Isaac was a free person because his mother was free. In a similar way, Christians who belong to God's family are free.

v27 The *Scripture says:

'To the woman who has never had children, be happy.

You never had a child. But you should shout and cry because you are happy.

You will have more children than the woman who has a husband.'

This *Scripture is Isaiah 54:1. Isaiah was referring to the *Jewish nation when he wrote it. But Sarah is like the woman who had no children. God kept his promise. All the people who trust Jesus Christ are like Sarah's free children. More and more people are trusting Jesus Christ. And so, this family keeps increasing.

v28 My Christian brothers and sisters, you are God's children because of what God promised. In the same way, Abraham had a son, Isaac, because of what God promised.

Isaac was born because of God's promise. Isaac was not born because of Abraham's effort. The Christians in Galatia were like Isaac. They belonged to God's family. This happened because of God's promise. It did not happen by their own effort

v29 One son (Ishmael) was born as a result of a natural process. He caused trouble for the son (Isaac), who was born because of God's Spirit. The same thing is happening today. **v30** But this is what the *Scripture says: 'Make the slave woman and her son go away. The son of the slave woman must not receive anything that belongs to his father. The son of the free woman will receive it all.'

God promised a son to Abraham. But God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, actually made it happen. You can read about this event in Genesis 21:8-10. Ishmael did not deal with Isaac in the right way. Ishmael caused trouble for Isaac. Ishmael, the slave, is like the people who were still trying to please God by their own efforts. Isaac, the free son, is like the Christians. The false teachers caused Paul a lot of trouble. They caused trouble in the *church too. People who do not trust Jesus Christ cannot receive God's blessings. ('Blessings' means the good things that God gives.) Such people will not receive anything that God has promised to Christians. The false teachers would have been very angry with Paul when they heard this. They worked hard to obey the *Jewish law. They supposed that God would reward them for their effort. And they did not want to trust Jesus.

v31 Therefore, my Christian brothers and sisters, we are not like the slave woman's children. Instead, we are like the children of the wife who is free.

Paul finished the explanation that he started in verse 21. Ishmael could not receive anything from his father. Real Christians, who trust Jesus, are not like that. They are like Isaac. They will receive all that God has promised.