

CHAPTER 4

From a child in the likeness of a slave to a son (4:1-7)

A further explanation of the child (under the law) growing up to become a son (in Christ).

(v 1-2) ... as long as the heir is a child (lit. 'is under age'), he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father."

Just as the 'under age' child is governed by rules and regulations (from his father/the testament), so we too were enslaved under the basic principles of the world (v 3). Paul's use of the Greek word for 'basic principles' (or 'elements') is not easy to understand.²⁵ Its meaning is probably that we are enslaved under the rules and regulations of the law or the world in sin.

When the set "time had fully come" (v 4-5), we were freed from this enslavement:

- by the coming of God's Son (so he is divine),
- born of a woman (her seed; he is also human),
- born under law, to redeem those under law,
- that we might receive the full rights of sons! (Lit.: 'the adoption as sons'; also in NASB)
- *Paul's use of the metaphor has shifted somewhat: we don't receive our rights by growing up and becoming an adult, but Jesus came **to redeem us** (pay the ransom) and to arrange **our adoption**:*
 - (Lit.) 'in order²⁶ to redeem those under the law',
 - (Lit.) 'in order that²⁷ we receive the adoption as sons'.

(v 6-7) According to these verses, sonship is related to:

- Receiving the Spirit of his Son
(identified as the Spirit of God in Rom 8:9, Spirit of sonship in Rom 8:15)
- Through the Spirit calling out 'Abba, Father'
(also in Rom 8:15)
- No longer a slave but a son
- Since you are a son, God has made you also an heir
(also in Rom 8:17; followed by being 'co-heir of Christ' – which may include his suffering)

Why going back to bondage? (4:8-11)

(v 8-9) Formerly, ... you were slaves to gods who are not gods (the Galatians used to worship idols²⁸)

- Now you know God,
- Rather are known by God!
- Why would you turn back to those weak and miserable (weak and beggarly) principles?
- Why do you wish to be enslaved all over again?

²⁵ Compare also Gal 4:9; Col 2:8, 20. Gr *stoicheia*, literally meant 'things placed side by side in a row'; subsequently this (plural) noun could mean 'fundamental principles' (cf 'elementary truths' in Hebr 5:12), the 'elements' (earth, water, air, fire; cf 2 Pet 3:10, 12) or even '(spiritual) powers'.

²⁶ Gr *hina* (so that, in order that, indicating the purpose).

²⁷ Ditto.

²⁸ See the beautiful, mocking descriptions of idols in Isa 40:18-20; 41:7; 46:1-2, 5-7.

(v 10) “You are observing special:

- days (Sabbaths, Sundays)
- and months (new moons)
- and seasons (festivals)
- and years (sabbatical years, jubilees). “
- (v 11) “I fear for you ... wasted my efforts on you.” (Paul really rubbed it in)
- See also Col 2:16-17, “... These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” Also, Col 2:23, “Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom ..., but they lack any value ...”

This is true of all religions outside Christ: bondage to idols; bondage to laws and regulations; bondage to religious rituals; bondage to moral achievements and good works; even, bondage to cerebral dead orthodoxy.

Make the right choice (4:12-20)

Paul's sharp reproof is immediately followed by a warm-hearted, intensely personal appeal. Learn from his approach!

- “I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong.” (v 12).
- Become like Paul: without the bondage of Jewish ritualism and ordinances. So, cast aside the whole idea of becoming righteous for God by doing law-works (as Paul formerly had done).
- Paul became like one of them: like a Gentile; no barrier, no dividing wall. He did not look down on them like the Jews did on the Gentiles. See also 1 Cor 9:19-23.

Then he reminded them of their good relationship from the beginning (v 12b-16).

- You have done me no wrong.
- He was ill the first time he preached the gospel to them.
- That illness was a trial (temptation) to them.
- They did not treat him with contempt or scorn.
- They welcomed him as if he were an angel of God, or Christ Jesus himself!

Their joy in accepting both the message and the messenger was so great that they were prepared, even, to tear out their eyes for him. Where was that joy now? Had Paul become their enemy by telling them the truth?

- “Because of an illness” (Lit.: ‘weakness of the flesh’)
- There is a theory of an eye-illness, bearing 4:15 and 6:11 in mind – some even refer to Acts 23:5. Remember also that Paul had been stoned in Lystra (Galatia), Acts 14:9. His attackers thought he was dead and had dragged him out of the city.

(v 17-18) Who are the real enemies? Those Judaist teachers were zealous for a wrong purpose. They wanted to isolate the Galatians from Paul, to bind them to themselves (“that you may be zealous for them”). There is nothing wrong with being zealous to win people, if it is with a good purpose (like Paul). In the absence of Paul their relationship had been cooled, their thinking was influenced in a wrong direction.

(v 19-20) Paul felt like a father who had lost his children. He was ‘perplexed’ about them. He wished he could speak in a different tone. He still felt the same love for them. He was again in the pains of childbirth. The first time was not easy for him (see report in Acts about the South Galatian churches), now he felt the pains again. The tone of the entire letter expresses these birth pains.

- “Until Christ is formed in you.”²⁹ That Christ can be seen in their whole being; both in their way of responding to God (faith instead of works) and as an expression of Christ to others (being like him).
- Compare Gal 3:27 “... all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

²⁹ John Calvin, “If ministers wish to do any good, let them labour to form Christ, not form themselves, in their hearers.”

- See also 2 Thes 1:10 “... on the day [Jesus] comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among [or: in] all those who have believed.”
- See also 1 Jn 3:2-3; Rom 8:29-30

Hagar and Sarah compared (4:21-31)

Paul was still contrasting law observance with the promise which is based on faith, but added a new argument. The explanation of who Hagar is and who Sarah is must have shocked both the Jews and the Judaist teachers in the church – possibly perceived by them as the most shocking and offence statement Paul had ever made. The Jews would proudly say that they were children of Abraham, from the line of Isaac, but Paul challenged their assumptions.

(v 21) “Tell me, you who want to be under the law,³⁰ are you not aware of what the law³¹ says?”

(v 22) “... Abraham had two sons ...

(v 24) “These things may be taken figuratively,³² for the women represent two covenants.”

The two boys had the same father but a different mother.³³ They took their destiny from their mothers. There is a difference in:

- way of birth;
- their relationship to each other;
- their right, or lack of right, to the inheritance.

Hagar’s despise of Sarah (Gen 16:4), and Ishmael’s mocking of Isaac (Gen 21:9), seems to be repeated in treatment the Gentile believers received from these false teachers. This matter concerns every Christian and every Jew. As Paul explained, it is not a matter of physical descent but of spiritual descent.

Two Sons = Two Covenants (Gal 4:21-31)	
Slavery	Freedom
slave son (of slave woman) (v 22-23)	son (of free woman)
born in the ordinary way (NASB: according to the flesh)	result of the promise (NASB: according to the promise)
Hagar covenant: (v 24-26)	
Mount Sinai (in Arabia) ³⁴	
slave children	Sarah covenant:
present Jerusalem, in slavery ³⁵ with her children	Jerusalem above , ³⁶ free
	our mother Isa 54:1 ... barren woman ... ³⁷
	you, like Isaac, are children of promise

³⁰ As was clearly evident, Gal 3:3 & 4:9. The false teachers focussed on the law of Moses (as in Lev. & Deut.).

³¹ This second mention of the law refers to the law in the broader sense, the Torah (Pentateuch, the so-called five books of Moses).

³² Paul did not deny the historic and biblical facts of Hagar and Sarah, but used them *figuratively* to illustrate theological truth.

³³ Ishmael, Gen 16:15-16; Isaac Gen 21:2-5. Or, more in full, Gen 16:1-15 & 21:1-20. Regarding covenant, see Gen 17:18-21.

³⁴ Ishmael’s descendents spread over current Arabia and the Sinai area (Gen 25:18). The Hebrew word *araba* means ‘desert’, but can also be used for ‘nomad’ (Isa 13:20; Jer 3:2). The Oxford Companion to the Bible (1993).

³⁵ See also Gal 3:23.

³⁶ After **present** Jerusalem, one could expect Paul to mention **future** Jerusalem, but he said **above** (it is already). Compare Rev 21:2.

³⁷ Isaiah’s beautiful promise of children after the Israel’s barrenness in exile is now applied as the promise of a greater influx through the gospel of faith.

born "in the ordinary way" (persecutes) -----> [Lit. "according to the flesh "] It is the same now	born "by the power of the Spirit" [Lit. "according to the Spirit "]
<-----	----- So (v 30): Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son
	(v 31) ... we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

In Romans 9, Paul used the same switch but more subtle. In v 6, "Not all who are descended are Israel ... through Isaac ... offspring ..." Paul explained that only the children of the promise are God's children (Rom 9:6-9). Then later, that only the children in faith (those pursuing righteousness by faith, not by works) are accepted; Rom 9:30-10:4.

See also John the Baptist's challenge to their ancestry (Mat 3:9-10) and Jesus' similar challenge (Jn 8:33-41).

So now the issue is:

- Not: natural Isaac/natural Ishmael
- Not: Jews/Arabs (as the Jews always thought).
- Not: Jews/Christians (which had become the issue).
- But issues of: faith/works; grace/law; spirit/flesh.

Some more lessons we can learn from it:

- Ishmael is the result of human considerations, not in God's way.
 - (how many 'Ishmael' works did we build?)
 - (devil will always try to use them as traps to us)
- Fleshly sons will always be jealous of the spiritual sons; will always persecute.
 - (enemies; see troubles between Jews and Arabs)
 - (troubles in our churches?)

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