

Galatians Chapter 4 – John Karmelich

1. My one word title for this lesson is "adoption". To begin, understand that in the Hebrew, Greek and Roman culture that dominated the world in which Galatians was written, the word adoption had a different meaning than as we think of it today. When we think of an adoption, we think of taking a person who was not naturally born to a couple and making that child a legal member of a family. To explain what it meant back then, think of a father saying to his child that he raised, "You are now worthy to be considered my child". It is little like the type of party that is common in many cultures that in effect says to a boy, "You are now a man and deserve the family name".
 - a) While there was no set age when this was to occur, it was a common ritual for those from these cultures to have a specific ritual for a child to be recognized as a legitimate part of the family of which that child grew up. Ok then, why am I stating all of this? Because it was that type of ritual that Paul had in mind as he wrote this part of Galatians.
 - b) That is nice. What does it have to do with you and me? This adoption ritual is how Paul is explaining to us as Christians how we become part of God's family. It is far more than just saying that God is now our legal father. It is the idea that we as Christians become a new unique entity, once we believe that Jesus did die for our sins. In this section of the letter Paul explains how we literally and physically change in our relationship with God once we become aware of that relationship. Paul uses that commonly practiced adoption ritual as it was understood in that culture. Bottom line: Paul uses this ritual to explain to them and us how we are saved by faith in Jesus and that's that.
 - c) Let me try this one more way: The reason why I want you to read this lesson is so that we can understand how we as Christians are also adopted creatures. Whether one realizes it or not, if one believes that Jesus died for one's sins and believe He is God and that He has been resurrected from the dead, then one is adopted. My job is to explain the significance of that adoption and the wonderful blessings that brings upon one's life now and for our eternal future for just knowing and accepting that relationship to be true.
2. To explain further, it is necessary to remember where we last left off in Galatians. To begin with, let me state what most of you already know, the original letter did not chapter breaks and verse numbers. Those numbering references were put there many centuries after the letter was written for us to easily find specific locations. This leads me back to understanding the significance of the text in Chapter 4. To begin, we need to understand where we left off in Chapter 3.
 - a) Therefore, me list here the last four verses of Chapter 3: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."
 - i) John's very loose translation: It doesn't matter what is your background. In fact, it does not even matter what is one's sex. If you are a Christian, then one is adopted into God's family even as the culture of that day thought of adoption. That is how one is now part of God's own family and in effect, one is now a son of Abraham.
 - ii) That does not mean one is now Jewish. Paul will develop that idea in this chapter. What it does mean, is that we as Christians are now adopted as in being accepted by God the Father as one of His. My difficult job as I go through Chapter 4 is to explain what it means to be adopted by God the Father. What Paul wants us to understand is why that is a blessing beyond our ability to full appreciate it.
 - iii) To put it another way, the reason that our adoption by God is such a big deal is to grasp the idea we can't earn it based on doing good things in life. That is why our salvation is by faith alone and we can't add to it based on how we live our lives.

3. All of this talk of adoption, being blessed and being accepted by God the Father leads us perfectly to Chapter 4 of the book of Galatians. As opposed to trying to summarize it in a few thoughts, it is best if I just start going through the book and explaining how it is we are blessed by adoption, as it was understood in that culture.
 - a) To give a hint about this adoption process before I start, try to grasp the concept that one is not only saved, but one is blessed beyond one's imagination. It is a little like discovering that one's parents are not who we think of as our parents. The God that adopts us gives us far greater blessings in this lifetime and whatever lifetime is to come. That starts with the acceptance of the idea that we are permanently part of this new family. There is nothing we can do to lose that privilege or add to that privilege. Once we grasp the concept that we get tremendous blessings by accepting that idea that we are now adopted, one gets the idea that we become a unique and eternal creation of God, one is ready for this chapter.
 - b) I promise to explain this better as we go through the text. Speaking of which:
4. Chapter 4, Verse 1: What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. ² He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.
 - a) This leads me back to the topic of being adopted. To understand these verses, imagine a small child growing up in a well-to-do household that has servants. Remember that when Paul wrote this, two-thirds of the Roman world was slaves. Therefore, those that read this letter would understand the world of servants and that children of parents raised in such households with servants would eventually get all of the wealth that the parents did have. In the meantime, those privileged young children are no better off than slaves were.
 - i) I was trying to think how to describe this. Imagine if a household servant today has the privilege of say driving the family's expensive car, to go buy groceries. Imagine if the a family servant has the right to use expensive electronics in that house when it was their off duty hours. That young child would not know how to use those things even if they are heir to the family fortune. At the same time, the servants had those privileges even though they don't actually own those things.
 - b) This leads me back to the adoption ritual in such a Roman household. There was even a certain date of the year (roughly late March) when such rituals were held. A father in that household would say to child who was usually around 13 years old, son, you are now old enough to grasp that you inherit everything. You were trained well by the slaves living in our house or maybe even by tutors. Now you deserve to be called by my name. Now you are now officially adopting you as part of my family. Then it was party time. ☺
 - c) OK John, this would be interesting if I lived in the Roman world back then. Why should I care about any of this stuff? What Paul is getting at is for us to comprehend what are the benefits one gets just for trusting that Jesus is God and He died for our sins. It would be like saying the natural order of things is when we do good things, good things happen to us. When we do bad things, bad things happen to us. However, a child that was part of a wealthy family, would get special blessings that are not what most people would ever get in their lives. That idea of a special blessing is the point that Paul is trying to make here.
 - i) With that said, the idea of us being adopted, as Christians is that we get far greater blessings in life than the natural order of things. I'm not saying we should avoid say, trying to be a good person. I am saying God wants to bless us, just because He wants to bless us. That is the advantage of being part of this adopted family.
 - ii) So if all of this is true, why aren't I more financially blessed at this point in my life?
 - a) The answer is if God gave every Christian great financial blessings just for accepting that Jesus is God and did die for our sins, people would want to become Christians for the financial blessings and not to spend eternity in a loving relationship with God the Father.
 - b) The point is God loves us just because He loves us and it is not financial.

- iii) This leads me back to the issue of the benefits of being adopted into God's family. If there are no guarantees of financial blessings or say fame for this privilege, why bother? For starters being part of God's family reminds us that He wants us to use our lives for the greatest purpose one can imagine: To make a difference for Him.
- iv) Let me explain it another way: When people look back at their lives, they want to know that they made a difference in this world. The greatest way I know that one can make a difference is to literally have the God who created everything to begin with guide us as to how to use our time to make that difference in the first place. In other words, God wants to guide our lives and help us to make that difference.
- v) OK then, what next? Ask God. Pray about it. Ask Him something like, "I want to be Your servant. Guide my life to make a difference for You. Make it obvious to me how I can use my life to make a difference for You." I then promise that God can and will, on His timing answer that prayer if we are serious about using our lives to make a difference for Him. At that point go do what one wants to do or what one has to do and trust that God is guiding us for His glory.
- vi) Let me try to think of an extreme example where this might be impossible. Let's suppose one is in jail for a crime one believes one is innocent of committing. In that case one can still pray for God to use them to help other prisoners draw close to God in that jail. Another example might be someone dying of cancer. With the time one has left, one can be a good witness to others working with them during the pain caused by that disease. My point is no matter how good or how bad the circumstances are in one's life, one can always choose to be used by God in order to make a difference in the world around us.
- d) You may think I have wandered away from the verses, but in effect I have not. I have just given examples of how being adopted into God's family works on a practical level. In the meantime, Paul is still explaining to the Galatians and in effect to us how adoption as it was practiced in that society has similarities to how God Himself adopts us as part of His own family if we are simply willing to trust Jesus to guide our lives.

5. Verse 3: So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.

- a) Remember earlier in this lesson when I made the point that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people? That in effect is what Paul meant when he was describing the "basic principals of the world." To say it another way, there are things in life that all people need to know about, whether they are slaves or free. This includes such basic concepts that if one steals and gets caught, one is going to be punished. It is a little like the Hindu concept of "karma" that what goes around comes around.
- b) Paul is not saying that the basic principals of how life works is necessarily a bad thing, but just that until we understand the power and freedom that God gives us as Christians, we are in effect slaves to those basic concept of how the world works.
 - i) I better try to explain this concept another way: If we do good things, we usually benefit from doing good things. When do bad things, we usually will suffer the consequences of doing those bad things. That is the slavery that all humans are under whether we accept it or not.
 - ii) As Christians, we are saved just for believing in Jesus. This comes back to what a pastor of mine once said, "As a Christian, I am free to get drunk, cheat, steal and lie all I want. The question is, how much do I want to?" In other words, we can't lose our salvation by sinning too much. We can suffer the consequences of those sins, but it does not affect our salvation. That is the point Paul is getting at.
- c) OK John, I sort of know all of that by now. Tell me why I should care? The answer is that even as knowledgeable Christians we can and do put ourselves into a form of bondage when we think we have to do "this or that" in order to be saved.

- i) Let me give an example: I have an old friend who grew up in a church where they had a motto: Christians don't drink, chew (tobacco) or spit and those who do are not welcome here. While such a rule may help to keep children in line at a church, in effect such rules are not biblical. One can do those things and still be saved, but just not be a great witness for Jesus when we are not considerate of others.
- ii) Let me try a few more examples: If one wants to be a true Christian, one has to go to our church every Sunday and never miss unless one is really sick. Another is if one wants to be a true Christian one has to wear a certain type of clothing or one is not welcome here. It is like when we see someone who is a believer, but they act very differently then we act and we think, "I am glad I am not like them". The big news is that we will spend eternity with them, so we might as well get used to the idea of accepting Christians who's lifestyle we may not be crazy about.
- iii) Let's be honest, there are certain churches where we are not welcome unless we do dress in a specific style or if we use the exact same bible translation that they do.
- iv) My point is simply that salvation is by faith in Jesus sin payment alone, that He is God, and He was resurrected. Everything and anything that one can add over and above that is things added to the Gospel message and is not God ordained.
- d) So why is Paul (and me) pounding this point over our head? As far as the Galatians, they were dealing with Jewish people who were trying to require that since they now believe Jesus died for their sins, they must follow all of the Jewish customs to become saved.
 - i) As far as me, I'm beating this point to death simply because it is too easy to start thinking that a person is not saved based on how they are acting, or even based on they way they are dressed or even based on what version of the bible they read.
 - ii) Yes, a person may be a bad witness for Jesus for doing certain things, but that is a different issue from salvation itself and that is Paul's point in this verse.
 - iii) That is why Paul says we need to rise above the slavery (being caught up in) the "elementary principals of the world" in that for example, good things happen to good people and bad things happen when we do bad things. Such knowledge is true, but the blessings that come from trusting God are greater in scope and in a benefit to our lives then the knowledge given to us from observing the world.
 - iv) With that speech out of my system, we are ready for Verse 4.
- 6. Verse 4: But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,⁵to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.
 - a) John's loose translation: Jesus came at the right time in history.
 - b) That leads to a logical question: Why did Jesus appear when he did? Why didn't He die for our sins, say right after Adam and Eve sinned or some other point in human history? Why not have Jesus pay the price for our sins today when the world can see it as recorded on someone's smart phone when it happens live? Why way back then?
 - i) For starters, God wanted to set up as much proof as possible that what Jesus did when He did it is the key event of human history. I am convinced that every single aspect of Jesus ministry, his death and resurrection is predicted somewhere in the Old Testament. The interesting thing is that once someone accepts Jesus payment by faith, that is usually when the bible usually opens up to us and one sees clearly that everything about Jesus' life was clearly predicted in the Old Testament.
 - ii) In summary God waited as long as He did to send Jesus to lay out as much proof as humanly possible that Jesus was going to do what God the Father asked Him to do. Every aspect of His ministry, His death and His resurrection can be tied to or traced to some story in the Old Testament. It was all for "proof's sake."
 - c) That leads me back to the text. It says, "born of a woman", a reference to the virgin birth. It also says, "born under the law", a reference to the fact Jesus was born a Jew and that His parents complied as best they could with the Jewish laws as understood back then.

- d) All of this leads to Verse 5. I want you to notice a possible contradiction in Verse 5. Let me expand my translation of it, so that you can get it. It says, (Jesus died) to redeem those under law (Jewish people), that we (Galatians, non-Jews) might receive the full rights of sons.
- i) In other words, Paul was writing this letter to non-Jewish Christians. He wanted to explain to them how they don't need to be "under the law" in order to be saved. Yet at the same time, Jesus was born under the law and came to free those who were subject to those laws as well as set free those who want to accept Jesus as their savior who were not under the Jewish laws. That leads back to the original question, "do we need to be under the law or not in order to be saved?"
 - ii) To explain it another way, the text makes a big deal about Jesus being born "under the law". I can just hear the Jewish people telling the Galatians if Jesus lived under that set of laws, what makes you Galatians think that you can avoid all of those laws in order to be saved? That is what Paul had to argue against in this letter.
 - iii) This leads me back to my expanded translation of Verse 5. Jesus came to redeem Jewish people from the requirements of the law. That does not mean God's laws are bad things. It just means it is impossible to try to obey them based on our own willpower. That is what Jesus came to redeem them from. By freeing them from the requirements of having to obey those laws in order to be saved, it also in effect frees people from non-Jewish backgrounds in order to be saved as well.
 - iv) That is why this verse is not a contradiction once it is understood. The point is we can't be good enough for God based on our efforts. That is what Paul is trying to teach the Galatian people and what he is trying to teach us as well.
- e) This leads me to the final phrase that says, "the full rights as sons". We are in effect back to the topic of adoption. It doesn't matter if one is male or female here. Paul is teaching that any person that accepts Jesus as Savior and God becomes immediately a new person, or better yet a newly created being as adopted into God's family. As I like to state, God knew before the world began who would accept Him and be part of that family. Since we don't know who is and who is not saved, from our perspective, that moment of adoption does not come until we ourselves accept that fact about our lives. On that positive note, I am ready for Verse 6.
7. Verse 6: Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "*Abba*, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.
- a) The Hebrew word for father is "*Abba*". I think the best English translation is daddy. It is like how a little child would refer to a loving father. The point here is because we have received that adoption as sons (be us male or female), the immediate benefit that we get for that adoption is that the Spirit of God takes up residence inside of us and helps us to have that close relationship with God the Father so we can treat Him like the loving father that He desires in all our relationships with Him.
 - b) That reminds me of how I like to think of my own relationship with God the Father. One has to have the balance in life: On one hand, remember that He is the "loving daddy" who cares about our lives personally. On the other hand, He is still greater than us, and wants the best for our lives. It is a balance between respecting Him as the One who is in charge of our lives and in charge of the world and at the same time is our loving father.
 - c) Let me explain a little about the Holy Spirit. How does one know whether or not what we call the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us? For starters, this verse teaches us when we do call out to God the Father it is the Spirit that leads us to call to Him. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to draw people to God and help us be closer to Him. The Spirit becomes part of us as Christians, but again, God never violates our free will. When we do make the effort to reach out to God, it is the Spirit that guides us as to how we should pray.

- d) All of this talk about the Spirit of God living inside of us and accepting Jesus payment for our sins as part of our lives does lead me back to the topic of adoption. The simple point is that if we do accept all of this as true, we are adopted into God's family. That means we can't earn that relationship by trying harder to keep any specific set of rules. Of course we can mess up our lives if we do bad things. God desires to guide our lives not only so that we can make a difference for Him but also because that is the best way for us to live out our lives. That is why we look to His word to guide us to live as His adopted ones.
 - e) In other words, we should behave well, because we believe in Him, not to earn any points or rewards because of that belief. Hopefully that point has sunk in by now that we can't earn His love, so we are ready to move on.
8. Verse 8: Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? ¹⁰ You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.
- a) John's very loose translation: Before you heard the gospel message, you believed in other things that were not real gods such as Greek and Roman mythology. Now that you have trusted that Jesus has died for your sins and do trust that Jesus is God, why are you now trying to prove to Him how worthy you are by your efforts? Paul was having fears that these Galatian people were trusting in efforts again for their salvation and not simply the fact that they are adopted into God's family.
 - b) Remember that Paul feared that these Galatians, many of which Paul personally lead to know Jesus were now turning to Judaism. The problem has nothing to do with learning about God's laws or wanting to obey them. The problem is about trusting in obeying all of those laws in order to be saved. That is what Paul meant by Verse 10 when he says that they observe "special days, months, seasons and years". Paul feared that the Galatians are now observing the Jewish calendar on a religious basis as proof of their salvation.
 - i) This means they were going to church every Saturday, taking off work for all the Jewish holidays and in effect believing they are more worthy by this observation.
 - ii) Paul is arguing that whether they realize it or not, they are becoming slaves to that system. The issue is not whether or not Judaism is a good or bad thing. The issue is about trusting in that observation in order to be more holy before God.
 - c) I can just hear some of you thinking, well, too bad for them. However, I don't personally observe the Jewish calendar of holidays, so why should I care about all of this?" Now ask yourself, am I more proper in my community because of I do attend church regularly? Am I trusting in some ritual in order to be respected before God? Let me try this another way: Do you think God loves me more today because I avoided some particular sin issue that I do struggle with? The answer to all of these questions is no. Again, remember that if God is perfect by definition, then He can't learn and He can't be happy or mad at you or me based on our behavior. In other words, living a life to make a difference for God does benefit our own lives, but it does not affect our salvation before Him.
 - i) If all of that is true, what is the eternal benefit of giving up sinful things and trying to live a life pleasing to God? Yes I believe there are rewards in heaven based on how faithful we were to what God has called us to do. That is a separate concept from our salvation. However, such rewards should never be our basis for doing whatever works we believe God has called us to do. We should live that way just because it is best way for us to live. The point is if we belong to God, we should want to serve Him, just because that is what He has called us to do.
 - ii) In other words, we want to do works and live like the bible commands us to live not earn point with Him, but just out of gratitude for what He has already done for us in our lives. That should be the only motivation to live the Christian life.

9. Verse 12: I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong.
- a) First, let me explain what Paul is not saying: Dress like me. Come on the road like me. Eat the exact foods I eat, walk like me and talk like me. All of that is wrong.
 - b) To understand what Paul meant, notice the second phrase: I became like you. That does not mean Paul dressed liked them or imitated them. It meant that Paul did not follow the diet restrictions as Jews lived. For example, I wonder if Paul ate pork products that are forbidden for Jewish people to eat, or mixed dairy products with meat products. Maybe Paul didn't wear his yamaka around them. In other words, I'm guessing. The point is he didn't go out of his way to act Jewish around this group. Paul did his best to blend in with them. Most likely it meant that Paul ate whatever he was given and that was that.
 - c) The point is Paul never acted "holier than thou" around this group and he never expects anyone to act "holier than thou" around him. To put this in modern terms, when we do get together with other Christians, we just enjoy time with people and don't try to fix any of their behavior. This is a lesson I've had to learn the hard way. What I do is remember the rule that if a person belongs to God, it is His job to change them and not mine. My job is just to be of service to others as best I can and help lead others closer to God. That is the role of all Christian believers. If we can learn to put others needs as priority to our own, there would be a lot less complaining in life and we would enjoy each other's company a lot more. That in effect is what Paul is teaching here.
 - i) In direct context, Paul was probably thinking, "I didn't act like a holier than thou religious Jew around you so don't think you can become a better person by trying to be more religious around me or other people."
 - ii) With that humbling thought stated, let me move on to the next verse.
10. Verse 13: As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. ¹⁴ Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. ¹⁵ What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶ Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?
- a) There is an issue that bored bible scholars debate over, and that is, what was the illness that Paul had to live with in his life? ☺ Apparently he had some sort of vision problem and he had to live with it as he traveled from town to town. In 2nd Corinthians 12:8, it says that Paul prayed three times for this problem to go away, and God responded with "My grace is enough" in the next verse there. The point is that God wanted Paul to live with that particular ailment, whatever it was and that He would provide the power for him (and us) to live on and do what God calls us to do, despite that issue.
 - b) The point as it relates here to the Galatian people is that, they did not put Paul down or mistreat him because of whatever physical problem Paul had. The Galatians focused on the specific message Paul preached. In fact they were so convinced that the Gospel is true that they offered to help Paul deal with his physical problem.
 - i) Imagine a good looking bible preacher tell us that we just need to believe Jesus has died for our sins and He desires to guide our lives in order to have the type of life that most of us desire to make a difference in this world. Now what if someone who wasn't visually appealing gave that same message. That is how I picture Paul looked as he traveled from town to town. People still heard him because he taught that one doesn't have to work hard in order to be saved. That message has appeal because people want to know whether or not their lives make a difference in this world and they don't care what the messenger looks like who preaches it.
 - ii) That, and the fact that God did miracles through Paul in order to validate that his message was God ordained to begin with. Let's face it; preaching that one does not have to work hard to earn God's love has appeal no matter who preaches it.

- c) Paul is saying to them and in effect to us too that we can have joy in life not by making all sorts of efforts to please God, but just by trusting that He loves us and that's that. Since we can't earn God's love, all we can do is enjoy it and then share that love with others.
 - d) To paraphrase Paul some more, "When I was with you, we had so much happiness and joy together. It didn't bother you that I preached to you with eye problems. In fact, you wanted to help me with that problem. Now I hear that you want to end the joy one can have by just trusting God to guide our lives. Once again you are trying to prove your worth to Him. That issue of just trusting God to guide our life is what I am preaching about in this letter". OK, I think you get the point by now. Time to move on.
11. Verse 17: Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them.¹⁸ It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.
- a) Let me paraphrase these verses: "Dear Galatians, it must feel good that so many people care about you and want to guide you to live like them. I (Paul) care about you and want you to live like me. These other people who in effect oppose what I preach also have the same type of zealously in that they want you to live like they do. I know that it feels good to be wanted. However, let me tell you the consequences of their type of zealously".
 - i) Let me also explain this as it was taught to me (John): Cults love to use a method called "love blanketing": This is where a large group "blankets" a target with love in order to get that person to join their cult. We have to look past the emotion of that effort and see the consequences of living how that group lives. Cults love to target those who do not have a great family life to draw them away by their love.
 - ii) In short, learn to see past the emotion and judge who is right in this case.
 - iii) What people fail to see is once that "love blanket" is over, then they expect you to work as hard as they do to go after the next person with the same method.
 - b) In effect, this comes back to the adoption issue I raised to start this lesson. If we are loved by God, don't let any group draw us away from that love. Nothing can compare with the type and amount of love and joy that God can give us, including any and all methods that any group can throw at us. So if all of that is true, how do I know who is right? The point is to think about the message and not the messenger. Consider what each group is trying to preach and use logic and not emotions to decide what is best to follow.
 - i) To make it simple, consider if would one rather live a life where one has to work hard to prove to God one's worthiness or just trust that God loves us just because He does and not have to try to prove that to Him?
 - c) OK John, how do I know for sure that God loves me just as I am? How do I know I don't have to work hard to earn His love? Why should I believe what Paul is preaching when he lived 2,000 years ago and doesn't know anything about me? Yes the idea is appealing, but how do we know for sure this is true? The only thing God asks us to accept by faith is the concept that He exists and by definition is perfect. If God is perfect then He must love us perfectly and perfectly know everything about us. The problem with any and all efforts to please God is we never know how much is enough. If we accept the idea that we don't have to try in the first place, that is a much easier way to live than to try to "kill ourselves" working as hard as we can to prove ourselves to God. That is the point here.
12. Verse 19: My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,²⁰ how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!
- a) Paul is saying that he really had a heart for the Christians who lived there at that time. This is Paul saying, you want emotional love? Great. I am more than happy to provide to you all the emotional love you want. Just because those who want you to work hard to prove to God your worthiness are there live and I am way over here does not mean that I care any less about you just because I am far away from you at this time.

- b) Paul is saying to them and to us, yes it feels good to be sought after. Yes it does feel good to have others around us care about us and want the best for us. However, God also gave us a brain and wants us to use it. Paul is saying think about the price to be paid of having to follow what this other group wants you to do. It is always good thing to want to obey God's commands for the sake of living a better life. The problem is not living that way. The problem is when we do it to try to earn His love. That is what Paul and I (John) for that matter are trying to preach against.
 - c) Let me stand back for a moment and say, what if I already know all of this? What if we get the idea that we can't earn His love? The danger for all of us is when our moments of weakness come and temptation comes along. Remember that the purpose of demonic forces is to make us a bad witness for Jesus. If they can get us on a guilt trip for not being a good enough witness for Jesus, they have done their jobs. When the guilt comes and we are tempted by whatever sin we are facing, besides confessing and turning from that sin, the point is God doesn't love us or hate us more based on what we did. We may still have to suffer the consequences of that action, but that never affects our relationship with God. We can't lose our salvation by sinning too much. We can blow our witness for Him, but we can't lose our relationship with God by any and all sins. The only unforgivable sin is a lifetime long denial that Jesus is God and that He did die for our sins.
 - d) Meanwhile, Paul is still preaching to the Galatians of trying to prove to themselves and the religious Jewish people in their neighborhood of the danger and also the impossibility of trying to prove one's worth to God. Paul will now use another Old Testament story to give an analogy of how God wants us to live. With that said, Verse 21.
13. Verse 21: Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?
²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise.
- a) For all of Paul's talk about the dangers of trying to live a Jewish life, Paul loves to quote from the Old Testament and teach the principals that it taught. My point is that learning the Old Testament is not a bad thing. Trying to obey the law is not a bad way to live. The danger is when we think we have to earn favor with God by obeying those laws.
 - b) Meanwhile, it is time for an Old Testament story. The short version is that Abraham did believe God existed and Abraham trusted God to guide his life. When Abraham was old, God promised him that he would have a son. After waiting many years for this promise to come true, Abraham's wife in a sense said, "I can't take the wait any more. Here, take my servant girl, get her pregnant and you can have your son." Abraham, like a typical dumb male husband said, "If that is what you think is right, I'll go along with the plan."
 - i) Yes I made up that response by Abraham, but in effect that is what happened in the story. The consequences of that mistake have cost millions of lives over the millenniums. That child became the parent of the Middle East nations that have fought against the Jewish people over thousands of years.
 - ii) The good news is that God did keep his unconditional promise to Abraham and thirteen years after that other son was born, Abraham and his wife did have a baby that was the fulfillment of the promise made by God.
 - c) For most of us reading this, this is old news. However, Paul's point was not to teach the Galatians this ancient bit of Jewish history. Paul's point is that both of those two children represent a different relationship with God the Father. Before I explain the details of this story, one can wonder how do I know Paul's analysis of this story is correct? One can say this childbirth represents this analogy and that birth represents that analogy, but how do we know Paul is correct in his interpretation? Yes I am going to answer that question after I explain what is the story. At this point I just want you to keep in mind as that question itself whether Paul was correct as we go through his analysis of these two specific births.

14. Verse 24: These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. ²⁵Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.
- a) Here we get the analogy itself. In summary, the child that Abraham produced through the slave girl represents "slavery" in the sense that one has to prove one's worth to God by trying to please Him by obeying all the Old Testament laws. The second child (Isaac) that came from God's promises represents that we are free from obeying those laws in terms of trying to prove our worth to God. Yes, I will explain that better coming up later.
 - i) In Paul's analogy, he compares the bad child to the specific mountain where the 10 Commandments were given. That is Mount Sinai. He compares the good child to Jerusalem, which if you don't know is located on another small mountaintop.
 - b) The point is of all of this is Paul is trying to make the case that just as Abraham and his wife had to wait on God's timing for the "true promise" to happen, so taking matters into our own hands to try to help God out only causes problems. That is what Paul is saying in this strange comparison of the two childbirths to two separate mountaintops.
 - i) Let me explain by an example. Let's say we are convinced that God wants us to go into a certain profession. Does that mean we avoid getting the education we need to go in that profession and just wait on His timing? Of course not.
 - ii) If we have a friend who is hurting and we want to help them and they are willing to let us help them, are we interfering with God's ability to intervene? Are we like Abraham taking matters into our own hands by doing the footwork? No.
 - iii) OK then, so what is the difference between trusting God and doing such works?
 - a) The way I describe it is we look to God's word to guide our lives. Then we make the best decisions possible based on those principals. There are times when one gets a feeling we should be doing something. I have learned to listen to those feelings but also put them in perspective of His word. Do I make mistakes? All the time. Part of trust in God, is just that, trust.
 - b) Learning to live on His timing is never about avoiding effort. It is about working hard not to prove ourselves to Him, but simply because that is how God calls us to live our lives. If we get that concept, then we get how Paul wants us to live as described in this book.
 - c) Meanwhile, let's get back to Paul's comparison of the two children to how our relationship with God the Father. I posed the question, how do we know Paul's analogy is correct? My answer is the examples I just gave about how we are to live out our lives. If we do accept the idea that God is perfect, why try to earn His love? If we accept that we can't earn His love, why try to prove our worth to Him? Yes, we do it to appease our egos. What Paul is teaching us through this illustration is that such efforts to prove ourselves to Him are not necessary. Since I've now beaten that point to death, I'm ready to move on.
15. Verse 27: For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."
- a) I get the feeling sometimes that when Paul doesn't know what to say next, he just thinks of an Old Testament verse to make a point. That is what Paul is doing in this verse. Verse 27 is a quote from Isaiah 54:1. That leads us to the big question, of who are the barren that is referred to in this verse? I don't think it refers to the descendants Abraham. Both of the children referred to in these verses lead to large nations. I believe Isaiah is prophesying in effect, Christianity will bring far more believers in the world than ever came in through Judaism. Think about how many people have come to trust in a "The God of the Jews" through Jesus as opposed to just through trusting in the Jewish laws. Even during Paul's day, the rapid growth of the church far outnumbered Jewish believers.

- b) Ok, we are well aware that Christianity is bigger in raw numbers than those who practice Judaism. How does that compare to the "barren woman" of Verse 27? Paul's point is that Isaiah was saying that probably no one in his day in Israel was just trusting God to guide their lives. People were trying to prove to God their worthiness by their efforts.
 - i) In that sense, the number of people who just trusted God like Abraham did was like a barren woman. That is why Isaiah prophesized a day would come when that "barren woman" would have far more people live by just trusting that Jesus is God and that Jesus guides our lives than by trying to prove our worth to God.
 - ii) But John, haven't you preached that most people in the world do believe they are going to heaven because they believe their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds? Yes I am convinced that is true. However, such efforts do not mean they are right with God. Remember that the key verse of Galatians is "Just shall live by faith". What I am preaching and apparently what Isaiah was also preaching is that those who are saved are like Abraham: Just believe God exists and trust in His goodness for our salvation and not our ability to prove ourselves to Him. If one accepts that concept, one gets the main point of the book of Galatians.
 - iii) Meanwhile, I still have four more verses to cover to finish the chapter.
16. Verse 28: Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.²⁹ At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.³⁰ But what does the Scripture say? "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."³¹ Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.
- a) While I was preaching about living by faith alone, Paul returns to the comparison of how to live as Christians by going back to the story of Abraham and his two children produced by two different women.
 - b) Remember that a promise given to Abraham by God that he would have a son in his old age. Abraham's wife was past the age where she could have a child and most likely had already experienced menopause. God told Abraham in effect that despite the fact Sarah had menopause many years earlier she will still get pregnant.
 - i) I can just picture Abraham telling Sarah, God said we are going to have a baby so let's get at it. Year after year, after this revelation was somehow given from God, nothing happened. Finally, Sarah in her frustration said in effect, take my slave woman and go get her pregnant, as I don't believe I can get pregnant. It was not until 13 more years past the time this first baby was born, that God's promise did come true to Sarah.
 - ii) I sort of picture Sarah thinking during those years, I'm not going to get pregnant anyway, so if Abraham still wants to do it, I might as well enjoy it. ☺
 - iii) Anyway, after Sarah finally had her baby, she gave the order that the slave woman that gave birth to Abraham's other son has to go away. There is a separate story of how God miraculously saves the life of that first baby, but that other story deviates from the point that Paul is making here in Galatians.
 - c) This leads me back to what Paul is saying. When we are adopted as part of God's family (or to say it better, we accept God's promise of salvation and we realize what He knew all along) that we are saved by our trust that Jesus is God.
 - i) That leads me back to the story of Abraham, Sarah and the two children. Sarah realized that the child born to the slave woman came based on her failure to trust in God's promise that she would get pregnant one day in her old age. Because she understood that her son was the fulfillment of God's promise, she wanted to have her son live separately from the son that came from her failure to trust God.
 - ii) That leads back to the adoption process and us. When we realize that God wants to lead our lives, we too walk away from the sins we committed beforehand.

- iii) Let me put it this way: When we realize we can trust in God's promises for our lives to come true on His timing, and when we realize we don't have to help God fulfill what are His promises for our lives then we too just live by faith that He will guide our lives. That is why we don't have to earn His love based on our efforts.
 - iv) In other words Paul is comparing Sarah's realization that we just need to trust God to guide our lives and not help Him fulfill His promises to how we should live out our own lives as Christian believers.
 - v) That in effect is why Paul compares the birth of those two babies to our destiny as Christians and how we should live out our lives.
 - d) Gee John, all of that is neat. However, let's assume I don't have any desire to get pregnant or if I am a married man, I don't want to raise another child. What does any of this have to do with us? What are the promises God makes to us that we just have to trust in? What is it that we don't do to help God fulfill in us? The answer is what I have been preaching to all of us this whole time: trying to do things to prove our worth to God by our efforts. If one gets that, one gets the main reason why Paul wrote Galatians to begin with.
 - i) But what about say, making the effort to help those in need, or making the effort to get the education we need to do what we believe God is calling us to do? There is nothing wrong with those things. That is not helping God. That is doing what we believe God is calling us to in order to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) So what is the difference between our good works, and say, Sarah's effort to help God by offering her slave girl in order for her husband to have a baby? The main difference is about trusting in God's promises to come true. God somehow made it very clear to Sarah that she herself would get pregnant. God makes it very clear to us in His word how He desires that we live. Doing the footwork so that those promises do happen is how God calls us to live.
 - iii) Think about the "Great commission" again for a moment. Jesus calls us to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. That is us doing the footwork, so that God's promises of building up a "nation" of believers do come true. That is how we mix doing things for God and trusting in His promises at the same time.
 - e) Let me close by returning to the concept of "Adoption". The key to appreciate the idea of being adopted by God, is all about our perspective of this life. Realizing that we will be blessed for all of eternity and don't have to prove ourselves to God should help us deal with whatever it is we have to deal with at the moment. It is like thinking, yes I have to deal with "this" specific problem or issue right now. I don't know how what I am dealing with will turn out. However, I accept the idea that God is in charge of my life. I accept the idea that He desires to guide me. I accept the idea that I will be blessed for eternity and I can't earn that blessing no matter what I do. So why should I worry about whatever it is I have to face when the God who created this world in the first place has adopted me for eternity. Hopefully that adoption process helps all of our perspective today.
17. With that said, let me close in prayer. Father, "daddy" and the God we honor as being in charge of our lives, we don't deserve the honor of being adopted into Your family. Help us to appreciate the fact You love us just because You do and we can't earn that love. Help us to use the most valuable thing You give us, our time and our resources to make a difference for You, not to earn Your respect or Your love, but just out of gratitude for what You have done for us before we were even born. Help us with whatever it is we have to face at the moment and help us to remember that You do desire to guide and help us through Your power to make a difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen`