

Galatians Chapter 4

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I always find it's a good thing every now and then to back up and explain the big picture. Doing that is going to help explain where we are in this book. The author Paul was not one of the "12". He appeared a few years after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to him in a vision. Paul influenced the course of Western Civilization more than anyone other than Jesus Himself. Most of the New Testament, after the Gospels were written by Paul (13 of the letters and some argue he wrote Hebrews too!) With that said, the book Galatians is the oldest of Paul's letters, but they are not placed in time-order in our bible! The reason I'm getting into all of this is to remind us all of Paul's letters were written to encourage believers to grow in their faith and trust Jesus more as believing Christians. One reason they are part of the bible is to encourage our faith as well! The danger for any Christian is it's easy to slip into bad habits such as thinking, "God must be really impressed with what I'm doing now" or "I'm not saved as I'm messing up so badly" or to think "in order to be saved I need to do this or that". All of us veterans of the Christians can easily slip into one of those ways of thinking. That's why we must study the epistles like Galatians to remind us of what it does and does not require to be saved!

With that windy speech of out my system. Time to discuss Chapter 4. As I state every lesson, there are no chapter breaks in the original text. In chapters 1 and 2 Paul emphasizes who he is (a disciple trained by Jesus Himself) to state that those who are teaching false Christian beliefs (we must do this or that in order to be saved) over and above just believing Jesus is God and died for our sins. After he states that case that he's the "real deal", Chapters 3 and 4 focus on why we're only saved by belief in Jesus as God and nothing else. Again, it's important for us Christians to remind ourselves of this truth because it's so easy to think when we mess up or doing some project for our church that now we are somehow: "more saved" or in better standing with God based on what we're doing at the moment!

To start Chapter 4, Paul picks up a theme he hinted at near the end of Chapter 3. He uses an analogy of raising children to understand the difference between freedom and slavery. Keep in mind in Paul's time slavery was common, a large part of that world were slaves and has nothing to do with one's skin color when it came to slavery! The analogy starts with the fact when a child is a child, in effect whether that child is the heir of a big estate or the child of a slave, that child's too young to be put to work. They can not grasp their futures until they are a certain age. The point is any adult could understand that. That'll lead Paul to discuss what's life like as a Christian. He jumps to the fact God sent His Son into the world at the "perfect time" to redeem those under the law. That requires a few explanations:

Ever wonder why Jesus didn't come after say Adam and Eve sinned, or say even today when He would be able to broadcast His actions instantly around the world? God wants the world to get what "the law" is, if for no other reason than for us to grasp what is God's requirements to be with Him in heaven. As I stated in the last lesson, the short answer is to be saved means to never sin once, then Jesus will "move over" or of course accept His full payment for all our sins! So why didn't Jesus wait until modern times where messages can be instantly broadcast around the world? Maybe God just wanted Jesus to do "His thing" before the Romans destroyed the temple. Consider how the Gospel spread from an obscure cult in a trivial part of the largest empire (Rome) the world had ever seen. It was a great time as Paul could travel all over that empire to spread the Gospel message. Despite persecution from both Jerusalem and Rome, the Gospel spread all over the empire in Paul's lifetime. Today Jesus is worshipped all over the world! My simple point is Jesus came "at the right time in history"!

That leads me back to "Redemption from the law". Part of it was the false Jewish sense that one had to be Jewish to be saved. Even non-Jewish people were bound by the laws of Roman society. In effect, I believe Paul's key point is there are no "things" one has to do to be saved other than just believe God is willing to let anyone in heaven who believes the Gospel message despite their background. Of course, how we act affects our lives here not to mention being a witness for God to the world around us! All I am saying is Paul used the illustration of "not knowing any better" to realizing God doesn't require any thing other than faith to spend eternity with Him! That's the Gospel message in a nutshell! Paul uses a loving term for Father: "Abba" which is best translated "Daddy" to describe the type of love He has for those of us who believe in Him. Again, for those of us who realize this, it's important to remind ourself of that fact the next time we mess up or think we're saved because we're doing "this or that" for God!

This leads us back to the Galatians themselves. Remember this is a region (not a city), in what is today part of the nation of Turkey. Paul wrote to them because in their midst were false teachers who wanted them to be obedient to God's laws for salvation purposes! It may help to remember what Satan's wants to do with saved people: "Make them bad witnesses for Jesus", thus there's a demonic factor behind all efforts to drive people away from Jesus. Paul got word that Galatian believers were turning back to the things that don't matter like observing Jewish holidays in order to be saved! By Verse 12, Paul wants to emphasize the fact they haven't "hurt Paul" by doing this. In effect Paul just wants to convince them to turn back to the correct belief that we're only saved by faith and nothing else! He reminds them of how the Galatians cared for Paul when he was there. Apparently, Paul had some sort of eye problems and it was reported they were willing to give them their eyes to help Paul! The point being is they believed in the correct Gospel message (so they're still saved) but they're going down the wrong path which makes them bad witnesses for Jesus at that moment in time! Bottom line is Paul's perplexed about how he will convince them of the truth, so he will now make up an example:

Apparently, he taught them the Old Testament (Genesis) story of how Abraham's wife was barren. For the few who don't know it, Abraham's wife slept with a servant to have a child, but that's not what God wanted as roughly a decade later when Abraham and his wife were about 100, they had a child. All of that lead to analogy by Paul in effect saying the "son not born of the promise" represents the false way to approach God (by trying to keep the law perfectly) while the son of the promise represents our faith in God to keep His word that Abraham would have a son in his old age!

One also needs to realize the "hints" Paul is placing in this text. Both in the fact Abraham's son Isaac represents God's promise to Abraham, so being a Christian who believes Jesus is God, and He died for our sins makes us saved no matter what we do with our lives. The other hint was at the chapter start as Paul stated we are the like the son that inherits everything. Paul is reminding us that we're sons of that promise and get blessings beyond comprehension for believing in Jesus.

OK, let me hold my horses for a second! Most of us already believe we are saved and are trusting in all that. It brings me to my classic "so what" question: When we're doing some project with our church or say something for God, we easily think we're more special at that moment with God. The motivation to do such good things should only be to be a good witness for Jesus and not to "earn points" with Him. I would also remind each of us when we mess up (and we all do) we are no less saved, we are just acting as a bad witness for Him at that moment. Remember why we're saved: To be a living witness for God in all that we do. Chapters like this remind us we're not "more saved" when we do good stuff and we're not "less saved" or lose our salvation when we mess up. That in effect is what Paul's communicating to us in this text and that's why it's important to remind ourselves what salvation is and is not!