

Galatians 4:8-5:1

An Outline

- I. **History** (Galatians 1-2) Paul affirms his Christ-given, apostolic authority to preach the true Gospel based on faith in contrast to a false gospel based on the Law.
- II. **Theology** (Galatians 3-4) Paul provides empirical, biblical, legal and analogical proofs to argue for the true Gospel, which is based on faith, God's promise to Abraham, and the freedom of sonship in Christ.
 - A. An argument from their experience – Did you receive the Holy Spirit by believing in Christ or by the works of the Law? (3:1-5)
 - B. An argument from the Old Testament – Abraham was justified by faith whereas the Law only brought a curse on anyone who did not perfectly obey it (3:6-14).
 - C. An argument from contractual law – God's conditional, temporary covenant with Moses did not nullify His unconditional, eternal covenant with Abraham (3:15-22).
 - D. An argument from the law of inheritance – The Law served as a custodian, keeping Jews in bondage, until they attained full sonship in Christ (3:23-4:7).
 - E. **An emotional appeal followed by an argument by analogy (4:8-31).**
 1. **Paul's emotional appeal (4:8-20).**
 - a. **The Galatians' turn towards a works-based religion is simply a return to their pagan works-based slavery (vv. 8-11).**
 - b. **Paul appeals to the Galatians' once deep affection for Paul when he first shared the Gospel with them (vv. 12-16).**
 - c. **Paul warns the Galatians' against the immoral zeal of those turning them away from the true Gospel (vv. 17-20).**
 2. **Paul's argument by analogy (4:31-31).**
 - a. **Paul contrasts the son born from Hagar with the son born from Sarah, as the son of flesh and slavery versus the son of promise and freedom (vv. 21-22).**
 - b. **Paul uses Hagar and Sarah as an allegory to figuratively contrast the slavery of the earthly Jerusalem with the freedom of the heavenly Jerusalem (vv. 24-31).**
 - c. **Ishmael's persecution of Isaac illustrate the Judaizers' persecution of the believers, but Ishmael is rejected from the free woman's inheritance (vv. 28-31).**
 - F. **Final Exhortation: Stand free, and don't revert to slavery! (5:1)**
- III. **Application** (Galatians 5-6) Paul exhorts believers to stand firm in the true Gospel that gives freedom from the Law and to live by the Spirit in loving service to one another.

Suggested resource: TheBibleProject.com Galatians YouTube - 4:17 to 6:37 (chapters 3-4 review)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Paul think he may have wasted his efforts on the Galatians?

Before Paul came to them with the Gospel, they were Gentile pagans without the knowledge of the true God and slaves to those by nature are no gods. They were “separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). They worshipped idols, which is “nothing at all in the world,” for “there is no God but one...there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’)” (1 Corinthians 8:4-5). Although these idols were nothing, behind them were demons (1 Corinthians 10:19-21), so that before they believed in Christ, they were worshipping demons.

They came to know God (more accurately, came to be known by God). So we read in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.” Even Paul speaks of his conversion this way: “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12). So John also writes, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10) and “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

How are you turning back to those weak and destitute elementary principles (*stoicheia*)? Paul used the same word in Galatians 4:3 to argue that “when we (Jews) were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.” So then, whether speaking of Gentile idolatry or Jewish legalism, the elementary principles were the same. Paul used this word again in Colossians 2:20-23, where he warns against the futility of following rules and regulations to bring about spiritual transformation. He writes, “Since you died with Christ to the elementary spiritual forces (*stoicheia*) of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” (Colossians 2:20-21). The Jewish equivalents to these “human commands and teachings” were the observance of “special days and months and seasons and years.” (Galatians 4:10).

Christ delivered them from the foolishness and futility of human commands and teachings, but now by embracing the Jewish Law, they were turning back to the very same things. Whether Gentile or Jew, the point was that people could not be good enough to merit God’s forgiveness. As Paul wrote earlier: “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing” (Galatians 2:21). Paul preached Christ so that they might give up the notion of self-made righteousness and trust completely in Christ. For even Paul writes of his righteousness, “I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:8-9).

This return to the vanity of works based on the Law is what prompts Paul to fear that he has wasted his efforts on them.

2. Why does Paul feel that the Galatians have unreasonably made him their enemy

Paul pleads with the Galatians to become like him as he became like them. In what sense? Paul lived by faith, freed from bondage to the Law. The Gentiles were in a sense free because they were not subject to the Jewish Law in the first place. In speaking of such Gentiles, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “To those under the law I became like on under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law [i.e. Gentiles] I became like one not having the law” (1 Corinthians 9:21). Paul became like the Gentiles, not under the Jewish Law, when he preached the Gospel to them. Now, he pleads for them to identify

with that same freedom from bondage, for while they submitted themselves to rules and regulations, they were governed by their flesh (sinful nature) and sin, When Christ died for them, he freed them from this bondage. This is what Paul argued in Romans 8:1-4:

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you[a] free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Again, in Romans 6:14, Paul wrote, “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.” The weakness of the law was not inherent but in the flesh (sinful nature). God made the new covenant in Christ because the people could not keep the old covenant (i.e. Mosaic Law) (Hebrews 8:7-9).

When Paul first preached the Gospel to them it was by providence, for he was sick. Paul was likely deterred from his original plan to go elsewhere. As he was recuperating in the provinces of Galatia, the Galatians received the Gospel from this sick man as though he were an angel of God, even Christ Himself. In other words, they treasured the message of the Gospel in spite of his sickly demeanor.

The provinces of Galatia included the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe in the Lycaonian region. Recall in Acts 14 that there were plenty of strong opposition from the Jews in these places. Recall also that the people of Derbe, seeing the miracles of Paul and Barnabas, began worshipping them as though they were gods. But the apostles vehemently corrected this error. The result? Following the influence of certain Jews, they stoned Paul and left him for dead. The Galatians were very fickle people. So, it may not be a surprise that they were so ardently devoted to Paul one moment and just as adamantly against him the next. In Derbe Paul was persecuted for speaking the truth (they were not “gods”). In the same way the Galatians turned against him for speaking the truth regarding the Gospel. After Paul was stoned, he went back into the city. We are not told that he was “healed,” so he may have returned to recuperate. This may have been the occasion for his preaching the Gospel there (Acts 14:20-21).

The way God used Paul’s sickness to advance the Gospel reminds me of 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, where Paul wrote of his “thorn in the flesh,” an ailment that Paul prayed to God to heal but was not healed. Instead, God told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). In Galatia, God’s power was demonstrated through Paul’s sickness in that the Gospel was preached to the Galatians.

There was no good reason for the Galatians to turn on Paul.

3. What perplexed Paul about the Galatians?

Paul simply refers to “those people” when referring to the Judaizers, who were persuading the Galatians to turn away from the faith-alone Gospel that he preached to them. These people, who scholars have labeled “Judaizers” (or Jew makers), were “zealous” to win them over to their point of view. Paul had no problem with their zeal, only the reason for their zeal. It was a zeal that was not based on right knowledge. Paul wrote about this faulty zeal in Romans 10:1-4:

Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness of God and

sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Paul's primary interest was in salvation for all, Jews and Gentiles alike. His concern was not in who the Galatians liked or followed in terms of personality or in view of popularity. If the Judaizers taught the truth, he would be happy for the Galatians to follow them. The message was greater than the messenger (cf. Galatians 1:8-9).

Paul wanted Christ formed in them because in Christ alone could they find the true righteousness of God, a true right standing with God. As a mother to her child, his joy in delivery became again the pain of birthing because they had turned away from the truth.

4. **Why does Paul end his theological argument with an allegory?**

Those who seek to put themselves under the law fail to realize that the law, that is, the Torah, the writings of Moses, are more than just Exodus through Deuteronomy. Genesis is very much a part of the Books of the Law and given through Moses. Paul points to this larger context to speak of the two sons of Abraham. One by an Egyptian slave woman, Hagar. The other by a free woman, Sarah. The first was born "according to the flesh;" that is, by human plans and effort and contrary to the purpose of God. Ishmael's birth was man's attempt to help God to fulfill His promises.

On the other hand, the son by the free woman was "the result of a divine promise." It was supernatural. They conceived when Abraham and Sarah were both far past the age of childbearing (Romans 4:18-19). This birth was in keeping with God's promise, not human effort. And it was received as such by faith (Romans 4:20-21).

Up to this point, Paul's case was historical and accurate. But then he proceeded to make an allegorical application, using Hagar and Sarah as types representing two covenants. Hagar represented the covenant given on Mt. Sinai in Arabia and corresponded to the earthly city of Jerusalem, which was under Roman occupation. Consequently, Hagar bore children, who were to be slaves. They were slaves in two senses. First, they were slaves to sin because they failed to keep the works of the Law commanded by God and which they had committed to. Second, they were slaves because they were subject to the Roman world power.

In contrast, Sarah represented the heavenly Jerusalem, which was free. Paul cited Isaiah 54:1, which was a promise to Jews in captivity, that their future would be glorious. Interestingly, this promise of future glory followed Isaiah 52:13-53:12, where God revealed the substitutionary and atoning work by Messiah (Isaiah 53:4-5, 10-12) in response to universal sinfulness (Isaiah 53:6) in order to achieve justification (Isaiah 53:11). By this Paul argued that the children of Sarah were greater than the children of Hagar.

After making this contrast, Paul declared that the Galatian believers, intimately addressed as "brothers and sisters," were, like Isaac, children of promise. They received the benefit of Christ's substitutionary atonement.

Just as Ishmael disparaged Isaac, Paul argued that the Judaizers were disparaging the Christian Gentiles. Paul cited Scripture commanding the child of the slave woman to be gone, keeping Ishmael from sharing in Isaac's inheritance and blessing in Christ (Genesis 21:10).

Paul's allegorical story did not interpret meaning but communicated, elucidated and applied principles, helping the Galatians to see that they were the children of the free woman, freed in Christ from bondage to the Law. The illustrative allegory provided a memorable clincher to Paul's argument, made more firm by the command of Galatians 5:1 to STAND FIRM in their freedom in Christ, that is, salvation by faith, and to not allow themselves to be burdened again by the yoke of slavery, namely, salvation by works.