

Love Letters

Lesson 3: Galatians 4

Paul was convinced that in the short span of time since the church in Galatia was founded, a growing number of these young believers were falling prey to false teachers. His tone with them is sharp but he does not appear to be hopeless. We note however, that Paul is more critical with this audience than with any in his other letters, chastening them for their foolish thinking and persuading them with strong reasons to return to the truth. It is a good reminder today of how easily one might stray from the only sure foundation—Christ alone!

Day One: Remember Who You Are!

Read Galatians 4:1–31.

Put yourself there with these Galatians. You’ve been listening to the advice of those who would woo you away from the gospel truths about Christ. And you’ve just received Paul’s letter—hearing his heartfelt words again reminding you of how steadfastly your faith was secured.

1. Looking back at Galatians 3:26–29, recap the following in your own words:
 - a. Whose likeness do *you* bear? Think about how this affects your perspective. Share your thoughts.
 - b. Considering the age and cultural climate in which *you* live, what unique distinctions have been erased that are no longer an issue between you and others who also believe?
 - c. Whose descendant are you? What does that give you by spiritual birthright?
 - d. What guarantee do you have that what Paul preached to the Galatians is true? See Ephesians 1:13–14. Did you know you were “sealed” and are guaranteed your salvation? How should this awareness strengthen *you* today?

Memory verse: Galatians 4:7 NKJV

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

*Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an **heir of God** through Christ.*

Day Two:

Don't Go Backwards!

Review Galatians 4:1–20.

To make the point regarding the spiritual condition of a person living under the law, Paul now uses the example of a child. Although he may be a full heir of everything his father possesses, while a child he lives as a servant or a slave, obeying the guardians over him until the time set by his father to receive his inheritance.

1. What is God's answer to man's dilemma of being held captive by the law (verses 4–5)?

2. As each person receives the Holy Spirit into their lives, how does the relationship dynamic change (verse 6)?

3. Using the resources you have on hand, write a definition for the following:
 - a. *Heir* (4:1)

 - b. *Adoption* (4:5)

 - c. "*Abba, Father!*" (4:6)

Selah ~

Based on the exercise you just completed, as you consider your relationship with God . . . when *you* step out your front door every morning how does remembering *who you are*—and *who's you are*—bear on your demeanor in front of others? How about to the way you think about yourself?

Your attitude and conduct should always reveal your adoption as a “son” [daughter]. As an heir of God, you have at your fingertips unlimited access to the reading of the will through the Word of God: *who you are, what you've received, where you're headed, and who you'll become*. There is really no excuse you can come up with for living beneath your spiritual net worth when you have an abundance of all that pertains to life and godliness! Briefly list below some of the blessings *you* enjoy today as an heir of God.

Wouldn't it be tragic to taste the goodness and richness of your inheritance only to turn away and go back to living like a spiritual pauper? Because your status cannot be revoked, that would only mean one thing: you chose to relinquish it. Paul is warning his readers not to listen to the false teachers that were seducing them away from freedom in Christ and backwards to their former bondage of legalism. Consider Paul's argument:

4. Before these Galatians knew Christ, to whom/what were they enslaved (verse 8)?
5. What do the terms *weak* and *beggarly* reveal about the extent to which they had regressed (verses 9–11)? To whom did Paul want them to look for their role model?

We can almost hear the disbelief and exasperation in Paul's voice that to return once again to the legalism of the law would be a tragic betrayal of God's grace! Paul pleads with them, referring to his earlier time with them and the relationship that developed, turning them towards God. He had brought the gospel to them without requiring anything in return; now he wanted them to become as he was: faithful to God and free from all entanglements.

6. What was Paul's condition when he first preached the gospel to them (verses 13–15)?
 - a. How did the people receive Paul? To what length would they have gone for him?
 - b. Contrast Paul's affection for these believers with the false teacher's motive (verses 16–17).
 - c. To express his deep love for them, to whom does Paul compare himself? What does he long to see (verses 18–20)?

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me (1 Corinthians 13:11 NIV).

Day Three: Two Covenants

Galatians 4:21–31

Having exposed the true motives of the Judaizers, Paul moves on to wrap up his argument against legalism by sharing an allegory, which is a symbolic interpretation of a spiritual truth that has literal meaning. He points to Abraham and the controversy involving his two wives and two sons that illustrate the two covenants—one by the law and the other by grace.

You may find today's passage challenging if the study of law and grace is new to you. The best way is to present it in terms of a simple history lesson. The actual account of God's promise to Abraham is covered extensively in the Old Testament. In case you're not familiar with it, we will examine the highlights from the vantage point of Abraham's progressive age in years. (The breakdown is listed for you below. As you have time and are able, look up the passages and note any additional facts *you* happen to discover.)

- 75 years of age: Abraham is called by God to leave his homeland and go to Canaan where God promises Him many descendants (Genesis 12:1–9).
- 85 years: His wife Sarah remains barren for many years and becomes impatient, offering her handmaid Hagar to Abraham to be his wife and have their son (Genesis 16:1–3).
- 86 years: Hagar becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, Ishmael, resulting in tension in Abraham's home. Sarah evicts Hagar, but the Lord sends Hagar back with a promise to care for her and her son Ishmael (Genesis 16:4–16).
- 99 years: Abraham again receives the promise from God that he will have an heir by Sarah and will call his name Isaac (Genesis 17–18).
- 100 years: Isaac is born, creating a rivalry with older half-brother Ishmael, whom his father dearly loves (Genesis 21:1–7).
- 103 years: Isaac is weaned (age 3) with a celebration to mark the occasion. Ishmael, now 17 years of age, mocks (persecutes) Isaac. Abraham makes a gut-wrenching decision to have Hagar and Ishmael expelled from the home (Genesis 21:8–14).

On the surface, the dramatic turnabout seems like the natural troubles blended families go through all the time. But upon closer examination, we see the connections these individuals have with one another represent spiritual realities that convey important lessons to us today.

1. Take a moment to reread the account in Genesis 21:1–12 along with that of Galatians 4:21–31. Who is the *bondwoman* and who is the *freewoman*?

- a. What does Paul say in Galatians 4 about the sons born to these two women (verses 23–26)?

Day Four:

Children of Promise

Galatians 4:21–31 (continued)

Hagar and Sarah represent the two covenants with God. Hagar represents the Mosaic Covenant of God's law handed down from Mt. Sinai; her children are slaves (Galatians 4:25). Sarah represents the Abrahamic Covenant of God's grace; her children are free (Galatians 4:26). Just as the law produces slaves, so too, grace produces freedom. Just as there was conflict between Isaac and Ishmael, there is also conflict between grace and legalism.

Paul's letter was not meant to alienate the believers in Galatia. They were indeed still Christians but they were sacrificing their joy by attempting to satisfy themselves through their works. They were convinced they were becoming better believers by returning to the law.

1. Personal: Take stock of *your* Christian life right now. Do you think you are advancing forward toward liberty or backward again into bondage? Please explain.

How sad and self-defeating it is when we allow ourselves to turn from the simplicity of our Christian faith to trust in rituals, rules, and routines that are based in self-effort. Reverting back is regressing into spiritual infancy when God wants us to grow up and mature. As a child of God you are an heir of promise, so learn to live like one!

We have already learned that the law was a tutor to make people realize their need for God. He sent his love letter in the form of the law so they would turn from their sin and turn to find Him.

2. If you look at little closer you can see His heart intent. What is the essence of His message to His people in Deuteronomy 7:6–9?
 - Verse 6:
 - Verse 7:
 - Verse 8:
 - Verse 9:
3. Now look at the truth of God's love letter to *you* recorded by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:3–6. What does God want *you* to realize in these verses?
 - Verse 3:
 - Verse 4:
 - Verse 5:
 - Verse 6:

4. Do you see it? Can you sense the love and passion in these words for *you* personally today? If you haven't caught it yet, look at one more passage and jot down God's purpose in calling you to a relationship with himself through faith in Christ. Summarize the Lord's words to you in John 15:9–17.

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. *LIVE*: Take the next step of obedience and record the difference it makes in your life.

Prayer Requests~

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