

Galatians 4: Concluding His Discussion

Paul's main themes leading up to Galatians 4 have been illustrating the distinctive marks of the New Testament Christian, the foolishness of returning to the Old Law, and the importance of rekindling the faithfulness of the Christians in Galatia by reminding them of their conversion.

Galatians 4 follows this same pattern, but now Paul is writing to conclude his previous discussions before moving on to the application of living a life under the new covenant by showing love and developing the fruit of the Spirit. In concluding his arguments, Paul will call to attention three topics of discussion: the purpose of Christ, the weakness of the Christians in Galatia, and the call of the old covenant.

(1) The Purpose of Christ (vv. 1-7)

To be an heir to the promises of God is the apex of Paul's writing in chapter 3. Paul continues this theme of being an heir in Galatians 4:1-7, illustrating our need for Christ through the picture of a child under a guardian. In doing so, the apostle reminds his audience that the promise of being an heir comes solely from the new covenant.

Paul has already compared the old covenant with a tutor (Galatians 3:24-25). He now doubles down on this illustration by comparing a person under the Old Law to a child awaiting an inheritance, one who is under a guardian until adulthood. A child may have a large estate awaiting him; but until the appointed time, he is unable to receive the full benefits of what awaits.

Living with the hope of a future inheritance, but unable to draw from it, was the situation for those under the old covenant.

“These all died in faith, _____, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

“Of this salvation the prophets _____, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, _____, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Those under the old covenant never fully received the benefits of the inheritance in their lifetime. Instead, as children under a guardian, they waited in faith, searching the scriptures for the time in which they would finally receive the blessings promised to Abraham.

- Read Ephesians 3:6. How does a person receive the promises of God?

With Christ’s coming and establishing a better covenant, those faithful to God are offered the full blessings of being an heir to God’s promises; however, returning to the old covenant would again put them under a guardian, cutting off their ability to receive the promised inheritance.

(2) The Weaknesses of the Churches in Galatia (vv. 8-20)

Paul’s work with the churches in Galatia did not make them exempt from facing struggles. His reason for writing to them was the fear that his work would be undone by Judaizing teachers (Galatians 4:11). In fact, because of false teachers, Paul had doubts concerning the faithfulness of the churches he once helped establish (Galatians 4:20).

Paul’s doubts arise because of two areas of weakness within the churches in Galatia. As we study these areas, we may find churches today still facing similar weaknesses.

A. Desiring Their Old Way of Life (vv. 8-10)

The Apostle Paul’s primary concern came from the Christians desire to return to their old life. They had grown to know God; even more, God is said to know them, but the familiarity and the comfort of their old lives was pulling them away from God. Backsliding was not uncommon. In fact, Paul often writes to Christians warning against the temptation of backsliding, calling us to forget our old life completely.

- Read Philippians 3:13-14. What did Paul forget?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-18. What has passed away in the life of a Christian?

Paul's charge to Christians, when faced with a return to their old way of living, is to leave the past in the past.

B. Failing to Love Truth (v. 16)

All knew Paul's love and care for the church. In Galatians 4:13-15, Paul reminds his audience that his work with the churches in Galatia was one that continued even when his body failed him. Nevertheless, after writing a letter to correct them of their shortcomings, Paul's concern for their souls has been taken as an act of hostility as if he were their enemy.

The truth of the gospel always consists of calling us out of our sins. The churches in Galatia, however, seem to have taken offense to Paul's call for them to leave their old life behind. This lack of love for the truth is something Paul has dealt with before: in 2 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul tells of the end of those who fail to love truth, saying,

“...those who perish, because they did not receive _____, that they might be saved.”

Paul calls to attention the destructive end for those who lack a love for the truth.

- Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-9. What is the outcome of those who listen to words of correction?

The churches in Galatia are beneficiaries of Paul's love for their souls. While it may be necessary for him to rebuke on occasion, it does not mean he has become their enemy. Instead,

Paul is challenging the churches to see the truth of his words and repent, once again creating an environment to grow in Christ.

(3) The Cry of the Old Covenant (vv. 21-31)

In closing this section of his writings, Paul again draws their attention to the old covenant. In so doing, he uses the old covenant against those who wish to be bound by it. Paul asks the Christians a pointed question in Galatians 4:21:

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, _____?”

Paul will use the story of Sarah, Hagar, and their sons as an allegory, revealing that when the old covenant is listened to, it reveals the necessity of a better covenant.

Hagar Old Covenant	Sarah New Covenant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bondwoman • Children born according to the _____ • Covenant from _____, which gives birth to _____ • Corresponded to _____ which now is and is in _____ • In bondage with her children • Cast out • Inheritance? Yes or No? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freewoman • Children born according to _____ • Covenant from _____, which brings _____ • Corresponds to _____ • Children are free, as are the children of promise • Inheritance? Yes or No?

Paul’s picture of Hagar and Sarah is compelling. Paul is showing that the old covenant is a fleshly covenant, one that enslaves those under it. As a slave would inherit nothing from his master, so too will those under the old covenant inherit nothing. The new covenant, in contrast, is

one of freedom from the curse of the old covenant and offers an inheritance to those who live under it.

Which are we? Paul says:

“Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, _____.” (Galatians 4:28)

As Isaac was, we are children of promise. For this fact to be true, Paul focuses on our birth. The son of the freewoman was born of the Spirit (v. 29); likewise, when baptized, the children of promise under the new covenant mirror Isaac’s birth.

“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you unless one is born of _____ and the _____, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the _____ is flesh, and that which is born of the _____ is Spirit” (John 3:5-6).

When Isaac was born, he was born to a mother who was past the age of bearing children; but through the power of God, she gave birth. In like manner, salvation is incomprehensible without God! We, like Sarah, must trust God’s plan and be obedient to His covenant in order to receive the blessings God has offered us.

Conclusion

As we look at Chapter 4 in light of Paul’s previous chapters, we see a flow of continuity. Paul has progressed from examining the marks of a New Testament Christian to calling back those who would return to the old covenant. Ultimately, Paul is charging each of us to live faithfully. Now that Christ has come and established His new covenant, there is no excuse for a return to our old way of life! Not even the old covenant itself can defend such a rejection of God’s new covenant. Understanding this reality, we ought to embrace our status as children of promise and live faithfully under God’s new covenant.