

Galatians

Session 6: Good News – The Benefits Start Now

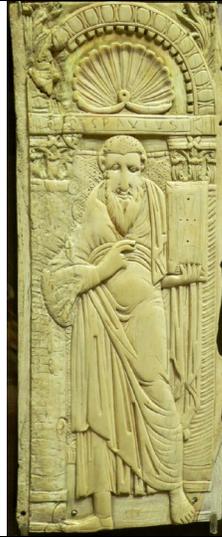
Galatians 4:1-20

Instructor: Dirk Rodgers

Grace Transforms our Present

1. You Are Children Now
2. Why Reject Me Now?

Saint Paul, 7th Century, Author Unknown,
Musée National du Moyen-Âge, Cluny



1. You Are Children Now

“I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.”

Galatians 4:1-2

- Slavery in the 1st century was a large element of the Roman culture and economy. Debts were often paid by indentured service. Conquered peoples were also forced into slavery.
- Paul is not condoning slavery; he is using a well-known feature of society to make a point. He will even make the case that Christ radically transforms the idea of slavery and freedom.
- He describes the long course of Jewish history as a period of “minority”, when children are placed under the authority of slaves until they reach maturity.
- He is also speaking personally; each one of us remain in our governed minority, until we come of age spiritually.

1. You Are Children Now

“In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.”

Galatians 4:3; compare 4:9;
Colossians 2:8, 20; Hebrews 5:12

- The translation of ‘elementary principles’ is debated. (Στοιχεῖον, *stoicheion*). The NIV (2011) has ‘elemental spiritual forces’.
- Term seems to have a range of meanings:
 - Basics of learning, like the “ABC’s”
 - Foundational components of nature, or heavenly bodies
 - Spiritual forces that exert influence in our world
- Perhaps Paul intends us to see all these meanings in this term: We are still learning the basics; we have not advanced beyond the basic needs and passions of our bodies, and, because of this, adverse spiritual forces still have too much power over us.

1. You Are Children Now

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

Galatians 4:4, 5

- In this case, “redeem” (ἐξαγοράζω, exagorazo) refers to the purchase of freedom for a slave.
- Paul begins to describe the law as the guardian put in charge of us until our spiritual maturity.
- Jesus willingly joined us in our minority, fighting the same ‘elementary principles’ that we battle. He likewise placed Himself ‘under the law’, meaning He willingly submitted to its demands.
- As ‘God’s Son’, Jesus can redeem the slaves and offer them a place in God’s family.
- The revelation of this truth awaited ‘the fullness of time’

1. You Are Children Now

“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

Galatians 4:6

- Our redemption is a Triune work; Father, Son and Spirit are the One God who redeems.
- ‘Abba’ is an, informal, familiar term for “father”, used by children to refer to their own father. (Still used in Jewish households)
- The Spirit confirms in our hearts and minds the truth that Jesus provides, that, because of His work, we are children and not slaves.

1. You Are Children Now

“So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

Galatians 4:7

This transition from slave to child carries with it the inheritance that the Father passes on to His children.

1. You Are Children Now

“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.”

Galatians 4:8

- Here we see that the ‘elementary principles’ mentioned in verse 3 and 9, are forces as well as ideas.
- Ignorance of God’s work in Christ left us in this enslaved position.
- The power that these forces have over us is limited, because they are not ‘gods’.
- Paul is contrasting the “God” we now know with the ‘gods’ that formerly had power over us.

1. You Are Children Now

“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?”

Galatians 4:9

- Paul draws us to a point of decision, based on our new knowledge of God in Christ.
- By switching from active to passive voice, from “knowing” God, to “being known by” Him, he reminds us that it is the Father’s action that changes us. Ultimately, we cannot change ourselves simply through our own action.
- Somehow, we do not grasp the significance of our new knowledge of God in Christ. We still imagine ourselves to be enslaved by the same principles that once held us captive.

1. You Are Children Now

“You observe days and months and seasons and years!”

Galatians 4:10; compare
Romans 14:5; Colossians 2:16

- Perhaps Paul refers here to the Gentiles reverting to the Jewish religious calendar, with all its required celebrations and sacrifices. In Romans 14, both this and circumcision are the issues of concern to him.
- Perhaps, also, he implies that unquestioned participation in this calendar is tantamount to submitting oneself to the movements of the heavenly bodies.
- The well-being of our mind and soul should no longer depend upon rituals alone, especially when those rituals are pointing forward to a fulfillment in Jesus.

2. Why Reject Me Now?

“I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”

Galatians 4:11

Paul seems frustrated by the fact that they refuse to see the point of the gospel he introduced to them.

2. Why Reject Me Now?

“Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.”

Galatians 4:12

Paul ‘became’ a Gentile for their benefit. Now he wishes them to return the favor. (see 1 Corinthians 9:22) He reminds them that initially they treated him with respect and care.

2. Why Reject Me Now?

“You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, ...”

Galatians 4:13

This ‘bodily ailment’ probably had something to do with his eyes; see below. Also, compare Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh;’ 2 Corinthians 5:7

2. Why Reject Me Now?

“...and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 4:14

Apparently they received and respected Paul when he first arrived, even in his weakened condition.

2. Why Reject Me Now?

“What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?”

Galatians 4:15-16

Paul wonders what would have caused this radical turn in their affections toward him.

2. Why Reject Me Now?

“They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.”

Galatians 4:17

Paul blames these false teachers who, he believes, are flattering these disciples into thinking they do not need Paul's shepherding. But Paul points out that the teachers only wish to have themselves flattered.

2. Why Reject Me Now?

“It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”

Galatians 4:18-19

Paul wishes to be loved again by this church, like when he was present with them, even as he continues to love them.

2. Why Reject Me Now?

“I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you!”

Galatians 4:20

*Paul wishes again to be loving and encouraging,
rather than stern and corrective.*