

Galatians 4:1-11 – Heirs not Slaves

Paul laid out a case that what the believer in Christ has is far better than what someone has under the law. Those under the law are under a curse, are imprisoned under sin, are captive under the law and are under a guardian. Those who are in Christ, who trust in Christ alone for justification are both children of Abraham and children of God. They have received the Holy Spirit and are heirs of the promises of God. The Gentiles didn't need circumcision, dietary constraints or attendance at feasts to receive all these blessings. The blessings come through the seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ. They don't come by works of the law.

Read Galatians 4:1-7.

Chapter 3 ended with “you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise”. To begin chapter 4, Paul gave yet another illustration of what it was like to be under the law. How is being under the law like being an underage heir? (4:1-2)

When does the underage heir gain control of the inheritance? (4:2)

In verse 3, who does “we” refer to? Instead of being under guardians and managers, what were “we” enslaved to? The “elementary principles” is a phrase that has generated a lot of thoughts, discussions and interpretations. Some of the other translations for “elementary principles” are “elemental spirits”, “basic principles”, “elements”, “rudiments”, “elemental spiritual forces” and “useless rules”. Paul has been talking about the law. It makes sense that this term is another word tied to the law. How is the law “elementary principles”?

In what sense was Paul, at one time, enslaved to the law? (4:3) See Acts 15:10.

Just as the father of an underage heir appoints a time when the heir will gain full control of the inheritance, so God appointed a time for his children to receive the inheritance. What does verse 4 tell us about that time? God the Father sent his Son. What is the significance that Jesus was born of a woman and born under the law? (4:4)

According to verse 5, why did God send his Son into the world? What does the word redeem mean? See also 3:13.

In verse 4, God sent his Son and then in verse 6 he sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. What is the significance of the word “Abba”? The word is used in a similar way in Romans 8:15b. How is “Abba” different from “father”? When did Jesus use the word “Abba”? See Mark 14:36.

What is true of those whom Christ has redeemed? (4:7)

Read Galatians 4:8-11.

What was true of the Galatians before they knew the one true God? (4:8)

What is the difference between knowing God and being known by God? (4:9) In John 10:14 Jesus said that he was the Good Shepherd and that he knew his own and his own knew him.

What did the Galatians want to return to? (4:9) This is reminiscent of God redeeming the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God freed them from bondage and the oppression of the Egyptians. It didn't take long for some of the people to complain that they wanted to go back to Egypt.

The Judaizers told the Galatians that they needed to be circumcised. Peter came to Antioch and changed his practice of eating with Gentiles. It may be that the Judaizers also insisted on Jewish food customs. From verse 10, what other Jewish customs were the Judaizers getting the Galatians to follow? Why doesn't the church follow these customs today? We also don't relate to God through priests descended from Aaron. We don't offer sacrifices for sin. We don't worship at the temple in Jerusalem (if there was one). Is all the law obsolete? If not, what parts are shadows which have found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ and which are still commands we should follow?

The Judaizers had really shaken the Galatians. What was Paul wondering about the Galatians? Was this a real fear or was it simply hypothetical? (4:11)