

Breaking down Galatians 4

Warning

This paper is not being submitted to start the 1888 war again but to give some insights on how I understand the chapter that seems to be raising controversy amongst our ranks again. It is not an answer to any ongoing discussions or dialogues but a personal submission of my own understanding. Let not the swords be drawn from their sheaths because no retaliation shall be made. Read, comment and criticize where necessary.

Introduction

THE main thesis of the Epistle is now established. Gentile Christians, Paul has shown, are in the true Abrahamic succession of faith. And this devolution of the Promise discloses the real intent of the Mosaic law, as an intermediate and disciplinary system. Christ was the heir of Abraham's testament; He was therefore the end of Moses' law. And those who are Christ's inherit the blessings of the Promise, while they escape the curse and condemnation of the Law. The remainder of the Apostle's polemic, down to [Gal 5:12](#), is devoted to the illustration and enforcement of this position.

In Chapter 4, as in the previous chapter, the pre-Christian state is assigned to the Jew, who was the chief subject of Divine teaching in the former dispensation; it is set forth under the first person ([Gal 4:3](#)), in the language of recollection. Describing the opposite condition of sonship, the Apostle reverts from the first to the second person, identifying his readers with himself. {comp. [Gal 3:25-26](#)} True, the Gentiles had been in bondage ([Gal 4:7-8](#)). This goes without saying. Paul's object is to show that Judaism is a bondage. Upon this he insists with all the emphasis he can command. Moreover, the legal system contained worldly, unspiritual elements, crude and childish conceptions of truth, marking it, in comparison with Christianity, as an inferior religion. Let the Galatians be convinced of this, and they will understand what Paul is going to say directly; they will perceive that Judaic conformity is for them a backsliding in the direction of their former heathenism ([Gal 4:8-10](#)). But the force of this latter warning is discounted and its effect weakened when he is supposed, as by some interpreters, to include Gentile along with Jewish "rudiments" already in [Gal 4:3](#). His readers could not have suspected this. The "So we also" and the "held in bondage" of this verse carry them back to [Gal 3:23](#). By calling the Mosaic ceremonies "rudiments of the world" he gives Jewish susceptibilities just such a shock as prepares for the declaration of [Gal 4:9](#), which put them on a level with heathen rites.

This alone can prove the fact that Paul is not talking about the pagan practices for in verse 3 he states well "we" including himself in. When he was a child?! When was that, read 1 Corinthians 13:11 and Acts 9:1-5. This is when Paul was dedicated to a false zeal. The difference between Judaism and Christianity, historically unfolded in chap. 3, is here restated in graphic summary. We see, first, the heir of God in his minority; and again, the same heir in possession of his estate.

Overview

One can fancy the Jew replying to Paul's previous argument in some such style as this. "You pour contempt," he would say, "on the religion of your fathers. You make them out to have been no better than slaves. Abraham's inheritance, you pretend, under the Mosaic dispensation lay dormant, and is revived in order to be taken from his children and conferred on aliens." No, Paul would answer: I admit that the saints of Israel were sons of God; I glory in the fact-"who are Israelites, whose is the adoption of sons and the glory and the covenants and the law-giving and the promises, whose are the fathers" {[Rom 9:4-5](#)} -But they were sons in their minority. "And I say that as long as the heir is [legally] an infant, he differs in nothing from a slave, though [by title] lord of all."

The man of the Old Covenant was a child of God in posse, not in esse, in right but not in fact. The "infant" is his father's trueborn son. In time he will be full owner. Meanwhile he is as subject as any slave on the estate. There is nothing he can command for his own. He is treated and provided for as a bondman might be; put "under stewards" who manage his property, "and guardians" in charge of his person, "until, the day fore appointed of the father." This situation does not exclude, it implies fatherly affection and care on the one side, and heirship on the other. But

it forbids the recognition of the heir, his investment with filial rights. It precludes the access to the father and acquaintance with him, which the boy will gain in after-years. He sees him at a distance and through others, under the aspect of authority rather than of love. In this position he does not yet possess the spirit of a son. Such was in truth the condition of Hebrew saints-heirs of God, but knowing it not.

This illustration raises in [Gal 4:2](#) an interesting legal question, touching the latitude given by Roman or other current law to the father in dealing with his heirs. Paul's language is good evidence for the existence of the power he refers to. In Roman and in Jewish law the date of civil majority was fixed. Local usage may have been more elastic. But the case supposed, we observe, is not that of a dead father, into whose place the son steps at the proper age. A grant is made by a father still living, who keeps his son in pupilage, till he sees fit to put him in possession of the promised estate. There is nothing to show that paternal discretion was limited in these circumstances. The father might fix eighteen, or twenty-one, or thirty years as the age at which he would give his son a settlement, just as he thought best. While he is still charge he is still no better than a slave though enjoying the privileges of a son title. This is the condition everyone is in as long as he has not come to truth, he is still in bondage and not a son; for he is still looking upon his shoulders to see if what he is doing is right or wrong.

This analogy, like that of the "testament" in chap. 3, is not complete at all points; nor could any human figure of these Divine things be made so. The essential particulars involved in it are: -

- *First, the childishness of the infant heir;*
 - *Secondly, the subordinate position in which he is placed for the time; and*
 - *Thirdly, the right of the father to determine the expiry of his infancy.*
1. "When we were children," says the Apostle. This implies, not a merely formal and legal bar, but an intrinsic disqualification. To treat the child as a man is preposterous. The responsibilities of property are beyond his strength and his understanding. Such powers in his hands could only be instruments of mischief, to himself most of all. In the Divine order, calling is suited to capacity, privilege to age. The coming of Christ was timed to the hour. The world of the Old Testament, at its wisest and highest, was unripe for His gospel. The revelation made to Paul could not have been received by Moses, or David, or Isaiah. His doctrine was only possible after-and in consequence of theirs. There was a training of faculty, a deepening of conscience, a patient course of instruction and chastening to be carried out, before the heirs of the promise were fit for their heritage. Looking back to his own youthful days, the Apostle sees in them a reflex of the discipline which the people of God had required. The views he then held of Divine truth appear to him low and childish, in comparison with the manly freedom of spirit, the breadth of knowledge, the fulness of joy which he has attained as a son of God through Christ.
 2. But what is meant by the "stewards and guardians" of this Jewish period of infancy? [Gal 4:3](#) tells us this, in language, however, somewhat obscure: "We were held in bondage under the rudiments (or elements) of the world" - a phrase synonymous with the foregoing "under law". {[Gal 3:23](#)} The "guard" and "tutor" of the previous section reappears, with these "rudiments of the world" in his hand. They form the system under which the young heir was schooled, up to the time of his majority. They belonged to "the world" inasmuch as they were, in comparison with Christianity, unspiritual in their nature, uninformed by "the Spirit of God's Son" ([Gal 4:6](#)). The language of [Heb 9:1](#); [Heb 9:10](#) explains this phrase: "The first covenant had a worldly sanctuary," with "ordinances of flesh, imposed-till the time of rectification." The sensuous factor that entered into the Jewish revelation formed the point of contact with Paganism which Paul brings into view in the next paragraph. Yet, rude and earthly as the Mosaic system was in some of its features, it was Divinely ordained and served an essential purpose in the progress of revelation. It shielded the Church's infancy. It acted the part of a prudent steward, a watchful guardian. The heritage of Abraham came into possession of his heirs enriched by their long minority. Mosaism therefore, while spiritually inferior to the Covenant of grace in Christ, has rendered invaluable service to it (comp. [Gal 4:24](#)).

3. The will of the Father determined the period of this guardianship. However it may be in human law, this right of fore-ordination resides in the Divine Fatherhood. In His unerring foresight He fixed the hour when His sons should step into their filial place. All such "times and seasons," Christ declared, "the Father hath appointed on His own authority". {[Act 1:7](#)} He imposed the law of Moses, and annulled it, when He would. He kept the Jewish people, for their own and the world's benefit, tied to the legal "rudiments," held in the leading-strings of Judaism. It was His to say when this subjection should cease, when the Church might receive the Spirit of His Son. If this decree appeared to be arbitrary, if it was strange that the Jewish fathers-men so noble in faith and character-were kept in bondage and fear, we must remind ourselves that "so it seemed good in the Father's sight." Hebrew pride found this hard to brook. To think that God had denied this privilege in time past to His chosen people to bestow it all at once and by mere grace on Gentile sinners, making them at "the eleventh hour" equal to those who had borne for so long the burden and heat of the day! that the children of Abraham had been, as Paul maintains, for centuries treated as slaves, and now these heathen aliens are made sons just as much as they! But this was God's plan; and it must be right. "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?"

It is Christ's mission to constitute men sons of God ([Gal 4:4-5](#)). His advent was the turning-point of human affairs, "the fulness of time." Paul's glance in these verses takes in a vast horizon. He views Christ in His relation both to God and to humanity, both to law and redemption. The appearance of "the Son of God, woman-born," completes the previous Course of time; it is the goal of antecedent revelation, unfolding "the mystery kept secret through times eternal," but now "made known to all the nations". {[Rom 16:25-26](#)} Promise and Law both looked forward to this hour. Sin has been "passed by" in prospect of it, receiving hitherto a partial and provisional forgiveness. The aspirations excited, the needs created by earlier religion demanded their satisfaction. The symbolism of type and ceremony, with their rude picture-writing, waited for their Interpreter. The prophetic soul of "the wide world, dreaming of things to come," watched for this day. They that looked-for Israel's redemption, the Simeons and Annas of the time, the authentic heirs of the promise, knew by sure tokens that it was near. Their aged eyes in the sight of the infant Jesus descried its rising. The set time had come, to which all times looked since Adam's fall and the first promise. At the moment when Israel seemed farthest from help and hope, the "horn of salvation was raised up in the house of David," - God sent forth His Son.

He sent Him "His Son - the ideal Son, the foretype even as a human son represents his father. This is a great truth and mostly denied with those who cast a shadow to the sonship of our Savior and resort to role play making John 3:16 and 5:26 of non-effect. He did not become so in virtue of His mission to mankind. His relations with men, in Paul's conception, rested upon His pre-existing relationship to God. "The Word" who "became flesh, was with God, was God in the beginning." "He called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God": {[Job 5:18](#)} so the Jews had gathered from His own declarations. Paul admitted the claim when "God revealed His Son" to him, and affirms it here unequivocally. "The Son of God," arriving "in the fulness of time," enters human life. Like any other son of man, He is born of a woman, born under law. Here is the kenosis, the emptying of Divinity, of which the Apostle speaks in [Php 2:5-8](#). The phrase "born of woman," does not refer specifically to the virgin-birth; this term describes human origin on the side of its weakness and dependence. {[Job 14:1](#); [Mat 11:11](#)} Paul is thinking not of the difference, but of the identity of Christ's birth and our own. We are carried back to Bethlehem. We see Jesus a babe lying in His mother's arms-God's Son a human infant, drawing His life from a weak woman! {Comp. [Rom 1:3-4](#); [Rom 9:5](#); [2Co 13:4](#); [Eph 4:9-10](#); [Col 1:15](#); [Col 1:18](#); [Col 2:9](#); [1Ti 3:16](#)}. Nor is "born under law" a distinction intended to limit the previous term, as though it meant a born Jew, and not a mere woman's son. This expression, to the mind of the reader of chap. 3, conveys the idea of subjection, of humiliation rather than eminence. "Though He was (God's) Son," Christ must needs "learn His obedience". {[Heb 5:8](#)} The Jewish people experienced above all others the power of the law to chasten and humble. Their law was to them more sensibly what the moral law is in varying degree to the world everywhere, an instrument of condemnation. God's Son was now put under its power. As a man He was "under law"; as a Jew He came under its most stringent application. He declined none of the burdens of His birth. He submitted not only to the general moral demands of the Divine law for men, but to all the duties and proprieties incident to His position as a man, even to those ritual ordinances which His coming was to abolish. He set a perfect example of loyalty. "Thus it becometh us," He said, "to fulfil all righteousness."

The Son of God who was to end the legal bondage was sent into it Himself. He wore the legal yoke that He might break it. He took "the form of a servant," to win our enfranchisement. "God sent forth His son, human, law-bound-that He might redeem those under law." Redemption was Christ's errand. We have learn how "He redeemed us from the curse of the law," by the sacrifice of the cross. {[Gal 3:13](#)} This was the primary object of His mission: to ransom men from the guilt of sin. Now we discern its further purpose-the positive and constructive side of the Divine counsel. Justification, is the preface to adoption. The man under law is not only cursed by his failure to keep it; he lives in a servile state, debarred from filial rights. Christ "bought us out" of this condition. While the expiation rendered in His death clears off the entail of human guilt, His incarnate life and spiritual union with believing men sustain that action, making the redemption complete and permanent. As enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; now "reconciled, we shall be saved by His life". {[Rom 5:10](#)} Salvation is not through the death of Christ alone. The Babe of Bethlehem, the crowned Lord of glory, is our Redeemer, as well as the Man of Calvary. The cross is indeed the centre of His redemption; but it has a vast circumference. All that Christ is, all that He has done and is doing as the Incarnate Son, helps to make men sons of God. The purpose of His mission is therefore stated a second time and made complete in the words of ver. 5b: "that we might receive the adoption of sons." The sonship carries everything else with it-"if children, then heirs" ([Gal 4:7](#)). There is no room for any supplementary office of Jewish ritual. That is left behind with our babyhood.

To us He is "the Spirit of adoption," replacing the former "spirit of bondage unto fear." For by His indwelling we are "joined to the Lord" and made "one spirit" with Him, so that Christ lives in us. {[Gal 2:20](#)} And since Christ is above all things the Son, His Spirit is a spirit of sonship; those who receive Him are sons of God. Our sonship is through the Holy Spirit derived from His. Till Christ's redemption was effected, such adoption was in the nature of things impossible. This filial cry of Gentile hearts attested the entrance of a Divine life into the world. The Spirit of God's Son had become the new spirit of mankind.

Abba, the Syrian vocative for father, was a word familiar to the lips of Jesus. The instance of its use recorded in [Mar 14:36](#), was but one of many such. No one had hitherto approached God as He did. His utterance of this word, expressing the attitude of His life of prayer and breathing the whole spirit of His religion, profoundly affected His disciples. So that the Abba of Jesus became a watchword of His Church, being the proper name of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Gentile believers pronounced it, conscious that in doing so they were joined in spirit to the Lord who said, "My Father, and your Father!" Greek-speaking Christians supplemented it by their own equivalent, as we by the English Father. This precious vocable is carried down the ages and round the whole world in the mother-tongue of Jesus, a memorial of the hour when through Him men learned to call God Father.

The interchange of person in the subject in [Gal 4:5-8](#) is very noticeable. This agitated style betrays high strung emotion. Writing first, in [Gal 4:3](#) in the language of Jewish experience, in [Gal 4:6](#) Paul turns upon his readers and claims them for witnesses to the same adoption which Jewish believers in Christ ([Gal 4:5](#)) had received. Instantly he falls back into the first person; it is his own joyous consciousness that breaks forth in the filial cry of ver. 6b. In the more calm concluding sentence the second person is resumed; and now in the individualising singular, as though he would lay hold of his readers one by one, and bid them look each into his own heart to find the proof of sonship, as he writes: "So that thou art no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, also an heir through God."

An heir through God- this is the true reading, and is greatly to the point. It carries to a climax the emphatic repetition of "God" observed in [Gal 4:4](#); [Gal 4:6](#). "God sent His Son" into the world; "God sent" in turn "His Son's Spirit into your hearts." God then, and no other, has bestowed your inheritance. It is yours by His fiat. Who dares challenge it? {[Comp. Rom 8:31-35](#); [Act 11:17](#)} Words how suitable to reassure Gentile Christians, browbeaten by arrogant Judaism! Our reply is the same to those who at this day deny our Christian and churchly standing, because we reject their sacerdotal claims.

Verse by Verse Galatians 4:1, 2

1. *Now I say.* Whoever made the division into chapters may have improperly separated this paragraph from the preceding, as it is nothing else than the concluding section, in which Paul explains and illustrates the difference that exists between us and the ancient people. He does so by introducing a third comparison, drawn from the relation which a person under age bears to his tutor. The young man, though he is free, *though he is lord of all* his father's family, still resembles a slave; for he is under the government of tutors. But the period of guardianship lasts only "until the time appointed by the father" after which he enjoys his freedom. In this respect the fathers under the Old Testament, being the sons of God, were free; but they were not in possession of freedom, while the law held the place of their tutor, and kept them under its yoke. That slavery of the law lasted as long as it pleased God, who put an end to it at the coming of Christ.

Since the church of God is one, how comes it that our condition is different from that of the Israelites? Since we are free by faith, how comes it that they, who had faith in common with us, were not partakers with us of the same freedom? Since we are all equally the children of God, how comes it that we at this day are exempt from a yoke which they were forced to bear? On these points the controversy turned, and not on the manner in which the law reigns over each of us before we are freed by faith from its slavery. Let this point be first of all settled, that Paul here compares the Israelitish church, which existed under the Old Testament, with the Christian church, that thus we may perceive in what points we agree and in what we differ. This comparison furnishes most abundant and most profitable instruction.

First, we learn from it that our hope at the present day, and that of the fathers under the Old Testament, have been directed to the same inheritance; for they were partakers of the same adoption. According to the dreams of some fanatics, and of Servetus among others, the fathers were divinely elected for the sole purpose of prefiguring to us a people of God. Paul, on the other hand, contends that they were elected in order to be together with us the children of God, and particularly attests that to them, not less than to us, belonged the spiritual blessing promised to Abraham.

Secondly, we learn that, notwithstanding their outward slavery, their consciences were still free. The obligation to keep the law did not hinder Moses and Daniel, all the pious kings, priests, and prophets, and the whole company of believers, from being free in spirit. They bore the yoke of the law upon their shoulders, but with a free spirit they worshipped God. More particularly, having been instructed concerning the free pardon of sin, their consciences were delivered from the tyranny of sin and death. Hence we ought to conclude that they held the same doctrine, were joined with us in the true unity of faith, placed reliance on the one Mediator, called on God as their Father, and were led by the same Spirit. All this leads to the conclusion, that the difference between us and the ancient fathers lies in accidents, not in substance. In all the leading characters of the Testament or Covenant we agree: the ceremonies and form of government, in which we differ, are mere additions. Besides, that period was the infancy of the church; but now that Christ is come, the church has arrived at the estate of manhood.

We now understand in what respect we are preferred to those who were greatly our superiors; for the statements are not applied to persons, but relate entirely to the economy of the Divine administration. This passage will prove a most powerful battery for destroying the pageantry of ceremonies, which constitutes the entire splendor of the Papal system. For what else is it that dazzles the eyes of simple people, so as to lead them to regard the dominion of the Pope, if not with admiration, at least with some degree of reverence, but the magnificent army of ceremonies, rites, gesticulations, and equipage of every description, contrived for the express purpose of amazing the ignorant? From this passage it appears that they are false disguises, by which the true beauty of the church is impaired. I do not now speak of greater and more frightful corruptions, such as, that they hold them out for divine worship, imagine them to possess the power of meriting salvation, and enforce with more rigid severity the observation of those trifles than the whole law of God. I only advert to the specious pretext under which our modern contrivers including SDA organization apologize for such a multitude of abominations. (For more on this point order my paper "Ezekiel 8 Type Antitype" and Omega of Apostasy - A Point of no Remedy". What though they object that the ignorance of the multitude

prevails to a greater extent than it formerly did among the Israelites, and that many assistances are therefore required? They will never be able in this way to prove that the people must be placed under the discipline or a school similar to what existed among the people of Israel.

Let it be carefully observed, Paul does not merely say that the yoke which had been laid upon the Jews is removed from us, but expressly lays down a distinction in the government which God has commanded to be observed. I acknowledge that we are now at liberty as “to all outward” matters, but only on the condition that the church shall not be burdened with a multitude of ceremonies, nor Christianity confounded with Judaism. The reason of this we shall afterwards consider in the proper place.

Galatians 4:3

3. *Under the elements of the world.* Elements may either mean, literally, outward and bodily things, or, metaphorically, rudiments. But why does he say that those things which had a spiritual signification were *of the world*? We did not, he says, enjoy the truth in a simple form, but involved in earthly figures; and consequently, what was outward must have been “of the world,” though there was concealed under it a heavenly mystery.

Adam Clarke's:

The whole Jewish people were in a state of nonage while under the law. The elements of the world] A mere Jewish phrase, yesodey olam hazzeb, "the principles of this world;" that is, the rudiments or principles of the Jewish religion. The apostle intimates that the law was not the science of salvation, it was only the elements or alphabet of it; and in the Gospel this alphabet is composed into a most glorious system of Divine knowledge: but as the alphabet is nothing of itself, unless compounded into syllables, words, sentences, and discourses; so the law, taken by itself, gives no salvation; it contains indeed the outlines of the Gospel, but it is the Gospel alone that fills up these outlines.

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown:

The Jews primarily, and inclusively the Gentiles also. For the "we" in Ga 4:5 plainly refers to both Jew and Gentile believers. The Jews in their bondage to the law of Moses, as the representative people of the world, include all mankind virtually amenable to God's law (Ro 2:14,15; compare Note, see on JFB for Ga 3:13; JFB for Ga 3:23). Even the Gentiles were under "bondage," and in a state of discipline suitable to nonage, till Christ came as the Emancipator. were in bondage—as "servants" (Ga 4:1). under the elements--or "rudiments"; rudimentary religion teaching of a non-Christian character: the elementary lessons of outward things (literally, "of the [outward] world"); such as the legal ordinances mentioned, Ga 4:10 (Col 2:8,20). Our childhood's lessons [CONYBEARE and HOWSON]. Literally, The letters of the alphabet (Heb 5:12).

You notice that Jamieson-Fausset compares Galatians with Colossians giving hint that the rebuke and context are of the same nature

Galatians 4:4

4. *When the fullness of the time was come.* He proceeds with the comparison which he had adduced, and applies to his purpose the expression which has already occurred, “the time appointed by the Father,” — but still shewing that the time which had been ordained by the providence of God was proper and seasonable. That season is the most fit, and that mode of acting is the most proper, which the providence of God directs. At what time it was expedient that the Son of God should be revealed to the world, it belonged to God alone to judge and determine.

God sent forth his Son. These few words contain much instruction. The Son, who was sent, must have existed before he was sent; and this proves his Godhead. Christ therefore is the Son of God, sent from heaven (this truth has been expounded on the overview above). Yet this same person was *made of a woman*, because he assumed our nature, which shews that he has two natures. But the language was also expressly intended to distinguish Christ from other men, as having been formed of the substance of his mother, and not by ordinary generation. In any other sense, it would have been trifling, and foreign to the subject. The word *woman* is here put generally for the female sex.

Subjected under the law. The literal rendering is, *Made under the law*. Christ the Son of God, who might have claimed to be exempt from every kind of subjection, became subject to the law. Why? He did so in our room, that he might obtain freedom for us. A man who was free, by constituting himself a surety, redeems a slave: by putting on himself the chains, he takes them off from the other. So Christ chose to become liable to keep the law, that exemption from it might be obtained for us; otherwise it would have been to no purpose that he should come under the yoke of the law, for it certainly was not on his own account that he did so.

To redeem them that were under the law. We must here observe, the exemption from the law which Christ has procured for us does not imply that we no longer owe any obedience to the doctrine of the law, and may do whatever we please; for the law is the everlasting rule of a good and holy life. But Paul speaks of the law with all its appendages. From subjection to that law we are redeemed, because it is no longer what it once was. “The vail being rent,” ([Mat 27:51](#).) freedom is openly proclaimed, and this is what he immediately adds.

“So far was he from subjecting to the yoke of the law those to whom the law had not been given, that he came in order to emancipate even the Jews themselves.” — *Wetstein*.

Galatians 4:5

5. *That we might receive the adoption.* The fathers, under the Old Testament, were certain of their adoption, but did not so fully as yet enjoy their privilege. *Adoption*, like the phrase, “the redemption of our body,” ([Rom 8:23](#).) is here put for actual possession. As, at the last day, we receive the fruit of our redemption, so now we receive the fruit of adoption, of which the holy fathers did not partake before the coming of Christ; and therefore those who now burden the church with an excess of ceremonies, defraud her of the just right of adoption.

Galatians 4:6

6. *And because ye are sons.* The adoption which he had mentioned, is proved to belong to the Galatians by the following argument. This adoption must have preceded the testimony of adoption given by the Holy Spirit; but the effect is the sign of the cause. In venturing, he says, to call God your Father, you have the advice and direction of the Spirit of Christ; therefore it is certain that you are the sons of God. This agrees with what is elsewhere taught by him, that the Spirit is the earnest and pledge of our adoption, and gives to us a well-founded belief that God regards us with a father’s love.

“Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.” ([2Co 1:22](#).)

“Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” ([2Co 5:5](#).)

This is implied in Paul’s words, *God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts*. It is not what the persons themselves, in the foolish judgment of the flesh, may venture to believe, but what God declares in their hearts by his Spirit. *The Spirit of his Son* is a title more strictly adapted to the present occasion than any other that could have been employed. We are the sons of God, because we have received the same Spirit as his only Son.

Crying. This participle, I think, is used in order to express greater boldness. Hesitation does not allow us to speak freely, but keeps the mouth nearly shut, while the half-broken words can hardly escape from a stammering tongue. “Crying,” on the other hand, expresses firmness and unwavering confidence.

“For we have not received again the spirit of bondage to fear, but of freedom to full confidence.” ([Rom 8:15](#).)

Abba, Father. The meaning of these words, I have no doubt, is, that calling upon God is common to all languages. It is a fact which bears directly on the present subject, that the name *Father* is given to God both by the Hebrews and by the Greeks; as had been predicted by Isaiah,

"Every tongue shall make confession to my name." (Isa 45:23.)

Galatians 4:7

7. *Wherefore thou art no more a servant.* In the Christian Church slavery no longer exists, but the condition of the children is free. In what respect the fathers under the law were slaves, we have already inquired; for their freedom was not yet revealed, but was hidden under the coverings and yoke of the law. Our attention is again directed to the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. The ancients were also sons of God, and heirs through Christ, but we hold the same character in a different manner; for we have Christ present with us, and in that manner enjoy his blessings.

The Return to Bondage

Gal 4:8-11

"Sons of God, whom He made His heirs in Christ, how are you turning back to legal bondage!" Such is the appeal with which the Apostle follows up his argument. "Foolish Galatians," we seem to hear him say again, "who has bewitched you into this?" They forget the call of the Divine grace; they turn away from the sight of Christ crucified; nay, they are renouncing their adoption into the family of God. Paul knew something of the fickleness of human nature; but he was not prepared for this. How can men who have tasted liberty prefer slavery, or full-grown sons desire to return to the "rudiments" of childhood? After knowing God as He is in Christ, is it possible that these Galatians have begun to dote on ceremonial, to make a religion of "times and seasons"; that they are becoming devotees of Jewish ritual? What can be more frivolous, more irrational than this? On such people Paul's labours seem to be thrown away. "You make me fear," he says, "that I have toiled for you in vain."

In this expostulation two principles emerge with especial prominence.

First, that knowledge of God, bringing spiritual freedom, lays upon us higher responsibilities. "Then indeed," he says, "not knowing God, you were in bondage to false gods. Your heathen life was in a sense excusable. But now something very different is expected from you, since you have come to know God."

We are reminded of the Apostle's memorable words spoken at Athens: "The times of ignorance God overlooked". [{Act 17:1-34}](#) "Ye say, We see," said Jesus; "your sin remaineth". [{Joh 9:41}](#) Increased light brings stricter judgment. If this was true of men who had merely heard the message of Christ, how much more of those who had proved its saving power. Ritualism was well enough for Pagans, or even for Jews before Christ's coming and the outpouring of His Spirit-but for Christians! For those into whose hearts God had breathed the Spirit of His Son, who had learned to "worship God in the Spirit and to have no confidence in the flesh"-for Paul's Galatians to yield to the legalist "persuasion" was a fatal relapse. Half lies, half devilry: such was the popular heathenism of the day. "Gods many and lords many" the Galatian Pagans worshipped-a strange Pantheon. There were their old, weird Celtic deities. On this ancestral faith had been superimposed the frantic rites of the Phrygian Mother, Cybele, with her mutilated priests; and the more genial and humanistic cultus of the Greek Olympian gods. But they were gone, the whole "damned crew," as Milton calls them; for those whose eyes had seen the glory in the face of Jesus Christ, their spell was broken; heaven was swept clear and earth pure of their foul presence. The old gods are dead. No renaissance of humanism, no witchcraft of poetry can reanimate them. As for us after these twenty one centuries, as to the Galatian believers, "there is one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through Him. Paul did not fear that his readers would slide back into actual heathenism. That was intellectually impossible. There are warnings in his Epistles against the spirit of idolatry, and against conformity with its customs; but none against return to its beliefs. What this people were now being led

to is Judaism which was akin to revert them to heathenism.

Things that in a lower stage of life were innocent, and even possessed religious value, may now be unlawful, and the practice of them a declension, the first step in apostasy. What is delightful in a child becomes folly in a grown man. The knowledge of God in Christ has raised us in the things of the spirit to man's estate, and it requires that we should "put away childish things," and amongst them ritual display and sacerdotal officiations, Pagan, Jewish, or Romish. These things form no part of the knowledge of God, or of the "true worship of the Father."

The Jewish "rudiments" were designed for men who had not known God as Christ declares Him, who had never seen the Saviour's cross. Jewish saints could not worship God in the Spirit of adoption. They remained under the spirit of servitude and fear; their conceptions were so far "weak and poor" that they supposed the Divine favour to depend on such matters as the "washing of cups and pots," and the precise number of feet that one walked on the Sabbath. These ideas belonged to a childish stage of the religious life. Pharisaism had developed to the utmost this lower element of the Mosaic system, at the expense of everything that was spiritual in it. Men who had been brought up in Judaism might indeed, after conversion to Christ, retain their old customs as matters of social usage or pious habit, without regarding them as vital to religion. With Gentiles it was otherwise. Adopting Jewish rites de novo, they must do so on grounds of distinct religious necessity. For this very reason the duty of circumcision was pressed upon them. It was a means, they were told, essential to their spiritual perfection, to the attainment of full Christian privileges. But to know God by the witness of the Holy Spirit of Christ, as the Galatians had done, was an experience sufficient to show that this "persuasion" was false. It did not "come of Him that called them." It introduced them to a path the opposite of that they had entered at their conversion, a way that led downwards and not upwards, from the spiritual to the sensuous, from the salvation of faith to that of self-wrought work of law.

"Known God," Paul says, "-or rather were known of God." He hastens to correct himself. He will not let an expression pass that seems to ascribe anything simply to human acquisition. "Ye have not chosen Me," said Jesus; "I have chosen you." So the Apostle John: "Not that we loved God, but that He loved us." This is true through the entire range of the Christian life. "We apprehend that for which we were apprehended by Christ Jesus." Our love, our knowledge-what are they but the sense of the Divine love and knowledge in us? Religion is a bestowment, not an achievement. It is "God working in us to will and work for the sake of His good pleasure." In this light the gospel presented itself at first to the Galatians. The preaching of the Apostle, the vision of the cross of Christ, made them sensible of God's living presence. They felt the gaze of an infinite purity and compassion, of an All-wise, All-pitiful Father, fixed upon them. He was calling them, slaves of idolatry and sin, "into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ." The illuminating glance of God pierced to their inmost being. In that light God and the soul met, and knew each other.

And now, after this profound, transforming revelation, this sublime communion with God, will they turn back to a life of puerile formalities, of slavish dependence and fear? Is the strength of their devotion to be spent, its fragrance exhaled in the drudgery of legal service? Surely they know God better than to think that He requires this. And He who knew them, as they have proved, and knows what was right and needful for them, has imposed no such burden. He granted them the rich gifts of His grace-the Divine sonship, the heavenly heirship-on terms of mere faith in Christ, and without legal stipulation of any kind. Is it not enough that God knows them, and counts them for His children!

So knowing, and so known, let them be content. Let them seek only to keep themselves in the love of God, and in the comfort of His Spirit. Raised to this high level, they must not decline to a lower. Their heathen "rudiments" were excusable before; but now even Jewish "rudiments" are things to be left behind. It further appears that the Apostle saw an element existing in Judaism common to it with the ethnic religions. For he says that his readers, formerly "enslaved to idols," are "now turning back to the weak and beggarly rudiments, to which they would fain be in bondage over again." There is a possibility that apart from Judaism they were mixing some heathen practices. This cannot be denied.

"The rudiments" of [Gal 4:9](#) cannot, without exegetical violence, be detached from "the rudiments of the world" of [Gal 4:3](#). And these latter plainly signify the Judaic rites. The Judaistic practices of the Galatians were, Paul declares, a backsliding toward their old idolatries. We can only escape this construction of the passage at the cost of making the Apostle's remonstrance inconsequential and pointless. The argument of the letter hitherto has been directed with concentrated purpose against Judaic conformity. To suppose that just at this point, in making its application, he turns aside without notice or explanation to an entirely different matter, is to stultify his reasoning. The only ground for referring the "days and seasons" of [Gal 4:10](#) to any other than a Jewish origin, lies in the apprehension that such reference disparages the Sabbath. This may be the point that makes many amongst us conclude that Paul was not addressing Judaism but Paganism.

But how, we ask, was it possible for Paul to use language which identifies the revered law of God with rites of heathenism, which he accounted a "fellowship with demons"? Bishop Lightfoot has answered this question in words: "we cannot do better than quote."

The Apostle regards the higher element in heathen religion as corresponding, however imperfectly, to the lower in the Mosaic law. For we may consider both the one and the other as made up of two component parts, the spiritual and the ritualistic. Now viewed in their spiritual aspect, there is no comparison between the one and the other. In this respect the heathen religions, so far as they added anything of their own to that sense of dependence on God which is innate in man and which they could not entirely crush, were wholly bad. On the contrary, in the Mosaic law the spiritual element was most truly divine. But this does not enter into our reckoning here. For Christianity has appropriated all that was spiritual in its predecessor...The ritualistic element alone remains to be considered, and here is the meeting-point of Judaism and Heathenism. In Judaism this was as much lower than its spiritual element, as in Heathenism it was higher. Hence the two systems approach within such a distance that they can, under certain limitations, be classed together. They have at least so much in common that a lapse into Judaism can be regarded as a relapse into the position of unconverted Heathenism. Judaism was a system of bondage like Heathenism. Heathenism had been a disciplinary training like Judaism" (Commentary in loc.).

This line of explanation may perhaps be carried a step further. Judaism was rudimentary throughout. A religion so largely ritualistic could not but be spiritually and morally defective. In its partial apprehension of the Divine attributes, its limitation of God's grace to a single people, its dim perception of immortality, there were great deficiencies in the Jewish creed. Its ethical code, moreover, was faulty; it contained "precepts given for the hardness of men's hearts"-touching, for example, the laws of marriage, and the right, of revenge. There was not a little in Judaism, especially in its Pharisaic form, that belonged to a half-awakened conscience, to a rude and sensuous religious faculty. Christ came to "fulfil the law"; but in that fulfilment He did not shrink from correcting it. He emended the letter of its teaching, that its true spirit might be elicited. For an enlightened Christian who had learned of Jesus the "royal law, the law of liberty," to conform to Judaism was unmistakably to "turn back." Moreover, it was just the weakest and least spiritual part of the system of Moses that the legalist teachers inculcated on Gentile Christians; while their own lives fell short of its moral requirements. {[Gal 6:12](#)}

Mosaism had been in the days of its inspiration and creative vigour the great opponent of idolatry. It was the Lord's witness throughout long centuries of heathen darkness and oppression, and by its testimony has rendered splendid service to God and man. But from the standpoint of Christianity a certain degree of resemblance begins to be seen underlying this antagonism. The faith of the Israelitish people combated idolatry with weapons too much like its own. A worldly and servile element remained in it. To one who has advanced in front, positions at an earlier stage of his progress lying apart and paths widely divergent now assume the same general direction. To resort either to Jewish or heathen rites meant to turn back from Christ. It was to adopt principles of religion obsolete and unfit for

those who had known God through Him. What in its time and for its purpose was excellent-nay, indispensable-in doctrine and in worship in time also had "decayed and waxed old." To tie the living spirit of Christianity to dead forms is to tie it to corruption.

"Weak and beggarly rudiments"-it is a hard sentence; and yet what else were Jewish ceremonies, in comparison with "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost"? What was circumcision, "now that there was no longer Jew and Greek"? These things were, as Paul saw them, the cast-clothes of religion. For Gentile Christians the history of the Jewish ordinances had much instruction; but their observance was no where more binding than that of heathen ceremonies. Even in the ancient times God valued them only as they were the expression of a devout, believing spirit. "Your new moons and your appointed feasts," He had said to an ungodly generation, "My soul hateth". {[Isa 1:14](#)} And was He likely to accept them now, when they were enforced by ambition and party-spirit, at the expense of His Church's peace; when their observance turned men's thoughts away from faith in His Son, and in the power of His life-giving Spirit? There is nothing too severe, too scornful for Paul to say of these venerable rites of Israel, now that they stand in the way of a living faith and trammel the freedom of the sons of God. He tosses them aside as the swaddling-bands of the Church's infancy-childish fetters too weak to hold the limbs of grown men. "He brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan-a piece of brass." {[2Ki 18:4](#)} Brave Hezekiah! Paul does the same with the whole ceremonial of Moses. "Beggarly rudiments," he says. What divine refreshment there is in a blast of wholesome scorn! It was their traditions, their ritual that the Judaists worshipped, not the Holy One of Israel. "They would compass sea and land to make one proselyte," and then "make him twofold more the child of hell than themselves." This was the only result that the success of the Judaistic agitation could have achieved.

In thus decriing Jewish ordinances, the Apostle by implication allows a certain value to the rites of Paganism. The Galatians were formerly in bondage to "them that are no gods." Now, he says, they are turning again to the like servitude by conforming to Mosaic legalism. They wish to come again under subjection to "the weak and poor rudiments." In Galatian heathenism Paul appears to recognise "rudiments" of truth and a certain preparation for Christianity. While Judaic rites amounted to no more than rudiments of a spiritual faith, there were influences at work in Paganism that come under the same category. Paul believed that "God had not left Himself without witness to any." He never treated heathen creeds with indiscriminate contempt, as though they were utterly corrupt and worthless. Witness his address to the "religious" Athenians, and to the wild people of Lycaonia. {[Act 14:15-17](#); [Act 17:22-31](#)} He finds his text in "certain of your own (heathen) poets." He appeals to the sense of a Divine presence "not far from any one of us"; and declares that though God was "unknown" to the nations, they were under His guidance and were "feeling after Him." To this extent Paul admits a *Preparatio evangelica* in the Gentile world; he would have been prepared, with Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and with modern students of comparative religion, to trace in the poets and wise men of Greece, in the lawgivers of Rome, in the mystics of the East, presentiments of Christianity, ideas and aspirations that pointed to it as their fulfilment. The human race was not left in total darkness beyond the range of the light shining on Zion's hill. The old Pagans, "suckled in a creed outworn," were not altogether God-forsaken. They too, amid darkness like the shadow of death, had "glimpses that might make them less forlorn." And so have the heathen still. We must not suppose either that revealed religion was perfect from the beginning; or that the natural religions were altogether without fragments and rudiments of saving truth. Observe: -

*God's test of the **heathen**, who have not the light, and of those living where the knowledge of truth and light has been abundant, is altogether different. **He accepts from those in heathen lands a phase of righteousness which does not satisfy Him when offered by those of Christian lands.** He does not require much where much has not been bestowed (MS 130, 1899). {5BC 1121.14}*

"Days you are scrupulously keeping, and months, and seasons, and years,"- On these matters the Galatians had, as it seems, already fallen in with the directions of the Jewish teachers. The word by which the Apostle describes their practice, *παράτηρησθε*, denotes, besides the fact, the manner and spirit of the observance-an assiduous, anxious attention, such as the spirit of legal exaction dictated. These prescriptions the Galatians would the more readily

adopt, because in their heathen life they were accustomed to stated celebrations. The Pagan Calendar was crowded with days sacred to gods and divine heroes. This resemblance justified Paul all the more in taxing them with relapsing towards heathenism. The Church of later centuries, both in its Eastern and Western branch, went far in the same direction. It made the keeping of holy days a prominent and obligatory part of Christianity; it has multiplied them superstitiously and beyond all reason. Amongst the rest it incorporated heathen festivals, too little changed by their consecration.

Paul's remonstrance condemns in principle the enforcement of sacred seasons as things essential to salvation. We may not place even the Lord's Day upon this footing. Far different from this is the unforced and grateful celebration of the Seventh Day of the week, which sprang up in Eden, and is assumed by the Apostolic Church. The rule of the seventh day's rest has so much intrinsic fitness, and has brought with it so many benefits, that after it had been enforced by strict law in the Jewish Church for so long, its maintenance was disdained. Its legislative sanction rests on grounds of public propriety and national well-being, which need not to be asserted here. Wherever the "Lord of the Sabbath" rules, His Day will be gladly kept for His sake.

The backward steps were "weak and poor". The best forms of piety, without inward knowledge of God is bondage. Liturgies, creeds and confessions, church music and architecture, Sabbaths, fasts, festivals, are beautiful things when they are the transcript of a living faith. When that is gone, their charm, their spiritual worth is gone. They no longer belong to religion; they have ceased to be a bond between the souls of men and God. "According to our faith"-our actual, not professional or "confessional" faith-"it shall be done unto us": such is the rule of Christ. To cling to formularies which have lost their meaning and to which the Spirit of truth gives no present witness, is a demoralising bondage.

But this is not the only, nor the commonest way in which the sons of God are tempted to return to bondage. "Whosoever committeth sin," Christ said, "is the servant of sin." And the Apostle will have to warn his readers that by their abuse of liberty, by their readiness to make it "an occasion to the flesh," they were likely to forfeit it. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh". {[Gal 5:24](#)} This warning must be balanced against the other. Our liberty from outward constraint should be still more a liberty from the dominion of self, from pride and desire and anger; or it is not the liberty of God's children. Inward servitude is, after all, the vilest and worst.

Galatians 4:9

9. *But now, after that ye have known God.* No language can express the base ingratitude of departing from God, when he has once been known. What is it but to forsake, of our own accord, the light, the life, the fountain of all benefits, — "to forsake," as Jeremiah complains, "the fountain of living waters, and hew out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water!" ([Jer 2:13](#).)

Farther to heighten the blame, he corrects his language, and says, *or rather have been, known by God*; for the greater the grace of God is towards us, our guilt in despising it must be the heavier. Paul reminds the Galatians whence they had derived the knowledge of God. He affirms that they did not obtain it by their own exertions, by the acuteness or industry of their own minds, but because, when they were at the farthest possible remove from thinking of him, God visited them in his mercy. What is said of the Galatians may be extended to all; for in all are fulfilled the words of Isaiah,

"I am sought by them that asked not for me: I am found by them that sought me not." ([Isa 65:1](#).)

How turn ye again? It can be said that they could not turn *again* to ceremonies which they had never practiced. The expression is figurative, and merely denotes, that to fall again into superstitions, as if they had never received the truth of God, was the height of folly. When he calls the ceremonies *beggarly elements*, he views them as out of Christ, and, what is more, as opposed to Christ. To the fathers they were not only profitable exercises and aids to piety, but efficacious means of grace. But then their whole value lay in Christ, and in the appointment of God. The false

apostles, on the other hand, neglecting the promises, endeavored to oppose the ceremonies to Christ, as if Christ alone were not sufficient. That they should be regarded by Paul as worthless trifles, cannot excite surprise; but of this I have already spoken. The word *bondage* conveys a reproof for submitting to be slaves. "By the word 'bondage,' he reproves them for the necessity to which they had reduced themselves to observe ceremonies."

The apostle is dealing with some of the difficulties which had arisen out of their former heathenism. The Galatian had worshipped "them which by nature were no gods," the powers of nature and celestial objects, which indicate and influence the changes of seasons, months, and days, and were returning to these "weak and beggarly elements." They were in danger not only of taking up with the Judaistic doctrine of justification by works, but also of relapsing into the heathen custom of calculating lucky and unlucky days and auspicious seasons by methods of astrology. Against this the apostle enters his protest. There is no evidence that he had any idea of the Jewish Sabbath in his mind. (W. Spiers, M. A.)

Adam Clarke's Commentary:

Now, after that ye have known God] After having been brought to the knowledge of God as your Saviour. Or rather are known of God] Are approved of him, having received the adoption of sons. ... To the weak and beggarly elements] After receiving all this, will ye turn again to the ineffectual rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law--rites too weak to counteract your sinful habits, and too poor to purchase pardon and eternal life for you? If the Galatians were turning again to them, it is evident that they had been once addicted to them. And this they might have been, allowing that they had become converts from heathenism to Judaism, and from Judaism to Christianity. This makes the sense consistent between the 8th and 9th verses. {Ga 4:8-9.}

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary:

Known God or rather are known of God--They did not first know and love God, but God first, in His electing love, knew and loved them as His, and therefore attracted them to the saving knowledge of Him (Mt 7:23; 1Co 8:3; 2Ti 2:19; compare Ex 33:12,17; Job 15:16; Php 3:12). God's great grace in this made their fall from it the more heinous. how--expressing indignant wonder at such a thing being possible, and even actually occurring (Ga 1:6). "How is it that ye turn back again?" weak--powerless to justify: in contrast to the justifying power of faith (Ga 3:24; compare Heb 7:18). beggarly--contrasted with the riches of the inheritance of believers in Christ (Eph 1:18). The state of the "child" (Ga 4:1) is weak, as not having attained manhood; "beggarly," as not having attained the inheritance. elements--"rudiments." It is as if a schoolmaster should go back to learning the A, B, C'S [BENGEL]. again--There are two Greek words in the original. "Ye desire again, beginning afresh, to be in bondage." Though the Galatians, as Gentiles, had never been under the Mosaic yoke, yet they had been under "the elements of the world" (Ga 4:3): the common designation for the Jewish and Gentile systems alike, in contrast to the Gospel (however superior the Jewish was to the Gentile). Both systems consisted in outward worship and cleaved to sensible forms. Both were in bondage to the elements of sense, as though these could give the justification and sanctification which the inner and spiritual power of God alone could bestow.

Galatians 4:10

10. Ye observe days. He adduces as an instance one description of "elements," the observance of days. No condemnation is here given to the observance of dates in the arrangements of civil society. The order of nature out of which this arises, is fixed and constant. How are months and years computed, but by the revolution of the sun and moon? What distinguishes summer from winter, or spring from harvest, but the appointment of God, — an appointment which was promised to continue to the end of the world? ([Gen 8:22](#).) The civil observation of days contributes not only to agriculture and to matters of politics, and ordinary life, but is even extended to the government of the church. Of what nature, then, was the observation which Paul reproveth? It was that which would bind the conscience, by religious considerations, as if it were necessary to the worship of God, and which, as he expresses it in the Epistle to the Romans, would make a distinction between one day and another. ([Rom 14:5](#).)

Talking about the heathen observance of days, months and years I will quote:

The superstitious belief in good and evil days has prevailed in all ages and countries. No season of the year, no month, no week, has been free from them. From Egypt unlucky days have received the name of Egyptian days. The Romans had their dies atri,

which were pointed out on the calendar with a black character denoting a day of bad luck, and their dies albi, pointed out with a white character denoting good luck. In commenting on the text Augustine says: "Those whom the apostle blames are those who say" "I will not set forward on my journey because it is the next day after such a time or because the moon is so; or I'll set forward that I may have luck, because such is just now the position of the stars. I will not traffic this month because a star presides, or I will because it does." Lodge (1596) tells us of those "who would not eat their dinner before they have lookt in their almanacke." Aubrey, the antiquarian, later on, in dealing with the same subject, says: "I shall take particular notice here of November 3rd, both because 'tis my own birthday, and for the remarkable accidents that have happened thereupon. Constantius, son of Constantine the Great, died on this day, Exveteri calendaris penes me. Thomas Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, that famous commander under Henries IV., V., and VI., died this day from a cannon shot received at Orleans. So also did Cardinal Borrhomes, and Sir John Perot, Lord deputy of Ireland, son to Henry VIII., and extremely like him; grief of the fatality of the day killed him. Stow in his annals says, November 3rd, 1099, the sea broke in on Scotland and England, drowning divers towns, and much people and cattle, submerging the lands once belonging to Earl Godwin in Kent, now called Godwin Sands, My father died in 1643, and within a year and a half of his decease such changes came upon my marsh lands in Kent by the influence of the sea that it was never worth one farthing to me; so that I often think this day being my birthday hath the same influence upon me that it had five hundred and eighty years since upon Earl Godwin and others. The Parliament so fatal to Rome's concerns here in Henry VIII.'s time began on November 3rd. The 3rd of November, 1640, began that Parliament so direfully fatal to England and its King." After the Reformation the unlucky day seems to have been Friday; fishermen and sailors would not go forth on that day, or servants take a place. No one on that day would get married, or begin a journey, or open a house of business on that day A similar superstition prevails among the Brahmins. In Japan a particular table is employed by travellers, which, it is said, has been observed to hold true by a continued experience of many ages, and wherein are set down all the unfortunate days of every month. A copy of this table is printed in all their road books. The Siamese observe the feasts of the new and full moon, and think the days that from the change precede the full are more fortunate than those that follow it. Their almanacks are marked with lucky and unlucky days. Neither prince nor any one who has means of applying to the astrologers will undertake anything without consulting them The Mexicans predicted the good or bad fortunes of infants from the sign under which they were born, and the happiness or misfortune of marriages, the success of wars; and of nearly everything from the day on which they were undertaken Nor are these notions confined to heathen countries. The newspapers frequently bring to light the credulity of Englishmen. "Such an extravagant cast of mind," truly says The Spectator, "engages multitudes of people not only in needless terrors but in supernumerary duties, and arises from that fear and ignorance which are natural to the soul of man. Wise men concern themselves to retrench the evils of life by the reasonings of philosophy; fools seek to multiply them by the sentiments of superstition. God's providence overrules all things. We should do our part faithfully, and leave the event with Him." Joseph S. Exell M.A. 1849

When certain days are represented as holy in themselves, when one day is distinguished from another on religious grounds, when holy days are reckoned a part of divine worship, then days are improperly observed. The Jewish Sabbath, new moons, and other festivals, were earnestly pressed by the false apostles, because they had been appointed by the law. When we, in the present age, intake a distinction of days, we do not represent them as necessary, and thus lay a snare for the conscience; we do not reckon one day to be more holy than another; we do not make days to be the same thing with religion and the worship of God; but merely attend to the preservation of order and harmony. The observance of days among us is a free service, and void of all superstition. This is exclusive of the Sabbath Day which is part of Moral Law and not Judaism.

Galatians 4:11

11. *Lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.* The expression is harsh, and must have filled the Galatians with alarm; for what hope was left to them, if Paul's labor had been in vain? Some have expressed astonishment that Paul should be so powerfully affected by the observance of days, as almost to designate it a subversion of the whole gospel. But if we carefully weigh the whole, we shall see that there was just reason; and that the false apostles not only attempted to lay the yoke of Jewish bondage on the neck of the church, but filled their minds with **WICKED SUPERSTITIONS**. To bring back Christianity to Judaism, was in itself no light evil; but **FAR MORE SERIOUS MISCHIEF WAS DONE, WHEN, IN OPPOSITION TO THE GRACE OF CHRIST, THEY SET UP HOLIDAYS AS MERITORIOUS PERFORMANCES, AND PRETENDED THAT THIS MODE OF**

WORSHIP WOULD PROPITIATE THE DIVINE FAVOR. When such doctrines were received, the worship of God was corrupted, the grace of Christ made void, and the freedom of conscience oppressed.

Do we wonder that Paul should be afraid that he had labored in vain, that the gospel would henceforth be of no service? And since that very description of impiety is now supported by Popery, what sort of Christ or what sort of gospel does it retain? So far as respects the binding of consciences, they enforce the observance of days with not less severity than was done by Moses. They consider holidays, not less than the false apostles did, to be a part of the worship of God, and even connect with them the diabolical notion of merit. The Papists must therefore be held equally censurable with the false apostles; and with this addition in aggravation, that, while the former proposed to keep those days which had been appointed by the law of God, the latter enjoin days, rashly stamped with their own seal, to be observed as most holy.

Galatians 4:12

12. *Be as I am.* Having till now spoken roughly, he begins to adopt a milder strain. The former harshness had been more than justified by the heinousness of the offense; but as he wished to do good, he resolves to adopt a style of conciliation. It is the part of a wise pastor to consider, not what those who have wandered may justly deserve, but what may be the likeliest method of bringing them back to the right path. He must “be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.” (2Ti 4:2.) Following the method which he had recommended to Timothy, he leaves off chiding, and begins to use entreaties. *I beseech you*, he says, and calls them *brethren*, to assure them that no bitterness had mingled with his reproofs.

The words, *be as I am*, refer to the affection of the mind. As he endeavors to accommodate himself to them, so he wishes that they would do the like by him in return. *For I am as ye are.* “As I have no other object in view than to promote your benefit, so it is proper that you should be prevailed on to adopt moderate views, and to lend a willing, obedient ear to my instructions.” And here again pastors are reminded of their duty to come down, as far as they can, to the people, and to study the various dispositions of those with whom they have to deal, if they wish to obtain compliance with their message. The proverb still holds: “to be loved, you must be lovely.”

Ye have not injured me at all. This is intended to remove the suspicion which might have rendered his former reproofs more disagreeable. If we think that a person is speaking under a sense of injury, or revenging a private quarrel, we turn away our minds from him entirely, and are sure to torture whatever he says into an unfavourable interpretation. Paul therefore meets the rising prejudice by saying, “So far as respects myself, I have no cause to complain of you. It is not on my own account, nor from any hostility to you, that I feel warmly; and therefore, if I use strong language, it must arise from some other cause than hatred or anger.”

Galatians 4:13

13. *Ye know that, through infirmity of the flesh.* He recalls to their recollection the friendly and respectful manner in which they had received him, and he does so for two reasons. First, to let them know that he loved them, and thus to gain a ready ear to all that he says; and secondly, to encourage them, that, as they had begun well, they would go on in the same course. This mention of past occurrences, then, while it is an expression of his kind regards, is intended likewise as an exhortation to act in the same manner as they had done at an earlier period.

By *infirmity of the flesh* he means here, as in other places, what had a tendency to make him appear mean and despised. *Flesh* denotes his outward appearance, which the word *infirmity* describes to have been contemptible. Such was Paul when he came among them, without show, without pretense, without worldly honors or rank, without everything that could gain him respect or estimation in the eyes of men. Yet all this did not prevent the Galatians from giving him the most honorable reception. The narrative contributes powerfully to his argument, for what was there in Paul to awaken their esteem or veneration, but the power of the Holy Spirit alone? Under what pretext, then, will they now begin to despise that power? Next, they are charged with inconsistency, since no subsequent occurrence in the

life of Paul could entitle them to esteem him less than before. But this he leaves to be considered by the Galatians, contenting himself with indirectly suggesting it as a subject of consideration.

Galatians 4:14

14. *My temptation.* That is, “Though ye perceived me to be, in a worldly point of view, a contemptible person, yet ye did not reject me.” He calls it a *temptation* or trial, because it was a thing not unknown or hidden, and he did not himself attempt to conceal it, as is usually done by ambitious men, who are ashamed of anything about them that may lower them in public estimation. It frequently happens that unworthy persons receive applause, before their true character has been discovered, and shortly afterwards are dismissed with shame and disgrace. But widely different was the case of Paul, who had used no disguise to impose on the Galatians, but had frankly told them what he was.

As an angel of God. In this light every true minister of Christ ought to be regarded. As God employs the services of angels for communicating to us his favors, so godly teachers are divinely raised up to administer to us the most excellent of all blessings, the doctrine of eternal salvation. Not without good reason are they, by whose hands God dispenses to us such a treasure, compared to angels: for they too are the messengers of God, by whose mouth God speaks to us. And this argument is used by Malachi.

“The priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” (Mal 2:7.)

But the apostle rises still higher, and adds, *even as Christ Jesus*; for the Lord himself commands that his ministers shall be viewed in the same light as himself.

“He that beareth you beareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me.” (Luk 10:16.)

Galatians 4:15

15. *Where is there your blessedness?* Paul had made them happy, and he intimates that the pious affection with which they formerly regarded him was an expression of their happiness. But now, by allowing themselves to be deprived of the services of him to whom they ought to have attributed whatever knowledge they possessed of Christ, they gave evidence that they were unhappy. This hint was intended to produce keen reflection. “What? Shall all this be lost? Will you forfeit all the advantage of having once heard Christ speaking by my lips? Shall the foundation in the faith which you received from me be to no purpose? Shall your falling away now destroy the glory of your obedience in the presence of God?” In short, by despising the pure doctrine which they had embraced, they throw away, of their own accord, the *blessedness* which they had obtained, and draw down upon themselves the destruction in which their unhappy career must terminate.

For I bear you record. It is not enough that pastors be respected, if they are not also loved; for both are necessary to make the doctrine they preach be fully relished; and both, the apostle declares, had existed among the Galatians. He had already spoken of their respect for him, and he now speaks of their love. To be willing to *pluck out their own eyes*, if it had been necessary, was an evidence of very extraordinary love, stronger than the willingness to part with life.

Galatians 4:16

16. *Am I therefore become your enemy?* He now returns to speak about himself. It was entirely their own fault, he says, that they had changed their minds. Though it is a common remark, that truth begets hatred, yet, except through the malice and wickedness of those who cannot endure to hear it, truth is never hateful. While he vindicates himself from any blame in the unhappy difference between them, he indirectly censures their ingratitude. Yet still his advice is friendly, not to reject, on rash or light grounds, the apostleship of one whom they had formerly considered to be worthy of their warmest love. What can be more unbecoming than that the hatred of truth should change enemies into friends? His aim then is, not so much to upbraid, as to move them to repentance.

Galatians 4:17

17. *They are jealous of you.* He comes at length to the false apostles, and does more by silence to make them odious, than if he had given their names; for we usually abstain from naming those whose very names produce in us dislike and aversion. He mentions the immoderate ambition of those men, and warns the Galatians not to be led astray by their appearance of zeal. The comparison is borrowed from honorable love, as contrasted with those professions of regard which arise from unhallowed desires. Jealousy, on the part of the false apostles, ought not to impose upon them; for it proceeded not from right zeal, but from an improper desire of obtaining reputation, — a desire most unlike that holy jealousy of which Paul speaks to the Corinthians.

“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” (2Co 11:2.)

To expose still more fully their base arts, he corrects his language. *Yea, they would exclude you.* They not only endeavor to gain your affections, but, as they cannot obtain possession of you by any other means, they endeavor to kindle strife between us. When you have been thrown as it were destitute, they expect that you will yield yourselves up to them; for they perceive that, so long as there shall be maintained between us a religious harmony, they can have no influence. This stratagem is frequently resorted to by all the ministers of Satan. By producing in the people a dislike of their pastor, they hope afterwards to draw them to themselves; and, having disposed of the rival, to obtain quiet possession. A careful and judicious examination of their conduct will discover that in this way they always begin.

Galatians 4:18

18. *But it is good to be the object of jealousy.* It is hard to say whether this refers to himself or to the Galatians. Good ministers are exhorted to cherish holy jealousy in watching over the churches,

“that they may present them as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (2Co 11:2.)

If it refers to Paul, the meaning will be: “I confess that I also am jealous of you, but with a totally different design: and I do so as much when I am absent as when I am present, because I do not seek my own advantage.” But I am rather inclined to view it as referring to the Galatians, though in this case it will admit of more than one interpretation. It may mean: “They indeed attempt to withdraw your affections from me, that, when you are thrown destitute, you may go over to them; but do you, who loved me while I was present, continue to cherish the same regard for me when I am absent.” By condemning improper jealousy, he now exhorts the Galatians to engage in a different sort of competition, and that, too, while he was absent.

Galatians 4:19

19. *My little children.* The word *children* is still softer and more affectionate than brethren; and the diminutive, *little children*, is an expression, not of contempt, but of endearment, though, at the same time, it suggests the tender years of those who ought now to have arrived at full age. ([Heb 5:12](#).) The style is abrupt, which is usually the case with highly pathetic passages. Strong feeling, from the difficulty of finding adequate expression, breaks off our words when half uttered, while the powerful emotion chokes the utterance.

Of whom I travail in birth again. This phrase is added, to convey still more fully his vehement affection, which endured, on their account, the throes and pangs of a mother. It denotes likewise his anxiety; for

“a woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” ([Job 16:21](#).)

The Galatians had already been conceived and brought forth; but, after their revolt, they must now be begotten a second time.

Until Christ be formed in you. By these words he soothes their anger; for he does not set aside the former birth, but says that they must be again nourished in the womb, as if they had not yet been fully formed. That Christ should be formed in us is the same thing with our being formed in Christ; for we are born so as to become new creatures in him; and he, on the other hand, is born in us, so that we live his life. Since the true image of Christ, through the superstitions introduced by the false apostles, had been defaced, Paul labors to restore that image in all its perfection and brightness. This is done by the ministers of the gospel, when they give

“milk to babes, and strong meat to them that are of full age,” ([Heb 5:13](#).)

...and, in short, ought to be their employment during the whole course of their preaching. But Paul here compares himself to a woman in labor, because the Galatians were not yet completely born.

This is a remarkable passage for illustrating the efficacy of the Christian ministry. True, we are “born of God,” ([1Jo 3:9](#);) but, because he employs a minister and preaching as his instruments for that purpose, he is pleased to ascribe to them that work which Himself performs, through the power of his Spirit, in co-operation with the labors of man. Let us always attend to this distinction, that, when a minister is contrasted with God, he is nothing, and can do nothing, and is utterly useless; but, because the Holy Spirit works efficaciously by means of him, he comes to be regarded and praised as an agent. Still, it is not what he can do in himself, or apart from God, but what God does by him, that is there described. If ministers wish to do anything, let them labor to form Christ, not to form themselves, in their hearers. The writer is now so oppressed with grief, that he almost faints from exhaustion without completing his sentence.

Galatians 4:20

20. *I would wish to be present with you now.* This is a most serious expostulation, the complaint of a father so perplexed by the misconduct of his sons, that he looks around him for advice, and knows not to what hand to turn. He wishes to have an opportunity of personally addressing them, because we thus obtain a better idea of what is adapted to present circumstances; because, according as the hearer is affected, according as he is submissive or obstinate, we are enabled to regulate our discourse. But something more than this was meant by the desire to *change the voice*. He was prepared most cheerfully to assume a variety of forms, and even, if the case required it, to frame a new language. This is a course which pastors ought most carefully to follow. They must not be entirely guided by their own inclinations, or by the bent of their own genius, but must accommodate themselves, as far as the case will allow, to the capacity of the people, — with this reservation, however, that they are to proceed no farther than conscience shall dictate, and that no departure from integrity shall be made, in order to gain the favor of the people.

Galatians 4:21

21. Tell me. Having given exhortations adapted to touch the feelings, he follows up his former doctrine by an illustration of great beauty. Viewed simply as an argument, it would not be very powerful; but, as a confirmation added to a most satisfactory chain of reasoning, it is not unworthy of attention.

To be under the law, signifies here, to come under the yoke of the law, on the condition that God will act toward you according to the covenant of the law, and that you, in return, bind yourself to keep the law. In any other sense than this, all believers are under the law; but the apostle treats, as we have already said, of the law with its appendages.

Galatians 4:22

22. For it is written. No man who has a choice given him will be so mad as to despise freedom, and prefer slavery. But here the apostle teaches us, that they who are under the law are slaves. Unhappy men! who willingly choose this condition, when God desires to make them free. He gives a representation of this in the two sons of Abraham, one of whom, the son of a slave, held by his mother's condition; while the other, the son of a free woman, obtained the inheritance. He afterwards applies the whole history to his purpose, and illustrates it in an elegant manner.

In the first place, as the other party armed themselves with the authority of the law, the apostle quotes the law on the other side. *The law* was the name usually given to the Five Books of Moses. Again, as the history which he quotes appeared to have no bearing on the question, he gives to it an allegorical interpretation.

Galatians 4:23

23. But he who was of the bond woman. Both were sons of Abraham according to the flesh; but in Isaac there was this peculiarity, that he had the promise of grace. In Ishmael there was nothing besides nature; in Isaac there was the election of God, signified in part by the manner of his birth, which was not in the ordinary course, but miraculous. Yet there is an indirect reference to the calling of the Gentiles, and the rejection of the Jews: for the latter boast of their ancestry, while the former, without any human interference, are become the spiritual offspring of Abraham.

Galatians 4:24

24. These are the two covenants. I have thought it better to adopt this translation, in order not to lose sight of the beauty of the comparison; for Paul compares the two *διαθῶραι*, to two mothers, and to employ *testamentum*, (a testament,) which is a neuter noun, for denoting a mother, would be harsh. The word *pactio* (a covenant) appears to be, on that account, more appropriate; and indeed the desire of obtaining perspicuity, as well as elegance, has led me to make this choice.

The comparison is now formally introduced. As in the house of Abraham there were two mothers, so are there also in the Church of God. Doctrine is the mother of whom we are born, and is twofold, Legal and Spiritual. The legal mother, whom Hagar resembles, *gendereth to bondage*. Sarah again, represents the second, which gendereth to freedom; though Paul begins higher, and makes our first mother Sinai, and our second, Jerusalem. The two covenants, then, are the mothers, of whom children unlike one another are born; for the legal covenant makes slaves, and the spiritual covenant makes freemen. It would be good to hear what Wagonner and Jones says on this matter but no one wants to resurrect 1888. (*On the issue of covenants request my research "The Ministration of th Letter vs the Ministration of the Spirit" and "Lets Keep the Feast - 1 Cor 5_8"*)

Under the vail of ceremonies, and of the whole economy by which they were governed, their freedom was concealed: to the outward eye nothing but slavery appeared. "Ye have not," says Paul to the Romans, "received the spirit of bondage again to fear." ([Rom 8:15](#).) Those holy fathers, though inwardly they were free in the sight of

God, yet in outward appearance differed nothing from slaves, and thus resembled their mother's condition. But the doctrine of the gospel bestows upon its children perfect freedom as soon as they are born, and brings them up in a liberal manner.

Paul does not, I acknowledge, speak of that kind of children, as the context will show. By the children of Sinai, it will afterwards be explained, are meant hypocrites, who are at length expelled from the Church of God, and deprived of the inheritance. What, then, is the gendering to bondage, which forms the subject of the present dispute? It denotes those who make a wicked abuse of the law, by finding in it nothing but what tends to slavery. Not so the pious fathers, who lived under the Old Testament; for their slavish birth by the law did not hinder them from having Jerusalem for their mother in spirit. But those who adhere to the bare law, and do not acknowledge it to be "a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ," ([Gal 3:24](#)), but rather make it a hinderance to prevent their coming to him, are the Ishmaelites born to slavery.

It will again be objected, why does the apostle say that such persons are born of God's covenant, and are considered to belong to the Church? I answer, strictly speaking, they are not God's children, but are degenerate and spurious, and are disclaimed by God, whom they falsely call their Father. They receive this name in the Church, not because they are members of it in reality, but because for a time they presume to occupy that place, and impose on men by the disguise which they wear.

Galatians 4:25, 26

25. *For Agar is mount Sinai.* The situation of the mountain is mentioned by way of contempt. It lies in Arabia, beyond the limits of the holy land, by which the eternal inheritance was prefigured. The wonder is, that in so familiar a matter they erred so egregiously.

Galatians 4:27

27. *For it is written.* The apostle proves, by a quotation from Isaiah, that the lawful sons of the Church are born according to the promise. The passage is in [Isa 54:0](#) where the prophet speaks of the kingdom of Christ and the calling of the Gentiles, and promises to the barren wife and the widow a numerous offspring; for it is on this ground that he exhorts the Church to "sing" and "rejoice." The design of the apostle, let it be carefully remarked, is to deprive the Jews of all claim to that spiritual Jerusalem to which the prophecy relates. Isaiah proclaims, that her children shall be gathered out of all the nations of the earth, and not by any preparation of hers, but by the free grace and blessing of God.

He next concludes that we become the sons of God by promise, after the example (*κατὰ Ἰσαὰκ*) of Isaac, and that in no other way do we obtain this honor. To readers little skilled or practiced in the examination of Scripture, this reasoning may appear inconclusive; because they do not hold the most undoubted of all principles, that all the promises, being founded on the Messiah, are of free grace. It was because the apostle took this for granted, that he so fearlessly contrasted the promise with the law.

Galatians 4:29

29. *As then, he that was born after the flesh.* He denounces the cruelty of the false apostles, who wantonly insulted pious persons that placed all their confidence in Christ. There was abundant need that the uneasiness of the oppressed should be soothed by consolation, and that the cruelty of their oppressors should be severely checked. It is not wonderful, he says, that the children of the law, at the present day, do what Ishmael their father at first did, who, trusting to his being the first-born, persecuted Isaac the true heir. With the same proud disdain do his posterity now, on account of outward ceremonies, circumcision, and the various services of the law, molest and vaunt over the lawful sons of God. *The Spirit* is again contrasted with the flesh, that is, the calling of God with human

appearance. ([1Sa 16:7](#).) So the disguise is admitted to be possessed by the followers of the Law and of works, but the reality is claimed for those who rely on the calling of God alone, and depend upon his grace.

Persecuted. But persecution is nowhere mentioned, only Moses says that Ishmael was [מִצְחָק](#), (*metzabek*,) *mocking*, ([Gen 21:9](#);) and by this participle he intimates that Ishmael ridiculed his brother Isaac. The explanation offered by some Jews, that this was a simple smile, is entirely inadmissible; for what cruelty would it have argued, that a harmless smile should have been so fearfully revenged? There cannot then be a doubt that he maliciously endeavored to provoke the child Isaac by reproachful language.

But how widely distant is this from persecution? And yet it is not idly or unguardedly that Paul enlarges on this point. No persecution ought to distress us so much as to see our calling attempted to be undermined by the reproaches of wicked men. Neither blows, nor scourging, nor nails, nor thorns, occasioned to our Lord such intense suffering as that blasphemy:

“He trusted in God; what availeth it to him? for he is deprived of all assistance.” ([Mat 27:43](#).)

There is more venom in this than in all persecutions; for how much more alarming is it that the grace of Divine adoption shall be made void, than that this frail life shall be taken from us? Ishmael did not persecute his brother with the sword; but, what is worse, he treated him with haughty disdain by trampling under foot the promise of God. All persecutions arise from this source, that wicked men despise and hate in the elect the grace of God; a memorable instance of which we have in the history of Cain and Abel. ([Gen 4:8](#).)

This reminds us, that not only ought we to be filled with horror at outward persecutions, when the enemies of religion slay us with fire and sword; when they banish, imprison, torture, or scourge; but when they attempt, by their blasphemies, to make void our confidence, which rests on the promises of God; when they ridicule our salvation, when they wantonly laugh to scorn the whole gospel. Nothing ought to wound our minds so deeply as contempt of God, and reproaches cast upon His grace: nor is there any kind of persecution more deadly than when the salvation of the soul is assailed. We who have escaped from the tyranny of the Pope, are not called to encounter the swords of wicked men. But how blind must we be, if we are not affected by that spiritual persecution, in which they strive, by every method, to extinguish that doctrine, from which we draw the breath of life! — when they attack our faith by their blasphemies, and shake not a few of the less informed! For my own part, I am far more grieved by my church’s ever-changing creed than of the Papists. They do not attack us by open violence; but, in proportion as the name of God is more dear to me than my own life, the diabolical conspiracy which I see in operation to extinguish all who differ with them on certain points, the apostasies that are condoned not lamented, the dis-fellowships and more base things which are not the subject discussion of this paper makes me tremble for our people.

Sacred history tells us, that he laughed at, derided, and mocked him to scorn, which is real persecution; probably through pride, and the conceit of being Abraham’s eldest son and heir.. [Δύω](#) will here denote injurious treatment of every kind, both in deeds and words. And although the Mosaic history records only one instance of insulting treatment, — namely, on Ishmael mocking Sarah, when she weaned Isaac, ([Gen 21:9](#);) yet when we consider the disappointment which both Hagar and Ishmael must have felt on the birth of Isaac, it was not unnatural for them to feel ill-will, and show it on every occasion, to the real heir of the promise. And many such are recorded, from tradition.

Galatians 4:30

30. *But what saith the Scripture ?* There was some consolation in knowing that we do but share the lot of our father Isaac; but it is a still greater consolation, when he adds, that hypocrites, with all their boasting, can gain nothing more than to be *cast out* of the spiritual family of Abraham; and that, to whatever extent they may harass us for a time, the inheritance will certainly be ours. Let believers cheer themselves with this consolation, that the tyranny of the Ishmaelites will not last for ever. They appear to have reached the highest pre-eminence, and, proud of their birthright, look down upon us with contempt; but they will one day be declared to be the descendants of Hagar, the sons of a slave, and unworthy of the inheritance. Let us be instructed by this beautiful passage,

“not to fret ourselves because of evil-doers, neither be envious against the workers of iniquity,” (Psa 37:1.)

...when they hold a temporary habitation and rank in the Church, but patiently to look for the end which awaits them. There are many pretended Christians, or strangers, who hold a place in the Church, but who afterwards give evidence of their departure from the faith, as he who, proud of his birthright, at first reigned, was cast out like a foreigner with the posterity of Ishmael. Some censorious persons smile at Paul’s simplicity, in comparing a woman’s passion, arising out of a trifling quarrel, to a judgment of God. But they overlook the decree of God, which took effect in such a manner, as to make it manifest that the whole transaction was directed by a heavenly providence. That Abraham should have been commanded to humor his wife ([Gen 21:12](#)) entirely in the matter, is no doubt extraordinary, but proves that God employed the services of Sarah for confirming his own promise. In a word, the *casting out* of Ishmael was nothing else than the consequence and the accomplishment of that promise, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” ([Gen 21:12](#)), — not in Ishmael. Although, therefore, it was the revenging of a woman’s quarrel, yet God did not the less make known his sentence by her mouth as a type of the Church.

Galatians 4:31

31. *So then, brethren.* He now exhorts the Galatians to prefer the condition of the children of Sarah to that of the children of Hagar; and having reminded them that, by the grace of Christ, they were born to freedom, he desires them to continue in the same condition. If we shall call the Papists, Ishmaelites and Hagarites, and boast that we are the lawful children, they will smile at us; but if the two subjects in dispute be fairly compared, the most ignorant person will be at no loss to decide.

Concluding Remarks

From Life Sketches of Paul by E.G. White

1. *While Paul looked with interest and hope to new fields of labor in the west, he had cause for serious apprehension concerning the fields of his former labor in the east. Tidings had been received at Corinth from the churches in Galatia, revealing a state of great confusion, and even of absolute apostasy. Judaizing teachers were opposing the work of the apostle, and seeking to destroy the fruit of his labors. {LP 188.1}*
2. *In almost every church there were some members who were Jews by birth. To these converts the Jewish teachers found ready access, and through them gained a foot-hold in the churches. It was impossible, by scriptural arguments, to overthrow the doctrines taught by Paul; hence they resorted to the most unscrupulous measures to counteract his influence and weaken his authority. They declared that he had not been a disciple of Jesus, and had received no commission from him; yet he had presumed to teach doctrines directly opposed to those held by Peter, James, and the other apostles. Thus the emissaries of Judaism succeeded in alienating many of the Christian converts from their teacher in the gospel. Having gained this point, they induced them to return to the observance of the ceremonial law as essential to salvation. Faith in Christ, and obedience to the law of ten commandments, were regarded as of minor importance. Division, heresy, and sensualism were rapidly gaining ground among the believers in Galatia. {LP 188.2}*

3. *Paul's soul was stirred as he saw the evils that threatened speedily to destroy these churches. He immediately wrote to the Galatians, exposing their false theories, and with great severity rebuking those who had departed from the faith. {LP 188.3}*
4. *In the introduction to his epistle, he asserted his own position as an apostle, "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." [Gal 1:1](#). He had been commissioned by the highest authority, not of earth, but in Heaven. After giving his salutation to the church, he pointedly addresses them: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another." [Gal 1:6-7](#). The doctrines which the Galatians had received, could not in any sense be called the gospel; they were the teachings of men, and were directly opposed to the doctrines taught by Christ. {LP 189.1}*
5. *The apostle continues: "But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." [Gal 1:7-8](#). {LP 189.2}*
6. *How different from his manner of writing to the Corinthian church is the course which he pursues toward the Galatians! In dealing with the former, he manifests great caution and tenderness, while he reproves the latter with abrupt severity. The Corinthians had been overcome by temptation, and deceived by the ingenious sophistry of teachers who presented errors under the guise of truth. They had become confused and bewildered. To teach them to distinguish the false from the true, required great caution and patience in their instructor. Harsbness or injudicious haste would have destroyed his influence over those whom he sought to benefit. {LP 189.3}*
7. *In the Galatian churches, open, unmasked error was supplanting the faith of the gospel. Christ, the true foundation, was virtually renounced for the obsolete ceremonies of Judaism. The apostle saw that if these churches were saved from the dangerous influences which threatened them, the most decisive measures must be taken, the sharpest warnings given, to bring them to a sense of their true condition. {LP 190.1}*
8. *To deal wisely with different classes of minds, under varied circumstances and conditions, is a work requiring wisdom and judgment, enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of God. The minister of Christ should learn the importance of adapting his labors to the condition of those whom he seeks to benefit. Tenderness, patience, decision, and firmness are alike needful; but they are to be exercised with proper discrimination. It is only by maintaining a close connection with God that his servants can hope to meet judiciously the trials and difficulties that still arise in the churches. {LP 190.2}*
9. *Paul had presented to the Galatians the gospel of Christ in its purity. His teachings were in harmony with the Scriptures; and the Holy Spirit had witnessed to his labors. Hence he warned his brethren to listen to nothing that should contradict the truth which they had been taught. {LP 190.3}*
10. *The apostle reverts to his own experience, of which the Galatians have been previously informed. He reminds them of his proficiency in the learning of the Jews, and his zeal for their religion. Even in early manhood he had achieved distinction as an able and zealous defender of the Jewish faith. But when Christ was revealed to him, he at once renounced all his prospective honors and advantages, and devoted his life to the preaching of the cross. He appeals to his brethren to decide whether in all this he could have been actuated by any worldly or selfish motive. He then shows them that after his conversion he had no opportunity to receive instruction from man. The doctrines which he preached had been revealed to him by the Lord Jesus Christ. After the vision at Damascus, Paul retired into Arabia, for communion with God. It was not until three years had elapsed that he went up to Jerusalem; and he then made a stay of but fifteen days, thence going out to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He declares that he was "unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me." [Gal 1:22-24](#). {LP 190.4}*
11. *In thus reviewing his history, the apostle seeks to make apparent to all that by special manifestation of divine power he had been led to perceive and to grasp the great truths of the gospel, as presented in the Old Testament scriptures and embodied in the life of Christ on earth. It was the knowledge received from God himself which led Paul to warn and admonish the Galatians in that*

solemn and positive manner. He did not present the gospel in hesitancy and doubt, but with the assurance of settled conviction and absolute knowledge. In his epistle he clearly marks the contrast between being taught by man and receiving instruction direct from Christ. {LP 191.1}

12. *The apostle urged upon the Galatians, as their only safe course, to leave the false guides by whom they had been misled, and to return to the faith which they had received from the Source of truth and wisdom. Those false teachers were hypocritical, unregenerate men; unholy in heart, and corrupt in life. Their religion consisted in a round of ceremonies, by the performance of which they expected to receive the favor of God. They had no relish for a doctrine which taught, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." [Joh 3:3](#). Such a religion required too great a sacrifice. Hence they clung to their errors, deceiving themselves, and deceiving others. {LP 192.1}*
13. *To substitute the external forms of religion for holiness of heart and life, is still as pleasing to the unrenewed nature as in the days of the apostles. For this reason, false teachers abound, and the people listen eagerly to their delusive doctrines. It is Satan's studied effort to divert the minds of men from the one way of salvation, --faith in Christ, and obedience to the law of God. In every age the arch-enemy adapts his temptations to the prejudices or inclinations of the people. In apostolic times he led the Jews to exalt the ceremonial law, and reject Christ; at the present day he induces many professed Christians, under the pretense of honoring Christ, to cast contempt upon the moral law, and teach that its precepts may be transgressed with impunity. It is the duty of every faithful servant of God, to firmly and decidedly withstand these perverters of the faith, and to fearlessly expose their errors by the word of truth. {LP 192.2}*
14. *Paul continues to vindicate his position as the apostle of Christ, not by the will of men, but by the power of God. He describes the visit which he made to Jerusalem to secure a settlement of the very questions which are now agitating the churches of Galatia, as to whether the Gentiles should submit to circumcision and keep the ceremonial law. This was the only instance in which he had deferred to the judgment of the other apostles as superior to his own. He had first sought a private interview, in which he set the matter in all its bearings before the leading apostles, Peter, James, and John. With far-seeing wisdom, he concluded that if these men could be led to take a right position, everything would be gained. Had he first presented the question before the whole council, there would have been a division of sentiment. The strong prejudice already excited because he had not enforced circumcision on the Gentiles, would have led many to take a stand against him. Thus the object of his visit would have been defeated, and his usefulness greatly hindered. But the three leading apostles, against whom no such prejudice existed, having themselves been won to the true position, brought the matter before the council, and won from all a concurrence in the decision to leave the Gentiles free from the obligations of the ceremonial law. {LP 192.3}*
15. *Paul further disproved the accusations of his enemies, by showing that his position as an apostle of Christ had been acknowledged by the council at Jerusalem, and that in his labors among the Gentiles he had complied with the decisions of that council. Those who were seeking to destroy his influence, professed to acknowledge Peter, James, and John as pillars of the church. They were constantly extolling these apostles, and endeavoring to prove them superior to Paul in position and authority. But Paul showed that his enemies could not justify their course by a pretended regard for these apostles. While he honored them as faithful ministers of Christ, he showed that they had not attempted to instruct him, neither had they commissioned him to preach the gospel. They were convinced that God had called him to present the truth to the Gentiles, as he had designated Peter to go especially to the Jews. Hence they acknowledged before the council Paul's divine commission, and received him as a fellow-laborer of equal position with themselves. {LP 193.1}*
16. *It was not to exalt self, but to magnify the grace of God, that Paul thus presented to those who were denying his apostleship, proof that he was "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles." [2Co 11:5](#). Those who sought to belittle his calling and his work were fighting against Christ, whose grace and power were manifested through Paul. Hence the apostle felt that he was forced, by the opposition of his enemies, and even by the course of his brethren, to take a decided stand to maintain his position and authority. {LP 194.1}*

[To view additional text of this chapter go to [2Co 1:1-24](#); [2Co 2:1-17](#); [2Co 3:1-18](#); [2Co 4:1-18](#); [2Co 5:1-21](#); [2Co 6:1-18](#); [2Co 7:1-16](#); [2Co 8:1-24](#); [2Co 9:1-15](#); [2Co 10:1-18](#); [2Co 11:1-33](#); [2Co 12:1-21](#); [2Co 13:1-14](#) and [Rom 1:1-32](#); [Rom 2:1-29](#); [Rom 3:1-31](#); [Rom 4:1-25](#); [Rom 5:1-21](#); [Rom 6:1-23](#); [Rom 7:1-25](#); [Rom 8:1-39](#); [Rom 9:1-33](#); [Rom 10:1-21](#);

[Rom 11:1-36; Rom 12:1-21; Rom 13:1-14; Rom 14:1-23; Rom 15:1-33; Rom 16:1-27](#) --ed.]

The Blessed Joy

What this inheritance includes in its final attainment, "doth not yet appear." Enough to know that "now are we children of God." The redemption of the body, the deliverance of nature from its sentence of dissolution, the abolishment of death-these are amongst its certainties. Its supreme joy lies in the promise of being with Christ, to witness and share His glory. "Heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ"-a destiny like this overwhelms thought and makes hope a rapture. God's sons may be content to wait and see how their heritage will turn out. Only let us be sure that we are His sons. Doctrinal orthodoxy, ritual observance, moral propriety do not impart, and do not supersede, "the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." The religion of Jesus the Son of God is the religion of the filial consciousness. Maybe it's a time we read Galatians and Colossians together. I mean if Paul using the same language in Colossians meant Jews festival yet speaking to gentiles how can he mean another thing using the same words while speaking to the Galatians while addressing the same issue?!

Blessings

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