

## GALATIANS 4 – 5.12

We ended chapter 3 with Paul explaining how, in the new Christian dispensation, the distinction between Jews and non-Jews has been abolished. God promised Abraham a family and we, according to Paul, are now a part of that family and share in the promises made by God. We are heirs.

Paul is now onto the subject of HEIRS. And since sons are usually heirs and heirs are usually sons, it's only a short jump to the subject of SONS.

And then another short jump from the idea of being **heirs and adopted members of Abraham's family** to the idea of being **heirs and adopted members of God's family**.

### Verses 1 – 11: Sonship in Christ, Contrasted with Slavery

Paul explores the distinction between SONS (heirs) and slaves.

- **Try and trace out the logic of Paul's argument—what's the point he's trying to make here?**
- **In Paul's argument, who are the slaves?**
- **And who are the sons?**

*Verse 7 is a key verse. Those who have read my book may remember in chapter 2 how God used this one to transform my whole conception of the meaning of the Christian life many years ago.*

*Elemental things (verses 3 and 9)* – this is a slightly opaque concept, and different translations struggle to find ways to conveying it. It comes in Colossians 2.20 also, where again it's tied up with observation of legalistic practices. It's generally accepted that the *elemental things* Paul refers to are **elemental spirits/spiritual forces of the cosmos**, i.e. for Paul's purposes, demonic-type forces.

- **How does Paul see the relationship between the Jewish Law and these elemental things?**
- **Is he being extreme here?**
- **How do we react to the idea that inappropriate religious practices may somehow tied up with supernatural forces in the spiritual realm which may be manipulating our behaviour? Are we shocked? Which comes first, the spirits or the practices?**

### Verses 12 – 20: Personal interlude

#### Verses 21: The Allegory

Paul continues on with the story of Abraham in Genesis chapter 16, turning it into an elaborate allegory to illustrate his thesis.

The story is this:

Abraham's wife Sarah, being a bit cynical about God's promise and not really believing it, encourages Abraham to have sex with her maid Hagar. This he does, and the maid gets pregnant. Sarah then gets jealous and throws Hagar out of the tent. Hagar has a son, called Ishmael, the son not of faith but of unbelief.

Only after that do they finally start trusting, and Abraham has a second son, by his wife Sarah, called Isaac..

The allegory is really a convenient illustrative story, used to illustrate the contrast Paul is making; it needn't be taken as any more than that.

In the allegory we are given:

- **Two types of sonship**
- **Two types of motherhood**
- **Two covenants**
- **Two places**

**How do all these fit together—try and sort them out in pairs.**

## **GALATIANS 5**

Paul has now established his theoretical, theological framework, and is now moving towards the **practical aspects**.

### **Verses 1 – 12: Standing Fast in Liberty**

**Verse 3: *I testify again. Why again? When was the first time?***

**Verses 2 – 4:** Paul uses some very strong language here.

- **What is the situation, according to Paul, of those who seek to be justified by following the Ten Commandments?**
- **Does this scare us?**
- **Should it?**

**Verse 12:** Generations of squeamish translators have struggled with the word translated here as *mutilated*. Paul is actually telling them to cut their entire genitals off (NIV says *emasculate*)—it can't really mean anything else. Following discussion of the evils of circumcision Paul is saying:

***If you really want to circumcise, why stop at the foreskin? Better chop the whole lot off!***

- **Is Paul joking and being sarcastic, or does he really mean it?**
- **When we look at the way Paul speaks, and the way we tend to speak and behave in church, does this tell us anything?**
- **Are we too polite, too anxious to avoid giving offence sometimes?**

Next week in the final part of the letter, Paul moves on to the practice of liberty—in the light of all this, how should we then live?