

In the previous verse (Gal. 3:29) Paul had mentioned that the Galatians were heirs of God through faith and now he expands on that idea, using it to illustrate the believer's relationship to the law. After contrasting the slavery of religion with the freedom that they have through faith in Christ, Paul asks the Galatians why they would want to return to the bondage from which Christ has set them free.

1 Now I say, *That* the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; 2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

“Now I say, *That* the heir, as long as he is a child [too young to talk]” – In the previous verse (Gal. 3:29), Paul declared that all who belong to Christ are the spiritual descendants of Abraham and thus are heirs to the promises that God made to Abraham. Paul now continues the idea of being an heir to illustrate the Christian's relationship to the law by using the example of a child who will eventually inherit the estate of his father. The Greek word he uses for “child” refers to a child who is too young to talk, who could be anywhere from an infant to a few years old.

“differeth nothing from a servant [slave], though he be lord of all” – Because this child is the son of the owner of the estate, he is “lord” (the owner and master) of the estate. However, this child has no more authority than a slave because he is too young to responsibly assert his lordship over his father's servants.

“But is under tutors [guardians] and governors [stewards]” – The tutor was responsible for the child's day-to-day care while the governor was a steward over the child's possessions. Paul points out the irony that the tutors and governors were slaves and yet the child had to submit to them because of his immaturity.

“until the time appointed of the father” – The child remained under the authority of the tutors and governors only until his father deemed him ready to take on the responsibilities of being the heir.

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: 4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

“Even so we” – The “we” Paul is speaking of likely refers to the Jews (of which he was one), who, unlike the Gentiles, were under the law for centuries. He switches pronouns to “ye” in v. 6 to include the Galatians as sons of God.

“when we were children [too young to talk]” – The fact that Paul uses the same Greek word for “children” and he did in v. 1 (a child from infancy to no more than a few years old), makes it obvious that he's drawing a direct comparison of a child heir being a servant to tutors and governors and the Jews being servants to the law. He speaks of the time before Christ came when the Jews were under the law, describing them as “children” in their understanding of the things of God because Christ had not yet been revealed.

“were in bondage [to make a slave] under the elements [rudiments; fundamental principles] of the world” – The Greek word for “elements” was used to speak of fundamental things such as the letters of the alphabet. When Paul refers to the “elements of the world” he is apparently talking about the basic elements of human religion. He calls adherence to the rituals of the law as “bondage” (slavery) since these things were required despite the fact that they could not produce righteousness in those those who practiced them (**Heb. 10:4** “*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins*”).

“But when the fulness of the time was come” – The phrase “the fulness of time” is an expression meaning “at the appropriate time” or “when everything was ready.” Although the coming of the Messiah had been prophesied for centuries, Jesus Christ did not come until the time was right for His arrival. Paul sees the coming of Christ as a turning point in history, dividing the time when the Jews were under the law from the time when they were to look to Christ in faith. The old covenant refers to the time before Christ when the Jews were under the authority of the law and the new covenant refers to the time after Christ came when believers turn to Christ in faith.

“God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” – At the appropriate time God sent Christ to be born, live a sinless life, and then die on the cross for our sins. The fact that Jesus was God's Son shows His deity. The fact that He was “made [born] of a woman” shows that He came in human flesh. The fact that He was born “under the law” shows that He was able to live sinlessly without breaking the very law that condemns the rest of us. All three of these facts are necessary for Jesus to be an appropriate Savior (**Heb. 2:16-17** “*For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people*”).

“To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” – The reason that God sent His Son was to redeem those who were under the condemnation/curse of the law (Gal. 3:10), thus enabling them to be adopted as heirs to the promises and kingdom of God.

6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

“And because ye are sons” – Paul makes the transition in pronoun from “we” to “ye” in order to include the Galatians (representing the Gentiles) as heirs. They take part in being an heir by following Abraham's example of faith and as a result have been adopted as sons/heirs of God.

“God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” – Because they are now His sons, God has given them “the Spirit of His Son.” Not only does the presence of the Spirit confirm that we are children of God, it places in our heart a love for our Heavenly Father. The word “Abba” is an Aramaic word that is an affectionate name used by children for their fathers. It is the equivalent of our English word “Daddy.”

7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

“Wherefore thou art no more a servant [slave], but a son” – Before Christ, the Jews were slaves under the law (v. 3). But now, both Jewish and Gentile believers are sons through faith in Christ.

“and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” – Through faith in Christ, believers have become sons and are now heirs of God. This is the point that Paul was illustrating in vs. 1-5.

8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

“Howbeit then, when ye knew not God” – Paul wants the Galatians to remember the time before they came to Christ.

“ye did service [to be a slave] unto them which by nature are no gods” – Just as the Jewish believers were previously in slavery to the requirements of the law, the Galatian believers, as Gentiles, were in slavery to their pagan gods, which were not true gods at all.

9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? 10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God” – They were once slaves to religion, but now they know God. However, Paul points out that it was more correct to say that they are known by God since they could never have known God without God initiating the relationship. We cannot know God through our own efforts; it is by the grace of God that we know Him.

“how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly [powerless] elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” – After God had shown His grace to them and set them free from the slavery of religion, why would they want to be enslaved once again to the powerless elements of religion that could never bring righteousness or salvation?

“Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years” – As examples of the elements the Galatians were wanting to be enslaved to, Paul refers to the rituals, feasts and holidays that were on the Jewish religious calendar. Gentiles were never required to observe these things and neither was the church, but the Galatians had been convinced that they should do so. They were exchanging one form of slavery (to pagan religion) for another (the Mosaic law).

11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

“I am afraid of you” – Paul was not fearful of his own safety. The Greek can easily be translated as “I am fearful for you.” Paul was concerned for the spiritual well-being of the Galatians.

“lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” – Paul is concerned that all the labor he spent in teaching the Galatians to trust in the grace of Jesus Christ for salvation might have been pointless if they were ignoring it and were instead trusting in the law. Many of the Galatians were merely misled by the false teachers, but Paul may also have been concerned that some of the Galatians may not have truly trusted Christ for salvation. He referred to these Jews that taught that Gentiles should keep the law as “false brethren” (Gal. 2:4). Those who push legalism the hardest may be revealing that they aren’t truly trusting in Christ alone for salvation and therefore are “false brethren.” Paul may be concerned that some of these Galatians have fallen into this category and are not truly saved.

12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.

“Brethren, I beseech [to ask, plead or beg] you, be as I am” – The Galatians were already familiar with Paul’s past when he was fully invested in Judaism and was seeking to be justified through the law (Gal. 1:13-16). He now understood that justification can only come through faith in Jesus Christ and has abandoned his own efforts to be righteous. He is urging the Galatians to follow his example and trust in Christ alone for their justification.

“for I am as ye are” – Even though he was a Jew, Paul could only receive justification the same way that they, as Gentiles, could: through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, there was no difference between him and them (Gal. 3:28 *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”*).

“ye have not injured [to do harm; to do wrong] me at all” – This statement should be taken in context with the verses that follow. Paul had suffered persecution and even bodily harm at the hands of Jews for the sake of Christ, but he reminds the Galatians that they had not done anything against him when he brought the gospel to them. They had welcomed him instead of persecuting him.

13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. 14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

“Ye know how through infirmity [weakness] of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first” – Paul reminds the Galatians of a physical weakness that he apparently had when he first came to preach the gospel. We don’t know what this physical weakness was, but some commentators point to Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-10) and many believe it to be a problem with his eyes (v. 15). The fact that he says “at the first” implies that Paul visited the Galatians more than once before this epistle was written.

“And my temptation [trial; test] which was in my flesh ye despised [to hold in low esteem] not, nor rejected” – Paul’s physical weakness (whatever it may have been) did not lower the Galatians’ opinion of him. They were not disgusted by Paul’s physical issues and reject him or the gospel that he preached.

“but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus” – Instead of rejecting him, the Galatians accepted Paul and treated him with the love and respect that they might have given to an angel of God or to Jesus Christ Himself. Paul is reminding them of the mutual love they had for one another when he was there to preach the gospel to them.

Verses 15-20: Paul’s words make it obvious that the Galatians loved Paul when he brought the gospel to them. However, they apparently have been convinced by false teachers that Paul had misled them by teaching that salvation came through faith in Christ alone. Paul asks what has happened to their love for him that had been so strong that they were willing to have plucked out their own eyes if it could have helped him. These false teachers had caused them to become zealous, but not in a good way. Paul describes his love for the Galatians as if he were a mother willing to endure the agony of childbirth again in order to insure that they have been born again through faith. He wants to see them again so that he can resolve the doubts he has about their salvation and beliefs.