

CHAPTER 4

The apostle, in this chapter, is still carrying on the same general design as in the former to recover these Christians from the impressions made upon them by the judaizing teachers, and to represent their weakness and folly in suffering themselves to be drawn away from the gospel doctrine of justification, and to be deprived of their freedom from the bondage of the law of Moses. For this purpose he makes use of various considerations; such as,

- I.** The great excellence of the gospel state above the legal (v. 1-7).
- II.** The happy change that was made in them at their conversion (v. 8-11).
- III.** The affection they had had for him and his ministry (v. 12-16).
- IV.** The character of the false teachers by whom they had been perverted (v. 17, 18).
- V.** The very tender affection he had for them (v. 19, 20).
- VI.** The history of Isaac and Ishmael, by a comparison taken from which he illustrates the difference between such as rested in Christ and such as trusted in the law. And in all these, as he uses great plainness and faithfulness with them, so he expresses the tenderest concern for them.

~~401~~ GALATIANS 4:1-7

THE REDEMPTION OF CHRIST

In this chapter the apostle deals plainly with those who hearkened to the judaizing teachers, who cried up the law of Moses in competition with the gospel of Christ, and endeavored to bring them under the bondage of it. To convince them of their folly, and to rectify their mistake herein, in these verses he prosecutes the comparison of a child under age, which he had touched upon in the foregoing chapter, and thence shows what great

advantages we have now, under the gospel, above what they had under the law. And here.

I. He acquaints us with the state of the Old-Testament church: it was like a child under age, and it was used accordingly, being kept in a state of darkness and bondage, in comparison of the greater light and liberty which we enjoy under the gospel. That was indeed a dispensation of grace, and yet it was comparatively a dispensation of darkness; for as the heir, in his minority, is *under tutors and governors till the time appointed of his father*, by whom he is educated and instructed in those things which at present he knows little of the meaning of, though afterwards they are likely to be of great use to him; so it was with the Old-Testament church the Mosaic economy, which they were under, was what they could not fully understand the meaning of; for, as the apostle says (1 COR. 2:13), *They could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished*. But to the church, when grown up to maturity, in gospel days, it becomes of great use. And as that was a dispensation of darkness, so of bondage too; for *they were in bondage under the elements of the world*, being tied to a great number of burdensome rites and observances, by which, as by a kind of first rudiments, they were taught and instructed, and whereby they were kept in a state of subjection, like a child under tutors and governors. The church then lay more under the character of a *servant*, being obliged to do every thing according to the command of God, without being fully acquainted with the reason of it; but the service under the gospel appears to be more reasonable than that was. The time appointed of the Father having come, when the church was to arrive at its full age, the darkness and bondage under which it before lay are removed, and we are under a dispensation of greater light and liberty.

II. He acquaints us with the much happier state of Christians under the gospel-dispensation, v. 47. *When the fulness of time had come*, the time appointed of the Father, when he would put an end to the legal dispensation, and set up another and a better in the room of it, *he sent forth his Son*, etc. The person who was employed to introduce this new dispensation was no other than the Son of God himself, the only-begotten of the Father, who, as he had been prophesied of and promised from the foundation of the world, so in due time he was manifested for this purpose. He, in pursuance of the great design he had undertaken, submitted to be *made of a woman* there is his incarnation; and to be *made*

under the law there is his subjection. He who was truly God for our sakes became man; and he who was Lord of all consented to come into a state of subjection and to take upon him the form of a servant; and one great end of all this was *to redeem those that were under the law* to save us from that intolerable yoke and to appoint gospel ordinances more rational and easy. He had indeed something more and greater in his view, in coming into the world, than merely to deliver us from the bondage of the ceremonial law; for he came in our nature, and consented to suffer and die for us, that hereby he might redeem us from the wrath of God, and from the curse of the moral law, which, as sinners, we all lay under. But that was one end of it, and a mercy reserved to be bestowed at the time of his manifestation; then the more servile state of the church was to come to a period, and a better to succeed in the place of it; for he was sent to redeem us, *that we might receive the adoption of sons* that we might no longer be accounted and treated as servants, but as sons grown up to maturity, who are allowed greater freedoms, and admitted to larger privileges, than while they were under tutors and governors. This the course of the apostle's argument leads us to take notice of, as one thing intended by this expression, though no doubt it may also be understood as signifying that gracious adoption which the gospel so often speaks of as the privilege of those who believe in Christ. Israel was God's son, his first-born, ~~ROM~~ Romans 9:4. But now, under the gospel, particular believers receive the adoption; and, as an earnest and evidence of it, they have together therewith the Spirit of adoption, putting them upon the duty of prayer, and enabling them in prayer to eye God as a Father (v. 6): *Because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.* And hereupon (v. 7) the apostle concludes this argument by adding, *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and, if a son, then an heir of God through Christ;* that is, Now, under the gospel state, we are no longer under the servitude of the law, but, upon our believing in Christ, become the sons of God; we are thereupon accepted of him, and adopted by him; and, being the sons, we are also heirs of God, and are entitled to the heavenly inheritance (as he also reasons ~~ANT~~ Romans 8:17), and therefore it must needs be the greatest weakness and folly to turn back to the law, and to seek justification by the works of it. From what the apostle says in these verses, we may observe,

1. The wonders of divine love and mercy towards us, particularly of God the Father, in sending his Son into the world to redeem and save us, of the

Son of God, in submitting so low, and suffering so much, for us, in pursuance of that design, and of the Holy Spirit, in condescending to dwell in the hearts of believers for such gracious purposes.

2. The great and invaluable advantages which Christians enjoy under the gospel; for,

(1.) We receive *the adoption of sons*. Whence note, It is the great privilege which believers have through Christ that they are adopted children of the God of heaven. We who by nature are children of wrath and disobedience have become by grace children of love.

(2.) We receive *the Spirit of adoption*. Note,

[1.] All who have the privilege of adoption have the Spirit of adoption all who are received into the number partake of the nature of the children of God; for he will have all his children to resemble him.

[2.] The Spirit of adoption is always the Spirit of prayer, and it is our duty in prayer to eye God as a Father. Christ has taught us in prayer to eye God as our Father in heaven.

[3.] If we are his sons, then his heirs. It is not so among men, with whom the eldest son is heir; but all God's children are heirs. Those who have the nature of sons shall have the inheritance of sons.

✠ GALATIANS 4:8-11

THE REDEMPTION BY CHRIST

In these verses the apostle puts them in mind of what they were before their conversion to the faith of Christ, and what a blessed change their conversion had made upon them; and thence endeavours to convince them of their great weakness in hearkening to those who would bring them under the bondage of the law of Moses.

I. He reminds them of their past state and behaviour, and what they were before the gospel was preached to them. Then *they knew not God*; they were grossly ignorant of the true God, and the way wherein he is to be worshipped: and at that time they were under the worst of slaveries, for *they did service to those which by nature were no gods*, they were

employed in a great number of superstitious and idolatrous services to those who, though they were accounted gods, were yet really no gods, but mere creatures, and perhaps of their own making, and therefore were utterly unable to hear and help them. Note,

1. Those who are ignorant of the true God cannot but be inclined to false gods. Those who forsook the God who made the world, rather than be without gods, worshipped such as they themselves made.

2. Religious worship is due to none but to him who is by nature God; for, when the apostle blames the doing service to such as by nature were no gods, he plainly shows that he only who is by nature God is the proper object of our religious worship.

II. He calls upon them to consider the happy change that was made in them by the preaching of the gospel among them. Now *they had known God* (they were brought to the knowledge of the true God and of his Son Jesus Christ, whereby they were recovered out of the ignorance and bondage under which they before lay) *or rather were known of God*; this happy change in their state, whereby they were turned from idols to the living God, and through Christ had received the adoption of sons, was not owing to themselves, but to him; it was the effect of his free and rich grace towards them, and as such they ought to account it; and therefore hereby they were laid under the greater obligation to adhere to the liberty wherewith he had made them free. Note, All our acquaintance with God begins with him; we know him, because we are known of him.

III. Hence he infers the unreasonableness and madness of their suffering themselves to be brought again into a state of bondage. He speaks of it with surprise and deep concern of mind that such as they should do so: *How turn you again*, etc., says he, v. 9. "How is it that you, who have been taught to worship God in the gospel way, should not be persuaded to comply with the ceremonial way of worship? that you, who have been acquainted with a dispensation of light, liberty, and love, as that of the gospel is, should now submit to a dispensation of darkness, and bondage, and terror, as that of the law is?" This they had the less reason for, since they had never been under the law of Moses, as the Jews had been; and therefore on this account they were more inexcusable than the Jews themselves, who might be supposed to have some fondness for that which had been of such long standing among them. Besides, what they suffered

themselves to be brought into bondage to were but *weak and beggarly elements*, such things as had no power in them to cleanse the soul, nor to afford any solid satisfaction to the mind, and which were only designed for that state of pupillage under which the church had been, but which had now come to a period; and therefore their weakness and folly were the more aggravated, in submitting to them, and in symbolizing with the Jews in observing their various festivals, here signified by *days, and months, and times, and years*. Here note,

1. It is possible for those who have made great professions of religion to be afterwards drawn into very great defections from the purity and simplicity of it, for this was the case of these Christians. And,

2. The more mercy God has shown to any, in bringing them into an acquaintance with the gospel, and the liberties and privileges of it, the greater are their sin and folly in suffering themselves to be deprived of them; for this the apostle lays a special stress upon, that after they had known God, or rather were known of him, they desired to be in bondage under the weak and beggarly elements of the law.

IV. Hereupon he expresses his fears concerning them, *lest he had bestowed on them labour in vain*. He had been at a great deal of pains about them, in preaching the gospel to them, and endeavouring to confirm them in the faith and liberty of it; but now they were giving up these, and thereby rendering his labour among them fruitless and ineffectual, and with the thoughts of this he could not but be deeply affected. Note,

1. A great deal of the labour of faithful ministers is labour in vain; and, when it is so, it cannot but be a great grief to those who desire the salvation of souls. Note,

2. The labour of ministers is in vain upon those who begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh, who, though they seem to set out well, yet afterwards turn aside from the way of the gospel. Note,

3. Those will have a great deal to answer for upon whom the faithful ministers of Jesus Christ bestow labour in vain.

←R012 GALATIANS 4:12-16

AFFECTIONATE REMONSTRANCE

That these Christians might be the more ashamed of their defection from the truth of the gospel which Paul had preached to them, he here reminds them of the great affection they formerly had for him and his ministry, and puts them upon considering how very unsuitable their present behaviour was to what they then professed. And here we may observe,

I. How affectionately he addresses himself to them. He styles them brethren, though he knew their hearts were in a great measure alienated from him. He desires that all resentments might be laid aside, and that they would bear the same temper of mind towards him which he did to them; he would have them *to be as he was, for he was as they were*, and moreover tells them that *they had not injured him at all*. He had no quarrel with them upon his own account. Though, in blaming their conduct, he had expressed himself with some warmth and concern of mind he assured them that it was not owing to any sense of personal injury or affront (as they might be ready to think), but proceeded wholly from a zeal for the truth and purity of the gospel, and their welfare and happiness. Thus he endeavours to mollify their spirits towards him, that so they might be the better disposed to receive the admonitions he was giving them. Hereby he teaches us that in reproofing others we should take care to convince them that our reproofs do not proceed from any private pique or resentment, but from a sincere regard to the honour of God and religion and their truest welfare; for they are then likely to be most successful when they appear to be most disinterested.

II. How he magnifies their former affection to him, that hereby they might be the more ashamed of their present behaviour towards him. To this purpose,

1. He puts them in mind of the difficulty under which he laboured when he came first among them: *I knew, says he, how, through infirmity of the flesh, I preached the gospel unto you at the first*. What this *infirmity of the flesh* was, which in the following words he expresses by *his temptation that was in his flesh* (though, no doubt, it was well known to those Christians to whom he wrote), we can now have no certain knowledge of:

some take it to have been the persecutions which he suffered for the gospel's sake; others, to have been something in his person, or manner of speaking, which might render his ministry less grateful and acceptable, referring to ⁴⁷⁰⁰2 Corinthians 10:10, and to 12:7-10. But, whatever it was, it seems it made no impression on them to his disadvantage. For,

2. He takes notice that, notwithstanding this his infirmity (which might possibly lessen him in the esteem of some others), they did not despise nor reject him on the account of it, but, on the contrary, *received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus*. They showed a great deal of respect to him, he was a welcome messenger to them, even as though an angel of God or Jesus Christ himself had preached to them; yea, so great was their esteem of him, that, if it would have been any advantage to him, *they could have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him*. Note, How uncertain the respects of people are, how apt they are to change their minds, and how easily they are drawn into contempt of those for whom they once had the greatest esteem and affection, so that they are ready to pluck out the eyes of those for whom they would before have plucked out their own! We should therefore labour to be accepted of God, *for it is a small thing to be judged of man's judgment*, ⁴⁰⁰³1 Corinthians 4:3.

III. How earnestly he expostulates with them hereupon: *Where is then, says he, the blessedness you spoke of?* As if he had said, "Time was when you expressed the greatest joy and satisfaction in the glad tidings of the gospel, and were very forward in pouring out your blessings upon me as the publisher of them; whence is it that you are now so much altered, that you have so little relish of them or respect for me? You once thought yourselves happy in receiving the gospel; have you now any reason to think otherwise?" Note, Those who have left their first love would do well to consider, Where is now the blessedness they once spoke of? What has become of that pleasure they used to take in communion with God, and in the company of his servants? The more to impress upon them a just shame of their present conduct, he again asks (v. 16), "*Am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?*" How is it that I, who was heretofore your favourite, am now accounted your enemy? Can you pretend any other reason for it than that I have told you the truth, endeavoured to acquaint you with, and to confirm you in, the truth of the gospel? And, if not, how unreasonable must your disaffection be!" Note,

1. It is no uncommon thing for men to account those their enemies who are really their best friends; for so, undoubtedly, those are, whether ministers or others, who tell them the truth, and deal freely and faithfully with them in matters relating to their eternal salvation, as the apostle now did with these Christians.
2. Ministers may sometimes create enemies to themselves by the faithful discharge of their duty; for this was the case of Paul, he was accounted their enemy for telling them the truth.
3. Yet ministers must not forbear speaking the truth, for fear of offending others and drawing their displeasure upon them.
4. They may be easy in their own minds, when they are conscious to themselves that, if others have become their enemies, it is only for telling them the truth.

~~<BOLD>~~ GALATIANS 4:17-18

AFFECTIONATE REMONSTRANCE

The apostle is still carrying on the same design as in the foregoing verse, which was, to convince the Galatians of their sin and folly in departing from the truth of the gospel: having just before been expostulating with them about the change of their behaviour towards him who endeavoured to establish them in it, he here gives them the character of those false teachers who made it their business to draw them away from it, which if they would attend to, they might soon see how little reason they had to hearken to them: whatever opinion they might have of them, he tells them they were designing men, who were aiming to set up themselves, and who, under their specious pretences, were more consulting their own interest than theirs: "*They zealously affect you,*" says he; "*they show a mighty respect for you, and pretend a great deal of affection to you, but not well; they do it not with any good design, they are not sincere and upright in it, for they would exclude you, that you might affect them.* That which they are chiefly aiming at is to engage your affections to them; and, in order to this, they are doing all they can to draw off your affections from me and from the truth, that so they may engross you to themselves." This, he

assures them, was their design, and therefore they must needs be very unwise in hearkening to them. Note,

- 1.** There may appear to be a great deal of zeal where yet there is but little truth and sincerity.
- 2.** It is the usual way of seducers to insinuate themselves into people's affections, and by that means to draw them into their opinions.
- 3.** Whatever pretences such may make, they have usually more regard to their own interest than that of others, and will not stick at ruining the reputation of others, if by that means they can raise their own. On this occasion the apostle gives us that excellent rule which we have, v. 18, *It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing*. What our translation renders *in a good man*, and so consider the apostle as pointing to himself; this sense, they think, is favoured both by the preceding context and also by the words immediately following, *and not only when I am present with you*, which may be as if he had said, "Time was when you were zealously affected towards me; you once took me for a good man, and have now no reason to think otherwise of me; surely then it would become you to show the same regard to me, now that I am absent from you, which you did when I was present with you." But, if we adhere to our own translation, the apostle here furnishes us with a very good rule to direct and regulate us in the exercise of our zeal: there are two things which to this purpose he more especially recommends to us:

- (1.)** That it be exercised only upon that which is good; for zeal is then only good when it is in a good thing: those who are zealously affected to that which is evil will thereby only to do so much the more hurt. And,
- (2.)** That herein it be constant and steady: it is good to be zealous always in a good thing; not for a time only, or now and then, like the heat of an ague-fit, but, like the natural heat of the body, constant. Happy would it be for the church of Christ if this rule were better observed among Christians!

~~809~~ GALATIANS 4:19-20

AFFECTIONATE REMONSTRANCE

That the apostle might the better dispose these Christians to bear with him in the reproofs which he was obliged to give them, he here expresses his great affection to them, and the very tender concern he had for their welfare: he was not like them one thing when among them and another when absent from them. Their disaffection to him had not removed his affection from them; but he still bore the same respect to them which he had formerly done, nor was he like their false teachers, who pretended a great deal of affection to them, when at the same time they were only consulting their own interest; but he had a sincere concern for their truest advantage; he sought not theirs, but them. They were too ready to account him their enemy, but he assures them that he was their friend; nay, not only so, but that he had the bowels of a parent towards them. He calls them *his children*, as he justly might, since he had been the instrument of their conversion to the Christian faith; yea, he styles them his *little children*, which, as it denotes a greater degree of tenderness and affection to them, so it may possibly have a respect to their present behaviour, whereby they showed themselves too much like little children, who are easily wrought upon by the arts and insinuations of others. He expresses his concern for them, and earnest desire of their welfare and soul-prosperity, by the pangs of a travailing woman: *He travailed in birth for them*: and the great thing which he was in so much pain about, and which he was so earnestly desirous of, was not so much that they might affect him as *that Christ might be formed in them*, that they might become Christians indeed, and be more confirmed and established in the faith of the gospel. From this we may note,

- 1.** The very tender affection which faithful ministers bear towards those among whom they are employed; it is like that of the most affectionate parents to their little children.
- 2.** That the chief thing they are longing and even travailing in birth for, on their account, is that Christ may be formed in them; not so much that they may gain their affections, much less that they may make a prey of them, but that they may be renewed in the spirit of their minds, wrought into the image of Christ, and more fully settled and confirmed in the Christian

faith and life: and how unreasonably must those people act who suffer themselves to be prevailed upon to desert or dislike such ministers!

3. That Christ is not fully formed in men till they are brought off from trusting in their own righteousness, and made to rely only upon him and his righteousness.

As further evidence of the affection and concern which the apostle had for these Christians, he adds (v. 20) that *he desired to be then present with them* that he would be glad of an opportunity of being among them, and conversing with them, and that thereupon he might find occasion to *change his voice* towards them; for at present *he stood in doubt of them*. He knew not well what to think of them. He was not so fully acquainted with their state as to know how to accommodate himself to them. He was full of fears and jealousies concerning them, which was the reason of his writing to them in such a manner as he had done; but he would be glad to find that matters were better with them than he feared, and that he might have occasion to commend them, instead of thus reproofing and chiding them. Note, Though ministers too often find it necessary to reprove those they have to do with, yet this is no grateful work to them; they had much rather there were no occasion for it, and are always glad when they can see reason to change their voice towards them.

~~ROB~~ GALATIANS 4:21-31

AFFECTIONATE REMONSTRANCE

In these verses the apostle illustrates the difference between believers who rested in Christ only and those judaizers who trusted in the law, by a comparison taken from the story of Isaac and Ishmael. This he introduces in such a manner as was proper to strike and impress their minds, and to convince them of their great weakness in departing from the truth, and suffering themselves to be deprived of the liberty of the gospel: *Tell me*, says he, *you that desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?* He takes it for granted that they did hear the law, for among the Jews it was wont to be read in their public assemblies every sabbath day; and, since they were so very fond of being under it, he would have them duly to consider what is written therein (referring to what is recorded Genesis 16

and 21), for, if they would do this, they might soon see how little reason they had to trust in it. And here,

1. He sets before them the history itself (v. 22, 23): *For it is written, Abraham had two sons*, etc. Here he represents the different state and condition of these two sons of Abraham that the one, Ishmael, *was by a bond-maid*, and the other, Isaac, *by a free-woman*; and that whereas the former *was born after the flesh*, or by the ordinary course of nature, the other *was by promise*, when in the course of nature there was no reason to expect that Sarah should have a son.

2. He acquaints them with the meaning and design of this history, or the use which he intended to make of it (v. 24-27): *These things*, says he, *are an allegory*, wherein, besides the literal and historical sense of the words, the Spirit of God might design to signify something further to us, and that was, That these two, Agar and Sarah, *are the two covenants*, or were intended to typify and prefigure the two different dispensations of the covenant. The former, Agar, represented that which was given from mount Sinai, and *which gendereth to bondage*, which, though it was a dispensation of grace, yet, in comparison of the gospel state, was a dispensation of bondage, and became more so to the Jews, through their mistake of the design of it, and expecting to be justified by the works of it. *For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia* (mount Sinai was then called Agar by the Arabians), *and it answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children*; that is, it justly represents the present state of the Jews, who, continuing in their infidelity and adhering to that covenant, are still in bondage with their children. But the other, Sarah, was intended to prefigure Jerusalem which is above, or the state of Christians under the new and better dispensation of the covenant, which is free both from the curse of the moral and the bondage of the ceremonial law, and *is the mother of us* alla state into which all, both Jews and Gentiles, are admitted, upon their believing in Christ. And to this greater freedom and enlargement of the church under the gospel dispensation, which was typified by Sarah the mother of the promised seed, the apostle refers that of the prophet, ²⁵⁰¹ *Isaiah 54:1*, where it is written, *Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she who hath a husband*.

3. He applies the history thus explained to the present case (v. 28); *Now we, brethren*, says he, *as Isaac was, are the children of the promise*. We

Christians, who have accepted Christ, and rely upon him, and look for justification and salvation by him alone, as hereby we become the spiritual, though we are not the natural, seed of Abraham, so we are entitled to the promised inheritance and interested in the blessings of it. But lest these Christians should be stumbled at the opposition they might meet with from the Jews, who were so tenacious of their law as to be ready to persecute those who would not submit to it, he tells them that this was no more than what was pointed to in the type; for *as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit*, they must expect it would be *so now*. But, for their comfort in this case, he desires them to consider what the scripture saith (⁽¹²¹⁾Genesis 21:10), *Cast out the bond-woman and her son, for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman*. Though the judaizers should persecute and hate them, yet the issue would be that Judaism would sink, and wither, and perish; but true Christianity should flourish and last for ever. And then, as a general inference from the whole of the sum of what he had said, he concludes (v. 31), *So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free*.