

Fact Sheet for **“Until Christ is Formed in You”**
Galatians 4:8-31

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We're going to finish out chapter four today. Paul has stayed on message for all of these chapters. We are saved by grace, through faith, and not by obedience to the Mosaic Law! As we move into chapter five next week we will begin to see the clear alternative to Law observance. Paul will hint at this with the phrase “until Christ is formed in you”.

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

Before they became Christians they were in bondage to false gods (Acts 14:11-13). In Galatians Paul wrote that they had come **to know God** (from man's perspective) or **to be known by God** (from God's perspective). The word translated “know” here means to know on a personal and intimate level. What does the term “elementary principles” refer to? These are the *binding* traditions, prohibitions, ordinances, and ceremonies that must be followed in religious thinking. These were there in the Mosaic Law (Galatians 4:3-5). They were there in Pagan beliefs (Galatians 4:9). By exchanging one system of rules (pagan) for another (Jewish) the Galatians were in danger of walking into religious slavery once more.

¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

These observances are from the Mosaic calendar, and the Galatians were feeling absolutely bound to keep them.

^{12a} Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

Paul had become free from the Law, as the Galatian believers were when they first began with Christ.

^{12b} You did me no wrong. ¹³ You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, ¹⁴ and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

Paul related how he was received by the Galatians on his first visit (Acts 13-14). Whatever this illness was Paul does not say here.

¹⁵ What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

This is just a bold figure of speech that spoke about the high esteem the Galatians had for Paul.

¹⁶ Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? ¹⁷ They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. ¹⁸ It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you,

The NIV translates verse 17 this way that shows the meaning of Paul's words well. This is why Paul said what he did in verse 16.

^{NIV} Galatians 4:17 Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them.

¹⁹ **my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!**
²⁰ **I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.**

Think about the words **until Christ is formed in you**. These are not speaking about the Galatians becoming Christians again. They speak of maturity in doctrine and life. And, they are a hint of Paul's alternative to Law observance.

²¹ **Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?** ²² **For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman (*Hagar*) and one by a free woman (*Sarah*).** ²³ **But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.** ²⁴ **Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.**

Ah yes, allegory. An allegory is a figure of speech where characters, places, or events are given different meanings to illustrate what is being said. When the Bible is interpreted allegorically that interpretation *often* denies the real historical meaning of the text and focus on its spiritualized meaning as being where the real truth is. For instance the Song of Solomon is often interpreted allegorically as referring to the love that Christ has for the church. First, Paul is in no way denying the literal meaning of the story of Abraham. Second, he is tying into the Genesis account where Isaac was the child born from God's promise, while Ismael was the child born through human plans. So, there is a real connection of Paul's allegory with the text of Genesis. Third, Paul is employing this allegory to illustrate literal truth. This is very different from other allegorical interpretations of the biblical text in which the real historical facts are downplayed and the fanciful, hidden meanings that are unrelated to the text are considered to be most important. Paul relates the slave woman (Hagar) with slavery to the Mosaic Law (Mount Sinai), and the then contemporary Jewish slavish adherence to the Law to earthly Jerusalem.

²⁵ **Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.** ²⁶ **But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.** ²⁷ **For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband."**

Those who will find themselves in the Jerusalem above (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2) will do so by faith, not through slavish obedience to the Law of Moses. Galatians 4:27 is a quote of Isaiah 54:1 speaking of God's future blessing on Israel. In Paul's words **For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband** you can almost hear him say Sarah versus Hagar.

²⁸ **Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.** ²⁹ **But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.**

Those who were teaching the Galatian believers that they needed to obey the Mosaic Law were also seeking to alienate them from Paul (Galatians 5:11) and persecuted him. In a similar vein Hagar, the mother of Ismael, persecuted Sarah, the mother of Isaac (Genesis 21:9).

³⁰ **But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."** ³¹ **So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.**

And so ends Paul's allegory.

Paul will in the next sermon begin to transition to the alternative to Law observance, the fulfillment of "until Christ is formed in you".

And we will encounter his words "You are severed from Christ" and "you have fallen away from grace".

¹ Genesis 21:10.