

Galatians 4

From Galatians 3:1 through 5:12 Paul offers a variety of reasons why the Galatians should resist those who require circumcision and obedience to the whole law as a means of justification before God

4:1-7 - Passing from Slavery to Sonship.

The law was never intended to be in force forever, and now that the promised Messiah has come, those who believe in him are sons of God.

4:8-11 - Passing from Idolatry to the True God.

The slavery that the Galatians are in danger of embracing again is not just a matter of forfeiting sonship but of abandoning the true God. They would be returning to false gods (v. 8), to worldly principles and structures (v. 9-10). It would be as if they had never even heard the gospel from Paul (v. 11). For these Gentile Galatian Christians, turning to the Jewish law would be like returning to their paganism.

4:12-20 - Appeal to the Galatians' Knowledge of Paul.

As in 3:1-5, Paul reminds the Galatians that they were once slaves to sin but needn't be any more. He recounts how he came to spend extended time teaching with them because of his ailment. Paul is pained and perplexed by their adherence to the *weak and worthless elementary principles of the world*

4:21-31 - Abraham's Sons.

Paul continues to emphasize the difference between being a free child of God and being a slave to the law, sin, and false gods. The background to this passage is Genesis 16-17 and 21. Abraham's son Ishmael—technically the firstborn—represents the slave sons of Abraham and hence the enslaving Sinai covenant, because he was Abraham's son through the slave woman Hagar. Isaac, on the other hand, represents the free sons of Abraham.