

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GALATIANS 4

THE LAST WORD OF GALATIANS 3 TOLD US THAT IF WE BELONG TO CHRIST (BY FAITH (V. 26), INITIATED THROUGH BAPTISM (V. 27)), WE ARE ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS AND AS A RESULT "HEIRS" ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE GOD MADE TO ABRAHAM (LAND, DESCENDANTS, & BLESSING). SO IN THE NEXT SECTION WE WILL READ, PAUL IS GOING TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN HEIR. MERRIAM WEBSTER DEFINES OUR ENGLISH WORD "HEIR" LIKE THIS:

(1) ONE WHO RECEIVES PROPERTY FROM AN ANCESTOR : ONE WHO IS ENTITLED TO INHERIT PROPERTY (2) ONE WHO INHERITS OR IS ENTITLED TO SUCCEED TO A HEREDITARY RANK, TITLE, OR OFFICE

GALATIANS 4:1-7 - SLAVES, CHILDREN, & HEIRS

WHEN AN "HEIR" IS JUST A SMALL CHILD (V. 1), EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE DESTINED TO RECEIVE ALL THAT THEIR PARENT OWNS/GIVES, FUNCTIONALLY THEY ARE NO DIFFERENT THAN A COMMON SERVANT IN THE SAME HOUSEHOLD. PAUL IS GOING TO USE THIS LIFE EXAMPLE AS A METAPHOR FOR THE GALATIANS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS KEEPERS OF THE LAW COMPARED TO FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST.

A CHILD/HEIR DOES NOT KNOW WHEN THE TIME WILL COME WHEN THEY INHERIT WHAT HAD BEEN PROMISED. SIMILARLY, AT THE "FULLNESS OF TIME" GOD SENT HIS SON WHICH BEGAN THE PROCESS OF TRANSITIONING THE "CHILDREN" FROM SLAVE-LIKE STATUS TO FULL GROWN HEIRS OF THE FATHER.

NOW, THOSE WHO ARE CHILDREN OF GOD ARE NO LONGER SLAVES. BEFORE CHRIST CAME THEY WERE NO DIFFERENT THAN SLAVES. IN FACT, AS THEY KEPT THE LAW TO STAY ON THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW AS CHILDREN, THEY WERE ENSLAVED TO THE LAW AND IT'S BLESSINGS/CURSES.

THAT'S HOW IT *USED TO BE*.

NOW, ONCE THEY HAD BEEN MADE RIGHT WITH GOD BY HAVING FAITH IN CHRIST, THEY ARE NO LONGER SLAVES, THEY ARE FULLY CHILDREN OF GOD AND NOT JUST THE "RUNT OF THE LITTER" CHILD BUT ADOPTED AS FULL-STATUS CHILDREN OF GOD. THEY HAVE BEEN "BORN OF GOD" BY HIS SPIRIT AND THIS MARKS THEM AS CHILDREN AND HEIRS.

THIS IS A LONG WAY TO GET TO THE MAIN POINT OF PAUL - SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN, YOU'RE A SON/DAUGHTER OF GOD NOW, THERE IS A NEW WAY TO LIVE FOR AND RELATE TO GOD. IT'S NOT AS MASTER/SLAVE, IT'S LOVING FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS (AS IMPLIED BY THE USE OF THE ULTRA PERSONAL "ABBA", V. 6). AND IF YOU'RE A SON/DAUGHTER, YOU'RE AN HEIR OF WHAT GOD HAS PROMISED TO GIVE. WHAT AN AMAZING REALITY!

GALATIANS 4:8-11 - CHILDREN SHOULDN'T GO BACK TO SLAVES

PAUL RETURNS TO HIS CONCERN FOR THE GALATIANS TURNING BACK TO THEIR OLD WAYS. UP UNTIL NOW HE HAS QUESTIONED AND CHALLENGED THEM AS TO WHY THEY WOULD RETURN TO KEEPING OF THE LAW OF MOSES BUT HERE HE REMINDS THE GENTILES AMONG THEM

HOW FOOLISH IT WOULD BE FOR THEM TO RETURN TO THEIR IDOLATROUS WAYS - AND COMPARES THEIR DESIRE TO KEEP "DAYS AND MONTHS AND SEASONS AND YEARS" (PRESUMABLY JEWISH FEASTS) AS PROFITABLE AS GOING BACK TO WORSHIPPING FALSE GODS!

KEEPING THE LAW OF MOSES DOES ABOUT AS MUCH TO EARN GOD'S FAVOR AND LOVE AS SERVING IDOLS. THAT'S QUITE THE STATEMENT FOR THE FORMER PHARISEE TO MAKE. THIS AGAIN SHOWS PAUL'S GRAVE CONCERN FOR THEIR OWN PROGRESS AND SPIRITUAL STATE. HE'S PUT A LOT OF WORK INTO SERVING AND SHEPHERDING THE GALATIANS CHURCHES AND DOESN'T WANT THOSE LABORS TO BE IN "VAIN (V. 11)."

GALATIANS 4:12-20 — DON'T FORGET WHAT WE'VE HAD!

PAUL USES SOME PRETTY GRAPHIC LANGUAGE HERE TO DESCRIBE THE NATURE OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GALATIAN BELIEVERS. AS WE SAW EARLIER IN OUR STUDY WHEN WE WENT BACK TO PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEY TO THE GALATIAN REGION (ACTS 13-14), PAUL HAD SPENT A GOOD AMOUNT OF TIME WITH THESE CHURCHES. HE SUFFERED GREATLY DURING HIS TIME MINISTERING THERE (INCLUDING THE FAMOUS STONING INCIDENT NEAR LYSTRA, ACTS 14:19-20). APPARENTLY PAUL HAD A GREAT LOVE-RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SAINTS THERE. LET'S REVISIT THE PHRASING HE USES HERE:

I *BEG* OF YOU BRETHREN (V. 12)

YOU HAVE DONE ME NO WRONG! (V. 12)

I WAS SICK WHEN I FIRST CAME TO YOU, BUT MY CONDITION DIDN'T CAUSE YOU TO TURN AWAY OR REJECT ME. (V. 14)

YOU WELCOMED ME LIKE YOU WOULD HAVE WELCOMED AN ANGEL OR EVEN JESUS HIMSELF! (V. 14)

I BELIEVE THAT IF I NEEDED A NEW EYE, YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN WILLING TO GIVE ME YOURS! (V. 15)

MY (LITTLE) CHILDREN (V. 19)

PAUL REMINDS THEM OF THE LOVE-RELATIONSHIP THAT THEY HAVE (HAD?) WHEN HE APPEALS TO THEM TO HEAR HIS HEART. THE FALSE TEACHERS ARE TRYING TO KEEP THE GALATIAN BELIEVERS AWAY FROM PAUL, THAT SHOULD BE A SIGN TO THEM OF SOMETHING NOT BEING RIGHT!

PAUL WANTS TO KEEP BEING A BROTHER AND FATHER FIGURE TO THEM - HE WANTS TO SEE THEM BECOME MORE AND MORE LIKE CHRIST AND HE IS WILLING TO WORK FOR AND WITH THEM UNTIL THAT HAPPENS. HE FEELS LIKE HE IS GOING THROUGH LABOR AGAIN - BUT HE SEEMS WILLING TO PUT IT OUT OF HIS LOVE FOR THEM! HIS APPEALS IN THIS LETTER ARE NOT BECAUSE HE IS ANGRY WITH THEM OR THAT HE HAS BECOME THEIR ENEMY - BUT HE IS BEING FIRM, TRUTHFUL AND DIRECT BECAUSE HE LOVES THEM.

GALATIANS 4:20 (NLT) - I WISH I WERE WITH YOU RIGHT NOW SO I COULD CHANGE MY TONE. BUT AT THIS DISTANCE I DON'T KNOW HOW ELSE TO HELP YOU.

GALATIANS 4:21-31 - ONE FINAL ALLEGORY: ISAAC & ISHAMEL, SARAH & HAGAR

PAUL RETURNS ONE MORE TIME TO THE STORY OF ABRAHAM TO ILLUSTRATE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING CONNECTED TO GOD BY FAITH OR BY WORKS OF THE MOSAIC LAW.

IF YOU ARE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE STORY (FOUND IN GENESIS 16 & 22), HERE'S A BRIEF SUMMARY. GOD HAD PROMISED ABRAHAM AND SARAH A CHILD, EVEN IN THEIR OLD AGE. THIS CHILD WOULD BE THE FIRST OF A MULTITUDE OF DESCENDANTS. BUT THERE WAS A TIME GAP BETWEEN THE GIVING OF THE PROMISE TO HAVE A SON AND THE ACTUAL REALIZATION OF HIS BIRTH (ISAAC). AND DURING THAT TIME ABRAHAM AND SARAH DECIDED TO TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS AND BRING ABOUT GOD'S WILL BY THEIR OWN EFFORTS (OR

SO THEY THOUGHT). ABRAHAM IMPREGNATES HAGAR, ONE OF SARAH'S SERVANTS, AND SHE WILL GIVE BIRTH TO ISHMAEL. THOUGH BOTH ISAAC & ISHMAEL WERE RELATED TO ABRAHAM, ONLY ONE WAS THE BLESSED PROMISED HEIR OF ABRAHAM. ISAAC WAS THE CHILD OF PROMISE AND ISHMAEL WAS THE CHILD OF HUMAN EFFORTS. ISAAC WAS THE SON OF ABRAHAM'S WIFE SARAH, ISHMAEL WAS THE SON OF SARAH'S SLAVE.

WITH THAT BACKGROUND PAUL USES THESE TWO INDIVIDUALS TO DOUBLE DOWN ON THE POINT HE HAS BEEN MAKING THROUGHOUT THIS CHAPTER. DO YOU WANT TO BE A SON OR SLAVE? IF YOU KEEP THE LAW, YOU'RE JUST LIKE HAGAR'S SON ISHMAEL. IF YOU LIVE BY FAITH IN CHRIST, YOU ARE A CHILD OF THE PROMISE, LIKE SARAH'S SON ISAAC. FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING, YOU CAN EITHER WORSHIP GOD AT MOUNT SINAI (WHERE THE LAW WAS GIVEN TO MOSES) OR YOU CAN WORSHIP GOD BY FAITH AT THE NEW JERUSALEM, WHICH IS WHERE CHRIST IS NOW AND WILL COME TO THE EARTH AT THE END. WE CAN'T BE OR DO BOTH.

A LOT OF IMAGERY AND OLD-TESTAMENT ROOTED EXAMPLES, BUT I THINK THE POINT PAUL HAS BEEN MAKING IN THIS CHAPTER ARE CLEAR ENOUGH TO GRASP. BUT NEVERTHELESS, THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO PAUSE AND TAKE A BREATH.

GALATIANS 4 CONTINUES TO MAKE PAUL'S CASE TO THE CHURCH THAT WE ARE MADE RIGHT BY FAITH IN CHRIST - AND THAT'S THE ONLY WAY. WE SHOULDN'T THINK THAT OUR EFFORTS (EITHER BASED ON THE MOSAIC LAW OR OUR OWN GOOD DEEDS) CAN CLEANSE US FROM SIN OR KEEP US IN GOD'S LOVE. THOSE THINGS BECOME REALITIES WHEN WE HAVE FAITH IN CHRIST AND ARE FILLED WITH GOD'S SPIRIT. WE'RE REMINDED AGAIN NOT TO TURN AWAY FROM THAT SIMPLICITY.

BEFORE WE CLOSE, LET'S CONSIDER ONE POINT THAT PAUL MAKES QUICKLY IN THIS SECTION WHICH IS A TIMELY REMINDER FOR US. PAUL APPEALS TO THE CHURCH IN 4:12-20 THAT THEY REMEMBER THEIR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER IN THE MIDST OF THIS "CONVERSATION" SO THAT THEY CAN RIGHTLY INTERPRET PAUL'S HEART WHEN THEY READ THE EMOTIONLESS BLACK AND WHITE INK ON THE PAGE. I APPRECIATE THAT HE REMINDS THEM OF HIS LOVE FOR THEM AND THE RELATIONAL HISTORY THAT THEY HAVE.

HE'S SAYING "GUYS, IT'S ME! HEAR MY HEART IN THESE WORDS!" AND FAMOUSLY HE ASKS:

"HAVE I NOW BECOME YOUR ENEMY BECAUSE I AM TELLING YOU THE TRUTH? (4:16, NLT)"

THAT'S A GOOD QUESTION FOR PAUL TO POSE TO THEM. AND ITS A GOOD QUESTION FOR US TO CONSIDER. WHEN SOME SPEAKS TRUTH TO US - *HOW DO WE RESPOND? HOW DO WE FEEL? HOW DO WE REACT?* DOES A CONFRONTATION CANCEL OUT RELATIONAL CAPITAL THAT HAS BEEN BUILT OVER THE YEARS? SADLY, IT OFTEN DOES. BUT IT SHOULDN'T.

I'M NOT THINKING ABOUT SOMEONE BEING A JERK OR RUDE OR UNKIND. SPEAKING THE TRUTH AS A JERK DOESN'T MAKE WHAT YOU'RE SAYING RIGHT. - THAT'S NOT LOVE. LOVE IS NOT RUDE OR EASILY ANGERED (1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-6). IF SOMEONE GETS UPSET AT YOUR BECAUSE YOU ARE RUDE, HARSH, UNKIND, ABRASIVE, ETC. - YOU NEED TO REPENT. TRUTH IS TO BE SPOKEN IN LOVE. JUST THE FACT THAT YOU SPOKE "TRUTH" DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN YOU WERE LOVING (...OK, RANT OVER).

THAT BEING SAID, WE NEED TO INCLUDE TRUTH-TELLING AS A PART OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITHIN A FAMILY. THIS IS A PART OF LOVE. RECEIVING TRUTH WITHOUT BEING EASILY OFFENDED IS HARD, BUT IMPORTANT. SPEAKING TRUTH WITH COMPASSION AND CONCERN FOR THE OTHER PERSON IS RARE, BUT NEEDED.

FOSTERING A LOVE RELATIONSHIP AMONGST BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST IS IMPORTANT. ONE OF THE REASONS WHY IS THAT WE WILL SURELY HAVE TO NAVIGATE DIFFICULT, AWKWARD AND TRYING SITUATIONS TOGETHER. BEING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO SOMEONE IS REQUIRED IN ORDER TO LOVE THEM - BUT IT ALSO COMES WITH THE RISK OF BEING CLOSE ENOUGH TO BE HURT BY THEM. BUT THAT'S THE RISK THAT LOVE DEMANDS.

IF YOU CONTINUE TO KEEP PEOPLE AT ARMS LENGTH SO AS TO NOT BE HURT, YOU WILL NEVER GROW CLOSE WITH PEOPLE SO AS TO BE LOVED.

TRUTH TELLING SHOULD NOT PUT RELATIONSHIPS AT RISK. AND THAT'S WHY PAUL REMINDS THE CHURCH THAT EVEN THOUGH HE IS SPEAKING TRUTH, IT'S BECAUSE HE LOVES THEM SO MUCH. IT'S HIS LOVE FOR THEM THAT PROMPTS HIM TO SPEAK THE TRUTH. THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES ARE AT RISK AND SO HE WANTS TO TAKE INITIATIVE AND GET INVOLVED TO HELP.

OH TO HAVE AND BE A FRIEND LIKE THAT.