

# GALATIANS

## Chapter 4

### *Sons and Heirs*

**I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.**

Gal 4:1–11 is a discrete paragraph in which the apostle seizes on the notion of “inheritance” (3:18) in the preceding pericope (see also “heirs” in 3:29). In 4:1–2 Paul offers an illustration or legal example that he then applies in 4:3–7. He concludes in 4:8–11 with a rebuke of the Galatians based on his illustration and its application. Several verbal connections tie 4:1–2 to 4:3–7: the pair “heir” and “slave” (κληρονόμος and δοῦλος, in both 4:1 and 4:7); “time” (χρόνος, 4:1, 4); “minor” (νήπιος, 4:1, 3); and “the F/father” (ὁ πατήρ, 4:2, 6). Also, “under guardians and managers” (ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους ... καὶ οἰκονόμους, 4:2) corresponds to “under the elements of the world” (ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, 4:3), and “the time set by the father” (ἡ προθεσμία τοῦ πατρός, 4:2) corresponds to “the fullness of time” (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, 4:4). “But” (ἀλλά) in 4:8 signals the beginning of Paul’s rebuke as he expands on 4:3’s “under the elements of the world” (ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου), to which the Galatians are returning. (CC)

The first part of the new chapter, 4:1–7, develops certain strands of the argument at the end of chapter 3. The parallels between this paragraph and 3:23–29 may be outlined as follows:

#### **Galatians 4:1–7**

#### **Galatians 3:23–29**

<sup>1</sup>As long as the heir is a minor ...

<sup>23</sup>Before the coming of this faith,

<sup>2</sup>He is under guardians and managers until the we were held in custody under the Law, time set by the father.

imprisoned until this coming faith should be revealed.

<sup>3</sup>When we were minors, we were enslaved under<sup>24</sup> The law became our custodian until Christ. the elements of the world.

<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time came ...

<sup>25</sup>Since faith has come,

<sup>5</sup> in order that he might redeem those under the we are no longer under a custodian. Law

and in order that we might receive the adoption<sup>26</sup>You are all sons of God. as sons.

<sup>6</sup>God sent forth the Spirit of his Son ...

<sup>27</sup> As many of you as were baptized into Christ ...

<sup>7</sup>Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son,<sup>29</sup>Then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according and since a son, also an heir through God. to the promise.

Paul invites his hearers to consider matters from a different angle. The key difference between the two sections is the role (or lack thereof) of Abraham. The terms of 3:1–29 were dictated by Paul's opponents, who had advocated status as a child of Abraham (see the commentary on 3:6). Paul neatly resolves the issue of Abrahamic descent with incorporation by faith and Baptism into Abraham's sole Seed and heir, Jesus Christ (3:29). With 4:1–7 Paul restates the whole matter on *his* terms. Paul is not ultimately concerned with Abrahamic descent but rather with *status* as children and heirs of God! The key term with which Paul opens and concludes 4:1–7 is therefore "heir." Who are the heirs to God's promises? (CC)

Scholars are not certain to what social and legal customs Paul is alluding. A long line of specialists have conceded the difficulty. Richard Longenecker concluded his rather lengthy discussion: "It is difficult to determine exactly what legal system Paul had in mind.... It is entirely possible, in fact, that Paul, being more interested in application than precise legal details, made the specifics of his illustration conform to his purpose. No illustration is required to represent exactly every aspect of a situation in order to be telling or meaningful." Leon Morris was categorical: "We do not know of a guardianship in the ancient world in precisely the terms Paul uses."<sup>30</sup> Similarly Richard Hays: "Paul is speaking in general terms here for the purpose of illustration, and there is no point in seeking to pin down precise legal details presupposed by the analogy, which works only loosely in any case." With respect to "the time set by the father" in 4:2, Hays added: "Whether this detail corresponds precisely to the provisions of inheritance law in Paul's culture is beside the point; he is already looking ahead to his application in v. 4, thinking of the fact that it is God who appoints the time for the state of subjection to come to an end." (CC)

More recently, many scholars have noted the possibility of exodus and wilderness allusions throughout Galatians and especially in 4:1–11. The evidence is not as clear for these allusions as the proponents suggest. Paul neither mentions the narratives explicitly nor cites their distinctive phrasing. The structural similarities between Israel's story and the Galatians' situation may nevertheless suggest an echo at a very general level. In 1:1–4 the Galatians have been rescued from the present evil age but are now, like the rebellious generation of Israel in the wilderness, turning away (1:6–7). In 4:3–7 God redeems and adopts the Galatians even as he made Israel his son, and now the Galatians are turning back again to their former slavery (4:8–9). Christ has freed the Galatians (4:21–5:1a), and so they must not submit again to the yoke of Egypt-like slavery (5:1b). The Galatians' story is analogous to the story of Israel upon the people's departure from Egypt when they threatened to apostatize and return to slavery (Ex 14:10–12; 16:3; 17:3; Num 11:4–6, 18; 14:2–4; Josh 24:14–20; Neh 9:17). The Israelites threatened to abandon their Lord in order to return to their old rulers. The rivals were urging the Galatians to join God's people Israel through observance of the Law. Paul may be suggesting that his hearers *already* share in Israel's story; the problem is that the Galatians are threatening to share in the worst part of that story. (CC)

The Romans practiced the adoption of sons into a new family. Adoption involved a tremendous change of status. An adopted son left one household and became subordinate to a new household head, a new father. During a ceremony the adoptee three times would be "sold" into bondage and then redeemed from bondage by the adopting father. Adopted sons subsequently enjoyed all the privileges of natural-born offspring. With this cultural background in mind, the concept of bondage/slavery in 4:3 would lead very naturally to redemption and adoption as sons in 4:5. Released from the oppressive, enslaving powers of old, a genuine reversal of fortune has taken place for those in Christ. Believers in Christ enjoy the status of adopted sons in the most prestigious household of all, God's! (CC)

### **An Illustration of the Appointed Time (4:1–2) (CC)**

4:1–2 I tell you: As long as the heir is a minor, he is no different from a slave, even though he is the master of all. But rather he is under guardians and managers until the time set by the father. “I tell you” (λέγω δέ) signals a minor break (cf. 3:17; 5:16). One could translate the expression as “and I am telling you this” or “my point is this.” Paul shifts in 4:1 away from the imagery that dominated 3:23–29 to a new set of metaphors. Nevertheless, the article with “the heir” (ὁ κληρονόμος) is anaphoric in referring back to the “heirs” just mentioned in 3:29. Those “heirs” are, collectively in Christ, “Abraham’s seed.” The “heirs” in Christ pave the way for a discussion of the representative “heir” in 4:1. (CC)

Paul’s “heir” is experiencing that temporary period of minority when a young man is subject to “guardians and managers” (4:2; “as long as,” ἐφ’ ὅσον χρόνον, 4:1; cf. Rom 7:1; 1 Cor 7:39). The word “guardian” (ἐπίτροπος) sometimes functioned as a synonym of “pedagogue/custodian” (παιδαγωγός). Perhaps the use of “pedagogue/custodian” in 3:24–25, with the child’s comparable period of minority, suggested to the apostle the imagery of 4:1–2. The period of minority under “guardians and managers” is temporary, even as the child’s time under the pedagogue has come to a close. The Galatians are now “sons” (υἱοί, 3:26) and “heirs” (κληρονόμοι, 3:29). (CC)

In the context of 4:1, however, Paul is not thinking of a “pedagogue/custodian,” but rather of a child’s legal guardian (ἐπίτροπος). A guardian would manage the child’s household and estate until he came of age.<sup>38</sup> The guardian would clothe the child and provide for his schooling. The minor could not act independently.<sup>40</sup> The guardian would treat an orphaned child as if the child were his own. The presence of a guardian does not necessarily imply that the child must be an orphan. The guardian (ἐπίτροπος) in Mt 20:8 works in a large household while the owner is still alive. A guardian could even be a family friend of high social status who had voluntarily stepped in for the father. “Managers/trustees” (οἰκονόμοι), on the other hand, were typically slaves who managed estates. Paul may be envisioning a division of labor: a guardian to handle the youth’s upbringing and education, and trustees to care for the property of the youth’s estate. Paul is describing a household of both wealth and status. The boy is the legal heir who will eventually become the master of a royal estate (“master of all,” κύριος πάντων), but as a “minor” (νήπιος) the boy is “no different from a slave” (οὐδὲν διαφέρει δούλου) since he may not act freely or make substantive decisions until the time set by the father. (CC)

Although Paul may employ the word for “minor” (νήπιος) with a sense of immaturity (1 Cor 13:11–12; Eph 4:13–14), Gal 4:1–2 is not outlining a process of maturation but rather an established time! The word for the set “time” (προθεσμία) in legal documents referred to an appointed day either when a contract’s stipulations were fulfilled or when a status or condition had changed. In one Hellenistic legal papyrus (P.Oxy. 491.8–10), a man specified in his will that if he died before his sons were of the appointed age of twenty years or older, then their maternal grandfather would serve as their “guardian” (ἐπίτροπος). The key word in 4:2 is “until” (ἄχρι). The heir’s life may be divided into the periods before and after he receives the full privileges as heir at “the time set by the father” (τῆς προθεσμίας τοῦ πατρὸς). For Paul, the appointed “time” has arrived with the dawning of the new creation in Christ (see 4:4–5!). (CC)

One must be cautious about Paul’s imagery. He does not identify the Galatian Christians with the minor of 4:1. Rather, in 4:3, 7 he identifies the Galatians as *former slaves*! Paul appears to be distinguishing the Galatian gentiles from ethnic Israel as the proper “heir.” Thanks to Christ, the baptized gentiles now share in Israel’s status (3:28–29). Whereas Israel was under the Law and hence under a “pedagogue” (3:23–24) as a minor (4:1–2), the former (gentile) slaves enjoy the inheritance of Abraham and his descendants as *adults*. They have entered into the inheritance with none of the restrictions of the age of minority. The gentile Galatian believers are therefore “master[s] of all” (see, e.g., Sirach 44:21; Jub 22.11–15, 24; 32.19; 1 En. 5.7; Philo, Mos. 1.28 § 155). How sadly ironic that in seeking to become the children and beneficiaries of Abraham, they are seeking what is already theirs! (CC)

**4:1** ἐστὶν ... διαφέρει ... ὧν (“is ... is different ... is”)—The present tenses are likely gnomic, signaling a general, timeless fact. Some see a reference to Israel’s former situation as slaves in Egypt with the historical present tense employed in the same manner as in 3:17 (ἀκυροῖ, “does [not] invalidate”), but 3:17 is too distant to be of any value in interpreting 4:1–2 (note the transition at 3:21). Furthermore, 3:17’s verb is likely a perfective present as the Law *still* does not invalidate the Abrahamic promises.

οὐδέν (“no”)—This pronoun (literally, “nothing”) is used adverbially.

δούλου (“from a slave”)—This is a genitive of comparison.

κύριος πάντων ὧν (“even though he is the master of all”)—The circumstantial participle ὧν is concessive. (CC)

*child*. A minor. Contrast with “adults” in 1Co 14:20 (“mature” in Php 3:15). (CSB)

**4:2** *guardians*. A broader term than “[one] put in charge to lead us” in 3:24. See Mt 20:8 (“foreman”); Lk 8:3 (“manager”). (CSB)

These were legally appointed individuals to whom a child’s welfare, support, and household affairs were entrusted. Under the Roman legal system, the status of a child still under the care of a guardian was roughly that of a slave (both were unable to enjoy the inheritance). The precise legal details of the procedure, however, are not known to us. (TLSB)

“You see,” he says, “even in civil law, that although the heir is the owner of the entire estate of his father, he is still a slave. Of course, he has the promise and the blessing of his inheritance. Nevertheless, before the time of emancipation, as the lawyers call it, has arrived, he is held and subjected to guardians and trustees, just as a pupil is to a custodian. They do not entrust the administration or control of his goods to him, but they force him to serve. He lives and eats on his own property as though he were a slave. Therefore he is no different from a slave so long as the time of his imprisonment and captivity lasts, that is, so long as he is under his taskmasters and superintendents. This subjection and captivity is actually for his own good; otherwise he would dissipate his goods foolishly. Still his captivity is not permanent; but it is finished at a definite date, which his father has set.” (Luther)

**4:3** ἡμεῖς (literally “we”; translated as “in our case”)—The pronoun, which could have been omitted, helps signal a change in referent from the minor (4:1–2) to “our case.”

ἡμεθα δεδουλωμένοι (“we were enslaved”)—Paul employs this middle form of εἰμί (Ɱ<sup>46</sup> & D\* and the tenth-century uncial 33) with the perfect passive participle δεδουλωμένοι in the pluperfect periphrastic construction, which takes the place of the proper pluperfect form ἐδεδουλώμεθα. The verb construction conveys an emphasis on the state of existence during the period of minority. The alternative reading ἤμεν δεδουλωμένοι (A B C Textus Receptus and most manuscripts), also a pluperfect periphrastic, employs an active form of εἰμί and is a scribal harmonization with ἤμεν earlier in the sentence. ἡμεθα should be preferred over ἤμεν as more likely original. (CC)

### **The Application of the Illustration (4:3–7) (CC)**

**4:3** *So also in our case, when we were minors, we were enslaved under the elements of the world.* With “so also in our case” (οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς), Paul begins to apply the metaphor to the Galatian audience. The Galatian “we” group of 4:3 was in slavery under the elements of the cosmos and cannot be identified with the young “heir” of 4:1–2, who only experiences limitations *like* a slave. The “also” (καί) signals the shift in subject from the legal minor to the enslaved. Both the formerly enslaved Galatians and the heir have to await the fullness of the appointed time under restraining entities, but their prior situations differ.<sup>49</sup> In 4:3 Paul therefore turns to a people who were of lesser status than the heir (Israel) in 4:1–2 but who are

nevertheless enjoying the inheritance at the appointed time. Commentators who identify the “we” group as Jewish Christians (as opposed to the gentile Galatians) have overlooked the distinction in status between 4:1–2 and 4:3. The status-conscious first-century Galatians, on the other hand, would not have missed it. Paul’s association of the “elements” (στοιχεῖα) with the Galatians’ pagan past in 4:8–9 confirms that the fuller phrase “elements of the world” (4:3) is referring to the situation of gentiles. The “enslaved” gentiles of 4:3 will become the sons of 4:7. (CC)

The precise meaning and referent of the phrase “elements of the world” (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) has been a longstanding problem. Paul and his contemporaries would have heard the phrase used almost exclusively for the fundamental constituting elements of earth, air, fire, and water. Paul chooses to employ the phrase metaphorically. He opens the letter with reference to “the present evil age” (1:4) and closes with the present “world” (κόσμος, twice in 6:14) being crucified and replaced by the “new creation” (6:15). The ancients understood the elements of the cosmos to consist of opposing pairs. Indeed, 4:3 follows on the heels of the climactic declaration in 3:28 that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female. The fundamental, enslaving divisions of this age, as fostered by Moses’ Law, have passed away with the dawning of a new age in Christ (note the past verb tenses of the imperfects ἤμεν and ἤμεθα, “we were,” in 4:3). Paul is limiting the authority of the “elements” to *this* world and not to the new creation in Christ. The “elements” can no longer enslave or bind those in Christ’s new creation—thus the redemption in 4:4–5. (CC)

*as long as he is a child* – Describes a state of confinement under the Law. (TLSB)

*in slavery.* Therefore the emphasis lies on the phrase “we were slaves,” as though he were saying: “Our conscience was subject to the Law, which exercised its tyranny over us with all its might, It whipped us as a tyrant whips his captive slave. It held us confined and captive; that is, it made us fearful, sad, pale, and desperate, by threatening us with eternal death and damnation.” This theological slavery is very harsh—not permanently, however, but as long as it lasts, as long as we are children, that is, until Christ comes. So long as He is absent, we are slaves, confined under the Law, lacking grace, faith, and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But after Christ comes, the imprisonment and slavery of the Law come to an end. (Luther)

*elementary principles.* The Greek term meant essentially “things placed side by side in a row” (as the ABCs) and then came to mean fundamental principles or basic elements of various kinds. The context here suggests that it refers to the elemental forms of religion, whether those of the Jews (under the law, v. 5) or those of the Gentiles (under their old religious bondage, v. 8). (CSB)

Cf v 9. Depicts the condition of slavery to which both Jews and Gentiles were subject prior to Christ’s coming—the Jews to the Law and the Gentiles to their pagan way of life (cf Col 2:8, 20; Heb 5:12). (TLSB)

*of the world.* In the sense that these principles do not come from the “new creation” (6:15). (CSB)

Paul is the only one to use this phraseology, when he calls the Law of God “elements of the world” or “weak and beggarly elements” or “the power of sin” or “the letter that kills.” The other apostles did not speak this way about the Law. Therefore let every student of Christian theology carefully observe this way of speaking that Paul has. Christ calls him “a chosen instrument” (Acts 9:15). Therefore He gave him a most excellent way of speaking and a unique phraseology, different from that of the other apostles, so that he, as the chosen instrument, may faithfully lay the foundations of the doctrine of justification and set it down clearly. (Luther)

4:4–5 *But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that he might redeem those under the Law and in order that we might receive the adoption as sons.* The roughly chiasmic structure of the verses serves to contrast God’s Son/sons with those under the Law in need of redemption:

- A God sent forth his Son
- B Born under the Law
- B’ To redeem those under the Law
- A’ That we might receive the adoption as sons (CC)

Paul does not develop the phrase “born of a woman” (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός) elsewhere in the letter, and “the fullness of time” (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου) is unique in the Pauline corpus. Some scholars have therefore contended that these two phrases, the chiasmic pattern of the verse, and the first person usage (“we”) are evidence that Paul is adapting a Jewish-Christian “sending” formula. These scholars hypothesize that Paul draws on the “sending” formula also in Rom 8:3–4: God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to resolve the requirement of the Law. Like Gal 4:4–5; Rom 8:3–4 speaks of God’s sending, of Christ’s sharing human existence, and of the plight under the Law. The two passages, however, differ considerably in wording. The hypothesis that pre-Pauline material stands behind either Gal 4:4–5 or Rom 8:3–4 is questionable. The phrases “the fullness of time” and “born of a woman” need not reflect pre-Pauline Jewish Christianity. Paul admonishes the Galatians at the beginning of the letter to recognize that they are in the midst of a new age inaugurated by Christ’s saving work (1:4), thus “the fullness of time.” “Born of a woman” is a common expression in Greek literature for sharing in humanity. Paul is stressing at this point Jesus’ identification with the human condition. (CC)

In developing their hypotheses of a Jewish-Christian “sending” formula, some commentators have speculated that the first Christians were connecting Jesus with the figure of Wisdom. Perhaps standing behind Gal 4:4 is Wis Sol 9:10: “Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her” (NRSV). Perhaps standing behind Gal 4:6 is Wis Sol 9:17: “Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?” (NRSV).<sup>58</sup> Another scholar abandoned any reference to pre-Pauline Jewish-Christian traditions and attributed the language of “sending” to Paul himself as he identified the Son seen on the Damascus road with the figure of Wisdom. These suggestions are unlikely as well. Wisdom of Solomon 9 does not identify Wisdom with the “Son of God,” and the sending of Wisdom is a response to Solomon’s need for guidance and not to the plight of the people as a whole. The sending of Wisdom may parallel the sending of the Son *or* the Spirit but hardly the twofold sending of both the Son *and* the Spirit in Gal 4:4–6. Still another scholar linked a potential “sending” formula not with Wisdom but rather with the Gospel traditions. In Mk 12:1–12, especially Mk 12:6–7, the father “sent” his son to check on the vineyard tenants even as God “sent” his own Son in Gal 4:4. As these varied hypotheses demonstrate, the notion that Paul is citing traditional material in 4:4–5 is unlikely and incapable of proof. Whether traditional or not, these verses express Paul’s own thinking. (CC)

The debate over pre-Pauline traditions behind 4:4–5 raises yet another question: the referent of the first person pronouns and verbs. Is Paul distinguishing “we” Jewish Christians by his first person pronouns and verbs in 4:3, 5 from “you” gentile Christians in 4:6? Paul never actually says that the “we” group in 4:3, 5 consists of Jewish Christians, and 4:5–6 is even more problematic for the proposal. In 4:5b “we” receive adoption as sons, and yet 4:6a concludes on the basis of that very adoption of the “we” group: “Now because *you* are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into *our* hearts.” *The “you” and “we” groups must be the same, or Paul’s line of reasoning would collapse.* One ardent advocate of the distinction between “we” Jewish Christians and “you” gentile Galatians has therefore resorted to the desperate measure of emending the Greek text of 4:6 from “our hearts” to “your hearts” in order to match “you are sons” in 4:6. This proposed textual emendation is based on meager external evidence. The first

person “our hearts” is the more difficult reading and therefore more likely the original reading, since scribes would have wanted to eliminate the possibly jarring contrast between the first person and second person pronouns and verbs (“we” in 4:5; “you” and then “our” in 4:6). Certainly God did not send his Son in 4:5 in order that “we” Jews might receive the “adoption as sons.” That is a privilege that Paul grants Israel *before* Christ’s coming (see Rom 9:4)! The logic of Gal 4:6–7 makes little or no sense if the pronouns and verbs are referring to differing groups: “And because you [gentiles] are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into *our* hearts [as Jewish Christians] ... so that you [gentiles] are no longer a slave but a son.” Jewish Christians do not depend for their reception of the Spirit on the gentiles’ adoption as sons. Paul is describing in 4:4–7 the situation of believers in general, regardless of whether they are Jewish or gentile. The Son’s work of redemption in 4:4–5a leads to the reception of sonship in 4:5b, which, in turn, leads to the reception of the Spirit by the same group (4:6): Since *you* are sons, God sent forth the Spirit into *our* hearts. (CC)

Paul begins 4:4 with “but when the fullness of time came” (ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου). The apostle does not say anything here about conditions in the Roman Empire. He does not say anything about a common government, a single language of commerce, a network of roads, or protected sea lanes. Paul’s categories here, as elsewhere in the letter, remain apocalyptic. Galatians opens with reference to “the present evil age” (1:4) and closes with the dawning of a “new creation” (6:15). The Scriptures frequently refer to God’s appointed purpose being brought to fruition at the appointed time (Dan 8:19 [cf. Dan 11:35]; 1QpHab VII.2; Mk 1:15; 13:32; Lk 21:24; Acts 1:7; 3:21; Eph 1:10). The rival teachers have completely missed *what time it is!* Substantives in Greek that end in -μα, as does πλήρωμα, “fullness,” tend to stress completed action. God has a plan for this world, and that plan is now coming to completion with the sending of the Son! The coming of the Son with his powerful Spirit has inaugurated a new age in the history of humanity with the full benefits of sonship. Paul, along with *all* Christ’s own (!), lives at a climactic moment. Two thousand years of intervening history do not change the comforting fact that believers enjoy God’s historic, completed work. (CC)

The reference to God’s “Son” in 4:4 comes amidst a cluster of terms centered on family and inheritance. Thanks to the rivals’ influence, the Galatians are coveting a sonship that would relate them to Abraham, the father of God’s historic people (3:6). Paul speaks of something even better. He grants that they have indeed become sons of Abraham, even if not in the manner that they had supposed. They are sons of Abraham not through Moses’ Law but rather through Christ, the sole, legitimate Seed of Abraham and the rightful recipient of the Abrahamic promises (3:16–18, 29). Christ is not only the sole, proper heir of the Abrahamic promises, but he is also the sole, proper “Son” of God (1:16). Since believers are “in Christ” (3:28) and God has sent Christ’s Spirit “into” them (4:6), they become *fellow* heirs. The Galatians are striving for Abrahamic sonship when they have already become sons of God with an incredible new identity (3:26)! (CC)

In the fullness of time, “God sent forth his Son, *born of a woman*” (ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός). Perhaps the sending of the Son is no different than God’s “sending” of human prophets and implies nothing with respect to Christ’s preexistence (Judg 6:8; Jer 7:25; Ezek 2:3; Hag 1:12; Paul in Acts 22:21). Indeed, Paul narrates his own call/sending with the language of the prophets (Gal 1:15–16; cf. Is 49:1, 5; Jer 1:5). The phrase “born of a woman” is a common way of expressing human existence in the OT, Second Temple Judaism, and even early Christianity (Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4; Mt 11:11 || Lk 7:28; 1QS XI.21; Sirach 10:18; Josephus, *Ant.* 7.1.4 § 21; 16.11.5 § 382). Paul is probably not, then, referring in 4:4 to a virgin birth. The Son simply became thoroughly, fully human. The late-first-and second-century Docetists who denied Christ’s humanity would have done well to reconsider 4:4–5. (CC)

The question still remains whether Paul is implying the birth of a preexistent, divine being. In support of this conclusion, first, if “born of a woman” were only emphasizing Jesus’ humanity, then the phrase

would have been unnecessary in the Galatian context since none of the parties would have disputed Jesus' humanity. Paul does not elaborate on Jesus' genuine humanity elsewhere in the letter. The phrase would be extraneous were it not signaling Jesus' preexistence. Second, even as God sent forth the Spirit in 4:6, God sent forth the Son in 4:4. Even as the Spirit is preexistent, so also the Son is preexistent. Third, although Paul was sent by God in a manner comparable with the sending of the prophets (Gal 1:15–16; cf. Jn 17:18), he is not God's Son. Unlike the prophets or apostles, the Son comes for a purpose that is cosmic in scope: he delivers people from "the present evil age" (1:4). Jesus' mission to "the present evil age" suggests that he stands *beyond* this age and has invaded it from without in order to rescue and redeem humanity. Fourth, the order of Paul's verbs in 4:4 ("sent ... born ... born") has the Son's sending *before* his birth, thereby implying his preexistence. Fifth and finally, Paul elsewhere in his letters expresses a very high view of Christ as God (Rom 9:5; 1 Cor 8:6; Phil 2:6 [cf. Phil 2:5–11: a preexistent person!]; Col 2:9). The apostle also describes Christ in the language of preexistent Wisdom in 1 Cor 1:24, 30; 8:6b; 10:4; cf. Col 1:15–17. Precisely because the Son is a powerful, preexistent, otherworldly figure, he can deliver those who are under the potent, enslaving Law. (CC)

In Gal 4:4–5 God sent forth his Son under the Law "in order that he might redeem those under the Law." Apart from 3:13 and 4:5, the verb "redeem" (ἐξαγοράζω) is used elsewhere in the Pauline corpus only in Eph 5:16 and Col 4:5 in the difficult phrase "redeeming the time." The only use of "redeem" in a sense similar to Gal 4:5 is in Diodorus Siculus 15.7: Some philosophers reportedly came together and redeemed Plato (ἐξηγόρασαν τοῦτον) to freedom after his sale on the slave market. Paul treats existence "under the Law" (Gal 4:5) as a form of slavery comparable to being "under the elements of the world" (4:3). The metaphor of slavery in this context probably suggested to Paul the verb "to redeem." A Jew such as the historian Josephus could write: "[God] made the Law the standard and rule, that we might live under it as under a father and master" (*Ag. Ap.* 2.17 § 174; Thackeray, LCL).<sup>82</sup> Paul does not view such subjection so favorably. Earlier in 3:10–12 Paul explains that God's Law demands obedience, and human beings fail to obey God's Law in the perfect manner that befits the God who gave it. The Law inevitably brings a curse upon its adherents. In 3:13 Paul turns to God's solution for humanity's plight under the Law in Christ's redemption. The apostle rejects as burdensome, oppressive, and impossible the futile attempt to avoid the curse through a proper obedience. One must die to the Law in Christ (2:19). Christ had to be "under the Law" (4:4) in order to redeem those "under the Law" (4:5). Luther's advice with respect to justification still stands: "Law, I shall not listen to you, because you have an evil voice. Besides, the time has now fully come. Therefore I am free. I shall no longer endure your domination" (AE 26:365). God in Christ has delivered humanity from the Law's burdensome, Egypt-like "yoke of slavery" (5:1; cf. Lev 26:13; Is 10:24–27). The mark of maturity for a Jewish teacher, Mosaic Law observance (e.g., Rom 2:20), has become ironically a mark of immaturity! (CC)

In Gal 4:4–5 Paul says that God has sent forth his Son not only to redeem those under the Law but also "in order that we might receive the adoption as sons." In 3:26 Paul climactically declares the Galatians to be "sons of God in Christ," and in 4:6 he again emphatically proclaims them God's adopted "sons." In the Greco-Roman world, adoption could grant even a slave the full rights and privileges of a natural son (thus 4:7). Although the Jews did not generally practice adoption in Paul's day (υιοθεσία, Gal 4:5; cf. also Rom 9:4), the apostle is drawing on a widely recognized custom as a way of explaining the benefits of Christ's saving work. (CC)

Paul associates "adoption as sons" (υιοθεσία) with the "Spirit." In Rom 8:15, for instance, he refers to "the *Spirit* of adoption (as sons)." The parallels between Gal 4:5–7 and Rom 8:15–17 are striking:

**Galatians 4:5–7**

**Romans 8:15–17**

<sup>5</sup>... in order that he might redeem (from slavery)<sup>15</sup>You received not the spirit of slavery ... those under the Law



and in order that we might receive the adoption but you received the Spirit of adoption as sons, as sons.

<sup>6</sup>God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, by whom we cry, “Abba, Father.”  
hearts, who cries, “Abba, Father,”

because you are sons.

<sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself bears witness ... that we are children of God,

<sup>7</sup>... and since a son, also an heir through God. <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs of God.

Paul likewise connects “adoption as sons” (Gal 4:5) with the Spirit in Galatians as the logic of 4:6–7 spells out. (CC)

**4:4** γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός (“born of a woman”)—In common speech there appears to have been some confusion between the verbs γενόμενον (from γίνομαι, “to become”) and γεννώμενον (from γεννάω, “to beget”). On γίνομαι as the quasi-passive of γεννάω, see 1 Esdras 4:15–16; Tobit 8:6; Wis Sol 7:3; Sirach 44:9; Jn 8:58. (CC)

*fullness of time had come.* The time “set” (v. 2) by God for his children to become adult sons and heirs. (CSB)

Pictures a container steadily being filled with the passage of time until full. Corresponds to “date set by his father” in V. 2. Thus at a specific and appropriate time in human history, God acted to fulfill His eternal purpose. (TLSB)

"But when the time had fully come" simply means "the full time." "When God wills it." Leave it at that. (Buls)

At God’s perfect time, maturity came, brought by the Son of God Himself. Jesus was born as a Jew so He might be subject to all the ceremonial laws as well as the moral law, the Ten Commandments. Having kept them perfectly, and also suffering for us the penalty of sin (death), He “redeemed us – bought us back from the curse and power of the Law, so that we might have full adoption into the family with all the rights of sons. (LL)

Some think of this as when the Jews had finally reached a time in a certain maturity. This is not so because if Judaism was ever at a low spiritual ebb, it was so when the fullness of the time arrived. We can enumerate some of the providences which helped to open the way for the gospel such as the vast extent of the Roman Empire, the spread of the Greek language, the facility of travel throughout the empire, the extensive diaspora of the Jews, its many proselytes from Gentilism, etc. All of these aided the spread of the gospel. What God saw and regarded as the fullness of the time in the spiritual condition of men, barbarian as well as Greek, is too difficult for us to predicate because His thoughts and judgments are too unsearchable for us. (Lenski)

Romans 5:6, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.”

2 Peter 3:8,9, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Romans 11:33-36, “<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! <sup>34</sup>“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” <sup>35</sup>“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” <sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

*God sent his Son.* See Jn 1:14; 3:16; Ro 1:1–6; 1Jn 4:14. (CSB)

Then God “commissioned forth His Son.” This means that the Son went out on His commission not only “from” God but “out from” God. John says that He was with God (John 1:1) and was God and that He became flesh (John 1:14). (Lenski)

"Sent" means "to send out with a commission." (Buls)

"His Son" denotes the divinity of Jesus. He pre-existence is implied. (Buls)

*born of a woman.* Showing that Christ was truly human. (CSB)

The preexistent Son of God (1 Co 8:6; Php 2:6-11; Col 1:15-16) became fully human. Paul nowhere mentioned Mary by name; Jesus was the focus of his theology and devotion. (TLSB)

Does "born of a woman" denote the virgin birth? Luther and others say it does. (Buls)

It denotes more than the separation from the womb, it includes the entire human nature of the Son as this was derived from His human mother. (Lenski)

*born under law.* Subject to the Jewish law. (CSB)

Jesus was born a Jew and under obligation to keep the Law of Moses (see FC SD III 58). Consistent with Paul’s imagery, Jesus entered our prison (3:23). (TLSB)

"Born under the Law" shows the humanity of Jesus. These words lead us right into the vicarious atonement. (Buls)

Luther: The Law did everything to Jesus that it did to us. It accused us and terrified us. It subjected us to sin, death, and the wrath of God; and it condemned us with its judgment . . . . It accused Him of blasphemy and sedition; it found Him guilty in the sight of God of all the sins of the entire world; finally it so saddened and frightened Him that He sweat blood, Luke 22:44; and eventually it sentenced Him to death, even death on a cross, Philippians 2:8. (Buls)

Space does not allow further beautiful quotes from Luther. It is time well spent for the reader to peruse his *Commentary on Galatians*. (Buls)

The Son “came to be under law” in general and not only under the pure code of Moses, but by virtue of this code under all that mankind had left of God’s law as written in their hearts. (Lenski)

**4:5** υιοθεσίαν (“adoption as sons”)—Although daughters were sometimes adopted in the Greco-Roman world—and this may be reflected in Paul’s movement from (masculine) “sons” to (neuter, inclusive) “children” in Rom 8:14, 16—daughters could not carry on a family line in first-century patriarchal society, and their adoptions are narrated with different terminology. Males were the only ones described by the ancients as enjoying “adoption as sons.” Paul also prefers “sons” (υιοί, e.g., Gal 3:26; 4:6) over

“children” (τέκνα, in Galatians only in 4:19–31) because the adoption of baptized believers as sons is dependent upon and inextricably tied to Jesus as God’s “Son” (υἱός, 4:4; also, e.g., 1:16; 2:20), the proper heir. (CC)

Here are two purpose phrases. Compare this with Galatians 3:14 where we also have two purpose phrases. In fact there is a close relationship between 3:10-14 and 4:1-7. Read the two side by side and note how the vicarious, universal atonement is so prominent in both passages. (Buls)

Compare the two clauses in 3:14 and 4:5. (Buls)

- a. In each case the *first clause* denotes what we call "objective justification."
- b. And in each case the *second clause* denotes what we call "subjective justification." (Buls)

REDEEM THOSE UNDER LAW – It is extremely important, therefore, to keep in view and always to consider this statement, so delightful and full of comfort, as well as others like it which define Christ properly and accurately; for then throughout our life, in every danger, in the confession of our faith in the presence of tyrants, and in the hour of death, we can declare with a sure and steady confidence: “Law, you have no jurisdiction over me; therefore you are accusing and condemning me in vain. For I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom the Father sent into the world to redeem us miserable sinners who are oppressed by the tyranny of the Law. He poured out His life and spent it lavishly for me. When I feel your terrors and threats, O Law, I immerse my conscience in the wounds, the blood, the death, the resurrection, and the victory of Christ. Beyond Him I do not want to see or hear anything at all.” (Luther)

The first pair of clauses: Why did Christ redeem us from the curse of the Law? "In order that Abraham's blessing (the Gospel) in Christ Jesus might come to the nations (3:14)." Why did God send His Son into the world? "In order that he might redeem those under the Law (the cursed, all men) 4:5." This is clearly objective justification. (Buls)

The Jews. (TLSB)

we – Both Jewish and Gentile believers (cf 3:14). (TLSB)

Galatians 3:13-14, “<sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”<sup>14</sup> He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

*receive adoption as sons.* Lit. “adoption [of a son].” See Ro 8:15, where the “Spirit of sonship” is contrasted with the “spirit of slavery” (cf. Eph 1:5). God takes into his family as fully recognized sons and heirs both Jews (those who had been under law) and Gentiles who believe in Christ. (CSB)

Now the second pair of clauses: In 3:14 it reads "In order that we might receive the promised Holy Spirit (the Gospel) by faith." In 4:5 we read: "In order that we might receive the adoption of sons." These purpose clauses are what we call subjective justification.(Buls)

In 3:10-14 Paul was discussing the awful danger of salvation by works. In 4:1-7 Paul is speaking about passing from the bondage under the Law to the freedom under the Gospel. (Buls)

Now, just one quote from Luther.

Luther: Now since Christ has conquered the Law in His own Person, it necessarily follows that He is God by nature. For except for God no one, neither a man nor an angel, is above the Law. But Christ is above the Law, because He has conquered and strangled it. Therefore He is the Son of God, and God by nature. If you grasp Christ as He is described by Paul here, you will neither go wrong nor be put to shame. Then you will be in a position to judge about all the various styles of life and about the religion and worship of the whole world. But if this true picture of Christ is removed or even obscured, there follows a sure confusion of everything; for the unspiritual person cannot judge about the Law of God . . . Then what is the purpose of the Law if it does not justify? The final cause of the obedience of the Law by the righteous is not righteousness in the sight of God, which is received by faith alone, but the peace of the world, gratitude toward God, and a good example by which others are invited to believe the Gospel. (Buls)

“The sonship” is modified by the context (v. 1-3) and thus signifies the status of sons who have advanced from their minority to their majority, to the status of full-grown son who are no longer under guardians and stewards. “Adoption” is not the proper word, for it may apply to a babe, a minor son and heir. (Lenski)

Pass from the condition and spirit of servants to the privileges and filial spirit of sons, in a state not of minority and servitude, but of manhood and freedom. The only sure evidence is connected to our faith in Christ and a hearty reliance on Him for salvation. (CB)

**4:6–7** *Now because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who cries, “Abba, Father.” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and since [you are] a son, [you are] also an heir through God.* The causal construal of the ὅτι, “because [ὅτι] you are sons,” is the simplest and most natural approach to the syntax as Paul turns to the blessings of sonship, namely, the reception of the Spirit. Some commentators have advocated an alternative translation that reverses the logic: “*That [ὅτι] you are sons is proved by [understanding ἐξαπέστειλεν to be an ellipsis for ἐμαρτύρησεν ἐξαποστείλας] God’s sending the Spirit of his Son.*” Or: “It is clear [understanding δῆλον] that [ὅτι] you are sons, because [understanding another ὅτι] God sent forth . . .” In Rom 8:14–15 Paul grounds the status of sonship in the prior presence of the Spirit. In other words, God creates sons by sending his Spirit. Likewise in Gal 4:29, the Spirit gives birth to the children of God. The causal translation of ὅτι as “because” in 4:6, as advocated here, would seem to ground the experience of the Spirit in the prior sonship. That would appear to contradict the order in Rom 8:14–15, if not also Gal 4:29. Certainly Paul appeals to the Galatians’ prior reception of the Spirit in 3:1–5. Paul expresses the relationship between the Spirit and sonship *both* ways: in 4:6 the Spirit is granted to sons, and in 4:29 and in Rom 8:14–15 the Spirit creates sons. Precisely because the Spirit and sonship are experienced as coterminous, Paul may word the relationship differently depending on the context. The most natural understanding of the syntax in Gal 4:6 with the causal ὅτι (“because”) is preferable. The Galatians, as do all “in Christ,” enjoy the inheritance of sons: God’s powerful Spirit in their lives. (CC)

In 4:4 “God sent forth his Son” (ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ), and in 4:6 “God sent forth the Spirit of his Son” (ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ). God’s sending of the Son and the Spirit is reminiscent of the sending of divine Wisdom in the Jewish Apocrypha (Wis Sol 9:10, 17). If the Wisdom parallels are any indication, Paul gives the distinct impression that the Son and the Spirit should be understood as divine. Furthermore, even as the Son is a personal being, so also must be the Spirit. Both are experienced simultaneously within the same, saving work of God. Gordon Fee has called 4:4–6 with its juxtaposition of God, the Son, and the Spirit “one of the great ‘Trinitarian’ passages in the New Testament.” (CC)

The sending of the Son and the Spirit together entails profoundly practical implications. Whereas the rivals are stressing the Law of Moses as the source of the Christian life, Paul is stressing the genuine

change that “the Spirit of his Son” (4:6) brings. The Spirit has been poured “into our hearts” (4:6)! This is not some charismatic “second experience.” The experience of the Spirit is part and parcel of being a son, an heir, in Christ. The Spirit renders God and his Son a personal reality. The Christian enjoys a new, changed identity. Christ lives in the believer (2:20). The baptized believer is clothed in Christ (3:27). Those who enjoy the Spirit’s presence no longer stand at a distance from God but are privileged to address God as Father. The Spirit within the believer cries, “Abba, Father” (4:6) as did Jesus himself. The Spirit refashions those who are sons in Christ into the *likeness* of Christ (cf. Rom 8:29)! (CC)

“Abba” (ἄββᾶ) is a Greek transliteration of אבא, the Aramaic vocative for address of a “father,” even as the Greek ὁ πατήρ is likewise a vocative of address of the “Father.” The Aramaic word may initially seem out of place in a letter in Greek to a gentile audience.<sup>98</sup> Aramaic was the language of the Jews in the vicinity of their homeland, while Greek was the language of Paul’s gentile audiences. Paul’s doubled address of the Father in both Aramaic (ἄββᾶ for אבא) and Greek (ὁ πατήρ) is likely another way of expressing that Jews and gentiles in Christ now share the same rights as sons in the same family (thus also Rom 8:15). They are “no longer” slaves (cf. Gal 3:25). (CC)

The divinely enabled address of God as “Father” will be of comfort to those who have suffered under sinful earthly fathers. In his faithfulness to his promises and in his selfless love for his children, the heavenly Father is the model for all fathers. Those who have suffered enjoy a *new* family in Christ! The heavenly Father brought forth children for the purpose of a joyous personal relationship. The pain of broken homes, uncaring parents, and failed relationships all point to the need for a caring parent and, ultimately, for a sound relationship with the heavenly Father. The loving Father will heal the wounds, whatever they may be. (CC)

A venerable scholarly tradition has noted the fact that the Jews generally do not call God “Father” and has concluded that “Abba” must have been Jesus’ own unique, preferred form of address of God (thus Mk 14:36). That scholarly tradition has of late been scrutinized.<sup>101</sup> First, the term “Abba” cannot be attributed with certainty to Jesus and may have originated in the Syrian Christian communities. Second, “Father” or “my Father” was occasionally used as an address and epithet for God in ancient Judaism (4Q372 Frag. 1.16; *T. Job* 33.3, 9; 40.2–3; 47.11; cf. *T. Job* 50.3; not as an address in *T. Job*).<sup>103</sup> Third, the address of God as “Father” did not necessarily originate with Jesus. Even granting these reservations, God is rather frequently called “Father” (πατήρ) throughout the Gospels (forty-five times in Matthew, five times in Mark, seventeen times in Luke, and a hundred eighteen times in John). The frequent use of Father-language in the Gospels is striking when compared with the paucity of the appellation in Judaism. “If the title does not go back to Jesus, why should the writers of the gospels make such use of it?” “Father” as the preferred form of address for God conveys Jesus’ sense of a unique sonship. Mk 14:36’s lone attestation of Jesus’ calling God “Abba” should not be downplayed and should be considered alongside the multiply attested address of God as “Father.” Furthermore: “That he should invite his disciples to use his word after him was almost certainly an expression of grace on his part.”<sup>107</sup> Believers who have received “adoption as sons” (υιοθεσία, Gal 4:5) participate in the rights of sonship to such an extent that they may address God in the very words of his own Son (αββα ὁ πατήρ, “Abba, Father,” 4:6). (CC)

In many Christian circles, “Abba” is understood as an intimate form of address that is the equivalent of “Daddy.” This popular understanding is unfortunately mistaken. Jesus addresses God as “Abba” in prayer during a rather serious moment in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mk 14:36. Mark interprets Jesus’ Aramaic utterance with the ordinary Greek word for “Father” (ὁ πατήρ) and not “Daddy” (πάππας or πάππας). Paul, like Mark, juxtaposes the Greek equivalent “Father” (ὁ πατήρ) to interpret the Aramaic word. Grammatically, the Aramaic *-a* ending signified not intimacy but rather definiteness. By Jesus’ day, “Abba” had replaced older Hebrew and Aramaic forms as a solemn, responsible address of a father, whether on the lips of an adult or a child. The word may indeed be used with a sense of endearment, but the context would convey that sense and not the word itself. The head of a household was an authority

figure who had the right to put a family member to death. Paul's point in Gal 4:6 is not to express intimacy, but rather status. The presence of the Spirit of God's Son who cries "Abba" demonstrates that those in Christ are likewise the sons of God. Paul's comments may have been a response to the rivals' claims about the identity of the true sons of Abraham. In Rom 8:15–17, on the other hand, in a context not dictated by a conflict situation, Paul describes those rescued from slavery and fear who by means of God's own Spirit cry out, "Abba, Father." The address of God as Father is close to the apostle's heart. Again, Christians enjoy a special relationship with their adoptive Father. Those who call God "Father" in the Lord's Prayer do so by virtue of a powerful, enabling presence in their lives! (CC)

Paul writes "into our hearts" (Gal 4:6). That the corporate community together cries out, "Father," attests to the Spirit's creation of a new family. The centrality of this new family in Paul's letter is signaled already in 1:4 when Paul called God "*our* Father" twice (1:3–4). Christians are members of *a new household*. The apostle develops the mutual burden-bearing of that close-knit community in 6:1–10. The Galatians are threatening to abandon their Father *and* their family! (CC)

The modern world is obsessed with identity crises. People are constantly seeking to discover their inner selves for self-fulfillment and self-actualization, or they may find their self-worth in their work or achievements. This preoccupation with identity and with the self is an exercise in vanity. God graciously and freely grants the Spirit, who directs the Christian away from a preoccupation with self toward the praise of God as "Abba, Father." A Christ-centered, God-honoring focus is at the heart of Paul's letter to the Galatians. Such a focus inevitably leads to the service of other people, especially those of the household of faith (6:10). (CC)

Paul summarizes 4:1–6 with 4:7: "therefore [ὥστε] ..." Paul's usage of a second person verb emphasizes to the Galatians that they share in the privileges of a son. The trouble is that the Galatians are on the verge of losing all that they have gained in Christ. Slavery to the Law and sonship in Christ are mutually exclusive—precisely the opposite of what the rivals are claiming. Nothing more is required of the Galatians beyond what they were when Paul left them (thus 4:12–20). Paul appends "through God" at the end of 4:7 to remind the Galatians that God has already acted on their behalf. He sent forth his Son and his Spirit, and the Galatians now enjoy a privileged position as his heirs. The very notion that the masters of all (4:1) would want to return to slavery reeks of absurdity, an absurdity to which Paul turns in 4:8–11. (CC)

**4:6** δέ ἐστε ("now ... you are")—The connective δέ signals a mild contrast with 4:5: the "adoption as sons" (4:5) is "now" a present reality for "you" Galatians.

τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ("the Spirit of his Son")—This is the more difficult and thus the more likely reading since "the Spirit of his Son" is an unusual phrase nowhere else employed in the NT (thus likely drawing scribal attention); cf. Rom 8:9 ("the Spirit of Christ"); Phil 1:19 ("the Spirit of Jesus Christ"); 2 Cor 3:17 ("the Spirit of the Lord"). The omission of τοῦ υἱοῦ, "the Son" (leaving just τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ, "his Spirit") in  $\mathfrak{B}^{46}$ , Marcion, and Augustine is likely secondary and associates the Spirit only with the Father.

εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν ("into our hearts")—This prepositional phrase is well supported  $\mathfrak{B}^{46}$  & A B C D\* G) and also the more difficult reading. The switch to ὑμῶν ("your") in some manuscripts and translations was likely motivated by a desire to assimilate the pronoun to the verb ἐστε ("you are") at the beginning of the verse. (CC)

*because you are sons* – Through faith (3:26), the Holy Spirit is received (3:2, 14). (TLSB)

Note that in verse 5<sup>a</sup> Paul spoke of mankind in the third person, in 5<sup>b</sup> in the first person plural. In verse 6 he speaks of Christians in the second person plural. In verse 7 he speaks of Christians in the second person singular. (Buls)

"Because" in verse 6 is variously translated "because" or "to prove that you are sons" or "inasmuch as." The word denotes both *cause* and *evidence*. God sends His Spirit into our hearts because Jesus took our place under the Law. God sends His Spirit into our hearts as *evidence* of the fact that we are redeemed. Read Galatians 3:1-5. (Buls)

*Spirit of his Son*. A new "guardian" (v. 2), identified as the "Spirit of God" in Ro 8:9 (see Ro 8:2; Eph 1:13-14). (CSB)

The "Spirit of His Son" prompts the prayer of God's Son ("Our Father" and so bears witness to the sonship of those who so pray (Mk. 14:36; Rom.8:15). (TLSB)

Note carefully the Trinity in this verse. The Bible always speaks of the Trinity as a *saving* God, in many, many places. Look at Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:13. (Buls)

Note that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son. This is one of the proof passages for the *filioque* principle, which means "and from the Son." Look at the Nicene Creed. The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit into the heart of the repentant sinner to assure that sinner of forgiveness of sins. When that happens that sinner prays: "Abba, Father!" (Buls)

Redemption from condemnation of Law, reception of sonship, and the gift of the Spirit, are a unit. Never separate them. They stand or fall together.

The Spirit Himself testifies to our close relationship with the Father and cries out in prayer to the Father for our needs. We are now heirs entitled to the heavenly inheritance and the benefits of sons and daughters in the Kingdom. (LL)

*crying*. The Greek for this phrase is a vivid verb expressing deep emotion, often used of an inarticulate cry. In Mt 27:50 it is used of Jesus' final cry. (CSB)

The Spirit is said to utter this cry when He moves us to utter it. The fact that He is in our hearts is the result of our sonship, and His presence makes this cry possible. (Lenski)

God by His Spirit has given you a filial temper, and taught you to use the language not of servants, but of sons. (CB)

*Abba, Father*. Expressive of an especially close relationship to God (see also NIV text note). (CSB)

Aram for "papa," an address of special intimacy not typically found in Judaism. (TLSB)

Paul's first Scriptural argument about justification by faith is by experience, of course, not apart from the means of grace. Faith is never a religious, charismatic, subjective experience apart from the Word of God and the atonement. (Buls)

But God *does* give the Christian experiential evidence. What is the evidence? The Holy Spirit praying in the heart of the believer. And the greatest prayers are like those of Jesus: "Abba, Father." True prayer proves that there is saving faith. Saving faith proves that the individual is a son of God, a free man, and an heir of God and of Christ. (Buls)

Abba is an ancient Palestinian Aramaic baby talk meaning, “Dear Daddy.” The rabbinic teachers of Israel used to say that when a child was weaned it began to say “Abba” and “Imma,” words which exactly correspond to “Daddy” and “Mommy.” Thus abba derives from an intimate family relationship. It is a young child’s word, though there is evidence that it continued to be used by adult sons and daughter, as “Daddy” and “Papa’ are used today. The only use of this Aramaic word in the Greek NT is in Mark 14:36 when Jesus prayed to God in Gethsemane as “Abba Father.” The presence of an Aramaic word in the NT Greek text is in itself rather unique. (The God Who Hears – W. Bingham Hunter)

Exhaustive research by biblical scholars has demonstrated that in all the huge literature of ancient Judaism there is not one instance of God being addressed in prayer with the word abba. The word abba was too personal, too familiar and intimate to be appropriate. The Lord was high and lifted up, the incomparable One. He was to be approached with reverence and awe. To call him “Daddy” was unthinkable blasphemy. Yet Jesus prayed like this all the time. (The God Who Hears – W. Bingham Hunter)

That Jesus gave Christians the right to address God as abba is usually argued from the wording of the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:1-2). We need to be reminded periodically that the privilege of speaking with God so intimately was not given to even the greatest OT saints. (The God Who Hears – W. Bingham Hunter)

Abba represents the essentials of the new relationship with God which Jesus offered men and women who believe on His name. From the Father’s side abba implies many things: (1) His mercy, compassion and love for the child; (2) His personal interest in the child and consistent concern for its good; (3) His willingness to provide for the needs of and given protection to the child; and (4) the use of His mature knowledge, judgment and wisdom in guiding and caring for the child. (The God Who Hears – W. Bingham Hunter)

The thought of the apostle is that we sons who are now in full possession of all that we have in the Son and in the Spirit of the Son direct our “Abba Father” to God in our fullness of sonship. (Lenski)

Romans 8:15-16, “<sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

In every temptation and weakness, therefore, just cling to Christ and sigh! He gives you the Holy Spirit, who cries: “Abba! Father!” Then the Father says: “I do not hear anything in the whole world except this single sigh, which is such a loud cry in My ears that it fills heaven and earth and drowns out all the cries of everything else.” (Luther)

**4:7** εἶ (singular “you are”)—The change from the plural verb ἐστε, “you are,” in 4:6 to this singular verb (and singular nouns) in 4:7 is an instance of *orati variata* in accord with Greek idiom. Paul switches back to the plural “you” in 4:8–11.

εἰ δὲ υἱός, καὶ κληρονόμος (“since [you are] a son, [you are] also an heir”)—The δέ (literally, “and”; left untranslated) is continuative. Although all conditional sentences that express a real state of affairs are first class conditionals, not all first class conditionals express reality. This first class conditional sentence does.

διὰ θεοῦ (“through God”)—This reading is strongly supported by  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$   $\aleph^*$  A B C\*, but  $\aleph^c$  C<sup>c</sup> D K P Textus Receptus have θεοῦ διὰ Χριστοῦ (“of God through Christ”). The variants διὰ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“through God in Christ Jesus”), μὲν θεοῦ συγκληρονόμος δὲ Χριστοῦ (“fellow heir of God and of



Christ”), θεοῦ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“of God through Jesus Christ”), διὰ θεόν (“because of/on account of God”), and θεοῦ (“of God”) are all more weakly supported. These scribal variations are, no doubt, a reaction to the unusual notion of God as a mediating figure (“through”), a role normally ascribed to Christ (with God as the source or origin). διὰ θεόν (“because of/on account of God”) in G and 1881 (a fourteenth-century miniscule) appears to be a scribal error with respect to the last letter (ν in place of υ). This reading also removes the perceived difficulty of God as a mediating figure. διὰ θεοῦ (“through God”) occurs only here in the NT, but διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ (“through Jesus Christ and God”) in 1:1 is a close parallel. See also the phrase “through the will of God” (διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ), which is unique to the Pauline corpus (Rom 15:32; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:5; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1). (CC)

*so you* – Continuing to address the Galatians directly in the second person, Paul even switches to the singular pronoun to assure each and every Galatian individually of the blessings brought by the Savior sent at God’s good time. (PBC)

Singular personal. By God’s grace, each person can regard himself or herself as an heir to all spiritual blessings. (TLSB)

Now comes the grand conclusion in the form of two fact conditions. (Buls)

"Therefore" in view of everything that's been said since Galatians 3:6 where Paul began by discussing the faith of Abraham and thus introduced the Scriptural arguments about justification by faith. Note that "you" is second person singular. "No longer a slave but a son" which means "you are no longer under the bondage and condemnation of the Law but you are free from sin, death, and the devil because Christ, your Substitute, suffered in your stead." (Buls)

But more than that. A second conditional sentence which also goes back at least to 3:29: "If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise." The last part of 4:7 is saying that the free person, the believer (see John 8:36) is an heir of everlasting life through the God who redeemed him. (Buls)

Luther: The Holy Spirit was sent first in a manifest and visible form, Acts 2:3. This was the first sending forth of the Holy Spirit; it was necessary in the primitive church, which had to be established with visible signs on account of the unbelievers, as Paul testifies. 1 Corinthians 14:22: 'Tongues are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers.' But later on, when the church had been gathered and confirmed by these signs, it was not necessary for this visible sending forth of the Holy Spirit to continue. The second sending is that by which the Holy Spirit, through the Word, is sent into the hearts of believers, as is said here: 'God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.' This happens with a visible form, namely, when through the spoken Word we receive fire and light, by which we are made new and different, and by which a new judgment, new sensations, and new drives arise in us . . . Let everyone accustom himself, therefore, to believe for a certainty that he is in a state of grace and that his person with its works is pleasing to God . . . Therefore we should strive daily to move more and more from uncertainty; and we should make an effort to wipe out completely that wicked idea which has consumed the entire world, namely that a person does not know whether they are in a state of grace. For if we are in doubt about our being in a state of grace and about our being pleasing to God for the sake of Christ, we are denying that Christ has redeemed us and completely denying all His benefits . . . The Holy Spirit's cry in us vastly exceeds, and breaks through, the powerful and horrible cries of the Law, sin, death, and the devil. It penetrates the clouds and heaven, and it reaches all the way to the ears of God . . . In deep terrors and conflicts of conscience we do indeed take hold of Christ and believe that He is our Savior. . . . And this is our foundation: The Gospel commands us to look, not at our own good deeds or perfection but at God Himself as His promises, and at Christ Himself, the Mediator. By contrast the pope commands us to look,

not at God as He promises, not at Christ our High Priest, but at our own works and merits . . . . And this is the reason why our theology is certain: it snatches us away from our selves and places us outside ourselves, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive. . . . For in the matter of justification I must be ignorant of the divine Law and not permit it to rule in any way over my conscience . . . . Therefore we come to these eternal goods -- the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, the glory of the resurrection, and eternal life -- not actively but passively. Nothing whatever interferes here; faith alone takes hold of the offered promise. (Buls)

*no longer a slave but his son* – This goes back to verse 1 that shows this person has attained his majority who possesses and enjoys the full benefits of an heir. (Lenski)

As non-Jews, the Gentile Galatians never were under the specific Mosaic Law. But they too had been freed from a tremendous burden of legal requirements – in their case, one imposed by their own former false ideas of how they needed to serve their pagan idols and “non-gods.” (PBC)

SINCE ...ARE A SON... ALSO AN HEIR – Whoever is a son must be an heir as well. For merely by being born he deserves to be an heir. No work and no merit brings him the inheritance, but only his birth. Thus he obtains the inheritance in a purely passive, not in an active way; that is, just his being born, not his producing or working or worrying, makes him an heir. He does not do anything toward his being born but merely lets it happen. Therefore we come to these eternal goods—the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, the glory of the resurrection, and eternal life—not actively but passively. Nothing whatever interferes here; faith alone takes hold of the offered promise. (Luther)

*through God* – This is due entirely to God. (Lenski)

**4:1–7** The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God’s children, redeemed by Jesus Christ and made full heirs of the promise to Abraham. The Spirit never derides God’s Son or spiritual matters (1Co 12:3). Christ earned for us the right to call God “our Father,” a prayer taught only by the Spirit. • Dear Father, in confidence and boldness I bring my needs before You. Hear me for the sake of Jesus alone. Amen. (TLSB)

*Paul’s Concern for the Galatians*

**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? **10** You observe days and months and seasons and years! **11** I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. **12** Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. 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. **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. **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, **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.

## The Danger of a Return to Slavery under the Elements (4:8–11) (CC)

**4:8** οὐκ εἰδότες θεόν (“because you did not know God”)—The causal participle εἰδότες (“because you did ... know”) in 4:8 agrees with the causal participial clause γνόντες θεόν (“since you know God”) in 4:9. Rather than μή, commonly used with participles in Koine Greek (e.g., μὴ οὔσιν in the next clause), note the Classical Greek usage of οὐ with the participle.

τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὔσιν θεοῖς (“to those that are not by nature gods”)—Two translations of this phrase are possible. The first is “to those *things* that are not by nature gods.” In this case, the participle οὔσιν would function substantivally with “gods” as the predicate. According to this translation, the pagans were confusing created entities with gods. The second possible translation is “to those *gods* who are not by nature (gods at all).” In this case, φύσει μὴ οὔσιν, “in nature not being,” would be an adjectival phrase limiting θεοῖς, “gods”: i.e., entities characterized as gods that are not so in reality. In 1 Cor 8:5 Paul uses “gods” (θεοί) for beings that are not real gods but nevertheless real in a demonic sense (cf. Ps 96:5; 1 Cor 10:20). Paul does not clarify in Gal 4:8 whether he considers the entities non-existent or demonic. (CC)

*But formerly, because you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that are not by nature gods.* Paul has repeatedly emphasized the new status the Galatians enjoy in Christ as Abraham’s seed (3:29) and as adopted sons of God (3:26; 4:6–7). With its strongly adversative “but/but rather” (ἀλλά), 4:8 offers a counterpoint to 4:6–7 and to 4:9 that follows. Paul reminds the Galatians in 4:8 of what they once were as gentiles before their recent blessings. Gal 4:8’s μέν (literally, “on the one hand”; left untranslated) finds its counterpart in 4:9’s δέ (“however/on the other hand”). The two verses interpret each other as 4:8’s “formerly/at that time” (τότε) contrasts with 4:9’s “now” (νῦν). As pagans they did not know the true God (4:8); now they do (4:9). (CC)

To “know God” in 4:8 (εἰδότες θεόν) does not refer to some mere assent to God’s existence. Paul is speaking here in relational terms. Knowledge of the true God is only possible by means of God’s own revelation (4:9), and such knowledge had been the privilege of Israel (1 Sam 3:7; Pss 9:10 [MT 9:11]; 46:10 [MT 46:11]; Is 43:10; Hos 8:2; Micah 6:5; Wis Sol 2:13). “Knowing God” is the consequence of an intimate relationship (cf. Gen 4:1). As former pagans, they had known only slavery under beings that by nature are not gods. Paul distinguishes in 4:1–3 between the young, privileged heir and the slave. If the Galatian gentiles as former slaves were in danger of losing their newfound inheritance, how much more tragic would be the fate of their Jewish-Christian false teachers? The Law of Moses had been the basis for the Jews’ privileged status as those who knew God, and yet that source of privilege has ironically become a liability in their teaching of gentiles. (CC)

The sophist Critias (460–403 BC) was the first among the Greeks to distinguish gods “by nature” or “in reality” (φύσει) from the sun, moon, and stars, which were gods “by human convention” (θέσει). Critias’ distinction was later adopted into a complex of ideas named “Euhemerism” after Euhemerus of Messene. Hellenistic Judaism, long before Paul, drew on Euhemerus’ critique of polytheistic idolatry and the false ascription of deity to the various aspects of nature. Early Christian missionaries, whether directly or indirectly, inherited and employed some of this critique as well. For Paul, the one true God stands against the false, so-called gods of the Galatians’ pagan world. Most Westerners, accustomed to a monotheistic worldview, find polytheistic claims or the deification of nature alien. The Western Christian can only imagine an environment in which polytheism is the norm. Paul’s strong words about the so-called gods would have had a profound impact on his original audience. (CC)

One of the gods widely venerated throughout Galatia was the Roman emperor himself! The Roman colonies set an example for the rest of the province (e.g., Iconium in Acts 13:51–14:7, 21). The temple of Augustus was at the very center of Pisidian Antioch (cf. Acts 13:14–52; 14:21). Because of its “progress”

in all things Roman, the city of Derbe under the governor Annius Afrinus (AD 49–54) was renamed “Claudicomium” and “Claudioderbe” after the reigning emperor Claudius (cf. Acts 14:20–21). Emperor worship was woven into the worship of all the other gods and their cults by means of special rooms dedicated to the emperor at the various temples. No, writes Paul, to worship the emperor or any other false god is nothing other than slavery. (CC)

*when you did not know God.* See 1Co 12:2; 1Th 4:5. (CSB)

*you.* Gentile converts. (TLSB)

I think you've had a similar experience like this. You know, maybe think back on when you had a good friend or maybe an old girlfriend where you were just thinking about why you liked her or why you had this friendship. And then something happened to sour it. And you know you're thinking good thoughts at one point. And the beauty of what it is that God had given you in this friendship. And then all of a sudden how it had turned so terribly bad and why that had happened. (Just – V-32)

Well, that's what Paul is doing here. And this is a section in which we see his deep distress. And I want to analyze it with you because I think you should follow along with me so you can see how this works. First of all, he's been talking about birth identity. And now he's going to talk about the disastrous developments in Galatia because of his opponents. And he is going to talk about this with a note of anxiety that is just dripping with pastoral concern. (Just – V-32)

*are not gods.* When the Galatians were pagans, they thought that the beings they worshiped were gods; but when they became Christians, they learned better. (CSB)

The entities enslaving the Galatians in their pagan past were not by nature gods, yet they were real forces. The present evil age is dominated by demonic principalities and powers hostile to Christ and His Church (cf. e.g., Rm 8:35, 38; 1Co 2:6, 8; Eph 1:21; 2:2; 6:12; Col 2:10, 15). (TLSB)

**4:9** οἷς πάλιν ἄνωθεν δουλεύειν θέλετε; (“do you want to serve them yet again?”)—Despite the two questions in the translation offered here of 4:9, technically this is a relative clause that depends on the prior part of the verse. With Longenecker: The “relative clause ... in effect becomes a supplementary question extending the impact of the main question.” De Boer offered in his commentary a translation that respects the grammatical construction: “But now, having come to know God, or rather having become known by God, how can you be turning again to the weak and impotent elements of which you are wanting to be slaves once more?”<sup>20</sup> The translation of the verse as a single sentence seems awkward in English, and thus the translation above divides the sentence into two questions. (CC)

*Now, however, since you know God—or, rather, are known by God—how can you turn back again to the weak and shabby elements? Do you want to serve them yet again?* Whereas (μὲν ... δέ) the Galatians were formerly (τότε) idolaters (4:8), “now” (νῦν) they know God (4:9). Paul immediately clarifies that the Galatians may not take credit for their knowledge of God. They, “rather [μᾶλλον], are known by God” (cf. Rom 8:29; also Wis Sol 8:21). In the words of the psalmist: “O LORD, you have searched me and have known me” (Ps 139:1). With the prophet Jeremiah (1:4–5): “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” God summoned Israel to “know that I am the LORD” (e.g., Ex 6:7; Deut 29:6 [MT 29:5]; Is 49:23; Jer 24:7; Ezekiel (sixty times!); see also Deut 4:39; 7:9; Is 49:23; 52:6; Jer 4:22; 9:3 [MT 9:2]; 22:16; 31:34; Hos 2:20 [MT 2:22]; 5:4). In Amos 3:2: “You only have I known from all the families of the earth” (see also Hos 5:3; 13:4). God chose Israel to be his people even as he has now chosen the gentile Galatian Christians! “Relationship with God does not have its basis in man’s seeking (mysticism) or doing (legalism) or knowing (gnosticism), but it originates with God himself and is carried on always by divine grace.”<sup>122</sup> As Martin Luther commented: “Beneath this simple statement there lies concealed the

lofty meaning that it is our function passively to receive God and His working within us, just as we see that a workman's tool is acted upon rather than that it does the acting.... Thus our knowing is a being known by God, who has also worked this very knowing within us" (AE 27:294). That the one true God, the Creator of the universe, would take the initiative in the lives of his people renders the Galatians' recent change of heart incomprehensible.

The Galatians had, thanks to Paul's ministry, abandoned paganism for Christ and now, under the rivals' influence, consider Israel's Law the final step leading to full membership among Abraham's (and God's) people. Paul's critique of the "elements" (Gal 4:9)—those that are not by nature gods (4:8)—echoes similar critiques in Judaism of gentile idolatry, and yet in the apostle's hands the critique is turned on the Law itself. Instead of honoring God by turning to Moses' Law, Paul wants them to understand that such a move would be the equivalent of a return to their former paganism. The equation of living under the Law with subjection to the Anatolian deities would have stunned the rivals! "How [πῶς] can you turn back again?" (4:9). In adopting the Law, the Galatians are, ironically, turning *away from* the God of Israel and Israel's promised inheritance and blessings!

On the basis of the contrast between "formerly/at that time" (4:8) and "now" (4:9), one would expect Paul to write in 4:9: "Now that you know God you have been set free from your former slavery to those that by nature are not gods." Instead, Paul surprisingly reverts to the language of 4:3 and asks how it is that the Galatians would turn back again to bondage under the weak and beggarly "elements." In Wis Sol 13:18–19 from the Jewish apocryphal writings:

For health he [the idolater] appeals to a thing that is weak [or sick];  
for life he prays to a thing that is dead. (NRSV)

Without God's Spirit, the weak and shabby elements are effete and impotent to impart new life. The verb Paul uses—"turn back" (ἐπιστρέφω)—is employed in contexts of conversion or repentance from a prior way of life (Lk 1:16; Acts 3:19; 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20; 1 Thess 1:9). The word can also be used for apostasy, a "turning back" (LXX Ps 77:41 [MT/ET 78:41]; cf. the related word ἀποστρέφω in LXX Num 14:43; 1 Sam 15:11; 1 Ki 9:6; Jer 3:19). Paul describes the Galatians' "turning" in the present tense (ἐπιστρέφετε). The nuance may be conative: how is it that you are *trying* to turn back again? The process is in motion or is being seriously considered but is not yet complete. The Galatians could still stop!

Appended to Paul's initial rhetorical question—"How can you turn back again?"—is, within the same sentence, effectively yet another rhetorical question: "Do you want to serve them yet again?" To "serve" the living and true God is commendable (1 Thess 1:9). To "serve" false gods is not (Ex 23:33; Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13). The verb "serve" (δουλεύω) literally means to "serve as a slave." The ancient gentile world viewed slavery, even to a god, as an undesirable condition and therefore did not use this verb for the worship of their gods. Paul's choice of the verb "serve" (δουλεύω) reminds the Galatians of the freedom they now enjoy in Christ as "sons of God" (3:26). Paul reserves the verb in the final clause until the very end: "Do you want?" (θέλετε, the last Greek word of the verse). Do the Galatians really want to be enslaved to these beggarly elements? As "weak" elements they will accomplish nothing positive at all. The Galatians will be replacing their gems in Christ with worthless gravel. For still more emphasis, Paul repeats the word "again" (πάλιν) in his follow-up question. "Yet" (ἄνωθεν), which is redundant after "again," further highlights the return to paganism. This is an exceedingly rare combination of words in Greek literature. Paul could not be more emphatic! (CC)

*know God* – It is as though he were saying: "It really strikes me as amazing that you who know God on the basis of the proclamation of faith now fall away so suddenly from the true knowledge of the will of God. For I thought that you held to this knowledge with such certainty and firmness that I had almost no fear that you would be overthrown with such ease. Yet now, because of the agitation of the false apostles, you have been turned back again to the weak and beggarly elements, whose slaves you want to be once more. But on the basis of my proclamation you came to regard it as the will of God that

He wants to bless all nations, not through circumcision or the observance of the Law but through the Christ promised to Abraham. Those who believe in Him are blessed with Abraham, who had faith (Gal. 3:9); they are sons and heirs of God. This, I say, is how you came to know God.” (Luther)  
The initiative always belongs to God. Paradoxically, knowing God is a purely passive experience. (TLSB)

*rather to be known by God* – This is a rhetorical correction. Paul corrects his first sentence (“now that you have come to know God”) or rather inverts it this way: “or rather to be known by God.” For he was afraid that they might lose God altogether. It is as though he were saying: “Alas, the situation has now come to the point that you do not even know God correctly, because you are returning from grace to the Law. Nevertheless, God still knows you.” As a matter of fact, our knowing is more passive than active; that is, it is more a matter of being known than of knowing. (Luther)

*turning back.* See 3:1–3. (CSB)

*weak and worthless elementary principles.* Seeking salvation through obedience to Jewish laws places a person under elementary powers of this evil age. (TLSB)

The reason is this: God does not want to be known except through Christ; nor, according to John 1:18, can He be known any other way. Christ is the Offspring promised to Abraham; on Him God founded all His promises. Therefore Christ alone is the means, the life, and the mirror through which we see God and know His will. (Luther)

*slaves ... once more.* Legalistic trust in rituals, in moral achievement, in law, in good works, or even in cold, dead orthodoxy may indicate a relapse into second childhood on the part of those who should be knowing and enjoying the freedom of full-grown sons. (CSB)

Now, I'm not sure that you catch it. I didn't when I first read this. But what he's talking about here when he talks about the weak and worthless elemental principles of the world whose slaves you want to become, he's talking there about those cosmic powers. And I think he's talking specifically about the law and circumcision. If you were enslaved to idols before, why are you making the law and circumcision new idols? They are as enslaving. Because they are powers, elemental powers, that are absolutely opposed to the power of God. (Just – V-32)

**4:10** παρατηρεῖσθε (“you are observing”)—The middle and active forms of this verb (παρατηρέω) are interchangeable with the same meaning. If the middle form here is a genuine middle, then it should be translated as “you are observing *for yourselves*.”  $\text{P}^{46}$  resolves the lack of a connecting particle between 4:9 and 4:10 by changing the present tense indicative verb παρατηρεῖσθε to the present participle παρατηροῦντες (“by observing”). The change renders 4:10 part of the question in 4:9, thereby explaining through what means the Galatians desire to be enslaved again. To take 4:10 with  $\text{P}^{46}$  as part of a question would resolve the potential tension between θέλετε, “you want,” in 4:9 and παρατηρεῖσθε, “you are observing,” in 4:10. Both verbs would be conative. The reading of  $\text{P}^{46}$  is therefore most likely secondary, despite the fact that the present tense verb in 4:10 may well be conative: “you are *trying* to observe.” (CC)

*You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!* The lack of a connecting particle in the Greek is striking. The ancients would often omit a connecting particle as a sort of exclamation mark to convey emotion or emphasis, precisely what the Galatians’ actions have evoked from Paul.<sup>134</sup> Paul faults them for observing a calendar. As pagans, the Galatians observed an elaborate calendar that structured their days, months, seasons, and years with the worship of the gods and the emperor.<sup>136</sup> Yet Paul does not offer any hint elsewhere in the letter that the Galatians have decided to revert back to their former, pagan ways. In view of the Law-observant teaching of the rivals, a more satisfying explanation is at hand. (CC)

Thanks to Paul's arrival and preaching, the Galatians had severed ties with their former religious practices. How should they then live? They had left behind the pagan calendar that had structured their lives. The Jewish-Christian teachers offered a solution. The Galatians would structure their days by the calendar of Moses' Law. Judaism was an old and established religious tradition, quite unlike the movement of a man who had died on a shameful cross only a few decades before. With the adoption of traditional, respectable Jewish observances, no pagan onlooker would mistake the Galatians' newfound faith for a *superstitio*, a newfangled cult movement that was nothing more than a disease afflicting society. (CC)

In their pre-Christian days, the Galatian gentiles would have divided time into nine-or ten-day segments. A month consisted of three segments of ten days based on the waxing moon, the full moon, and the waning moon. Three months would be a season, four seasons would be a year, and four years would be an Olympiad. The Jews too divided time into days, months, seasons, and years (Gen 1:14; *1 En.* 75.3; 79.2; 82.7). More frequently, the Jews referred to festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths, as does Paul in Col 2:16. The Jews were widely known for their celebration of the Sabbath. The Sabbath had become a litmus test for righteousness in the Second Temple Jewish period and had attracted the attention of non-Jews, especially in the upper classes, who liked the notion of a day off each week (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.39 § 282; Philo, *Mos.* 2.3 § 21; Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96). The Jews celebrated the "months" with new moon festivals (Num 10:10; 28:11–15; 2 Ki 4:23; Ps 81:3 [MT 81:4]; Ezek 46:3, 6–7). Seasonal celebrations included the appointed feasts, and among annual celebrations were the three major pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, also called Booths. Supra-annually, the Jews, at least in Palestine, also celebrated Sabbatical and Jubilee Years (Lev 25:1–7, 8–24). The basis for determining the calendar remained a matter of controversy among the various Jewish sects of Paul's day. Although most Jews followed a lunar calendar, a vocal minority for over two centuries had claimed that the biblical celebrations should be based on a *solar* calendar. According to *Jub.* 2.9: "The LORD set the sun as a great sign upon the earth for days, sabbaths, months, feast (days), years, sabbaths of years, jubilees, and for all of the (appointed) times of the years" (trans. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*). (CC)

Paul's "observe" (παρρηρέω, Gal 4:10) is unexpected in this context since this verb is never associated with religious observances elsewhere in the NT or the Jewish Septuagint.<sup>143</sup> Paul may be using the word in the sense of closely *watching* the days, months, seasons, and years in order to celebrate the right days. *Jub.* 16.28–29: "[Abraham] observed this feast [Booths] in its (appointed) time according to the testimony of the heavenly tablets. Therefore it is ordained in the heavenly tablets concerning Israel that they will be observers of the feast of booths seven days with joy in the seventh month which is acceptable before the Lord (as) an eternal law in their generations throughout all (time), year by year" (trans. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*).<sup>145</sup> Paul's rivals, in promoting the Law of Moses, would have had to advocate a particular calendar for the appointed times. (CC)

Paul is consciously avoiding using language that would directly identify these calendrical observances as Jewish. He is downgrading and dismissing the rivals' Jewish calendar by effectively equating it with the idolatrous observances of the Galatians' past that honored the "elements" (Gal 4:9). For that ironic equation to work, Paul must use generic language that could apply to both Jewish and pagan calendrical observances. Paul wants to shock the Galatians into a reconsideration of their point of view.<sup>147</sup> The calendar they are now observing is proof that they are in the process of adopting the entirety of the Law and its customs. The calendar is just the first step (note the present tense of παρατηρεῖσθε, "you are observing," 4:10), with circumcision presumably soon to follow, if it has not already. (CC)

The apostle may also be alluding to Gen 1:14 in which God placed lights in the sky "for signs and for seasons and for days and years." Paul's wording is not identical to LXX Gen 1:14. If he were in fact alluding to Gen 1:14, then the point would be similar to what he says in an allusion to Gen 1:27 in Gal 3:28's "male and female": The "new creation" in Christ (6:15) renders the distinctions and calendar of an

old era obsolete. By adopting the Jewish calendar, the Galatians are losing track of what time it is. Tragically, they have become caught up in this “present evil age” (1:4)! “What foolishness! How could people who have already received adoption as children of God and are praying ‘Abba, Father’ in the Spirit, people who know God and are known by him, start to depend on the observance of holy days for their relationship with God?” They are going backward! (CC)

*you observe days and months* – The Greek denotes scrupulous observance, suggesting that the Galatians were actually adopting or following the Jewish calendar being required by them (cf Ex13:10; 31:16-17; Nu 10:10; Lv 25:1-7; 1 Ch 23:3). (TLSB)

*special days*. Such as the Sabbath and the Day of Atonement (tenth day of Tishri; see Lev 16:29–34), which had never been, and can never be, in themselves means of salvation or sanctification. (CSB)

*months and seasons*. Such as New Moons (see Nu 28:11–15; Isa 1:13–14), Passover (Ex 12:18) and Firstfruits (Lev 23:10). (CSB)

*years*. Such as the sabbath year (see Lev 25:4). The Pharisees meticulously observed all these to gain merit before God. (CSB)

Ascension – Christmas Day 2– New Year’s Day

They are venerating the cosmic elements. Now, as pagans they did it by worshiping the sun, the moon, the seasons, those kinds of things. Now under the influence of these Jewish opponents of Paul, they are worshiping it through the old Jewish calendar. Now, there's nothing wrong with their calendar. There's nothing wrong with their church year, so long as it's focused in Christ. But this calendar is not. It's the old Jewish calendar. And Paul is saying: Why do you want to go from one calendar that was enslaving to another calendar that's enslaving? You're simply talking about Gentile observance of the law, which is the equivalent of idol worship. You can imagine how this is going to be heard by Jewish opponents. They are going to be infuriated that Paul is comparing paganism with their Judaism. (Just – V-32)

**4:11** φοβοῦμαι ὑμᾶς (“I fear for you”)—The pronoun ὑμᾶς is an accusative of respect and should not be translated as a direct object, “I fear you” or “I am afraid of you.” In NT usage the accusative object (here ὑμᾶς, “you”) with the verb φοβοῦμαι, “fear, be afraid,” always denotes what or who inspires the fear and never the one for whose sake one fears; see also Rom 13:3; Gal 2:12; Eph 5:33; Col 3:22. “You” in Gal 4:11 therefore refers to the *cause* of the fear. Paul’s concern is about the effectiveness, or better, the potential futility of his ministry.

μὴ πως (“lest perhaps”)—After a verb of apprehension such as φοβοῦμαι, “I fear,” this phrase should be translated as “lest perhaps” or “lest somehow”; see Gal 2:2; 1 Thess 3:5.

κεκοπίακα (“I have toiled”)—In place of this perfect, Ϝ<sup>46</sup> and the minuscules 1739 (tenth century) and 1881 (fourteenth century) have the aorist ἐκοπίασα (“I toiled”) with no real change in meaning. The perfect tense conveys a sense of the continued result of Paul’s labors on behalf of the Galatians.

εἰς ὑμᾶς—Here εἰς expresses advantage: “for you.” (CC)

*I fear for you, lest perhaps I have toiled for you to no avail.* The Galatians’ adoption of calendrical observances proves to Paul that they are serious about a Jewish lifestyle and Moses’ Law. The defection has begun but is not yet complete. Paul fears for the Galatians (φοβοῦμαι ὑμᾶς, 4:11) in the sense that the current crisis has caused Paul to be worried that his labors may be in vain. Paul is genuinely concerned as their spiritual parent that they may not enjoy eternal life in Christ (4:11–20). As already recognized by the early church father Chrysostom, the apostle hopes to shame them with this emotional display. Elsewhere he commends the Philippians for being faithful by “holding fast to the word of life, giving to me a reason



for boasting on the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain; neither did I labor in vain” (Phil 2:16; cf. 1 Cor 4:12; 15:2, 10; Col 1:29; 1 Tim 4:10). He has likewise labored diligently on the Galatians’ behalf, but it may all be for naught. This is not the only time in this letter that he laments the potential loss for the parties involved (Gal 2:2; 3:4; 5:2; 6:15). Paul is very concerned. He places the adverb “in vain/to no avail” (εἰκῆ) forward for emphasis (cf. 1 Thess 3:5): all to no avail. The emphasis is reminiscent of the Servant of the Lord, who laments in Is 49:4: “I would have thought, ‘*In vain I labored; for emptiness and vanity I expended my strength.*’ Yet surely my righteous cause is with the LORD, and my reward is with my God.” God responds in LXX Is 65:23: “My chosen shall not toil in vain, neither shall they beget children to be cursed” (trans. L. C. L. Brenton). God will vindicate his children! “Your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). Nevertheless, Paul’s anguish with respect to the Galatians is beginning to pour forth into the open (Gal 4:12–20). (CC)

*labored over in vain.* Due to their return to the old covenant law. (CSB)

A prominent expression in Gal (3:4). Paul could hardly bear the thought that after all his hard labor, the Galatians were in danger of losing the Gospel and the freedom it brings. (TLSB)

And then Paul goes back to his distress. And here is that language of fear again. He says: I am afraid for you continually. And I think this is one of the most extraordinary statements. Because Paul now describes himself in a sense as the one who gave birth to him. Which he was. He's like their mother. He says: I am afraid for you. Lest somehow I may have labored over you in vain. That I gave birth in a sense to stillborns. That I thought I was giving birth to those who are alive in Christ. But maybe I'm not. (Just – V-32)

Now, that is a very, very powerful image. And one in which you can see Paul is speaking here pastorally, lovingly, and yet as -- think of yourself if you're a father. Or think of your own father. When a son or a daughter kind of rebels or goes away. Think of the distress you have. Think of the prodigal son. How that father stood there day after day after day waiting for that son to come home. And then once -- my favorite part of Luke's Gospel. One of my favorite passages in the whole New Testament. While he was still afar off, the father sees him, runs, has compassion on him. This is the distress Paul has. As one who has really kind of given birth to them as their father in the faith. And now they are abandoning him for things that enslave. They are going back to their old life for all intents and purposes. Yeah, they are not pagans anymore. But they are living under a law that they were not given to live under. (Just – V-32)

**4:12-20** I think Paul recognized that at this point, especially after the sublime theology that he has kind of unveiled here, and after then his kind of moment of describing his pastoral distress for them, that he wants to connect to them again. He wants to go back to that moment when they first met. Now, we don't know the historical circumstances here. And we aren't sure of exactly what Paul may be referring to. And it's somewhat problematic to try to take a guess here. But I think we can, if we look back into the Book of Acts, if you go back to Chapter 14 of the Book of Acts, it says that Paul was stoned in Lystra. And let me just read you that. Because I think it's helpful to see that this might have been the occasion for Paul's coming to the Galatians. (Just – V-33)

One commentator, Richard Longenecker, has proposed a major break in the letter between 4:11 and 4:12. Several considerations, however, suggest continuity between 4:1–11 and 4:12–20. Paul does not signal a major break in 4:12 with *δέ* or a similar disjunctive particle. In 4:8–9 Paul contrasts the Galatians’ former experience as slaves with their present experience of the true God. In 4:12–20 Paul contrasts their previous reception of him with their current response. He remains concerned in 4:12–20 that they are returning to their former state (4:9). Although 4:12 does not represent the dividing point of the letter as a whole, several epistolary devices distinguish 4:12–20 as a paragraph: the address of the Galatians as “brothers (and sisters)” in 4:12, the request formula in 4:12, two disclosure formulas in 4:13, 15, and a

vocative in 4:19. Paul also shifts in 4:12 to an imperatival verb form. Whereas Paul offers autobiographical background in support of his character in 1:11–2:14 (*ethos*) and reasons from the Scriptures in 3:1–4:7 (*logos*), 4:12–20’s emotional appeal represents a distinctly different mode of rhetoric, *pathos*. The strong emotional appeal and the various epistolary devices draw attention to 4:12–20. Whereas Paul has had harsh words for the Galatians (1:6; 3:1), now he wants to express his genuine concern. He appeals to their feelings toward him (4:12, 15). He attempts to elicit pity for his physical condition (4:13–14). He reminds them that he is their parent who has labored in tremendous pain on their behalf (4:19). As a parent, he wants to change his tone but is, frankly, worried about them (4:20). He frowns on the rivals’ zealous courting (4:16–17). Ultimately Paul is speaking to brothers and sisters as a family member, as their parent in Christ (4:12, 19–20). As such, he admonishes them. (CC)

The ancients recognized the importance of appealing to the emotions in the act of persuasion. They did not shy away from expressing their feelings. Passionate feelings and beliefs, when communicated with pure motives, were part and parcel of effective communication. Paul therefore turns at this point in his letter to a profoundly personal appeal. Commentators through the years have noted the shift in tone. Martin Luther appreciated the pastoral example Paul set in his fiercely protective parental attitude (AE 26:413). As Luther wrote in his 1519 commentary: “These words breathe Paul’s own tears” (AE 27:299). The emotional appeal of the paragraph contrasts sharply with the detached, intellectual approach of some modern preaching and teaching. Even as Paul deliberately hopes to stir the emotions of his audience, the modern preacher or teacher should not strive to avoid all emotional appeals. The Bible was never intended for the sole use of dry academics and intellectuals. The stakes in this particular instance could not be higher. The Galatians are abandoning their relationship not only with Paul but also with the very Savior Paul preached. They are turning their backs on both! The apostle wants to refresh in their memories those relationships in the hope of snapping them out of their current mindset. (CC)

Paul recognizes the Galatians as his dear brothers and sisters and assumes that they will remember his former visit (4:13–15, 18). He considers them his own converts (4:19). He does not differentiate subgroups as he addresses the Galatian Christian assemblies as a whole, with the sole exception of the rival outsiders in their midst (“[those people],” 4:17). Had Paul been absent from Galatia for a substantial period of time, new converts would likely have joined the Galatian Christian movement. Paul’s address of the assemblies *in toto* suggests that not much time has elapsed since his work at Galatia. A short period of time since his departure might explain why he is amazed in 1:6 at how quickly the Galatians seem to be apostatizing. Paul therefore urges them to become like he is (4:12). Since Christ lives in the apostle (2:20), to become like Paul will lead to Christ’s being formed in the Galatians (4:19). They must not abandon the example of their “mother” in the faith! (CC)

**4:12** *Become as I [am], because I—nasmuch as you [are] brothers (and sisters)—am not requesting anything of you. You wronged me.* The most common translation of this verse is to this effect: “Become as I am because I became as you are, brothers, I beg you. You did me no wrong.” What motivates so many commentators to adopt this translation is a perceived ABCB’A’ structure:

- A [You] become [γίνεσθε]
- B as I [am] [ὡς ἐγώ]
- C because [ὅτι]
- B’ I [became/was] [κἀγώ]
- A’ as you [are/were] [ὡς ὑμεῖς]. (CC)

This perceived structure requires and depends on three unstated but presumably understood verbs. The outside part of the pattern (A) consists of second person verbs (*you* become/are), and in the inside part (B) are first person verbs (*I* am/became), and both sides of the pattern (AB and B’A’) revolve around the central “because” (C). The understood verbs’ tenses, however, are not obvious.<sup>36</sup> Since the two verbs that

Paul expressly uses in the first sentence of 4:12 are in the present tense (the imperative γίνεσθε, “become,” and the indicative δέομαι, “I beg you”), one could translate the first part of the verse: “Become as I *am* [εἰμί understood] because I *am* [εἰμί understood] as you *are* [ἔστε understood].” This translation, while consistent with the expressed present verbs, makes little sense. To become like Paul would mean for the Galatians to become like they already are. (CC)

A second possibility is to translate the understood verbs as follows: “Become as I [am] because I *was* [ἦμην] as you [*are*].” Paul was once “under the Law” (3:23), and the Galatians are presently entertaining that sort of lifestyle. They are becoming what he once was. Although this approach offers a reasonable scenario, Paul could hardly have left unstated a verb (ἦμην, “was”) so crucial for the meaning of the sentence. Yet a third possibility is nearly the opposite of the second: “Become as I *am* because I *am/became* [εἰμί/γέγονα/ἔγενόμην] as you *were* [ἦτε].” Paul did not become as the Galatians in the sense of their former gross idolatry. Rather he abandoned his former adherence as a Jew to circumcision to advocate instead that the Galatians’ uncircumcision does not matter. This approach unfortunately involves a severe, unwarranted shift from addressing the Galatians as a people subject to the Mosaic Law (they must become as he is) to referring to them as gentiles apart from the Law (Paul became as they were). Most scholars who have advocated this translation have suggested that the apostle became as the Galatians were at the point when they believed in Jesus Christ, before they were influenced by the advocates of Law observance.<sup>41</sup> Under the influence of the rivals, the Galatians have been adopting a new, competing identity. (CC)

A more defensible version of the third approach maintains that Paul wants the now Law-sympathetic Galatians to become as he is in his recognition of the Law’s irrelevance to salvation, just as he became as the Galatians *were* in their existence apart from the Law. In 1 Cor 9:20–21 Paul writes of how he became as one “under the Law” “to those under the Law” and as one “outside the Law” “to those outside the Law.” One problem for this otherwise attractive approach is that Paul’s immediately preceding statements in 4:8–9 contrast the Galatians’ past *idolatry* with their present knowing/being known by God. Paul is referring to the Galatians as former idolaters in 4:8–9 and would not now suddenly speak of them in 4:12 as former believers in Christ (before being influenced by the rival Law advocates). A weakness of both the second and third approaches is that they require understood verbs that differ in their temporal reference (past) from the expressed verbs (in the present). Such temporal shifts in the sentence require some signal, whether by employing verbs in differing tenses and/or by some temporal marker in the context. Such contextual cues are lacking in 4:12. (CC)

Despite the popularity of these three approaches to 4:12, such translations should be rejected. Again, temporal cues to signal a shift in understood verb tense are missing. These translations do not account for the utter rarity elsewhere of a double ellipsis with “as” (ὡς) clauses. In all of Greek literature from the fifth century BC to the first century AD, there are only four instances of such a construction. Furthermore, the object of “I beg you” (δέομαι ὑμῶν) in Greek literature is almost invariably stated. In the rare instances where the object precedes “I beg you,” as would be the case in these translations of 4:12, the object is always placed directly in front of the “I beg you” clause. Such is not the case in 4:12. Two intervening clauses would separate the proposed object “become as I [am]” (γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ) from the governing clause “I beg you” (δέομαι ὑμῶν), a separation unprecedented in Greek literature. The object of “I beg you” (δέομαι ὑμῶν) is more likely “nothing” (οὐδέν), which is in the normal position for the object, immediately after this verb. Such a construction leaves as a separate sentence “you wronged me,” the opposite of the usual translation, “you did me no wrong [οὐδέν].” By the end of the paragraph (4:16–20) Paul makes clear that the Galatians *did indeed* wrong him. When Paul was present with them, they were generous toward him (4:13–15). That has all changed in his absence (4:16–20). Their former conduct is giving way to enmity in the present (“at this very moment” [ἄρτι], 4:20; cf. “formerly” [πρότερον], 4:13). Paul’s syntax in the first sentence of 4:12 should therefore be construed as follows:

“Become as I [am], because I—inasmuch as you [are] brothers (and sisters)—am not requesting anything of you.” (CC)

Paul admonishes the Galatians to become as he is. That demand would strike many modern readers as arrogance on Paul’s part. Nevertheless, Paul presents himself as a paradigm of the power of the Gospel in Galatians 1. He embodies in his life the truth that he proclaims. To imitate Paul is to imitate none other than the one who lives within and works through Paul, Jesus Christ himself (2:19–20)! As a representative of Christ, Paul presents the Galatians with a choice. The character and behavior of the ancient teacher was to serve as a role model for his students. Will the Galatians follow Paul’s example or the example of his rivals? The letter provides some clues as to the specific elements of Paul’s character he expects the Galatians to model. In his autobiographical remarks in Galatians 1–2, he describes his abandoning the Mosaic Law as the basis for salvation. In 2:19–20 he is one who has died to the Law and in whom Christ dwells. Both these elements—“in Christ” and dead to the Law—are central to Paul’s identity. His life is a testimony to the tearing down of the barrier between Jew and gentile that takes place in Christ, and yet, ironically, the gentile Galatians are now seeking to become Jewish! He criticizes them in the paragraph before (4:8–11) for their recent adoption of a Jewish ritual calendar (see the commentary on 4:10). The crucified Christ must be their focal point and not the Law. In Christ the Law’s distinction between Jew and gentile has become irrelevant (5:6; 6:15). Their adoption of the Law is not yet complete as Paul still calls them “brothers (and sisters)” (4:12). He reminds them of what they *already are* and summons them to *become* as he is, that is, one with Christ in his death (cf. 2:19–20). They remain full members of God’s family as gentiles quite apart from circumcision and the Law. The emphatic nature of Paul’s appeal is flagged by the first second-person imperative of the letter (“become as I [am]”) in the context of his recognition of their identity as fellow siblings in Christ (3:6–29). (CC)

Paul is not requesting anything of the Galatians! He does not require their circumcision or observance of Moses’ Law. Although they initially received Paul with open arms, the Galatians are turning their backs on him in favor of a relationship with the rivals. The apostle is being forced to give birth to them through painful labor yet again (4:19). To become like Paul, they must be restored from the Law which enslaves just as the “elements” of their pagan past had enslaved them (4:3, 9). Paul must give birth to a people who once again recognize the centrality and sufficiency of faith in Abraham’s Seed for adoption into Abraham’s family (3:15–18, 28–29; 4:4–5). (CC)

*become as I am* – Now, as I said, we can’t be sure that this is in fact the occasion for what Paul is talking about here in Chapter 4 of Galatians for his coming to Galatians. But it certainly could be. And Paul says something here in Verse 12 to introduce his personal recollection, which is a request to them. And this is a common type of request in the ancient world in which he is appealing to them to imitate him. But in many ways for him to imitate them, as well. Now, listen to what he says, this is Verse 12: He says: Brothers, I beg you, become as I am just as I am as you are. You did me no wrong. Now, listen to that again: Become as I am. That’s really how the Greek starts. Because I have become as you, brethren. I am begging you. (Just – V-33)

As a man whom Christ set free from the bondage of the Law, Paul was an example to be emulated (1Co 4:16; 11:1; Php 3:17; 1Th 1:6; 2:14; 3:12; 2Th 3:7–9). (TLSB)

Now, this is mutual imitation. And I think Paul speaks not only of the Galatians and himself in the same context. But that they are to actually exchange places. Now, what does that mean? Well, I think here you have the Jew-Gentile thing. And that they are one in Christ. And because they are one in Christ, they are in interchangeable ways. A Gentile becomes like Paul, a Jew. Paul, a Jew, becomes like a Gentile in Christ. And he’s begging them to consider that. To consider how important that is. Don’t become a Jew. Don’t leave the fact that you are Christian now, in which there is neither Jew nor Greek. But become as I am. I am all things to all people. Just as I became like you. I became one with you. A

Jew becoming one with Gentiles in Christ. And then this extraordinary thing he says: You did me no wrong. I mean, why does Paul say that? Why does Paul say that the Galatians did him no wrong? Now, clearly, with these opponents there is animosity towards Paul. That Paul is concerned about the fact that he is no longer in the situation that he was before when he was with them. That there is this animosity between them. (Just – V-33)

*you did no wrong* – He also teaches by his example that pastors and bishops should take a fatherly and motherly attitude, not toward the ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15) but toward the miserable, misled, and erring sheep, patiently bearing their weakness and fall and handling them with the utmost gentleness. Nor can they be called back to the right way by any other means, for a more severe rebuke is more likely to anger them than to bring them back to their senses. (Luther)

### **The Galatians' Welcome (4:13–18) (CC)**

**4:13** δι' ἀσθένειαν (“because of a weakness”)—In this instance διά with the accusative expresses the occasion or cause and not the means of Paul's preaching. (CC)

*You know that it was because of a weakness of the flesh that I formerly proclaimed the Gospel to you.* Paul attributes his initial preaching at Galatia to “a weakness of the flesh” (ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός). This phrase has proven to be exceedingly difficult to unravel. To date, no solution is without problems. One approach finds its inspiration in 4:14, where Paul mentions that the Galatians did not in their revulsion spit. Spitting was a common response directed toward people suffering from a disease or with a visible, bodily condition. Perhaps the “weakness of the flesh” was an illness such as malaria that forced Paul to leave Perga or the marshes of Pamphylia for the sake of a more rapid recovery at a higher elevation. Pisidian Antioch and the Galatian regions are over three thousand feet above sea level. Paul evangelized in several locations in Galatia, as the presence of multiple congregations indicates (1:2). That mission work would have required several starts and stops as he went from place to place. He would have sufficiently recovered from malaria at his initial stop. Perhaps Paul was forced to come to these regions initially to recuperate and *then* decided to evangelize the area. If so, Paul would be effectively conceding in 4:13 that he did not originally plan to come to the Galatians. His visit was an unintentional by-product of a random illness. Yet as he attempts to win back the Galatians, he would not have wanted to remind them of the unintended nature of his visit. (CC)

In 4:15 Paul recalls how the Galatians had been willing to pluck their eyes out for him. A second approach to Paul's “weakness of the flesh” (4:13), then, is that he was afflicted with a disease or condition affecting his eyes. In 6:11 he draws attention to the large letters with which he writes. A visual impairment might be a factor in his regular use of a scribe (e.g., Rom 16:22; 2 Thess 3:17). As windows on the world, the biblical authors deemed eyes as particularly valuable among the bodily organs (cf. Deut 32:10; Ps 17:8; Zech 2:8 [MT 2:12]). Perhaps such an ailment would explain the presence of a physician among Paul's traveling companions (Col 4:14) as well as his weak bodily presence (2 Cor 10:10). No sooner does he mention a vision that changed his life in 2 Cor 12:1–7 (which he also heard) when he turns to his weakness (2 Cor 12:7). Luke recounts that Paul was blinded when Christ appeared to him on the Damascus road (Acts 9; 22; 26). A consequent, recurring eye problem may have required him to stop periodically. On the other hand, Paul apparently had no problem with his eyes in Acts 13:9 as he stared intently at a man. One commentator found it troubling that the word “your” in reference to the Galatians ripping out their eyes for Paul (Gal 4:15) is not emphasized by its placement in the sentence as might be expected had the expression been intended literally. Why should a recurring eye problem be the motivation for a trip to Galatia and nowhere else? “Paul's physical health ... must on the whole have been very good, or he could never have survived the hardships and perils described in [2 Cor] 11:23–33.” Surely Paul would have referred to this condition elsewhere in his letters, and yet he never mentions any

particular disability or recurring condition. Plucking out one's eyes was a proverbial phrase at the time and should not be taken as evidence of an eye ailment.<sup>60</sup> The Galatians were simply enthused about the message Paul had brought them. (CC)

The absence of a personal pronoun (e.g., “my”) in connection with the phrase “weakness of the flesh” has led to an ingenious, third interpretation. Troy Martin has proposed that the “weakness of the flesh” was not Paul's but rather the Galatians' weakness! Paul would not be referring to himself at all. He had evangelized in their midst because of *their* weakness of the flesh. The “flesh” (σάρξ) is a major concept throughout the letter (3:3; 4:28–31; 5:13, 16–17, 19–21, 24; 6:8). It is a power at odds with the Spirit and alienated from God. In Martin's reading, the Galatians needed Paul's Spirit-empowered Gospel message as a solution to their plight under the flesh (2:20; 3:3; 5:21, 24). Although “weakness” (ἀσθένεια) by itself frequently refers to illness in antiquity (thus 1 Tim 5:23; see also the cognate verb ἀσθενέω, “to be weak,” in Phil 2:26–27; 2 Tim 4:20), “weakness,” when syntactically related to “flesh” (σάρξ), is not used for illness until the seventh century AD. The ancients considered illness an affliction of the body but not of the “flesh.” When Paul uses the phrase “weakness of the flesh” (ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός) in Rom 6:19, he is not referring to an illness. Rom 6:19 agrees with Rom 5:6's use of “weak” (ἀσθενής) for the unredeemed plight of all humanity (note the parallelism with Rom 5:8). Rom 6:17–21 contrasts the Romans' prior slavery to sin, as they offered their bodily members to uncleanness and iniquity, to their liberation in Christ. Paul may have felt the urgent need to take the message of Christ to the Galatians in order to free them from the dark power of the flesh. (CC)

Unfortunately, Paul does not write “*your* flesh” (there is no ὑμῶν), which would clarify that the Galatians' weakness is in view. That clarification would be necessary since the subject of the main verb is *Paul*: “I proclaimed the Gospel” (εὐηγγελισάμην). Therefore the weakness would surely be his. Also, Martin's parallels for “weakness of the flesh” (4:13) are rather limited in number. Only eight instances prior to the seventh century AD connect the two nouns, and only four of those eight have “flesh” as a genitival modifier of “weakness,” as is the case in Gal 4:13 and Rom 6:19. None of the remaining four instances offers a good parallel to Paul's usage. Two employ the *plural* of “flesh” (σάρξ); one employs a *derivative* of “weakness” (ἀσθένεια); and the fourth [in Eustratius] appears in an entirely different sort of context. Further, Martin took the “flesh” in 4:13 as the Galatians' subjection to the weakness of this age, whereas the “flesh” in 4:14 refers (in Martin's view) to Paul's circumcision. This radical shift in the meaning of “flesh” is possible, but a better interpretation would maintain the same meaning for “flesh” from 4:13 to 4:14, as is the case in the more traditional interpretations. Finally, the witness of the church fathers should not be too quickly dismissed. The word “weakness” regularly refers to illnesses of various sorts. The early Christian authors therefore interpreted Paul's “weakness of the flesh” as an illness. (CC)

A fourth interpretation takes “weakness of the flesh” (4:13) to be the marks of Paul's suffering for Christ (with Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther [AE 26:418–21]). When he speaks of having publicly placarded the cross of Christ before the Galatians' eyes in 3:1, he may well be referring to his own visible representation of Christ's sufferings. He mentions his experience of persecution in 5:11 and, near the closing of the letter (6:17), he refers to “the marks of Jesus” that he bears on his body. The rhetoricians of the day pointed to scourged bodies among the visible *realia* that could create a potent effect in the hearer (Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.1.29–36). Whereas the rivals are pushing circumcision as a physical identity marker, Paul the former persecutor points to another sort of physical identity marker. Paul's disfigurement from his ministry would have tempted the Galatians to reject his message. Like one of the prophets of old, Paul embodies his message, the message of a crucified Savior (2:20; 3:13–14; 6:14). At the same time, the apostle's “weakness of the flesh” (4:13) now serves as a reminder of his calling and thus of the need to reach the peoples of Galatia. (CC)

Some advocates of a bodily ailment have further cited the “thorn in the flesh” (σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί) in 2 Cor 12:7–10 as a parallel to the “weakness of the flesh” of Gal 4:13. Paul shows no interest in revealing the

exact nature of his supposed ailment, whether in Gal 4:13 or in 2 Corinthians 12. Only the cause and purpose of the illness within God’s plan are of relevance. Appeals to 2 Corinthians 12 are therefore fraught with great difficulties. Paul certainly describes the thorn in the flesh as a “weakness” (ἀσθενεία, 2 Cor 12:5, 9, 10) but not a “weakness of the flesh.” The messenger of Satan (may!) tempt Paul in 2 Cor 12:7, but the temptation of Gal 4:13 affects the *Galatians*. For many interpreters, 2 Cor 12:7 seems to describe a chronic illness, but Gal 4:13 an acute illness. These differences as well as the lack of clear connection between the two texts render any appeal to 2 Corinthians 12 perilous. As Terence Mullins wrote years ago: “This technique of using σκολοψ τη σαρκι [‘thorn in the flesh’] and ασθενειαν της σαρκος [‘weakness of the flesh’] as synonyms and of transferring arguments about the latter to the former is quite improper unless one has demonstrated that the two phrases do in fact refer to the same thing. A fairly rigorous demonstration would seem to be required. Yet there is no such proof.” (CC)

The vocabulary of Gal 4:14—“temptation” (πειρασμός), “despise” (ἐξουθενέω), “spit” (ἐκπτύω)—may potentially provide a few further clues to 4:13’s enigmatic “weakness of the flesh.” Although Paul uses “temptation” (πειρασμός) elsewhere in an unrelated sense for idolatry leading to apostasy (1 Cor 10:13), he uses a cognate word (πειράζω) in 1 Thess 3:4–5 (ἐπειράσεν ὑμᾶς ὁ πειράζων, “the tempter tempted you”) for persecution that accompanies faith. The “temptation” (πειρασμός) in Gal 4:14 is located in Paul’s own flesh, and that flesh bears the scars of persecution (5:11; 6:17). Paul speaks of the suffering of Christ “in my flesh” (ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου) in Col 1:24. The verb “spit at” (ἐκπτύω) is not used in the LXX, and in the NT it is used only here (καταπτύω means “d disdain” in *Jos. Asen.* 2.1). The verb “despise” (ἐξουθενέω) is rare in Classical Greek but often expresses contempt. The visible marks of persecution on Paul’s body likely posed a sort of test for the Galatians. The “weakness of the flesh” for many interpreters, then, refers to the *result* of Paul’s apostolic witness in subsequent persecution. (CC)

The suffering Paul endured as his “weakness in the flesh” may not, however, be the result of persecution for his apostolic witness. In 4:13 Paul identifies the weakness of the flesh as the *cause* of his preaching the Gospel at Galatia, and not the result. The logic is precisely the reverse of the persecution theory.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, in calling the Galatians to imitate him, “Paul is not calling the Galatians to suffer persecution (though that might become necessary), but to return to the gospel Paul preached and embodied in his life.” The verbal connections in 4:13–14 may or may not in themselves be referring to persecution, despite the attractiveness of that reading for many over the centuries. “Weakness” (ἀσθενεία) more likely refers, as elsewhere in Paul, to illness (1 Tim 5:23; see also the cognate verb ἀσθενέω, “to be weak,” in Phil 2:26–27; 2 Tim 4:20), and that illness need not be associated with persecution for Paul’s apostolic witness. Although the Galatians knew what the “weakness of the flesh” was, subsequent generations may never know. (CC)

Paul is referring in these verses to a bodily illness or condition that he bore wherever he went that served as a visual display of the weakness of Christ’s cross. This weakness of the flesh is a potential stumbling block and poor advertising for Paul’s message since he does not appear to be benefiting from God’s blessing.<sup>84</sup> The Greco-Roman cults of the day promised divine blessings and benefits for their participants. Although Paul has explained that Christ endured the curse of the Law on behalf of the Galatians (3:10, 13), the apostle’s appearance gives credence to his rivals’ case that it is really *he* and not they who stands under God’s curse, that is, the curse of Deuteronomy for those who do not follow the Law (Deut 25:1–3; 27:25–26; 28:15; cf. Gal 3:10; 2 Cor 11:24). Paul’s visible appearance suggests that he has turned his back on the blessings of Abraham and the Sinaitic covenant and drawn upon himself instead God’s wrath. Paul’s “weakness of the flesh” (Gal 4:13) in reality highlights yet another “weakness,” that of the cross of Christ. The power of Christ’s cross is always hidden in what is scandalously, paradoxically weak and lowly (cf. also 1 Cor 1:18–25). The worst mistake the Galatians or their teachers could make would be to exchange the apostle’s apparent weakness for the “weak” and beggarly elements of their cosmos (4:3, 9). (CC)

Commentators have debated whether Paul is writing to the residents of north or south Galatia. Acts 13:14 narrates an initial visit to south Galatia and Acts 16:1, 4 a second. Perhaps the second visit to south Galatia took place in Acts 14:21 when Paul retraced his route. Other commentators have pointed to a potential Pauline outreach to *north* Galatia in Acts 16:6 with a second in Acts 18:23. The phrase here translated as “formerly” (or “originally”; τὸ πρότερον, Gal 4:13) may also be translated as “the first,” that is, of two or more visits. Paul would be writing to the Galatians after a subsequent visit. Translating the phrase “formerly” (or “originally”), on the other hand, would not imply any further visits.<sup>88</sup> Ernest De Witt Burton contended that a contrast between “formerly” during the initial visit and now in the letter is trivial. He added that the verb “evangelize” or “proclaim the Gospel” (4:13) suits oral proclamation but not a written letter. He therefore favored translating the phrase as a reference to the “first” of two or more visits. Burton’s reasoning is faulty. “Proclaim the Gospel” in 3:8 refers to the evangelizing function of the *written* Scriptures quite apart from the oral proclamation. Further, 4:13 represents the only potential reference in the letter to a possible second visit. Paul does not allude to a second visit elsewhere, and the paragraph otherwise maintains the focus on the initial contact with the Galatians. The context of 4:8–20 decisively favors the translation “formerly/originally.” Paul is contrasting his initial visit with the current need to give birth to the Galatians “again” (4:19). The “then” and “now” contrasts in this paragraph parallel a similar contrast in 4:8–9. As Paul reminds them of their relationship when he first visited, he hopes to leverage their goodwill from their time together at this crucial moment. (CC)

*ailment.* On the basis of v. 15; 6:11 some suggest it was eye trouble. Others have suggested malaria or epilepsy. (CSB)

Numerous suggestions have been offered (e.g., malaria, epilepsy, eye ailment; cf 2Co 12:7–10). Since the ailment was the cause of Paul’s original visit, perhaps it required rest and recuperation and thus a stay in Galatia. (TLSB)

*preached...at first.* When Paul visited Galatia on his first missionary journey (Ac 13:14–14:23). (CSB)

And this is when he launches into this personal recollection. And here it's really quite extraordinary. He says: You know that -- and here he's appealing now to the time when he came to them. He says: You know that on account of weakness of the flesh. Now, this is obviously a sickness or what I think is this beating in Lystra. On account of the weakness of the flesh I first preached the Good News, the Gospel, to you. That was the occasion. That his weakness in the flesh became the occasion for the Gospel. And then he goes onto say -- and this is an extraordinary statement in Verse 14: And through my trial, my temptation, my trial, in my flesh, you did not despise me and literally you did not spit me out. I love that word in the Greek. It's \*\*\*ec patu. The word itself is pttt (phonetic). You did not spit me out. But you received me. You welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself. (Just – V-33)

**4:14** τὸν πειρασμὸν ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου (“your temptation in my flesh”)—This reading with ὑμῶν is supported by κ\* A B C<sup>2vid</sup> D\* G vg Ambrosiaster Marius Victorinus Jerome Augustine. This reading is most likely original because the awkwardness of “your” would have tempted scribal emendations. Scribes likely harmonized the pronoun with “my flesh” later in the verse; thus “my temptation, (the one) in my flesh” (τὸν πειρασμὸν μου [τὸν] ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου) in ℞<sup>46</sup> C\*<sup>vid</sup> D<sup>2</sup> Textus Receptus Chrysostom Cyril. Several manuscripts have an article, but no pronoun (“your” or “my”), after πειρασμόν (“temptation”): κ<sup>c</sup> 81 104 326 Basil Euthalius Theophylact. “Your temptation” (τὸν πειρασμὸν ὑμῶν) includes an objective genitive.

οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε (“you neither despised”)—“Temptation” would be nonsensical in this sentence were it the object of the verb “you despised” (ἐξουθενήσατε). Most likely, “temptation” is an adverbial



accusative of respect: “With respect to your temptation in my flesh, you neither despised nor spat at [me], but rather you welcomed me.”

οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε (“nor spat at”)— $\mathfrak{F}^{46}$  omits this clause. “Despise” (ἐξουθενέω; see Rom 14:3, 10; 1 Cor 1:28; 6:4; 16:11; 2 Cor 10:10; 1 Thess 5:20) was used synonymously with “disdain” or “spit out” (ἐκπτύω). ἐκπτύω appears only here in the NT and not in the Septuagint, but see the synonymous use of ἐξουθενέω and καταπτύω in *Jos. Asen.* 2.1 (from the same era as Paul). A scribal recognition of synonymy would likely have resulted in the omission of ἐξεπτύσατε in  $\mathfrak{F}^{46}$ . Some have contended that ἐξεπτύσατε should be translated as “loathe” since the word is used in connection with ἐξουθενέω (“despise”). In the context of “temptation in my flesh,” “spat at” would be apt from a cultural standpoint. Paul may be intending a double entendre. (CC)

*With respect to your temptation in my flesh [to reject me], you neither despised nor spat at [me], but rather you welcomed me as if the angel of God, as if Christ Jesus.* Most commentators have identified the temptation in Paul’s flesh with the “weakness of the flesh” in 4:13. Troy Martin, however, has instead identified the temptation with the apostle’s circumcision. The Abrahamic covenant of circumcision in Gen 17:13 was “in your flesh” (עַל בְּשָׂרְךָ; LXX: ἐπὶ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν). So in Gal 6:13 the rivals hope to boast “about your [the Galatians’] flesh” (ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρα σαρκί), that is, in their circumcision. Uncircumcised gentile authors of the time regularly deride circumcision as a sort of mutilation that left the male genitals appearing lewd and obscene (e.g., Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.37; 16.4.9). Paul’s circumcision could therefore have posed a major stumbling block to his acceptance by the uncircumcised gentiles at Galatia. The Galatians nevertheless welcomed Paul and received his Gospel message. The apostle hopes that the Galatians will now return to that original indifference toward the rite of circumcision (Gal 5:6; 6:15; cf. Rom 2:25; 3:1–2). (CC)

Martin did not explain why Paul’s circumcised state during his visit would be such a stumbling block to the Galatians when he was not insisting on the rite (whereas the Jewish-Christian rivals were). If Paul’s circumcision were a temptation for the gentile Galatians to reject his ministry, surely his circumcision would have posed a similar temptation in other locations as well. Paul’s circumcision never emerges as a problem for his ministry elsewhere in his letters. In 2 Cor 10:10 the Corinthian critics noted Paul’s “weak” (ἀσθενής) bodily presence and “contemptuous” (ἐξουθενημένος) speech. Those two terms in 2 Cor 10:10 are cognate to “weakness” (ἀσθένεια) in Gal 4:13 and “despise” (ἐξουθενέω) in 4:14, and yet nothing suggests that circumcision was at issue in 2 Cor 10:10. More likely, with the majority of commentators, the illness or bodily scarring in Gal 4:13 serves as the basis for the Galatians’ temptation in 4:14. Since he was suffering from a bodily illness or condition of some sort, the Galatians would have been tempted to reject Paul as suffering from a curse. Instead (ἀλλά, “but rather”), the Galatians received the apostle in an unexpected way. They neither “despised” (ἐξουθενήσατε) nor “spat at” (ἐξεπτύσατε) him. The second verb, ἐξεπτύσατε, could be serving as a synonym for the first verb (“treat with contempt” or “despise”), or it could be the non-synonymous “spit.” The ancients would regularly spit as a means of warding off sickness, epilepsy, witchcraft, demonic threats, or the evil eye (e.g., Pliny, *Nat.* 28.7 §§ 36, 39). Even these days people reveal a great deal about themselves by how they react to outward appearances and hardships. Obsession with outward appearances can be a great stumbling block in the modern world, and yet God’s power is manifest in outward, apparent weakness! (CC)

The Galatians overlooked the temptation in Paul’s flesh to welcome and accept him as “the angel of God,” even as “Christ Jesus” himself (4:14). Paul distinguishes ordinary human messengers by the term “apostle” (ἀπόστολος, Gal 1:1, 17, 19; also, e.g., 1 Cor 4:9) from heavenly messengers as “angels” (ἄγγελος, Gal 1:8; 3:19; also 1 Cor 13:1; perhaps 2 Cor 12:7). The Galatians did not spit at Paul as though he were a demonic agent but received him as an *angel* (cf. 2 Cor 11:14). He further specifies their reception of him as an “angel of God” (ἄγγελον θεοῦ, Gal 4:14). The “angel of God/the LORD” throughout the Septuagintal translation of the Hebrew Bible is either a divine messenger from God or, in

many instances, the Lord himself (e.g., Gen 21:17; Exodus 3–4; 14:19; Judges 6; 13:9; see also Genesis 18). The Galatians had initially received Paul as God’s own messenger, as Christ Jesus himself. (CC)

The relationship of the second “as” (ὡς) phrase (“as if Christ Jesus”) to the first (“as if the angel of God”) is not clear. Does Paul intend a progressive or ascensive effect with the first phrase leading to the second, “higher” phrase? He may in that case be distinguishing the angel of God as God’s messenger from Christ himself as an even greater authority. Perhaps he is identifying the angel of God with Jesus Christ. The OT texts that equate the angel of the Lord with God lend credence to the latter view. Whichever option one selects—a firm conclusion is not possible—Christ is clearly of greater authority than a messenger or angel of God. Ironically, Christ has redeemed Paul from the curse, whether from illness or from any other affliction (3:13; 4:5). The marks of Paul’s suffering ultimately serve as an instrument to reveal the crucified Christ before the Galatians’ eyes (3:1; 6:17). Paul embodies the message of a crucified Savior (2:19–20; cf. 6:14, 17; also 2 Cor 4:5, 10)! The Galatians received Paul as if he were Christ himself!<sup>103</sup> In imitating Paul (4:12), Christ’s messenger (cf. 1:1), the Galatians will be imitating Paul’s Lord! (CC)

This reception of Paul as the angel of the Lord and/or Christ himself offers an intriguing parallel with the reception in Acts 13–14 in southern Galatia. Paul and Barnabas were confused with Zeus and Hermes after performing healings and other miraculous signs by means of the Spirit. Ancient inscriptions from Lystra describe altars to the god Zeus and the god-messenger Hermes. Witherington has argued from the perceived parallel with Acts 13–14 that the letter to the Galatians must be addressed to the south Galatians and must therefore date to an earlier period in Paul’s ministry. These connections are attractive, but the Galatians’ reception of Paul as the angel of the Lord or Jesus Christ himself (in Galatians) is quite different from a reception as the false god Zeus or Hermes (in Acts). (CC)

*a trial to you.* Evidently Paul’s appearance was repulsive, inviting disdain and disgust. (TLSB)

*received me.* He implies that under the influence of Judaizers they have changed their attitude toward him. (CSB)

The Church had honored Paul by recognizing his apostolic authority as a messenger and representative of the risen Christ (Lk 10:16; Jn 13:20). (TLSB)

Now, here is the deal, this is what I think is going on: Paul is left alongside of the road, beaten to a pulp. To the point of death as it says. Now, I don't know if you've ever seen anybody beaten. I have. When I was a high school kid, I went to school outside of Boston. We used to go into the trail way station there. And one day a whole bunch of us prep school kids were on our way back to school. And there was a man who was totally beaten on the side of the bus station. I mean, bleeding, eyes bulging, pathetic mess. And he smelled. And it wasn't just because he was kind of a street person. The sickness of his beating had an aura to it. I think that's what's meant by Paul saying: I could have spit you out. Paul smelled. You know how you get sulfur in your nose and all of a sudden you just want to spit it out. You know, terrible. I'll never forget when my dog got hit by a skunk in the face and you had to put vinegar and tomato juice in its mouth and the dog was spitting it out because it smelled bad and it tasted bad and it was horrible. And that's Paul was. Paul was a pathetic horrible figure. Weakness of flesh. In shame. And great suffering and sickness. And yet these Galatians, they welcomed him. They received him as a messenger of God. They did thought despise him in his weakness. They weren't tempted to cast him out and say: What a pathetic human being. (Just – V-33)

You know, in that culture, a person who was in that condition, they must have said something was wrong with him. A spirit has gotten him. A demon has gotten him. But no. They accepted him as Christ Jesus himself. You know why? Because Christ's sufferings were seen in Paul's sufferings. When they saw

Paul in his state of humiliation and shame and suffering, they saw Christ. And Paul's very body preached the Gospel to them. In weakness. Not in strength. But in weakness they saw the Gospel. (Just – V-33)

1 Corinthians 1:23,

**4:15** ὑμῖν (“on your behalf”)—This could be an indirect object (“I testify to you”; cf. Acts 15:8), but in view of Pauline parallels such as Rom 10:2 and Col 4:13 (so also Acts 22:5), a dative of advantage is more likely.

εἰ δυνατόν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὑμῶν ἐξορύξαντες ἐδώκατέ μοι (“if [it had been] possible, you [would have] torn out your eyes and given [them] to me”)—It was not uncommon in the Hellenistic period to omit “it had been” (ἦν) from the protasis as well as “would” (ἄν) from the apodosis of second-class, contrary-to-fact conditionals; cf. 1:10; 3:21. (CC)

*Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify on your behalf that if [it had been] possible, you [would have] torn out your eyes and given [them] to me.* In 4:15 Paul asks: “Where then is your blessing?” Commentators have remained divided over how to understand this question. The Greek word (μακαρισμός) can mean both “blessed” (i.e., “the pronouncement/recognition that someone is blessed”) and, in secular usage, “happy.” With the secular usage, the sentence would read: “What, then, has become of the goodwill you felt?” The Galatians’ initial enthusiasm and joy would have faded as they are now treating Paul differently. On the other hand, the only other instances of this word in Paul (Rom 4:6, 9) refer to the pronouncement of a *blessing*. “Blessing” in Gal 4:15 could be understood in the passive sense of Paul’s praise for the Galatians’ initial enthusiasm (an objective genitive). The passive sense of the word would therefore refer to the Galatians’ sense of *being* blessed (by God). The same word is used in Rom 4:6, 9 for a blessing by God in not having sins counted. So the Galatians would have initially recognized their blessing by God. The immediate context of Gal 4:15, on the other hand, stresses their reception of Paul, a fact which suggests another possibility. The blessing should be understood in an *active* sense (a subjective genitive): the Galatians’ blessing *of Paul* after he preached to them. They graciously welcomed him as the angel of God and as Christ himself (4:14); they would have ripped out their eyes for him (4:15b). They did not spit at Paul as if he bore a curse (4:14; cf. 3:13). Their initial word of blessing has now turned into something else. Perhaps the sense is deliberately ambiguous: in their blessing (receiving) Paul, they experienced God’s blessing. That blessing now stands in jeopardy. (CC)

After asking what has become of the Galatians’ blessing, Paul reminds them of how they were willing to pluck out their own eyes for his sake. One recent theory maintains that Paul is alluding to a torture technique. The verb “pluck out” (ἐξορύσσω) and the noun “eye” (ὀφθαλμός) are used together in several Greco-Roman descriptions of how an oppressor might torture a victim (e.g., 1 Kgdm 11:2 (MT/ET 1 Sam 11:2): a treaty signified by the gouging out of the oppressed’s right eye—ἐν τῷ ἐξορύξαι ὑμῶν πάντα ὀφθαλμὸν δεξιόν). According to this approach, the Galatians were voluntarily identifying with the suffering, persecuted apostle. In a cruel irony, instead of remaining as Paul’s fellow oppressed, they now regard the apostle himself as their enemy. This approach is beset by the fundamental difficulty that the Galatians are willing to pluck out their own eyes for the sake of Paul. This is hardly a reference to suffering persecution at the hands of *others*.<sup>114</sup> More likely Paul is referring to a proverbial saying along the lines of such modern expressions as “he would have been willing to give the shirt off his back” or “he would have been willing to give his right arm for me.” Lucian in the second century AD narrates a story that reflects the cultural assumptions behind Paul’s figurative expression (*Tox.* §§ 40–41): Dandamis managed to negotiate the release of his friend Amizoces from captivity by sacrificing his own eyes. Amizoces was so moved by the gesture that he had his own eyes removed as well. Plucking out one’s eyes had become a proverbial, exaggerated expression of deep, committed friendship. Instead of the

hostility of an evil eye (cf. 3:1), the Galatians would have plucked out their eyes for Paul's sake. All that goodwill has now changed. (CC)

*What then has become of the blessing?* Because of the restraints of legalistic Judaism they had lost their blessing and joy. (CSB)

The Galatians had considered themselves extremely fortunate due to the blessings Paul brought. (TLSB)

And in fact, Paul goes on to say in Verse 15 -- and again, this just continues to show the \*\*\*pathos of this. What then has become of the blessing you felt by me? And he says: I testify to you, I bear witness to you, I make myself a martyr for you literally. If you were able to, you would have plucked out your eyes and you would have given them to me. Now, here is where we think this weakness of the flesh was that he was beaten. And you remember I said he had bulging eyes. His eyes were all puffed over. You know how your eyes get when you're beaten? They were puffed over. They were oozing and swollen and ugly. And they would have taken out their eyes. That's how much they loved Paul. And given them to him if they could. Now, this shows you the love between the Galatians and Paul. And how in weakness Paul preaches the Good News. In weakness they see Jesus. In weakness and suffering they understand the Gospel. Now, these are mercenaries. These are soldiers. They are used to seeing people beaten up. People who are probably even worse off than Paul. So I mean, in some ways it wouldn't have been a great shock to them. But they also would have seen that as a sign of weakness and would have rejected it. But instead, they embraced Paul. (Just – V-33)

*gouged out your eyes.* A hyperbole indicating their willingness, for his benefit, to part with that which was most precious to them. See Mk 2:4, where the same verb is used of digging through a roof. (CSB)

In today's idiom, "You would have given your right arm to me." (TLSB)

**4:16** ὥστε ("so then")—Although ὥστε does not introduce a question in the pages of the NT, it does so elsewhere in Greek literature.<sup>7</sup> NA<sup>28</sup> and most English translations regard the verse as a question. Nevertheless, Paul consistently uses ὥστε at the beginning of a clause to introduce an inference elsewhere in Galatians (2:13; 3:9, 24; 4:7), and so the verse is here translated as an exclamation. (CC)

*So then, I have become your enemy because I am telling you the truth!* The Greek word "so then" (ὥστε) normally indicates a conclusion or a result of what was just stated (cf. 3:9, 24; 4:7). The irony and even indignity are inescapable as Paul has gone from dear friend to enemy.<sup>118</sup> Gal 4:16 is an urgent plea for the Galatians to recognize what has happened to their relationship with Paul. In the second century, Jewish-Christian teachers will label the apostle Paul the "enemy," and that is precisely how the Galatians, under the influence of the first-century rivals, are coming to view Paul. The Jewish-Christian rivals were convincing the Galatians that Paul's message was deficient. The Galatians may have come to view Paul as having withheld crucial information for a right relationship with God. The Galatians' relationship with the apostle had been poisoned. Paul counters that he has indeed told them the truth. The truth of the Gospel permits circumcised Jews and uncircumcised gentiles to eat at the same table together (2:5). Nothing further is required of the gentiles. Paul has already, at great risk and cost, stood firm for that truth (2:14; cf. 5:7; Eph 4:15). The *rivals* are the manipulators who deceive. God blesses the gentiles as *gentiles*, and that is the truth! As Christians share the Word of God with others, they should remain cognizant that a warm reception can easily lead to a cold rejection. The truth of the Gospel cuts like a two-edged sword. The Word of God may very well alienate. A sober recognition of the truth of God's Word will help a Christian remain loyal to the faithful teachers and preachers of the Scriptures. (CC)

*your enemy.* Telling the truth sometimes results in loss of friends. (CSB)

Now, this recollection leads into his distress over the future. And here again you can see how deeply distressed he is. In Verse 16 he says to them: So now have I become your enemy? You hate me. Do you now hate me essentially. Because I have told you the truth. I've told you the truth of the Gospel by speaking this truth to you. (Just V-

*truth?* The truth of the Gospel (2:5, 14), spoken forthrightly, contrasts the opponents' deceptive tactics. (TLSB)

**4:17** ἵνα αὐτοὺς ζηλοῦτε (“so that you would be zealous for them” or “so that you would earnestly court them”)—This reading is well attested, but D\* G it Ambrosiaster reflect the influence of 1 Cor 12:31 in adding ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ κρείττω χαρίσματα (“but be zealous for/earnestly court the greater gifts”). From a grammatical standpoint, ἵνα with a future indicative verb may be used to express purpose in the NT (e.g., 1 Cor 13:3, following the reading καθήσομαι). At first glance ζηλοῦτε appears to be a present indicative, but ἵνα with the present indicative would be unusual. Since both Pauline instances of this pattern occur with -οω verbs (here and ἵνα μὴ εἶς ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐνὸς φοσιοῦσθε in 1 Cor 4:6), most likely a morphological shift has taken place with the subjunctive (here ζηλοῦτε) being formed identically to the indicative on the analogy of the -αω verbs. (CC)

*[Those people] are zealously courting you not in a fitting manner, but rather they want to exclude you so that you would zealously court them.* With 4:17 matters become clearer. Paul has become the Galatians' enemy (4:16) as a result of the influence of the rivals, whom he refuses to name. He does not even identify them by a pronoun but rather employs a mere verbal suffix! Those people who shall go unnamed “are zealous for/are courting you” (ζηλοῦσιν ὑμᾶς). This verb (ζηλόω) is used three times in 4:17–18, but it can be translated in different ways. Perhaps it means “they earnestly desire you” on the analogy of a romantic relationship. In the Greco-Roman world, such courtship language was used in the context of the teacher/student relationship. Another possible translation of the verb is “they are zealous for you” in the sense of a religious zeal for God, as Paul himself was zealous in his pre-Christian days (1:14). A third, more pejorative sense is that “they are jealous or envious of you.” This third meaning does not fit this particular context. As for the first two meanings, a decision may not be necessary. The rivals are courting the Galatians to win them over to their way of life, even as the rivals are, at the same time, ironically zealous for Moses' Law as Paul himself had once been.<sup>124</sup> Paul, however, had been mistaken in that zeal. The results of the rivals' zeal will be no less disastrous and destructive of the faith. (CC)

The rivals' motive in their courtship of the Galatians is less than honorable (οὐ καλῶς, “not fitting,” “unacceptable,” “for no good”). Rather (ἀλλά), in their zealous courting “they want to exclude you so that you would zealously court them.” The rivals are playing an exclusive game in order to motivate the Galatians to want “in.” As was the case at Antioch (2:11–14), the Jewish-Christian rivals are withdrawing from the gentile Galatian Christians, thereby putting pressure on them to adopt Jewish customs for the sake of their shared fellowship (cf. 6:12). To “join the club” the Galatians are going to have to play by the rivals' interpretation of the rules. The Galatians will have to separate from their fellow gentiles and identify with the people of Israel. Of course, if the Galatians will not adopt Jewish customs, they will be excluded not just from the Eucharist or table fellowship, but they must also fear being excluded from God's very people! Like true zealots, the rivals are guarding the boundaries they believe demarcate the people who are God's own.<sup>126</sup> In the process, they are drawing the Galatians away from Paul into their own sphere of influence. They want the Galatians to be just as zealous or desirous for them. They want to replicate their own zeal! Instead of becoming like Paul (4:12), the Galatians will become like the rivals (in a rather obvious physical manner too [through circumcision]). “These teachers surely claimed that they desired to *include* the Galatians in the true people of God, but in fact, they were *excluding* them from God's people if the Galatians followed them.” (CC)

*They.* Judaizers (see 2:4, 12). (CSB)

False teachers, called “Judaizers,” were agitating the Church. (TLSB)

*no good purpose* – Verse 17 which is kind of a difficult verse to understand. But I think it's really -- if you think about it, it's not that hard. He says -- and let me get a translation here. Because the Greek is really difficult to translate. They make much of you. That is the opponents of Paul. But for no good purpose. They want to shut you out that you may make much of them. Now, let me translate it literally so you can see why it's difficult. They are seeking you -- this is the Galatian opponents. But they are not doing it well. They are not doing it for the right reasons. But they wish to exclude you, to shut you out, so that you might seek them. Now, Paul goes onto say in Verse 18: It is good to be sought by someone always in a good way, for the right reasons. Not only, you know, when I am with you he says. So it's not that it's bad to seek somebody. But it's when the motives, the ulterior motives are such that they are actually trying to in a sense seduce them into something that they really shouldn't be in. (Just – V-33)

*they want to shut you out* – The ESV has “shut you out.” Judaizers sought to bar fellowship with noncircumcised Gentiles. (TLSB)

*make much of them* – It is as though he were saying: “They do indeed burn for you with extreme zeal and love, but their purpose is that you may make much of them in return and shut me out. If their zeal were faithful and sincere, they would permit you to love us along with them. But they hate our teaching; therefore they want it to be completely wiped out among you and their own teaching to be circulated. To accomplish this more smoothly, they are trying to alienate you from us by this flattery and to arouse your hostility, so that you may hate us as well as our teaching and may attach your zeal and effort to them, love only them, and accept their teaching.” Thus he makes the false apostles suspect to the Galatians by saying that they are lying in wait for them and making an impression on them by means of a beautiful external appearance. In this way Christ warns us, saying (Matt. 7:15): “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing.” (Luther)

The agitators hoped that by wooing the Galatians into their sphere of influence, the Galatians would, in turn, become their followers. (Note: The verse begins and ends with the same Gk word, *zeloo*, meaning “court someone’s favor.”). (TLSB)

**4:18** καλόν (“[it is] good ... [to be zealously courted]”)—The apostle uses the anarthrous καλόν with an infinitive (as here with ζηλοῦσθαι; see the next textual note) in the undisputed letters (Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 7:1, 26b; 9:15) to mean “it is good (to).” Each of these instances employs a noun or pronoun in the dative case with the exception of Rom 14:21 and Gal 4:18. Paul uses καλόν *with* the article to refer to “the good” or “what is good”; thus Gal 6:9: τὸ δὲ καλὸν ποιῶντες μὴ ἐγκακῶμεν, “but let us not become weary in doing (the/what is) good”; also Rom 7:18, 21; 2 Cor 13:7; 1 Thess 5:21. The presence or absence of the article is not in itself an indicator of a difference in meaning in the case of abstract nouns. In 1 Cor 5:6 Paul uses the anarthrous καλόν for “a good thing.” Nevertheless, Paul does tend to use the anarthrous καλόν for “it is good (to).”

ζηλοῦσθαι (“to be zealously courted”)—This reading is supported by A and most manuscripts. The articular infinitive, τὸ ζηλοῦσθαι, in D G and the Byzantine manuscripts is a stylistic adaptation to the following preposition ἐν. κ B vg Or have ζηλοῦσθε, another way of writing the infinitive or perhaps an imperative. As an imperative, the subject of the verb would be the Galatians and not Paul. With the active verb forms of ζηλόω in the context, ζηλοῦσθαι is more likely passive and not middle. The verb is iterative.<sup>15</sup>

ἐν τῷ παρεῖναί με πρὸς ὑμᾶς (“when I am present with you”)—παρεῖναι πρὸς may be used for “to be present,” although παρεῖναι ἐν would be more typical. (CC)

*But [it is] good always to be zealously courted in a fitting manner, and not only when I am present with you.* The verse begins with “but” or “on the contrary” (δέ). Paul is now stating in positive terms what he expresses in negative terms in 4:17. In a first approach to the verse, then, the Galatians are the recipients of missionary fervor (4:17), but that fervor should stem from pure, honorable, and acceptable motives (4:18). Paul is contrasting the negative motives of the rivals with a more positive approach. When the motives are impure, be warned!<sup>130</sup> Cognate to “zealously court” (ζηλόω, 4:17, 18) is the Greek noun “zeal” (ζήλος), which may be used in a positive sense or a negative sense depending on its object. Paul therefore qualifies the need to be courted zealously in a *good* manner. The apostle is clear about his worthier motives at the beginning and end of the letter (1:6–10; 6:12–14). (CC)

In a novel, second approach, “good” (καλόν) would be the subject of the passive infinitive “to be zealously courted” (ζηλοῦσθαι), with the object of the Galatians’ emulation or zealous pursuit as the abstract concept “the good”: “The good is to be zealously pursued in a good way.” Perhaps Paul is suggesting that the Galatians imitate what is genuinely “the good,” namely, Paul’s cruciform weakness (4:13–14). This proposal assumes that the Galatian readers would have easily recognized a *topos* about “the good” from contexts encouraging imitation or emulation of a teacher in order to advance the Greek values of virtue, nobility, honor, and power. Emulation of the strong and powerful is replaced by zeal for a weak individual (4:14). Envy of physical beauty is replaced by the Galatians’ willingness to gouge out their eyes for Paul (4:15). It is not clear, however, that this *topos* is really “ubiquitous” or if the Galatian audience would have been familiar with such elite writers as Isocrates, Aristotle, Alciphron, Plutarch, and Philo. In this second approach, “the good” would refer to the manner in which the Galatians received Paul in 4:13–15, but that “the good” should mean *this* is hardly self-explanatory. (CC)

A third approach to 4:18 would take Paul as the object of the Galatians’ courting, even as Paul was the object of their favorable treatment before their relationship took a turn for the worse (4:13–16). Certainly Paul is distressed by the current state of their relationship (4:14–16). He has stressed in 4:12 that the Galatians become as he is. In such a context, the verb “to zealously court” (ζηλόω) may be translated as “emulate” or “imitate” and would take an object. The problem is that Paul does not specify an object. (CC)

The verb “to zealously court” (ζηλόω) and the notion of honorable, fitting (καλῶς/ἐν καλῷ) courtship link 4:17 and 4:18 and suggest that 4:18 offers a contrast to the rivals’ dishonorable courtship of the Galatians in 4:17. The first approach to this verse is therefore preferable. Paul, for his part, courts the Galatians in the selfless, sincere manner of a mother giving birth to her dear children (4:19)! (CC)

Had the teachers who endeared themselves to the Galatians been faithful ministers of the one Gospel, Paul would have rejoiced (as in 1Co 3:5–10; Php 1:15–18). But their purpose was less than honorable. (TLSB)

*it is always good to be made much of for a good purpose* – Now, Paul goes onto say in Verse 18: It is good to be sought by someone always in a good way, for the right reasons. Not only, you know, when I am with you he says. So it's not that it's bad to seek somebody. But it's when the motives, the ulterior motives are such that they are actually trying to in a sense seduce them into something that they really shouldn't be in. (Just – V-33)

### **Paul as a Mother Giving Birth Again (4:19–20)**

**4:19–20** *My little children, [with] whom I am again suffering labor pains until Christ is formed in you—how I wish I could be with you at this very moment and change my tone because I am at a loss because of you!* Paul begins the paragraph in 4:12 addressing his “brothers (and sisters).” In 4:19 the

apostle describes himself rather surprisingly as a mother giving birth. Tragically, instead of celebrating the growth and maturation of the children, Paul as a mother is suffering the pangs of childbirth a second time!<sup>139</sup> The Galatians are turning on him and jeopardizing their salvation. The Greek verb he uses (ὠδίνω) is never elsewhere employed for giving birth itself but rather for the anguish associated with childbearing (LXX Is 66:7–9; Jer 4:31; Sirach 19:11; Homer, *Il.* 11.268–72 [as a metaphorical description for suffering from a battle wound]; see also the cognate noun ὠδίν, “labor pains,” in LXX Is 13:6, 8; Jer 6:24; Micah 4:9). The Hebrew Bible frequently describes the excruciating experience of God’s judgment in terms of a woman’s labor pains (Is 13:8; 21:3; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6; 48:41; 49:22, 24; 50:43; Micah 4:9–10; Nah 2:10 [MT/LXX 2:11]; see also Sirach 48:19). Yet such terrible suffering often served as a necessary precursor to God’s deliverance of his people (Is 13:1–14:2; Jer 30:4–11; Micah 4:9–13). In Is 42:14–17 God describes *himself* as a mother in labor pains while waiting for the deliverance of the Judeans from captivity. In Second Temple Jewish literature, the potent imagery of labor pains soon came to be associated with the coming age (e.g., *1 En.* 62.4, 6; *2 Bar.* 56.6; *4 Ezra* 4:42; 1QH XI [= III].7–12) as well as God’s impending judgment (e.g., *2 Bar.* 56.6; *4 Ezra* 4:42). Paul draws on the rich eschatological imagery of birth pangs to describe his suffering. These are “children” who must be born yet again! Not all is well in this family. Many of God’s servants can relate to a “labor intensive” ministry full of suffering.

Since Paul normally describes himself as a father begetting children (1 Cor 4:14–15; Philemon 10), the question arises, Why does he speak of himself at this point as a mother giving birth? Brigitte Kahl, a leading feminist interpreter of the letter, has contended that Paul wants to subvert the male-female dichotomy. “There is no male and female” (3:28)! The patriarchal voice of Paul suddenly, ironically becomes the transgendered cry of a woman in labor pains. He has just asked in 4:12 that the Galatians become like he. The Galatians are to imitate Paul as *mother*. Kahl maintained that the weakness of Paul as mother is none other than the weakness of the cross, a weakness which undermines the dominance and honor of masculinity.

Kahl’s approach, while intriguing, is not the most likely explanation of 4:19. Paul does not elaborate much, if at all, on 3:28’s “male and female” dichotomy. The letter revolves primarily around 3:28’s “neither Jew nor Greek” and the freedom the non-Jew experiences on equal terms in Christ. Furthermore, the imagery of a male suffering labor pains would not have been as striking in a first-century context as it would be for modern ears. Paul’s audience would have been accustomed to hearing the anguish of males described with the cognate noun (“labor pains,” ὠδίν) of the verb Paul uses (ὠδίνω; e.g., LXX Ex 15:14; Deut 2:25; Ps 47:7 [MT 48:7; ET 48:6]; Is 13:8; Jer 27:43 [MT/ET 50:43]). The influence of the Hebrew Bible should not be discounted in understanding Paul’s metaphor. The Hebrew Bible and Second Temple passages that speak of “labor pains” never associate the imagery with an overturning of gender differences.<sup>144</sup> As an instrument of his God, the feminine metaphorical imagery that Paul applies to himself is not so surprising. Ultimately, Paul’s imagery derives from his apocalyptic worldview (cf. Rom 8:18–22; 1 Thess 5:3; note the labor pains). A radical overturning of gender does not play a role in those expectations.<sup>146</sup>

Is 45:10 bears a number of similarities to Gal 4:19, and these similarities have led many interpreters to conclude that Paul was indeed alluding to Isaiah. First, both LXX Is 45:10 and Gal 4:19 apply the word “suffer birth pangs/give birth” (ὠδίνω) in a metaphorical sense to God’s redemptive deed and Paul’s apostolic labors, respectively. Second, both Is 45:10 (cf. Is 45:1) and Gal 4:19 have an explicitly masculine subject; in Is 45:10 both the “father” who “begets” and the “mother” who “suffers birth pangs” represent the LORD, and the one suffering labor pains in Gal 4:19 is Paul. Third, both verses posit a corporate people as the object of the masculine subject’s action. Isaiah (in Is 45:10) and Paul speak of God and the apostle, respectively, as both “begetting” (γεννάω) and “giving birth” (ὠδίνω). These connections with Isaiah 45 should not be surprising since Paul explicitly draws on Isaiah 45 elsewhere in his letters (Rom 9:20 [Is 45:9 (!)]; Rom 14:11 [Is 45:23]; 1 Cor 14:25 [Is 45:14]). Is 45:10–11 portrays God both as a male begetting children and as a woman suffering labor. Thanks to the rivals’ influence, the Galatians—just like God’s children in the book of Isaiah—are in danger of being aborted. On the other hand, these connections may not be as strong as they at first seem. Is 45:9–13 may not be referring to a



corporate people after all. The Isaiah verses narrate God's choice of Cyrus as an instrument of deliverance in fulfillment of the promises (see esp. Is 45:11, 13). The emphasis in Is 45:10, unlike Gal 4:20, is not primarily on the labor pains, but rather on God's creative power to bring forth something new. Finally, Paul is the one suffering labor pains in Gal 4:19, but *God* is the one who forms Christ in the Galatians. In Gal 4:19 God himself does not suffer labor pains. Paul may not be alluding to a single passage.<sup>153</sup> The best approach to Gal 4:19 is to keep the focus on what he actually says.

Paul, a man, is a mother giving birth to the same children for a second time. The paradoxes of the verse do not end there. He suffers labor pains for children who remain in his womb until Christ is formed in *their* wombs! The picture is bizarre. Inside Paul are the Galatians, and inside their wombs is Christ being formed. Despite the jolting imagery, the basic point is clear. Even as Christ dwells in the apostle (2:20), he looks forward to Christ's dwelling again in the Galatians as well! At that point, circumcision and uncircumcision will no longer matter (3:28; 6:15). Christ will take shape within them irrespective of whether they are Jews or gentiles.

Paul employs a passive verb: Christ will *be formed* (μορφωθῆ) in the Galatians. Paul (identified in the context in the first person) is not the one who will actively form Christ in the Galatians. The Galatians will be the recipients of *God's* activity! The Father sent the Son in the first place (1:4; 4:6). God has taken the initiative on behalf of humanity. As Luther put it: "A preacher can be anxious over how he may give birth to Christians, but he is unable to form them. He is no more able to do so than a natural mother forms the fetus. She only carries what is to be formed and to be born" (AE 27:308). The preacher is only an instrument that God employs for his purposes and should never take credit for the miraculous births that the Lord is bringing about.

God's end-times community therefore has a truly Christ-like character and shape. Believers in Christ are caught up in an end-of-the-ages drama at work in their midst as they bear Christ to the world. For Christ to be within believers is the converse of believers' being "in Christ." Christ and the believer are in a very close personal relationship, a relationship as close as a mother's womb. Some Christians may sometimes be hesitant to affirm such a close, personal relationship, but the apostle Paul is encouraging his hearers to treasure that intimate relationship with the Lord.

The new reality in which a Christian participates is not just an individual affair. Paul does not say "in each one of you" with a Greek singular, but rather uses a Greek plural (ἐν ὑμῖν), "in you," "among you," or "in your midst" (4:19). This is not surprising in view of 3:27–29 (where the second person "you" forms are also plural). Baptism creates a new community in which individuals not only put on Christ but also find their differences set aside. The emphasis on a new community will dominate Paul's thinking in chapters 5 and 6. The point is that the Christian community takes on the character of Christ! Individual congregations would do well to reflect upon Paul's point. As Hansen narrated:

I once heard a son speak at his father's funeral service about his inheritance. He said, "The greatest inheritance my father left me was not what he had but what he was. He was a man of integrity; he was humble and often admitted his own failures. He was generous and compassionate. Above all, he was a man of deep faith in God. That's the inheritance that I most treasure, the inheritance of the character of my father." As children of God, we can say the same. Our greatest inheritance is not the abundance of things the Father gives us, but the character of his Son which the Spirit of his Son is forming within us.

The new community of believers that God is forming is not some unattainable ideal. Paul is in labor pains "until" (μέχρις οὗ) Christ is formed in them. The apostle envisions a maturation point in this process. At the same time, the new reality in Christ and his Spirit will not be complete until the new creation, now dawning, arrives in its fullness (6:15). The process by which Christ is formed in the Galatians paradoxically has a present fulfillment as well as a future fulfillment with Christ's return. Unfortunately, under the influence of the rivals, the Galatians are abandoning what they began in Christ and his Spirit (3:3) and are threatening to return to the present evil age (1:4). So Paul must suffer labor for the Galatians yet again. (CC)

The relationship between Paul’s labor pains in 4:19 and the immediate context has proved difficult to interpret. Most commentators consider 4:19 an emotional outburst interrupting Paul’s expressed desire to be present with the Galatians in 4:18, a point to which he returns in 4:20. An interruption of thought is not likely, however. Gal 4:19 contributes to the flow of thought in the immediate context. In 4:17–18 Paul favors a good approach to courting people over a bad approach. What better example for a positive sort of courting than the self-sacrificial love of a mother in the pains of childbirth for her very own children! Paul may view his apostolic ministry as mirroring and embodying Christ’s own sacrificial suffering on behalf of humanity. Whereas the rival teachers threaten to exclude the Galatians (4:17), Paul desperately desires to be *present* with the Galatians as a mother with her children. (CC)

Paul concludes in 4:20 (δέ) by lamenting that he wants to be with them at that very moment and to change his voice. Letters are imperfect substitutes for a person’s physical presence, but there may be more to Paul’s desire to be present.<sup>168</sup> The weakness of Paul’s flesh helps display the cross of Christ (4:13–15; 6:17). He is a physical representation of his message (3:1). Paul’s physical presence would model a different sort of “mark” than the circumcision the Galatians were being encouraged to receive under the influence of the rival Jewish-Christian teachers. Hence Paul is in labor pains for children who are, ironically, far away from his womb at the moment. Despite his earnest desire to be present, Paul does not mention any plans for a future visit even though the situation is clearly critical. In other letters, he regularly mentions plans for upcoming visits (Rom 15:22–33; 2 Cor 12:14–13:10; cf. Phil 2:19–24). Apparently, Paul is unable at this point to travel to Galatia. Is he experiencing a crisis situation in the very location from which he writes? Paul may have been preoccupied by the crisis situation at Antioch that forced him to go to Jerusalem (Acts 15; cf. Gal 2:1–14). (CC)

When Paul says “change” or perhaps “exchange” (ἀλλάξει) in 4:20, he does not mean that he wants to *exchange* the voice heard in his letters for his personal presence in a visit. Rather, he would like to *change* his voice in the sense of his reproachful tone (cf. the harsh tone in 1:6–9; 3:1–5; 4:8–11; 5:12). Precisely because he is “at a loss” (4:20), he is unable to change his tone. The emotional pitch of Paul’s appeal in 4:19 confirms that Paul is speaking of a change in his tone rather than an exchange of letters for a visit. (CC)

Some scholars have noted that Paul’s statement of being “at a loss” (ἀποροῦμαι) is a common rhetorical device called *dubitatio* in antiquity (cf. Acts 25:20; 2 Cor 4:8). Paul’s expression of shock and perplexity at the situation may also signal that he does not know the entirety of the situation at Galatia.<sup>176</sup> In any case, the rhetorical device conveys a sense of the broken relationship. The Galatians have abandoned Paul for his rivals and left him in a state of perplexity with respect to his family. Paul’s “pathos” is hardly feigned, nor is this mother finished giving birth! The problem is that he is not the only mother trying to give birth (4:21–31). (CC)

**4:19** τέκνα (“children”; vocative)—This reading is supported by  $\aleph^*$  B D\* G it Marcion, which constitute slightly better attestation than the alternative reading τεκνία (“little children”):  $\aleph^c$  A C Byzantine Clement. Paul always uses τέκνα (“children”) for his relationship with his converts (1 Cor 4:14–15, 17 [as a father]; 2 Cor 6:13; 12:14; 1 Thess 2:7; 2:11–12 [as a father]; in the singular in Phil 2:22; Philemon 10 [as a father]; cf. 4:28). Some commentators have concluded that the diminutive τεκνία (“little children”) would be the more difficult reading since it differs from Paul’s normal word for his convert children, and the unusual metaphor of a pregnant mother giving birth here offers further support for the diminutive. At the same time, a scribe may just as easily be tempted by the image of a mother giving birth to alter Paul’s original τέκνα to τεκνία.

οὓς (“whom”)—After the neuter τέκνα (“children”; or neuter τεκνία, “little children”), one would expect the neuter relative pronoun ἃ. The masculine pronoun οὓς matches the sense of the verse and is the direct object of ὠδίνω (see the next textual note).

ὠδίνω (“I am suffering labor pains”)—The verb here is being used transitively with the Galatians as the object of Paul’s labor pains. The intransitive use of the verb may refer to literal birth pains or, in a figurative sense, to intense emotional or physical suffering. The transitive use of the verb, on the other hand, is rarely metaphorical and, when metaphorical, is not used with a concrete object. Paul’s metaphorical, transitive usage with the Galatian community as the concrete object is therefore unusual. (CC)

*My little children.* For Paul’s affectionate relationship to his converts see Ac 20:37–38; Php 4:1; 1Th 2:7–8. The expression occurs only here in Paul’s writings, but is common in John’s (e.g., Jn 13:33; 1Jn 2:1; 3:7). (CSB)

A term of endearment (1Co 4:14–15; 1Th 2:11–12). (TLSB)

And at the end Paul speaks to them in as tender of words as you’re going to hear him speak. He says to them: My children, my little children. These are tender words. My little children, for whom I am again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. (Just V-33)

*anguish of childbirth ... Christ is formed in you!* Paul is like a mother in travail, but he does not labor to bring forth children in his own likeness—Paul has no use for Paulinists (cf 1Co 1:12–13). The Gospel he speaks is to bring forth Christians, men and women in whom Christ is formed, in whom Christ lives. Cf 2:20; 2Co 4:16; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10. (TLSB)

*until Christ is formed in you.* The goal of Paul’s ministry (see Ro 8:29; Eph 4:13, 15; Col 1:27). (CSB)

Remember that birth imagery? Have I labored over you in vain? Here he uses it again. I am in birth pains until Christ is formed in you. (Just – V 33)

**4:20** ἤθελον (“I wish”)—The imperfect tense is unexpected. One would have expected the present tense when speaking of “this very moment” (ἄρτι). Perhaps this is an “epistolary imperfect,” in which case Paul is writing from the point of view of the recipients of the letter: he *had been* wanting to be in Galatia at the time he wrote the letter. An epistolary imperfect would be a highly unusual usage. Others have suggested a conative imperfect to indicate a tentative future visit.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Paul uses the imperfect tense as a polite idiom. Whatever the case, he is speaking of the present (ἄρτι) and not of a future wish. ἤθελον may be the apodosis of an understood conditional with ἄν omitted: ἤθελον [ἄν, εἰ δυνατόν ἦν] παρεῖναι πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἄρτι (“I would wish [if it had been possible] to be with you at this very moment”).

ἄρτι (“at this very moment”)—Paul uses ἄρτι and not νῦν, “now.”

ἀποροῦμαι ἐν ὑμῖν (“I am at a loss because of you”)—The middle of ἀπορέω has virtually the same meaning as the active form. ἐν ὑμῖν expresses the cause or occasion of the perplexity. (CC)

*I wish I could be present with you now* – And there he means not in you personally but in your congregations. So that Christ is preached as the crucified and risen one. And that alone is the Gospel that’s preached. And then Paul says something where you can see as a pastor he knows his presence is important. He says: I wish to be with you now. He wants to be present with them. (Just – V-33)

*my tone.* Lit, “voice.” (TLSB)

*I am perplexed about you* – And change my tone. And that's a very important thing. Because he could see the tone of his letters, there's a harshness there. There's a distress. They can hear it in his letters. But he wants to be able to communicate with them personally. He wishes he were there present with them. And he says: For I am perplexed about you. Literally I am at my wit's end over you. (Just – V 33)

**4:8–20** Paul appeals to the Galatians as a pastor with affection and tenderness, genuinely desiring to restore their friendship and especially the freedom in Christ they once so gladly embraced. Tragically, enemies of the Gospel continue to camouflage their dishonorable intentions as they seek to draw people away from Christ. When pastors proclaim the Gospel, Christ Himself is inviting all to return to Him for forgiveness and renewal of faith. • Heavenly Father, I pray for all ministers of the Word and the blessings they bring. Through them, open our eyes to the truth. Amen. (TLSB)

*Example of Hagar and Sarah*

**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 and one by a free woman. 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. 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.” 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. 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.**

**4:21-31** Now, these ten verses here do provide an interpretation of Genesis that is unique to Paul. And I want to point out a few things that I think you're going to find to be very interesting. But I think the best way to approach this is simply to work through it. So let's just do that. And as we work through it, keep in mind that this is the final exegetical section in which he is talking about Genesis 16 to 21. And the same theme is here: The identity, the birth identity, the genetic identity of the Galatian congregations. Who are they? Who are they? (Just – V-34)

Paul returns in 4:21–31 to the figure of Abraham (cf. 3:6–9, 14, 15–18, 29). The rivals at Galatia likely raised the topic of the patriarch. For many of Paul's Second Temple contemporaries, Abraham was the premiere example of faithfulness to the Law of Moses, that is, in its as-yet unwritten form (Sirach 44:20; *Jub.* 23.10; 24.11; cf. *Jub.* 16.28; 1 Macc 2:52; 2 Bar 57.1–2; *m. Qidd.* 4.14). Not only was Abraham exemplary for his Law observance, he also served as the model convert from paganism. Philo, the first-century Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, described Abraham's journey from his pagan starting point to perfection in the one true God (*Abr.*). God called him from his father's household and from his family's idolatry (see also, e.g., *Apoc. Ab.* 1–8). Circumcision, as Philo explained, provided crucial assistance for Abraham in bringing his passions and lusts under control (*Spec.* 1.2 § 9). The rite also marked him as a follower of the one God. All the males in his household, including Ishmael, received circumcision. The rivals would surely have considered themselves on sure Scriptural footing to teach that the children of Abraham are those who likewise receive the mark of circumcision and adopt the path of the Law. Did Paul's rivals promote Abraham as a model of conversion and deliverance from the flesh's desires? Did they advocate Abraham's Law observance as a solution to the passions? Such conclusions are probable in view of the role of Abraham in Second Temple Jewish thought. (CC)

Second Temple Jews had strong opinions about who the true children and beneficiaries of Abraham's promises were. *Jub.* 16.16–18, a Jewish document from the second century BC, identifies the Jews with the progeny of Isaac and the gentiles with the progeny of Ishmael (trans. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*):

And through Isaac a name and seed would be named for him [Abraham]. And all of the seed of his [Abraham's] sons would become nations. And they would be counted with the nations. But from the sons of Isaac one would become a holy seed and he would not be counted among the nations because he would become the portion of the Most High ... so that he might become a people (belonging) to the Lord, a (special) possession from all people, and so that he might become a kingdom of priests and a holy people. (CC)

The chosen people who enjoyed the Abrahamic covenant were the Jews, whereas the Ishmaelites, stand-ins for the gentiles, lived in ignorance and sin apart from Abraham's inheritance. One can imagine the rivals telling the stories of Abraham while gently encouraging the Galatian gentiles to be circumcised and to obey the Law of Moses in order to become Abraham's children and heirs (cf. Gen 17:19–21). Such Jewish-Christian teaching would continue into the second century AD and beyond. The Jewish-Christian *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 1.17.3 describes a Law-observant mission to the gentiles. The *Epistle of Peter to James* 2.3, another Jewish-Christian text that may be dated to the second century, refers to two gentile missions, one led by Peter and the other by Paul, who is the "enemy" preaching "a lawless and absurd doctrine" (trans. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:494). The second-century Jewish-Christian advocacy of gentile Law observance may represent a trajectory stemming from the rival mission at Galatia and elsewhere. (CC)

Many of Paul's unique twists in 4:21–31 confirm that the rivals were teaching the Galatians on the basis of the Abrahamic texts. In Genesis Isaac was the beneficiary of the Abrahamic covenant. Paul, for his part, recognizes the covenant with Isaac but speaks also of *another* covenant with Ishmael. Whereas in Genesis Abraham promptly carried out God's command to circumcise his household, the apostle completely ignores any mention of the "eternal covenant" of circumcision (בְּרִית עוֹלָם, Gen 17:7, 13, 19; cf. Gen 21:4). "It is written" (γέγραπται) in Gal 4:22 introduces an interpretive summary of Genesis 16–18; 21, whereas elsewhere Paul employs that verb to introduce direct quotations of the biblical text (γέγραπται in Gal 3:10, 13; 4:27). These departures are telltale signs that circumstances have dictated the discussion. He is not raising the Abrahamic narratives of his own accord.<sup>40</sup> Paul never mentions Sarah or Ishmael by name but assumes the Galatians' knowledge of these characters. Descriptive epithets will apparently suffice. Paul is responding to his rivals' use of the Scriptural texts. (CC)

The departures from Genesis are at times surprising. When Paul mentions the Abrahamic "covenant" in 3:15–18, he completely ignores the covenant God made with Moses at the giving of the Law, a covenant grounded in God's dealings with Abraham. No, the Law came four hundred thirty years *after* the time of Abraham and bears no connection to the Abrahamic covenant (3:17). In 4:21–31 Paul returns to that potential connection between the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. This time he grants an association, but Mount Sinai is shockingly linked with Hagar and Ishmael's covenant of slavery rather than with Sarah and Isaac's covenant of freedom. Paul daringly turns the biblical traditions on their heads when he associates Ishmael with the *present Jerusalem* and uncircumcised gentiles with *Isaac*, the child of promise! As Richard Hays put it: "Paul is executing a bold counter-reading, reversing the polarity of the story." Luther commented: "I for my part would not have had the courage to handle this allegory in this manner" (AE 26:438). Such "audacity" "seems prompted less by his own interpretive imagination than by circumstances." Surely Paul would never mention these Abrahamic covenant texts with their emphasis on circumcision (esp. Genesis 17; cf. Gen 21:1–4) unless he were forced to do so. The contortions of the Genesis narrative convey his discomfort. (CC)

In response to the rivals, Paul structures his discussion of the Abrahamic texts with a series of stark contrasts. In 4:23 those begotten according to the *flesh* stand opposed to those begotten according to the *promise*. Bearing children into *slavery* in 4:24 is contrasted with being mothered by *freedom* in 4:26. In 4:29 Paul speaks of two children: one born according to the *flesh* and the other born according to the *Spirit*. He speaks of the *present Jerusalem* in contrast to the *Jerusalem above* (4:25–26). In short, flesh-slavery-present Jerusalem is contrasted with Spirit-freedom-heavenly Jerusalem. Surprisingly, Paul includes *Sinai* on the negative side of this divide. Gal 4:21–31 is therefore laying a foundation for Paul’s admonitions against the Mosaic Law in 5:1–12. The series of harsh, striking contrasts is rhetorically pointed. He hopes to steal his rivals’ thunder. (CC)

Paul’s departures from Genesis are, of course, vulnerable to challenge from the rival advocates of circumcision. The apostle is well aware that he is not treating Genesis in the ordinary literal manner. He signals in 4:24 that he is interpreting allegorically (ἀλληγορούμενα, *allēgoroumena*, “taken figuratively/allegorically”). Modern presuppositions regarding “allegorical” interpretation, however, are not the same as those of the ancients. Tryphon, a late first-century AD Alexandrian grammarian, describes ἀλληγορία: “*Allegoria* is an enunciation which, while signifying one thing literally, brings forth the thought of something else.” Heraclitus, another first-century AD Alexandrian grammarian, offers a similar description: “The trope that says one thing but signifies something other than what is said is called by the name *allegoria* [ἀλληγορία].” For Paul, the slave woman and the free woman stand for two covenants. (CC)

Some have debated whether Paul’s phrasing in 4:24 (ἅτινα ἐστὶν ἀλληγορούμενα) should be translated as “these things are *spoken* allegorically” or “these things are *being interpreted* allegorically.” Hellenistic and Jewish authors employ ἀλληγορέω both ways. To “speak allegorically” would refer to the Genesis text itself whereas to “interpret allegorically” would refer to *Paul’s* interpretation of the Genesis text. In other words, if Paul were saying that the Genesis texts are “spoken allegorically,” then he would be claiming that they should not be taken on their own terms as referring to actual events. The modern interpreter must recognize that Paul is not dismissing but rather assuming the factual nature of the Genesis account. He explains his interpretive approach in 4:25: Hagar “is aligned with” or “corresponds to” (συστοιχεῖ) the present Jerusalem. The translation “taken figuratively” in 4:24 (instead of “spoken allegorically”) helps avoid the mistaken notion that Paul does not take Genesis at face value. The intensely polemical nature of Paul’s discussion here must be kept in mind as he shockingly associates Mount Sinai with the children of Hagar. As Paul responds to the manner in which these texts were interpreted and taught by others at Galatia, he signals clearly his non-literal approach. (CC)

Although Paul is addressing concerns raised by his rivals, his thoughts in 4:21–31 advance several motifs from earlier in the letter. He continues his discussion of slavery (4:22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31; cf. 4:1, 3, 7, 8, 9). His contrast of the flesh and the Spirit (4:23, 29) recalls 3:2, 3, 5, 14; 4:6. The language of inheritance and the heir in 4:30 (quoting Is 54:1) builds on 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7. Throughout 3:1–4:7 Paul argues that the baptized Galatian believers are children of God; in this paragraph the process of childbearing comes to the fore. Paul’s mention of the “Law” in 4:21 continues a discussion that began in Galatians 2. What is new, however, is the emphasis in this paragraph on the free woman: Paul has mentioned “freedom” (ἐλευθερία) previously only in 2:4. By 5:1, a key moment of transition in the letter, Paul will doubly emphasize that very freedom (ἐλευθερία and ἐλευθερόω, 5:1; see also ἐλευθερία twice in 5:13). (CC)

J. Louis Martyn has emphasized in his work on 4:21–31 that Paul is not denigrating Judaism as such. The apostle had just been speaking of his own ministry for Christ in terms of a *mother giving birth* (4:19). When the apostle turns to two mothers giving birth in 4:21–31, he appears to be contrasting his own Law-free missionary movement with the Jewish-Christian rivals’ Law-observant mission to the gentiles. Another clue pointing for Martyn to the two Christ-believing gentile missions is Paul’s use of γεννάω, “to father, beget, bear children,” or in the passive, “to be born,” for the respective pregnancies and deliveries

of the two women (4:23, 24, 29). The use of γεννάω is a departure from LXX Genesis 16–21, which never uses γεννάω for Hagar or Sarah but instead employs τίκτω, “to bear a child,” an appropriate verb for women giving birth. Instead of τίκτω as in LXX Genesis 16–21, Paul chooses γεννάω five times (!) in this paragraph (4:23 [twice], 24 [twice], 29). The Septuagint uses γεννάω for *male* “fathering” or “begetting,” that is, for the father’s role in producing children. Indeed, Paul speaks of his own “begetting” (γεννάω) activity in 1 Cor 4:14–15 and Philemon 10. Furthermore, the present tense of the feminine *present* participle “bearing [children]” (γεννώσα) in 4:24 reinforces the sense that he is describing realities current in his day. The one covenant is bearing children into slavery, and the Galatians appear to be next on the covenantal agenda. Thus, for Martyn, Paul is contrasting the free mother’s bearing of “children” (4:26–28, 31) with the rival Jewish-Christian missionaries’ activity. (CC)

According to Martyn, in 4:21–31 Paul is primarily objecting to the wrongful imposition of the Law on gentile Christians: “It is a grave mistake to speak here of a polemic against Judaism itself.” Martyn wanted to distinguish between the Sinai covenant on its own terms and that covenant as *imposed on gentile Christians*. Nevertheless, as Martyn conceded, the Law remains utterly impotent in curbing sin. He recognized that Paul makes “a causative connection between the Sinai covenant and enslavement.”<sup>64</sup> Although the apostle’s primary purpose is to confront the Law-observant gentile mission, the claims he makes about the salvific inefficacy of the Law have profound implications for a Judaism apart from Christ (see also 2:21; 3:21). Certainly Paul’s target is his Jewish-Christian rivals, but the modern attempt to rescue Paul from anti-Semitism must not ignore what he concretely says about the Mosaic Law as an ineffective instrument for a right standing before God. (CC)

An appreciation of the cultural context of Paul’s remarks is helpful for interpreting 4:21–31. North and south Galatia are both located in the ancient land of Anatolia. Central Anatolia was a melting pot of peoples of diverse origins: Hittite, Persian, Greek, Gallic, and Roman. The Anatolians in both the north and the south worshiped the Mountain Mother of the Gods. In the northern lands, for instance, Pessinus served in effect as a temple state with sacred slaves and a temple hierarchy ruled by a priest-king, Attis, who was the object of the goddess’ affection. Overlooking this major center of trade was Mount Dindymus, known to the inhabitants as “Meter Dindymene,” “the Mother of the Gods.” The inhabitants of the city were her “children.” The Mother Goddess was also one of the “enforcer deities” who oversaw the legal system. Laws and property deeds were stored in the city of Athens, for example, at the temple of the Mother of the Gods. One group of slaves serving the Mother Goddess were called the “galloi.” They were young men who, caught up in the frenzy of the orgiastic rituals, castrated themselves to demonstrate their loyalty and to begin their service to the Mother Goddess. Susan M. (“Elli”) Elliott, in her doctoral work, called attention to the numerous parallels between the Mother Goddess cult and Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In 4:21–31 Paul associates the Law with a mother, Hagar, as well as with a mountain, Sinai, and this mother has her children as well. Later in 5:12 Paul mocks circumcision as a sort of galloi-like mutilation. Paul’s rhetoric against the slave woman Hagar, a.k.a. Mount Sinai, would be heard by the Galatians within this cultural context. In a stroke of rhetorical genius, Paul communicates to his Anatolian hearers that the adoption of the Jewish Law is the equivalent of a return to the harsh bondage and oppression of their pagan past. (CC)

Paul’s contrast of the earthly Jerusalem of ethnic Jews with the heavenly Jerusalem of Jewish and gentile Christ-believers would also have resonated from a cultural standpoint. The Jews of Paul’s day treated Jerusalem as the mother-city, even for the Jewish colonies in the Diaspora (e.g., Philo, *Legat.* 36 §§ 281–83; similarly Josephus, *Ant.* 11.5.6 § 160; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.19.2 § 517; 2.21.7 § 626; 4.4.2 §§ 234–35; Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.28). In Greek thought, Plato had contrasted the typical earthly city with its heavenly, ideal counterpart (*Resp.* 9.592A–B). The Platonic distinction became especially popular in Stoic thought as the Stoics developed the notion of a dual citizenship in both the earthly and the heavenly city. Seneca explains that the heavenly city belongs to *all* people and not just Athenians or Carthaginians or any other particular people (*De otio* 4.1). The philosophers Zeno and Chrysippus were therefore serving the

interests of what stands beyond any one city (Seneca, *De otio* 6.4: the whole human race for the ages to come; 8.1–3). Dio Chrysostom encourages the earthly city to be ruled according to the model of the heavenly city. He adds that the heavenly city is not limited to people from a particular earthly city (*Borysth.* [Or. 36].27). The Galatians may have recognized the contours of Paul’s rhetoric and their inclusion, even as non-Jews, in the Jerusalem above.

The paragraph may be outlined as follows:

- 4:21 Introduction to the Paragraph
- 4:22–27 The Allegory and Its Interpretation (enclosed by “for it is written” in 4:22, 27)
  - 4:22–23 Allegory
  - 4:24–27 Interpretation
- 4:28–31 Application and Appeal (enclosed by “children of promise/of the free woman” in 4:28, 31, and the “you”/“we” direct address in 4:28, 31)
  - 4:28 Identification of the Galatians
  - 4:29 Persecution by Ishmael’s Descendants
  - 4:30 Expel the Agitators!
  - 4:31 Identification of the Galatians (CC)

**4:21** οἱ ... θέλοντες (“O people who want”)—This is an articular vocative. (CC)

### **Introduction to the Paragraph (4:21) (CC)**

*Tell me, O people who want to be under the Law, are you not listening to the Law?* Paul begins the new paragraph with an abrupt, challenging change of tone. Implied in the question is the notion that the Galatians do not, in fact, understand what Law observance entails. To be under the Law is to suffer its awful curse (3:10) and to fall prey to the power of sin (3:22). Paul addresses the Galatian assemblies in toto as gentiles who “want” to be under the Law (cf. 4:9). He could very easily have singled out those within the congregations who were serious about assuming Law observance, had he wanted to do so, by simply including the pronoun “you” (ὁμεῖς). A “you” (plural) would have pointed to the subgroup within the Galatian assemblies attracted to the Law of Moses.<sup>73</sup> That the audience wants to observe the Law implies that not all the Galatian gentiles have yet taken upon themselves the yoke of the Law. Apparently the temptation is widespread enough to address the matter to all the Galatians. (CC)

Paul asks: “Are you not listening to the Law?” Some of the Western texts and some versions have “are you not *reading*?” (ἀναγινώσκετε; D G it vg cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> arm; cf. Acts 8:30). “Read” is a later adaptation that reflects the experience of the scribal copyists since ordinary people in antiquity did not have ready access to written copies of texts. Paul asks those who want to be “under the Law” if they hear the Law. Paul’s point effectively is this: If you wish to heed the Law’s witness, you must *understand* these Scriptures. From the apostle’s perspective, the Galatians do not. The apostle is treating the Mosaic Law from two different perspectives. The Law is heard; it testifies. Paul also treats the Law as an enslaving agent “under” which people labor (see 3:22; 4:4). The Law is both a legal demand that enslaves as well as a Scriptural witness that testifies to God’s grace and promises. The slavery implicit in the oppressive phrase “under the Law” becomes explicit in the ensuing verses. (CC)

**YOU WANT TO BE UNDER THE LAW** –Now, he starts here with his first imperative in a long time. And you’re going to see that the imperatives are now going to come fast and furiously to the end of the epistle. And he starts by saying: Speak to me, tell me, those of you who wish to be under the power of the law. Now, this is law in its negative sense. As an enslavement. Those of you who wish to be that way. And he’s speaking to the Galatians. And he’s speaking somewhat facetiously, ironically here. You who want to be under the law, if that’s what you want to do, why do you not listen to the law? Now, this is the first positive reference to the law in Galatians. And he’s speaking here about torah. Why don’t you



listen to what Moses wrote in the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Why don't you listen to what it says? Now, there's sarcasm there. And he's appealing now to Genesis. Let's listen to Moses. Those of you who wish to live under the power of the law. (Just – V-34)

The first usage refers to law as a state of enslavement under Moses' Commandments, and requiring liberation (4:5; cf 5:18). The second usage designates the Books of Moses or Scripture in general, since what follows is based on the history in Gn 16–21. (TLSB)

**4:22–23** The false teachers and Paul related the same biblical story but probably with sharply different interpretations. The story: Unable to bear children, Abraham's wife, Sarah, gave Abraham a son, Ishmael, through her Egyptian slave Hagar (Gn 16:1–16; 17:18). Years later and past their childbearing years, Abraham (age 100) and Sarah (90) received God's promise that Sarah would bear a son, whom they named Isaac. The interpretation: The teachers likely argued that the uncircumcised Gentiles corresponded to Ishmael and were illegitimate sons, not true descendants of Abraham. Paul, conversely, declared that uncircumcised Gentile believers corresponded to Isaac, the son of the promise. Paul contrasts the births of Abraham's two sons according to the status of their mothers. Ishmael's mother was Hagar, the slave woman; Isaac's mother was Sarah, the free woman (Gn 16:15; 21:2–3). The apostle then contrasts the way the sons were born, Ishmael by natural birth and Isaac naturally but through God's promise (Gn 17:19; 18:10). (TLSB)

### **The Allegory (4:22–23)**

**4:22–23** *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. But the one, of the slave woman, has been born as a result of the flesh; the other, of the free woman, [has been born] through promise.* With 4:22 Paul turns to the testimony of the Law as Scripture: “for it is written.” Elsewhere Paul employs this formula to introduce Scriptural quotes (thus, e.g., 3:10, 13). What follows here, however, is not a quote but rather a summary of one aspect of the Abrahamic story (Gen 16:15; 17:15–21; 18:10, 14; 21:1–9). Paul does not mention several of the key Genesis figures by name, which may well reflect the Galatians' familiarity with these stories.<sup>78</sup> The apostle's use of these texts is pointed against the rivals. He calls Sarah not by name but rather “the free woman.” No such adjective is in the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, but Paul's use of the adjective clearly reflects his own emphases as he declares the Christian believer's freedom in the ensuing verses (4:31; 5:1, 13). Earlier in the letter Paul criticizes those who came to spy on his freedom (2:4). He contrasts the son with the slave (4:7). Now Paul places the slave/free contrast back on center stage with the Genesis narrative and is asking his readers to consider again the nature and status of Abraham's heir (thus resuming the topic of 3:6–4:7).

In yet another departure from the Genesis account, Paul characterizes the son of the free woman as begotten/born “through promise” (δι' ἐπαγγελίας) and the son of the slave woman as born/begotten “as a result of the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα, 4:23). The Greek verb Paul uses (γεννάω) means “beget” when in reference to a father and “bear” when in reference to a mother. Paul has employed birthing imagery in 4:19 (for himself!) and uses the verb γεννάω for a mother's “bearing” children in 4:24. The verb in 4:23 should be translated, then, as “bear.” Nevertheless, Paul refers in his other letters to how he has “begotten” spiritual children (the same verb in 1 Cor 4:14–15; Philemon 10). He is clear in 4:19 that *his* birthing activity is at issue immediately before contrasting his own children with those of his rivals (4:22–31). Paul therefore chooses a verb that may carry the sense of both “beget” and “bear.” The perfect tense (γεγέννηται, “has been born”) signals the continuation of these respective birthing ministries.

The contrast of “flesh” and “promise” in 4:23 is more fitting with respect to the Abrahamic narrative than a contrast of “flesh” and “Spirit” (as in 3:3 or 5:16–26). The “Spirit” does not figure in the Abrahamic texts but God's Word of promise does (Gen 15:4; 17:17, 21; 18:10, 14; 21:1–2). Although Paul has just discussed the promise to Abraham in Galatians 3 and related it to the Spirit (Gal 3:14), the

prepositional phrase here, “through promise” (δι’ ἐπαγγελίας), is somewhat surprising. Paul’s hearers would expect “as a result of [κατά] the promise” (κατ’ ἐπαγγελίαν, as in 3:29). Paul’s choice of preposition invites reflection. In 3:18 he emphasizes the effectiveness of the promise as God’s means of blessing Abraham. God’s promises are an expression of his powerful, reality-generating Word (cf. Gen 1:3; Is 55:11), which is probably Paul’s intended sense here as well. Isaac’s conception took a divine miracle (Gen 17:15–21; 18:10, 14). He was begotten “through promise” (Gal 4:23). As Luther noted (AE 26:434–35), Abraham went in to Hagar with Sarah’s permission and at her behest. No voice or Word of God directed this decision. Unlike Ishmael, Isaac was born with the power and promise of God’s Word. The circumstances of the respective births of Ishmael and Isaac are important for Paul’s purposes as he contrasts God’s genuine power with what is the result of mere flesh. The rivals, in their emphasis on circumcision and human observance of God’s Law, are effectively relying on the “flesh” (4:23). The characters in the Genesis narrative are themselves secondary to this contrast between flesh and promise and therefore remain unnamed until 4:25 (for Hagar) and 4:28 (for Isaac).

In 1925 the Nuzi tablets were unearthed near the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk. These fourteen–thirteenth century BC tablets were produced by an even more ancient culture and have helped illumine customs presupposed in the Pentateuch. In Nuzi marriage contracts, if a wife proved barren, she was obligated to offer to her husband a substitute wife for the sake of legal heirs. Sarah offered Hagar to Abraham in Genesis 16. (Leah and Rachel did the same for Jacob in Genesis 30.) Abraham’s actions were likely accepted practice in his day. Paul, for his part, did not have access to the Nuzi tablets. Abraham’s “going in” to Hagar (Gen 16:4) might have been viewed in Paul’s day—as is the case for many modern readers—as scandalous. The apostle may have viewed Ishmael as the illegitimate son of a slave woman as opposed to the legitimate son of the wife. “Has been born as a result of *the flesh*” (κατὰ σάρκα) may in that case bear a pejorative reference. On the other hand, “has been born as a result of the flesh” may mean for Paul nothing more than that the conception was by natural means rather than by God’s promise and miraculous intervention. Abraham was a hundred years old, while Sarah was ninety and beyond childbearing years (Gen 18:10–14). In view of Paul’s wider pattern of usage throughout his letters, the juxtaposition of flesh and Spirit, or flesh and promise, likely signals a contrast between God’s gracious, promised action and natural human heredity (cf. Rom 9:6–18). Abraham had sought to fulfill God’s promise by ordinary means with Hagar. Isaac, on the other hand, came as a result of God’s miraculous promise and intervention, just as the Galatians had come to be the children of the free woman!

Both OT and later Jewish literature employed the phrase “son of the slave woman”—perhaps surprisingly for the modern reader—as a self-designation for the Jewish people who were loyal to the Law of God. The sons of the slave woman were the children of God’s covenant with Abraham (Pss 86:16 [LXX 85:16; the handmaid in this context is *Jerusalem*]; 116:16 [LXX 115:7: υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης σου]; Wis Sol 9:4–5 [υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης σου]; 1QS XI.16 [ךבן אִמָּהֶן]; 4Q381 Frag. 15; 4Q381 Frag. 33). Paul has taken a phrase associated with Jewish privilege and turned it into a designation of bondage under the Law. The Law/“Mount Sinai” simply offers no advantage for the Jew, let alone for the gentile Galatians who desire to come “under” it (4:21). (CC)

**4:22** ἔσχεν (“had”)—The aorist tense conveys that Paul was thinking of the respective births of the two sons rather than the fact that Abraham *has* two sons; thus the slave-born (first) son is mentioned before the free-born (second) son. Cf. ἔσχεον in Mt 22:28.

ἓνα ... καὶ ἓνα (“one ... and the other”)—Literally, “one ... and one,” εἷς ... καὶ εἷς is a common construction (e.g., Mt 20:21; 24:40–41; 27:38; Jn 20:12).

τῆς παιδίσκης ... τῆς ἐλευθέρης—The articles with “*the* slave woman” and “*the* free woman” signify well-known individuals. The Galatians would have been familiar with the characters of this story, whether from Paul’s instruction or, more likely, his rivals’ teaching, given their emphasis on the Torah.<sup>3</sup>

Although παιδίσκη (“slave woman”) is the feminine diminutive of παῖς, the word conveys status rather than age (e.g., LXX Gen 16:1; see Acts 12:13; 16:16). It implies little or nothing as to whether the woman is young. (CC)

*two sons.* Ishmael was born to the slave woman, Hagar (Ge 16:1–16), and Isaac to the free woman, Sarah (Ge 21:2–5). (CSB)

And here he begins his allegory now in Verse 22. It is written -- notice that. It is written. So this is Scripture. This is the Word of God. Abraham had two sons. Very true. Never names the sons. Well, he does name Isaac. But he doesn't name Ishmael. Abraham had two sons. He talks about their mothers. One out of a slave woman. And one out of a free woman. Now, if you want the references there, the slave woman is referenced in Genesis 16:15. And the free woman is referenced in Genesis 21:2, 9 and of course in other places, as well. But that's where this language is used. Now, that's important. Two sons. One out of a slave woman. One out of a free woman. So slavery and freedom are now going to be the major topics here. (Just – V-34)

**4:23** ἀλλ' (“but”)—This word signals a second, deeper, ascensive contrast between the two sons. Not only is one a son of the slave woman and the other a son of the free woman, but also one is born according to the flesh and the other through promise. The initial ἀλλά, however, could be left untranslated without losing the sense from the context that this verse is yet a second contrast between the two sons.

ὁ μὲν ... ὁ δέ—(“the [one son] ... the other”)—The μὲν in the text is supported by κ A C D F G 33 1881 and the Majority text, among others. Its omission is supported by ℣<sup>46</sup> B vg and a few others. On internal grounds, Paul is working with a contrast between entities that stand in two opposing columns. The μὲν-δέ contrast helps identify the elements of those contrasting columns (likewise in 4:24). At the same time, the μὲν-δέ contrast need not be overstressed in translation; one may translate the particle combination “the one ... the other” as is often the case in the NT.

κατὰ σάρκα ... δι' ἐπαγγελίας (“as a result of the flesh ... through promise”)—In 4:29 Paul's phrase κατὰ πνεῦμα surely means “as a result of the power of the Spirit” (see BDAG, κατὰ, B 5 a δ). Such instrumentality is frequent in the usage of the preposition κατὰ (e.g., 2:2: Paul went up to Jerusalem “as a result of/in accord with” a revelation). The flesh and the Spirit are competing powers with the ability to produce children (cf. Rom 9:8). Paul is contrasting two birthing movements. The Spirit, like the promise, is a *power* at work in the lives of people. Gal 4:21–31 therefore contrasts the ineffectual power of the flesh with the effective power of the promise and the Spirit for begetting free children (of God).

Excellent witnesses, such as ℣<sup>46</sup> κ and A, offer the anarthrous construction δι' ἐπαγγελίας (“through promise”). The arthrous variant διὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας is more weakly attested in B D G and the Majority text.

γεγέννηται (“has been born”)—Since 4:22 began with a perfect (γέγραπται), an aorist (ἐγεννήθην) could have been used here: γέγραπται ... ὅτι ... ἐγεννήθην, “it is written that ... *he was* born.” The perfect γεγέννηται, “has been born” (which could also be translated as “was begotten”) with reference to an OT event may have an exemplary sense. In other words, according to BDF § 342 (5), the perfect tense in 4:23's ὁ μὲν ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης κατὰ σάρκα **γεγέννηται** (“the one [son], of the slave woman, has been born as a result of the flesh”) is effectively **γέγραπται** ὅτι ἐγεννήθην (“it has been written [i.e., an example of continuing relevance] that he was born”). Wallace identified what he called a “perfect of allegory,” that is, a past event viewed in terms of its contemporary significance and value (thus Jn 6:32; Acts 7:35 [possibly]; Heb 7:6, 9; 8:5; 11:17, 28). The son who was begotten thus prefigures other sons being begotten in like manner “as a result of the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα). (CC)

*by a slave...free woman* – And he says in Verse 23: But the one who was begotten out of the slave woman was begotten, born, begotten according to the flesh. And I think here we would want to translate that: By the power of the flesh. But the one out of the free woman was begotten by the power of the promise. The promise. Now, there you have slave woman, flesh. Free woman, promise. (Just – V-34)

Now, we know who they are talking about. They are talking about Hagar and Sarah. And what's interesting is Sarah is never mentioned here. Hagar is. And Ishmael is never mentioned. But Isaac is. So the mother of the -- kind of the -- not illegitimate son but the son to whom the promise wasn't given. But the son to whom the promise is mentioned is given. Now that's not insignificant. And what we see here is the crucial point. The crucial point are the two mothers and their sons. (Just – V-34)

Now, let me just speak parenthetically here for a minute. A number of years ago I had a chance to teach this to what are called the POBLO students here. These are People of the Book of Lutheran Outreach. These are a former people from Islam, from Muslim who have become Christians, they are Lutherans. And they are doing wonderful work particularly in the Detroit area but all over the country it for all intents and purposes. In Texas. Everywhere. And when we got to this point in Galatians, they were fascinated. Because Islam traces its roots through Ishmael and of course Christianity through Isaac. And so they wanted to know all about what Paul is doing here in it's allegory. So in other words, this allegory which may seem like an ancient kind of long, you know -- I don't know what you want to call it. It's kind of a -- something that doesn't apply to us anymore, for these people who have gone from Islam to Christianity, this is the most applicable section of Galatians that they had. And they told me something that I never knew. Maybe you know this. But I never knew it. That the people of Islam, in order to become Islam, you must be circumcised. I didn't know that. Now, whether or not that is insisted upon I think is another story. But that is in fact the way it should be if you are to become Islam. So they were also interested in the whole circumcision metaphor. So there's something going on here that's very, very pertinent today for people that are coming out of another religion into Christianity. Namely, Islam. (Just – V-34)

### The Interpretation (4:24–27) (CC)

**4:24** ἅτινα (“these things”)—This neuter plural form of ὅστις has taken over the function of the simple neuter relative pronoun ἃ, as also in 5:19 (cf. Phil 3:7; Col 2:23), even as ἦτις has taken over for ἦ in Gal 4:24, 26; BDF § 293: “They [ὅς and ὅστις] are no longer clearly distinguished in the NT.”<sup>8</sup>

ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα (“are being taken figuratively” or “are being interpreted allegorically”)—The verb ἀλληγορέω is a hapax legomenon in the NT and in very early Christian literature. It appears for the first time in Philo (*Cher.* 8 § 25) only a few decades before Paul. Cicero (*Orat.* 27 § 94) cites the use of the noun ἀλληγορία (“allegory”) by the Greeks. In a recent article Di Mattei contended that ἀλληγορέω should always be translated as “speak allegorically.” Di Mattei, however, conceded in his linguistic data that some Hellenistic and Jewish authors use ἀλληγορέω for “interpret allegorically.” Both translations are therefore possible and must be decided by Paul’s context.

μία μὲν ἀπὸ ὄρους Σινᾶ εἰς δουλείαν γεννῶσα (“one from Mount Sinai bearing [children] into slavery”)—The phrase ἀπὸ ὄρους Σινᾶ may be *adjectival*, modifying “covenant”: “the one [covenant] from Mount Sinai [is] bearing [children] into slavery,” or it may be *adverbial*, modifying γεννῶσα, “bearing [children]”: “one [covenant] bearing [children] from Mount Sinai into slavery.” The adverbial interpretation of the phrase avoids the need to supply “is” (ἐστί), which then splits up “from Mount Sinai” and “bearing into slavery.” The meaning is not significantly changed. Either way, those associated with the Sinai covenant are being born “into slavery.”

ἣτις ἐστὶν Ἀγάρ (“which is Hagar”)—For ἣτις, see the first textual note on 4:24. The verb εἰμί, “is,” in allegorical or figurative contexts can be translated as “represents” or “stands for” (e.g., Mt 13:38). Of the two “covenants” (διαθήκαι), the “one” (μία) portrayed in the second half of 4:24 is the slave woman Hagar—thus the string of feminine terms: διαθήκαι, μία ... γεννῶσα, ἣτις ... Ἀγάρ. (CC)

*These things are being taken figuratively. For these women are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai bearing [children] into slavery, which is Hagar. Paul seizes the Genesis Abrahamic texts in use by his rivals in order to clarify the current situation at Galatia. At the beginning of 4:24 he signals to his hearers*

that he is going to interpret Genesis “figuratively.” Consequently, the surprising twists in his interpretation are not unexpected. Paul immediately elaborates *how* (“for” [γάρ]) he interprets Genesis figuratively: He takes the two women in Abraham’s life as two covenants. After beginning with “one” (μία) of the covenants, he never returns to the other (no corresponding δέ). After associating the one Abrahamic covenant with Mount Sinai (as per the teaching of his rivals), he ignores the second, more legitimate covenant. Paul dare not emphasize the legitimate Abrahamic covenant lest he run the risk, in the Galatian context, of perpetuating a confusion of the Abrahamic covenant and Moses’ Law (see the commentary on 3:15–18). Paul takes the safer route. He also seems ambivalent about “covenant” language altogether (note the very brief reference here). Gal 4:24 concludes by identifying the one covenant at Mount Sinai with Hagar “bearing [children] into slavery”! Gal 4:25 takes up this sudden, shocking association of the Law with the slave woman Hagar. (CC)

*may be interpreted allegorically.* The Sarah-Hagar account is not an allegory in the sense that it was nonhistorical, but in the sense that Paul uses the events to illustrate a theological truth. (CSB)

An adverb occurring only here in Gk Bible, used of an analogy or likeness that stands for something different. (TLSB)

Now, going back to Paul, Paul talks now here in Verse 24 about how he is speaking allegorically. Now, what that means is that the two women point beyond themselves to something else. And allegory here is being tempered by what we call typology. It's not pure allegory. It is somewhat typological as well. But it's something that is a symbol or something that points beyond itself. And here is what he says: These two women are two covenants. Now, the idea that there are two covenants in Genesis is a new thought. They are not described. There's only one covenant. And that's the covenant with Isaac through Abraham and the promise given to him by God. There is no covenant given with Hagar and Ishmael. (Just – V-34)

*covenants.* But Paul now speaks of it as two covenants. One he says from Mt. Sinai, which begets churches, bears children. But really it's churches into slavery, which is Hagar. Again, this is interesting because Mt. Sinai is not mentioned in Genesis or in connection with Hagar or Sarah. It's only mentioned in Exodus. But Paul is suggesting here that Mt. Sinai is the covenant that is given to Hagar and Ishmael. This is what he's trying to say. The law. They live under the law. And he even describes that. You know, Hagar is the one -- and let me make sure I translate this right. Now, Hagar is -- yeah, that's exactly right. Now, Hagar is Mt. Sinai in Arabia. Speaking now of the law. Which kind of has as its parallel here he says Jerusalem now. This is the earthly Jerusalem. Who is enslaved now with her children. (Just – V-34)

*Mount Sinai.* Where the old covenant was established, with its law governing Israel’s life (see Ex 19:2; 20:1–17). (CSB)

**4:25** τὸ δὲ Ἀγὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ (“now ‘Hagar-Sinai’ is a mountain in Arabia”)—The beginning of 4:25 is textually disputed. The crucial matter is whether or not Paul mentions Hagar in this clause. These are the possible readings of the original:

1. τὸ δὲ Ἀγὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ (“now Hagar ...”; A B D etc.)
2. τὸ γὰρ Ἀγὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ (K L Ψ [ἐστὶν ὄρος] 33 Byzantine)
3. τὸ γὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ (κ [with ὄν between ἐστὶν and ἐν] F G etc.)
4. τὸ δὲ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ (ℱ<sup>46</sup>)
5. τὸ γὰρ Ἀγὰρ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ (d)

The two main textual issues are (1) whether “Hagar” (Ἀγάρ) should be included and (2) whether the reading should be γάρ or δέ. “Hagar” is included in A B D K and L, but ℱ<sup>46</sup> κ F G omit it. On the addition of ὄν (a neuter singular participle of εἶμι) in κ, Burton noted: “But since without Ἀγάρ there would be no

occasion to insert ὃν, the probability is that Ἀγάρ has fallen out, and that the testimony of κ is really in favour of the presence of Ἀγάρ in the text.” In other words, the external witness for the inclusion of “Hagar” is that much stronger. The inclusion of “Hagar” is more likely on internal grounds since it seems an odd assertion that a scribe would likely have omitted it, especially since Hagar was just mentioned in 4:24. Some commentators have favored τὸ γὰρ Σινᾶ as the original reading and contended that this reading led to Ἀγάρ by dittography from the preceding γάρ. This leads to the question of whether γάρ or δέ is original. The original reading is most likely with δέ. Reading 1 with δέ (τὸ δὲ Ἀγὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ; “now/and [the name] Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia”) could explain the other readings. A scribe probably changed the weak connective δέ (“now/and”), which made little sense, to the stronger explanatory connective with γάρ (“for”) as in the second reading: τὸ γὰρ Ἀγὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ, “for [gar] [the name] Hagar represents Mount Sinai in Arabia.” The switch to *gar* (γάρ, “for”) may also reflect the influence of “Hagar” (Ἀγάρ) on the scribal tradition. The *gar-Hagar* juxtaposition then led to the omission of one or the other, as in reading 3.

Ἱερουσαλήμ (“Jerusalem”)—Paul employs this feminine, singular spelling here and in 4:26 as opposed to the neuter plural spelling Ἱεροσόλυμα in 1:17–18; 2:1. Paul’s use of the feminine singular in 4:25–26 (as in Rom 15:19, 25, 26, 31; 1 Cor 16:3) matches the context’s comparison of two women and agrees with the NT’s exclusive use of the feminine singular Ἱερουσαλήμ for the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem. (CC)

Now “Hagar-Sinai” is a mountain in Arabia; nevertheless she is aligned with the present Jerusalem, because she is in bondage with her children. Despite the textual issues in this verse (see the first textual note on 4:25), Hagar is indisputably present in 4:24 and remains pivotal to Paul’s logic:

- 4:24b These women are two covenants.
- 4:24c One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery, which is Hagar.
- 4:25a For (1) she (Hagar) is Mount Sinai in Arabia (perhaps an obscure proof),
- 4:25b and (2) she (Hagar) corresponds to the present Jerusalem (the seat of the Torah),
- 4:25c for (explanation) she (Jerusalem) is in slavery with her children. (CC)

Paul’s explanation in 4:25c emphasizes the present Jerusalem as a slave mother with her children. The emphasis in 4:25c on a *mother* requires Hagar, and not Sinai, as the subject of 4:25b regardless of the textual variant involved (4:25c is explaining 4:25a–b). Paul is drawing Hagar and the present Jerusalem into close alignment. (CC)

The juxtaposition of “Hagar” with “Sinai” has led some commentators to conclude that Paul is making a wordplay in this passage. Arabia was known as the land of Hagar’s descendants through Ishmael. Hagar had gone south to Beersheba, and Ishmael dwelt in Paran near Sinai (Gen 21:14, 21; Ps 83:6 [MT 83:7]: the “Hagrites”). According to Josephus (*Ant.* 1.12.4 §§ 220–21), the Ishmaelites occupied the Nabatean land from the Euphrates to the Red Sea, including Mount Sinai, as “the Arabian nation.” Sinai was therefore a good distance away, literally and figuratively, for Paul, and thus was associated with Hagar’s descendants. The Arabic word *hajar* means “rock” or “cliff” and would in later times be associated with the Sinai peninsula. “Hagar” (הַגָּר) and “Ḥagra” (חַגְרָא) sounded similar, and a wordplay developed in later Jewish literature associating Hagar with the location of Ḥagra/Sinai. Paul could be saying that “the name ‘Hagar’ is a mountain, Ḥagra [Sinai], in Arabia.”<sup>94</sup> However, “the Arabic *h* does not correspond to the Hebrew ה (*h*), except only roughly in sound.” Paul probably would not have been hindered by that discrepancy as he fashioned his argument.<sup>96</sup> The Arabic name may also have been pronounced with an *h* sound. The Hagar/Ḥagra connection is possible, but unless Hagar somehow figured in the rivals’ teaching, the Galatians would not have been in a position to appreciate such a sophisticated wordplay (in Arabic!). Furthermore, the wordplay is unnecessary to explain Paul’s logic. The association of Ishmael with Arabia in biblical literature would sufficiently account for the apostle’s Hagar-Sinai connection.

Also, the Galatians would likely have recalled Paul’s Arabian sojourn in 1:17. The mention of Arabia here would signal to the Galatians his firsthand knowledge of these matters. (CC)

Paul identifies “Hagar” with “Mount Sinai” in 4:24. Most translations repeat the identification of Hagar and Sinai in 4:25, e.g., “now Hagar is Mount Sinai” (NRSV).<sup>99</sup> Taking “Hagar” and the indeclinable “Sinai” in apposition (τὸ δὲ Ἄγαρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστίν) in 4:25 would remove this redundancy. “Hagar” would function, in effect, adjectivally: “Hagar-Sinai.” “Mountain” (ὄρος) appears to be the predicate of the sentence (ἐστίν). The neuter article (τό) does not likely modify “mountain” (ὄρος) since too much distance separates the words. For many commentators, the article serves to place “Hagar” effectively within quotation marks for the ancient reader: “Now this ‘Hagar,’ mentioned in my previous sentence, represents Mount Sinai in Arabia.” A translation that also recognizes the apposition of “Hagar” and “Sinai” would be “Now this ‘Hagar-Sinai’ is a mountain in Arabia.” Paul’s reasoning in the first half of 4:25 prepares for the latter half: “Now this ‘Hagar-Sinai’ is a mountain in Arabia; nevertheless [δέ] she is aligned with the present Jerusalem.” In other words, the geographical proximity of Hagar to Mount Sinai in Arabia does not stand in the way of associating Hagar with present-day Jerusalem (in Palestine). Ironically, the rivals’ advocacy of the Mosaic Law has rendered the Galatians children not of Sarah but rather of Hagar, the slave woman in Arabia! (CC)

Gal 4:25’s verb συστοιχέω is best translated as “is aligned.” Some translators prefer the English verb “represents”: “she *represents* present-day Jerusalem” (see NEB/REB, NJB). Such a translation fails to recognize that the verb’s root meaning is “to stand in line with” something. The Pythagoreans in antiquity would place the pairs of elements in opposing columns or tables (e.g., male vs. female, hot vs. cold).<sup>104</sup> Paul is likewise constructing two similarly opposing columns. Mount Sinai, however, is aligned with, that is, in the same column as “the present Jerusalem.” Other commentators have suggested translating the verb as “corresponds to.”<sup>106</sup> This translation, unfortunately, is capable of misunderstanding: the items in one column may wrongly be seen as “corresponding to” items in the opposing column (which would require ἀντιστοιχέω, “to stand opposite to” the item in the other column). Paul’s correspondence remains *within* the individual columns. Hagar is aligned with the present-day Jerusalem in slavery.<sup>108</sup> The Law serves only to produce children in confinement and bondage (3:23; cf. 4:3, 9).

flesh	promise
slavery	freedom
born of the flesh	born of the Spirit
present Jerusalem	Jerusalem above
slave woman/Hagar	free woman/[Sarah]
Ishmael	Isaac
Mount Sinai	
Law of Moses	

Paul’s reference in 4:25 to “the present Jerusalem” is open to differing interpretations. Does he mean the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem, or does he mean more specifically the members of the Jerusalem church? In 1:17, 18; 2:1–2 Paul uses “Jerusalem” as a geographical location (cf. Rom 15:19, 25, 26, 31; 1 Cor 16:3–4). In other instances, as J. Louis Martyn has contended, “Jerusalem” serves as a metonym for the Jewish-Christian church there and not for the general Jewish population. Martyn theorized that Paul was

disappointed with the Jerusalem Christian leadership because they did not confront the believers who were adamantly advocating Law observance for the gentiles:

Obviously, the leaders did not directly confront and ultimately vanquish their colleagues. Nor does Paul say that, after the leaders recognized his mission, they instructed the False Brothers henceforth to leave him in peace. Clearly, the acknowledged leaders in Jerusalem did no such thing. Much to Paul's displeasure, then, the False Brothers remained after the meeting what they had been before it: respected and influential members of the Jerusalem church. (CC)

Is Paul censuring the Jerusalem church? Nowhere in the letter does he explicitly fault the Jerusalem pillars for their failure to confront the stricter Jerusalem Christians. What he *does* express in 1:11–2:10 is respect for the Jerusalem “pillars” (2:9). Paul spent a significant period of time visiting Peter and met James, the Lord's brother. In a later visit he shook hands with Peter, John, and James, the Lord's brother, after negotiating an agreement (2:9–10). Why would he change tact in 4:21–31 and suddenly lump the Jerusalem pillars in with the rival parties that openly opposed him? Martyn thought that Paul is respectfully distancing himself from Jerusalem, although this is reading between the lines. To suggest, as Martyn did, that the Jerusalem church in its entirety, including the “pillars” (2:9), is bearing children into slavery, seems unnecessarily extreme. Paul consistently distinguishes a rival sect from the pillars of the Jerusalem church. Although men from James did cause problems for Paul at Antioch (2:11–13), at the time of his letter after that incident had taken place, Paul narrates a very positive meeting with James in 1:19 as well as his negotiations with James (and Peter and John) in 2:1–10. Paul certainly is upset with Peter and the men from James in 2:11–14, but he gives no indication elsewhere in Galatians that he would describe the Jerusalem church as a monolithic entity in bondage. The polemical edge about Paul's comments must be kept in mind. The rival teachers at Galatia apparently valued and claimed Jerusalem's heritage. The rivals' position is, for Paul, analogous to the emphasis on gentile Law observance of the “people ... from James” (2:12). So in the first few chapters of the letter he belabors the exact nature of his relations with Jerusalem, an apparently sensitive topic. Insofar as certain members of the Jerusalem church opposed Paul, he can speak of “the present Jerusalem” (4:25; cf. “the present evil age” in 1:4). The other members of the Jerusalem church are numbered among “the Jerusalem above,” to which Paul turns in 4:26. (CC)

The most serious problem for Martyn's limitation of the enslaved “present Jerusalem” to the Jerusalem church is that whenever Paul speaks of slavery in this letter he is referring to an existence “under the Law” (e.g., 4:21). Jewish Christians are not the only ones potentially “under the Law.” *All Jews* are “under the Law.” Paul never grants that Law-observant Jews can find a right relationship with God through the Law (2:21; 3:21; cf. Phil 3:3–11). Paul criticizes the Law itself as an oppressive, enslaving, cursing entity in Galatians 3; he returns to Mount Sinai in the same breath as Hagar and slavery (4:21–31). He is denigrating the defining mark of Judaism! The ultimate danger “is a failure to grasp the radical implications of the Gospel, in particular of Christ's death and resurrection.” The shock of the connection of Mount Sinai with the slave woman Hagar in Arabia cannot be underestimated! Paul's rivals would consider themselves Abraham's children and the beneficiaries of the Law from Mount Sinai (cf. Jn 8:33)! Although the rival Jewish-Christian missionaries are surely the primary targets of Paul's comments here (with Martyn), the comments are apropos to Judaism in general (against Martyn). The Law simply cannot save; it only enslaves. (CC)

*corresponds to the present Jerusalem.* Jerusalem can be equated with Mount Sinai because it represents the center of Judaism, which is still under bondage to the law issued at Mount Sinai. (CSB)

Now, this is an interesting point of view. Remember, Paul's opponents are saying they are from Jerusalem. They are men from James. And Paul is saying: If you want to go that route, Jerusalem now is the equivalent to Mt. Sinai and Arabia, to Hagar, to Ishmael. Now, you know -- you know that the Jews



from Jerusalem who are now Christians who are coming to Galatia trying to get them to keep the law, they would in no way claim Hagar or Ishmael as their descendants. They are Abraham and Isaac. And I think it's important for us here to see what perhaps Paul's opponents are saying. (Just – V-34)

Now, we don't have this written anywhere. So in a sense you could say I'm making this up. But I think you can see from Paul's argument here, we can read between the lines to see that perhaps this is what they are teaching. They are the ones -- this is Paul's opponents using the language of Sinai, seed of Abraham. Our mother Jerusalem. So Paul turns the tables on them. (Just – V-34)

And this is what they are saying -- and you can see how Paul's argument goes against this. Paul's opponents are saying this: That the law observant descendants of Abraham through Sarah, these are the Isaacs these are the free people. This is who we are. The law observant descendants. Those who keep the law. Whereas they are saying the lawless Gentiles, the Gentiles who have no law, they are descendants through Hagar, the Ishmaelites. They are slaves. Okay. Did you get that? That's what the opponents are saying. (Just – V-34)

Here is what Paul would be saying: The descendants of Abraham through Sarah are free from the law. They are the Isaacs. They are the ones who receive the Gospel and the Gospel alone. Whereas the keepers of the law, they are descendants through Hagar. They are the ones who go through Ishmael. They are slaves. Now, that's sometimes hard for us to read through this. Because we don't know the context. But I think what you're seeing Paul say here is that this is a good example of how Scripture can be twisted. (Just – V-34)

**4:26** μήτηρ ἡμῶν (“our mother”)—This reading is well supported by  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$   $\kappa^*$  B C\* D G  $\Psi$  33 1739 it vg syr<sup>pesh</sup> cop<sup>sa,bo</sup> Marcion Irenaeus Tertullian Origen Chrysostom Jerome et al., but μήτηρ πάντων ἡμῶν, “the mother of us all,” is in  $\kappa^c$  A C<sup>c</sup> K P Byzantine syr<sup>h,pal</sup> arm Irenaeus<sup>lat</sup> Origen<sup>lat</sup> Eusebius Hilary Cyril Ambrose et al. (cf. Rom 4:16, 19). The external evidence slightly favors “our mother.” The variant “the mother of us all” appears to be a scribal attempt to render explicit the universal implications of Paul’s reasoning. The variant obscures the contrast between the children of the free woman and the children of the slave woman since the Jerusalem above is *not* the mother of us *all*. (CC)

*But the Jerusalem above is free, who is our mother.* Paul is not the first Jew of his day to lament the plight of “the present Jerusalem” (4:25) and to envision something better. Jerusalem, in Isaiah’s day, was “a desolation,” a curse (Is 64:10 [MT 64:9]; cf. Gal 3:13). The contrast between the desolate Jerusalem of Isaiah’s day and a future righteous people courses through Isaiah (e.g., chapters 2; 11; 35; 65). The new heavens and new earth will include a revitalized Jerusalem (Is 65:17–25). In *Pss. Sol.* 1–2, the first-century BC author describes a once-prosperous Jerusalem with many children, but those children had become arrogant and did not acknowledge God (*Pss. Sol.* 1:6). God therefore chastened the people with the clamor of war. *4 Ezra* 9:38–10:59 describes Jerusalem, “the mother of us all” (*4 Ezra* 10:7), in a state of sorrow and grief even worse than a once-barren woman who has just lost her only son. The author looks forward to the day when God would intervene and transform the grieving woman into a glorious city (*4 Ezra* 10:25–27). As *4 Ezra* 7:26 and 13:35–36 explain, a city which is currently hidden would appear for all to see (similarly *2 Bar.* 4.2–6; 6.9: the present Jerusalem will be transformed to reveal the hidden Jerusalem). Like the Jewish apocalyptic hopes of a transformed, heavenly Jerusalem replacing the earthly Jerusalem, Paul turns from “the present Jerusalem” in Gal 4:25 to “the Jerusalem above” in 4:26 who is “free” and “our mother.” Paul wants to remind the Galatians of who they are as he prepares for his appeal in 4:28–31. The apostle, no doubt, saw Ps 87:5 (LXX 86:5) fulfilled as the gentile nations call “Zion” “mother.” The gentile Galatians enjoy the heavenly Jerusalem as their mother; they are *already* enjoying a taste of heavenly realities (cf. Gal 3:3). Paul is writing in the present tense—the Jerusalem above *is* our mother—and yet, tragically, the Galatians are considering abandoning that wonderful heritage in their desire to come “under” the Jewish Law by circumcision (4:21–31; 5:1–12). (CC)

Paul includes himself with the Galatians among Jerusalem’s children. Jerusalem is “our” mother (4:26). Whereas Paul labors painfully to give birth to the Galatians in 4:19, the free woman, the Jerusalem above, gives birth without pain (4:27, quoting Is 54:1; Gal 6:17). One cannot, then, identify Paul with the Jerusalem-above mother (contra Martyn). By the free woman, Paul means the power of God’s eschatological promise now fulfilled in the sending of his Son (4:4–7). As Paul puts it in 5:1: “For freedom *Christ* set us free.” Even as the free woman is not Paul, the slave woman should not be identified with the rival missionaries. Rather, the slave woman refers to the message and ministry of gentile circumcision and Law observance.<sup>125</sup> The rivals are the “sons” of that ministry, even as Paul is the child of a different sort of ministry in Christ. Paul is contrasting the life-giving power of the Spirit with the imprisoning and enslaving Law of Moses (cf. 2:21; 3:21). (CC)

Although it was tempting to take pride in the earthly city of Jerusalem, Paul wants the Christian to look forward to the heavenly Jerusalem. “One of the greatest reasons for taking delight in our citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem is that people from every race, nation, language group and social class belong to that city. Whereas identification with the city of our origin sets us apart from people from other cities, identification with our city of destination unites us with people from every city.” Let the heavenly Jerusalem be the source of the Christian’s identity and not a mere earthly city, as if saving faith could be found in only one place on earth. (CC)

*Jerusalem above is free.* Rabbinical teaching held that the Jerusalem above was the heavenly archetype that in the Messianic period would be let down to earth (cf. Rev 21:2). Here it refers to the heavenly city of God, in which Christ reigns and of which Christians are citizens, in contrast to the “present city of Jerusalem” (v. 25). (CSB)

The spiritual Jerusalem, the Church. Luther: “The church, believers scattered throughout the world, who have the same Gospel, the same faith in Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments” (AE 26:439). Cf Php 3:20; Heb 12:22–24. See also Ap VII and VIII 10. (TLSB)

*our mother.* As citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, Christians are her children. (CSB)

“[The Christian Church] is the mother that conceives and bears every Christian through God’s Word” (LC II 42). (TLSB)

Therefore Sarah, or Jerusalem, our free mother, is the church, the bride of Christ who gives birth to all. She goes on giving birth to children without interruption until the end of the world, as long as she exercises the ministry of the Word, that is, as long as she preaches and propagates the Gospel; for this is what it means for her to give birth. Now she teaches the Gospel in such a way that we are set free from the curse of the Law, from sin, death, and other evils, not through the Law and works but through Christ. Therefore the Jerusalem that is above, that is, the church, is not subject to the Law and works; but she is free and is a mother without Law, sin, or death. And as the mother is, so are the children to whom she gives birth. (Lu)

**4:27** ἡ οὐ τίκτουσα ... ἡ οὐκ ὠδίνουσα (“who does not bear [children] ... you who have no labor pains”) —The negative οὐ with a participle is a Hebraism; BDF § 430 (3). In place of οὐ with τίκτουσα D F G read μή. All witnesses read οὐκ with ὠδίνουσα. Although English grammar requires translating ὠδίνουσα with a verb that can be plural (“you who have”), it, like τίκτουσα, is feminine singular.

πολλὰ τὰ τέκνα τῆς ἐρήμου μᾶλλον ἢ (literally, “more [will be] the children of the desolate one than ...”)—The combination πολλὰ ... μᾶλλον ἢ forms a comparison, “more ... than.” The Masoretic and Septuagintal texts of Is 54:1, as Paul, do not supply a verb. The context of Isaiah’s promise of a future

restoration of Jerusalem favors supplying a future tense of the verb “to be” (εἶμι). Of course, what Isaiah envisioned in the future is, for Paul, *now* in the process of being fulfilled. (CC)

*For it is written: “Rejoice, O barren woman who does not bear [children]; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains, because the children of the desolate woman [will be] more numerous than [the children] of her who has a husband.”* The explanatory “for” (γάρ) links this verse to the initially barren woman of 4:22–24 as well as to the heavenly Jerusalem of 4:25–26. “It is written” (γέγραπται) is Paul’s standard formula for introducing an OT quote, in this case a verbatim citation of LXX Is 54:1. Isaiah refers to a childless, desolate woman, who eventually bears more children than the woman who is married. The question is whether Paul is developing a *further* connection between Is 54:1 and the figures of Hagar and the unnamed “free woman” (Sarah) earlier in 4:21–26. In other words, is Paul’s contrast of the barren woman and the fruitful woman—with Isaiah 54—to be connected to the earlier contrast of the two Abrahamic women? Such a connection is unlikely. Isaiah’s initially fertile woman is the married woman (Is 54:1). The fertile Hagar was not originally married to Abraham; she was the slave woman. The contrasting pairs of women in Is 54:1 and Gal 4:22–26 do not correspond. Furthermore, after Hagar gives birth, she is left desolate in the wilderness (Gen 21:14–16), whereas in Is 54:1 the desolate woman who has never given birth is the one who is blessed with “more numerous” children. As Paul draws on Is 54:1, he has left Sarah and Hagar behind. The word “barren” invokes a contrast between a “desolate” woman and a fruitful woman “who has a husband” that befits a Jerusalem in ruins that is later restored (Gal 4:26, 27). “Although these points of contact might *allow* the quotation, they hardly explain what *prompts* it.” The rationale for Paul’s use of Is 54:1 may lie in how this verse and its context figured in the discussions of his day. (CC)

Isaiah 54 figured heavily in Second Temple Judaism. The Dead Sea Scroll 4Q164 cites Is 54:11–12 as looking forward to the Qumran community itself as the foundation of an eschatologically restored Jerusalem. The Jews in later centuries associate the barren woman of Is 54:1 with Jerusalem—an association that may perhaps have been current in Paul’s day. Jerusalem was left desolate in Is 54:1 because her inhabitants *had abandoned Moses’ Law!* Adherence to the Torah would reverse Jerusalem’s fortunes and result in a multitude of children for the barren woman. Is 54:1 may therefore have figured in Paul’s rivals’ teaching, or the apostle may have raised the passage himself. Paul, however, understands this passage in very different terms: a zealous adherence to the Law is precisely what has led to the “present” Jerusalem’s predicament (Gal 4:25). The rivals were not likely drawing upon Is 54:1 to interpret Genesis 16–21. Had that been the case, Paul would surely have developed his counterargument further and rendered the link between Is 54:1 and Genesis more coherently and directly. The rivals were using Is 54:1 *independently* of the Abrahamic texts. Paul is responding simultaneously to their use of Is 54:1 and of the Abrahamic traditions because it served *his* purposes. Is 54:1 thus does not correspond exactly to the contrast that Paul has been making between the enslaved and free Abrahamic women (Gal 4:21–26). (CC)

Paul’s logic may be clearer in view of the seven widely used interpretive principles that the later rabbis ascribed to Rabbi Hillel in Jesus’ day. The second of those seven principles is *gezera shawa* (גזירה שווה), the linking of passages by shared words. Sarah’s “barrenness” (στεῖρα) in LXX Gen 11:30 would have led Paul to the reference to “barrenness” (στεῖρα) in LXX Is 54:1. Paul draws heavily from Isaiah in Galatians. Is 54:1 would in many ways be apt for Paul’s purposes since it brings together several motifs from Gal 4:22–26, e.g., barrenness and Jerusalem. (CC)

Some scholars have noted a potential allusion *in Is 54:1* to Sarah. In its original context, Isaiah 54 refers to the nation of Israel as a forsaken woman who is later restored:

For your husband is your maker,  
the LORD of hosts is his name....

For [when you were] like a wife abandoned and grieved in spirit  
the LORD called you...  
For a small moment I abandoned you,  
but with great compassion I will gather you. (Is 54:5–7) (CC)

Although Isaiah is speaking of Jerusalem here, the prophet names Abraham and Sarah in Is 51:2. In fact, Is 51:2 is the only reference to Sarah by name in the Hebrew Bible outside of Genesis. According to Isaiah, Sarah is no longer the mother of a child but rather of an entire people. For that matter, Sarah is not the mother of an ethnic people as such but of those who “pursue righteousness” (Is 51:1)! When Isaiah turns to the barren mother in Is 54:1, the prophet still may have had Sarah in mind. Isaiah may be connecting the barren Sarah with the barren Jerusalem of his day that will eventually bear children, the children of righteousness as opposed to those of mere ethnic descent. On the other hand, the otherwise attractive connection between Sarah in Isaiah 51 and the barren/desolate woman in Isaiah 54 remains questionable since Is 54:1 does not actually refer to Sarah, and the Hebrew Bible is filled with the stories of other barren women. Barrenness alone does not sufficiently indicate that Sarah is in view in Isaiah 54. (CC)

Paul could have explicitly interpreted Is 54:1 in light of Is 51:1–3’s mention of Sarah had that been his intention. He does not. While naming others, he conspicuously avoids mention of Sarah’s name in 4:21–31. He is not concerned with the personage of Sarah. Paul has no interest in tracing “fleshly” descent from Abraham and Sarah. The children of the barren woman now include gentiles with no fleshly relation to Sarah. They are, rather, children of *the free woman* (4:22, 23, 26). The figure of Sarah functions insofar as she introduces the category of a “free woman.” Paul then describes by way of Is 54:1 a desperate, barren woman’s situation, which is miraculously overcome. Whereas Abraham’s “fleshly” liaison with Hagar brought forth Ishmael, the barren woman gives birth in fulfillment of God’s powerful promise. Paul is drawn to Is 54:1 solely because of its reference to “barrenness” in the context of the city of Jerusalem. The barren woman stands for eschatological Jerusalem. The rivals are interfering with God’s powerful fulfillment! (CC)

The Hebrew Bible regularly personified cities, especially Jerusalem, as women (e.g., Ps 87:5 [LXX 86:5]). In fact, Paul seems to allude in Gal 4:26 to “mother” Zion in Ps 87:5 (LXX 86:5). The married woman of Is 54:1 is likely Babylon (cf. Is 47:1–4). The figure of a barren woman, on the other hand, typically stood for a conquered, defeated people or city (cf. Lam 1:1, 5, 16). Isaiah envisions a barren woman in the present miraculously giving birth to a people who will “inherit” the nations (κληρονομέω, LXX Is 53:12; 54:3, verses that frame Is 54:1); cf. “inherit” (κληρονομέω) in Gal 4:30. God will cause Jerusalem’s judgment to give way to prosperity. Isaiah therefore distinguishes, as does Paul, between the present Jerusalem and the eschatological Jerusalem upon whom God will pour out his Spirit (Is 44:3; 59:21). For Paul, that eschatological moment has now arrived with the promised Seed, Christ, the first of an even more numerous people (Gal 3:16, 19). Abraham’s seed has indeed multiplied (3:29). The distinction in Isaiah between the present (desolate) Jerusalem and the eschatological Jerusalem (full of her children) paves the way for Paul to undermine his rivals’ emphasis on the earthly Jerusalem.<sup>149</sup> The rivals may find Paul’s contrast between “the present Jerusalem” (4:25) and the heavenly “Jerusalem above” (4:26) shocking, but Paul contends for precedent in the pages of Isaiah. (CC)

Indeed, the prophet Isaiah himself anticipated a new people inclusive of the gentiles (in the immediate context, see Is 51:4–5; 52:10; 54:2–3; 55:5; but also, e.g., Is 2:4; 42:1, 6; 49:6). The desolate woman in Isaiah 54 is called to rejoice in the face of God’s powerful fulfillment of his promises. The city will be rebuilt in glory, with the wife rescued from the shame of abandonment and restored to her husband (Is 54:4–8, 11–12). She shall have an abundant offspring. That is God’s power-charged promise (Is 49:19–21; 51:1–3; 66:7–9). The very power that Isaiah anticipates is the power that Paul describes in action in Galatians 5–6, the power of God’s own Spirit (contrast the enslaving, imprisoning Law of 3:21–22). In

4:29 he describes children “according to” or “as a result of the Spirit”! God’s fulfillment of his promise is cause for celebration! Ironically, gentiles are the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham and Sarah precisely because God gives life apart from the Law and apart from fleshly means through the promise. The enslaving Law was an interruption in history prior to Christ’s coming that had done nothing to bring children to Sarah (3:16–19, 29). Abraham’s inheritance and blessing is realized—apart from the Torah—in Christ. As Isaiah’s barren woman gives birth to a multitude, the Galatians should consider themselves among those fulfilling the ancient promises. They should rejoice, break forth in song, and shout! (CC)

“If στεῖρα [‘barren’] is the *Stichwort* [‘catchword’] that links Isa 54:1 to Sarah’s story in Gen 11:30, ὠδίνω [‘experience labor pains’] is the *Stichwort* that links the prophetic text to Paul’s apostolic ‘labor’ in Gal 4:19.” A paradoxical contrast is at work: whereas Paul suffered the pains of childbirth (ὠδίνω, 4:19), the barren woman in her newfound fecundity does not (οὐκ ὠδίνουσα, 4:27). The contrast does not diminish the value of Paul’s apostolic labors but speaks rather to the fullness of what is to come and is even now beginning to take shape. The labor pains that signified Jerusalem’s judgment (e.g., Is 26:17; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; Micah 4:10) are now gone. Isaiah’s story climaxes with children being born to Zion so quickly that there is no suffering or pain in her childbearing (Is 66:7–9). Isaiah envisioned numerous children (Is 54:1), an expansion of the family tent (Is 54:2–3), and the restoration of the people. What has afflicted women since the days of Eve (Gen 3:16) is now being overcome in the new creation (Gal 6:15)! Jerusalem above is “our mother” (4:26). As Paul and his converts “labor” in their suffering for the sake of the cross, the “Jerusalem above” (4:26) is already making its presence felt in miraculous, painless childbirth. The gentile believers along with Paul are the children of promise! (CC)

Paul applies Isaiah’s joyful promise to exiled Jerusalem (in her exile “barren” of children) to the ingathering of believers through the gospel, by which “Jerusalem’s” children have become many. (CSB)

These words of Isaiah recalled the miraculous blessing of once-barren Sarah to comfort Israel exiled in Babylon (a “barren” condition) with the hope of restoration and increase of children (cf Is 49:6; 51:4–5). (TLSB)

Rejoice, oh, barren one, who does not bare. 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. Now, let me read that again. And listen carefully. This seems to be absolutely contrary to what a Jew would expect. Rejoice, oh, barren one, who does not bare. Break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor. Now, that’s absurd. Nobody rejoices over being barren. Nobody rejoices over not having children. The greatest blessing for a Jew is to have children. The greatest blessing for a Jew is to be a man or woman who had a full quiver of children. So to not bare children is a curse. Remember Elizabeth? You know when she had John how she had such bitterness but now that was taken away from her because she bore a child. And then it says: The children of the desolate one, the whom in whom there are no children will be more than those of the one who has a husband. Desolate meaning without a husband. (Just – V-34)

Now, I have to confess, this is a very complicated argument. Paul is using Scripture in a way that we might not ourselves use it. But I think his opponents would have understood it. That the Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem of which Paul is a part is a Jerusalem in which there is great fertility. That there are many churches being born into it. But if you’re the Jerusalem below, the Jerusalem of this earth, the Jerusalem of the law, then even though it looks as if you are bearing children, you are really barren. You are really desolate. You are really without -- and this is what it means to be without a husband, without the sustaining presence of God. The presence of God is with the heavenly Jerusalem. With those who are bearing children according to promise. Not according to the flesh. The children of Sarah. The children of Isaac. Not the children of Hagar and Ishmael. (Just – V-34)

**Application and Appeal (4:28–31) (CC)**

**4:28** ὑμεῖς ... ἐστέ (“you ... are”)—This reading has good support in  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$  B D\* G 33 1739 <sup>it<sup>d</sup>, g</sup> syr<sup>pal</sup>, cop<sup>sa</sup>. The variant, “we ... are” (ἡμεῖς ... ἐσμέν), is supported by  $\kappa$  A C D<sup>c</sup> but is not likely original since it appears influenced by the first person plural forms ἡμῶν in 4:26 and ἐσμέν in 4:31. Fee contended that Paul’s habit is to begin with “you” Galatians before including himself and other believers; thus ἐστε ... ἡμῶν (“you are ... our”) in 4:6. The emphatic placement of ὑμεῖς at the beginning of 4:28 with the verb placed at the end suggests emphasis: “you *too* ... are!” (CC)

*So you too, brothers (and sisters), just as Isaac, are children of promise.* Paul employs the Greek connective δέ, “so,” with “brothers (and sisters)” (ἀδελφοί) when he is signaling a shift, as is the case here in 4:28. With a second person plural address (ὑμεῖς, “you”), Paul drives home the consequences of 4:22–27 (cf. 3:26; 4:6). Although the rivals are emphasizing Abrahamic descent (3:7, 16, 29), Paul studiously avoids any mention of Isaac’s name until this climactic moment in the paragraph. Then he identifies Isaac with the children of the free woman, who are descendants *not* according to the flesh! The gentile Galatians are, after the very manner of Isaac (“just as Isaac,” κατὰ Ἰσαάκ), the miraculous children of promise (4:28). Paul is, in effect, developing two separate family trees or genealogies in 4:28–29. One family consists of children who were born “as a result of the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα, 4:29) in a merely human manner. The other family tree consists of children who were born “as a result of the Spirit” (κατὰ πνεῦμα, 4:29). The “barren woman” (4:27) gives birth to children by means of God’s miraculous power and in fulfillment of the ancient promises. (CC)

*now you* – Emphatic in Greek. (TLSB)

*children of promise.* Children by virtue of God’s promise (see 3:29; Ro 9:8). (CSB)

Paul applies the allegory to the Galatians who, like Isaac, are children of promise (cf 3:8, 14). (TLSB)

Now, that's how Paul concludes this, Verse 28. He says: Okay, now, you brothers -- again that familial language. You are children according to Isaac. Children of promise. Now, that's very important. There is the connection. You who are baptized into Christ, you're not children of Ishmael or Hagar. Contrary to what the opponents are saying of you. You are the children of Isaac, the children of promise. (Just – V-34)

**4:29** ἀλλ’ (“but”)—The conjunction ἀλλά can in some instances serve as a transition (BDAG, 2 and 3), a function which led Longenecker—in the absence of a clear, strong contrast—to translate the word as “and.” Nevertheless, 4:29 offers a contrast with 4:28 insofar as 4:28 is a positive affirmation of being children of promise and 4:29 qualifies that positive reality with the harsh fact of persecution: *in spite of “our” being children of the promise* (cf. ἡμῶν in 4:26), the children of the slave woman are seeking to deprive the children of promise of their blessings.

ἐδίωκεν (“was persecuting”)—The exact sense of the imperfect in this context is unclear. *Tried* to persecute? *Used* to persecute? If conative (*tried*) Paul need not be implying repeated or continuous action. (CC)

*But just as at that time the one born as a result of the flesh was persecuting the one [born] as a result of the Spirit, so also now.* In Gen 21:9 Sarah saw Hagar’s son “laughing/mocking” (קִיֵּץ) or “playing with her son Isaac” (LXX: παίζοντα μετὰ Ἰσαακ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς). This could very well have been an innocent act (thus *Jub.* 17.1). The Hebrew verb could also mean to “make fun of” or “scorn.” Sarah certainly reacted harshly to the incident (Gen 21:10). Jewish interpretations in the later rabbinic age ranged widely. Some rabbis viewed Ishmael as guilty of idolatry or sexual sin, others as having shed blood (e.g., *Tg. Ps.-*

*J.* on Gen 21:9–11; *Gen. Rab.* 53.11; *t. Soṭah* 6.6; *Pirqe R. El.* 30 [shot an arrow at Isaac to kill him]). These interpretations, however, may stem more from the hostile actions of the biblical Hagrites (Ps 83:6 [MT 83:7]; 1 Chr 5:10, 19) than from the text of Genesis. The first-century historian Josephus (*Ant.* 1.12.3 § 215) thought Hagar and Ishmael were forced to leave because Ishmael might injure Isaac upon Abraham’s death. In Gal 4:29 Paul interprets Ishmael’s “play” with the little Isaac as *persecution* (διώκω). (CC)

Just as the one born as a result of the flesh was persecuting the one born as a result of the Spirit, likewise the Galatians have been enduring persecution. The verb “to persecute” (διώκω) is never used elsewhere in the NT for conflict within the early Christian assemblies. Luke employs the word in synagogue situations where punitive action was being taken against the early Christian believers (Acts 7:52; 9:4–5; 22:4 [22:7–8]; 26:11 [26:14–15]; cf. Lk 21:12). Aside from Gal 4:29, all four other instances of this verb in Galatians are in the context of non-Christian Jews persecuting the early Christians (1:13, 23; 5:11; 6:12; so also 1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6). The situation in Galatia in the context of Gal 4:29 is *not* analogous as Jewish *Christ-believing* missionaries are pressuring the gentile Galatians to adopt the customs of Moses’ Law with circumcision. Moreover, Paul clearly signals that he is writing figuratively in this paragraph (4:24). Hagar and her children represent a competing missionary, birthing movement. Paul may very well be ascribing a sort of persecuting activity to Jewish Christians, even if it is not the harsher forms of persecution that he speaks of elsewhere. In a pejorative turn of phrase, he figuratively identifies the Jewish-Christian missionaries’ pressure tactics (cf. 5:12: “trouble”; 6:12: “compel”) with the violent persecution of non-Christian Jews. These Jewish-Christian missionaries are, as J. Louis Martyn pointed out, forcing Paul to endure labor pains again (4:19). They are trying to *isolate* and *exclude* the gentile Galatian Christians (4:17). The missionaries, who would otherwise affirm Christ, are actively opposing God’s own work through Paul and are attempting to hinder the children begotten by the power of the Spirit. The “present Jerusalem” (4:25) finds itself in the role of the one born according to the flesh, Ishmael! (CC)

*persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit.* Suggested by Ge 21:9; cf. Ps 83:5–6. (CSB)

He says: 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. Namely, if you go back to Genesis, you may be able to see that the one born according to the flesh, namely, Ishmael, persecuted the one born according to the Spirit, that is Isaac. Now, if you read between the lines very carefully in Genesis, you can see that. But it’s not as prominent as you might think. But he says: So also now. And what he means by that is now the children of Ishmael, namely, my opponents, are persecuting you, the children of Isaac. Don’t let them do that. They are trying to turn the whole thing on its head. But that is not -- that is not what has happened. (Just – V-34)

Jewish tradition interpreted Ishmael’s conduct as hostile against Isaac (e.g., that Ishmael shot arrows at Isaac; cf Gn 16:12). (TLSB)

*also it is now.* See Ac 13:50; 14:2–5, 19; 1Th 2:14–16. (CSB)

This passage contains some very powerful comfort. All those who have been born and live in Christ, and who boast of their birth and inheritance from God, will have Ishmael as their persecutor. We are learning this today from our own experience. We see that everything is filled with tumults, persecutions, sects, and offenses. If we did not fortify our minds with this comfort from Paul and others like it, and if we did not hold fast to the doctrine of justification, we would not be able to bear the power and the wiles of Satan. (Luther)

*persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit.* Cf 3:4; 4:6. The Judaizers pressured the Galatians to undergo circumcision. (TLSB)

**4:30** λέγει ἡ γραφή (“the Scripture says”)—Scripture *continues* to speak. The present tense clause “the Scripture says” (λέγει) typically precedes an OT citation (e.g., Rom 4:13; 9:17; 10:11; 1 Tim 5:18). Wallace described a “perfective present” and cited for this uncommon usage Lk 1:34; Rom 10:16; Eph 4:8; 1 Tim 5:18; and 1 Jn 5:20.

οὐ ... μὴ (“by no means”)—The NT use of this construction is less emphatic than in the classical period and tends to be limited to Septuagintal quotations and Jesus sayings. In the Septuagint, the usage is frequently *prohibitive*; BDF § 365 (2).

τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἐλευθέρως (“the son of the free woman”)—The variant τοῦ υἱοῦ μου Ἰσαάκ (“my son Isaac”) in D\* G and Ambrosiaster appears to be a scribal modification to conform the text to LXX Gen 21:10. (CC)

*But what does the Scripture say? “Drive out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman will by no means inherit with the son of the free woman.”* Paul cites Gen 21:10; according to the Septuagint, Sarah tells Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman and her son, for the son of this slave woman will not inherit with my son Isaac.” Paul alters the single negative in the original Septuagintal translation of Genesis, “will *not* inherit” (οὐ γὰρ κληρονομήσει), to a doubled negative for emphasis: the son of the slave woman “will *by no means* inherit” (οὐ γὰρ μὴ κληρονομήσει)! Consistent with that emphasis, Paul ignores the angel sent to rescue Hagar and the promise given to Hagar on Ishmael’s behalf (Gen 16:7–13, 21:13, 17). (CC)

Paul also changes Sarah’s “my son Isaac” to “the son of the free woman.” Paul thereby ignores his rivals’ focus on the actual child Isaac and Abrahamic descent, and at the same time he stresses the woman’s *free* status over her identity in Genesis as Sarah. The free woman and her child are therefore in the opposite column from the imprisoning, enslaving Law (3:22–23; for the two columns, see the commentary on 4:25). The apostle further ascribes these words to “Scripture” rather than to Sarah alone (she is speaking in the Genesis account). Sarah’s “*this* slave woman” (τῆς παιδίσκης ταύτης), specifically referring to Hagar alone, becomes “*the* slave woman” (τῆς παιδίσκης), that is, the category of all who rely on observing the Law of Moses. *Scripture* condemns “the slave woman.” (CC)

Paul employs a second person singular imperative in Gal 4:30 (quoting LXX Gen 21:10): “drive out” (ἐκβάλε). This imperative is juxtaposed with several other imperatives: three in Gal 4:27 (quoting LXX Is 54:1), “rejoice,” “break forth,” and “cry aloud,” and two in Gal 5:1, “stand firm” and “do not be burdened.” Paul is addressing the Galatians as children of the free woman with these five other imperatives. He repeatedly calls the Galatians in 4:28 and 4:31 his “brothers (and sisters).” The Scriptural citation in Gal 4:30, according to one recent interpreter, is not an imperative for the Galatian congregations; rather, they are to overhear what Scripture said *to Abraham*. Whenever Paul enjoins his audience, he consistently employs second person *plural* imperatives (4:12, 21; 5:1, 13, 15, 16; 6:1, 2), *third* person singular imperatives (6:4, 6, 17), or the hortatory subjunctive first person plural (6:9–10). Despite the variety of verb forms, Paul consistently avoids any use of a second person singular imperative (like ἐκβάλε in Gal 4:30) for directives to his congregations. When Paul issues an imperative to one of his congregations in the language of the Scriptures in 1 Cor 5:13, he alters the Septuagint’s *singular* form (the imperatival future ἐξαρείς, “you shall purge out,” in, e.g., LXX Deut 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 24:7) to his own customary *plural* imperative form, ἐξάρσατε, “purge out.” (CC)

Susan Eastman concluded from this pattern of usage that Paul is *not* issuing a command to “cast out” (ἐκβάλε, Gal 4:30) the rivals and their followers. Rather, Paul is warning of the “contrasting destinies” of the children of the slave woman and those of the free woman. Paul’s emphasis here is on the positive exhortation in 5:1 to “stand firm” in their identity as Christ’s own. If Paul had wanted to issue a command



to the Galatians to expel the rivals, Eastman contended, he would have issued the exhortation with a plural imperative (as he does in 1 Cor 5:13). Paul simply intends for the Galatians to *overhear* what the Scriptures said to Abraham (cf. 3:8, 22). The harsh fate of Hagar and Ishmael awaits those who adopt the path of the rivals. The seriousness of the warning is clear from Paul's angry curse upon his rivals in 1:8–9 as well as from his menacing closing remark in 6:17: "Let no one continue to cause me troubles." The rivals and their followers are on the verge of being cast out! Paul is concerned not primarily about the rivals, according to Eastman, but rather about the Galatians who are entertaining an existence "under the Law" (4:21). Paul's warning is serious (4:30). The Galatians still have time to heed the apostle and amend their ways. Indeed, the "Spiritual" in their midst (6:1–2) may be able to assist and restore those who have transgressed in adopting the Law's customs (6:1). The door has not yet closed to restoration. In Eastman's reading, 4:30 is yet another attempt to persuade: Paul wants the Galatians to overhear the command to exclude Hagar and Ishmael as a warning of their own potential exclusion should they remain on their present course to be "under the Law" (4:21). Those birthed by a fleshly process will *not* inherit the kingdom of God (cf. 5:21)! (CC)

Eastman did not think that Paul was expecting the Galatians to dissociate themselves necessarily from the rival missionaries, nor was Paul admonishing them to cast the rivals out. Eastman has overplayed her hand, however. It is true that Paul's custom is to avoid second person singular imperatives when he admonishes his audiences. Such an observation, on the other hand, is of little value in the interpretation of 4:30: Paul is citing *a Scriptural text* as the basis for the Galatians' action. This is not just some isolated directive to Sarah or mere historical trivia. "Scripture" spoke to Abraham (4:30), and he acted on that revelation. Paul intends the Galatians to overhear the imperative and to note Abraham's obedient response. The Galatians are likewise to obey the command. (CC)

To review and expand: 1 Cor 5:13, like Gal 4:30, includes an imperative from the Scriptures, but Paul alters the original text's singular imperative to his customary plural imperative, thereby renewing its imperatival force for the Corinthians. In Gal 4:30 Paul does not alter the original text, as Eastman noted. The alteration of the wording of the Scriptures in 1 Cor 5:13 served as a necessary signal for the audience to recognize the continuing imperatival force of the particular OT text. Paul does not need to change the wording of the Septuagint in 4:30 since he makes it clear to the Galatians that the normative "Scripture" is speaking: "*Are you not listening to the Law?*" (4:21). In the immediately preceding paragraph of the letter, Paul observes how the rivals are seeking to exclude the Galatians (4:17)! Paul is trying to counter the rivals' harsh approach with an admonition to act in a peremptory fashion. He can quote the original form of the imperative (singular in the MT and LXX) with confidence that it will command afresh (4:21). While the Galatians may seek to restore those who have fallen prey to the false teaching (with 6:1–2), those who stubbornly insist on teaching contrary to the apostle must be driven out. (CC)

*cast out the slave woman.* Sarah's words in Ge 21:10 were used by Paul as the Scriptural basis for teaching the Galatians to put the Judaizers out of the church. (CSB)

The Galatians must exercise discipline, because a religion of bondage cannot coexist with the Gospel of freedom. (TLSB)

And so he concludes now in Verse 30 -- and this is -- if you haven't gotten it so far, this is where it's going to come from. And read this now in the context of persecution. Persecution is affirming their identity. Showing them that they are in fact children of the promise. And he says this: Cast out the slave woman and her son. Now, the slave woman of course is Hagar and her son is Ishmael. But here the slave woman are the opponents of Paul and all those they have given birth to by means of circumcision. Throw them out. Because those children, the son of the slave woman, will not inherit with the son of the free woman. In other words, those who submit to circumcision now under the powerful persuasion of the opponents,

they will not inherit, they will not be the inheritors of Abraham's promise with those who are free, namely, those who are baptized. (Just – V-34)

**4:31** διό (“therefore”)—This conclusion derives not just from the citation in 4:30 but from the entirety of 4:21–30. The reading διό is supported by  $\times$  B D\* among others, but significant variants appear in the textual tradition: “then” (ἄρα) in  $\mathfrak{B}^{46}$  D<sup>c</sup> K L etc.; “then, therefore” (ἄρα οὖν) in F G; “but we” (ἡμεῖς δέ) in A C P 81 1241; and “we, therefore” (ἡμεῖς οὖν) in syr Ephraem. Although Paul’s conclusion at this point overlaps in content with 4:28, he does not want to conclude on the stern warning of 4:30. The positive emphasis on the Galatians’ identity in Christ prepares for 5:1 and following. (CC)

*Therefore, brothers (and sisters), we are not children of a slave woman but of the free woman.* Paul concludes the paragraph with yet another reminder of the audience’s identity as “brothers (and sisters)” (ἀδελφοί; cf. 4:28). Despite his dire warning (4:30), Paul does not leave matters on a dark note. He clings to the hope that he can persuade the Galatians away from what they are presently contemplating. “We” are a different sort as children of the free woman. With 4:21–31 and its contrast of two sets of children, Paul concludes a discussion that begins early in chapter 3 of the letter: who are the real children of Abraham, indeed *of God*? Let the Galatians give heed to who they *really* are. Paul continues to state their identity with the indicative verb form “we are” (ἔσμεν). This strong affirmation of the Galatians’ identity naturally leads to the exhortation to freedom in 5:1. Let the Galatians be what they already are! (CC)

*we are not children of the slave woman.*† The believer is not enslaved to the law but is a child of promise and lives through faith (cf. 3:7, 29). (CSB)

And so he concludes Verse 31: Therefore, brethren, we are children not of the slave woman but of the free one. We are the children of Sarah. We are the children of Isaac. We are not children of Ishmael and Hagar. And so you can see how there are -- they are both reading the text. The opponents and Paul are both reading Genesis 16 to 21. And yet they are coming to totally different interpretations. And Paul is saying very clearly here: Don't listen to them. Because they are saying exactly the opposite of what you were taught by me. And up until this point I have shown you how the law enslaves, how the law brings us to our knees. How the law is an imprisoning jailer. And if you go that route, you under the law are children of Hagar and Ishmael. But if you go with the Gospel that I've preached, the Gospel of freedom, then your mother is Jerusalem. Not here now. But Jerusalem above. And you are free. You are free because you believe in the Gospel, the pure Gospel, of Christ crucified and risen from the dead without any law added. Without having to do anything to cooperate with God for your salvation. (Just – V-34)

Now, if you look at this argument that began in Chapter 3 and ends here now at the end of Chapter 4, this is as powerful an ending to his interpretation of Scripture around what faith is, what law is, what promise is, what ultimately the truth of the Gospel is. This is as powerful an ending as you can see. And it takes us back into the very heart of the Old Testament. Abraham. Isaac. The sacrifice of Isaac. And the fact that there was this division between Isaac and Ishmael. And that division could take place now in the Christian church founded on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let it not be so says Paul. Because he sees that his preaching is bringing forth children of promise, which you, Galatians, he says are. (Just – V-34)

Remember that. Remember your identity. And that's something we need to remember, too. That we are the baptized. We are not slaves to the law. We are freed by Christ. And as Lutheran Christians, we know that the freedom of the Gospel is at the heart and soul of our faith. (Just – V-34)

**4:21–31** Paul reverses the Judaizers’ definition of Abraham’s true children. The uncircumcised Gentile Christians are Sarah’s children (and thus free), not Hagar’s (slaves). Legalism (v 21) imagines that a saving relationship with God depends on certain rules and regulations. The Christian religion sets people

free, giving birth to heirs of eternal life in Christ. • We rejoice, O Lord, that through faith we are already members of Your heavenly kingdom. Lead us to share our joy by sharing the promise in Jesus. Amen.  
(TLSB)