

Galatians 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;

Analysis

Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; Paul continues his argument about sonship and inheritance with a new illustration. "The heir" (ho klēronomos, ὁ κληρονόμος) legally owns the inheritance, but "as long as he is a child" (eph' hoson chronon nēpios estin)—during minority, childhood. The word nēpios (νήπιος) means infant or minor who hasn't reached maturity.

"Differeth nothing from a servant" (ouden diapherei doulou)—functionally indistinguishable from a slave. Both are under supervision, lacking freedom. "Though he be lord of all" (kyrios pantōn ὅν)—legally the owner, potentially sovereign over the estate, but practically powerless until maturity. Paul's point: Israel under law was like a child-heir—destined for inheritance but living under restrictive guardianship. The Judaizers wanted to keep believers in this childhood state rather than embracing mature sonship in Christ.

Historical Context

Roman law had elaborate provisions for managing estates when heirs were minors. Guardians (epitropoi) managed property and supervised the child until legal maturity (varying by jurisdiction, often age 14-25). Though legally the heir, the minor had no access to the inheritance and lived under strict supervision. Jewish practice had similar provisions. Paul uses this familiar legal reality to illustrate redemptive-historical progression from law to Christ.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Are you living as a mature heir enjoying your inheritance in Christ, or as a child under restrictive supervision?
2. How does recognizing that you're already 'lord of all' in Christ change your sense of spiritual authority and freedom?
3. What 'childhood' forms of religion keep you from enjoying the full freedom and responsibility of mature sonship?

Interlinear Text

Λέγω	δέ	ἐφ'	ὅσον	χρόνον	ό	κληρονόμος	νήπιος
I say	Now	as long as				That the heir	a child
G3004	G1161	G1909	G3745	G5550	G3588	G2818	G3516
ἐστιν	οὐδὲν	διαφέρει	δούλου	κύριος	πάντων	ῶν	
he is	nothing	differeth	from a servant	lord	of all	though he be	
G2076	G3762	G1308	G1401	G2962	G3956	G5607	

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 4:23 (Parallel theme): But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.