

## GALATIANS

### Lesson 12

#### Slaves and Then Sons Galatians 4:1-7

#### INTRODUCTION

One of the hazards of verse by verse exposition of the scriptures is that some portions of the Bible are more interesting and easier to preach on than others. This is not the case with the whole fourth chapter of Galatians. While there is deep truth in this chapter, it is not easy to preach.

However, I'm committed to preaching the whole counsel of God. If it is in God's Word, it is important and relevant even if it does not seem so at the time.

Most children when growing up hate spinach but as good parents we feed them spinach anyway because we know it is good for them. At first, children surely will balk and sometimes gag but over a period of time they actually learn to like spinach. Expository preaching which often has some tough sections of scripture to preach may cause many Christians to balk and to gag but if they stick with it, they will actually gain an appreciation for the word of God preached verse by verse.

By way of background, the Apostle Paul in Galatians chapter three has explained how God made a promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the earth through His posterity, the Jews. This covenant with Abraham contained the promises of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ because Christ Himself is the One who ultimately fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant. All who have Christ as Savior and Lord are spiritual seed of Abraham. (Gal. 3:29: **"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."**).

The Apostle Paul has also pointed out that the Mosaic Law did not set aside God's promise to Abraham but actually enforced it and made it more necessary and urgent. The Mosaic Law was never designed by God to give eternal life but to show men their sinfulness (Rom. 3:19-20 **"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law, rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."**). The law was given to show men their total bankruptcy in righteousness before a holy God and to drive them to Jesus Christ who can give them the forgiveness of sins and a righteousness that will make them acceptable to a holy God (2 Cor. 5:21 **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."**).

#### MAN'S CONDITION UNDER THE LAW 4:1-3

**"What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father."**

Paul uses an illustration from Roman life of that day to show that men under law are like an heir to an inheritance who cannot have it because he is not of age. According to Roman law, a child or one in his minor years (under seventeen) could be an heir to a great estate. The father had made up the will and the estate was certain to be his by promise, but the child could not have the estate in his experience because he was not of age. Although the child was the rightful owner of all the estate by title, yet in actuality he was no better off than a mere slave, for not one penny of the inheritance was in his possession.

In his minor years the child was put under guardians and trustees who had complete control of the child's person and property until he became of age to receive the inheritance. These guardians and trustees directed the child, ordered him about, disciplined him and for all practical purposes controlled him. The child was under constant restraint and had no liberty. This was his position and condition until the time appointed or fixed by his father. At the precise day (sometime after turning seventeen), he would become the rightful heir to the inheritance.

**“So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.”**

The condition of the Christian before conversion is compared to a child who is heir by right but is actually a slave until the appointed time of the Heavenly Father to change this condition. As unsaved people, we were enslaved to sin and in bondage to the law. Sin controlled us and the law condemned us. We were under constant restraint from the law and had no liberty.

As non-Christians, we lived according to the basic principles (elementary concepts) of religion. The “basic principles” are the physical, external aspects of man-made religion. These principles are that man is somehow saved by works. If we live a good enough life surely God or the gods, if there is a God, will accept us. Salvation by good works is at the basis of all the religions of the world, except Christianity. Before conversion to Christ, all men are trusting themselves and their good works to get them to heaven (if there is a heaven). This is all the natural man knows, and until he trusts Christ he will never know what it means to be saved by grace.

GOD'S ACTION THROUGH CHRIST 3:3-5

**“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son”**

At a predetermined and fixed point of history, God sent forth Jesus Christ into this world to save sinful men from the bondage of sin and the curse of the law.

The foreordained time of Christ's coming not only guaranteed that sinful men could be set free from the bondage of the law, but His death on the Cross brought an end to the age of law. Man's bondage under the law continued for 1,300 years, but God ended it at the Cross.

**“Born of a woman”**

Christ was not only God's Son, possessing the very nature of deity, but He was true humanity, being “born of a woman.” This is a beautiful picture of the God-Man. Christ had to be God, for only God could redeem men, and He had to be human or He could not have been a perfect sacrifice for sin.

**“Born under the law”**

Jesus Christ was born under the Mosaic Law. He had a Jewish mother, lived in a Jewish nation and was subject to Jewish law. Jesus Christ kept all the requirements of the law perfectly. He did what no other person could—he perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of the law. Because He alone kept the righteous requirements of the law, He alone can set it aside as a way of life.

Jesus could keep the law perfectly because He was truly God and truly man. The deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ and the righteousness of Christ qualified Him to be the Savior, the redeemer, the mediator between God and man.

**“To redeem those under law”**

Christ came to redeem people who are under the curse of the law because of their sin. Our sin brings the curse of God because the law simply shows that we are sinners (Gal. 3:10 **“All who rely on**

**observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the law.’)**

The first purpose for sending His Son is that He might redeem men. The word “redeem” means, “to purchase out of the slave market.” All men are under the curse of God because they are sinners, but Christ came to purchase men out of the slave market of sin and set them free from the curse and bondage of the law. (Gal. 3:13 **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”**)

If we have received Christ as our Savior and Lord, we have been redeemed and set free from the bondage of sin. We are not free from sin but from the bondage of sin. This does not mean we do not sin any more, but we have a new position before God as redeemed ones through Christ, and now we have a new motivation to live for Christ.

Archeologists not too long ago discovered some very valuable business and personal letters written in the New Testament or *Koine* Greek. These discoveries are called the Chester-Papyri writings, and one of the letters was all about the meaning of the word “redeem.” It tells about a woman who was a slave and was put up for sale in the slave market. Apparently she was quite attractive and would have made a fine slave for any master. A trader purchased this woman for a very high price. And when the purchase was made, for no good reason other than the good pleasure of his will, he told the woman, “I have paid a high price for you and have bought you out of slavery, and now I set you free forever. You never have to be my slave or any one’s slave again.” He then turned and walked away. She stood there a free woman. A few minutes later, the slave trader heard hard running foot steps behind him and a weeping woman’s voice crying, “Sir! Sir!” He said, “What do you want with me, woman, I have set you free forever.” The woman cried out, “My Lord, for your kindness and graciousness in setting me free, I will voluntarily be your slave forever. You are now my master!”

So it is for the Christian when he comes to understand that he was a slave to sin and that Christ purchased him out from the slave market of sin. He voluntarily makes himself a slave to Christ.

**“That we might receive the full rights of sons.”**

The second purpose God sent forth His Son was to give each one of us an adult standing before God as sons and daughters. Literally this says, “That we might receive the adoption of sons.” This again refers to a Roman custom. The Romans had a special way of adopting their own sons. Adoption had nothing to do with taking an orphan child and making him a member of a family.

The Romans acknowledged all children as part of the family but only those who went through the ritual of son-placing were officially recognized as sons. A Roman father never referred to male children as sons until they were of age. They were his children but not his sons. But when the child became of age (which was seventeen in the Roman system) the father took his son through a ritual. The family had a festival (party) called the *liberalia* (the liberation). At this time the son took off his robe or toga of youth called the *toga proetexta* and put on the *toga vitilis*, which was the robe of an adult son, being recognized as man, an adult son in the father’s family. The father then took his son to the public forum and there announced his child to be an adult son, heir of the father, and sharing the privileges as well as the responsibilities of a son.

When we receive Christ, we are made an adult son in God’s family with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of a son. We are set free from being a minor under the law and made a son or daughter with an adult standing in the family of God.

The Bible does not teach that God is Father to all people. It does teach He is the Father of Christ and all those who believe in Christ, making up the family of God. The Bible does not teach the Fatherhood of God for all men but only for those who have accepted Christ.

**“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out ‘Abba, Father.’”**

To give positive demonstration that Christians are true sons and daughters of God, God the Father sends forth the Holy Spirit into their hearts. As soon as the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us, the Christian begins to cry out “Abba, Father.” The word “Abba” means *papa* in the Aramaic and the word “father” is the Greek word *pater*. These are words of respect and endearment. As soon as we are saved, the Holy Spirit begins to cry out in us “Father, Father!”, telling us through experience that we are truly members of God’s family.

We have a new relationship with the Heavenly Father because of redemption through Christ and the witness of the Holy Spirit, telling us that we are truly sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:15-16 **“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.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”**).

The Father’s purpose was not only to secure us as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ but also to assure us through the Holy Spirit. He sent His Son that we might have the status of sonship, and sent His Holy Spirit that we might have an experience of this. Through this new formula, we find a vital and intimate relationship exists between adult sons and the Heavenly Father.

The fact that the Spirit of Christ in our hearts cries unto God and makes intercession for us with groanings should reassure us greatly. However, there are many factors that prevent such full reassurance on our part. We are born in sin. To doubt the good will of God is an inborn suspicion of God with all of us. Besides, the devil, our adversary goeth about seeking to devour us by roaring: “God is angry at you and it is going to destroy you forever.” In all these difficulties we have only one support, the Gospel of Christ. To hold on to it, that is the trick.

Christ cannot be perceived with the senses. We cannot see Him. The heart does not feel His helpful presence. Especially in times of trials a Christian feels the power of sin, the infirmity of his flesh, the goading darts of the devil, the agues of death, the scowl and judgment of God. All these things cry out against us. The law scolds us, sin screams at us, death thunders at us, the devil roars at us. In the midst of the clamor the Spirit of Christ cries in our hearts: “Abba, Father.” And this little cry of the Spirit transcends the hullabaloo of the law, sin, death and the devil, and finds a hearing with God.” (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*).

One of the first evidences that a person is a child of God is that he cries out through the Spirit, “Father, Father.” The way God assures us of our sonship is not by some spectacular gift, sign or super-emotional experience but by the quiet inward witness of the Holy Spirit.

There was a Christian woman who had received word that her fiancée had been suddenly killed in an accident. She was a relatively new Christian, and when she received this word she was tremendously disturbed. She went into her bedroom and shut the door.

Her mother heard her sobbing and after awhile the mother said to the woman’s father, “I think you had better go up and see her; she needs a father right now.” So the father went upstairs and was about to open the door when he heard his daughter sobbing. Quietly he opened the door a crack and saw that she was kneeling beside the bed with her head buried in her hands crying out, “Oh, Father, Oh, Father, Father.” Her dad just quietly shut the door, came back downstairs and said to his wife, “She is in better hands than mine for she is with her Heavenly Father.”

As sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, we not only have privileges but responsibilities to walk a godly life so as to make our Heavenly Father proud of us. It is impossible to lose our position as sons and daughters in God’s family. However, we may fail to please God in our daily experience. We may be obedient or disobedient, faithful or unfaithful, committed or not committed as children of God. If we are not pleasing God in our experience, then our Father, in great love, has to bring discipline to us to teach us the folly of going our own way, living for self and depending on the flesh. God disciplines us as our

Heavenly Father because He loves us and desires that we should walk godly lives (Heb. 12:10 **“Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.”**).

**“So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”**

A Christian is no longer a slave to sin and under the bondage of the law. He is an adult son of God and set free in Christ. The Christian life is not being slaves to sin and law, but sons and daughters. It is not bondage but liberty. We are no longer slaves of sin and self but slaves of God through Christ.

As Christians, we are slaves to God, to Christ and to others, but this kind of slavery brings freedom to the soul. Christianity is a religion of sons and daughters not slaves to sin and law, and one becomes a son or daughter by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from any law-works. Christians trust only in the finished work of Christ to save them, and this act makes them sons and daughters.

It is so very easy to confuse Christianity and good works, for there are many religious people who know nothing of a personal relationship with Christ. John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher, was raised in a Christian family, a member of the Church of England, a clergyman and a member of a devoted group of men called the Holy Club. Yet, he was not converted to Christ. He was orthodox in belief and full of good works. He went to church regularly when he was not preaching; he partook of the Holy Communion; he gave sacrificially to the Lord’s work, searched the scriptures, fasted, prayed and even went to the mission field in America. But he was bound in the chains of salvation by works, for he was trusting in himself for righteousness instead of trusting in Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

A few years later John Wesley actually was born of the Spirit and trusted Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. Later, looking back over his pre-conversion days, he wrote, “I had even then the faith of a servant, though not that of a son.”

Christianity is a religion of sons and daughters and not slaves to sin, law, death and Satan. Christianity is for those who know what it means to be born of the Spirit by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

## CONCLUSION

Every person is a creature of God but not every person is a son or daughter of God. God’s children are those who are related to Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of the Father.

I want to assure you that you may become a son or daughter of God if you will acknowledge that sin has separated you from God and then turn to Christ, believing that He died as a substitute for your sin. At the very moment of decision for Christ, you will become a son or daughter of God, and God will become your Father. Then for the first time you will experience the Holy Spirit working in you and quietly crying through you, “Father, Father.”