

WE ARE SONS OF GOD

Galatians 4:1-7

Key Verse: 4:6

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

In today's passage, Paul reminds us that we are sons of God. We used to be slaves to sin and death until Jesus set us free. Now we are sons of God with all the blessings and privileges as his children. God is our loving father and we call him, "Father." May God help us to know this God personally so that we may love him and serve him out of love!

I. GOD SENT HIS SON TO REDEEM US (1-5)

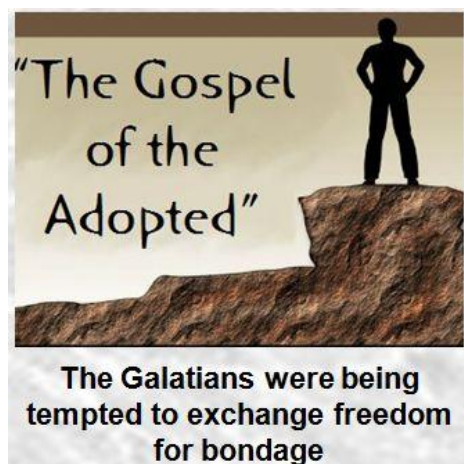
In verses 1-3, Paul describes the situation of people under the law in the Jewish context by using an analogy that was familiar to them at that time. *What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.* The New Living Translation (NLT) version paraphrases these verses: "Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world."

To fully understand this analogy, we need to know the customs of the Roman society. The children of a typical Roman family were raised by slaves. They were disciplined by the adult slaves. They played with the slave children. This was true when a wealthy Roman died and left an inheritance to his children. His young sons had the legal rights to his estate. But until they grew up, they were under the supervision of their legal guardians. They still played with the slave children. They were still disciplined by the adult slaves. They had to obey their guardians until the time set by their father, which was usually around age 15. Their coming of age was celebrated with a ceremony called "the toga virilis."

So what is the point of Paul's analogy? Before we were saved by the blood of Jesus according to God's promise, both Jews and we were under the supervision of the law. The law could not save us. It only disciplined us. We had no freedom. But our coming of age happened when we accepted Jesus as our personal Savior. We have been set free by our Lord Jesus who shed his blood on the cross to pay for our freedom. We are no longer subject to guardians and trustees, that is, the law. This is what Paul said earlier: *Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by*

faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law (3:23-25).

In verse 3 Paul says, *So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.* The original Greek word for the “basic principles” (or “elemental spiritual forces”) is “*stoicheion*,” which is literally the “ABC’s”. Between Moses and Jesus, the Jews were in elementary school, learning the spiritual ABC’s through the law so that they would be ready for the coming of the Son of God. For example, the blood sacrifice system they had to learn was just the foreshadow of what Christ would do later. They had to kill a year-old lamb and sprinkle the blood for atonement for their sins. But Jesus came and died as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). He shed his blood on the cross to atone for our sins. The human history was changed forever, turning BC into AD. A new era dawned for those who accept him as the Savior. Jesus Christ who is the Alpha and Omega (Rev 22:13) came to reveal to us the full truth about God (4:9). Therefore, those who believe in Christ are no longer in the elementary school of the law. We are in college and grad school, learning the full truth about God, writing dissertations about the depth and width of God’s love. But the Judaizers were telling the Galatian Christians to go back to the law. How foolish is it for grad



students to go back to elementary school to learn the ABC’s all over again? Paul called it a foolish thing to do (3:1). He says in verse 9. *But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?* St. Paul elaborates this further in Colossians 2: “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Col 2:20-23).

Look at verses 4-5. *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.* When and how did Jesus come? What does “God’s set time” imply? It was “the right time” set by God (NLT). Many Jews were wondering when God would send the Messiah, but God set the right time to send his Son. Jesus was “born of a woman” fulfilling the prophecies of God in the Old Testament scriptures. God kept his promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:18 that said, “... and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” God had also promised in Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary as the Prophet Isaiah had prophesied long ago, “Therefore the Lord himself will

give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isa 7:14).

Jesus was born under law “to redeem those under law” (5a). He was circumcised on the eighth day according to the law (Lk 2:21). Jesus was made like his brothers in every way in order to be a merciful and faithful high priest for us (Heb 2:17). God sent his Son to this world to save all sinners, Jews and Gentiles. Jesus, the Son of God, gave up his heavenly glory to come down to this world as a humble human being. He was born to a poor family and laid in a manger. Why? It was because we sinners could not come to the Holy God. So God came down to live with us and save us from our sin and death. John the Apostle was so moved by this amazing grace of God that he exclaimed: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

How amazing is the grace of God that Jesus came and died for our sins? Before Christ redeemed us, both Jews and we Gentiles were miserable under the law. We were condemned by the law. As sinners, we knew we were not right with God but couldn’t do anything to save us from our bondage to sin and death. We were prisoners in the prison of sin. We were death-row inmates. But God sent Jesus to redeem us. He set us free from our slavery by paying a price with his own life. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood (Ro 3:25). People in the Roman world were very familiar with the slavery market since there were 60 million slaves at that time. No slave could be set free until a full price was paid for his freedom. This is what Jesus did for us. He redeemed us by paying a full price with his blood on the cross. Our sins died with him when he died on the cross. He said, “It is finished.”

What was the ultimate purpose of Jesus in redeeming us? Look at verse 5 again. “... *to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*” Jesus set us free from sin and death so that we might be adopted into God’s family. We received the full rights of sons. He didn’t redeem us to remain as slaves. He redeemed us to be sons of God. Again we need to know the customs of the Roman society to understand the full meaning of this. Under Roman law, an adopted child had all legal rights as a son. He was not a second-class son. He was equal to biological sons. There was no distinction between them. As adopted sons of God through the blood of Jesus, we share with him the full rights of sons (5). We will talk more about this in a minute. But let us remember how we received the full rights of God’s sons. We did not do anything to deserve this wonderful grace. We did not earn it. We did not keep 100% of all the laws to receive it. Instead, we received the grace of God by faith in Christ. We became children of God, “not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a



husband's will, but born of God" (Jn 1:13). It was all because what Jesus did for us. We can only thank him and love him for this amazing grace.

II. GOD IS OUR FATHER; WE ARE HIS SONS (6-7)

Look at verses 6-7. *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.* We used to be slaves. Now we are sons. So how is our life now different? Let us think about the difference between the life of a slave and the life of a son based on these verses.

First, sons of God call him "Abba, Father." Paul says in verse 6, *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."* The first thing that changed in our lives is our relationship with God. He is our Father. We call him affectionately, "Daddy!" On the other hand, slaves call their master "Master." They would not dare to call their master "Father." But we now have an intimate love relationship with our God. This new relationship is not based on some adoption papers. It is based on the Holy Spirit that moves our hearts. The Holy Spirit touches our hearts to believe that our sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus and we have been adopted into God's family. Paul says in Romans 8: "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" (Ro 8:15-16).



Calling God "Father" seemed a foreign concept to the legalistic Jews even as Jesus taught them the truth. To them God was only an authoritative figure whose words must be obeyed, just as slaves must obey their master's commands. They dutifully observed God's commands, but with no love towards him, like the older son did in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. Jesus was heart-broken whenever he saw them blinded by their stubborn and legalistic hearts. We are sons of God. Sons love the father and obey him out of love. Slaves obey him out of fear.

Second, sons are free. Slaves are not free. We were slaves until Jesus came to set us free through his cross and resurrection. As the adopted sons of God, we are free. We have been set free to serve God and serve one another in love (5:13). We will explore this more in Chapter 5. As former slaves, however, we need to be reminded that we are sons of God and we are free. Sometimes, we find ourselves thinking and acting like slaves. This happens when we forget the grace of God. For example, we might be slaves of our own emotions such as anger, jealousy, hatred and self pity. We show symptoms of being a slave when we serve God's ministry grudgingly rather than out of love for God. We may be slaves of our pride and stubbornness. We may be slaves of legalism when we

focus on keeping rules rather than building relationships in Christ. Let us not despair when we find the vestige of our old nature, but boldly come to God and cry by the Holy Spirit, “Abba, Father!” We are sons of God. We have been set free from our bondage to sin and death!

Third, sons have a future. Sons are heirs. Sons have a future; slaves do not. We have a bright future in God. Look at verse 7. *So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.* Paul also says in Romans 8:17, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ in the eternal kingdom of God. We have an inheritance stored up in heaven. St. Peter says, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ...” (1Pe 1:3-4).

In conclusion, Paul reminds us that we are sons and daughters of God. We call God our “Abba, Father.” Because of what Jesus did for us, we can enjoy all the blessings and privileges as sons of God. God loves us and he is keeping in heaven our eternal inheritance. As former slaves, we sometimes suffer from slave mentality. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us to live each day as blessed sons of God, loving him and serving him out of love!