
The Christian as a Son

Galatians 4:1-7

Dan Turner

Introduction [Introduction adapted from the booklet *God as Father; when your own Father failed* written by David Powlison]

In this is love, not that we have loved God
but that he loved us and sent his Son
to be the propitiation for our sins. (1John 4:10)

...God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

It is patently clear that the Bible teaches that God loves His people. He demonstrated it in the past through the historical event of Christ on the cross. He demonstrates it in the present through the sending of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His children. He is a loving Father and His children are His beloved.

My question for us this evening is personal. Do you know Him as a loving Father? Or maybe a better question would be: How can you know God as a loving heavenly Father?

In our two month series titled *Christ and the Christian's Identity* we aim to show who Christ is and who we are as a result of being united to Him. This morning Pastor Devon declared Christ as the Son of God. What I aim to do tonight is simply demonstrate through one paragraph in the Bible who we are IN CHRIST. What I will be saying is that the Bible says that we are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And my prayer is that this practical truth will reach your hearts because...

Some advisers and teachers would have us believe that if you did not have an earthly father that displayed affectionate love you cannot understand the closeness of the heavenly Father's affection for you. That if your father was (or is) a cruel, critical or self-centered you are prevented from knowing God as a loving Father.

Is this what the Bible says? Do I, for example, have no hope of sensing the love of my heavenly Father because my earthly father abandoned my family and me back in 1962?

This evening I want to give you hope through a paragraph in the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The plan of this message is that you will leave here tonight knowing experientially the fatherly love of God. And you will do so if you know the truth about three matters; The Dilemma (that we all face), The Deliverer (that we all need) and the Delivered (that we all need to be). To this end, open your Bibles to the letter to the Galatians.

The book can be divided into three basic sections.

1:10-2:21

After a brief yet sobering introduction (vv.1-9) Paul puts forth his apostolic qualifications. This was to set the foundation that his gospel was the only gospel. And that to challenge his authority was to challenge the true gospel.

3:1-5:12

After laying the rationale for his unquestionable authority, Paul moves to the core of the letter. This is found in 3:1-5:12. In this section Paul makes clear the difference between the Judaizers interpretation of Christianity and Paul's interpretation of Christianity.

What Paul is saying in this section is that if one is to be called a child of Abraham and to share in his promises he must seek salvation not in the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul wants the readers to know the true significance of the law and the true freedom of believers from the law.

5:13-6:8

In the last part of the letter (5:13-6:8) Paul shows that this freedom from the law is not a freedom from love and morality. Paul points out that freedom in the Spirit breaks the bondage to sin and frees us to love people.

Now, for our purposes tonight we will move to the core of the letter to notice the freedom of a right relationship with God. This freedom is seen in our identity as sons of God.

We pick up this topic by noticing in chapter 3:23-29 how the subject has changed. It no longer is the difference between promise and law as a means of salvation as seen in vv.15-22. The subject now becomes the great change that took place in the coming of Christ. This great change is described in terms like "heir", "children", "sons". All of this terminology points to the believer's relationship to God. In v.29 the heir stands in relationship to Abraham. But in our text for tonight, 4:1-7, heir stands in relationship to God.

In other words, Paul is making plain that to be a child of Abraham through faith is the same as to be a child of God through faith. And to be a child of God is to be an heir to the full inheritance. If Gentiles can be legitimate children of Abraham, they are also legitimate children of God. And this identity is solely by faith in Christ; not by the works of the law.

Now for us to leave here tonight knowing experientially the fatherly love of God, let's think together on what Paul is saying in Gal.4:1-7 <read>.

The Dilemma

vv.1-3

An analogy

vv.1-2

There is no good news without bad news. Therefore, it is no surprise that Paul begins this breathtaking paragraph with the dilemma (vv.1-3). This dilemma is made known as Paul makes use of an analogy (that is, a figure of speech, a word picture). He begins to talk about human physical growth (vv.1-2). Notice that the heir is a child. Until he grows up and reaches maturity, he does not receive any benefits of the estate. Therefore the heir, while

still a child, is really no better off than a slave, though in reality “he is the owner of everything” (v.1).

As seen in verse two, in ancient times, a family would hand over loyal slaves to take care of such a child. The child would take orders from these slaves (in the text the slaves are referred to as “guardians and managers”) until he came of age. Then when the day set by the father came the child ceased being under the authority and power of the guardians and was declared an adult. He was ready to inherit what was always his.

An application

v.3

In verse 3, Paul applies the analogy of heir and an estate to the situation at hand. “When we were children, we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world”. Here we see the dilemma. The phrase “elementary principles” literally means “in a row” as in perhaps the ABC’s. It is something which is basic or foundational. The direct connection of this term with immaturity and the fact that the law is seen here as an instrument of bondage would support the argument that “elementary principles” is more likely referring to elementary and imperfect teaching. In other words, to accept the Jewish law or something like that as a system to get right with God is to come under slavery to some distorted doctrine (and perhaps demons behind the distorted doctrine). The phrase “elementary principles of the world” appears to carry the notion being right before God based upon merit or rewards earned through obedience to a law.

In our day it would be like saying “good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. And since we are born good and most stay this way through education and by trying to be nice or good or productive, then most go to heaven and the notorious criminals go to hell”.

That American, false doctrine of salvation by good works is not found in the Bible. Paul’s theology, on the contrary, is that all people are sinful and under condemnation. Only those in Christ are given eternal life and the forgiveness of sins.

The Deliverer

vv.4-5

With vv.1-3 as the dilemma all humans face, Paul sets up the reader to anticipate the solution. And this is what we see in vv.4-5. It is not the Law that delivers nor is it the resolutions we make to keep the law. Paul shifts from talking about “enslavement” to “deliverance”. He talks about the Deliverer. This morning Devon did a masterful job at getting us into Romans 1:1-7 to see who Jesus Christ is. Tonight, vv.4-5 will merely serve as a reminder of this morning’s message.

His timing

First we see the Deliverer in his timing.

Fullness of time

The phrase “But when the fullness of time had come” tells us that Jesus came just at the right moment in history. God was not panicking as he oversaw His history. He never looked upon sin and societal evils as out of control. He had the precise date and time in mind from eternity past.

His identity

Second we see Paul teaching on Christ's identity. Who will save us from the bondage to sin and the bondage to man-made rules?

His Son sent forth

Paul identifies the Redeemer as the Son of God. Jesus Christ is the One sent forth by the Father to accomplish the work of redemption through laying down his own life at the cross (1Tim.2:5-6; Romans 3:21-26).

Born of woman, born under the law

This Son did not come into the world with His radiance of eternal glory. The text before us tells us that he was "born of woman, born under the law". This means that Jesus was the very substance of humanity. What Paul is stressing is that Jesus had an actual human body like ours and faced the same sort of trials and temptations we face as humans, yet was without sin (cf. 2Cor.5:21). This was necessary if He was to bear the punishment for our rebellion.

The text also tells us that he was born "under the law". Jesus came as a man living in submission to the divine law. He completely fulfilled the divine law. He did this in order that He might qualify to redeem us from the penalty of the Law and to give us His perfect obedience.

His mission

Having briefly looked at the Deliverer's identity, Paul now points the Galatians to the Deliverer's mission. What was the task Jesus Christ was given right from the start?

To redeem

Jesus Christ came to redeem those who were under the law. This is why the incarnation; God the Son became a man. This is why Jesus was given human nature without losing his divinity. So many in our day place the emphasis on Jesus as the example. That is, how we are to live our lives is determined by how Jesus lived his (eg. the "wwjd" bracelets). While He certainly is and gave the perfect example, that was not why He came to earth. He came that he might redeem sinners from the curse (3:10-14).

This term "redeem" describes a marketplace where slaves were regularly sold. It literally means "to buy out of the marketplace" or "to ransom from slavery". Redemption involved a price and a person to pay the price. The slave had no way of personal deliverance. Jesus Christ came to earth in order to be nailed to a cross so that he might bear the wrath of God on our behalf. That was the price. He was the Person. And we were the slaves.

To adopt

As we read more of this paragraph we come to the next clause that introduces us to another aspect of Christ's mission. The clause "so that we might receive adoption as sons" tells us that Christ came not only to deliver us from the penalty of sin but also to bring us into a relationship with the Father as sons and daughters.

Up to this point in his letter, Paul has dealt extensively with the legal aspects of our salvation. The truth of our justification in Christ is in and of itself an astounding truth! To think that God would send His Son to bear my guilt before His just wrath is virtually incomprehensible. These Galatian believers who were struggling with their salvation were reminded anew of the work of Christ that alone satisfies God's demands in justifying sinners. Sinners are forgiven and declared righteous not on the basis of works but on the life and death of Jesus Christ.

But if that is not enough, the Apostle adds to the magnificence of justification and redemption. He states that we received adoption as sons. God sent forth His Son to not only redeem us out of slavery, but also to procure for us sonship in His family. We who have been enemies of God are now, by faith in Christ, sons of God. To be free from sin's dominion and curse would be glory enough. But God goes still further. What more can He do for undeserving sinners than to call them His own sons?

The Delivered

Vv.6-7

What does it mean to be sons of God? Why is it important for us to have an understanding of and believe in this truth?

The strength to experience new life and to press on in the demands of this life are wrapped up in the truths that the Apostle unfolds for us in this passage.

New status

One thing we notice about the implications of sonship is that of a new status. Verses 5-7 repeatedly tell us that we are sons through our union with Jesus Christ by faith. We are no longer slaves to the elementary principles of the world. We are no longer under the dominion of Satan. We must not live with the attitude of slavery. We who are trusting God are sons and daughters of God!

The context of the Judaizers pressing their legalism upon the Galatians comes into play at this point. To revert back to rules and regulations for their standing with God put the Galatians into a position as slaves. Paul assures them, "You are no longer a slave but a son". To view God as a slave owner whose commands are to be kept in order to obtain His favor shocked the Apostle. This new status as sons of God changes everything. You are no longer one of God's enemies. You are one of His children.

New assurance

We notice something else about the implications of sonship. Not only do we have a new status but we also have a new assurance. Verse 6 says, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying "Abba! Father!"

Here is the wondrous assurance granted by the witness of the Holy Spirit. Notice the ministry of the Holy Spirit as it relates to the name of God in this verse. We are not to merely memorize the names of God and spout them off as if doing so will help. This

verse is at the heart of this paragraph. To trust the Father as a son means that we know him experientially and sincerely as our endearing heavenly Father.

Dr. Piper, when writing about this phrase talked about the reason for Paul's use of terms. He said, "...the reason Paul uses the word "cry" and the Aramaic word "Abba" is because both of them point to deep, affectionate, personal, authentic experience of God's fatherly love. Doctrinal affirmations [about the Fatherhood of God], as important as they are, don't make children. What he said was that the testimony of the Spirit that we are God's children is that from our hearts there rises an irrepressible cry – a cry, not a mere statement, a cry: "Abba! Father!" We don't infer logically the fatherhood of God from the testimony of the Spirit. We enjoy emotionally the Fatherhood of God by the testimony of the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit is not a premise from which we deduce that we are children of God; it is a power by which we delight in being the children of God”.

The second implication of being a son of God is seen in a new assurance.

New hope

Our text lays one more claim to those who are redeemed. Verse 7 brings Paul's thought to a conclusion. "Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son; and if a son then an heir through God". The glorious reality of sonship doesn't stop with our earthly life. There is more ahead! All the riches of belonging to God will one day be unfolded for the child of God. When the world attempts to lure you into its snare, tempting you with temporal delights, cast your gaze ahead to the inheritance that is yours as a son or daughter of God. You are to see that you are an heir through God's gracious act on your behalf through Christ.

God, through Paul, is telling us this evening to live like sons not slaves. Trust Him for eternal life. Live as those who have an inheritance through God. Be identified with your future and not trapped by legalistic strivings. Understand that whatever you face in this life, the inheritance laid up for you is infinitely greater than anything you can imagine because your inheritance is full and forever enjoyment of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion In conclusion, we've thought through three things.

1. Our dilemma: All of us are sinners hopelessly enslaved to the thought that if we just do better we can earn favor with God.
2. The deliverer: Due to the fact that we cannot get out of our own sin, God, rich in mercy, sent His perfect Son to do two things. 1) He came to redeem us from the slave market; to liberate us from the cruel bondage to sin and Satan. 2) He accomplished this redemption so that we could receive adoption as sons. To have the Almighty Father as our endearing Father comes from the work of Christ on the cross.
3. The delivered: We who see our dilemma and see that our only deliverance is Christ put our trust in Him. We are saved from the tyranny of sin and the thought that we can earn favor from God through self-righteous acts. We are sons and daughters of the King. And as a result we have the Holy Spirit poured out into our hearts. We now can know experientially the love of God. We now can sense His closeness and care. We now can cry out with heart-felt affection and trust to the One who loves us most; God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Gal.1:3).

Owing to the fact of Christ's objective work on the Cross and owing to the fact of the Spirit's subjective work in our hearts... (preach and press home the applications)

■ **Live like you have a new identity**

■ We are sons

■ **Live like you have a new assurance**

■ He is Abba Father

■ **Live like you have a new hope**

■ We have an inheritance

Oh church, God's sons and daughters, let us live in these truths.