

## ***“From Slaves to Sons”***

March 13, 2011

Text: Galatians 4:1-7

**John Wesley was an Oxford graduate, an ordained minister, & a missionary to the American Indians--but not a Xn.**

As a young man he had actively ministered to people in prisons and workhouses, and had taken food/clothing to children in slums/orphanages.

He read the Bible every day & attended Xn worship services faithfully, every Lord's Day.

He fasted, prayed, and lived an exemplary moral life.

But having done all these things, he wrote in his journal=>

“I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.”

On the voyage back home to England from his missionary endeavors in America, the ship almost sank in a storm at sea, & he was terrified.

But in contrast to his own panic, he witnessed the calmness of some Moravian Xns on board, who quietly sang their hymns as they entrusted their lives to X.

Wesley realized they had something that he was missing.

After Wesley had safely reached London, he went to a Moravian Bible study.

Afterward he wrote in his journal, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Wesley later said of the period during which he'd tried so hard to earn his salvation by his good works and religious deeds=> “I had even then the faith of a servant, though not that of a son.”

**The whole point of our text today is that God turns religious servants/slaves into His own dear sons.**

Paul teaches that a person trying to earn salvation by good works, is like a young child whose life is no better than a slave's.

But when he becomes saved by faith in X, he gains all the status and privileges of a mature son of God.

This text is divided into those 2 parts=>

\* Life as a spiritual child

\* Life as a spiritually adult son

**\* Life as a Spiritual Child**

[Galatians 4:1]=> “Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything,”

**Paul is using an analogy here to describe man's condition under the Law=>**

It's like being the young child of a wealthy man, whose life is no different from that of his father's slaves, even though potentially he owns his father's entire estate and will someday receive it as his inheritance.

His situation could be described as "virtual slavery."

He went to bed at night when he was told to do so, and got up in the morning when he was told to get up.

He worked, studied, played, or rested, only as he was told.

His father commanded the family slaves to do this or that, and they treated this child the same way (at least those who had received authority over the child).

He was the heir who would someday inherit all his father's wealth, but at that moment, he was just a child, which for all practical purposes meant he was no different from a slave.

Both Paul's Jewish/Gentile readers understood this well.

Technically/potentially, the child might be the "**owner** [*kurios*] of everything."

"*Kurios*" is the word we usually translate "lord";

But in this case, as long as he was still a child, this little "lord" was as powerless as a slave.

**That all suddenly changed when the child became an adult.**

In a Roman home, the ceremony of the *toga virilis* changed a boy's status from that of a child, to that of a grown man.

The Romans also had a ceremony in which boys burned their toys, & girls their dolls, as sacrifices to the gods.

It signified that they were putting childhood behind them.

In a Jewish home, *bar mitzvah* changed a boy into a man.

The boy's father prayed, "Blessed be Thou, O God, who has taken from me the responsibility of this boy."

Then the boy would pray, "O my God, and the God of my father, on this solemn and sacred day which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my eyes unto You, and declare with sincerity and truth, that henceforth I will keep Your commandments & undertake to bear the responsibility of my actions toward You."

There was no such thing as adolescence in those days—you were either a child or an adult—a change that occurred in only 1 day's time.

**Now Paul describes a few more details about the slave-like conditions of this child's life.**

[Verse 2]=> "*but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.*"

Not only was this minor under the authority of a *paidagogos* in the most direct sense, he was also under the authority of a “guardian”/“manager”-- controllers of his person/property.

“Guardians” were responsible for his bodily care/welfare.

They were his legal guardians, 2<sup>nd</sup> only to his father.

“Managers” managed his household or property.

If the child’s father had died, these 2 individuals exercised full parental authority over him, until the date which his father had set for him to assume full responsibility for his own life/welfare.

**Verse 3 will now go on to describe the similarity of such a child-heir to people living their lives in bondage to law**

Paul’s point here will be that those who are living under the Law, trying to earn their salvation by their obedience to it, are just like childhood heirs in a great household.

God’s promise to Abraham of justification by faith, and all the spiritual wealth that comes with it, will someday be theirs;

And the Law will help lead them to it, being like the *paidagogos* which we learned about 2 weeks ago.

The Law will create in them an awareness of their need to believe in X for salvation.

But at the moment, they are still slaves to the Law.

They’re still spiritual children, being told what to do/not-do.

[Verse 3]=> “So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.”

**When the Jews began to look on the Mosaic Law as a means of earning their salvation by obedience to it, they became enslaved to the Law.**

The situation became even worse when the Pharisees added to it all their own rules/prohibitions.

In verse 5, Paul will tell us that the Jews needed to be redeemed from the Law, like slaves being bought out of bondage, in a slave market.

In Acts 15:10, Peter likened this bondage to a yoke, which

he said, “neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.”

In verse 3 of our text, the phrase “elemental things” is actually “elementary things,” because the Law was for spiritual children.

It actually means the ABC’s of rudimentary religious truth.

It taught the Jews higher theological concepts by giving them simple things to do.

E.g. sacrificing a lamb taught the abhorrent nature of sin, but also, that God would someday atone for sin, once/for-all, by sending His own perfect Lamb to us.

**Instead of saying we were held in bondage to “Mosaic Law”, however, Paul refers to our being held by “*the elemental things of the world.*”**

These include the humanistic ideas, upon which all man-made religion is founded, & which make men religious slaves.

E.g. that man can, by his own efforts, do things that will put him in good standing with God, or with the gods (in the case of pagans).

The Pharisees had treated the Law that way, saying “Do what we tell you, & you will please God & you’ll live; don’t do it and you won’t.”

But the converted Gentiles in the church at Galatia had also once had the same ideas about their old pagan religion.

Such religions always come with a list of do’s/don’ts, by which one can supposedly ingratiate himself to deity.

So the “*elemental things of the world*” is a general term for all religious philosophies/traditions, filled with rules for making oneself right with the gods, by doing certain things.

In Gal 4:9, Paul will call such practices=> “*weak and worthless elemental things*”=>

\* “*Weak*” in that they have no power to redeem/save anyone.

\* “*Worthless*” in that they have no value by which to enrich oneself spiritually.

Before X entered the picture, offering salvation by grace through simple faith in Himself, man always reverted back to the “*elemental things*”=> spiritual slavery of salvation through his own efforts.

And he always found his religious practices/traditions weak/worthless.

**Ironically, even great OT saints, who sought salvation by faith (not good works) found themselves in the same position of that child-her who hadn’t yet received his inheritance.**

After describing the incredible exploits of their faith, Heb 11:39

says=> “*And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, / because God had provided something better for us*” (11:39-40).

During their lifetimes, they didn’t receive the full inheritance God had promised to Abraham, because Jesus hadn’t come yet to atone for their sins by His death.

And the H.S. hadn’t yet come to permanently indwell/empower believers.

**Now Paul contrasts the helpless/frustrating life of a spiritual child with that of a mature son of God.**

**\* Life as a Spiritual Son**

**The believer's transition from spiritual childhood to adulthood began, when God determined it was time to send His Son into the world, to redeem men/women.**

[Verse 4]=> *"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son,"*

**What does "the fullness of the time" mean?**

It was the time God had chosen before creation, for X's coming.

From our human perspective, it was a time in history when the world was ripe for the gospel, because=>

- \* A common language (Gk) facilitated communication between various nationalities.
- \* Roman roads, & the "Roman peace," had created a political stability in which evangelism could flourish.
- \* Common people were no longer satisfied w/ pagan gods/religion.
- \* Israel had been cured of idolatry by the Babylonian Exile.
- \* The OT had been completed, and the OT canon had been compiled by men such as Ezra.
- \* The Jews had established synagogues, which missionaries like Paul could use to evangelize the Jews.
- \* Jewish Law had convinced men they were truly sinners and needed a Savior.

But ultimately, it was the "fullness of times" simply because God had determined this was when He would send His Son to earth.

In the analogy of the child-heir, God was the "father" who "set the date" for his sons to receive their inheritance.

**In the fullness of time, God "sent forth" His Son to earth.**

This "sending forth" was the incarnation of Jesus.

As Paul described it in Phil 2:6, Jesus=> *"although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, / but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, & being made in the likeness of men" (6-7).*

Jesus, who had already existed from eternity, assumed a human nature in Mary's womb, becoming the only man who has ever had both a human and a divine nature, indissolubly united in 1 personality.

To save us from sin, and to redeem us from the Law, X had to be both human/divine=>

- \* Divine, so His sacrifice would be infinitely valuable,
- \* Human, because it would be offered for human sins.

**Now we encounter the 1<sup>st</sup> of 4 blessings that we, as God's people, received because the fullness of the times had arrived.**

## Blessing #1—A New Freedom

God sent forth His Son from heaven to earth on a mission of freeing believers from their bondage to the Law.

Again, [Verses 4-5a]=> ““*But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, / in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law,*”

**In order to become fully human, X was “born of a woman” (mid. voice verb=> He emptied Himself and took our humanness on Himself).**

He had always been divine, but now He added a woman’s (Mary’s) humanity to His own innate divinity.

Unlike all other men He came as a perfectly righteous Man.

Having thus become fully human, Jesus was “*born under law,*” under an obligation to obey it.

And yet He could say at the end of His life (Jn 14:30)=> “*The ruler of the world (Satan) is coming, and he has nothing in Me,*” having obeyed the Law perfectly.

**Jesus completely fulfilled the Law, and having done so, He was able to “redeem” from its curse, us who violate it.**

“Redeem” means to buy something out.

Jesus bought us out of slavery from the Law’s curse, by dying to pay the price for our freedom/redemption.

The only possible termination of the Law which would be just/honorable, would be for its principles to be perfectly obeyed and its curses to be fully endured.

Jesus did both, coming as the perfect God-Man, who could serve as our Substitute because He shared our nature, and yet was perfectly sinless/law-obeying, by nature.

**The implications of all this for us are tremendous.**

There was a time when we lived like slaves under the harsh lash of the Law, but now X has freed those who believe in Him.

\* We’re no longer spiritual children living like slaves, striving to earn/keep God’s-favor/our-salvation, with good deeds.

\* We’re no longer slaves, trying to stay out of trouble with our master; but free/mature men/women in X Jesus, fully persuaded that God has forgiven us, by His grace.

X has come to free us, assuring us of God’s infinite grace/love towards us.

He has freed us from the Law’s condemnation, once/for-all.

Great is our freedom, now that our childhood has ended.

Jesus, having been born of a woman, & born under the Law, has liberated our souls, & we delight in our newfound freedom.

We're no longer on a treadmill of good works, endlessly toiling like slaves to earn our salvation—Praise God!

It's true that we do good works, because we love our Father, and know that pleases Him.

But we don't do them for our salvation.

Throw away any religious caution about exulting in your spiritual freedom, fearful of counting your eggs before they're hatched.

The Proclamation of your Spiritual Emancipation has been declared by X, & there'll be no going back to the old childlike slavery.

### Blessing #2—A New Sonship

This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> purpose for God's sending His Son to earth=> To turn us, who were slaves, into God's sons, through adoption.

[Verse 5b]=> *“that we might receive the adoption as sons.”*

**Adoption ordinarily bestows on a person a new name, a new legal status, and a new family relationship.**

But God also accomplished something else by adopting us, that normal human adoption could never accomplish=>

He changed us by His indwelling Spirit, giving us His own nature.

2 Pet 1:4=> *“He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature.”*

Because of this new nature, we are also destined to develop a new image (Rom 8:29)=> *“Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the **image** of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.”*

Because of our adoption, we are being spiritually/morally transformed, so that in the end, we will be like Jesus.

Earthly parents can't pass their spirits on to adopted sons, but God has passed His Son's Spirit onto believers.

We are sons by God's grace, but X is God's only-begotten Son, by nature.

We will never match Jesus in terms of His divine attributes which are incommunicable, but we will match Him for holiness/righteousness someday, as we become fully conformed to His image.

**If you have believed in Jesus for the salvation of your soul, you are an adopted son of God.**

You are the recipient of all God's gifts, because of your sonship.

In Lk 11:13, Jesus asked=> *“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”*

Moreover, your children are yours for life, and you, as a child of God, are guaranteed to be His child forever.

He may discipline you, because that's what good fathers do to their erring children.

But He'll never withdraw your right to call yourself His son.

Jesus was born of a woman, that you might feel/enjoy the full privileges of being a son/daughter of God.

May the H.S. enable us to live in that confidence/joy.

To say within our hearts, "God, my Father, is love, & He loves me as His dear child, delighting in me, as I do in my own children; And I delight in Him; His face makes me glad."

As God's adopted son/daughter, you can walk around like a royal prince/princess.

### Blessing #3—A New Prayer-life

[Verse 6]=> "*And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'*"

**Because Xns are sons, God gives them His Son's Spirit (H.S.), & because the H.S. dwells in them, they pray differently.**

Notice that in mid-sentence Paul switches from the 2<sup>nd</sup> person ("you") to the 1<sup>st</sup> person ("our") because what he's talking about is so wonderful, he can't do so in the abstract—he must include himself in it.

That's also why he uses the word "*Abba*" (from his own native Aramaic language), then translates it into the Gk (*pater*—"father") for his Gk-speaking readers.

"*Abba*" expresses family trust/endearment/closeness.

Jesus used it as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

When we pray, we too are praying to our own beloved Heavenly Father (our "*Abba Father*").

**But interestingly, it's actually the Spirit within us who is seen praying here in verse 6.**

This is determined by the grammar.

"*Crying*" is a singular neuter verb, which requires a singular neuter noun as its subject.

The only such noun in this sentence in "*Spirit.*"

"*Our hearts*" is a plural feminine noun, so it can't be the subject of "*crying.*"

This is an illustration of Rom 8:26=> "*The Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*"

We pray to God as His children, because the H.S. within us cries out to our Heavenly Father as we pray, calling out to Him earnestly, “*Abba, Father!*”

Now turn to [Rom 8:14]=> “*All who are being led by the Spirit [those who “walk by H.S. {vs 4}, because they have the H.S. w/i them, because they’re truly saved {vs 9}] of God, these are sons of God. / For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we [not H.S.] cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ / The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (8:14-16).*

How do we know we are God’s sons?

Ans: Because the H.S. leads us in prayer, our prayers can match His prayers on our behalf.

The result is that God answers our prayers which are in accord w/ His will, & we sense His Fatherly love, as He gives us good gifts.

The Spirit bears witness of it, with our spirits.

Our love/veneration/trust in Him is then expressed in our prayer of thanks to our Heavenly Father.

The Spirit of light/life/love/liberty, the same Spirit who was in X, is in you, bringing you (thru prayer) into loving communion w/ God, as He answers your Spirit-directed prayers.

#### Blessing #4—A New Inheritance

[**Verse 7**]=> “*Therefore [because of all the wonderful things I’ve just told you] you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.*”

“*You*” here is singular—you as an individual believer.

Paul has gradually become more/more direct, increasing the pressure on each of his readers to realize that all these blessings are truly his/hers, to claim for their own.

Ultimately (Paul says) you are each one an heir of the promise God gave Abraham, of justification by grace, thru your faith in X.

You have received what all those heroes of the faith listed in Heb 11, hadn’t yet received.

But in addition to that, you are an heir of all the blessings that come with being a child of the Creator/Ruler of the world.

He is your Heavenly Father, even as He is the Father of God the Son (Jesus X).

Eph 1:3=> “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*”

Your Heavenly Father delights in giving you good gifts, as you surrender to the influence of the Spirit w/i you, while you pray to Him.

He has sent you His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem you from slavery to the Law, and bring you into the privileges of full/mature sonship.

Because you have become His son, He has sent the Spirit into your heart, crying "Abba, Father!" so that your requests of Him will match His own will.

And as He answers your prayers, giving you good gifts out of His love, you will gratefully come to a full appreciation of all the good things lying ahead of you, as your inheritance.

As Rom 8:17 says, we are "*heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,*" so that we will receive a share in all the wonderful things God will give to X, including His rule over the world in the Millennium (Rev 20:6).

**Finally, w/ 2 words Paul puts 1 last nail in the coffin of salvation by human works (instead of God' grace)=>**

*"...through God."*

Because of God's initiative in sending His Son to die for us, and sending His Spirit to call, regenerate & engage us in His eternal purposes through our prayers, all these blessings are ours.

For that reason, we look up to our beloved Father and say with heartfelt gratitude, "Like John Wesley, I love You, I thank You for Your marvelous grace, and I praise Your holy name! I was a slave, but You've made me Your own son."