

‘A child of God.’ (10)

In our last sermon, we saw how the apostle Paul introduced the concept of an heir of God. And remember that an ‘heir’ is someone who has been appointed to receive an inheritance. Today he’s going to continue with this idea by presenting an argument against the Judaizing teachers that’s based on the premise of how we have received the adoption to be sons of God. He’s going to tell us that Sonship isn’t the result of some physical identity with Abraham, but through the spiritual identity of Abraham’s faith.

A friend of mine was sitting in a coffee shop one day looking glum so I asked him, ‘What was wrong?’ He said, ‘My mother died last month, and left me 60k!’ ‘Sorry to hear!’ I replied. He went on and said, ‘Then my father died last week and left me 20k!’ so I replied by saying, ‘Wow, that must be so hard, losing two parents in a month!’ ‘Yeah, then today my brother died and left me 10k!’ I felt sorry for him so I put my arm around him to comfort him, and he looks at me and says, ‘thanks but the worst part of it is, there is no one left for next month!’

Now as sad as that thought is, I’ve actually heard people talking about how they can’t wait for their parents to die in order for them to get their inheritance money. Let’s go ahead and read what Paul has to say concerning inheritance.

Galatians 4:1-3 “What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world”.

Paul says although a child has potential inheritance of his father’s estate, as a child, he is no better off in terms of relation to the inheritance than a slave. And so, in a sense, the son is kept in ‘slavery’ until the time of the inheritance. The only advantage the son has that makes him different from a slave is that he is heir to the estate. In other words, the son is after the nature of the father, but the slave isn’t. The son has a father, but the slave is under a master. The son serves the father out of love, but the slave serves out of fear.

Paul’s point is that the Galatians were trying to return to slavery at the expense of their relationship to Christ and ultimately God. And because ‘the heir is subject to guardians and trustees’ this meant that the son has no rights to the possession of the inheritance until he actually inherits the estate at the time the father has designated.

Now in our culture, the custom is you’ll receive an inheritance after someone dies, but in Biblical times that wasn’t always the case. Remember the story of the Prodigal son? Jesus shares a parable about a man who had two sons and He says in **Luke 15:12** “The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So, he divided his property between them”.

And so, the inheritance didn’t always mean you had to wait until someone dies to receive something. Now the Christians whom Paul is addressing here were wanting to go back to Old Testament way of life, a time when they were slaves to the law. But Paul also seems to be addressing the Gentiles, who before Christ, were also shut up under bondage by the law unto themselves. Both Jews and Gentiles were kept under the basic or elementary principles of man-made religion until the coming of Jesus.

The Gentiles were kept under the bondage of superstitious religions that haunted their minds with fear according to **Acts 7:42**. And although there were Gentiles who lived by faith in God before the cross, they were still in the bondage of their inability to obey any law in order to be justified before God. Paul’s point is that both Jews and Gentiles were slaves in bondage before the grace of God was revealed through Jesus. And Paul says if they return to that kind of slavery, they were actually returning to their spiritual childhood. They were rejecting the Gospel which actually freed them from all those rules and regulations of the Old Testament.

Now loved ones, if Jesus Christ has freed you from your old way of life why would you want to go back to it? Why would anyone want to go back to any religious system which can’t save anyone, a religious system which only offers slavery?

You see, God knew that mankind couldn’t live without breaking His laws, He knew that mankind couldn’t live without breaking their own manmade laws. And so, God had to intervene to make fellowship with Him possible. God had to intervene to help mankind be free. **Galatians 4:4+5** “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship”.

At the exact second in time, God set His plan to save mankind, He sent His Son Jesus into the world at the exact moment in time. It was a time of peace that began with the rule of **Octavius Caesar Augustus** in **17 B.C.** It was a time when Rome had developed a common language, roads, economic stability and national unity throughout the Roman Empire. It was a time when the world was sociologically prepared to receive the intervention of God into the world. Jews had been scattered throughout the world because of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The stage was set for the coming of the Messiah in Jerusalem in order to be announced to the Jews in synagogues throughout the world. It was a time when the Gospel could be announced on earth and be shared throughout the nations of the Roman Empire.

And so once again, we're reminded that God works on His own timetable not ours. Now let me quickly mention something about this text, the **NIV** and other translations have made a real mess of this text because it should read, **'God sent his Son, born of woman, born under law'**. In the original text, it doesn't say **'born of a woman, born under the law'**.

Now this is important because some people like to believe that this is talking about the virgin birth of Jesus but it isn't. Paul is simply saying that Jesus was born naturally, He had a human birth just like you and I. And notice also that the word **'the'** isn't in the original text, when Paul talks about Jesus being born under law. He's telling us that Jesus was subject to law, all law not just the Law of Moses.

Paul is basically asking, **why would we want to return to a religious system that Jesus delivered us from?** You see, Jesus came to redeem us from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order that we be justified by God's grace. He redeemed us from sin which was shown in our inability to keep law. The word **'redeem'** means to buy back and it's a metaphor that finds its earthly meaning in one of two sources, or both.

Israel was in Egyptian captivity from which they couldn't deliver themselves. And so, God redeemed them by His grace, since they couldn't redeem themselves. During Roman times, a slave couldn't deliver himself, but could find freedom if someone paid the redemption price for their freedom. Whichever is the source of the metaphor Paul has in mind here, the thought is the same.

We were in the captivity of our own sinfulness, we couldn't gain freedom by meritorious works of law or perfect law-keeping. **Why?** Because all have sinned as **Romans 3:23** tells us. Loved ones, law was the problem and we couldn't find atonement in doing good deeds. God had to send His Son to die for us and now through the blood of Jesus, we're bought out of the captivity of sin. The Jews couldn't keep God's law perfectly, the Gentiles couldn't keep their own manmade laws perfectly and so both were slaves to law.

But why did Jesus come to earth according to the text? In order **'that we might receive adoption to sonship'**. John tells us in **John 1:12** **"to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."** You see when a person gives their lives to Christ, believing and trusting in Him alone for salvation, God says they become part of His family. But this isn't through the natural process of human conception, but through adoption.

Paul says in **Romans 8:15** **"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." And remember that no one is forced to adopt anyone, adoption is a choice and motivated by love. Ephesians 1:5+6 says, "he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves."**

In other words, adoption is based upon God's choice to adopt us and motivated by His love. It's based upon our faith in Jesus, not on meritorious obedience to law. Paul is saying that the Gentiles mustn't try to go back to their superstitions, fear and bondage. The Jews mustn't go back to depending on law-keeping which brought no justification. Bondage brings fear because everyone knows that they have broken the law but liberty brings joy and peace of mind.

I remember a few years ago, a new convert came to see me because he was in deep distress. He said to me, **'No matter how much he prays, no matter how hard he tries, he simply can't seem to be faithful to his Lord.'** He said, **'he thinks he's losing his salvation.'** I asked him, **'Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained, he never makes a mess, he is obedient, he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess.'** So, I asked him, **'but who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog, my son is my heir.'**

You see loved ones, all Christians mess up at times in their walk with God. All Christians think or act in ways they shouldn't at times, but we're still God's children. Just like that new convert, we're Jesus Christ's heirs because He died for us. We are Christ's heirs, not through trying to be perfect but because of His grace.

That's why Paul continues and says in [Galatians 4:6+7](#) "Because you are his 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 God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." Paul says because they were sons, the Holy Spirit was given to them.

But when did they receive the Holy Spirit? [Acts 2:38](#) "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." In other words, when they were baptised, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself who would take up residence in them. Because it's at our baptism that not only are our sins forgiven and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, but it's at our baptism we truly become a child of God.

Paul's point is that the Holy Spirit wasn't among them because they try to keep the law, but through the grace of God. They didn't earn the right to have the indwelling of the Spirit, the Spirit was freely given. If the Galatians went back to law-keeping, they would give up their right to be sons of God and they would lose the presence of the Spirit in their lives.

Now the words, 'Abba, Father' was a term of endearment used by Jewish children in reference to their physical fathers. You see, it's all about our relationship with the Father, we can't call God, 'Father' unless we truly are His children. A slave doesn't have that kind of intimate relationship with his master. Those who appreciate their salvation by grace that has been extended from the Father through the cross, cry out to the Father for direction.

When we say, 'Abba, Father,' we're actually making a plea as His sons and daughters for direction from the Father. And Paul says as sons, the Galatians aren't as slaves in their relationship with the Father. If they return to law-keeping, they will return to the status of a slave, and so they can't address the Father as 'Abba.' But, since they are sons through Jesus, then they are heirs of the promise and they can call Him Father.

Paul says, "You are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." Loved ones the contrast Paul is making between being a son or slave is obvious. The son has a close relationship with the Father, the slave doesn't. The son has hope of inheritance, the slave doesn't. The son labours in love of the Father, the slave labours in fear. The son is of the nature of the Father, the slave isn't. The son has a father, the slave has a master.

No wonder Paul said in [Galatians 1:6](#) "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel." No wonder he said back in [Galatians 3:1](#) "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified." No wonder Paul is going to say later in [Galatians 4:20](#) "How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!"

The Galatians wanted to leave the grace of God and turn back to law keeping. They wanted to leave that intimate relationship with the Father and go back to being slaves. In other words, they wanted to trust in their own abilities to be right with God, rather than trust in what Jesus done for them at Calvary.

Now what about you? Are you trusting in your own abilities be right with God? What motivates you to do good works for God? Some people do good works because they feel they are contributing towards their salvation. Some work in charity shops, some help the homeless, some give loads of money to people in need. And so, in a sense they believe they are good people, doing lots of good things and God will be pleased with them and will grant them entry into heaven.

In other words, some people do good deeds because they feel that have to, to be right with God. But the real Christian doesn't do good deeds because they have to, they do them because they want to, because they know they're already right with God. We don't do good deeds for our salvation, we do good deeds because of our salvation. We can't save ourselves but Jesus can and we're saved not because of what we do here and now, we're saved because of what Jesus did back then at Calvary.

Let me describe to you someone I know and as I'm describing them to you, **ask yourself if you believe they are right with God?** This man and his family are devoted to God, in fact his whole family really fear God. The man was a very generous man, who always gave to anyone who had a need. If he saw a homeless person, he would buy them new warm clothes for the winter. If he saw someone begging for food, he would go to the local market and buy them some food. If there was a famine in some other part of the world, he would give lots of money to help them out. He was a man who always prayed to God with thanksgiving.

Now let me ask you, **was this man and his family right with God?** I guess most people today would say, **'yes he was.'** **Why?** Because of his and his family's actions. Now most of you who know your Bibles, will know I'm talking about the centurion named Cornelius whom we read about in **Acts 10**. But for those of you who aren't familiar with Cornelius and his story, let me show you something very important.

Acts 10:1+2 "At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly." Now according to this text alone we would say that he was a prime example of someone who was right with God because of his actions but, **was he saved? Was he really right with God?** Now look with me at **Acts 10:48 "So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."**

Loved ones if this devout, God fearing, generous, praying man and his family were already right with God, **why would Peter order them to be baptised?** I'll tell you why, it's because despite of their devotion to God, despite of their fear of God, despite of their generosity and prayers, they still had a sin problem. A sin problem which can only be dealt with properly in the waters of baptism.

Can't we understand that our good deeds can't save us? A slave does things because they have to but free people do things because they want to. **Romans 8:1+2 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."**

The question I want to leave you with is simply this, **do you want to continue to live like a slave under condemnation? Or do you want to live like a person who's been set free from sin and death because of what Christ has done?**