

Galatians 12 – From Slavery to Sonship

Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC - 12-1-2024

We are in a sermon series on the book of Galatians called Freedom Through Christ. In this letter Paul confronted the Galatians for believing that Christ and the cross were not enough for salvation, but they also had to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. They believed that you start by faith but you finish by works. But the Bible teaches that salvation begins and is brought to completion by grace through faith – not by obeying the law.

So – if we are not saved by keeping the law, not sanctified by keeping the law, don't receive our spiritual inheritance by keeping the law, why did God give the law?

I preached on that 2 weeks ago in a sermon entitled The Purpose of the Law. We saw that the law was given to show us what sin is, to convict us of our own sinfulness, to show us that we are powerless to overcome sin on our own, to show us our need for a Savior and to lead us to Christ. That's why Galatians 3:23-25 says:

Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 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.

We've seen how the law was a jailor that kept us in prison to sin. But this verse is saying something much more than that. Let me read it from the New King James Version.

The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

There is a boatload of truth in these verses that most of us do not understand because we are not aware of the customs of ancient times. Most of us have not been taught the cultural meaning of these verses.

The role of a preacher who expounds the Scripture is to first show what the verse meant to those who originally wrote it and read it. Then we discover how we apply that to us today.

I'm preaching a message entitled From Slavery to Sonship. Some of us have never been taught that in the Bible there is a difference between a child and a son.

And some do not understand what a tutor was in those days. To us, a tutor is someone who helps teach us subjects in school that we have difficulty with.

In ancient times, a tutor was much more than this. A tutor was not a teacher. In the Greek culture, fathers entrusted their male children ages 6-16 to a servant who was the child's guardian. The guardians' responsibility was training and discipline, not imparting knowledge.

Strong's Concordance says that the biblical Greek word for tutor means: a child-leader, i.e. a servant whose office it was to take the children to school. This guardian was not the instructor of the child; he exercised a general supervision over him and was responsible for his moral and physical well-being.

The child was an heir but had to totally submit to the guardian. That's why Paul says in Galatians 4:1

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.

In Bible days, there was little difference between a child and a slave. Both were under the guardianship of an overseer.

The guardian made sure a child went to school.

The guardian made sure they did their homework.

The guardian instilled into the child the ways and purposes of their father.

This happened until the child became of the age to become a man.

Galatians 4:2 says:

He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.

In both Jewish and Greek cultures, there were definite "coming of age" ceremonies where a boy stopped being a child and started being a man, with legal rights as an heir. For Jews, this is called a bar mitzvah and happens at age 12. For Greeks it occurred at age 18. In the Roman custom, there was no specific age when the son became a man. It happened when the father thought the boy was ready.

When Paul used the phrase until the time appointed by the father, he shows that he had the Roman "coming of age" custom more in mind than the Jewish custom. A Roman child became an adult at a sacred family gathering when the child was formally adopted by the father as his acknowledged son and heir.

So, in the Roman culture, adoption was not just taking on the responsibility of a child that was from another family, it was also the coming-of-age ceremony when a child became a man. He was actually now a son.

In the New Testament – the Greek word for child is teknon and the word for son is huios. And the word for adoption is huiiothesia (hwee-oth-es-ee'-ah); a compound of the word son and the word place. **Adoption literally means to place as a son. To give the position of a son.**

Vine's Expository Dictionary says "adoption" is a term involving the dignity of the relationship of believers as sons; it is not a putting into the family by spiritual birth, but a putting into the position of sons.

What God wants to do is move us beyond slavery and beyond childhood immaturity to take our place as sons and heirs.

There's a difference between a child and a son.

The word child refers to who you are by birth.

The word son refers to your place as a mature son of God.

This speaks of our position and privileges as a mature believer in Christ.

A child receives life from the father, but a son shares the life with the father and lives a life that shows forth the character of the father.

There's little difference between a slave and a child. But there's a huge difference between a slave and a son.

A slave is bound but a son is free.

A slave has no inheritance but a son is an heir.

A slave does not have the life of the father, but a son has life.

A slave does not have the spirit of the father, but a son has the spirit.

As long as he is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all. Think of a wealthy ancient household, with a young boy who is destined to inherit all that his father has. When the boy is just a child, he actually has less day-to-day freedom and authority than a high-ranking servant in the household. Yet, he is *destined* to inherit everything and the slave isn't.

Paul is saying that this is what the law does for us. It is a tutor that leads us to Christ so that we might have faith in Christ for salvation where we become children of God. But the law has its limits because it treats us like slaves, not sons.

The law is our guardian UNTIL we come to faith in Christ. When the child has grown, he doesn't do away with the discipline and lessons he gained from the tutor; but he also doesn't live *under* the tutor any longer. This is our relation to the law of God.

The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

But we still respect our tutor, the Law; we remember our lessons from it, but we don't live *under* the law. We live under Jesus by faith. Galatians 4:3-5 says:

3 So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. 4 But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

When we were immature spiritual children, we were we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.

And when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

The idea behind the phrase the fullness of time is “when the time was right.” Jesus came at just the right time in God’s redemptive plan when the world was perfectly prepared for God’s work.

It was a time when much of the world was governed by Roman. Because of that, *pax Romana* – or Roman peace brought relative tranquility to the world. It was a time when travel and commerce increased because of the roads that the Romans built which linked the Roman empire. It was a time when there was a common language and culture because of the influence of the Greeks.

James Boice said: “Add the fact that the world was sunk in a moral abyss so low that even the pagan cried out against it and that spiritual hunger was everywhere evident, and one has a perfect time for the coming of Christ and for the early expansion of the Christian gospel.”

At the perfect time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman. **Paul never says that Jesus was born of a man and he does not say that Christ was born of man and woman because His Father is God.**

It’s hard for some people to understand, but Jesus was fully God and fully man. He had to be fully God for His sacrifice to be perfect to be worthy to atone for our sins. He had to be fully man so He could take on our guilt and penalty as the sacrifice for our sins.

The eternal Son of God in heaven added humanity to His deity and became a man, born of a woman, born under law. He was born under the law and totally fulfilled the law during His lifetime. He was born under law so that He could redeem those who were under the law.

Because Jesus is God, He has the power and the resources to redeem us. Because Jesus is man, He has the right to redeem us.

He came to purchase us out of the slave market, from our bondage to sin and *the elements of the world*.

John Newton, the man who wrote the most popular hymn *Amazing Grace*, knew how to remember this. He was an only child whose mother died when he was only seven years old. He became a sailor and went out to sea at eleven years old. As he grew up, he became the captain of a slave ship and had an active hand in the horrible degradation and inhumanity of the slave trade.

But when he was twenty-three, on March 10, 1748, when his ship was in imminent danger of sinking off the coast of Newfoundland, he cried to God for mercy, and he found it.

He never forgot how amazing it was that God had received him, as bad as he was. So, not only did John Newton quit the slave trade, but he also worked for years with William Wilberforce to get slavery banned in England.

John Newton never wanted to forget what God did for him. To keep it fresh in his memory, he fastened across the wall over the fireplace mantel of his study the words of Deuteronomy 15:15 - You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you.

And we would do well to keep the same truth fresh in our minds! Never forget what God redeemed you from and never forget who you are now in Jesus Christ!

Christ redeemed us that we might receive the adoption as sons. It would be enough that we are purchased out of slavery. But God's work for us doesn't end there; we are then elevated to the place of sons and daughters of God by adoption. Galatians 4:6 says:

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

We know that we are the sons and daughters of God by the witness of the Holy Spirit within us. God secures our sonship by His Son and He assures us of sonship by His Spirit!

Notice that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of His Son because the idea of our sonship is based on Jesus' sonship. Our sonship is based on who we are in Jesus, yet there are important distinctions between our sonship and Jesus' sonship.

He is the *only begotten* Son making Him a Son by His essential nature. We are *adopted* sons and daughters of God, made children by a legal decree of God.

It is fitting that those who are in fact sons have the Spirit of the Son in their hearts. This gives us both the *right* and the *ability* to cry out Abba to God our Father, even as Jesus did to His Father.

Abba is an Aramaic affectionate term for 'father' equal to our word daddy. It shows a level of intimacy with God. For mature sons, God is not some far off, distant deity – He is our daddy.

Vines' Dictionary says that servants were forbidden to use this term for the head of the household because they did not have the same level of intimacy that a son had.

But we have access to the same intimacy with God the Father that God the Son, Jesus Christ had. Jesus addressed God the Father as “Abba” when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:35-36

Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him. 36 "Abba, Father," He said, "everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will."

We should not whisper “Daddy” as if we were hesitant to speak so affectionately. Instead, we cry it out.

John Calvin says that crying out means to express great boldness. Uncertainty keeps our mouth shut. But crying out is an expression of certainty and unwavering confidence.

Martin Luther said, “Let the Law, sin, and the devil cry out against us until their outcry fills heaven and earth. The Spirit of God outcries them all. Our feeble groans, ‘Abba, Father,’ will be heard of God sooner than the combined racket of hell, sin, and the Law.”

Not only do mature sons have an intimate relationship with God, they are also His heirs and joint heirs with Christ. Galatians 4:7 says:

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

Sons are never slaves and slaves are never sons in their father’s house. Listen, you can be a child of God and have a slave mentality.

Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. When the prodigal son came to his senses, he tried to return to his father as a slave — but the father refused and would only receive him as a son.

The father would not let the son say, Make me like one of your servants. The Father does not want sons who act like slaves.

And the elder son in the story had the status and privileges of a son, but he did not express the life or the spirit of the father. Instead, he also had a slave mentality.

But Galatians says we are sons, we are heirs.

This is a beautiful progression.

First we are set free from slavery.

Then we are declared sons and adopted into God’s family.

Then, as sons, we are made heirs.

Heirs inherit something and Paul made it clear just what we inherit.

Through Christ our release from slavery, our sonship, the Spirit of Jesus in our hearts, and our status as heirs of God are all birthrights given to us in Jesus. We receive them through Christ. These are things we should be living in and enjoying every day of our Christian life. Galatians 4:8-9 says:

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 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 beggarly principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Before we knew God, we were slaves to things which are not really God. Yet the Galatians had known God and still placed themselves under bondage. This was what amazed Paul.

In turning to legalism, the Galatians were not turning to a new error, but coming back to an old one — the idea of a works relationship with God.

As Christians, we can place ourselves under the bondage of a works-based relationship with God — but this is moving backward, not forward.

One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in fact it is childish.

These elements of the world are weak because they offer no strength; they are beggarly because they bestow no riches. All they can do is bring us again into bondage. That's why Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:11 to put away childish things. They don't just go away – you must put them away.

Paul is saying: “If you were a slave and are now a son, how can you turn back again to the old slavery? How can you allow yourself to be enslaved by the law from whom Jesus Christ has rescued you?”

God wants to set us free from that today!!!

In closing, I want to ask you: Are you a son or a slave?

A slave is bound by the law, but a son is free.

A slave is bound by weak and beggarly elements, but a son is not.

A slave is not an heir, but sons are joint heirs with Christ.

A slave does not have a close relationship with the father.

He cannot cry out Abba Father.

He does not have the life of the Father in him.

He does not have the character of the Father.

But a son has the spirit of God, a close Abba relationship with God.

A son has the life and character of God.

Romans 8:19 says that all creation is eagerly expecting the manifestation of the sons of God! So, it is imperative that we move from slavery to sonship!