

From Slaves *to* Heirs



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 3:26–4:20; Rom. 6:1–11; Heb. 2:14–18; 4:14, 15; Rom. 9:4, 5.*

Memory Text: “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (*Galatians 4:7, ESV*).

Paul tells the Galatians that they should not live and act as slaves but as the sons and daughters of God, with all the rights and privileges thereof—a truth that the young Martin Luther needed to hear. As his convictions of sin deepened, the young man sought by his own works to obtain pardon and peace. He led a most rigorous life, endeavoring by fasting, vigils, and scourgings to subdue the evils of his nature, from which the monastic life had brought no relief. Luther shrank from no sacrifice by which he might attain such purity of heart that would enable him to stand approved before God. He was, he said later, a pious monk who strictly followed the rules of his order, and yet he found no peace within them: “If ever monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it.” Yet it didn’t work for Luther.

Only as he later began to understand the truth about salvation in Christ, as revealed in Galatians, did he ever start to have any kind of spiritual freedom and hope for his own soul. As a result, too, our world has never been the same.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 19.

Our Condition in Christ *(Gal. 3:26–29)*

Keeping Galatians 3:25 in mind, read Galatians 3:26. How does this text help us understand what our relationship to the law is now that we have been redeemed by Jesus?

The word *for* at the beginning of verse 26 indicates that Paul sees a direct connection between this verse and the preceding one. In the same way that a master's son was under a pedagogue only as long as he was a minor, Paul is saying that those who come to faith in Christ are no longer minors; their relationship with the law is changed because they are now *adult* "sons" of God.

The term *son* is not, of course, exclusive to males, as Paul clearly includes females in this category (*Gal 3:28*). The reason he uses the word *sons* instead of *children* is that he has in mind the family inheritance that was passed on to the male offspring, along with the fact that the phrase "sons of God" was the special designation of Israel in the Old Testament (*Deut. 14:1, Hos. 11:1*). In Christ, Gentiles now also enjoy the special relationship with God that had been exclusive to Israel.

What is it about baptism that makes it such a significant event? *Gal. 3:27, 28; Rom. 6:1–11; 1 Pet. 3:21.*

Paul's use of the word *for* in verse 27 indicates once again the close, logical development of his reasoning. Paul sees baptism as a radical decision to unite our lives with Christ. In Romans 6, he describes baptism symbolically as our uniting with Jesus, both in His death and resurrection. In Galatians, Paul employs a different metaphor: baptism is the act of being clothed with Christ. Paul's terminology is reminiscent of wonderful passages in the Old Testament that talk about being clothed with righteousness and salvation (see *Isa. 61:10, Job 29:14*). "Paul views baptism as the moment when Christ, like a garment, envelops the believer. Although he does not employ the term, Paul is describing the righteousness which is conferred upon believers."—Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 145.

Our union with Christ, symbolized through baptism, means that what is true of Christ also is true of us. Because Christ is the "seed" of Abraham, as "joint-heirs with Christ" (*Rom. 8:17*), believers also are heirs to all the covenant promises made to Abraham and his descendants.

Dwell on the thought that what is true of Christ is also true of us. How should this amazing truth affect every aspect of our existence?

Enslaved to Elementary Principles

Having just compared our relationship to God with that of sons and heirs, Paul now elaborates on this metaphor by including the theme of inheritance in Galatians 4:1–3. Paul’s terminology evokes a situation in which an owner of a large estate has died, leaving all his property to his oldest son. His son, however, is still a minor. As is often the case with wills even today, the father’s will stipulates that his son is to be under the supervision of guardians and managers until he reaches maturity. Though he is master of his father’s estate by title, as a minor he is little more than a slave in practice.

Paul’s analogy is similar to that of the pedagogue in Galatians 3:24, but in this case the power of the stewards and managers is far superior and much more important. They are responsible not only for the upbringing of the master’s son but also the financial and administrative affairs until the son is mature enough to assume those duties himself.

Read Galatians 4:1–3. What is Paul saying there that, again, should help clarify what the role of the law should be in our lives now that we are in Christ?

Exactly what Paul means by the phrase “elementary principles” (*Gal. 4:3, 8, ESV*) is disputed. The Greek word *stoicheia* literally means “elements.” Some have seen it as a description of the basic elements that compose the universe (*2 Pet. 3:10, 12*); as demonic powers that control this evil age (*Col. 2:15*); or as the rudimentary principles of religious life, the ABCs of religion (*Heb. 5:12*). Paul’s emphasis on humanity’s status as “minors” before the coming of Christ (*Gal. 4:1–3*) suggests that he is referring here to the rudimentary principles of religious life. If so, Paul is saying that the Old Testament period, with its laws and sacrifices, was merely a gospel primer that outlined the basics of salvation. Thus, as important and instructional as the ceremonial laws were to Israel, they were only shadows of what was to come. They never were intended to take the place of Christ.

To regulate one’s life around these rules instead of Christ, then, is like wanting to go back in time. So, for the Galatians to return to those basic elements after Christ already had come would be like the adult son in Paul’s analogy wanting to be a minor again!

While a childlike faith can be positive (*Matt. 18:3*), is it necessarily the same thing as spiritual maturity? Or could you argue that the more you grow spiritually, the more childlike your faith will be? How childlike, “innocent” and trusting, is your faith?

“God Sent Forth His Son” (*Gal. 4:4*)

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (*Gal. 4:4, ESV*).

Paul’s choice of the word *fullness* indicates God’s active role in working out His purpose in human history. Jesus did not come at just any time; He came at the precise time God had prepared. From a historical perspective, that time is known as the *Pax Romana* (the Roman Peace), a two-hundred-year period of relative stability and peace across the Roman Empire. Rome’s conquest of the Mediterranean world brought peace, a common language, favorable means of travel, and a common culture that facilitated the rapid spread of the gospel. From a biblical perspective, it also marked the time that God had set for the coming of the promised Messiah (*see Dan. 9:24–27*).

Why did Christ have to take our humanity in order to redeem us? *John 1:14; Gal. 4:4, 5; Rom. 8:3, 4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 2:5–8; Heb. 2:14–18; 4:14, 15.*

Galatians 4:4, 5 contains one of the most succinct accounts of the gospel in Scripture. These clear verses put forth God’s plan for the world, indicating that the coming of Jesus into human history was no accident. “God sent forth His Son.” In other words, God took the initiative in our salvation.

Also implicit in these words is the fundamental Christian belief in Christ’s eternal deity (*John 1:1–3, 18; Phil. 2:5–9; Col. 1:15–17*). God did not send a heavenly messenger. He, Himself, came.

Although He was the divine preexistent Son of God, Jesus was also “born of woman.” Though the virgin birth is implied in this phrase, it more specifically affirms His genuine humanity.

The phrase “born under the law” points not only to Jesus’ Jewish heritage but also includes the fact that He bore our condemnation.

Thus, it was necessary for Christ to assume our humanity because we could not save ourselves. By uniting His divine nature with our fallen human nature, Christ legally became qualified to be our Substitute, Savior, and High Priest. As the second Adam, He came to reclaim all that the first Adam had lost by his disobedience (*Rom. 5:12–21*). By His obedience, He perfectly fulfilled the law’s demands, thus redeeming Adam’s tragic failure. And by His death on the cross, He met the justice of the law, which required the death of the sinner, thus gaining the right to redeem all who come to Him in true faith and surrender.

The Privileges of Adoption *(Gal. 4:5–7)*

In Galatians 4:5–7, Paul expands on his theme, stressing that Christ has now redeemed those who were under the law. The verb *redeem* means “to buy back.” It referred to the price paid to buy the freedom of either a hostage or a slave. As this context indicates, redemption implies a negative background: a person is in need of being liberated.

From what, though, do we need to be freed? The New Testament presents four things among others: (1) freed from the devil and his wiles (*Heb. 2:14, 15*); (2) freed from death (*1 Cor. 15:56, 57*); (3) freed from the power of sin that enslaves us by nature (*Rom. 6:22*); and (4) freed from the condemnation of the law (*Rom. 3:19–24, Gal. 3:13, 4:5*).

What positive purpose has Christ achieved for us through the redemption we have in Him? *Gal. 4:5–7; Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15, 16, 23; 9:4, 5.*

We often speak about what Christ has accomplished for us with our “salvation.” Though true, this word is not nearly as vivid and descriptive as Paul’s unique use of the word *adoption* (*huiiothesia*). Although Paul is the only New Testament author to use this word, adoption was a well-known legal procedure in the Greco-Roman world. Several Roman emperors during Paul’s life used adoption as the means of choosing a successor when they had no legal heir. Adoption guaranteed a number of privileges: “(1) The adopted son become[s] the true son . . . of his adopter. . . . (2) The adopter agrees to bring up the child properly and to provide the necessities of food and clothing. (3) The adopter cannot repudiate his adopted son. (4) The child cannot be reduced to slavery. (5) The child’s natural parents have no right to reclaim him. (6) The adoption establishes the right to inherit.”—Derek R. Moore-Crispin, “Galatians 4:1–9: The Use and Abuse of Parallels,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. LXI, no. 3 (1989), p. 216.

If these rights are guaranteed on an earthly level, just imagine how much greater are the privileges we have as the adopted children of God!

Read Galatians 4:6, realizing that the Hebrew word *Abba* was the intimate word children used to address their father, like the word *Daddy* or *Papa* today. Jesus used it in prayer (*Mark 14:36*), and as God’s children we have the privilege of calling God “*Abba*,” as well. Do you enjoy that kind of intimate closeness to God in your own life? If not, what’s the problem? What can you change to bring about this closeness?

Why Turn Back to Slavery? (*Gal. 4:8–20*)

Read Galatians 4:8–20. Summarize on the lines below what Paul is saying in these verses. How seriously does he take the false teachings among Galatians?

Paul does not describe the exact nature of the Galatians' religious practices, but he clearly has in mind a false system of worship that resulted in spiritual slavery. Indeed, he deemed it so dangerous and destructive that he would write such an impassioned letter, warning the Galatians that what they were doing was akin to turning away from sonship to slavery.

Though he didn't get into specifics, what does Paul say the Galatians were doing that he found so objectionable? *Gal. 4:9–11*.

Many have interpreted Paul's reference to "days and months and seasons and years" (*Gal. 4:10, ESV*) as an objection not merely against ceremonial laws but against the Sabbath as well. Such an interpretation, however, goes beyond the evidence. For starters, if Paul really wanted to single out the Sabbath and other specific Jewish practices, it is clear from Colossians 2:16 that he easily could have identified them by name. Second, Paul makes it clear that whatever it is the Galatians are doing, it has led them from freedom in Christ to bondage. "If observance of the seventh-day Sabbath subjects a man to bondage, it must be that the Creator Himself entered into bondage when He observed the world's first Sabbath!"—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 967. Also, why would Jesus not only have kept the Sabbath but taught others how to keep it if its proper observance were in any way depriving people of the freedom that they have in Him? (*See Mark 2:27, 28; Luke 13:10–16.*)

Might there be any practices in Seventh-day Adventism that take away from the freedom that we have in Christ? Or instead of the practices themselves being problematic, what about our attitudes toward the practices? How could a wrong attitude lead us into the kind of bondage that Paul warned the Galatians about so vehemently?

Further Thought: “In the council of heaven, provision was made that men, though transgressors, should not perish in their disobedience, but, through faith in Christ as their substitute and surety, might become the elect of God predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will. God wills that all men should be saved; for ample provision has been made, in giving his only-begotten Son to pay man’s ransom. Those who perish will perish because they refuse to be adopted as children of God through Christ Jesus. The pride of man hinders him from accepting the provisions of salvation. But human merit will not admit a soul into the presence of God. That which will make a man acceptable to God is the imparted grace of Christ through faith in his name. No dependence can be placed in works or in happy flights of feelings as evidence that men are chosen of God; for the elect are chosen through Christ.”—Ellen G. White, “Chosen in Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, January 2, 1893.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the idea of what it means, and what it does not mean, to be like children in our walk with the Lord. What aspects of children are we to emulate in regard to our faith and our relationship with God? At the same time, what are ways in which we can take this idea too far? Discuss.
- ❷ What is it about human beings that make them so afraid of the idea of grace, or salvation by faith alone? Why is it that many people would rather try to work their way to salvation, if that were possible?
- ❸ As a class, go over the final question from Thursday’s study. In what ways can we as Seventh-day Adventists get caught up in the kind of slavery that ideally we have been freed from? How could this happen to us, how can we know if it does, and how can we be set free?

Summary: In Christ we have been adopted into God’s family as His sons and daughters. As God’s children, we have access to all the rights and privileges that such a family relationship entails. To relate to God on the basis of rules and regulations alone would be foolish. It would be like a son wanting to renounce his position and inheritance in order to become a slave.