



(For access to all available commentaries and sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

Galatians

Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, Galatians 4:1

In the previous chapter, and in particular verses 23-25, Paul had spoken about those under the law as being under a tutor (someone who would tend to the child as a guardian). He will now expand upon that thought, comparing the child, here term "the heir," who is under a tutor, to a person living under the law.

This "heir," as long as he is a child does not have the right to run the estate. He doesn't have the maturity or understanding of what to do in order to keep the estate. And so, even though he is the heir to the estate, at that point he "does not differ at all from a slave."

The word here translated as "child" is the Greek word *népios*. It refers to an infant, and figuratively to a simple-minded or immature person. Thus it is a minor who has the inability to properly handle the full rights that he may be entitled to.

A slave has no right to run an estate. Instead, he takes orders, performs whatever functions are required of him, and keeps out of those areas his master has forbidden him to participate in. The child of the master, though heir, is in exactly the same position. And so he truly is no different than the slave in this regard. And this is despite the fact that "he is master of all."

The heir will someday assume the full rights of his position. But that time must wait until he is ready and capable of doing so. Until that point, he may have certain privileges, but he does not have the right to the estate itself.

Paul will continue to discuss this and explain what he means, but he is making a parallel to those under the law before coming to Christ. Their status as heirs was not in question, but their rights as heirs were not fully developed. Until they came to Christ by faith, they did not have the rights of the inheritance. Instead, they remained in a position of servitude to the law. This would only end in their coming to Christ through His accomplishment of the law.

Life application: For the nine-billionth time, Paul has shown that being under the law is contrary to being "in Christ." The law keeps people in bondage; the gospel frees them. To mandate observances of the law to those who have already come to Christ can only be harmful to the relationship that had been established. To mandate observances of the law to those who have not yet come to Christ can only keep such a person from ever being liberated and to entering into a right relationship with God.

...but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

Galatians 4:2

This verse is connected to verse 1 and it would be good to cite them together for context -

"Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, ² but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father."

The child may be the inheritor of all of the estate, just as Israel was to be the inheritor of the New Covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31, 32), but like the heir, they were not ready for that to be revealed "until the time appointed by the [F]ather."

Until that time, they were "under guardians and stewards." Paul is using a real life example to show why the law was given to Israel and the purpose that law served.

The term "guardians" refers to a person to whom the care of a boy was committed during a particular time in their development. They trained them, took them to school, and even personally helped in educating them. This was what they did and it is what occurred for Israel while they were being taught through the many long years of their need for something other than the law.

The term "stewards" indicates a manager of a house. He was the overseer of it. He had the authority over the entire household including slaves and servants. It is pretty much what Joseph did under Potiphar while in Egypt. Eliezer of Damascus served a similar function under Abraham. Even though slaves, they were given this responsibility because they were found trustworthy and competent.

In this, Paul is equating Israel to being under such a guardian and a steward. The right to the inheritance belonged to them, but they were guided under the guardian until they became of rightful age. They were kept under such care until they had been shown that the law was insufficient to save them. Until that point, the law was intended to keep them in check and to show them how sinful sin really is.

At the coming of Christ, these caretakers were no longer needed. Instead, by faith in Christ, they would become recipients of God's promises and they would have full rights within the house.

Life application: The law is shown time and time again to be a mere stepping stone in the process of redemptive history. It served its purpose and it was fulfilled in Christ. At that time, its purpose had been served and it was set aside. Now, by faith alone in Christ alone, all become rightful heirs of the promise. Don't be duped into believing you must observe the law. It is a step back to bondage.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. Galatians 4:3

Paul has been speaking of the heir of an estate who is, until a certain point, no different than a slave within the house as far as authority and needing instruction is concerned. He may be the master of all, but he needs to be instructed, just as a slave does, in every step of his life. Paul now shows that his words were a metaphor for those who have not yet come to Christ. And so he says, "Even so we..."

The "we" is speaking of Jews under the law, but it is not limited to that. He is also speaking of the Gentiles who lived under their own systems of religion within the confines of the world. Each group was deficient in understanding what was needed to be right with God as Christians. In this state, "when we were children" is a time of being in bondage. Whether it is Jews under the law, or Gentiles without Christ, the bondage existed, and the bondage is sin.

The law didn't take care of the sin problem, it merely highlighted it. Were it not for the provision of mercy within the law, meaning the Day of Atonement, there would be no hope for those under the law. As the Day of Atonement was a day of faith, then their annual covering was not of works of the law, but of trust in God for mercy. Only in Christ is that realized. The same is true with Jew or Gentile.

And so in that previous state, all "were in bondage under the elements of the world." The word for elements is *stoicheion*. It means "properly, *fundamentals*, like with the *basic components* of a philosophy, structure, etc.; (figuratively) '*first principles*,' like the basic fundamentals of Christianity" (HELPS Word Studies).

It further refers to "the *rudiments* with which mankind . . . were *indoctrinated* (before the time of Christ), i.e. the elements of religious training or the ceremonial precepts common alike to the worship of Jews and of Gentiles" (J. Thayer).

Both Jew and Gentile had worldly systems in that they did not transcend this world. Each participated in ritual sacrifices. Each had certain feast days. Each had systems which only pointed to spiritual and heavenly things. It doesn't matter that the law was given by God and that the other religions were of man, they both fell under the same worldly types of workings.

It is for this reason that Paul uses the same term, *stoicheion*, to speak of these systems in a negative light in Colossians 2:8 and 2:20. In those verses, it is referring to any such worldly system - whether law or Gentile religion. The only difference is that the law actually pointed to Christ. Other than that, it was still only a type and a shadow.

If these things, even those under the law, are "worldly" then they need to be put aside when the "heavenly" and "spiritual" truly comes. In Christ, they are realized.

Life application: The Bible is about the redemption of man. How sad it is that people try to convince others that they need to do something which is of this world in order to be redeemed! Christ, the heavenly Man, is the way for us to be reconciled to God. Put away works of the law and be reconciled to God through Christ Jesus. Call on Him today!

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, Galatians 4:4

This is a verse filled with wonder and delight concerning the eternal councils of God and the marvelous plan of the ages which has been slowly realized in the stream of human history. It helps us to understand the concept of progressive revelation. This is a doctrine which tells us that God slowly and methodically reveals His will to man concerning the process of redemption. He revealed the first explicit hints of it in Genesis 3:15. Since that time, He has revealed a bit more at key points in history - all pointing to the coming Christ.

Understanding this, Paul now says, "But..." This is in contrast to the words of the previous verse which said, "...when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world." Of this contrasting thought, Charles Ellicott states, "That which was predetermined in the counsels of God as the right and proper time when the whole course of previous preparation both for Jew and Gentile was complete."

It was at this exact moment in history, when the right time for the Dispensation of Grace was ready to be revealed, that Paul says, "...the fullness of the time had come." The law had served its purpose. Those under the law had been taught their lesson concerning their need for something else. They would be properly directed to an understanding of their need for Christ. Those without the law would likewise be ready to understand what Christ had done within the law. The time had come for the world to learn this new part of God's unfolding plan of redemption.

And so "God sent forth His Son." The word for "sent forth" is *exapostelló*. God sent out from Himself His Son. This is described by the apostle John at the beginning of His gospel -

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1

Jesus was with God, and God sent Himself forth in order to reveal Himself to the world. In both John 1:1, and in Paul's words now, the pre-existence of Christ is taken as an axiom. He always existed; He is not a created being. Paul further describes this remarkable event in Philippians 2 -

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men." Philippians 2:5-7

Christ came from God and entered into the stream of humanity, being "born of a woman." This same general terminology was used when speaking of John the Baptist in Matthew 11:11 -

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Because of this, Paul is referring in this clause not to His deity, but to His humanity. Though fully God, having come from God, He is also fully man, having come through the stream of humanity. But to ensure that a full understanding of Christ's deity is not overlooked, it needs to be noted that the same word for "sent forth" is used again in Galatians 4:6 when speaking of the Holy Spirit -

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"

Bible scholar Bengel notes that, "What that means is evident from the train of thought in this passage, for we have received first adoption, then the Spirit of adoption. Therefore Christ Himself is not the Son of God, merely because He was sent and anointed by the Father."

In other words, the deity of Christ cannot be called into question. Through Christ, we are adopted children of God. Because of this adoption, we are then granted the Spirit of adoption, thus sealing our new status in Christ. Jesus was sent from God; the Holy Spirit is sent from God. Each performs His role as determined by the Godhead. In other words, the concept of the Trinity is seen in what is being relayed to us.

And yet, though fully God, Christ's humanity is likewise not to be diminished in our theology. He was born of a woman and he was also "born under the law." The very law that God gave to the people of Israel is the same law which Christ was

born under. He was, in essence, born subservient to the law. Israel demonstrated that the law could not save them, and that they needed something else. As Christ was born within the people of Israel and under that same law, then what would be the outcome? Paul will explain the situation in the next verse.

Life application - The deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, and the nature of the Godhead - meaning the Trinity - are all tied up in the theology of the Bible. To dismiss any of these precepts leads directly down the heresy highway. Be sure to accept the record of the Bible as it stands. Jesus Christ is fully God, fully Man, and the second member of the Godhead.