

## Gospel, Faith and Freedom (Studies in Galatians)

### Gospel Family - Sons & Heirs

#### Galatians 3:26-4:7

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##### So far...

Paul is astonished (1:6), afraid (4:11), and in anguish (4:19) over the Galatians and their 'deserting' of Christ. Therefore, he declares to them afresh that:

- his apostleship, authority and gospel is not from man, but from God (1:1, 11-12; 2:9);
- Christian freedom is secured by the gospel of Christ, not by the church.
- we are justified not by works but by grace, through faith (2:15-16). As such, it is no longer I (ego) who live, but Christ who lives in me (2:20);
- this justification and salvation is by faith from beginning to end (3:3);
- as far back as Abraham, God's blessing is promised and is received by faith, not by law keeping (3:6-14).

##### In the passage before us today...

Since Christ has come, both the status *before* God and the experience *of* God have changed for all who believe in Christ. We were once slaves, held captive under the law and guarded by it. But now that faith/Christ has come, we are sons and heirs, redeemed and adopted by God, and filled with the Spirit of his Son.

In the passage before us, Paul explains *how* this remarkable change, from what we once were, to who we are now in Christ Jesus, has taken place— namely, by faith in Jesus Christ who has come. In effect, we have 'come of age', having being released from both the 'captivity' of the law and its 'classroom'. In the final two chapters he explains how we can enjoy the life and experience of 'being of age'.

##### We were...

- held captive under the law - imprisoned (3:23).
  - the law cannot bring life nor freedom to anyone.
- the law was our guardian - *paidagogos* (3:24).
  - the law ruled over every aspect of one's life - as teacher and disciplinarian.
- there were divisions of human cultural construct which limited both our unity with one another and our (perceived) access to the promises of God (3:28).
- Using another 'human example' (Cf. 3:15), we were no different to a slave. Despite having the promise and effective 'ownership' of everything, a child's inheritance was not 'in his hands' until the time set by the father (4:1-2).
- In the same way we were 'enslaved' to the elementary principles of the world (4:3).

The law had its place in God's redemptive plan, (and still has its place today). It is good and holy (Romans 7:13, 16), and is the expression of God's own character, but it cannot set us free. On the contrary, it holds us captive as both our 'guard' and our 'guardian'. It imprisons us under sin, and it teaches us, but in no way can it set us free or transform us.

## But now...

- we are no longer under a guardian - *paidagogos* (3:25).
  - We are free, and have a new teacher (Romans 6:14, Titus 2:11-14)
- in Christ Jesus we are all sons of God, through faith (3:26).
  - This is who we are now - in Christ Jesus.
- through faith and baptism (as the public sign of our faith) we have 'put on Christ' (3:27).
  - He is our identity, our example, and our covering.
- we are now all one in Christ Jesus.
  - In the family of God, Christian love and acceptance crosses racial and cultural barriers on the basis of our unity in Christ.
  - The GOSPEL unites us together, equally, before God. It does so negatively, exposing us all as sinners! It does so positively, in Christ, as sinners who have been saved and adopted by grace into the family of God, now all treated equally as sons and therefore, as worthy recipients of the promised blessing and inheritance of God.
- As we are now Christ's, and one in him, we are included in that 'singular collective' of Abraham's offspring and we are therefore heirs 'according to promise' (3:29). Cf. 3:9, 14, 18, 22.
- We have been *redeemed* from slavery under the law so that we might be *adopted* as son of God (4:5).
  - we are not only set free, we are adopted as sons, and given the full rights of sons (John 1:12-13)
- As sons of God, the Spirit has been sent into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (4:6).
- Again, by way of conclusion, Paul emphasises we are no longer slaves but sons. And being sons, means we are also heirs through God (4:7).

## The 'pivot point' between what we once were and what we are now is...

- the revealing of the 'coming faith' (3:23)
- the coming of Christ (3:24)
- the coming of 'faith' (3:25)
- through faith and baptism (3:26-27)
- the fullness of time, set by the Father (4:2, 4)
- the sending of God's Son - Jesus (4:4)
  - all of which has brought about our justification (3:24), our redemption and adoption (4:5).

## And so, we are no longer slaves, but sons, and so, heirs according to promise (3:29; 4:7).

This is the climax of God's great plan of salvation! It's not just that our sins have been forgiven, or that we have been set free (as wonderful as those gospel truths are!) Instead, we have been both redeemed and adopted - set free and made to be sons. As J. I. Packer once responded to the question "What is a Christian?" in his book, *Knowing God*:

The richest answer I know is that *a Christian is one who has God as Father...* Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.... The truth of our adoption gives us the deepest insights the New Testament affords into the greatness of God's love.

*"You are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God"* (Galatians 4:7).

Are we living like a slave or a son? Paul is desperately perplexed about the Galatians and longs for them (and us!) to live in the fullness and freedom of being sons of God.