

Unlocking Freedom: A Study in Galatians

Galatians 4:1-11

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist

May 5, 2019

Introduction

This coming week across the country young men and women will be honored for years of hard work as family and friends gather together in stadiums and gyms. We call this ceremony ‘**graduation**’. And with both commencements in high school and college, what this means is that as one chapter of preparation closes another chapter opens. That young man and woman is now going to share a greater responsibility and burden in society. And in such a moment of realization there are many emotions associated with graduation. Families and graduates alike feel the wonderful joy of accomplishment and the sorrow of a chapter coming to an end. As years continue on, those days of school and less responsibility are looked back upon in a nostalgic sort of way. This is an experience common to man. Books and Movies have played upon this theme of turning back the clock, reminiscing and returning to those ‘golden years’. And although this emotion is very real and there is a sense of nostalgia accompanying that look back into the years of our youth, there is much to joy be recognized in the place where God has today. In fact I would go as far to so say that if we had the ability to turn back the clock, many things would be had again, but more would be lost. There is an ounce of foolishness to desiring to be a child again. In these first 11 verses found in Galatians chapter 4 Paul speaks about being a child, becoming an heir, and gives a warning to the Church concerning turning back to they ways of their youth.

If you have your Bible with you, please open them to **Galatians 4**, read with me **verses 1-11**. *Prayer.*

In order to give us a bit of contextual bearing, let me remind you of where we have come. The Gospel is under attack, as Judaizers have taught the Church a law plus faith salvation. So Paul has spent some considerable time defending the true Gospel message by showing the reason for the law and illuminating the superiority of faith in Christ. He is battling for the very souls of these new Gentile believers in Galatia. Last week we saw that the Law had purpose as a tutor pointing out redemptions path leading to Christ. And then Paul shows us that once you understand the Law’s purpose and come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ alone, you are *baptized into Christ, clothed in Christ, belong to Christ and are heirs according to the promise*. Such wonderful truth we worked our way through last week. Paul now continues to help us understand what exactly happens in regard to our position before God at the moment of salvation. And it is here that we see the significance of what it means to be an *heir according to promise*.

1. **From Slave to Son** (vv. 1-7)

Verses 1, 2 – “*Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything. But he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.*” In the ancient world the division between childhood and adulthood was much more definitive than it is in most society’s today. Until the age of

12 a Jewish boy was under the direct and absolute control of his father. In ancient Greece, a boy was under his father's control until about the age of 18. Either way a child was under the complete control of their father and mother until that age of adulthood was realized. And therefore, although a child and heir, until of age, he did not differ from a slave. In fact the slave would have more say in this child's life than even the child. For it was the slave who would be charged with guardianship and household managerial responsibilities in regard to this child. This was a fact that most those reading the letter would fully understand. It is one that we even understand today. But what does it have to do with us?

Verse 3 – *“So also we, while were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.”* When Paul is speaking of spiritual children here, it's important for us to differentiate between a spiritually immature child and an unbeliever. A spiritually immature child is one who has placed their faith in Christ, but has much to continue to learn in regard to faithful obedience to the Word of God. An unbelieving child has only learned about spiritual things from what they have observed. I believe here due to the audience of newly saved Gentiles (that Paul is writing to) that he is speaking of unbelieving children. He is saying, “While we were spiritually dead and blind, we were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.” This phrase ‘elemental things of the world’ has to do with the basic side of human religion. It carries with it the educational meaning similar to learning one's ABC's. So what Paul is saying here is that while were unbelieving children we were held in bondage – by the way this is the same word for slave, and it speaks to the action of losing one's freedom – as unbelievers we were slaves to our own foolish understandings and the immature conclusions of human religion – for example, Romans and Greeks would offer sacrifices to pagan deities in hopes of a good harvest, a long love life, a safe journey, etc. They understood that there must be a God, and that He must impact their lives. But they did not know the true God and therefore worshipped everything from made up gods to the moon itself. This was the best they could do based upon foolish and selfish observations concerning human religion. And they were held in bondage under this foolish and depraved way of thinking. God knew it, He saw it, His heart broke for His creation, and He made Himself known.

Verses 4, 5 – *“But when the fullness of time came God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”* What a tremendous truth! While humanity, especially Gentiles, were wandering through this world blind, selfish, and lost God's plan of redemption was in place. And in His perfect timing Jesus was born fully human and fully God, perfectly abiding by the Law, in order that through His perfect life, death and resurrection we might receive redemption which leads us to adoption as sons into the family of God. Do you see the drastic change that takes place within our lives when we trust in Jesus as Savior? Our entire position changes from slave to son. We were not born into the family, this is not our birthright, and yet because of God's great love for us His Son paid the ultimate price redeeming us and bringing us in to His family through the wondrous act of adoption. Again, this is not the act of God simply setting us free to be freed slaves, He redeemed us, set us free from the bondage of sin we are under

and adopted us into His family. **Verse 7** – *“Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, than an heir through God.”* Paul says in Romans 8:17 that those who place their faith in Jesus Christ are *“heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ!”* What an incomprehensible truth! That by giving ourselves to Christ in faith, God gives us everything His Son possesses. When it comes to our inheritance, we are on equal grounds as Jesus. That which we will inherit is truly remarkable and incomprehensible. But there are benefits of being an adopted child of God presently.

Verse 6 – *“Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”* There are 2 truths here that I want to focus in on for a few moments. **First**, God puts His stamp on believers as adopted sons through the gift of the Holy Spirit. **John MacArthur** writes in his commentary, that “believers not only have the knowledge of sonship through the truth of God’s Word in their minds but the very essence of sonship through His indwelling Spirit in their hearts.” As was promised at the onset of the Church, the Spirit of God has come to indwell each man, woman and child who places their faith in Jesus Christ. He is the “Helper” that was prophesied, and the Holy Spirit is the greatest current inheritance of the adopted child of God. For it is the Spirit who guides us in truth (Jn. 14:26). It is the Spirit assists us as we seek to become more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). It is the Holy Spirit who gifts you for ministry (1 Cor. 12:4-11). The Holy Spirit gives love, comfort, and peace the exact moment we need it. And all of this comes with being an adopted child of God. That is a wonderful truth. Paul also gives a **second** truth when he says that one of the ministries of the Spirit is to give us the full confidence and right to cry out to God as a son cries out to His Father – *“Abba!”* What a reflection of the intimate relationship that we are able to have with the Creator of the Universe because of our adoption into His family. When a child cries out to his father it is with full confidence knowing that his father will come to his aid – whether a child needs loved, is afraid, or just wants to share in a moment – he or she knows that when they cry out “Abba!” that Daddy is nearby. This is also true of God. When times are hard and life is painful, cry out to God. When you are afraid and the future is uncertain, cry out to God. And when you simply want to share in a moment, cry out to God. Because of your adoption into the family of God, you have the ear of your heavenly Father always at all times. These are the present privileges of being an adopted son or daughter of God – and joint heir with Christ. Because of Jesus, you are no longer a slave you are a son.

So why would you want to return to your days of unbelief, your days when your relationship with God was fractured because of sin? This is where Paul heads next as he warns the Church.

2. A Warning to the Church (vv. 8-11)

Verse 8 – *“However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.”* Paul begins his warning by reminding them of their unbelieving past. *“You were slaves to those which by nature are no gods”* These are the idols we worshiped before knowing the true God. God created humanity to have a relationship with Him, and when sin entered the world, that relationship was fractured. From that moment on, every human being that has entered this world has a void in their life that a renewed relationship with God can only fill. And when we do not know God,

we seek to fill it with everything else. Fun, Family, Things, Food, Drugs, Relationships, and the list goes on. That's what enslaved us.

Verse 9 – “*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?*” Why, after knowing God and being known by God, after tasting of all that accompanies a relationship with Jesus Christ; why would you ever want to return to your childish, foolish, and godless ways? That is what once enslaved you, why after being set free and brought into the family of God, would you want to grab the shackles again and choose slavery over sonship?

Verse 10 – “*You observe days and months and seasons and years.*” Paul is bringing both pagan holidays and holy days within the Law to the surface here, equating them to those elemental things that enslave us. Even things that we think are good, under the mantra of religion, did nothing to secure a relationship with God. Don't be fooled by these religious leaders that say you should return to the Law, because that is as foolish as returning to your pagan idolatrous ways. And yet that is exactly where these Galatian believers are headed.

You can hear the frustration in Paul's voice as we arrive at **verse 11** – “*I fear for you that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.*” This is a man who is pleading with his beloved family in Galatia. And in the honesty of the moment, he writes, my fear is that you are already gone and every spirit led step we've taken has been lost and worthless. Paul really loves these families and he is tenderly warning them of the path they are on.

You are adopted sons and daughters of the Most High God, don't return to slavery.

Conclusion

Like Paul, we too end our time this morning with a warning. Some of you have tasted of the freedom found in Christ, and yet perhaps you continue to flirt with the slavery of your past. Do you see the radical difference of a slave and a son? Why would you even continue to flirt with sin? Why would you even consider sinning against the God who knows you intimately - The One who has adopted you into His family and made you joint heirs with Christ?

If you find yourself at this fork in the road this morning. A decision must be made. You can, through the help of the Spirit, the Scriptures, and Christ overcome that which enslaved you. Living with shackles is no place to be. May we heed Paul's warning this morning, and live free in Christ!

Let's pray.