

April 13, 2014  
Community Baptist Church  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Galatians  
643 South Suber Road  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study Galatians 4:1-7.

1. Compare the child who, though he is the heir, is like a slave, to our condition before we were saved.
2. Describe some of the elementary principles of the world that once enslaved us.
3. What does the term “Abba Father” tell us about our relationship with God through Jesus Christ?

### IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME Galatians 4:1-7

I have a hard time trying to imagine what it must be like to be a slave. How does a person live each day knowing that tomorrow and next week and next year the life of servitude will not change? Imagine knowing that you will never have freedom, you will always have to do what your master tells you to do, and that there is no way out.

Conversely, I know what it is like to be a son. While no human father is perfect, most of us have experienced the confidence that comes from living in a family where there is a dad who makes sure that all the needs are met to the best of his ability. Being a son ought to give confidence. Being a slave naturally brings frustration.

And yet, there are many people who know too well what it is like to live in slavery. Many people have developed sinful habits that

enslave them and demand obedience. They do not know freedom from these slave masters for many days at a time. We look at such people with pity failing to realize that to some extent we all should be able to empathize with that condition. Maybe we are not enslaved to destructive habits, but we ought to be able to sense ever-present temptation toward sin. Even if it is a matter of wrong attitudes or the small sins like covetousness, envy, or jealousy, we know what it is like to be slaves.

Would it not be more beneficial for us to remember that we are children of God who are recipients of His amazing blessings of grace? Sure. But what if we are not? Paul’s argument for the Christians in Galatia not only challenged them to remember that they were God’s children but could also serve to warn them to look carefully to see if they actually were in the family.

### Our Natural Condition (vv.1-3).

A common illustration illustrates our natural condition in the first couple of verses in this chapter. It is a picture of the heir of an estate who has to wait until the appointed time to inherit what is rightfully his. Though he is the owner, the heir is like a slave. *I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything (v.1).*

Paul used four titles to describe a frustrating dilemma. First, the subject of the illustration is an heir. The word *kleironomos* comes from a different Greek word, *kleiros* which speaks of a lot, a portion that is gained through a drawing, or of the casting of the lot. This word speaks of the heir who is in line to receive an inheritance. The inheritance is the lot, and the heir receives it. It was a very significant picture in the Old Testament because of God’s plan for the Promised Land. When Israel took over the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership, each family was awarded a piece of property. God intended for that property to stay within the family through inheritance. The heir to the inheritance was very important.

That picture rolls over to the New Testament where God the Father has appointed Jesus Christ to be the *heir* of all things (Hebrews 1:2). The entire creation, yea the redeemed creation, is Christ’s inheritance. But things get even more blessed when we discover that believers are the heirs who receive blessing according

to God's promise. *So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath (Hebrews 6:17).*

Since this is true, the heir is potentially the master of all the estate or inheritance. That is the second work Paul used. The *kurios* is the Lord or master. This is the person who is in line to receive the full inheritance of the estate and is—in principle—the authority or ruler over the estate. This would be especially true if the will is irrevocable. In such a case, it would be only a matter of time before this person will exercise the same authority as the father who, being master of the estate, wills it to the heir. Everyone involved in the picture of that family or estate knew that one day the heir would occupy the position of authority.

However, the heir could not serve as master of the estate at the time because of the third noun Paul used to describe the person. The subject of the illustration was a child. The word *neipios* speaks most accurately of an infant. However, generally the word described a small child about the age of three or four. Jesus referred to little children like this when He said on a couple of occasions that God revealed great truth to little children (Matthew 11:25). A three or four year old child is in no condition to act as master over an estate!

Therefore, the person actually was no better off than a slave. The fourth noun Paul used of this hypothetical person was *doulas*. The *doulas* was not even on the same level as a household servant. This term generally described the lower level of slaves. Such a person was usually purchased or stolen. He had no rights, no freedom, no authority, and generally no options for making major decisions about life. He served under the authority of another.

How frustrating it would have been for a child to know that the estate was wholly his in a matter of time. But he could not possess or make any decisions effecting it. This must have been a familiar picture of Roman culture. We know there were many servants and slaves in the empire. We know that situations like this were common among the wealthy class. Therefore, Paul used a common picture to illustrate an important truth.

The heir remains in this condition until the fullness of time. The heir, being no better off than a slave, was *under guardians and managers until the date set by his father (v.2)*. The heir, while he was a child, was under the tutelage of guardians and managers. We know

about guardians because of the picture Paul gave in 3:24. Now in this part of his letter, Paul introduced the picture of managers who were stewards. These were very important servants who were responsible to oversee the entire estate or household of the wealthy. As such, the manager made many decisions that effected the heir, the future owner of the estate.

It was the father's prerogative to determine the details of such covenants or wills. Since he owned the estate, he had the authority to decide who to distribute it to and when to distribute it. He might decide to wait until he himself died before the heir would receive the inheritance. Or he might decide to give the heir the inheritance when the heir reached a particular age. That was the case in the story Jesus told about the prodigal son. Whatever the case might be, this example would have been well known and understood by the Galatian Christians.

The picture was common and easily understood. But Paul wasn't going to leave us with just the picture. In verse three, he applied the picture to help us understand the reality. The fact is that we were once enslaved. *In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world (v.3)*. We too are kept under the authority of something else. We are by nature just like the child who is under the authority of the guardian or manager. By nature we are born under the power of the elementary principles. That is the case even for us who are destined to be children of God. Though God already determined that we would be joint heirs with Jesus Christ, we start out pressed under the authority of a "guardian." The idea is similar to the thought of being imprisoned under the law because no one can achieve the righteous principles.

But here the picture turns to something far less than righteous, far opposite the law that demonstrates God's character. The term *elementary principles* is one word in the Greek and difficult to interpret in this context. It shows up seven times in the New Testament. Paul used it here in Galatians 4:9 and in Colossians 2:8,20. The writer to the Hebrew Christians used the word to refer to the basic truths of the Bible, like milk compared to meat. Peter used the word twice to describe the basic elements of the earth that will be destroyed in the last days (2 Peter 3:10,12).

Probably Paul's use of the word in Colossians 2:8 interprets what he meant by it. *See to it that no one takes you captive by*

*philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossians 2:8).* The elementary principles are those traditions, teachings, and rituals that people of the world (unsaved) have created in an attempt to gain justification. These are the efforts of humanity to atone for their sins. No one did it better than the Pharisees. The Judaizers who were badgering the Christians in Galatia were of that stripe.

In our natural state, before Christ came and brought us salvation, we were enslaved to principles like these. That is to say, before God placed us in a relationship with Himself through faith in Christ, we tried to make God like us by making resolutions that we promptly broke. We tried to work our way into heaven by doing things that we deemed good, valuable, or even righteous. In pursuing that path, some folks might become part of a religion that taught a list of things we must do to “make it into heaven.” Some of the more common examples of these efforts are Roman Catholicism which requires adherents to participate in the seven means of grace in order to get into heaven. Or Islam which requires their people to keep the five pillars in order to go to heaven. In Mormonism the people are expected to become members of the temple – among other things. Then there is Arminianism which essentially teaches the sinner that he needs to win and keep salvation by doing the “right” things. What are the right things? Whatever the leaders of the particular church or group determine they are. In short, it means the people gain and keep salvation by not sinning. Lots of luck with that one.

In that state, we all once lived. In that state, we were oblivious to the fact that *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away (Isaiah 64:6).*

That was in the past. We were like infants under the authority of elementary principles devised by the world and unable to bring us to maturity. That **was** our condition. We must acknowledge that this was the state in which every person is born. It was not a matter of choice but a matter of default. The good news is that such a state **was** our condition. Paul addressed this letter to believers, and, therefore, it applies to believers in this age also. Something happened in their lives and in our lives that removed us from bondage to the basic religious principles that offered no life.

At one time, we hopelessly tried one principle after another (if we tried at all) only to discover that nothing granted us the maturity of sonship and the authority that comes with it. We were infants, small children living under the authority of worldly-wise principles (4:1-3). We were sinners imprisoned by the law (3:23). We were children under the direction of a guardian (the law) that was directing us toward the freedom of spiritual adulthood (3:25). Under those conditions, we would never become full-grown adult children who would inherit the estate unless the Son made us sons.

### **God Made “Sonship” a Possibility (vv.4-7).**

He acted according to His plan (vv.4-5). In the fullness of time, He sent forth the “Seed of the woman.” *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law (v.4).* The Heavenly Father determined the exact time for God the Son to open the way for sonship. It was a time determined in eternity, not a time established as reaction to circumstances. God had given the promise centuries earlier and the Old Testament believers looked forward to the coming of the Seed of the woman.

Then at precisely the right time God sent His Son. It was the right time religiously because the nation of Israel was looking for the Messiah. They had been in bondage to Rome for many years. The people had been taught in the synagogues about the coming Messiah. Politically the time was right. Most of the civilized world was under the control of one ruler, the Roman Emperor. It was the *Pax Romana* the peace established by Rome. Culturally the time was right. The road system of the empire was the best it had been in history providing for easy travel. That was good news for the spreading of the Good News. Greek had become the universal language due to the influence of Alexander the Great centuries earlier (much like English is today). None of these things were coincidental. All of these elements were the work of God’s directing hand.

In that setting, *God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.* Those three statements are the basis of the gospel, the good news. Jesus Christ, the man from Nazareth, was no normal person. He is the one and only God who serves in the capacity of “Eternal Son.” He always was God, always will be God. This Son of God humbled Himself to the plan of the Triune God and became man

by being born of the woman Mary. This was the fulfillment of the Genesis 3:15 promise of the Seed of the woman. This had to be a virgin birth because no man is mentioned in the relationship – only God. This had to be a virgin birth so that Jesus would not be born with original sin.

God the Son was born under the law. Because He was one of us (human), He had to be subject to His own law. If He broke any part of the law, He, like us, would be guilty of breaking the entire law. Unlike us, He lived perfectly according to the requirements of the law. He is the only man who ever lived who could have gained righteousness by keeping the law. But He didn't need to gain righteousness since He was already perfectly righteous.

God's purpose in sending the Son was redemption. He sent Christ *to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (v.5)*. The plan of God the Father was to redeem us who were kept imprisoned under the law. We were kept enslaved to the law. That is because the law continually condemned us for breaking it by sinning. We could not help but sin because we were slaves to sin also. Jesus taught, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34)*. Paul taught the same truth: *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin (Romans 7:14)*.

Therefore, we needed to be purchased from slavery. God provided the redemption price. Sin and the law demanded the price of the perfect sacrifice, the perfect blood to be spilled to pay for sin. No human ever born could pay the price. The best, most dedicated, most religious person by applying all his works against the debt of sin would not make the smallest dent in sin's demand. But when the time was right according to His plan, the Father sent the Son to pay the redemption price for all sin.

The plan of God the Father was to give adoption to us who were children under the elementary principles. In paying the redemption price for the children deserving wrath, God opened the way for adoption. Children who live under the authority of the elemental principles of the world are children who deserve God's wrath. The Christians in Ephesus learned this truth. *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all*

*once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:1-3)*.

According to that Scripture, we, like the old Pharisees, are of our father the devil (John 8:44). We are not children of God, but we are His enemies. But when God the Son offered the covering for our sins, the door was opened for us to become sons of God through adoption. Legal adoption was well known to Paul's readers. Once the covenant was affirmed, a child who had not been the actual child of the father was given full rights of any child through adoption. It means that we sinners, who were enemies of God, now enjoy all the rights of a natural born son. We receive adoption when we embrace the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the payment for the sins we confess. Nothing we or anyone else can ever do will remove us from that position as a full child of God. And our Father in heaven will never disown us.

The results of becoming the children of God are immeasurable (vv.6-7). God gave us the Spirit of His Son. *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (v.6)*. The promises of God's Word encourage us to remember that we are His children through adoption. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:3-8)*.

But nothing removes doubt of our relationship like the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here is the wonderful promise: *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14)*. He bears witness with our spirit that we are indeed children of God (Romans 8:16). The Holy Spirit prompts us to speak to God as our "Daddy." He who guarantees

our salvation also validates our intimacy with our Creator, the Judge of all people for eternity. What value do you place on experiencing an intimate relationship with the Judge? What is it like for you to crawl up into the lap of the Creator and Judge?

Also, at that time, God made us sons and heirs. *So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God (v.7)*. That means that we have ceased being slaves. No longer are we enslaved to sin. We are no longer imprisoned by the law. We are no longer held down by the elemental religious principles of natural wisdom. The fence, the guardian, the managers no longer serve that purpose in our lives. Now we enjoy being heirs through God's mercy and grace. As sons, we enjoy all the full blessings of being a family member. As sons, we look forward to the complete inheritance of God's eternal estate.