

**Galatians 4: 1-3; “When We Were Children”, Message # 23 in the series –
“Christ has Made us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
June 8th, 2014, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

This afternoon we want to think about the experience of the believer as an heir of all things in Christ. An earthly heir is one who stands to inherit; land, property, goods, money, and the possessions of his father when he dies, or when his father decides to give it to him. As our text says, he is “master of all” because he stands to inherit, but he is not actually in possession of all, until the time appointed by the father. It was even so with those who were Jews before the Incarnation of Christ. Although this letter was written to the Galatian churches, which were composed for the most part of Jews, nevertheless I will attempt to apply this study to ourselves as Gentiles, some of us having been under a nominal Christianity when we were children. Some of us belonged to churches which taught infant baptism, confirmation, and taking the Lord’s Supper as being the means of our becoming Christians. For some of us, we were blind to the idea of “carnal ordinances”. So tonight we want to speak 1st about how the heir does not differ from a slave when they are a child. 2nd – That the Jews were under guardians and stewards until the time appointed. And 3rd – How being under the law was a bondage under the elements of the world.

1st – The heir does not differ from a slave when they are a child.

“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, but he is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.” The heirs that are being spoken of here were the Jews after the flesh. They were those who were destined by God in a national sense to inherit all the privileges of being God’s sons and daughters if they lived by faith in the Promised Seed Jesus Christ. Let’s read Galatians 3: 18 and 19. “For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.” “What purpose then does the law serve?” “It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.” So we see here that the attempted observance of everything written in the law would not bring the inheritance; the inheritance would only come through faith in the promises given to Abraham. Then, 430 years later when the law came, Paul says that it was added because of transgressions; because people (that is – Jews and Gentiles) needed to see their own sinfulness and inability to keep the law, and yet that they would also see that the law’s purpose was to conduct them to the place, spiritually speaking, that they would see their need of faith in the promised Christ. Those under the law were servants and slaves of the law, even though they were also heirs by faith of all of the good things of salvation in Christ if they exercised faith in the promise of Christ. We know from their subsequent history that not many of them did.

But let us see the good design of God in the law. The law itself set forth the many types and shadows of the good things of salvation that were going to come when Christ would come and fulfill the law, and all the sacrificial types, by obeying God’s law fully and perfectly, and dying for the sins of each and every one who would believe in Him. Look with me over at Hebrews 10, verses 1 –4. “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” “For then would they not have ceased to be offered?” “For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.” “But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.” Now let’s look at the difference between what the priests did and what Christ did; verses 11-14. “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.” “But this Man, after He

had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.” “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” You can see the difference can’t you? Many priests, in the Old Testament times were ministering daily the sacrifices commanded in the law, and this they would do year by year, and yet the people’s sins could not be taken away by the sacrifices themselves. The people were ritualistically clean, ceremonially clean, but their consciences could not be cleansed except by faith in the coming Messiah.

Let’s stop and apply this to our own day. If a person is attending a Roman Catholic church or a liberal Protestant church, can they be saved by taking the Mass or by being baptized and observing the Lord’s Supper? The answer is: No they cannot. The question then comes: Why not? The answer is, because it is not God’s appointed way of salvation. It is men’s imposing what pleases them naturally, in an earthly sense, upon the truth of the Bible. There is nothing inherently spiritual about partaking of the ordinance, without having been saved; without having been first converted to Jesus Christ. People see that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are ceremonial ordinances which all Christians should partake of, and so they partake of them because they want to be a religious person accepted by God. Many people want desperately to believe that having a ceremony performed over them, or their participation in the ceremonies and ordinances of the church is what makes them a Christian, and gives them eternal life. The Roman Catholic sacrifice of the Mass cannot be pleasing to God because it is sacrificing Christ over and over again, when in reality all that God is requiring is faith in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, in order to be saved. And so when people trust in their participation in the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, thinking that these ritual acts will save them, they make a tremendous mistake, a fatal mistake if they are trusting in that. For these ceremonies are only the pictures, the shadows if you will, of the substance which is found by faith in Christ. Therefore it is very important to get beyond this child-like, slave-like state of trusting in the outward ordinances of the law, or the 2 sacraments which are commanded to be observed in all New Testament New Covenant churches; Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

When Christ came then, He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins, once for all, and in that sacrifice He perfected forever those who are being sanctified; those who are set apart for salvation by grace through faith, and being made progressively holy as they live their lives to God. An heir of God and eternal life is a joint-heir with Jesus as it says in Romans 8: 15-17 – “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” When Jesus came and fulfilled the law, then the heirs, those Jews and Gentiles who have believed in Him are heirs according to the promise, and all the blessings of justification and sanctification belong to them. Galatians 3: 29 – “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to promise.”

2nd – We need to see that the Jews were under guardians and stewards until the time appointed.

“The heir is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.” The verse is very clear. First, physically in the example: An heir of an estate in that day was placed under guardians and stewards if they were under-age; under 21 years of age, or under 18, or whatever that societal norm was. And secondly then, the spiritual application to Israel. They, the Old Testament people of God, the Jews, believing and unbelieving alike; all being under the Old Covenant law, they were placed under it from that time when it was given on Mt. Sinai, until the time that the ministry of Jesus Christ was finished. They were placed under it as being under guardians and stewards. Being heirs of the promise given to Abraham, in that time period of the

Old Testament meant that God intended to have His law set forth to them by wise stewards and guardians until the law was fulfilled in Christ. So in one sense, the law of God itself was the tutor and the governor; the law itself was the guardian to conduct the nation of Israel all through their history until Christ came. The children of Israel under this dispensation were nothing different from servants or slaves, even though they stood to inherit so much. But they still needed to be guarded from themselves; especially in relation to the thoughts and attitudes of their hearts concerning how they would know God, and how they would follow God and how they would glorify Him. God knew that they would need leaders who would teach them the meaning of the law; teach them of His mercy and grace in relation to coming Redeemer. For the children of Israel were at many points in their history like foolish and disobedient children in relation to their failing to keep the commandments of God. And at other points they were found to be outwardly keeping the ceremonial law, but inwardly they struggled to keep the moral law. Therefore they needed these guardians and stewards; they needed men and leaders who would rightly handle the Scriptures, so that they would hopefully live in faith in Promised Messiah. But let's look at this guardianship at one of the high points in Israel's history.

Let me give you an example of what I think that these verses mean from the book of Ezra in the Old Testament. Ezra Chapter 6, verses 15-22. The children of Israel have come back from their captivity in Babylon, and have now finished building the temple and they are now going to dedicate it. "Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius." "Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy." "And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of tribes of Israel." "They assigned the priests to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses." "And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month." "For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean." "And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves." "Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel." "And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyrian toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."

Now this, I am saying, was the right use of ordinances and ceremonies. They offered their offerings according to the law; they offered them in the faith that God would accept them, not because of their own righteousness, but because they were doing it according to His law in the faith of what would please Him, not themselves. They observed the Passover, remembering how God had delivered them from Egypt, and now in this special way, He had also delivered them from their captivity in Babylon. Therefore they purified themselves and made themselves ritually clean; they separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek their God. And what was the result? The Lord made them joyful. And if you will look down to Chapter 7, verse 8, you will see what kind of a guardian was given to them in those days; what kind of a steward of truth was given to them by God. "And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king." "On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him." "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel." You can see from these verses that Ezra was a man who was one of the guardians and stewards who taught the people the difference between law and grace. This was so very important then, in the Old

Testament times; but it is also very important now in New Testament times. I will explain this to you more in our 3rd point.

3rd – We need to learn that being under the law was a bondage under the elements of the world.

Look over at Nehemiah 8, verse 5. “And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up” “And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.” “Then all the people answered “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands.” “And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” “Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.” “So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.” “And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord you God; do not mourn nor weep.” “For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.” “Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord.” “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” I want you to see, in closing, that being under the Law meant being under the elemental principles of the world; that is, all of these commanded rituals and ceremonies were meant to show them God’s holiness and righteousness needed to be satisfied. It needed to be satisfied either by them, or by a substitute. But when the people heard the requirements of the law, they knew that they had not kept it; and so they were mourning and weeping. The governor Nehemiah and the steward of truth, Ezra, addressed them with words of grace; gracious words by which they might go forward to glorify God. What were they doing? Lessening the requirements of the law? No. They were showing them that the ordinances of the law, without the grace which believing in the promise of Christ alone could give, would bring their spirits into the bondage of not knowing how they could ever find favor with God. But when they remembered and believed in God’s free grace and mercy, even as it was being set forth in observing a typical ordinance by faith, it would set them free.

But listen to what our confession says in regard to what faith in Christ will do in both Old and New Testament times. In Chapter 8, on Christ the Mediator, Paragraph 6 – “Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ until after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefit thereof were communicated to the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices wherein He was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which bruise the serpent’s head.” In Nehemiah 8: 14-17, right after the section that we read before, the children of Israel observed the Feast of Booths. This feast was typical of Christ’s coming to dwell with His people. We need to see that all of these Old Testament ordinances of the law would have engendered a bondage in the spirit of an Israelite if they were not seen in the light of their being types of what Christ would come and fulfill in His perfect obedience and sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection. They had to participate in these feasts with their faith looking forward to what God would provide in Christ, in due time. A good minister of God, like Ezra, would be able explain to them that the Lord’s intent in the giving of the law was to show men His righteous standard; and in doing so, he would also show them that they could not keep it without faith in the promise of Christ. This promise is seen in the Feast of Booths as a picture of their needing to believe more than anything else, the promise of the coming Messiah. John 1: 14 – “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Christ has fulfilled the law on our behalf, both its righteous requirements and in suffering for our sins. Therefore let us believe in Him, and rejoice that He has come to dwell in our hearts by faith; and to give us grace to be accepted to God, both our persons, and our works.

