

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## A Study of Galatians: Sons must live as sons! - Galatians 4:1-31

Last week, in Galatians 3, we saw that those who have faith in the living God are classed as the “sons” of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). The principle of faith was active before the Law of God was given to Israel through Moses. In faith, there is freedom because it seeks, in a voluntary way, to obey the God who is pleased to bless. However, the Law of Moses brought in another principle, namely, enforced obedience to the commandments that God had set out. Obedience would lead to life but, if the commandment was broken by the children of Israel, to whom it was given, then the curses of God listed in the Law would fall upon them. As nobody could keep the commandments of God, they then became subject to the curses set out by God and, ultimately, death. As Paul states in Romans 7:10: “And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.” However, Galatians 3:29 gives us the opposite, saying: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

This theme continues into Galatians 4 where there is a contrast between the believer under the Law of Moses and under the grace of Christ. We can explore this under three main headings:

1. “Slaves, Sons and Heirs”.
2. “Back to Bondage”.
3. “Abraham’s Sons”.

### Slaves, Sons and Heirs

Galatians 4 begins with an allegory or a picture in words. Galatians 4:1-7 state: “Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Paul illustrates the difference between a child who is the rightful heir of his father and those who are full-grown sons in the sight of God through the redemption accomplished in Christ. Galatians 4:1-2 may be paraphrased as: “And I say, so long as the heir is a young child, he is no different from a slave even though he is lord of all; but he is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by his father.” So the young child only receives the rights of his heirship at a time appointed by his father. Then, he, as the son, will receive and run the inheritance. However, while still a child, he does not have the skill or wisdom to manage such an estate. The stewards do this on his behalf. They manage the inheritance on his behalf. At the same time, the guardians care for the child. They look after his person. Therefore, the son is likened to a slave because he has to do what he is told. Until he reaches a mature age, he unquestionably takes orders and gives none. He is under subjection. In a similar way, the Jew was enslaved by the Law.

The explanation of this little illustration begins in Galatians 4:3. Here, Paul begins with: “Even so we...” He is identifying himself with the rest of the Jews. So, when the Jews were under Law, they were classed as children. However, they were also slaves, not to actual guardians and stewards; but to the fundamentals of the world. As the Authorised version puts it: “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world...” These “elements of the world” are suitable for men of the world who could only appreciate things seen by the human eye. So the Law presented tangible places, furniture, clothing and artefacts that were aimed to lead people to serve God. This is confirmed by Hebrews 9:1 where we read: “Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.” Hebrews 9 goes on to describe the Old Testament’s Tabernacle and its items for priestly service.

Christians today, need no special place, no special furniture, no special clothing, and no special artefacts in order to worship. In John 4:21-24, Jesus makes this clear to the woman of Samaria: “Jesus saith unto [the woman], Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is,

when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

So, we return to the fact that the Jew was a slave while under the Law. He was in desperate need because he was under the curse of God also. In the next verses (Galatians 4:4-5) God marvellously provides for the redemption of the Jews: It shows how slaves are changed into sons. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

So what is meant by "the fulness of the time"? It marks the end of an age in the ways of God. The Law had served its purpose. It had shown itself to be God's "plumb line", that is to say, it showed up the crookedness of the lives of people. God was ending that and bringing in something new. Yet, the direct article "the" emphasises that it was a special time already anticipated. It was the time prophesied by God in Daniel 9:25 and relates to "the coming of Messiah the Prince". Hence, it was a time divinely appointed. It was also a time where the morality of men had greatly deteriorated along with their rejection of God. Yet, it was also a time when communication had vastly improved under the Roman Empire and the word of God could have free course.

The next clause of Galatians 4:4 states: "God sent forth his Son." Here we are presented with the grace of God in sending His Son to be the Saviour and, at the same time, a confirmation that Christ is the Son of God. These truths are reinforced by scriptures such as:

- 1 John 4:14 "...The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world";
- Romans 8:3 "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh";
- Romans 8:32 "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"
- John 5:18 "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God";
- Luke 22:70-71 "And they all said, 'Thou, then, art the Son of God?' and he said unto them, 'Ye say it, because I am;' and they said, 'What need yet have we of testimony? for we ourselves did hear it from his mouth'" (Young's Literal Translation).
- John 9:35-37 "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee".

This brings us to consider "...made of a woman". The word "made" is really "come". The clause is, therefore, "Come of a woman..." and emphasises His manhood. It was the desire of faithful women to give birth to the Saviour who would defeat Satan (Genesis 3:15). God chose the virgin called Mary to be the means by which He brought His Son into the world to be a man. In this way, Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled. It says: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." As the Lord Jesus Christ, God was indeed among men as a man. He was a sinless man - a completely different kind of man. As 1 Corinthians 15:47 puts it: "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven."

The fact that He was "come under the Law" shows that He was born a Jew. His faithfulness to that Law was perfect. He both kept it and, in His Person, fulfilled it. He merited the right to life that it promised.

The purpose for which He came is then given, namely, "...to redeem them that were under the law." Based on *Strong's Concordance*, the word "redeem" means "to deliver by payment of a ransom". The slaves to the Law are set free at a tremendous cost - by the precious blood of Christ! The only man to have fulfilled the Law, bore the curse of the Law on the cross. The punishment for breaking the Law had been removed in His death on the cross where He "became a curse for us". Galatians 3:13 states this clearly: "Christ did redeem us from the curse of the law, having become for us a curse, for it hath been written, 'Cursed is every one who is hanging on a tree.'" (Young's Literal Translation).

Having been purchased, the believing Jew had now come under God's wing and favour. But more than that, he is placed as a fully-grown son in God's family for we read: "...that we might receive the adoption of sons." Sonship brings with it the thoughts of both dignity and status. As a child of God, a Christian is dependent upon God. As a son, he shares the Father's will and work.

This section concludes with all the Galatian believers being addressed. How do we know this? Paul changes from using the word "we" to adopt the word "ye" instead. We read in Galatians 4:6: "And because ye are sons, God hath

sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Having put their faith in Christ, God classes them as “sons”. The Christian Jews are no longer servants under the Law. They are able to call God “Abba, Father”. Both the Aramaic and the Greek words used speak of the same Father. They have entered into a relationship with God in all the intimacy of a son with a Father. In his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, WE Vine states: “‘Abba’ is the word framed by the lips of infants, and betokens unreasoning trust; ‘father’ expresses an intelligent apprehension of the relationship.” The proof of their sonship was seen in that God sent the Spirit of His Son into their hearts. The Holy Spirit would mould the believer to be like Christ and to act as He does. Hence, the heart can cry: “Abba, Father.”

As a result of this new relationship, each of these Christians is also an heir of God. Notice the change from “ye” to “thou” showing that Paul is addressing the individual when he says: “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” As an heir of God, each Christian is able to share in the administration of God’s estate now; but only through the Lord Jesus. The believer also has an inheritance reserved for him or her in heaven. It is described by Peter as an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled and will never fade away (1 Peter 1:4).

### **Back to Bondage.**

Paul’s argument showed that the Christian Jews had been freed from the Law and uses this to show the Gentile Christians that the Law was not for them either. There were those among the Galatians who were trying to persuade the Christians to adopt the works of Judaism. Hence, the section from Galatians 4:8-20 is broadly headed as “Back to Bondage”.

Paul begins, in Galatians 4:8, by reminding them of their idol worship before trusting in Christ. This particularly relates to the Gentile believers. They were supposedly serving gods that were gods in name only. They weren’t gods at all! In 1 Corinthians 10:20, Paul writes: “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.”

The Apostle then shows his amazement that they might even consider returning to the bondage that came with trying to keep the Law. They had come to know the God of grace, but were tempted to go back to that which was so weak it could not redeem and so beggarly it could only offer death as a reward. This, in comparison with the God and Father who was able to redeem and liberate; the Father who desired their fellowship; and, the God who was able to offer them unbounded blessing.

Paul also saw the Law creeping into their lives because they had resorted to observing special days, months, times and years. These things were observed in Judaism in the keeping of things like Sabbaths, new moons, special feasts and the Year of Jubilee. There is a warning in this for Christians today. Do we keep special days for sacred purposes and then carry on regardless at all other times? This is a real danger for the established church especially where there is a good deal of profession of Christ, but not the sincerity that goes with it.

It had been with exhausting labour that Paul had brought the Gospel to them. Now he writes: “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Galatians 4:11).

In Galatians 4:12-15, the Apostle lovingly reminds them of the manner in which they had received him at first. He pleads with them to be free of the Law in his words, “...be as I am”. At the same time, by saying, “I am as ye are” he identifies with the Galatians as if he were a Gentile himself seeking the way and will of the true God. He had left Judaism behind to trust Christ. He was asking them to do the same.

In Galatians 4:13, he speaks of the physical weakness or disease that he had when he first came to them with the Gospel. We don’t know what this weakness was, but we know the appearance of Paul was unimpressive and his speech of no account (2 Corinthians 10:10). Because of what follows and the “large” writing he used (Galatians 6:11), some think he had poor eyesight. Paul himself calls it a “thorn in the flesh” in 2 Corinthians 12:7. Whatever it was, the Galatians could easily have harmed him with derogatory comments; but he notes that they had not despised or rejected him because of this infirmity. In fact, they had received him as a messenger of God and Christ. In other words, they had believed the message that was preached. They acknowledged it had God-given authority and presented to them a glorified Saviour.

Paul then asks about the joy or happiness they had received when they first trusted in Christ: “Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?” It seemed to have been lost. Paul feared he would be seen by them as an enemy because he was admonishing them by telling the truth. However, he quickly reminds them of the wonderful fellowship that had affected them in Christ and says: “...if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.” Their initial faith in Christ brought out such love that they would have been prepared to make great sacrifices for Paul.

The Apostle then warns the Galatian believers that the Judaisers wanted to have them for themselves, excluding them from the blessing of the Gospel of Christ preached through Paul. The Apostle notes their zeal in seeking the truth, but indicates that their efforts are misplaced. He asks them to seek that which is good. The best thing they could seek was to have Christ fashioned within. How tenderly he shows his feelings for them to this end by saying: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you" (Galatians 4:19-20).

### **Abraham's Sons.**

With reference to Abraham's two sons, Paul uses that which is written in the books of Moses to show the difference between "the Law and its bondage" and "Grace and its promise". They wanted to be ruled by the Law, so Paul lets the Law itself argue against it. He speaks of the two sons of Abraham. The first, Ishmael, was born of a slave called Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16). The second, Isaac, was born of Sarah who was a freewoman (Genesis 21:1-7). Ishmael was born by natural means (with human desire and design in the background); but Isaac was born because God had promised him (Genesis 17:15-18:15). He was born from one who was very aged and had been, by all accounts, barren.

Paul likens Hagar to the conditional Covenant of Law given at Sinai. The earthly Jerusalem and her children were seen under it in bondage. On the other hand, Sarah is likened to the unconditional Covenant of Promise seen in the heavenly Jerusalem. This Covenant of Promise marks the Christian. Each Christian is a child of promise. Notice, Paul uses Isaiah 54:1 to speak of Sarah, once barren, but bearing more children than the earthly Jerusalem. So, not only is the believer a son of Abraham through the principle of faith, she or he is freeborn and belongs to that which is heavenly.

The Apostle goes on to show that just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so it is today. The earthly persecutes the heavenly. Those simply born of the flesh persecute those who are born of the Spirit. They cannot dwell together. Therefore, the Covenant of Law must be cast away because it binds to death those under it. On the other hand, Christians are heirs of promise. They have liberty before God. They are indeed sons and heirs of God and should behave accordingly!

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