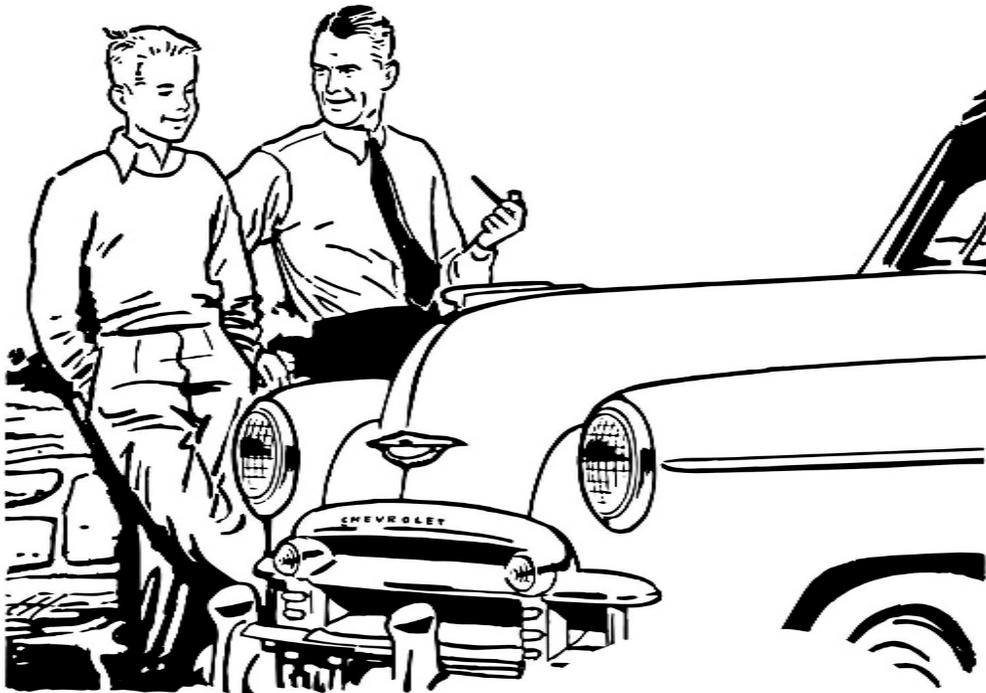


GALATIANS: THE ONE TRUE GOSPEL



WEEK 16 FROM SLAVES TO SONS GALATIANS 4:1-7

Van Nuys Bible Study
Doulos Fellowship Group
Grace Community Church

Prepared by Hans Kaufman
2015

Galatians 4:1-7 – From Slaves to Sons

The Text

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, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Introduction

- “False brothers” (the Judaizers) have infiltrated the Galatian churches.
- Paul is astonished that some of the Galatians are abandoning the gospel to be justified by the law.
- He has stressed the superiority of the promise God made to Abraham and the inferiority of the law to bring salvation.
- The law was not given to replace the promise, but to increase transgressions and show how important the promise really is.
- Those who put their faith in Christ (Abraham’s seed) are recipients of God’s promise to Abraham.

Principal Proposition

We once were slaves; now we are sons... it is ludicrous to consider going back to being slaves.

Literary Context

- A. Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel (1:11-2:21)
 - B. Paul's Explanation of the Gospel (3:1-4:11)
 - 1. The Experience of the Galatians (3:1-5)
 - 2. The Example of Abraham (3:6-9)
 - 3. The Curse of the Law (3:10-14)
 - 4. **The Law and the Abrahamic Covenant (3:15-4:11)**
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Literary Structure

From Slaves to Sons

The Slaves	(v. 1-3)
The Solution	(v. 4-5)
The Spirit	(v. 6)
The Sons	(v. 7)

Interpretive Comments

From Slaves to Sons

The Slaves

- v. 1 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,
- “I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave”
 - It is good to remember that there are no chapter breaks in the original letter. The author's flow of thought from chapter three to chapter four is unbroken.

- Paul has already compared the law to a prison warden (3:23) and a guardian (3:24). He now continues to develop the illustration of a child becoming an adult.
- Children do not have the same privileges and responsibilities adults do. This is true today, but was even more apparent in ancient cultures than ours.

➤ “though he is the owner of everything”

- Heirs do not enjoy the same freedoms as adults, but the promise of inheritance (one day, it will all be theirs).
- The child in Paul’s illustration is no different from a slave because he does not have the freedom to interact with the things that will one day be his.

v. 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

➤ “but he is under guardians and managers”

- These are the people who will bring up the child and prepare him for adulthood.



➤ “until the date set by his father”

- This points to the time when the father grants the inheritance to the son.

Paul applies the decision of the father to give the inheritance to his son to God’s control of history and the realization of his saving promises. – Thomas Schreiner

v. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

➤ “In the same way we also, when we were children”

- Paul ties the illustration to the Christian’s spiritual experience.

➤ “were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world”

- Paul does not define what the elementary principles of the world are. Here are a few of the many suggestions Bible scholars have to offer:
 1. Demon spirits who rule the current world system (over unbelievers)
 2. Heavenly bodies such as stars and moons (astrology)
 3. Physical elements that make up the world (earth, wind, fire, and water)
 4. Man's faulty reasoning (an uninformed/unregenerate worldview)
 5. The basics principles of human religion (idolatry)
- What do you think he might be referring to here?

For an unbeliever there is potential salvation and fulfillment of the promise given to all the world through Abraham (Gen. 12:3). But unless and until he spiritually "comes of age" through saving trust in Jesus Christ, every unbeliever is a kind of slave and is imprisoned under the elemental things of the world. – John MacArthur



The Solution

- v. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law,
- “But when the fullness of time had come”
 - All of human history led to Christ. The timing of Jesus’ first coming was perfect... and marked the beginning of the end.
 - Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “The birth of Jesus is the grandest light of history, the sun in the heavens of all time. It is the polestar of human destiny, the hinge of chronology, the meeting place of the waters of the past and the future.”
 - “God sent forth His Son, born of woman”
 - Merry (belated) Christmas!
 - The eternal Son of God became an earthly son of man.
 - There was nothing unique about physical entrance into the world.

➤ “born under the law”

- Even though He was sinless, Jesus had to be born under the rules and obligations of the Mosaic Covenant.
- Why was it important for Jesus to be born under the law?



He was the lawmaker and the lawgiver. He is both the judge of the law and the executioner of the law, and yet He Himself came under the law. – Charles Spurgeon

v. 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

➤ “to redeem those who were under the law”

- Redemption comes from slavery.
- In the Greco-Roman world, a slave could either buy his freedom or have his freedom bought for him. By giving His Son to be a ransom for many, God has paid the price of our redemption.
- This is true for everyone (not just Jews) because everyone is under the law’s curse (Galatians 3:13-14, Ezekiel 18:4).

➤ “so that we might receive adoption as sons”

- Jesus’ accomplishment on the cross is the seal of our eternal adoption.
- His earthly mission is the only reason we can become sons of God. He has redeemed us to adopt us.

The Spirit

v. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

- “And because you are sons”
 - Children receive privileges from their parents that others do not.
- “God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts”
 - As sons, we receive the Spirit of Jesus in a very personal way. The heart is the most vital figure of life.
 - He reaches into the affections of a man and then illuminates the intellect.
- “crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”
 - “Abba” is the Aramaic word Jesus used while praying in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36).
 - He used it as a personal expression of agony in His native tongue. As adopted sons, we too have accessibility and communion with the Father.
 - This truth was a favorite of Paul’s; he shared it with the Romans as well (Romans 8:15).



The Sons

v. 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

- “So you are no longer a slave, but a son”
 - Paul declares that we were not only like slaves... we were slaves.
 - All of God’s sons are His slaves, but the relationship changes things.
- “and if a son, then an heir through God”
 - Even though we are adopted, we enjoy all the rights and privileges of being in God’s family. We share in all that the Father has.
 - His household is our household.

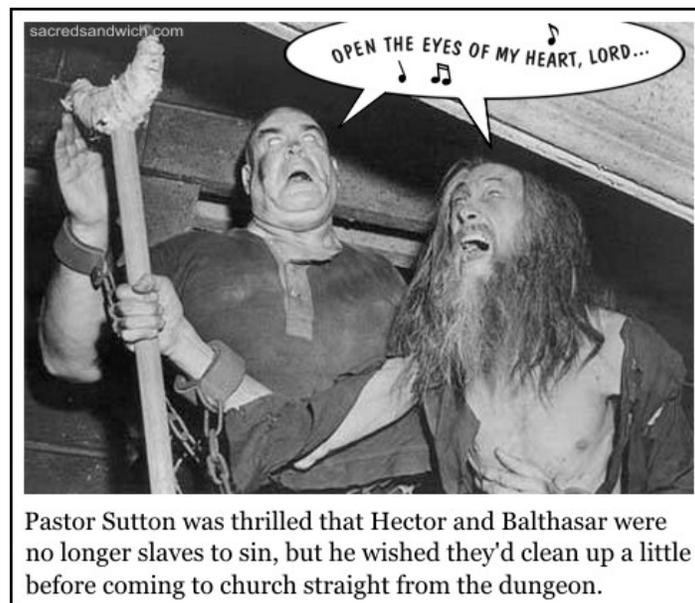
Summary

Until faith comes we are under guardians and managers, like mere boys. But after faith we take our rights as sons of God. The Jewish church of old was under the yoke of the law; its sacrifices were continual and its ceremonies endless. . . . It treated him like a boy at school who has a rule for everything. Now that faith has come, we are full-grown sons, and therefore we are free from the rules that govern the school of the child. We are under law to Christ, even as the full-grown son is still under the discipline of his father's house; but this is a law of love and not of fear, of grace and not of bondage.¹

– Charles Spurgeon

Discussion Questions

- Paul does not define what the elementary principles of the world are. What do you think he might be referring to here? (pg. 4)
- Why was it important for Jesus to be born under the law? (pg. 5)



¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Ga 4:2.