

FROM SLAVERY TO SONSHIP PART 2

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:1-7

December 19, 2010

INTRO/REVIEW:

The entire Bible is about God's mission to reclaim the world (this includes man as well as the entire created order, cf. Lk. 19:10; Rom. 8:23). At the center of His mission is the biblical teaching of covenant.

God has obligated Himself to reclaim the world because, as we have learned in our study of Galatians, He made a covenant with Abraham, which found its fulfillment in the person and work of Christ (3:16).

In 4:1-7, Paul shows how God has unilaterally bound Himself to redeem sinners out of slavery and to grant them full rights and privileges of sonship. Through faith in Christ, God the Father gives to us everything His Son has inherited (4:7).

The question is how is this possible? How does God the Father take us from slavery to sonship? How does God accomplish His mission?

In 4:1-7, Paul sets forth three truths concerning God the Father's adoption plan, which reveals how He brings a sinner from slavery (with no rights) to sonship (with the full rights of inheritance).

I. THE LAW DISCLOSES OUR NEED FOR SONSHIP. vv. 1-3

The law reveals our status and standing before God as that of a slave not a son. A minor in Roman society lived under the constant restriction of guardians and managers and was therefore no different from a slave. Until the date set by the father came, a minor had no rights, no privileges, no inheritance and no freedom.

In the same way, all who seek to live under law are like minors living under the constant restrictions of guardians and managers (i.e., "the elementary principles of the world"). To be under the elementary principles of the world is to be under the Law's relentless demands for perfect righteousness.

Guardians and managers (i.e., law) could not grant sonship. The law doesn't bring us freedom. It only encloses us with taxing restrictions. The law reveals God as a Judge who condemns us rather than as a Father who adopts us and grants us a glorious inheritance. The law confronts us with the hopelessness of our enslaved status. It makes known that we have no freedom, no rights, no privileges and no inheritance.

The first thing then Paul teaches us concerning God the Father's adoption plan is that the law discloses our need for sonship. But, the good news is that God, in His infinite love and grace, is on a mission to redeem and adopt. This leads us to a second truth Paul gives concerning God the Father's adoption plan.

LESSON:

II. GOD THE FATHER SENT HIS SON TO MERIT OUR SONSHIP. vv. 4-5

Whereas the Law discloses our need for sonship (vv. 1-3), the gospel grants it (vv. 4-5). The work of the Son says, "Mission Accomplished." The Son was sent by the Father to accomplish for us what we could not do for ourselves because of our enslavement under the Law (v. 3).

In vv. 4-5, Paul discloses the heart of God's adoption plan. These verses represent "the centre of the entire epistle (letter)..." (Trevor Burke, *Adopted Into God's Family*, p. 116). John Calvin writes, "These few words contain much in instruction" (Calvin, *Galatians*, p. 118).

Paul shows how the whole work of salvation (sonship) originates with God the Father (v. 4a, b), is accomplished by God the Son (vv. 4c-5) and is guaranteed by God the Holy Spirit (vv. 6-7).

We will see how these verses thunder against all forms of works righteousness and leave no room for man to take credit for any part of his salvation. Vv. 4-5 are filled with nothing but Good News of divine grace and divine initiative.

Paul's words are pregnant with good news for those who recognize their need (cf. vv. 1-3). They are loaded with life-changing truths concerning the believer's salvation. Without these words, all mankind remains enslaved to the relentless demands of the law and in bondage to demonic spirits (vv. 1-3, 8-9).

Unless God devised and carried out His mission to redeem and adopt, we would all remain enslaved (v. 3) like a minor in Roman society and left with no privileges, no freedom and no inheritance.

And so in vv. 4-5, Paul shows how God the Father accomplishes His mission of redeeming a sinner from slavery to sonship through the person and work of Christ. We must note carefully how Paul defines the person and work of Christ in vv. 4-5. He outlines six truths concerning how God the Father accomplished His adoption plan through the sending of His Son.

A. THE TIMING OF THE SON'S SENDING, v. 4A

"But when the fullness of time had come"

Just as a Roman father had the authority to appoint the time when His son would receive his inheritance (v. 2), so God the Father appointed the time when the eternal Son would grant believers their inheritance (v. 4a).

Some Bible teachers point out how the historical circumstances were a perfect time for the sending of Christ (cf., Boice, *Galatians*, p. 472). For example, Jesus was born at a time when the Roman empire extended over most of the civilized earth. Roman roads (approx. 50,000 miles) ran to every corner of the Roman empire. This unparalleled network of roads made travel far easier and thus aided in the expansion of the Christian faith. Moreover, the universal language of Greek linked together diverse people groups, which also facilitated in the spreading of the gospel. And, historians note that the state of morality was at an all time low.

As true as these historical factors may be, this is not Paul's point of emphasis. Paul is emphasizing that the advent of Christ took place in God's appointed time. In His eternal wisdom and providence, God the Father determined the appointed time to intervene into human history and accomplish His mission of redemption and adoption (cf. Gal. 1:15-16).

All the promises God made to OT believers would be fulfilled at His appointed time (cf. Lk. 1:54-55). Someone may ask, "Why didn't Christ appear sooner? Why did God wait so long to fulfill His promises?"

John Calvin answers,

At what time it was expedient that the Son of God should be revealed to the world, it belonged to God alone to judge and determine. This consideration ought to restrain all curiosity. Let no man presume to be dissatisfied with the secret purpose of God, and raise a dispute why Christ did not appear sooner," (*Galatians*, p. 118).

This single phrase removes all merit from the work of salvation. It demonstrates that God's adoption plan is not in any way shape or form a response to man's law-keeping or worthiness. Rather, it reveals divine grace and divine initiative in redeeming and adopting orphaned, law-breakers! The sending of Christ was divinely appointed not legally merited.

B. THE SOURCE OF THE SON'S SENDING, v. 4B

"God sent forth His Son"

There are some important truths implied in this short phrase that we need to take note of.

FIRST, THIS PHRASE HIGHLIGHTS THE LOVE AND GRACIOUS INITIATIVE OF GOD THE FATHER.

The source of our redemption and adoption originated in God the Father. In Colossians 1:12, Paul says that it is God the Father “who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” In John 3:16, Jesus taught, “For God (the Father- J.F.) so loved the world, that He gave His only Son...” In Romans 5:8, Paul says that “God (the Father- J.F.) shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Out of love, the Father sent the Son to perform that which we could not because of our enslavement to the relentless demands of the law (v. 3). The gospel then is the announcement of the past historic event in which Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves (v. 3). And the sending of the Son to redeem and adopt highlights the love and gracious initiative of God the Father as Paul writes in Ephesians 1:4-5, “⁴In love ⁵He (God the Father- J.F.) predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will...”

SECOND, THIS PHRASE HIGHLIGHTS THAT THE TRINITY DESIGNED THE WHOLE WORK OF SALVATION.

God the Father’s adoption plan was carried out by the divine design of the Trinity. To say that the advent of Christ was a significant historical event is an understatement. The sending of Christ was the turning point of human history because it was the outworking of the eternal purpose of the Trinity.

The NT clearly shows that the Son understood that He was sent by the Father to redeem a people given to Him and make them His own (cf. Matt. 10:40; Mk. 9:37; Lk. 4:18; 10:16; Jn. 1:33; 4:34; 5:24, 30, 36-37; 6:38-39, 44; 7:28-29; 8:18, 26, 29, 42; 10:27-29; 12:44-45, 49; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:2-4, 18, 21, 23, 25; Heb. 2:13 cf. Isa. 8:18, for further discussion, see Guthrie, *Comm. on the NT Use of the OT*, p. 951).

The sending of the Son is rooted in an eternal covenant between the persons of the Trinity. Theologians refer to this as the Covenant of Redemption. Michael Horton describes the covenant of redemption as “the opening act in the drama of redemption” (*God of Promise*, p. 78).

Unlike the Mosaic, Abrahamic and New Covenants, which God made with men in time, the covenant of redemption took place before time (Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 78). There is a gospel of redemption and adoption to proclaim in time because there is an eternal covenant between the persons of the Trinity before time.

The gospel is an announcement of the sovereign grace and love of the Triune God. Michael Horton writes,

In the covenant of redemption, the love of the Father and the Spirit for the Son is demonstrated in the gift of a people who will have Him as their living head. At the same time, the Son’s love for the Father and Spirit is demonstrated in His pledge to redeem that family at the greatest personal cost” (*God of Promise*, p. 79).

The Incarnate Son was sent in order to reveal the love of the Father and Spirit. Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, the love of the Father comes to its fullest and final expression. The apostle John writes, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and *sent His Son* to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10; emphasis mine).

Again, this phrase, “God sent forth His Son,” eliminates all merit from the equation. How? The covenant made by the Trinity takes the Fall of man into account (Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 78). This means that no one is more worthy of salvation than anyone else. All are equally enslaved to the elementary principles of the world (v. 3, i.e., held in bondage under the relentless demands of the law for perfect righteousness).

And so this phrase emphasizes God the Father’s divine initiative and grace rather than human initiative and merit. The Father sent the Son! Apart from the divine design and gracious initiative of God, we would all be left in our sin, condemned under the relentless demands of the law for perfect righteousness.

THIRD, THIS PHRASE HIGHLIGHTS JESUS’ ETERNAL DEITY.

The fact that the Son was sent indicates that He existed before He was born. Jesus is the One and Only Unique Son (Jn. 1:18). He is the second person of the Trinity. Before the incarnation, Paul says Christ was in the form of God (Philip. 2:6). As the eternal Son, He was with the Father before He was born in Bethlehem (Jn. 1:1; 17:5, 24).

Such a high view of Christ is important for us to understand because as Graeme Goldsworthy points out, “A sound Christology becomes a vital part of our theological formation, and without it we will probably become purveyors of sentimental images of Jesus,” (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 41).

We must guard against allowing our understanding and thinking about Jesus (especially at Christmas time) to be more influenced by “sentimental images of Jesus” from the culture than by the gospel.

Here, Paul sets forth a fundamental and necessary truth of the gospel, namely that Jesus Christ is God (Note: we will see the significance of this momentarily). In the Father’s appointed time, He sent the Son from Heaven to be “born of woman.”

C. THE METHOD OF THE SON’S SENDING, v. 4C

“born of woman” v. 4c

This phrase testifies to Jesus’ genuine humanity. It is a summary statement of the doctrine of the Incarnation (God became man). In God’s appointed time, the Son who eternally existed with the Father (Jn. 1:1) was sent to assume human nature (Jn. 1:14). He added humanity to His deity.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Q. 35 summarizes the Incarnation as follows, “The eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took upon Himself true human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, through the working of the Holy Spirit. Thus He is also the true seed of David, and like His brothers in every respect, yet without sin.”

Jesus walked among us. He was tried and tempted. He experienced hunger and the limitations of physical weakness. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He experienced rejection from His own family. He suffered throughout His whole life, was crucified, raised and exalted to God’s right hand (Philip. 2:5-11).

Thus, in the Father’s appointed time, God the Son became and now remains forever both God and man (2 natures) in one person. Christ’s divine and human nature is one of unity without fusion and distinction without separation (Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 65).

Why does Paul mention both the deity and humanity of Christ in this context, which has to do with redemption and adoption? The importance of what Paul is saying is this:

God’s mission to redeem and adopt sinners would be impossible if Jesus was not both God and man in one person. Graham Goldsworthy writes, “For the gospel to be the gospel, Jesus has to be acknowledged as both true God and true man” (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 64).

Questions 15-19 of the Heidelberg Catechism summarizes in a clear fashion Scripture’s teaching on exactly why Jesus had to be both God and man.

15. Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer must we seek?

A. One who is a true and righteous man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God.

16. Q. Why must He be a true and righteous man?

A. He must be a true man because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin. He must be a righteous man because one who himself is a sinner cannot pay for others.

17. Q. Why must He at the same time be true God?

A. He must be true God so that by the power of His divine nature He might bear in His human nature the burden of God’s wrath, and might obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

19. Q. From where do you know this?

A. From the holy gospel...

REFLECTION:

As we consider Paul's profound statements of Jesus' person and work, what benefit(s) do we receive from the incarnation (i.e., the sending of the Son)? By being born of woman, Jesus, the God-man, becomes the perfect Mediator. Through faith in this perfect Mediator, our sin, in which we were all conceived and born, is totally covered with His innocence and perfect holiness in the sight of God (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 36).

That Christ covers our sin in the sight of God is Good News! But, there is more! Christ was born not only to cover our sin (lawbreaking) but in doing so, He made it possible for God the Father to grant us sonship and an eternal inheritance (vv. 6-7)!

Just like minors in Roman society, all who are under the law have no rights, privileges or inheritance. Under law, we are enslaved to the constant restrictions and relentless demands of the law (v. 3). But the gospel declares that the Son left His freedom, privileges and full rights in heaven so that we might be granted freedom from the law's demands and receive the full privileges and rights as sons!

2 Corinthians 8:9 provides a succinct commentary of Christ's voluntary condescension, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich."

By adding humanity to His deity, Christ became "poor" and accomplished (merited) God the Father's adoption plan so that you could receive a rich eternal inheritance. As Scotty Smith writes in *Reclaiming Adoption*, "We're not just in God's family; we're in God's future and estate."

Because of our redemption and adoption now, we are guaranteed an even greater privilege of receiving perfect resurrection bodies and the perfections and wonder of life in the new heaven and new earth (Rom. 8:23; Rev. 21:1-22:6)!

This is the wonder of Christmas! Our salvation (redemption and adoption) originated in the love of the Father. God's whole adoption plan is a divinely designed work of the Trinity. It was accomplished through person and work of Jesus.

The Incarnation was necessary for our redemption from slavery and adoption as sons! What immeasurable riches we have through the person and work of the Son! This is the good news of Christmas. This is what and why we celebrate!

Charles Spurgeon writes, "Infinite, and an infant. Eternal, and yet born of a woman. Almighty, and yet hanging on a woman's breast. Supporting a universe, and yet needing to be carried in a mother's arms. King of angels, and yet the reputed son of Joseph. Heir of all things, and yet the carpenter's despised son. Oh, the wonder of Christmas."

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