

FROM SLAVERY TO SONSHIP
PART 3

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:1-7

December 26, 2010

INTRO/REVIEW:

In 4:1-7, Paul sets forth three truths concerning how God the Father 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. 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.

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). In vv. 4-5, Paul discloses the heart of God the Father's adoption plan, which is centered in the sending of His Son. Specifically, Paul outlines six truths concerning the person and work of the 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). The sending of the Son was divinely appointed not legally merited. v. 4a

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

"God sent forth His Son"

The source of our redemption and adoption originated in God the Father. This phrase highlights the love and gracious initiative of God the Father. The sending of the Son derives from the Father's love. By His love, God the Father goes before and anticipates our redemption and adoption in Christ. Because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19), He afterward redeems and adopts us to Himself through the sending of His Son (cf. John Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.3). Calvin quoting Augustine writes,

For it was not after we were reconciled to Him through the blood of His Son that He began to love us. Rather, He has loved us before the world was created, that we also might be His sons along with His only-begotten Son... The fact that we were reconciled through Christ's death must not be understood as if His Son reconciled us to Him that He might now begin to love those whom He had hated. Rather, we have already been reconciled to Him who loves us, with whom we were enemies on account of sin. The apostle will testify whether I am speaking the truth: 'God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' [Rom. 5:8]. Therefore He loved us even when we practiced enmity toward Him and committed wickedness" (*Institutes*, 2.16.4).

Thus, the Father "so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son" (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8). This loving initiative by the Father reveals that He is not a "harsh, demanding taskmaster who must be persuaded by the Son to have mercy. Rather, it is the Father Himself who sends the Son to save the world by His voluntary obedience in life and death," (Michael Horton, "A Dying Man's Consolation: The Active and Passive Obedience of Christ," *Modern Reformation Magazine*, March/April vol. 5 no. 2 1996, 23-24).

This phrase also highlights that God's adoption plan was an eternal plan that was perfectly designed and executed by the Trinity. And lastly, it highlights Jesus' eternal deity. The fact that the Son was sent indicates that He existed before He was born. But, in the Father's appointed time, He sent the eternal Son from Heaven to be "born of woman."

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

"born of woman"

This phrase testifies to Jesus' genuine humanity. God's mission to reclaim sinners would be impossible if Jesus was not both God and man in one person. By being sent by the Father and born of woman, Jesus becomes the perfect Mediator (the God-Man).

This brings us to a fourth truth concerning how God the Father accomplished His adoption plan through the sending of His Son.

LESSON:

D. THE OCCASION OF THE SON'S SENDING. v. 4D

"born under law"

This short phrase highlights why was it necessary for God the Father to send His Son into the world. It also summarizes the state of the world apart from Christ. Why then does Paul mention that Christ was born under the law? Why was this necessary?

The justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin (cf. Q. 16, Heidelberg Catechism). This, however, is impossible because all men have broken God's law and are unable to pay for sin. All men (Jew and Gentile) are universally enslaved under the relentless demands of the law (cf. vv. 1-3).

The world into which God the Father sent the Son is one that is enslaved under sin and the curse of the law. For example, in Galatians 3:23, Paul writes, "Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned..." (cf. 3:25). In 4:2, Paul reveals that man is enslaved under the relentless demands of the law for perfect righteousness (i.e., "the elementary principles of the world"). Further, to be "under the law" is to be "under sin" ("But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin...", 3:22). And, lastly, to be under law is to be under its curse ("all who rely on works of the law are under a curse," Gal. 3:10).

The law only justifies perfect lawkeepers and it curses all lawbreakers. This then is man's condition apart from Christ. He has failed to abide by all things written in the book of the Law and do them. Therefore, he is under sin and the law's curse. He is enslaved to the law's relentless demands for perfect righteousness (4:3). This is why the Son had to be born under the law as a man.

Thus, Paul writes, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law..."

Our enslaved state was hopeless until the date set by the Father! In His appointed time, God the Father sent forth His Son to fulfill the obedience that we owe to God. The Son was sent to keep the law for Adam's orphans. Simply put, Jesus was born to obey in order to merit our sonship.

The Son being born under the law is the only remedy for our law breaking. Paul says the Father sent the Son to perform that which we could not because of our enslavement under the law (Gal. 4:3). To borrow Paul's words from Galatians 3:10, Jesus was born under the law to abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.

Michael Horton notes that too often people think that God is lenient or that His grace makes up for what we lack. However, Christ's perfect obedience doesn't just make up for what we lack. Rather, His obedience satisfies the justice of God and His just wrath against sin. It even satisfies God's justice against the imperfections of our "good works" as believers ("A Dying Man's Consolation," *Modern Reformation*, pp. 23-24).

And so the Son could not have accomplished the work of salvation if He was not born under the law. He had to be born of woman under the law so, as the perfect man, He could merit for us perfect righteousness and thus grant us the full rights and privileges of sonship.

This is what theologians refer to as the active obedience of Christ. For example, in response to John the Baptist's reluctance to baptize Jesus (Matt. 3:14), Jesus said, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus declares, "¹⁷ Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."

By being born under law, Jesus, the Incarnate Son, did everything that His Father sent Him to do. The author of Hebrews in 10:5-7 writes, "⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

As a child, Jesus didn't lack in any godly character quality. But, what He did lack was having lived an entire perfect life of obedience to the Father, without sin. Luke tells us that Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man" (2:52). Jesus progressively obeyed His Father throughout His life.

As the last Adam, the obedience Jesus gave to His Father had to be tested (cf. Lk. 4:1-13). Luke says that Jesus was "led by the Spirit in the wilderness." Jesus had to undo what Adam, Israel and all mankind had failed to do. As a genuine man, Jesus' obedience, unlike the first Adam, was perfect and complete. When tempted in the wilderness, He obeyed whereas Adam failed.

It is impossible for us to imagine what it would have been like for Jesus to experience genuine temptation in precisely the same way as we do. Yet, this is what the Scriptures tell us (Heb. 4:15).

As a man, Jesus had to turn His will away from every form of unbelief, jealousy, gossip, revenge, hate, lust, envy, selfishness, greed, pride, laziness, etc... (i.e., every type of disobedience in thought, word and deed).

Jesus did not sin by omission or commission. He never sinned by ignorance or by arrogant disregard of divine commands. For example, in Psalm 19, the Psalmist prays for forgiveness of "hidden sins" (i.e., sins committed in ignorance, v. 12). Jesus never made such a request. The Psalmist also requests to be kept from committing "presumptuous sins" (i.e., guilty of arrogant disregard of divine commands, which come to have dominion over us/enslave us, v. 13).

Jesus not only turned His will away from every form of disobedience but He also brought every thought, word and deed into perfect conformity to the demands of the Law to love God and neighbor perfectly. John Calvin discussing the effects of Christ's obedience and

death notes how Christ has redeemed us through His obedience, which He practiced throughout His life. He writes,

Now if someone asks, How has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God, and acquired righteousness to render God favorable and kindly toward us? To this we can in general reply that He has achieved this for us by the whole course of His obedience...Paul extends the oasis of the pardon that frees us from the curse of the law to the whole life of Christ: ‘But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, subject to the law, to redeem those who were under the law’ [Gal. 4:4-5]...In short, from the time when He took on the form of a servant, He began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us” (*Institutes*, 2.16.5).

The crowning act of Christ’s obedience is seen in His voluntary, obedient death on the cross. In Philippians 2:8, Paul writes, “being found in human form, He humbled Himself *by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (emphasis mine). Even in His death, we must take careful note of Jesus’ obedience. Again, Calvin writes,

...even in death itself His willing obedience is the important thing because a sacrifice not offered voluntarily would not have furthered righteousness...we must hold fast to this: that no proper sacrifice to God could have been offered unless Christ, disregarding His own feelings, subjected and yielded Himself wholly to His Father’s will...” (*Institutes*, 2.16.5).

Christ’s suffering wasn’t simply the scorn, ridicule and unjust accusations of His executioners. His suffering was not merely the shame and physical agony of the cross. Rather, Christ’s suffering was His obedient submission to the divine curse of the law. This is what made His obedience so trying, which is why He prayed in Gethsemane, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Mt 26:39).

Having been sent by His Father, Jesus voluntarily obeyed the commandment He had received from His Father. In John 10:17-18, He declares,

¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. *This commandment* I have received from my Father” (emphasis mine).

The Good News of the gospel then is not only that Christ died for our sins but that He also lived a sinless life that perfectly fulfilled the righteous standards of the law for us. For 33 years, Christ was tempted in every way like us, yet He was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Jesus is the only man who can say that He loved His Father and neighbor perfectly with all His heart, soul, mind and strength.

The significance of this phrase, “born under the law” cannot be overemphasized. If all that was necessary for our justification was the death of Jesus on the cross, He could have bypassed being born of woman and under the law and simply come down on Good Friday, died on the cross and three days later rose again.

But, Paul says that God the Father sent forth His Son born of woman, born under law. Why? It is not enough for Christ to simply pay the penalty for our sins. Through Christ’s death, our debt to God is cancelled and no punishment is due to us. This is certainly Good News! But, it is not enough good news to grant us entry into God the Father’s household.

Removing the debt that we owe to God brings us into a state of moral neutrality. Moral neutrality is not enough to stand before a holy and just God. God’s law not only requires the absence of sin but the possession of perfect righteousness (i.e., a righteousness that perfectly conforms all of the law’s requirements).

This is why Christ was born under the law! The perfect obedience to the law that He practiced throughout the course of His 33 years of life on earth is the righteousness that is credited to our account through faith in Christ alone. Paul confirms this in Romans 5:19, “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

Christ is our righteousness (“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” 1 Cor. 1:30). Through faith in Christ alone, we are justified because Christ’s perfect righteousness is credited to us.

This is good news! For your every act of unbelief, Jesus trusted His Father. For your every act of jealousy and envy, Jesus was content. For your every act of gossip you have given or entertained, Jesus spoke only words of grace and edification. For every angry, revengeful desire you have had against someone who offended or wronged you, Peter says, “When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 1:23). For every impure and lustful thought you have had, Jesus was pure in heart. In short, every act of love, purity, kindness, selflessness, trust, (i.e., every form of obedience) that Jesus performed is reckoned to you through faith alone.

The saying we have grown familiar with is true. Justification is not only as “just as if I’d never sinned.” Even better, justification consists of “just as if I’d always obeyed.” Because the Son was born under the law we stand before God “just as if we’d always obeyed” (i.e., clothed in the imputed righteousness He merited in His 33 years under the law)!

REFLECTION:

What difference does the active obedience of Christ make in our lives?

1. THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST BRINGS COMFORT IN OUR ONGOING STRUGGLE WITH SIN.

All of us know what it is like to taste the bitterness of sin and thus experience anxiety about our standing with God. In these times, we must call to mind Christ's obedience and know that we stand before God clothed in the imputed righteousness Jesus merited in His 33 years under the law!

Because we find ourselves always saying like Paul, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing," we must daily preach the good news of Christ's active obedience to ourselves. Jerry Bridges writes,

...God wants us to find our primary joy in our objectively declared justification, not in our subjectively perceived sanctification. Regardless of how much progress we make in our pursuit of holiness, it will never come close to the absolute perfect righteousness of Christ that is ours through our union with Him in His life and death" ("The Discomfort of the Justified Life," in *Justified*, p. 94).

2. THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST ASSURES US THAT GOD THE FATHER IS PLEASED WITH US.

Despite every time we have failed to obey God's law in thought, word, and deed and have sinned with arrogant disregard of His divine commands, God the Father sent forth His Son to fulfill the obedience that we owe.

Thus, through our faith union with Christ, God the Father no longer contemplates us as we are in ourselves but as we are in His Son. As we have learned, Christ's obedience satisfies the justice of God against even the imperfection of our best works as believers. Thus, through our union with the Son, all of our works as believers are acceptable and pleasing to the Father.

John Calvin writes, "If, then, we would be assured that God is pleased with and kindly disposed toward us, we must fix our eyes and minds on Christ alone. For...through Him alone we escape the imputation of our sins to us- an imputation bringing with it the wrath of God" (*Institutes*, 2.16.3).

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