

FROM SLAVERY TO SONSHIP PART 4

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:1-7

INTRO/REVIEW:

Since it has been several weeks since we have been in Paul's letter to the Galatians, I need to take a moment and remind you of Paul's argument in vv. 1-7.

The predominant theme of Paul in these seven verses is that salvation in Christ makes us sons not slaves. Salvation does not make us slaves (i.e., servile followers of a tyrannical God). Rather, this great salvation makes us sons (i.e., grateful followers of a loving Father).

How then does God bring us from slavery to sonship? Paul shows this by setting forth three truths concerning how God the Father brings a sinner from slavery (with no rights of inheritance) to sonship (with full rights of inheritance).

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

Through the law, we see who we were: children enslaved to the elementary principles of this world (4:3).

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

In vv. 4-5, Paul discloses the heart of God's adoption plan, which is centered on the person and work of Jesus. He 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." Here, Paul tells us when the Son came. The sending of the son into the world occurred in God the Father's appointed time.

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

"God sent forth His Son." Now, Paul tells us who sent the Son. The source of our redemption and adoption originated in the loving, sovereign plan of God the Father. This phrase also testifies to the Son's eternal deity (i.e., that the Son was sent indicates that He existed before He was born).

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

"born of woman." v. 4c By this phrase, Paul explains how the Son came. This phrase testifies to Jesus' genuine humanity. God's adoption plan would be impossible if Jesus

were not both God and man in one person. By being born of woman, Jesus becomes the perfect Mediator, the God-man.

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

The phrase, "born under law" (v. 4d) reveals under what condition the Son came. Paul This phrase summarizes the state of the world apart from Christ (i.e., under law) and highlights why was it necessary for God the Father to send His Son into the world.

All men (Jew and Gentile) are universally enslaved under the relentless demands of the law (see Gal. 3:10, 22-23; 4:1-3). And so this short phrase, "born under law" emphasizes that God the Father sent forth His Son to fulfill the obedience that we owe to God. Christ's obedience undoes Adam's (and our) disobedience (cf. Rom. 5:19).

This brings us to a fifth truth concerning God the Father's sending of the Son.

Paul now explains why the Son came.

LESSON:

E. THE PURPOSE OF THE SON'S SENDING, v. 5

Paul mentions a two-fold purpose for why the Son was sent by the Father: to redeem, v. 5a; to adopt, v. 5b.

vv. 4-5 read, "⁴ God [the Father] sent forth His Son... ⁵ to (ἵνα) *redeem* those who were under the law, so that (ἵνα) we might *receive adoption as sons*" (emphasis mine).

First, God the Father sent the Son "to redeem those who were under the law."

1. REDEMPTION, v. 5A

The purpose of the Father's sending forth the Son was to purchase our redemption. In this phrase, Paul is referring to Christ's death on the cross. Christ's obedient life is critical (v. 4d) but He did not redeem us by His life alone.

Notice carefully how Paul ties together the phrases, "born of woman, born under the law" in v. 4 to the work of redemption in v. 5. Paul immediately associates the Son's being born under law with His death on the cross.

The word redemption carries the idea of "to release by the payment of a price" (see Louw & Nida, "ἐξαγοράζω"; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 61).

In Paul's day the term "redemption" was used in reference to the release of a slave by the payment of a price. Throughout Galatians, Paul likens the state of man under law to a kind of slavery, a captivity, which he cannot free himself (see Gal. 3:10, 22-23; 4:1-3).

Thus, the term *redemption* highlights the fact that man, because of his sin, is unable to do anything about his enslaved, cursed state. Man is not able to free himself. He needs someone outside of himself to pay the price and thereby “redeem” him out of his enslaved state. Through His death on the cross, Jesus has paid the ultimate price of our redemption.

“Redeem” is the same word Paul used in Galatians 3:13. As the fully obedient Son, Jesus willingly took upon Himself the curse, which all men are under as a result of their failure to keep it (cf. Gal. 3:10). Thus, to be redeemed from “under the law” is to be freed from the “curse of the law.”

The *precepts* of the law are not only to be fully obeyed, but the *penalties* imposed for the least disobedience of the precepts are to be fully borne. As the perfect man, Jesus totally fulfilled the requirements of the law in His life as well as bore the curse of the law in His death. He redeemed us from our enslavement to the curse of the law by bearing its penalties on the cross.

Christ’s redemption then is substitutionary, which means that He paid the price that we could not pay. He became a man for the purpose of obeying the very law He had given and for receiving the penalties He Himself had prescribed. Because Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, God’s Law has no more claim on us!

Here we see the immeasurable love of the Father and Son. Should you ever begin to doubt the Father’s love, you must not lose sight of two facts. First, God the Father is the source (author) of our redemption. God the Father sent forth His Son to redeem us.

When we remember the enslaved state of sin out of which we have been redeemed, this makes the Father’s love all the more remarkable! God the Father has so loved those whom He redeemed on the cross that He has adopted them as sons and made them heirs of all that is His. “Consider how lavish is the love which the Father has showered upon us! That we should be called God’s children! And that is what we are” (1 Jn. 3:1, *WBC*, Smalley, pp. 140-141)!

Second, if you still doubt the Father’s love toward you, you must fix your eyes solely on the person and work of the Son. By His willing, voluntary obedience, Christ paid the price, bore the curse and redeemed us so that we may receive adoption as sons. This leads us to the second purpose of the Son’s sending.

2. ADOPTION, v. 5B

The Father’s sending of the Son had both a redemptive as well as an adoptive purpose. Paul says we were redeemed so that we might receive adoption as sons. The Sending of the Son and His redemption were means to an end, namely adoption as sons.

Adoption as sons is the subject that is in the forefront of Paul's mind. God the Father sent His Son to redeem us from our greatest problem, which is slavery under the curse of the law.

Before we could receive adoption as sons, we had to be redeemed from our slavery. Redemption from the bondage and curse of the law is Good News! But, the gospel is more than that!

The Good News is also that He sent His Son to redeem us so that we might receive the highest privilege that the gospel offers, namely adoption as sons (see, J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 206).

To be liberated as a slave is great! But then to be adopted as a son and made a co-heir of the Father's entire estate is astounding!

The shift from slave to son language is remarkable, to say the least. By virtue of our adoption our whole relation to God has radically changed. Our change in relation to God is so significant that J.I. Packer writes, "Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption" (*Knowing God*, p. 202).

Note the contrast Paul presents here.

We once were children in bondage under the law (vv. 1-3). Now we are sons and heirs (vv. 5b-7). We once were condemned by God as a Judge but wow we are sons who are adopted by God as a Father.

When teaching His disciples how to pray, note how Jesus taught them (and us) to think about their relationship to God, "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father..." (Matt. 6:9).

When Jesus died on the cross and paid for our freedom, He didn't leave us homeless. He not only paid for our freedom but also placed us in His family and granted us a rich, eternal inheritance (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4).

By virtue of our adoption, we have been given:

- A new name (son no longer slave)
- A new legal standing/status (accepted no longer alienated or condemned)
- A new family-relationship (Father no longer Judge)
- A new image, the image of Christ, ("For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers," Rom. 8:29).

REFLECTION:

As we reflect upon Paul's words, here are some important questions that you and I need to ask ourselves:

Is my Christianity the drudgery of being a slave or is it the freedom of being a son of God?

Is my Christianity a burden that I carry? Or, is it a blessing that carries me?

Is my obedience driven more by the Father's love for me or by fear of punishment?

There are multitudes of people in churches, synagogues, mosques and temples for whom their religious life is a burden that they desperately try to carry. If they were honest, they would admit that it is something of drudgery.

Regrettably, few know little of the liberty and joy of having a gospel that bears and carries them. Few know little of the freedom and intimacy of fellowship with the living God who is their heavenly Father.

All who go on seeking to obey God out of fear or slavish duty, demonstrate they do not understand what Paul says here concerning what Christ has done for us. They have not yet comprehended the radical change that has taken place in their relation to God.

Christianity is not bondage and slavery but rather freedom and sonship. In contrast to the Old Covenant (Mosaic), which the Judaizers were seeking to draw the Galatians back to, the accent of the New Covenant is not on the danger of drawing near to a holy God (cf. Heb. 12:18-22), but on the boldness and confidence with which believers may approach Him (cf. Heb. 12:22-24).

This boldness is not presumption. Rather, as J.I. Packer notes, the Christian's boldness springs directly from faith in Christ and from the knowledge of His saving work (*Knowing God*, p. 203). Thus, Paul writes, "we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him" (Eph. 3:12). The author of Hebrews writes, "Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:19-22).

To those who are Christ's, a holy God is now a loving Father. The Christian may approach God without fear of rejection or the threat of the law's curse. How can this be? As we have already noted, because Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, God's Law has no more claim on us! Because of what Christ has done, the Christian can always be sure of God's fatherly concern and care. This boldness and confidence created by the gospel is the heart of the New Testament message (see *Knowing God*, p. 203).

J.I. Packer, in his book, *Knowing God*, writes,

What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father...you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God (*Knowing God*, p. 201).

One final thought.

Sonship to God is not an automatic status by virtue of one's birth. Nor is adoption something that is earned through good works. Paul has shown that there was no worth in us, no beauty, no virtue; nothing in us to move God to bestow the privilege of sonship upon us. To be sure we have enough in us to move God to curse us, but nothing to move Him to adopt us.

Notice what Paul says, "so that *we might receive* adoption as sons" (emphasis mine). Adoption is a gift, which one receives through faith in Jesus. In Galatians 3:26, Paul writes, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."

God is the Father only of those who trust in Christ as their Savior. John Calvin writes, "The cause and root of adoption is Christ because God is not a Father to any that are not members and brethren of His only-begotten Son" (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 20, "2 Corinthians" p. 138).

Sonship to God is a gift of grace received (ἀπολάβομεν, v. 5b) not a reward of merit earned. The privilege of being in God's family does not depend on our works but in trusting in Christ and His works. Will you trust in the Son today?

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