

## "Freedom as an Heir"

**Lesson Text:** Galatians 3:23–4:1–7 **Background Scripture:** Galatians 3:19–4:7

**Devotional Reading:** Genesis 12:1–9

**Galatians 3:23–4:7 (NIV)**<sup>23</sup> Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

<sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

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What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. <sup>2</sup> The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. <sup>3</sup> So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces<sup>1</sup> of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. <sup>6</sup> Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba,<sup>1</sup> Father." <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

### TODAY'S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To restate the task of the law.
- **Biblical Principle:** To **compare** and contrast conditions under the law with conditions in Christ Jesus.
- **Daily Application:** To state one way to express the reality of Galatians 4:7 to an unbeliever.

### INTRODUCTION

#### From a Slave

Until I was in high school, I believed that God relished the prospect of disciplining me and sending me to hell for my sins. Because of this wrong view of God, I tried to manage my works with a list of dos and don'ts. I wasn't practicing a healthy rejection of evil, led by the Spirit; I was a slave to my own attempts to earn my salvation. This was my only relationship with God.

Paul's words in today's lesson had something to say to my young heart, and they yet speak to all of us as he puts the law in its proper context.

### LESSON CONTEXT

In today's printed text, Paul continued his efforts to instruct the Galatian Christians about the correct relationship between law and grace. Because of some false teachers called Judaizers, the churches in the province of Galatia were adding works of the law to the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6–10). Paul reflected on his own "extremely zealous" experience in Judaism (1:14) as he highlighted his inability to follow the law to the point of justification (2:15–21). Through Christ, the promise of salvation had been revealed to the whole world (3:6–9). Paul went on to show the unifying nature of that salvation for all who would believe in Christ.

Because of Paul's preaching of the gospel of grace, some of his opponents accused him of acting in contradiction to the Old Testament (example: Acts 18:12–13). While Paul presented the new message of

grace without apology, he also readily acknowledged that there was a purpose for the old Law of Moses. He strenuously maintained that the new is superior, but that the old had a vital purpose in God's plan.

Galatians 3:15–22 (immediately preceding our printed text) focuses on the illustration of Abraham's (singular) seed. It is in Christ alone that God fulfilled the law. And this fulfillment did not do away with the promises God made; far from it! Instead, Jesus was the means by which God made good on the promises to Abraham and his descendants. In 3:21–22, Paul focused on the limitation of the law, namely that it could not impart righteousness or life.

### **Abraham's Seed: Galatians 3:23-29**

The Greek word translated *held in custody* is best understood here as guarding or shielding (compare Philippians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:5). It was really for protection rather than incarceration for punishment. "Locked up until the faith" means that we were shut up to faith in Christ as our only means of freedom. The law *imprisoned* men and woman so that they might find true liberty in Christ; it cuts off every other way of escape. The purpose of the law was to prepare men and woman for faith in Christ. The law was a preparation for faith in Christ, not a substitute for it, or a supplement to it.

A *guardian* (v. 24 of today's lesson) was a man put in charge of a young boy by his parents. He was the trusted boy-leader or child-escort employed to attend a boy from the age of six to sixteen and who watched over his morals and manners. He was not the teacher and had no authority to punish. His business was to see that the child went to the right place and did the right thing. Such was the purpose of the law, to prescribe right conduct and impose certain checks. The law convicts of sin, restrains from sin, and condemns for sin; but the law cannot save from sin. The God-given purpose of the law was to "bring us "until Christ came" (v. 24b). The law's (guardian's) work is now finished, "that we may be justified by faith."

Because the law could only point to sin and not save from sin, God sent his Son to fulfill the requirements of the law (see Romans 8:1–4). The work of Christ was the culmination of God's plan for our salvation; placing our faith in Him is the success of the guardian. Now that Christ has come, we do not look to the law as a way to be in right standing before God; rather, we look to Christ as "the culmination (end) of the law so that there may be righteousness" (10:4).

### **1. What did Paul mean by "we were held in custody under the law" (Galatians 3:23-24)?**

With faith in Christ the born-again believer is no longer under the boy-leader, who has been discharged from service. We are not under the law, but under grace (Roman 6:15).

Paul now changes from “we” to “you” (v. 26 of today’s lesson), to apply the truth to the Galatians, that “all” Jews and Gentiles are “children of God through faith.” All Christians are God’s children having being born again and sharing God’s nature (2 Peter 1:4).

## **2. How does faith in God make us His children? (Galatians 3:25-26)**

With the coming of Jesus Christ, the nation of Israel moved out of childhood into adulthood. The long period of preparation was over. While there was a certain amount of glory to the law, there was a greater glory in the gracious salvation of God as found in Christ. The law could reveal sin and, to a certain extent, control behavior, but the law could not do for the sinner what Jesus Christ can do. Paul now in verse 27 speaks of baptism. This is not baptismal regeneration and does not refer to water baptism, for that never put anyone into Christ. Paul speaks of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which places all true believers into a living union with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

“For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (v. 28 of today’s lesson), confirms that race or national distinction does not exist; class differences vanish, and sex rivalry disappears. These things are not barriers to Christian fellowship. At the foot of the cross all men and woman are equal and no one enjoys special privileges.

## **3. What did Paul mean by being “baptized into Christ” (Galatians 3:27-29)**

### **What Do You Think?**

Over the years, how has the Holy Spirit changed your heart regarding divisions that exist between people within the body of Christ?

### **Digging Deeper**

Does that change of heart extend beyond the church? Why or why not?

In verse 29, Paul goes on to add, since all believers *belong to Christ*, union with Christ has made all believers *Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to God’s promise* (Genesis 12:2-3; Romans 4; 8:16-17). Christ is heir to all things (Hebrews 1:2) and you are joint-heirs with Him (Romans 8:17). Being in Christ implies having full access to the promise of His blessing.

### **What Do You Think?**

If you met Abraham today, how would you describe your experience of the blessings that God promised would come to Abraham’s seed?

### **Digging Deeper**

How do you extend the invitation to experience God’s blessings to people who are not currently Abraham’s heirs?

## **God’s Children: Galatians 4:1-3**

These verses take up the analogy from Galatians 3:24-25, above, to further illustrate the nature of God’s plan. Paul did so by picturing an underage child who will eventually inherit the father’s property. The underage person is treated as a slave although at the same time he owns the whole estate, having already been designated as the heir who will control the property. In Roman custom, an heir lacked

control over family property until he reached the age of majority. The *guardians and trustees* exercised authority until then (compare Galatians 3:24, above).

Paul now made the comparison (4:3): like those who are underage, the Galatian Christians had lived not as heirs, but *in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world* (compare Galatians 4:9 and Colossians 2:8, 20). Some students think that the word *forces* refers to the supernatural powers or elements regarded as having control over the events of this world, considering Paul's different uses of this word in passages just noted.

Others think that the concept of elements in this particular context means "something that is basic or elementary," such as learning one's ABCs, or first principles of non-Christian humanity, the elemental lesson is simple symbols of outward things (again, see Colossians 2:8, 20). The kindergarten department of instruction in religious observances which are external and temporal as contrasted with the permanent spiritual principles of faith in Christ. Under the law men were in the process of preparatory training.

#### **4. How did Paul further illustrate the spiritual immaturity of those living under the law and who are being prepared for faith in Christ? (Galatians 4:1-3)**

##### **Grown Heirs: Galatians 4:4-7**

The word "but" introduces a contrast as *the set time had fully come*—the time for Old Testament prophecies to be fulfilled (see Genesis 12:3; 2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6-7; Mark 1:15; Ephesians 1:10). The contrast is with the era of childhood, between *children of God* (Galatians 4:1-3) and *sons of God* (4:4-7).

Because the Galatian believers were living when God had fulfilled His purposes with the Law of Moses, its regulations were of the past. There was no reason for Christians—whether of Jewish or Gentile background—to listen to those who insisted on submission to its distinctives in order to receive salvation in Christ (compare Mark 7:19; Colossians 2:16-23; etc.).

The Son is divine, eternal, and had been *sent* with purpose (John 1:1, 14; 3:16-19; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 1:16; Philippians 2:6-8; Colossians 1:15-18). Born not only a human birth but a Jewish birth, subject to all the ordinances of *the law* (example: Luke 2:22-24), to *redeem* means "to buy back" (see Leviticus 25:25-55). In that regard, Jesus' ministry was twofold. First, He rescued us from the tyranny of the law, under which we stood condemned because of our sin. But He did not do that merely to send us out on our own; He has also adopted us as *sons* into His family. Now that we are placed and recognized as adult sons, this means full deliverance from the child-servant status.

#### **5. What about Jesus' coming revolutionized our relationship with God? (Galatians 4:4-5)**

##### **What Do You Think?**

What practical difference has being adopted into God's family made in your life?

##### **Digging Deeper**

How does your adoption into God's family affect how you interact with your earthly family?

Because we are sons, God *sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts* (v. 6). God could not do this while we were still minors under guardians and stewards. All guardians and stewards have been discharged; their supervision is no longer needed because believers are full-grown sons indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Why while an immature child is under supervision, he doesn't fully appreciate his Father; But when he reaches his maturity, he begins to realize who and what his Father is and so cries out "Abba, Father" (v. 6b; Romans 8:15). These words were used by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14: 36). The word *Abba* is an Aramaic word that is the equivalent of our English word "papa." This shows the closeness of the son to the Father. No servant has this.

“And since you are his child, God has made you also an heir” to His glorious inheritance (Gal. 4:7b). We are recipients of God’s promises now and through eternity!

## **6. What gift did God give us? (Galatians 4:6-7)**

### **CONCLUSION**

In my freshman year of high school, I went to a camp that described Jesus in a new way. This teaching depicted God—my Father—as one who loved me very much. This God would forgive me and never abandon me. This teaching was good news! When I surrendered to Jesus, I realized I had been a slave to a works-based salvation, a slave to sin, a slave to fear, and a slave to “trying hard, but never sure.”

But the situation is not hopeless. A pardon has been provided through the death of Jesus. In Christ, I am free from this anguish. And you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, enjoy the same status I do. We are loved; we are our Father’s children. Our new status is a result of this relationship. The Spirit lives in our hearts to confirm this. God had a plan from the beginning, and regardless of who you once were, in Christ you are made right with God. You have been bought with a price and adopted as his child. We are not to be slaves to law, traditions, cultural norms, or other restrictions; we are free through faith in Jesus Christ to live fully as the heirs of God’s promise.

### **PRAYER**

Father, forgive us for the times where we act as if You are not enough. Thank You for the new identity that You give us by loving us and making us Your children. Help us to live in the promise that You give us through faith. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Whoever we are, wherever we come from, we can be children of God through Christ!