

God Sent His Son Galatians 4:4-7

Are there things you left behind in twenty-eleven? Did you pledge to give up things that were not helpful to your life, to your relationships, to your well-being? Did you pledge to add things to your life that are healthy and helpful? Our scripture today is Paul's reaction to be believers in the region of Galatia who had added on a requirement to the gospel message. Their challenge came from Judaizers, teachers who insisted that belief in Jesus was not enough for salvation. One must also keep the Law of Moses, they said. In a way, one can understand their point of view. For centuries Jews had held to the Law as the righteous path to favor with God (Deut. 6:1-9; 30:15-20; compare Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28). The Judaizers perceived Jesus as building on the Law of Moses, but not replacing it. Paul is outraged and furious with the deceptive claims of the Judaizers and zealous to defend the integrity of the gospel. So he composed this letter. Paul emphasized that Christ alone is sufficient for salvation – nothing more and nothing less.¹

Before we become righteously indignant about the believers at Galatia we need to think about the things that we have added to the gospel. Some of these are baptism (when, how, and for what reason), confirmation or the right hand of fellowship, communion (how often and who gets to serve at the table), church attendance or financial giving (is it generous giving or tithing). Even today the question of whether Christians are to obey the Ten Commandments (part of the Law of Moses) or is grace sufficient for salvation! So you see the question has never really gone away.²

¹ *The Word in Life Study Bible, New Testament*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993, 642

² *The Christian Century*, December 27, 2011. Living by the Word, page 20

But Paul asked why the people want to add the Law. If the Law could have given us a right relationship with God then there was no reason for Jesus to have come and died for our sins. No, at the right time God sent Jesus to redeem us, to adopt us into the family of God!

The New Testament word for adoption means “to place as an adult son.” It has to do with our standing in the family of God: we are not little children but adult with all of the privileges. In our society sons and daughters have equal inheritance rights but during Roman times the sons were the only one to receive the inheritance of the father. So the only way Paul could express this was in patriarchal and male dominate terms. We are the children of God by faith in Christ, born into God’s family. When we trust Christ, as far as our position is concerned, we are adults who can draw on the Father’s wealth and who can exercise all the wonderful privileges of the heir.

To fully understand Paul point we need to understand that made a person an adult. In the Jewish world, on the first Sabbath after a boy had passed his twelfth birthday, his father took him to the Synagogue, where he became A Son of the Law. The father uttered a benediction, “Blessed be thou, O God, who has taken from me the responsibility for this boy.” The boy prayed a prayer in which he said, “O my God and God of my fathers! On this solemn and sacred day, which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my eyes unto thee, and declare with sincerity and truth, that henceforth I will keep thy commandments, and undertake and bear the responsibility of mine actions towards thee.” There was a clear dividing line in the boy’s life; almost overnight he became a man.

In Greece a boy was under his father’s care from seven until he was eighteen. He then became a cadet, and for two years he was under the direction of the state. The Athenians were divided into ten clans. Before a lad became a cadet, at a

festival he was received into the clan; and at a ceremonial act his long hair was cut off and offered to the gods.

Under Roman law the year at which a boy grew up was not definitely fixed, but it was always between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. At a sacred festival in the family the son took off the toga with a narrow purple band at the foot of it and put on the toga which was plain and worn by adults. He was then conducted by his friends and relations down to the forum and formally introduced to public life. It was essentially a religious ceremony. There was a Roman custom that on the day a boy or girl grew up, the boy offered his ball, and the girl her doll, to Apollo to show that they had put away childish things.

When a boy was an infant in the eyes of the law, he might be the owner of a vast property but he could take no legal decision; he was not in control of his own life; everything was done and directed for him; and, therefore, for all practical purposes he had no more freedom than if he were a slave; but when he became a man he entered into his full inheritance.

So a time came when God was ready and when the world was providentially ready for the birth of the Savior. Historians tell us that the Roman world was in great expectation, waiting for a Deliverer, at the time when Jesus was born. The old religions were dying; the old philosophies were empty and powerless to change lives. Strange new mystery religions were invading the empire. Religious bankruptcy and spiritual hunger were everywhere. God was preparing the world for the arrival of His Son.

From the historical point of view, the Roman Empire itself helped prepare the world for the birth of the Savior. Roads connected city with city, and all cities ultimately with Rome. Roman laws protected the rights of citizens, and Roman soldiers guarded the peace. Thanks to both the Greek and Roman conquests, Latin

and Greek were known across the empire. Christ's birth at Bethlehem was not an accident; it was an appointment: Jesus came in "the fullness of the time."

Then Paul explained why Jesus came: "to redeem them that were under the Law" (Gal. 4:5). Redeem means "to set free by paying a price." A man could purchase a slave in any Roman city (there were about 60 million slaves in the empire), either to keep the slave for himself or to set him free. Jesus came to set us free. So, to go back into the Law is to undo the very work of Christ on the cross. He did not purchase us to make us slaves, but adult heirs! Under Law, the Jews were mere children, but under grace, the believer is a child of God with an adult standing in God's family.

Paul gives his readers and us examples to help us understand our changed relationship to God:

The child has the same nature as the father, but the servant does not. When we trust Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us; and this means we are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). The Law could never give a person God's nature within. All it could do was reveal to the person his desperate need for God's nature. So, when the believer goes back into Law, he is denying the very divine nature within, and giving the old nature (the flesh) opportunity to go to work.

The child has a father, while the servant has a master. No servant could ever say "Father" to his master. When we trust Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit within, and the Spirit tells us that we are children of the Father (Rom. 8:15–16). It is natural for a baby to cry, but not for a baby to talk to the father. When the Spirit enters the heart, the Spirit says, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6); and, in response, the believer cries, "Abba, Father!" (Rom. 8:15) The word Abba is an Aramaic word that is the equivalent of our English word "daddy." This shows the closeness of the child to the Father. No servant has this.

The child obeys out of love, while the servant obeys out of fear. The Spirit works in our hearts to increase our love for God. “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22). “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit]” (Rom. 5:5). The Judaizers told the Galatians that they would become better Christians by submitting to the Law, but the Law can never produce obedience. Only love can do that. “If ye love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

The child is rich, while the servant is poor. We are both “children and heirs.” And since we are adopted—placed as an adult in the family—we may begin drawing on our inheritance right now. God has made available to us the riches of God’s grace (Eph. 1:7; 2:7), the riches of God’s glory (Phil. 4:19), the riches of God’s goodness (Rom. 2:4), and the riches of God’s wisdom (Rom. 11:33ff)—and all of the riches of God are found in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:3).³

Through Jesus God intervened and brought hope and freedom to humankind. As a human father chose the time for his child to become an adult, so the heavenly Father chose the time for the coming of Christ to make provision for people’s transition from bondage under Law to spiritual inheritance. The “Son” was not only divine; Jesus was also human. He was born under Law as a Jew. He kept the Law perfectly, fulfilled it (cf. Matt. 5:17), and finally paid its curse (cf. Gal. 3:13). And since Christ redeemed and set free those who were under the Law, why should Gentile converts now wish to be placed under it! Also Christ’s Incarnation and death secured for believers the full rights of heirs. All the enjoyments and privileges of a mature child in a family belong to those who have entered into the benefits of Christ’s redemptive work.

God the Father not only “sent His Son”; God also sent the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a gift of God to every child of God. The Spirit is present within each

³Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ga 4:1

believer's heart to give evidence of that one's position in God's family. We now join with Christ (cf. Mark 14:36) in using Abba, a term of intimacy and trust as opposed to the formalism of legalism.

Paul says that the Law taught us the ABCs of God. But know that we have learned the alphabet we are not slaves to the Law. We are adult readers and have the freedom to live as children of God. To conclude, Paul declared that the Galatians were no longer slaves, but were children and heirs.⁴ For Paul, one who governed their life by slavery to the law was still a child; one who had learned the way of grace had become mature in the Christian faith.⁵

⁴Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:601

⁵ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 33