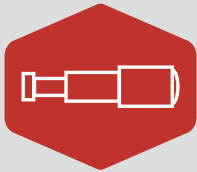




Lesson 9: Adopted for Life

Main Idea: Paul points to adoption as an illustration of how people become part of God's family: Jesus redeems us from slavery and into sonship. In this lesson, you will discover that God's "adopted" children are incredibly privileged and blessed..

Scripture: Galatians 4:1-11



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

This lesson investigates some very important questions about your relationship to God. In lesson 7 (Galatians 3:15-25), we discussed that purpose of the Law was to act a guardian (*paidagogos*) to leads us as children to Jesus. Here in 4:1, Paul continues this analogy. He states that while a child in a family may eventually be an heir, before he comes of age he is no different than a slave as far as obligations and responsibilities. New Testament scholar Craig S. Keener sheds light on this thought when he states, "The minor child was heir and *master of everything*, yet he could not access this owned property until he achieved maturity."¹

Roman households in Paul's time had a coming-of-age ceremony that the Galatians would have known. (Paul also alludes to this in 1 Corinthians 13:11.) Once a father determined his son was ready to become a man, he called for a ceremony in which the son would lay aside the clothes of his childhood

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Cambridge Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 321.

to signify he had reached adulthood.² The father and son would then take the son’s childish belongings and offer them to the gods. The high value that Roman culture placed on maturity was a bridge to understanding the transformation that occurs in followers of Jesus when the Law brings them to Jesus.

We can better understand verses 1-2 through three important context points. The first is the dominant religious belief of the Greeks and Romans in the Galatians’ time. People believed that all of humanity was in bondage to deity powers. These deities people believed in were far-off, impersonal gods that humanity should try hard to please—far different from the notion of a God who wanted to treat His followers like family.

Another important point is the religious understanding of God’s people, Israel. The people of Israel, as we have seen through Paul’s writing in Galatians, were under the Law in the same way children were under a guardian in that time. Only a prophet, priest, or king of Israel had the opportunity to personally experience the presence of God. Everyone else connected with God through a priest. This was quite different from God’s personal presence offered to everyone through Jesus.

A third point critical to understanding these verses is the tough choice it presented to the Galatians. The Galatian believers were ex-pagans who had worshipped the cultic gods as demanded by the Roman government. To abstain from this worship placed them at risk of persecution, arrest, and possibly death for the crime of atheism, dependent on the whim of each emperor. Roman law exempted only Jews from participation in such worship, and the Galatian believers were not legally recognized converts to Judaism. (The way to become legally Jewish was through following the customs and beliefs of Judaism.) Education Director for First Fruits of Zion, D. Thomas Lancaster, notes that “to be under the law is just Paul’s way of saying ‘legally Jewish’ and obligated to observe the Torah.”³ Therefore, the Galatian Gentile believers felt forced to choose between two options: Either legally convert to Judaism or worship Roman gods. Paul presented a third option: Live a life of relationship with God based on what Jesus did on the Cross.

In the next nine verses (verses 3-11), Paul explains the incredible progression that took place in the Galatians’ walk with God from slavery to sonship.

In verse 3, Paul uses the phrase “elementary principles of the world.” These are principles of thinking, acting, and believing that are opposite of God’s ways. Prior to Paul’s coming, the Galatians tried to please the cultic gods. They felt

² <https://www.romansinfocus.com/sites/www.romansinfocus.com/files/Coming%20of%20age%20%28boys%29.pdf>

³ Lancaster, Thomas D. *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians*. (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2011), 203.

their destiny was determined by these gods, and they lived in fear of them. In that day, people believed in all kinds of gods such as nature deities, deities of beauty, and deities of power. The Galatians lived under the control of their passions and idol worship. They spent their lives looking for things other than God to meet their needs. These behaviors lie at the core of idolatry.

In verses 4-7, Paul reminds them that both Jewish and Gentile believers received their adoption through Jesus and are now sons of God.

Paul uses the phrase “fullness of time” in verse 4 because God knew just the right time to send His Son. Here are three major ways in which the fullness of time had come for Jesus on earth:

First, the fullness of time had come spiritually, especially for the Jewish people who had spread across the known world and were waiting for the Messiah. They were scattered from their homeland because God sent them into exile (first in 722 BC and then in 597 and 586 BC) for disobeying His commandments. In every place they scattered, they built synagogues—houses of worship and teaching where, after the fullness of time, teaching about Jesus could spread throughout the world.

Second, it was the right time culturally and linguistically. Alexander the Great had conquered the world roughly three centuries before, bringing Greek culture and language into dominance for many cultures and ethnicities. Nearly everyone spoke and understood Greek, which made it possible for the Gospel to spread quickly.

Third, it was the right time politically. The Roman Empire dominated the global landscape within a century of this letter. The economy was somewhat stable, due in part to the stone-paved highways that Rome constructed which provided a way to transport goods and people throughout the Roman Empire—west as far as Hispania (Spain and Portugal), north to Gaul (Western Europe) and Britannia (England), east to Asia (Turkey) and the Middle East, and south along the entire north coast of Africa. This was a great time for the gospel to, quite literally, travel throughout the Empire.

Thinking back to the coming-of-age ceremony in Roman culture, it was even the right time personally for people to have a framework for understanding Jesus: at just the right time, a son would be called a man, and at just the right time the Father sent forth His Son. Unlike earthly sons, Jesus didn’t possess only a human nature: He possessed a divine nature as well, the only One who lived as fully God and fully man. Therefore, He was the only One who could bring God and man together through His crucified and resurrected body.

While Jesus was the only person who existed before He was born, like every Jewish man before Him, Jesus still had to fulfill and live under the Law. But

unlike every other man, He lived the Law perfectly and completely fulfilled it. He did this so those who believe in Him would not need to live under the Law. Paul brings this up to ask the Galatians why they are resorting to laws to achieve a status they already possess.

In verse 5, Paul says that God sent Jesus to redeem all those under the Law. The word “redeem” means to pay back in full, and the Galatians would have understood this word from the slave trade market of their time. One-third of the Roman empire was made up of slaves, and you could find a slave market in every major city. The slaves were placed on a stand, and people would bid to purchase them. Paul points out that Jesus bought humanity from the slave stand of this world in order to make us free.

Also in verse 5, Paul uses the phrase “adoption as sons.” In Paul’s day, someone could adopt a person outside of the family to become a child and heir. It was a high honor to become a member of a family through adoption, particularly to an affluent family. Caesar Augustus is one example. Born with the name Gaius Octavius, he was the great-great-nephew of Julius Caesar, famed Roman dictator, who adopted Octavius as his son because he did not have an heir. Julius Caesar changed Octavius’ name to Caesar Augustus. Later, Caesar Augustus became the first emperor of Rome. Thought he died before Paul wrote this letter, the Galatians doubtless knew Caesar Augustus’s adoption story.

In verse 6, Paul explains how believers are given a connection to the Godhead when they are adopted spiritually into God’s family. Even though legally part of a family, adopted children do not have the nature of their new father. However, in God’s family, God sends forth the Spirit of His Son (the Holy Spirit) to give the new believer God’s nature. The Holy Spirit enables believers to participate in the greatest intimacy possible with God.

The Jewish people of Paul’s day referred to God in terms that indicated the highest respect and distance. They saw their powerful God as a distant, unreachable deity. But Paul uses a surprising term in reference to God: *Abba*. This Aramaic term was one not only of great respect and honor but of intimacy. Paul communicates to the Galatians that the work of Jesus gave them not only an inheritance but an intimate relationship with God.

Notice the word “crying” that Paul uses in verse 6 for how we say this name of God. It conveys the idea of a passionate, heartfelt cry. Keener says,

One location in the gospel tradition where *Abba* is specifically preserved for us is Mark 14:36, in Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane. The *Abba* prayer might therefore recall Gethsemane and Jesus’s

cries of anguish as he prepared to face the world’s hostility.”⁴

Paul might have been encouraging the Galatians to utter the very term of love and intimacy that Jesus expressed to his Father.

Paul reminds the Galatians in verse 7 that living a law-keeping kind of Christianity would take them from being a son back to being a slave. He reminds them that Jesus Christ redeemed them and that they cannot earn or deserve sonship. The Galatians needed to remember that at one time they were pagan idolaters who did not know the true God. Now that they knew Him, if they began following the laws preached by the Judaizers, it would be as if they were slaves again.

Paul closes out this section of his letter by informing the Galatians what it meant to be sons of God. He states in verse 9 that it was not just that they knew God, but that they were *known by* God. The foundation of a relationship with God is not how well a person knows God, but how well God knows them. This type of knowing is not simply a memorization of facts; it is a deep understanding of a person forged through experience. This verse confirms both the technical aspects of adoption by God (redeeming those under the Law) and the relational aspects of that adoption (experiencing personal intimacy with God). Paul wanted the Galatians to know that God was not just a God of doctrine and theology but a God who actually met with people through Jesus.

Finally, in verses 9–11, Paul reminds the Galatians that since they once were in bondage to cultic idols and are now sons of God, they should not return to idolatry by following rules and regulations. Here Paul is actually comparing the Judaizers’ message of circumcision to the bondage of paganism which the Galatians had escaped.

The “days and months and seasons and years” in verse 10 are Paul’s way of indicating that the Galatians had begun celebrating the feasts of Judaism. While there was not inherently anything wrong with this, Paul warns that if they thought such religious activity was what made a person right with God, or helped them mature in God, they were missing the point of their relationship with Christ.

Acts 14 describes Paul’s journey into the Roman province of Galatia. Because he preached the Gospel, he was stoned and left for dead. However, “when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up. and entered the city” (Acts 14:20a). They demonstrated care and faith, and Paul continued to risk his life from them. We see from the rest of the Book of Acts how Paul labored for the Galatians, traveling night and day for them and fasting for them.

⁴ Keener, 347.



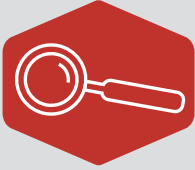
After all of this, Paul says in Galatians 4:11, what a waste it would be to watch the Galatians trade their dynamic relationship with God for the idolatrous bondage of rules.



My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.

- We are God's children with a new sense of intimacy with God that causes us to cry out, "Abba, Father" (vv. 1-7).
- We are servants until we respond by faith to His promise (vv. 1-2).
- God operates in sovereign freedom (v. 3).
- Our adoption means more than status: it means that we share the life of the Father (v. 6).
- The power of God in our life is greater than this present darkness (v. 9).



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Write down your answer to the following question here or in your journal:

- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage.

- Who appears in this passage?

- Where is this passage taking place?

- When is this passage occurring?

- Why is this passage important?

- What is happening in this passage?

- How does this passage apply to my life?

- What in your life are you most apt to turn into an idol?

- What is the difference between the mentality of a son and the mentality of a slave? Has your Christian life primarily been lived as a son or as a slave? How can you become established in the mindset of a son?

- Do you feel you are growing in your knowledge of God? What most helps you mature in your knowledge of God?

- How have you experienced legalism to be bondage? In what ways do you endeavor to avoid legalism in your walk with God?



Using My *Fire Bible*®

Read the study notes for the following verses and the article in the Fire Bible and answer the accompanying questions.

- **Galatians 4:2** What is the principle (bottom-line truth) in this verse? What should parents do with regard to raising their children?

- **Galatians 4:6** What are the two sure signs of the Spirit’s work within believers?

- **Galatians 4:8** What did the Galatians learn after they became Christians?

- Look in your *Fire Bible* index for the article titled “Parents and Children” and answer the following:
 - » Whose responsibility is it to raise children in a way that prepares them to fulfill God’s purpose for their lives?

 - » What is the core of parental care?

