

MBC – 4/24/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“Sons of God in Christ”
 Galatians 3:23-4:11

Paul is contrasting living by lawkeeping with living by faith in Christ - and now he is going to show the difference it makes in our lives—

- Galatians 3:23–4:11 ²³Now before faith came (and he means faith in Jesus Christ), we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

Now Paul gives an illustration of what he is talking about—

- ¹I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive *adoption as sons*. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. ⁸Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? ¹⁰You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Intro - What is Redemptive History?

Paul is giving us a course in “Redemptive History.” What is *redemptive history*, you ask? Redemptive history is the story of God’s unfolding plan of salvation. It began in the Garden, it ends in Revelation, and it takes in everything in between, because all of human history is the story of what God has done, is doing, and will do, to redeem His people and His entire creation through Jesus Christ.

- So Paul gives us here, a slice of this *redemptive history* from Abraham (about 2,000 BC) – to Moses (about 1,400 BC) – to Jesus Christ (33 AD) – so a period of about 2,000 years. And he wants to show how these 3 great men relate to each other in God’s plan of salvation: 4,000 years ago God gave a gracious promise of salvation to Abraham; then He gave a Law to Moses to show that this promise could never be earned by human effort – which made faith in Jesus Christ indispensable to receive the promise. Jesus fulfills the promise made to Abraham and He also fulfills the Law given to Moses, so that everyone who is driven to Christ by the Law will inherit the promise made to Abraham.

But there is a twist in his history lesson in this passage: As he progresses from the promise to the Law to the fulfillment of the Law and the promise in Jesus, it's the history of the Old Testament and the Jewish people – but it's also the personal history of every Christian. Let me explain this—

- Galatians 3:23–24 ²³Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

Do you see how Paul is talking about the progression of “redemptive history:” Israel was *under* the bondage of the Law, held captive *until* the coming of Jesus. But he is also talking about your personal history and mine: we were all *under* the bondage of lawkeeping, *trying* to earn God's acceptance by our own efforts – If the Bible wasn't beating you up, your own conscience sure was! Your life was *trying* instead of trusting – *until* God opened our eyes to see our need for Jesus to save us, through simply trusting in Him.

- So the history of the he Jewish people, is the progression from promise, to Law in the OT, to the fulfillment in Christ in the NT. And that's also the biography of every Christian: we were held captive to lawkeeping until we came to faith in Christ.

And if you think about it, it's really the spiritual story of every person: everyone is either living under the OT or the NT – you are under either law or grace. You are either following Moses or Jesus. God wants us to pass through the guilt and frustration of the Law to lead us to Christ for deliverance.

- *I was talking with someone this week who was going on and on about what a good person he is, how he helps people out of the goodness of his heart – he never expects anything in return – that's just the way he is, he wants to be a blessing to everyone. And he was sprinkling God into all of this. But twice he said, “Of course, I'm not perfect!” And I finally jumped in and said, “That's why we need Jesus!” No response.

And I thought, “This person is *trying*, not *trusting*. He's still in the OT, living under the law, fixated on his own works instead of Jesus' works.” When a person says, “Well, I'm not perfect!” they probably aren't a Christian – because what they are really saying is, “I'm not perfect, but I'm pretty good, and after all, God doesn't expect perfection.” But yes, He does – that's why we need Jesus – to take away our sins, and give us His perfection!

- So back to our course on redemptive history: Moses had his purpose, and it was absolutely necessary: God says to us this morning: Let Moses do his work. Let him terrify you and break you to drive you to Jesus for grace and mercy! But once you find Jesus, don't turn back to life under Moses! And he contrasts what it's like to live under law or grace, Moses or Jesus—

I. Life under the Law.

First, he says it was like being in jail—

A. It was like being in jail.

- Galatians 3:23 ²³Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

Being under the Law of Moses was a drag – if you try to work your way through Leviticus, you have to think to yourself: “I am so glad that I don’t have to do all of this stuff!” Do you remember Peter, at the Jerusalem Council said the same thing about putting Gentiles under the Law?—

- Acts 15:10–11 ¹⁰Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Moses was kinda like a prison guard: all he did was stand there with his arms crossed and a grim look on his face. He was there to *enforce* the rules, but he offered no help to keep the rules! You were on your own. And mostly he just shook his head in disappointment. And life under the Law—

B. It was like being under a guardian.

- Galatians 3:24 ²⁴So then, the law was our *guardian* until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

This is a really interesting illustration. The word "guardian" is the Gk. word *paidagogos*, and it referred to the slave that was put in charge of a Jewish boy between the ages of 6 and 16. This slave was not a teacher, he was the one who would lead the boy to school each day and make sure he did his homework. The *paidagogos* was a strict disciplinarian: he had the authority to whip the kid if he didn’t do his homework, so every Jewish boy longed for the day when he would be free of this man. Paul says, that’s like the OT Law – always scolding us and thumping on us because we couldn’t do it all.

But it wasn’t meant to be permanent: v. 23 says, “*until* the coming of faith,” v.24 says, “*until* Christ came.” Look at v.25—

- Galatians 3:25 ²⁵But now that *faith* has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

What is the guardian? The Law of Moses. So if we are no longer under the guardian – we are no longer under the Law of Moses. Once the Law has done its job, and led us to Christ to be justified by faith, Moses walks away and says with a smile: “I can go now, my work here is finished!”

(And if you want to dive more deeply into how we as Christians relate to the OT now, you might listen to the sermon I did on Matt.5:17-20, on March 20/2011 – “***Christians and the Law***”)

Life under the Law was a drag, but let’s look at—

II. Life in Christ.

A. You are sons of God in Christ.

- Galatians 3:26 ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all *sons of God*, through faith.

And yes, we can say sons or daughters - God isn’t your Judge, or your Executioner waiting to carry out your sentence. And He isn’t your Guardian, thumping you for not doing your homework – God is your

Father. Think of that! Jesus is His Son, and because you are in Christ, you are His son too, with every right and privilege of being a son—

- Galatians 3:27 ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

When you were saved, you were baptized into Christ – you were *immersed* into His death, burial, and resurrection. Dunked into Jesus, which is what baptism by immersion pictures. When you are born again, you are dripping with Jesus. Soaked in Jesus. So Paul is talking about a spiritual baptism that is *pictured* by our water baptism. I've said many times, the NT knows nothing of an un-baptized Christian. If you have been baptized into Christ, then you need to confess that to the world by getting dunked.

But Paul uses another analogy of our salvation: if you have been baptized into Christ, you have “put on Christ” – your Bible might say you have “clothed yourself with Christ,” you have put off the old you and put on Jesus as your new identity: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” You should walk and talk and live and breathe like you are wearing Jesus!

- And Paul is probably thinking here of a literal robe here called the toga virilis. The Romans had a coming-of-age ceremony – like the Jewish Bar-Mitzvah. Somewhere between the age of 14-17, when a Roman father decided that his male child was ready to become a man, they would have a ceremony and place on him the *toga virilis* – the “robe of manhood,” and he would be an official Roman citizen with all of the rights and responsibilities that went with adulthood.

When we are joined to Christ, we are no longer children, but we sons (or daughters) of God, clothed with Christ, with every privilege, and all the inheritance that belongs to Him – more on this in a minute. The next blessing that is yours as a son of God in Christ is—

B. You are one with other sons, in Christ.

- Galatians 3:28 ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Such an important passage—

1.) No distinctions of race.

None. The Jews used to be the privileged people of God, but no more. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight, and all one in Christ, and that means we are all one with each other. There should be no hint of racism in the church of Jesus Christ (OPC)

2.) No distinctions of rank.

There is no slave or free in the body of Christ, no caste system – remember in our study of James, he said, if you show partiality to people with social rank or money, that is evil. It lies against the Gospel that says, we are all one in Christ Jesus.

3.) No distinctions of gender.

There is no male/female – notice, only two genders – Paul means that men and women are absolutely equal in Christ. Yes, they have differing roles in the family, and in the church, but women are not inferior in any way to men – as they were back in Paul's day in the Roman culture, and even in the Jewish

culture. And people coming into our churches should see that we value women and men equally. God bless the SBC for finally condemning the way it has covered up so much sexual abuse in its churches.

C. You are Abraham's seed, in Christ.

- Galatians 3:29 ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

You are part of this drama of redemptive history! You have a place in the plan! You are the spiritual seed of father Abraham who lived and died 4,000 years ago – you are one of those stars in the sky that he couldn't count – and you share in everything that was promised to him: you are "heirs according to promise." And that's not just your salvation. Let me read you something mindblowing—

- Romans 4:13 ¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be *heir of the world* did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

As an "heir according to promise" you will inherit the new heaven and earth! Gloriously renewed, restored, Jesus called it, "regenerated"—this world will be born again, and given to you, for the rest of eternity!

When we move into ch.4, Paul goes over this same history of redemption again – by going deeper into that illustration of the guardian and the minor child to show—

III. Our condition under the Law.

- Galatians 4:1–3 ¹I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child (and not yet a *son*), is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ²but he is under guardians and managers *until* the date set by his father. ³In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

*So this is kinda like Prince George, William and Kate's firstborn son: one day he will be the King of England. He is heir to the throne – but right now he's just a punk 8-year old kid who has to clean his room, eat his 'mushy peas' and do his homework!

That's like the Jews under the Law, and it's like God's elect before God calls them – still under the burden of trying to please God by our own efforts – the yoke of legalism. And in v. 3 Paul hints that there might be demonic forces that keep unbelievers enslaved to their works-righteousness religion—

John Wesley was one of those slaves. His Christian testimony is pretty interesting: He graduated with honors from Oxford University, and while he was there, he started a group that included his brother Charles, George Whitefield, and another man named William Morgan. They were mockingly called "The Holy Club:" someone wrote a poem about them: "By rule they eat, by rule they drink, By rule do all things, but think!" They met constantly for prayer and Bible study. They visited widows, orphans, and prisoners. They gave money to the poor and worked in the slums. They fasted so much that William Morgan died – supposedly from his fasting. They were total Jesus Freaks.

Wesley went on to become an ordained minister in the church of England. He crossed the ocean to become a missionary to American Indians in Georgia. He was famous for being such a godly man. *But he wasn't saved.* While sailing back to England, he met some Moravian Brethren who shared the Gospel with him and he received Jesus Christ by faith. He later wrote this: "I who went to America to convert others was never myself converted to God. . . *I had even then the faith of a servant, though not that of a son.*"

IV. What God did for us.

A. He sent us His Son.

Verse 4-5 are so beautiful—

- Galatians 4:4–5 ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

At just the right time in the history of redemption, God sent the world Jesus. It was the perfect time for Him to come and for the Gospel to spread: Rome had subdued most of the world and had built roads that made travel easy and safe; the Greek culture and language tied the world together – but mostly, Paul would say that Moses had done his job in preparing men for Christ to finally come and set us free.

- So at just the right time, God sent forth His Son – the sinless Son of God, *born of a woman* – Jesus was real God and real Man. He had to be just like us to take the punishment for our sins. He was born under the law – subject to the Law of Moses as a Jew, and He perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of that Law, and He took on the curse of the Law so that He might redeem us and make us sons of God.

Never forget that the word *redeem* meant "to buy back, to buy out of slavery to freedom." So Jesus came to set slaves to sin and Satan, free, and to turn minor children into adopted sons. God sent His Son for us, and then—

B. He sent us His Spirit

- Galatians 4:6 ⁶And because you are sons – no longer children – God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Let me give you a note on redemptive history here: this passage proves that OT saints did not have the indwelling HS. The HS would come on people, but He didn't indwell them: David cries out in Ps.51, "Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me!" But Paul says it is because you finally have the status of *sons*, that God sent His Spirit into our hearts. Every Christian has the HS.

- And don't you love what he says here? He sent the Spirit into our hearts to cry, "Abba! Father!" Abba was almost like saying "Daddy!" Jesus always called God, "Abba!" Except for one time: when He hung on the cross bearing our sins and He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!"

But God sent His Son so that we might have the position of sons, and He sent His Spirit so that we might have the *experience* and *intimacy* of sons! The HS is *in* you to make real *to* you everything that is true about you in Christ!—

- Romans 8:15–17 ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Joint-heirs with Jesus – He is the Son of God, we are sons of God, we get what He gets because we have the same Father!

And then he sums it up when he says—

- Galatians 4:7 ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

*None of this was true of the OT saints, even Abraham didn’t see the fulfillment of this promise: it’s fulfilled now, in Jesus Christ and His people. And I want to tell you more about what it means for you and me to be adopted sons and daughters—

The primary reason for adoption in the Roman world was to have a legal heir: if a man didn’t have a son by birth he would adopt a full-grown young man, not because he was lonely, but to be his legal heir. And Paul put it this way in—

- Romans 8:17 ¹⁷and if children, then *heirs*—heirs of God and *fellow heirs* with Christ

Beloved, when the call of God came to you He showed you Jesus as your Savior – you *immediately* became an adult son or daughter in God’s family and an heir of God! Because He owns it all, you get it all!

- Jesus said, ⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the *earth*.” Matthew 5:5
- Paul said in 1 Cor. 3:22,23, “all things belong to you, ²³and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.”

We are heirs of God, but Paul also said that we are fellow heirs or *joint-heirs with Christ*. What does that mean? Jesus is God’s true and rightful heir of all that belongs to His Father, but we *share* it with Him because we are in union with Him. Now if it had said that we were *equal-heirs* that would have been a different story: equal-heirs split the inheritance, but *joint-heirs* share the whole thing together!

- I would love to read you the will right now, but you can do that when you get home – it’s in Rev.21,22, the new heaven and new earth. It’s all yours if you are a son or daughter of God in Christ Jesus!

So if you put these two analogies of slavery and sonship together, it’s like God saw us, naked and cold, up on the slave block, and He bought us – redeemed us by the blood of His Son – off the slave block in order to adopt us as own sons and daughters to receive His inheritance. And then He gave us the Holy Spirit to convince us that it’s all true!

- We sang earlier: “God is for us!” do you see that here? Not only is God for us, He desperately wants us to know and feel deep in our hearts, that He is for us. Isn’t that why He has us studying

this passage this morning? How it must grieve Him as a Father when He sees His children sad and sullen, discouraged and dejected; feeling like abandoned orphans, dumpster diving for their next meal – when the reality is they are His adopted children and heirs of the world!

After making his case, he finally states his appeal—

V. So . . . why would return to slavery?

- Galatians 4:8–11 ⁸Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? ¹⁰You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

The legalists had such an influence on the Galatians that some of them had gone back to the Jewish Sabbaths, and feasts and festivals. They had gone back to living by rules and regulations – and all of this was slipping backwards into diapers and slavery instead of freedom in the Gospel.

Paul is astonished – again! He just can’t figure out how anyone who has found Jesus would go back to man-made religion. So what do we learn from this passage?

1.) What the Christian life is.

It’s the life of sons and daughters, not the life of slaves. It’s about freedom not bondage. Sin was bondage – amen? But Jesus doesn’t just set us free from the guilt of sin, but from the power of sin. When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed! The NT talks about being slaves of Christ – but Jesus said, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” John the Apostle said—

- ³For this is *the love of God*, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 1 John 5:3 Obedience is the way we *love* God, and it is no burden, it’s joy!

What the Christian life is not is living under the horrible burden that your salvation hangs in the balance, depending all on you; never knowing if you have done enough. Never knowing if you have committed some sin that God just won’t forgive. Wondering if you might die and go to hell. Horrible.

Jesus sets you free from that bondage and fear! You don’t wonder, you *know* that your salvation rests completely on the finished work of Jesus Christ, His sin-bearing, curse-bearing death. Instead of fear and insecurity, you have blessed assurance.

2.) How to live the Christian life.

It’s really simple: keep reminding yourself of who you are in Christ. Paul said, “you once were slaves, but now you are sons, so live like it!” You once were dead in your sins, but God has made you alive in Christ. You were once an abandoned orphan, but now you are an adopted son who can cry out to your “Abba! Father!” And your Father has promised you an eternal, imperishable inheritance awaiting you – so live like an heir, not an orphan!

* * *

And let me close with this thought: You are part of that Redemptive History that I was talking about – that eternal plan of God that spans all of human history and the entire Bible. Jesus is focal point of this entire story, and you are in Him, so when you read this Book, it has everything to do with you and your future with Jesus.

I was going through some notes from when I taught a group of pastors in India how to be Christ-centered preachers. I read to them the introduction to “**The Jesus Storybook Bible**” by Sally Lloyd-Jones. This was written for children, but she makes the point that “every story whispers His name.”

“Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn’t do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn’t mainly about you and what you should be doing. It’s about God and what he has done.

Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The Bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you’ll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren’t heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose), they get afraid and run away. At times, they’re downright mean.

No, the Bible isn’t a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It’s an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It’s a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne—everything—to rescue the ones he loves. It’s like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

You see, the best thing about this Story is—it’s true.

There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.

It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. He is like the missing piece in the puzzle—the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture. Every story in the Bible whispers his name.”