

## **“No Longer a Slave, but a Son”**

### **Intro -**

Some time ago, mowing my lawn, I ran over something in my yard. The blade to my mower suddenly stopped and my lawnmower died a quick, violent death. Long story short, my mom and dad were in town, and my dad came to the backdoor and asked me what happened. I told him, and he story tickled him. But in his innocent chuckle I felt condemned and ridiculed. And I was suddenly very angry. And it turned into this rage. And as I fumed, I laid out in detailed history a play by play account of how he had failed me over the last 30 years. My mom just held my daughter and my wife stood there wide-eyed in disbelief, while I was like the Tasmanian Devil leaving carnage everywhere. There are 2x I've seen Dad cry: when I walked the aisle at Glenwood Hills Baptist Church to give my life to Jesus, and that day in my house.

Now the point of all this is to tell you, that When the dust settled, and I spent some time growing as a man with my own children, I realized something — what I so desperately desired from my father, I actually had all along: His Approval. My dad is a good man. And tender. And the truth is, I have never had to doubt his love or earn his approval. Ever. And I almost broke his heart trying!

It's Father's Day. It's not on the church calendar, but it's something our culture celebrates. And it gives us the chance to look at the most precious reality there is — that God is our Father. And the same thing we want from our earthly fathers, we want from him — APPROVAL. And here's the good news: if we are in Christ, we have it. Which these verses from Galatians tell us quite plainly. Now, this text is thick and dense with meaning. Every phrase counts.

But every phrase hangs on two very simple points:

1. God has sent his Son to secure our status as children of God (4:4, 5).
2. God has sent the Spirit of his Son to ensure that we enjoy our status as children of God (4:6, 7)

### **Body**

#### **I. God has sent his Son to secure our status as children of God (4:4, 5).**

*“But when the fulness of time had come” (4:4a)*

Paul has just spent the previous chapter of Galatians reviewing the last 1300 years of Israel's life, juxtaposing the PROMISE of Faith given through Abraham and the works of the LAW given through Moses. He says those who rely on faith to make them righteous are BLESSED; those relying on works of the law are under a CURSE. You're either one or the other. You're either of faith, or of the law. Either you are trusting God for your righteousness, or you are trusting yourself to fulfill every requirement in the law.

Paul says, “Before faith came, we were held captive under the law imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. The law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Jesus Christ you are all sons of God, through faith.” (Gal 3:23f)

And Paul is saying the previous 1300 years have served their purpose: the LAW has done its work, to imprison us, to hold us captive.

John Stott writes, *"The dreadful function of the law is to condemn, not to justify."*

And Paul is saying the condemning work of the law was done and over. The way Paul describes the law reminds me of those terrible Victorian border schools you read about in Charles Dickens novels — *Nicolas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield*; its purpose was to train and discipline, but it was oppressive, and nobody wanted to be there.

But like John said recently — "God's law is not the problem. We are the problem." And as Paul told the Romans,

*"The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good....[but] It was SIN, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure" (Romans 7:7f).*

So it was into this "fullness of time" (4a) — when God's law had served its purpose to show the utter sinfulness of sin — that Paul says *"God sent forth his Son"* (4b).

And he sent him *"Born of woman"* (4c).

I would expect him to say 'Born of a virgin'. But Paul's point here is not the virginity of Mary, but the majestic grace of God, who sent his Son into our world to win us. "Born of woman", to be blunt, means the Son of God humbled himself and took on flesh, entering this world through the birth canal of a woman... a Jewish woman, in the Jewish nation, under Jewish law, which is what Paul stresses next:

*"Born under the Law"* (4d)

We've already talked about the law. But let me amplify it a little: Consider "law" as shorthand for trusting anything YOU do to make God love you; "Law" is ultimately trusting in your own goodness for a right relationship with God. There are endless self-salvation projects going on in us and all around us, including coming to church! Whatever you're doing to try to make God love, or maybe even *like* you, that's what we're talking about. Only one has kept the law perfectly.

Jesus was "born of woman" and "born under the law".

He was fully human. He felt the weight of the same demands from God's perfect law as you and feel... actually, in fact, he actually felt the **true** weight...

The author of Hebrews invites us to consider Jesus, and how completely unique he is. He writes:

*"In your struggle against sin you have not resisted to the point of shedding your blood." (12:4)*

Jesus obeyed the law fully, completely, and perfectly IN OUR PLACE.

Let's camp out here for a second, because it's important to know what the Son was sent to do: The law we're talking about was harsh: It was basically "Obey and live, disobey and die." Don't believe it's that cut and dry? Right after the Ten Commandments were given, we read *"Whoever dishonors his father or his mother shall be put to death"* (Ex. 21:17).

Under the law, I would've been dragged out and stoned to death after treating my father like i did that day. This is the law Jesus was born under.

John Stott:

*"God intended the law to reveal sin and to drive men to Christ; Satan uses it to reveal sin and to drive men to despair. God meant the law as an interim step to man's Justification; Satan uses it as the final step to his condemnation. God meant the law to be a stepping-stone to liberty; Satan uses it as a cul-de-sac, deceiving [us] into supposing that from its fearful bondage there is no escape."*

Luther adds this,

*"The principal point ... of the law ... is to make men not better but worse; that is to say, it shows them their sin, that by the knowledge of it they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and by this means may be driven to seek grace, and so to come to that blessed Seed (sc. Christ)."*

How is God's law working in your life? Has it revealed that you're ruined? Humbled you to seek grace? Driven you to Jesus? Or are you still trusting the LAW to make you LOVABLE to God? It will not make you lovable. That's not its purpose. All the good you do and laws you keep will NOT make God love you any more than he already does; and nothing you do will make him love you any less.

So Paul says, "when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law" ... and V5 tells us why.

5a *"to redeem those who were under the law"*

When Paul uses the word "redeem", he has something very specific in mind. Something hard for us to imagine, but not the Galatians. He is talking about purchasing and releasing a slave from their master. Paying the slave's full price. Buying the slave's freedom. God the Father is telling us through Paul: WE were slaves, the law was our master, and Jesus came to pay our full price. His perfect work, culminating at the cross, released us from the law's relentless demands. He was perfect in our place.

Whether you are a Christian or not, you can feel the burden of the law mastering you... it's written on every heart (Rom 2:15)... But God the Father has sent forth his Son to redeem you, to purchase you from that Master. To free you. He has paid for your freedom.

And he's done this for a specific reason:

5b *"so that we might receive adoption as sons."*

God the Father wants to remove the shackles from your weary feet, the cuffs from your bruised and bloody wrists; he wants to change your status from slave to son. Unfortunately, we often the first part of V5 and not this second part. We've been Redeemed. Purchased. Pardoned. We get that, and sing about it — and we should never stop rejoicing and celebrating that! But don't deny the power and purpose of your redemption/ freedom: God sent his Son, to redeemed us, SO THAT we might receive adoption!

The first time I heard a sermon on this text, I felt like I had been saved all over again! In fact, I was taking notes and at the top I wrote "SAVED!"

All of this is God's initiative:

Like Michael Card sang:

*You can stop pretending that it all depends on you  
For it's not how much you love as much as how much he loves you*

You are not a slave. You are a son. You are a daughter. And you have NOT been adopted so that you can start trying to earn your Father's affection and approval. You've been adopted so you can STOP trying!

A number from our church have adopted from far off (Days, Moldrups, Steimers, et al): they didn't bring their children home so they could start working to earn their love. These children won their love with just one glance. And just like these adopted children running around our church, ALL OF US were in a far country. And we were slaves. But God has sent his Son into the far country to find us, and pay the full price to free us from our master, and bring us home to the Father.

Friends, this is not peripheral. This is central.

Listen to this quote from J.I. Packer:

*"You sum up the whole of the New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of the 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."*

So how much do you make of that thought? That God is your Father? Maybe you know it, theoretically, theologically...but what about *experientially*? Do you delight in it daily? Do you cherish it? If you're a Christian and not enjoying fellowship with the Father, that's like being adopted, but left in the orphanage, longing, wondering and waiting. Your adoption might be true, but it doesn't *feel* true. And let's face it, if it doesn't feel true, what's the point?!

## **II. GOD HAS SENT THE SPIRIT OF HIS SON**

God knows this, and here's what he's done: Not only has he sent Jesus to secure your status as a Son. He sent the Spirit of his Son, the Holy Spirit, to make certain you are satisfied in him, that you delight yourself in him.

David could see this coming in Psalm 65:3-4

*When iniquities prevail against me (Accusation of the LAW)  
you atone for our transgressions. (Accomplished work of Christ)  
Blessed is the one you choose and bring near,  
to dwell in your courts! (Adopting grace of God)  
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house. (Holy affections= Spirit work)*

So V6 says....

V6 *"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"*

Christian, The devil is outside of you roaring "God is angry at you!" But the Spirit is inside you crying "Abba! Daddy!"

Crying!

I don't know about you, but when I cry, really cry, it isn't pretty. And if I'm fighting tears, I can barely speak. God is saying, "don't hesitate, don't hold back, cry out to me! You are my sons and daughters, I've given you the Spirit of my Son, now have confidence and come to me."

Charles Wesley wrote a great hymn rejoicing in this truth:

Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears;  
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears:  
Before the throne my surety stands,  
Before the throne my surety stands,  
My name is written on His hands.

My God is reconciled; His pardoning voice I hear;  
He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear:  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
And "Father, Abba, Father," cry.

Friends, Christ's perfect, bodily life, death, resurrection and Ascension made it possible for us to know God as Father. And the Spirit of the Son indwells us. And as we put to death the flesh, the indwelling Spirit of the Son begins to literally possess us — living in us, praying through us, enlivening affections for the Father and for others.

Tim Keller:

*"The work of the Son is done externally to us, and is something we can have without feeling. But the work of the Spirit is done internally to us, and consists in us being completely moved—emotionally as well as intellectually—by the love of the Father."*

So what about you? Is the Spirit stirring up godward affections within you?

The night before he went to the cross, Jesus prayed, *"Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."* (Mark 14:36)

If you are in Christ, your prayers will increasingly sound like your elder Brother, Jesus. There's tenderness, trust, assurance, and note this: obedience and submission. That is the Spirit of the Son. Does that sound like your relationship with God? In the crush of life, if the Spirit of the Son lives in you, you'll pray like a son or daughter. Not like a slave.

And here's the thing: God did not answer Jesus' prayer. On the cross he drank full the cup of the Father's wrath. And he did it so you could drink full the cup of the Father's fellowship.

V7 *"So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."*

This verse is worth every ounce of attention we can give it.

When Paul was writing to the Galatians, the only time a slave would be adopted was when an affluent person was childless — and, therefore, had no heir. God, however, does have a Son; which means he has an heir. So the only way this text makes sense is if we realize what Paul spelled out in his letter to the Church in Rome:

*"For 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!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:15-17a ESV)*

The mystery and majesty of the Gospel, is that you and I are co-heirs with Jesus. His inheritance is our inheritance. Because we are in Christ. We are his Body. Growing up we used to sing that old Gaither hymn,

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God!  
I've been washed in the fountain,  
Cleansed by His blood.  
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,  
For I'm part of the family,  
The family of God.

Do you believe this? It's time to claim your inheritance.

Tim Keller, *"The astonishing bottom line of sonship is that God now treats us as if we have done everything Jesus has done."*

But, you know, it doesn't really matter Keller says. What did Jesus say?

*"Father ... let the world know that you sent me and have loved them [meaning us!] even as you have loved me. Father, [here's our inheritance] I want those you have given me to be with me where I am" (John 17: 21, 23-24).*

Let this shocking reality sink deep into your mind: If you are adopted into the family of God, you have all the approval Jesus has. I'm not saying God turns a blind eye to willful sin. The Bible says he's a good Father, and as such he disciplines his children. But here's the life-changing difference: do you respond to his discipline like a slave, in fear, or a child, with the assurance and comfort that he loves you?

If you are shackled in sin and condemned by God's law today, take a closer look at the Judge. He is inviting you to trust the finished work of his Son who fulfilled the law in your place. And

though you have failed utterly, and know the condemnation is just, if you are in Christ, you have been declared “not guilty”. And not only that, but this Judge has stepped down from the bench, come down to you, removed your shackles and chains, and said “Be my child.”

So I plead with you... Know his affection for you. Put your trust in Christ, receive his Spirit, cry out “Abba” and know his approval of you... You, not the person next to you, you, are not a slave; you are a child; and not just a child, you are an heir.