

## **NO LONGER A SLAVE, BUT NOW A CHILD OF GOD**

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## **NO LONGER A SLAVE, BUT NOW A CHILD OF GOD**

### **Galatians 4:1 – 7**

**“Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything. [2] Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. [3] In the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements of the world. [4] When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. [6] And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” [7] So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir.”**

These verses that we are looking at this morning are the theological centre of this entire letter of Galatians. This is the hinge that everything comes down to and this passage is so rich. With no shortage of content, you could easily spend six or seven weeks unpacking these few verses we just read, it's so crammed with teaching in it.

In these few verses, we see the doctrine of the Trinity. The mystery of the Trinity in all of the glory of God. We see the miracle of the Incarnation, when Jesus came into the world to be our Saviour. We see God's plan of redemption unfolding, how God did it to bring us back to himself. We see the majesty of our adoption that we are truly now, sons of God, what God has done to welcome us into his household. We see in this passage the assurance that he provides for our salvation, so that any born-again Christian, any believer and follower of Jesus Christ can know that we are truly sons of God. We see therefore the believer's position, how we are fixed today in God's presence, that we are not just people wandering aimlessly through this world but we are in fact seated with Christ in Heavenly places and we are the sons and daughters of the Living King.

It's all right here in just a paragraph, and we could spend weeks on that, but I only have today, so that's not going to happen. Now, I want you to note that this passage we've just read is Trinitarian. It speaks of the work of the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit.

Now if I asked any one of you this morning, to give me a verse in the bible that teaches the doctrine of the Trinity, the one that would usually come to mind is that scene when John the Baptist was baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan. And in it, we see how God the son, Jesus, stood in the river about to be baptized and the bible says that the heavens opened and the Father's voice from Heaven spoke and said “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” In the very same moment, the Spirit of God descended upon him in the form of a dove. There in that moment, you see all three persons of the Trinity. There is only one God, but he is expressed in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a mystery to be sure, but that is what the Bible teaches us.

Now the word Trinity does not appear anywhere in the Bible, but the doctrine of the Trinity is on page after page. If I asked you this morning, where does the Bible teach the Trinity, that baptismal scene might be the first scene that comes to your mind, the Son in the river, the Father's voice, the Holy Spirit descending, all three persons of the Trinity right there. But you know what? There are many other New Testament passages that clearly show us that God is a trinity of persons and in fact I would go so far as to say there are a number of passages in the Old Testament that suggest that understanding for us as well. But one of the most outstanding passages that teach us the doctrine of the work of God as Trinity is right here in Galatians 4:1 – 7, so we're going to work through these verses in that way, recognizing the work of the Trinity here.

So the first thing we are going to look at is this:

### 1) THE ADOPTING FATHER

If you go back to the end of the previous chapter and look at verses 26-29, you see there the precursor to what we are looking at today; those verses are really a continuation of one thought.

**“For through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus. [27] For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. [28] There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29)**

Paul is continuing on with the thought that God has made us to be his sons by adoption. That the law of God that was given through Moses, the Ten Commandments and all of that Mosaic law, was only the ABCs, the base elementary principles that were keeping us under watch until the time of maturity, when Jesus Christ came and in him, we have finally come to our adoption.

It's not the adoption of little children, it's the adoption of adult sons and daughters now. God has called us to himself and called us his sons and we are adult children, that is, we have the full inheritance that God has provided for his family. We are living in the reality of that today, so that's what Paul said in those last few verses of chapter 3, he now goes on to illustrate and he illustrates the fact of our adoption with a powerful analogy. Look at the analogy in verses 1 – 3.

Paul say **“Now I say,”** another way to translate that might be “Let me put it another way.” He's already talked to us about our adoption in the last few verses of chapter 3 then he says, “let me put it another way” that the heir as long as he is a child does not differ from a slave though he is master of all.

Let's pause right there. So in a Greek or a roman family, you could be a little infant of two to three years of age, even a baby in arms, not yet able to talk, and that's the word here, an infant child. You could be an infant in a very wealthy house and you could be the eldest son who's going to rule everything one day and everything is yours by inheritance. Yet in that moment, Paul says your life has very little difference than to a slave in the house. Why so? Here's what he says in verse 2. That infant... **“Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his**

**father. [3] In the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements of the world.” (Galatians 4:2-3)**

This was imagery that was very well known to Paul’s readers in Galatia. They would have understood this picture whether they were Jewish people in the first century or Greeks or Romans in the first century because all of these cultures had a ceremony to mark a child’s coming of age. Until that time, that child was under guardians and trustees or stewards as some translations say. But what does that mean? Well, there were educated slaves in the house, people who were trusted, who were put in charge of the infant right up through to the moment when their father declared them to be a man and as they were growing up, they were under the control of these trusted slaves in the house.

In verse 2, Paul uses two different words to describe those entrusted with the child. Here’s the point, when a baby was born into a house, they had one kind of guardian, like a nurse who would look after them. But then they would pass the child on to another kind of guardian who would look after them until they were a little bit older and then they were passed on to another guardian who would look after them getting to and from school and who would really be in charge of teaching them manners and discipline. The child would go through these various stages under guardians and trustees, each one designed to help them grow to maturity.

The two words imply two things. Guardians talks about those who were responsible for their person, to look after them and to teach or train them. At times, they could be very severe, they were allowed to discipline the child sometimes severely. Here you have a slave in the home disciplining the child but they were given that authority. So this child in this moment differed very little from one of the slaves in the house but it was for their good to bring them to maturity.

And then the trustees or stewards, they were the ones in the house who had the responsibility to look after the child’s property because right now, they’re heir of everything but what happens if the father of the house dies before the child comes to the place of manhood. They are not yet responsible enough to care for all of the goods so there were people who were in the house, trusted servants who looked after all the property of the house, for the father and for the son.

The child is being prepared for manhood but through all of that, his life is like one of the slaves in the house because he has not yet come to maturity. Paul goes on here to point out that the guardians and the trustees of the property were always preparing for the day of maturity and that is exactly the picture of what the law of God as done for us. It kept us in a place of preparation until maturity. We’ll come back to that in just a moment.

Let me first say this. Sons verses servants. The contrasts are very obvious, aren’t they? If you’re a son in the house, your life is very different from a slave in the house. And Paul’s analogy here points out that if you’re a mature son, your life changed from the years when you were an infant still living very much like a slave in the home. Your life instantly changed, because here’s the difference, the son has a father and is in relationship with the father while the servant has a master. If you’re a servant in the house, your relationship will never change, that’s who you’re

going to be. If you're a child still not yet mature, you're being treated like a slave and your relationship is still very much to your masters, your guardians and trustees.

Secondly, the son obeys out of love, the servant obeys out of fear. The relationship changes when you are heir apparent and you've been declared the mature son in the house because now you have all the rights pertaining to that position and you serve your father out of love not out of the fear of a servant.

Thirdly, as a son, your future is absolutely assured while the servant's future is not assured at all. This is the difference between a son and a servant and Paul says it all changes one day when the father says you are now the son that I've been preparing you to be. What Paul is saying is as Christians, we are not living as servants in God's house but we are sons *IN* God's house. We are the adults who have received all the inheritance of our father. For those who are still under the law, there is little difference between the child in the home and a slave but God sent Jesus to pay the price of our ransom out of slavery and to adopt us as his sons, to place the robe of his son's righteousness on us.

No longer are we thinking in terms of our righteousness, we are thinking in the terms of a righteousness that's been bestowed upon us by our Father. Our own righteousness never worked. The law of God was sent to bring us to maturity, to realize that unless the Father declared us to be adopted, our own righteousness would never make it. We all failed to keep God's law, we all failed in this way of pleasing God by obeying him. None of us kept the law of God properly.

Paul's point to the Galatians is clear, why would you ever want to go back to the immaturity, to the ABCs, to the elementary things of the law? It was only ever meant to get you ready for faith in Christ. But now Jesus Christ has come and you are no longer under the guardianship, the stewardship of the law. You're no longer infants but you are adult sons and daughters because you've come to faith in Jesus Christ.

So the adopting father is the first figure in this passage and it brings us to the second thing which is:

## 2) THE REDEEMING SON

What did Jesus accomplish for us so that God could adopt us as his own adult sons? Here's what it says in verse 4:

**“When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”**  
Galatians 4:4-5

What an amazing statement this is. We often hear these verses preached at Christmas time, don't we. This morning, I want to break this down for you and see what is in these two verses.

## A) THE TIMING OF CHRIST'S COMING

First of all, it talks about the timing of Christ's coming. Now we can look at it in a couple of ways but think of it in terms of what Paul is saying in this passage. **“When the time came to completion...”** The ESV says **“But when the fullness of time had come.”** When everything was ready in the providence of God, according to God's wisdom and God's will. When everything was ready, God sent forth his son, Jesus.

How was everything ready? Here's how we usually talk about it. In that moment when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, everything was culturally ready. There had been this great phenomenon called the Hellenization of the world under a man called Alexander the Greek. He'd come through and brought in Greek culture all across the world, the world was united in that moment in the Greek culture and they all spoke one common language. It was not Latin, even though by the time Jesus came, the Romans were in control. But Latin didn't really gain ascendancy, it was the Greek language, it was the universal trade language that everybody spoke.

Guess what? That meant that for the first time in history, when Jesus came and died on the cross and gave his gospel to 12 disciples, they were able to travel everywhere and speak in a common language to spread the good news of Jesus. It had never been before ready in that way so culturally everything was prepared for the coming of Jesus so the gospel could go to the ends of the world.

Not only culturally, but politically everything was ready. Here's where the Romans come in. The Romans had taken over from the Greeks and they had something in place called the Pax Romana, the Peace of Rome. They by an iron fist made sure that there was peace all across their empire. Nobody crossed the Romans. That meant people could travel in safety along roads that the Romans made all over the world. The seas were safe for naval passage. Everything in the Roman empire was established so that there could be very free and safe travel and people could live in a place of law and order.

That meant when the disciples went out to bring the Gospel, they could do it in safety in travel and could go all over the known world quickly on these roads that the Romans had built. So the world was culturally ready, it was politically ready but I want to give you a third thing this morning and that is, when the fullness of the time had come, that is when the world was religiously ready. Something we don't often think about.

The world was ready in that moment for the coming of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let me point out some things. The Old Testament was complete and ready, all the writings were there and had been compiled into the Hebrew bible. Did you know that the Hebrew bible was the bible of the early church, because they didn't have the New Testament yet? The apostles went back to the Old Testament scriptures and saw Jesus on every page and they were able to stand up each week or whenever they met with their “congregations” and say ‘turn with me to the book of Exodus and let me show you Jesus!’

Not only was the Old Testament ready but it had been translated into Greek and that version of the Old Testament was called the Septuagint. So when the apostles went to places like Athens, Rome, Galatia and all the places where there were a lot of people who didn't speak Hebrew, they could preach right out of a Greek text of the Old Testament.

Also, the temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem and sacrifice was taking place day by day. All of which was teaching the law of Moses and prefiguring the work the Lord Jesus would do in becoming our sacrifice for sin. There was a diaspora, the Jews had gone all over the world from Jerusalem and established synagogues and spreading the concept for the very first time of monotheism, that is there is one God. If you went to Rome before that, they believed in many gods, the Greeks believed in a pantheon of gods. The Jews went across the world teaching the idea of monotheism and in fact, they made their converts from the gentiles, people who became Jewish because of this belief in one God.

The law had done its work. For more than a thousand years, the law of Moses had been working on the Jewish people and then it was beginning to spread to work on others and the law of God written on the consciences of people, showing that all of us are law-breakers. No one could keep God's perfect law, the law had done its work to show us that we were all shut up in our sin and we needed a Saviour desperately.

By the time you get to Jesus Christ, what do you see amongst the Jewish people? People who are like sheep without a shepherd, people who are desperately crying out for answers. When Jesus came and began to preach the truth from Heaven, those people said "we've never heard teaching like this." They had been lost in their religion and had seen the bankruptcy of it. They had the most beautiful temple that had ever been built. Solomon's temple was magnificent and glorious but Herod's temple was built to a whole new scale, it was the biggest Jerusalem had ever seen. They were free to do all of their rites and rituals and what had that led to? They still were not saved by their religion.

The law had done its work, religion had done its work and they were ready for Jesus to come, the one who could truly save them.

## **B) THE ORIGIN OF CHRIST'S COMING**

When the fullness of time had come, meaning that's the timing of Christ's coming, but also we see the origin of Christ's coming. He came at the perfect moment, that God sent forth his son. Where did Jesus come from? Out of a village in Nazareth? From a little couple, Joseph and Mary? No! That was the entry he had into the world but he was sent from God.

In a moment, we're going to see that Paul uses the exact same phrase again, "sent forth." Here he says, God at the right moment sent forth his son and then a couple of verses later, he says God has sent the Holy Spirit. It's the exact same word in Greek. Nobody reading their bible could doubt for one moment that the Holy Spirit had always existed.

**Genesis 1:2 – “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”**

Before God created anything else, the Spirit was already there. Before he created mankind, before he created angels, before he created stars and planets, the Holy Spirit was already the Eternal God. God sent him forth. Here, just two verses beforehand, Paul says God in exactly the same way sent forth his Son. Jesus never had a beginning in Bethlehem, he had always been the son with the Father and the Holy Spirit for eternity passed.

### **C) THE MANNER OF CHRIST’S COMING**

Thirdly, the manner of Christ’s coming.

He was born of a woman, the miracle of the incarnation. Born of Mary, but not the son of Joseph except that Joseph adopted him as his own, to raise him in the world. But he was the son of God born in the womb of a virgin. It was a miracle. But he came in our exact likeness, he was born a human being with a human body to a human mother so that he could completely represent us in the world of salvation by standing in our place.

Just as Adam first got us into sin and in rebellion against God, the second Adam, Jesus, came into the world so that he could pay the price for us and bring us back to God. The manner of his coming, he was born of a woman but look at the condition of Christ’s coming.

### **D) THE CONDITION OF CHRIST’S COMING**

Jesus was born under the law. This is what we’ve been talking about. The law that had prepared us for a Saviour, the problem was that none of us could keep it, but guess what Jesus did? He kept it perfectly. He came in under this condition, our condition, that we could not please a Holy God by our life because we kept failing because of our sin. Jesus came and perfectly kept the Lord’s commands. He perfectly pleased the Father, “This is my son in whom I am well pleased.”

Perfect, so that he can die in our place, not as a blemished lamb but as a perfect lamb. He can take away our sins.

### **E) THE TWO-FOLD PURPOSE OF CHRIST’S COMING**

And then finally in these verses, there’s the two-fold purpose of Christ’s coming. The first purpose was to redeem all those who were under the law. We were shut up to our sin and couldn’t save ourselves. We were in slavery to sin and in slavery to the law.

Jesus came as the perfect substitute, the perfect Saviour and what did he do? He redeemed us out from under the law. He came to redeem us to set us free. So Jesus work here was to

pay for our sins so that we could be set free from slavery of sin and slavery to the law. But that's the negative work that Jesus did.

Here's the positive work that Jesus did. That we might receive the adoption as sons, not just to cancel our slavery but to bring us into being sons of God. To positively adopt us into God's household. This is the redeeming Son.

So we have the adopting Father, the redeeming Son, and there's a third person here in this passage, isn't there.

### 3) **THE WITNESSING SPIRIT**

**Galatians 4:6: "And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"**

The word "Abba" is not a Swedish band, it's the most affectionate term of a Jewish child in his home towards his father. It's like saying Papa or Daddy. We cry out to the God of the ages, the creator of the universe, from the depths of our heart, "ABBA, you are our father." Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying out "Abba Father." Notice the word "sent", the same God who sent forth his son to die for us has now sent forth another, the Holy Spirit who is with us continually. Jesus ascended and went back into heaven but we have the Spirit of his Son with us continuously sent forth from the Father and his job is assurance. He does a lot of things in our lives actually but he has this role of assuring us that we are the sons of God, that we are God's children. How many of you needed to hear that this morning. That you are God's sons & daughters and that God loves you.

Note the wording in verse 6:

**Galatians 4:6: "And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"**

Now what the text says there, is that it is the Holy Spirit in us who does the crying out of "Abba, Father!" If you turn back to Romans 8:15, Paul says the same thing in this letter to the Roman church but he words it differently. **Romans 8:15: "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!"**

Who does the crying? We do. So in Galatians 4, Paul says the Spirit cries out, in Romans 8 he says we cry out, which is it? And the answer is, yes!! It's a double cry. The Holy Spirit comes in and he's crying out within us and he is teaching us and inspiring us that we ourselves begin to cry out "Abba Father." It is such a close union, our spirit and the Spirit of God, that the cries are coming up to God from us both. "Abba Father!"



So the Father is adopting us, he's been able to do so because the Son has redeemed us. He's paid the price for the transaction, for us to no longer be servants but to be sons, adult sons in his house. The Holy Spirit has been sent in the same way as Jesus was to us, just as real as if Jesus stood beside us, the Holy Spirit is indwelling us and he teaches us to cry out and relate to God as our Father.

#### 4) **SO WHO ARE YOU AT THE END OF ALL OF THIS?**

In verse 7, Paul sums up everything he's just said in these six verses.

**Galatians 4:7: "So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir."**

John Wesley, the great preacher, he had spent years as a very religious man trying to please God by his actions. When he was still at Oxford University in 1720, he had formed a fraternity called The Holy Club. This was a group of young men who wanted to live for God and be used by God, most of them were ministerial students, where they went about doing the most good works that they possibly could. They read their bible daily, went to church on Sunday, they worked in charitable deeds, especially among the children of the city of London trying to bring them help and comfort. They did everything they could to live as good Christians.

After Oxford, Wesley got on a ship and went to New England where he worked as a missionary among the First Nations. That whole time, he had no assurance of salvation and his work was fruitless, not one single convert among the First Nations. Nothing ever seemed to take place in his ministry, it was dead as a doornail. But one day he was in a meeting in London and was listening to someone read Martin Luther's preface to the book of Galatians and as that was read out, the Gospel became so real to John Wesley and in that moment, he said "I felt as if I, even I myself did finally trust in Christ and Him alone to be saved and my heart was strangely warmed."

In that moment, he moved from darkness to light, he'd been a religious man but he moved into a whole new relationship and this is what he said. "Previously, I had known what it was to try and be a servant of God but now I was a son of God." That was the difference, he moved from servanthood to son-hood. That moment when the Gospel came into his life, it was entirely different to be a son in God's house.

Last year, a senator in the US said this old quote: "If a parent stops loving a child, a child will not stop loving the parent, they will stop loving themselves." How many people have gone through life with crippling inferiority, even self-loathing because of a dysfunctional or non-existent relationship with their father or their mother? They think to themselves, and this may strike a chord with somebody this morning, they think "If my own parent couldn't love me, I must be truly worthless."

We've seen the disastrous results of that again and again, but here's the Gospel. No Christian ever needs to live that way. How this broken world needs this message today, that there is a Father in heaven who loves his children and will never stop loving them. That he so loved them that he gave his only son to be their elder brother and to die in their place so they could come home to him and be eternally, unshakeably safe in that love.

The greatest love in the universe, the infinite love of the Eternal God is ours forever and in Christ we are forever accepted by God. He will never turn away from us; it is not based on our performance. It is based on his mighty, unchanging heart and all that he's done to secure our adoptions. We are Sons and Daughters, capital S, capital D, children of God. Joint heirs with Jesus Christ. No believer ever needs to suffer from feelings of worthlessness or inferiority ever again.

So who are you this morning? Are you the servant or the son or daughter? When you look at this passage, you see that we do not need to come groveling into God's presence. We do not need to snivel in self-loathing as beggars who really have no right to be there. That once was our position, we were cut off from God but that is no longer the case at all. We were the beggars, now we are royalty, we were the prisoners, now we're running free. We are forgiven, accepted, redeemed by his grace and let the house of the Lord sing praise.

That's what happens when you accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Let's pray.