

Bible Study

September 30, 2020 (Lesson 2)

Children of Promise

Galatians 3:23—4:31

Unit Theme: The Gospel in Galatians

Central Truth: Christ frees believers from sin and enables them to receive His promises.

Focus: Examine and rejoice in the freedom of being God's heirs in Christ.

Context: The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians around AD 52.

Golden Text: "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

Study Outline:

I. Freed and Adopted by Faith (Gal. 3:23—4:7)

II. Do Not Return to Bondage (Gal. 4:8-20)

III. Free by God's Promise (Gal. 4:21-31)

INTRODUCTION

Last week's lesson emphasized the inheritance believers receive by faith in Christ. The process by which the inheritance comes to the believer, faith and not works, was especially emphasized. In the text for this week, Paul illustrates the manner and implications of the inheritance.

Paul uses three primary means of illustration. The first idea is that of being an heir. The second is the concept of Roman "adoption." The third is the principle of Jewish promise found in the story of the sons of Abraham by Hagar and Sarah.

Paul's desire was to provide a firm foundation for the faith of the Galatian believers. They had become weak in their faith, turning to works of the Law for their salvation. Paul wanted the Galatians to see the profound truth of freedom from the Law. The importance of living by faith was uppermost in Paul's mind.

The metaphors Paul used to make his point were carefully chosen. The illustrations drew on the backgrounds familiar to his readers. They had felt the impact of Jewish and Roman society. The heritage of Abraham was a critical part of their faith. Paul

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used these backgrounds to demonstrate that justification has been made possible through Christ.

I. FREED AND ADOPTED BY FAITH (Gal. 3:23—4:7)

A. No Longer Under a Schoolmaster (3:23-25) (Galatians 3:23, 25 is not included in the printed text.) 24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

These verses identify the position of a person under the Law. He or she is under a schoolmaster. A schoolmaster in Greek and Roman society was both guardian and teacher, watching and disciplining a young boy. His job was not to punish the boy but to train him through discipline. The child's role in this relationship was preparatory. The young child could not yet be trusted with rights and responsibilities. He was still under his guardian and disciplinarian.

Verse 25 declares that believers are no longer in this preparatory relationship. We are not under a schoolmaster. The NASB reads, "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

- " Describe the difference "before faith came" (v. 23) and "after" (v. 25).
"When we have accepted Jesus Christ, we have become akin to the Father; having become real children of God, we then have the spirit of sonship by which we can come into His presence and make known our wants in a familiar way."—A. C. Dixon

B. Children of God by Faith (vv. 26-29) 26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The word "children" (v. 26) is literally sons in the Greek text. It emphasizes full maturity and possession of rights and responsibilities. Had the actual Greek word for children been used, the emphasis would have been on endearment and tenderness. The use of the word sons shows that the believer has received the riches of God in Christ.

Verse 27 emphasizes that the believer has received the rights and responsibilities of sonship. The words "put on Christ" indicate the believer has acquired what Christ

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has provided—the blessings of heaven, forgiveness of sins, and righteousness before God. These are all “put on” through faith in Christ.

Paul’s reference to the Galatians being “baptized into Christ” does not indicate that salvation comes through water baptism. On the contrary, Paul had written far too much about justification by faith to suddenly jump to the important ritual of baptism as the basis for salvation. Rather, he is referring to baptism as an act of commitment which reflects the faith of the believer.

In verse 28, Paul not only highlights the lack of discrimination in the eyes of God, he also eliminates all grounds of inheritance the Galatians may have trusted in. Paul points out that no one has cause to feel they have superior access to God because of race or nationality: “There is neither Jew nor Greek.” Neither does anyone have greater privilege with God because they are wealthy or free: “There is neither bond nor free.” Also, “there is neither male nor female” in God’s sight.

We all have equal access to Christ. The promises of Christ are available for whosoever will believe in Him. The Christian has received the promise of God, the inheritance of Abraham’s seed, in Christ. God’s qualifications for eligibility show no discrimination. Neither is there any other basis for our salvation except Christ.

- What unifies the body of Christ?

“For in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free; even you may be the children of God, if you believe in Jesus.”—George Whitefield

C. The Time of Bondage (4:1-3) (Galatians 4:1-2 is not included in the printed text.)
3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

Paul once again illustrates the manner of the life of the believer before he or she receives the promise of God in Christ. The word “child” (v. 1) is not the same word used in 3:26 for children, but is from the Greek word which means “infant” or “minor.” It speaks of someone who is still dependent on his or her father.

This minor’s relationship in the household is similar to that of a slave. Both are dependent for food and shelter; both come under the discipline of the house. The form of discipline the minor receives comes through “guardians and managers” (v. 2. NASB). The minor remains in this status until his or her time comes to acquire their rights and responsibilities of their inheritance. The bondage a person is under before coming to Christ is “the elements of the world” (v. 3). Before coming to

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Christ, the sinner submits to the world. He is just as submissive to the allurements of sin as a minor is to his parents.

The bondage that falls on the sinner is the fact that he is under—guided by, controlled by—the principles of the world. He has not come under the control of Christ. Rather than living above the elements of the world, he is under them.

- What are the “basic spiritual principles of this world” (v. 3 NLT), and how are we set free from them?

“When sin exerts itself and we know its power and by its power we are held in bondage, surely our dire need is for God to deal with the cause, a sinful heart.” — Duncan Campbell

D. Sons and Heirs (vv. 4-7) ⁴ But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵ To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ⁶ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. ⁷ Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

“Fulness of time” corresponds with the time described earlier in Paul’s illustration. In verse 2 he spoke of the “time appointed of the father.” This is the time when the rights and responsibilities of maturity are granted to the child. It was in such a time that Christ came to earth to redeem those under the Law so they might believe in Him and receive the rights and responsibilities of “sons” of God.

The words “God sent” indicate the manner in which the work of Christ was commissioned by the heavenly Father. The Son was sent by God, on the basis of the Father’s sovereignty.

“To redeem” indicates the purpose of Christ’s coming to earth. He came to “buy back” sinners out of their sin and into the position of privilege and responsibility that God had intended for them. This position becomes the focus of Paul’s further discussion.

Paul first focuses on the rights and responsibilities of the believer with the idea of adoption. This word refers to the Greek and Roman practice wherein someone who was not a son by birth became one by adoption. The inheritance was given to the son, even though he was adopted. The rights and responsibilities of the believer’s inheritance are guaranteed by “adoption” through Christ.

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In verse 6, Paul expands the idea of adoption to include the intimacy between a child and his parent. In verse 7, he deals with the acquisition of the inheritance. Both concepts are made possible by the guarantee of adoption by Christ.

In verse 6, the closeness between the child of God and the heavenly Father is accentuated by Paul's mentioning the presence of the Spirit within the believer and the tender utterances the believer is privileged to make to the Father. The presence of the Spirit provides a unity of heart as well as a legal relationship.

"Abba" and "Father" were the Aramaic and Greek terms of endearment that were appropriate only for a close child-parent relationship. Christ has brought the child of God into a close, dear relationship with the Father.

In verse 7, Paul emphasizes the privilege of inheritance. A "servant" was one who may have known the father, even in a close relationship. It was not unusual for a bondservant in that day to be a close companion and friend to his master. However, a servant could never have the inheritance of his master while he remained a servant. On the other hand, a son had the full inheritance of his father.

- Contrast spiritual slavery with sonship.

"The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God." —C. S. Lewis

II. DO NOT RETURN TO BONDAGE (Gal. 4:8-20) A. Knowing God (vv. 8-9) 8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. 9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

The instinct to worship is universal in men and women. Many who are ignorant of the true God have turned to imaginary deities—gods which are no gods. What we love most, care for most, and delight in most is our god.

In his vision of the Temple, Ezekiel saw "every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel" portrayed—painted or carved—on the walls (Ezek. 8:10). Before these filthy pictures—loathsome objects, the inventions of depraved minds—stood the seventy elders, representatives of the people, mumbling their heathen incantations and waving censers filled with incense. Then the angel told the prophet, "Hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth" (v. 12).

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The vision of Ezekiel was true of the spiritual condition of Israel at the time of the Exile. There was a formal adherence to the religion of Jehovah, but they served other gods in their heart. In their secret chambers of idolatry and imagery, they bowed down before the images of Baal and Moloch.

This is what the apostle Paul was warning the Galatians against. He knew people sometimes advance in the way of Christianity yet make a foul retreat afterward, defecting from the faith.

- Why and how do some people return to spiritual bondage?

B. Turning Back (vv. 10-20) (Galatians 4:10-20 is not included in the printed text.)

Some of the Galatians had sought to secure divine favour as Christians by observing the Jewish cycle of sacred days (v. 10). Paul was anxious, lest they should repudiate the Christian faith they had once accepted, making his efforts toward them wasted (v. 11).

The apostle is not condemning order and beauty in worship. He knew the value of genuine Christian service and sacraments. But he is warning against reliance on ceremonies, which robs believers of spiritual liberty.

Paul pleaded with the Galatians to accept his viewpoint (v. 12). He felt no ill against them. He cherished no grudge. He viewed them with a feeling of gratitude and deep obligation because of the affection they manifested when he first brought the Gospel to them. It is clear the apostle first came to them with an illness so severe and repulsive that the Galatians might readily have rejected the message because of the weakness and unattractiveness of the messenger (vv. 13-14).

Why then had they changed their attitude toward him now (vv. 15-16)? They were being influenced by people who were zealous to win them over to their cause (v. 17). Paul warned them that these people were up to no good. They would destroy the faith of the Galatians. This thought pained the apostle (vv. 19-20).

1. Describe Paul's love for the Galatian believers (vv. 15, 19).
2. What was Paul's great concern (v. 11)?
3. How can telling "the truth" create enemies today (v. 16)?

"To be risen with Christ means not only that one has a choice and that one may live by a higher law—the law of grace and love— but that one must do so. The first obligation of the Christian is to maintain their freedom from all superstitions, all

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blind taboos and religious formalities, indeed from all empty forms of legalism.” —
Thomas Merton

III. FREE BY GOD'S PROMISE (Gal. 4:21-31)

A. Two Sons of Abraham (vv. 21-25) 21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? 22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. 24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. 25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

In verses 21-23, Paul draws on a powerful illustration: the two sons of Abraham— Ishmael and Isaac. The example of Abraham cuts to the heart of the false teachers who have been attempting to draw the Galatians to salvation by works of the Law. They had evidently based their arguments on being children of Abraham and on keeping the requirements of the Law. Paul used those arguments to prove how wrong they had been.

Verse 21 is one of the most pointed statements Paul makes in this letter. He asks the Galatians and false teachers to tell him what the Scriptures really say. By his use of the word law, Paul means not only the Mosaic Law but also the Jewish Scriptures, which told of Abraham.

Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, illustrate the opposing concepts of slavery and freedom—the sinful nature and the spiritual promise. One signifies the effort of man to accomplish the plan of God through fleshly means, which leads to bondage. The other signifies freedom, which comes from dependence on God and His promise.

Abraham endeavoured to have a son on his own, outside the means God had provided. God had indicated that his son would come through his wife, Sarah. Abraham and Sarah, not relying on God, used Hagar to have a son (Gen. 16:1-3). It was a work of the flesh—a human endeavour. The result was dependence on the bondwoman, or servant, Hagar.

Conversely, when Abraham trusted God, he had a son with Sarah, who was a free woman. The way of promise was the way of freedom from bondage.

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Paul indicated that this allegory of the two women, Hagar and Sarah, was symbolic—representing “two covenants” (Gal. 4:24). (Hagar is the transliteration of the Greek for “Hagar.”) Paul’s reference to Mount Sinai indicates that Hagar represented the Law, which came from Mount Sinai. Dependency on the Law for salvation brought only bondage, whereas Sarah represented freedom.

By “Jerusalem which now is” (v. 25), Paul meant that Mount Sinai corresponded to Jerusalem in that day because Jerusalem was in spiritual bondage, although it was intended to be the representation of God’s peace and blessing on earth. She had miserably backslidden repeatedly, falling short of the glory God had intended for her.

All those who depend on works and ritual for their salvation fall under the bondage represented by Hagar, the bondswoman. They fall under the law of Mount Sinai, which only served to reveal sin. They fall under the backsliding and failure represented in the “Jerusalem which now is.”

- “What “promise” (v. 23) is Paul discussing in verses 21-25?”

“No soul can be really at rest until it has given up all dependence on everything else and has been forced to depend on the Lord alone. As long as our expectation is from other things, nothing but disappointment awaits us.” —Hannah Whitall Smith

B. Freedom of Jerusalem (vv. 26-27) 26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

“Jerusalem which is above” denotes spiritual Jerusalem, which does achieve the purposes and blessings God intended from the beginning. It is a foretaste of the Jerusalem to come in the new heaven and new earth. Paul refers here to the blessings that are received by the offspring of Sarah, the free woman. These blessings belong to those who are born again in Christ.

Paul compares this Jerusalem to a spiritual mother. He quotes Isaiah 54:1, which encourages the free woman to rejoice: “For the desolate woman now has more children than the woman who lives with her husband” (NLT).

These illustrations served to remind the Galatians of their need to believe in Christ. Reliance on works and ritual for salvation would be to renew the failure of Abraham when he went to Hagar, and it would perpetuate the backsliding of Jerusalem. On

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the other hand, faith in Christ would correspond to the trust Abraham had when he relied on God for a son through Sarah. Faith in Christ also means the believer has a part in the heritage of Jerusalem that God originally intended. “Faith in Christ and a reliance on ourselves, even to the smallest degree, are mutually exclusive.” —Jerry Bridges

C. Children of Promise (vv. 28-31)

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. 29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Paul summarizes his arguments by calling the Galatians to greater faithfulness. They were the children of promise as Isaac was. Ishmael persecuted Isaac, and the Galatians would be persecuted by those relying on works and ritual for salvation. Nevertheless, Paul calls them to be faithful to Christ.

As believers, we should realize the depth of God’s plan in Christ. Salvation by grace is not just a story but the gift of God. Pursuing salvation by works is a great temptation, but salvation comes only by faith in the One who secured it on Calvary.

How does Paul describe the heritage of Christians?

“If there be ground for you to trust in your own righteousness, then, all that Christ did to purchase salvation, and all that God did to prepare the way for it is in vain.” —Jonathan Edwards

CONCLUSION

God wants to reveal Himself as your heavenly Father. When you wonder which way to turn, He’ll guide you along life’s path. When everything is falling apart, you’ll feel your Father’s arm around your shoulder to hold you together.—Lisa Whelchel

GOLDEN TEXT CHALLENGE

“IF YE BE CHRIST’S, THEN ARE YE ABRAHAM’S SEED, AND HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE” (Gal. 3:29).

When we believe in Jesus Christ and appropriate the provisions of Calvary, we are adopted into the family of God. We are not stepchildren, but blood kin—heirs with

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the Elder Son. We are His treasure, His jewel, His joy. We are privileged to have angels as lifeguards. We are given His coat of arms—the lion for courage, the dove for meekness, the eagle for power and protection.

Belonging to the family of the Creator by physical birth is a matter with which we have nothing to do; belonging to the Father's family on the level of moral and spiritual choice is a personal matter. We all must make that choice.

Daily Devotions:

M. Promise to Bless All Nations • Genesis 12:1-3

T. God's Promise to Joshua • Joshua 1:1-9

W. God's Promise Is Forever • Psalm 105:1-10

T. We Are God's Adopted Heirs • Romans 8:14-17

F. Heirs Through the Gospel • Ephesians 3:2-7

S. Heirs of Eternal Life • Titus 3:4-8