

Galatians 4:1-7 – No longer slaves

Exegetical Big Idea: All humans are by nature enslaved under the law, forced (but willing) to live under the nature of sin. In the fullness of time however, God sent his Son to turn slaves into free Sons and Daughters of God.

Homiletical Big Idea: **The gospel of Christ turns slaves into sons and daughters of God.**

Fallen Condition Focus: All humans are subject to the slavery of sin, and under the curse of the law. Unless we seek freedom from this by faith in Christ alone, we continue to be slaves to sin.

Background:

Paul is excited about the freedom of the gospel of Jesus. This whole letter to the Galatian churches is all about how faith in Christ brings freedom, while obedience to the law only brings more slavery. If there is anyone who has been in both camps, it's Paul. He was a Pharisee among the Pharisees. He lived his life in obedience to the Law of Moses. As most Pharisees did, they went above and beyond the laws, just to make sure they stayed as far away as possible from breaking any laws. But for all of Paul's hard work as a Pharisee, he had nothing to show for it. He was no closer to being in relationship with God. He had no friendship with God, no joy in him, no communion, just distance. But then things changed when the resurrected Jesus physically appeared to Paul. At that moment Paul knew that he was wrong, the resurrection was true, and being a son or daughter of God was not acquired by obedience to the law, but by faith in Christ alone. I can't help but think that this personal experience of Paul's, and thus his concern for the Galatian church, is what is behind this letter. Today Paul is going to expand on what it really means to be sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus.

Intro:

You'll remember the story of Joseph in Egypt. Joseph was the son of a man named Israel, and yes this is the same man whom the nation is named after. Israel had 12 sons who had 12 families, and whose families turned into 12 tribes making up the nation of Israel. Well before they were families, they were brothers. Joseph was the favourite of his father out of all the rest of his brothers. As you can imagine the brothers were not too thrilled about this, and came up with the bright idea one day to sell Joseph to a caravan of traders that were heading down to Egypt. So off goes Joseph to Egypt.

Through a chain events, this once favoured son of a wealthy family finds himself in prison. He's locked up, and to no fault of his own. He has no freedom, no family, no one who cares about him or remembers. He has even helped the cupbearer to pharaoh get released from prison and return to his position in the palace, but even the cupbearer has forgotten about him.

It's a common thread in Joseph's story that everyone has forgotten about him; His family, those he meets along the way, the cupbearer. But there is one person who is always with Joseph and who had not for a second forgotten about him. God.

Eventually Joseph is summoned to Pharaoh, who has had these dreams that he can't understand, and God gives Joseph the meaning of the dreams. At that moment, Joseph goes from a prisoner and slave, to becoming royalty. He becomes second in command in all of Egypt!

Joseph's story is a story of the gospel. We are like the prisoner Joseph, although to be clear we are in prison because we deserve it! We are imprisoned to sin. There is nobody to help us, even they wanted to. But God has not abandoned us to our slavery in sin. He remembers us and sends a deliverer.

In Christ there is an even more incredible transformation. Joseph was transformed from a slave to royalty in Egypt. But in the gospel of Christ there is an infinitely greater transformation.

The gospel of Christ turns slaves into sons and daughters of God.

Vv. 1-3: All people are born into the slavery of sin.

In the verses we looked at last week, Paul made the bold claim that those who are in Christ by faith are sons and daughters of God. He's going to expand on that here. He starts off by saying "I mean that..." which is a pretty good indication that he is connecting what he's saying now to what he was saying before. So he starts by giving a human example, much like he did when he was speaking of human contracts back in chapter 3.

He gives the example in verse 1 of a young child, who is an heir. And heir is a person who is set to inherit the estate of their parents. Simply being an heir says nothing about the wealth of the parents, but it's pretty safe to assume here that the inheritance is pretty big. As we will see, the heirs are people, and the Father is God.

So the heir is set to inherit the estate of his or her parents, but in this case the heir is a child. In the example, this does not necessarily mean that the child is a baby, just that he or she is not old enough yet to receive the inheritance. Another way to look at this would be that the heir is a minor. Being a minor, Paul explains, is actually not functionally different at all than being a slave! Sure, the heir one day will be over all the estate, but not at the moment. At the moment, we see in verse 2, he is under guardians. Interestingly enough, this word for guardian is not the same word that Paul used last week in chapter 3. That type of guardian was more of a babysitter, this type of guardian is more of a manager, or foreman.

The point in this illustration is not that the heir needs a babysitter, the point here is that the heir, though he is the future owner of everything, is restricted in his freedom! He has to obey the rules of the manager set over him. In one sense we can consider him to be owner of everything (the Greek is literally "lord of all" interestingly enough). But in a realistic sense, he's a slave. Paul is pointing out a contrast here between freedom and restriction. The heir, *should* be free technically! But he's in actuality no different than a slave.

[The idea of a foreman reminds me of when I used to work in construction. If you've stopped and watched construction workers work for a few moments, you've probably noticed that sometimes there will a bunch of guys doing some work like digging, and one guy just standing around. Well likely he's not just taking a break. Next time you see some construction going on, take a look at the color of the workers' hard hats. The guy standing around probably has on a white hat. That white hat means he's a foreman, or simply, the boss. The guys doing the digging are probably wearing orange hats. They are the workers who are under the foreman. When I was in construction, I wore an orange hat. And I took orders from a guy wearing a white hat named Grant. He was mean. Now if I met Grant in the grocery store on a weekend, I have the freedom to deny his orders! But on the jobsite, the guy could (and did) make me dig for days on end until my whole body hurt. In one sense you could say I was free! But in

another sense, I was under the orders and management of my foreman. I couldn't tell him I wanted to do something else, he'd laugh at me and hand me back my shovel.]

This is the picture that Paul is giving here. There is no question that the foreman in this picture is our sin and the law of God. Paul has said as much in the previous verses. We were born into this slavery through Adam. He and Eve were the first to sin, but we have inherited that sinful identity from them and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

But who is the heir? It's possibly that Paul has in mind here the nation of Israel. After all, they were the apple of God's eye in the Old Testament. They were God's chosen holy nation to be a nation of priests to the rest of the world. In one sense we can consider them to certainly be heirs! But even as heirs, they too are subject to sin.

But even if Paul considers this heir in the example to be the nation of Israel, he certainly blows it wide open in verse 3. "In the same way *we also* when we were children, were enslaved..." It's hard to imagine Paul saying "we also" to just mean the small population of Jewish Christians. He's likely meaning the whole church of Galatia! And if he is including both Jewish and Gentile Christians, then that includes us!

It makes sense then that he says that "we", meaning all people, are enslaved to the "elementary principles of the world". Even though this statement is hard to figure out, I think it's safe to say Paul means this *fallen* world. We live in a world that is marked and stained by sin. I think Paul is simply saying that we are slaves to our sinful nature and this fallen world in general.

The reality is that we have exchanged worship God the Creator, with worship of his creation. And this is true whether you are Jew or Gentile. We were meant to worship God alone, Creator of us and the universe. But instead we chose to worship created order. Whether it's worshiping ourselves or something else, we are slaves in that all have rejected worshiping God, and chose instead to worship something less.

So you see all humans in one sense are meant to be heirs! We were all created in God's image, his children who are his representatives in creation. Think about it. Adam and Eve were given dominion over creation and communion with God in the Garden of Eden. That's what we were meant to be!

But because of our sin, we are no better than slaves. We are slaves in fact, to sin. We lack the ability and even the desire to worship God. We've replaced a delight in the Lord, with a delight in sin.

All of this is Paul building more and more his argument that this is not a problem of performance! The false teachers were making it a problem of performance, but it's in actuality a problem of identity. And you can't change your identity with performance.

Paul has talked a lot about being "in Christ". This is the doctrine of union with Christ. But there's a flip side to that. If you are not *in Christ*, then you are by default *in Adam*. If being in Christ leads to life and blessing and forgiveness and righteousness, then being in Adam is the exact opposite.

We are slaves to sin, *in Adam*. The solution to our problem is not that we need to figure out a way to be better Adam's. We need a new identity! We need redemption. And there is hint to that hope at the end of verse 2 when Paul says "...until the date set by his (or literally it's 'the') father."

Before we can understand redemption in Christ, we need to understand that all people are born into the slavery of sin, but the good news is that:

The gospel of Christ turns slaves into sons and daughters of God.

Vv. 4-5a: Christ's whole purpose was to free those captive under the law.

I love it when bad news is followed with "but". Yes, we are slaves to sin. Yes, this is a problem of identity. Yes, we are unable to do anything about it ourselves. But God can. And he did. Paul says in verse 4 "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son..." God broke the pattern. He stepped in to do something about our problem. And what did he do? He sent forth his Son.

He didn't send forth another prophet to encourage us back to obedience. He didn't send forth a military person to break free from world powers. He didn't send forth another Moses to give more law. He sent forth his Son. Notice too that it was God who sent forth his Son. Sure, that seems rather obvious, but don't miss the significance of this. It was not *us* who initiated it. We didn't ask for it. We didn't twist God's arm. We didn't make ourselves good enough for God to say "ok I'll finally do it". God is the source of this, not us. Another indication that God is the source of our salvation, not us! God wouldn't need to send forth anything or anyone if we were able to get ourselves out from slavery.

But we can't, so he did. The answer to the problem of slavery to sin and the law, is Jesus. Full stop.

I love how Paul says "when the fullness of time had come". We get the impression that God sent Jesus when God was good and ready. This word literally means "to fill up". Why did God wait so long, from our perspective, to send Jesus? Why not send him right after Adam and Eve sinned? He could have. But the time was not yet full. In one sense yes we can think of practical reason why God might have waited. Jesus came when the Romans owned most of the known world. There more of a common language, which would be handy if you're trying to send out a message of hope to the world. The Romans also built roads everywhere, also handy if you're trying to get a message out. But God didn't *need* to wait for these. Why did God send for Jesus when he did? Because the time was finally full.

[It's been really hot the last few weeks. It's hard to stay outside for long periods of time, unless you have a pool. We have a small one that is perfect for the kids, but some of you have really big ones. For the winter your pools get emptied at least some of the way until the weather gets hot again. Imagine the heat of these days comes and you get excited to go for a swim, but you look out the window and the pool is empty! You're going to be disappointed. But then you get the hose and turn it on and put in the pool. Is the pool full yet? Nope. You're going to have to wait. Every hour you go to the window and check on your pool, you see that it's not full yet. Over and over again you go to the window looking to see when the pool is full. You are longing for that pool to be full. You want, or *need* that pool to be full! You can't speed it up, it's going to be ready when it's ready. But in the meantime, your longing for being refreshed grows and grows in anticipation...until, it's full! How good and satisfying is it when you jump in?]

That's the picture we get with this. When the fullness of time had come, God send forth his Son. God was ready when he was ready. He didn't wait for us. We couldn't speed it. We could only long for it. As we talked about last week, that's the point of the law. To show our need for, and to drive us to, Christ.

In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son. And why his Son? There's indication of Jesus' special nature in these verses. First of all, Paul uses the words "sent forth". The picture here is that Jesus had always been there, but when the time was full, he was sent. In fact this is exactly the case. Jesus was never created, he has always existed. Jesus, God the Son has existed from eternity past with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. One God, existing in 3 Persons. So Jesus is special and different because he's God, truly and fully God. This is essential of course as to *why* he has come.

But he's not only fully and truly God. Paul makes sure to mention in verse 4 that Jesus was "...born of woman, born under the law..." What does he mean by this? Well he means to say that in the same way that Jesus is fully God, he's also fully human. He was born by a woman, just like every single other human being who has ever existed. He is fully God and fully man. But he's also born under the law. Jesus chose, he was not forced, but chose to be born under the requirements of the law.

Paul explains that even though Jesus is fully God, he chose to be made like us in every way.

It had to be this way because of *why* he came, which Paul explains in verse 5. He writes "to redeem those who were under the law". This is it. This is the whole purpose of Jesus coming to earth. He came to earth, to glorify the Father, by redeeming those who are slaves to sin. I think the simplest way to think of the word "redeem" is to think of the word "purchase".

[When I was a kid I had a paper route. It didn't pay much, but it allowed me to save some money. I remember saving up for a video game I really wanted. It was called "Uniracers". The game was exactly as the name sounds. It was unicycles that raced. It sounds silly now but I had played it a friend's house and really wanted it for myself. So what did I do? I saved money from my paper route until I had enough money to buy the game. I remember going with my dad to the store, picking it out, and redeeming it at the cash. I think many of us can relate to that. There is something that we want, but we have to give something of ourselves to get it. It has to be purchased, or *redeemed*. But it costs something.]

In the same way, our lives cost something. Our sin demands payment. We have rebelled against God and God cannot just ignore it. There has to be a price paid. That's where Jesus redeemed us. He didn't spend money, though being God he has an infinite amount of it. He didn't sacrifice a billion sheep for us. The price that Jesus paid was his life. He gave everything, and held nothing back. Jesus paid it all.

He paid it all by becoming the curse of sin for us. Paul explained this back in chapter 3. Jesus took upon himself the requirements of the law, and obeyed them perfectly. He also took upon himself the punishment of the law that we deserved. This is what Paul means when he says that Jesus redeemed those under the law.

In saying this Paul shows that both Jews and Gentiles are in need of this redemption, since both Jews and Gentiles are born under the law. It makes not a single bit of difference whether you are part of the nation of Israel or not, redemption is found in Jesus alone. And how is a person found to be in Jesus alone? By faith, not by works.

If all we needed was a "moral compass", we wouldn't need Jesus. If we needed a bit of correction to get us on the right track, we wouldn't need Jesus. If we needed a boost, or even a clean slate (which by the way the sacrifices in the Old Testament basically did), then we wouldn't need Jesus. We're not going to "grow out of" sin. What we needed was a redeemer, and in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son.

That was Christ's whole purpose in coming.

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Vv. 5b-6: Freedom from the law means adoption into God's family

Christ redeemed us, but that's not the end of the story. He redeemed us *to* something. It's interesting that the beginning of verse 5 starts with "to", which indicates purpose. That same Greek word is used halfway through verse 5 but translated "so that" in our English Bibles (at least the ESV). The idea is that God Jesus for the purpose of redeeming us, but also that the purpose of redeeming us is that we might receive "adoption as sons (and daughters)".

This is what we are freed to: being adopted into God's family. Adoption is clearly the emphasis in these verses. In the original language the sentence goes "adoption you have received". That sound weird in English but in Greek that means that adoption is the emphasis of the sentence.

The purpose of Christ coming was to redeem us. The purpose of Christ's redeeming us is for adoption into God's family.

And this is something that we don't earn, because Paul makes it clear that we have "received" it. If redemption and adoption were through the law, then we would earn it. But since it's by faith in Christ, we *receive* it.

[Let's pretend for a moment that you are a kid, and that your family is going on an awesome vacation. Maybe you're going to Disney World in Florida. Sounds great! I'm really happy for you. Who's invited on this trip? Well it would obviously be for your family. Now you may be kind to pastor Jason left here in Leamington while you're having fun and bring me home a postcard or a keychain, and I'd be thankful for that for sure. But let's say you pleaded with your parents, and you begged them to adopt me. Now who gets to go with you? I do! Why? Because now I am part of your family. I am your brother! Before I was not part of your family, and I did not get to enjoy and participate in the things that your family was doing. But now that I'm adopted, I get to come with you, and the only reason I get to come with you is because I am part of your family now. And, by the way, I can't force my way into your family. Adoption is something that I would have to receive.]

It's the same way with God. When we are slaves to sin and under the law of God, we are *not* part of God's family. We do not get inheritance. We do not have life. We do not have peace with God. And we miss out on so much more than just a visit to Disney World. We miss out on being with God forever. But, if we are redeemed by Jesus through faith, we *are* in God's family! We have been adopted. And the benefits are so much more than a trip to Disney World.

I know that in that example it's funny to think of a grown up being adopted, but it's not so weird when we think about God's family. There is no such thing as a natural son or daughter in God's family, except Jesus. There are only adopted children. The only way into God's family is by adoption. Even the picture of adoption points us to the doctrine of union with Christ. Since Christ is the only legitimate Son, then the only way to be considered a son or daughter is to be *in Christ*. If we are not in Christ, then we are by definition *not* sons or daughters of God. But in Christ, we share in his identity as a son (or daughter).

This adoption is for both Jews and Gentiles. Notice how Paul no longer speaks of an heir as a natural son as he did in his example in verse 1. I think he does this on purpose. Paul's logic is this: We are all enslaved under the law and our sin. Since we are all enslaved, the offer and gift of redemption is held out to all. Since the purpose of redemption is adoption, then the only way to be a legitimate son or daughter of God is redemption by faith in Jesus!

Just as I love it when bad news is followed by "but" I think I love it even more when good news is followed by "and". Paul continues in verse 6 to show us the result of adoption. He writes that because we are sons (and daughters), "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts..."

Paul means to tell us that the sending of God's Spirit into our hearts is *because* of our adoption. In other words, this is part of the participate in the family of God, we get God's Spirit living in us. Just as God "sent forth" his Son when the time was full, so now he "sends forth" his Spirit into our hearts. This is yet another gift from God!

And what a gift it is. This is nothing short than the presence of God. But look at this. This is not the presence of God *beside* us or *around* us, but *in* us. Paul makes sure to make clear that God's Spirit is in our hearts. The heart means here more than what we think of as heart. We tend to separate the heart and mind as different things. But the way they would have understood this word "heart" is to mean inmost being. Paul means this: That if you are redeemed, then you are adopted. And if you are adopted, you God lives in the core of who you are. He's not beside you or around you, or even somewhere in the periphery of your being, but inside the innermost of your being.

That's what makes this next statement so profound. At first when we read this we realize it's the Spirit who is crying out "Abba Father" in verse 6. And it's true! But if the Spirit of Christ lives in us, and we live in Christ, then are we not the ones crying out to God *through* the Spirit? Yes! That's exactly what it going on. It's a beautiful picture of intimacy with God. It's no coincidence that Jesus, when he was most in anguish, in the garden of Gethsemane before his journey to the cross in less than 24 hours, also cried out "Abba Father".

If God hears the cry of his Son, even in his hour of deepest need, then God hears the cry of his other sons and daughters as well when we, by the Spirit of the Son, cry out "Abba Father". There is no deeper intimacy with God than being adopted into his family.

Paul gets real personal in this final verse. All of the pronouns he uses are singular. He is no longer talking simply to a church, or group of churches, he's speaking to the individual. This is the hope that we have as individuals.

"So" he says, "you are no longer a slave, but a son (or daughter), and if a son (or daughter), then and heir through God."

Though I was a slave, I have been redeemed by Christ work on the cross. Because I have been redeemed, I am an adopted free son of God marked by the indwelling of his Spirit. And since I am an adopted son, I am also an heir. As an heir, I have the hope of reigning with Christ and communion with God. And all of this "through God".

I don't know how Paul can make this any clearer. This is what the gospel does! This is not what the law can achieve.

July 20, 2025

I've never heard of a slave calling his master "Abba Father". But that is exactly what the sons and daughters of God do, because:

The gospel of Christ turns slaves into sons and daughters of God.