

Abba, Father!

Galatians 4:1-7

Key Verse: 4:6

“Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

In 3:15-29, we studied how God started his salvation work through the promise to Abraham. God fulfilled his promise through Jesus Christ. We also learned why, in the course of salvation history, God gave the law through Moses. The purpose of the law was to expose sin as sin and to lead us to salvation in Christ. However, God’s salvation history is based on his promise to Abraham, not on the law. Whoever believes the promise of God in Jesus Christ becomes a child of God. And in Christ Jesus, we are all children of God, regardless of nationality, gender, color, or social status.

In today’s passage Paul develops the idea that we are children of God, and his letter comes to its climax. He first reminds us of our status as slaves before the coming of Christ. He then teaches us how we became children of God, and what blessings and privileges we receive. Many Christians do not really enjoy the blessings and privileges of being God’s children. Even though they call God “Father,” they have no sense of intimacy. In fact, many feel burdened. Their daily life is more like that of a slave than of a child of God. We need to realize that in Christ we are God’s children with great blessings and privileges. Today let’s learn to enjoy our Father God and his blessings!

I. God sent his Son (1-5)

Thus far in Galatians, Paul has frequently written about the law. He has been primarily referring to the law of God found in the Old Testament. In chapter 4, beginning in verses 1-2, Paul begins to refer to the law in Roman terms, which would be more familiar to many of the Galatians. Paul explained our status as slaves in a way that we Gentiles can understand. Then in verses 4-5 Paul tells us what God has done to redeem us from this slavery and to make us his precious and beloved children.

First, slavery under the law (1-3). Look at verses 1-2. Here we find the words, “heir,” “child,” “slave,” “guardian,” and “trustee.” Paul draws upon the Roman system to explain what kind of slaves we were and how Christ has set us free. Roman times were somewhat different than ours. The Roman family was

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patriarchal. The father governed the lives of family members and all business affairs and property. He had the right to disown his children, or sell them into slavery. When an heir was a child, he was indistinguishable from a slave. Heirs were subject to guardians--usually reliable household slaves--who trained them in many ways. During that training period, the heir had to obey the guardian. Though the heir had a large bank account, he could not spend any money without the permission of his trustee. However, when a set time had passed, the father would terminate the heir's subjection to others. In a day, the heir's status changed. He was given the full rights of a son to govern the estate. Then he was free from his former guardian and trustee. Typically, the father held a great feast to celebrate.

In verses 3-5, Paul applies the analogy to God's dealing with mankind. Look at verse 3. **"So also when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world."** When Paul says, "we," he is referring to both Jew and Gentile. As Jews had been under the law of God before Christ's coming, the Gentiles had been under "the elemental spiritual forces of the world" (basic principles). Here the Greek word "stoicheion" literally means "ABC's." This refers to basic education through family, social, educational and religious systems. These things may have been good. However, the problem is that they cannot give life; they cannot set us free from the power of sin and death. What is worse, failure to live up to them brings about its own condemnation. There was a Japanese woman who was raised under the teachings of Buddhism. From a young age she recognized that Buddha's teachings were good, but she could not live up to them. She fell into condemnation and lived with a sense of guilt and inadequacy. This prepared her to receive the good news of Christ with humility and faith. I was raised a Catholic. I learned many good moral teachings. But I could not live up to them and fell into condemnation. This led me to seek Christ. The point is that we were all in slavery to the elemental spiritual forces of the world in one way or another. There was no way out. We were helpless. Did God abandon us because we were useless? No. Then what did God do?

Second, children of God through the Son (4-5). Look at verse 4. **"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law..."** Here the words "the set time" tell us that God set a time for sending his Son into the world to be our Savior. According to his time schedule, God sent his Son. The Son's coming is comparable to the day that heirs are liberated from guardians to receive the full rights of sons. So the coming of the Son is the best news to mankind; it was the dawn of a new era. The words "fully come" are also important. They tell us how God fully prepared before sending his Son into the world. When we refer to the book of Daniel we find that God foretold the events

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preceding the Son's coming in detail. God is the Sovereign Ruler of all the kingdoms of the world and he uses them for his salvation purpose. He prepared Christ's coming in several ways. The spread of Greek language made international exchange of ideas possible. The rise of the Roman Empire brought order to the world and accelerated worldwide travel and communication. Greco-Roman people were weary of their cruel man-made gods. Jewish people, bound under the law of Moses, longed for freedom. People everywhere were thirsty for the truth. When the gospel was proclaimed, it spread rapidly to the whole world in the first century. God is still in control of nations and people. God still uses all things to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. And God has set a time for Christ to return, and it will happen! But that is another message.

Look at verse 4 again. It says, **"God sent his Son."** This tells us how much God loves us. His Son is most precious to God. Yet God was willing to sacrifice his Son for us. It is hard for us to sacrifice time, energy or money for others. Giving a child is unthinkable. God demonstrated his great love by sending his one and only Son. God deeply loves us with immeasurable love, and we should accept this based on the fact, regardless of how we may feel.

God's Son Jesus was born of a woman, the virgin Mary. This fulfilled God's promise to send a Savior from the offspring of a woman (Gen 3:15; 22:18; Isa 7:14). Why did God send him in this way? God wanted to reconcile with mankind. God is holy. Man is an incorrigible sinner. So people cannot come to God by themselves. God, in his mercy, came down into the world to live among us. This is the incarnation. John 1:14 says, **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."** We cannot see God. But through the incarnation people could experience God. In 1 John 1:1, John says, **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life."** This is amazing grace. Even though Jesus is God, he became a man to be with us. In this way he became a mediator between God and man (1 Ti 2:5).

Jesus was also "born under the law." Jesus was subject to the law, and fulfilled the law perfectly in its entirety. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day and presented to the Lord according to the requirement of the law (Lk 2:21-24). Jesus lived in obedience to his parents, who taught him the law of God diligently. At the time of his death, Jesus knew that all was completed and that the Scripture had been fulfilled. Finally, he said, **"It is finished"** (Jn 19:28, 30). In Matthew

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5:17 Jesus said, **“Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”** Why did he do that? Verse 5a says, **“...to redeem those under the law...”** The law had condemned us sinners to death. We had to die, shedding our blood, to pay the demand of the law. But Jesus shed his precious blood on the cross to pay the price for us. Romans 3:25a says, **“God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood--to be received by faith.”** Hebrews 9:12 tells us that Jesus **“entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.”** Hebrews 10:14 explains the implication of this: **“...by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”** Jesus paid it all through his perfect sacrifice on the cross.

What was God’s ultimate purpose? Verse 5b says, **“...that we might receive adoption to sonship.”** God’s intention is not just to save us from our miserable situation, but to adopt us as his own children. Here we need to think about the word “adoption.” In Roman law it meant that a slave could become a son who would inherit the estate of his master. When we see the movie “Ben-Hur,” we can find a good example. Judah Ben-Hur was a galley slave on a Roman ship with the number “41.” There was no way for him to escape his destiny as a slave. But during a battle at sea, he rescued Quintus Arias, the commander of the fleet. Quintus Arias was a friend of Caesar and a man of great influence in Rome. But he had no heir. So he adopted Judah Ben-Hur as his own son and made him his heir. Suddenly Judah’s status changed from a galley slave to a noble son. He received his father’s good name as a man of honor in the society. He also received vast property and was granted the right to reign over the household. The old NIV says in verse 5b, **“...that we might receive the full rights of sons.”** God did not give us half of the rights of sons, but the full rights of sons. We can understand what this means through the prodigal son in Luke 15. When he returned to his father, he was given sandals, a robe, and a ring on his finger. It symbolized the full rights of a son. He did not go through a probationary period, but became a full-fledged son immediately. These days many people adopt children from poor countries. The children’s condition suddenly changes from poor, abandoned, and unloved to dearly loved, secure, and wealthy. We were slaves of sin and condemned by the law. We were abandoned, unloved and miserable due to our sins. But God had mercy on us and sent his Son to purchase us through the shedding of his precious blood. Furthermore, he adopted us as his dear children. What a great blessing God bestowed on us! But that is not all. God’s blessing is deeper and richer still.

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II. God sent the Spirit of his Son (6-7)

Read verse 6. **“Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”** We were miserable sinners. Now we have become the children of God. Wow! Is it true? How can we know this for sure? Verse 6 says, **“God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.”** The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and of God. The Spirit is the invisible God who dwells in our hearts. He assures us of God's love by testifying with our spirits that we are children of God (Ro 8:16). This assurance is not something we manufacture. It is the Spirit's own testimony that assures us that we are children of God. Here we see that the Triune God is at work in our redemption. God the Father made a plan and sent his Son. The Son, Jesus Christ, came into this world and sacrificed himself for us. The Spirit comes into our hearts to assure us of God's love.

In sending his Spirit into our hearts, God made an intimate love relationship with us. The Spirit enables us to call out, **“Abba, Father.”** “Abba” is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word for “My Father.” The NLT says, “My dear Father!” The Message Bible says, “Papa! Father!” This shows us that the relationship between God and people is indeed intimate. This was revolutionary. In the Old Testament God was seen as holy and awesome. Sinful men could not approach him. They were fearful just to think of him. They had no idea to call God **“Abba, Father.”** Most Muslim people today are like this. But God made us his children through Christ. God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts so that we may call him **“Abba, Father.”**

Actually, this idea came from Jesus. Jesus called God **“Abba, Father”** in prayer (Mk 14:36). When he was dying on the cross, he called out, **“Father, forgive them...”** (Lk 23:34a). Jesus' cry to God reveals the deep and personal nature of their love relationship. Jesus never doubted God's love even in the most difficult of times. This enabled Jesus to overcome all kinds of temptations and hardships and win the victory. By sending the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Father shares this same relationship with us. We can call God **“Abba, Father”**, and experience his love and power and have victory in any situation or circumstance. Jesus assured his disciples of this by telling them in John 20:17b, **“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”** What a great blessing to call God **“Abba, Father.”** God is the Almighty Creator God who made the heavens and the earth. God is the owner of all things. He is ready to answer all our prayers by providing limitless comfort, strength and wisdom. He enables us live as more than conquerors in this hard world. He is always ready to

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welcome us and to provide mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb 4:16).

However, there is a problem. Some people do not have a good image of a father in their hearts. They think of a runaway father or an abusive father. Then they are rather burdened by the word "father." On the other hand, some people have been so spoiled by their fathers that they never received any basic discipline. Their concept of a father is a vending machine that gives them whatever they need on demand. But our heavenly Father is different. Our Father God is perfect and holy. He always loves us in precisely the way we need. He is almighty. There is nothing he cannot do for us. He is always loving and understanding. He never hurts us or spoils us, but always blesses us and watches over us with great care and affection. He also give us proper discipline. God is our good Father. Moreover, he is our Everlasting Father. Let's come to God, calling, **"Abba, Father!"**

Verse 7 says, **"So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."** Romans 8:17a says, **"If we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..."** As heirs of God we have an inheritance. It is an eternal inheritance. We really need this inheritance. The other day I spoke with an insurance agent. She stressed that with a certain kind of life insurance the company knows they will pay out the benefit at some point. So I filled in the blank, "You mean that everyone dies." And she said, "Yes." So I told her, "We need more than life insurance; we need Jesus Christ and eternal life." God provided us with an eternal inheritance, the glorious kingdom of God. Peter described that this inheritance will never perish, spoil or fade. It is kept in heaven for us (1 Pe 1:3, 4). We are children of God, heirs of his kingdom. Let's live with this clear identity and reveal our Father's goodness and love to the world.

The 19th century evangelist John Wilbur Chapman told a story of a man in his church. This man was searching for his son who had left home at the age of 13. The father searched for his son for 18 years without giving up. One day he happened to go to a railroad station in Pennsylvania. A man who looked like a homeless drug addict approached him and begged for twenty-five cents. It was his son! The father cried out, "Tom! I am your father!" Then the man looked at him and said, "Please spare a quarter." The father hugged his son and said, "Twenty-five cents does not matter. I am your father. You are my son. Everything I have is yours. Even my life is yours. Come home and live with me!" Sometimes we forget that we are glorious heirs of God. We wander in the world seeking a quarter even

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though our heavenly Father wants to give us all things. Let's accept that we are sons of God and heirs of God and act accordingly.

The Westminster Catechism says that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Do you truly enjoy God and delight in his love and blessings? Do you feel loved and wealthy, like the privileged son of a rich father? Or are you burdened by the thought of God? Let's repent our slave mentality and enjoy God, and his blessings and privileges, as dear children!