

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON FIFTY-SIX)

“SONS AND HEIRS”

GALATIANS 4:6-8

(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

6 And because you are sons, God has 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 an heir through God.

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.

In previous Lessons we have considered the phrase “*adoption as sons.*” We said that the phrase is the translation of a Greek word which literally means, “to place one as an adult son.” The idea is of being placed in the position of an adult son who possesses the same rights as the natural children of the parents.

Paul uses this word in order to cement in the minds of his readers the particular idea of the status of a son. The emphasis of the term “*adoption*” is not so much on the **nature** of the son as it is on the **status** of the son. By adoption we become the sons of God, not merely in a natural sense but in a legal sense, and we are given the rights and privileges that legally belong to the members of the family of God.

It is by adoption that we become joint-heirs with Christ, having been raised to the status as adult sons, thereby becoming heirs of God. We

jointly inherit with Christ all that He possesses as an heir of God the Father, by virtue of His Son-ship and work on the Cross.

What do believers inherit? We inherit all the riches of God's mercy, grace, and love, as well as His presence and His peace. We inherit a relationship with Him now and forever.

In verse **6** Paul writes, *“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”* Paul is explaining to his readers that God the Father sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all those whom He adopts as His sons, and that the Holy Spirit testifies inwardly and convincingly to them that they are indeed the sons of God.

In **1 John 3:24**, we read, *“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”* And in **1 John 4:13**, we read *“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”*

This sending forth of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers brings about a change in their position from that of **minors under law**, to that of **adult sons under grace**. The bestowal of the Holy Spirit gives to each believer a consciousness of the familial relationship between themselves as sons of God, and God as their Father. Instead of considering ourselves to be in a forbidding courtroom in the presence of an offended judge, we now consider ourselves to be in a warm family circle in the presence of a loving Father with whom we have the privilege of living as His sons. The fact of our possession of the indwelling Holy Spirit should be enough to demonstrate to us that we are no longer under law, but under grace.

According to Paul, when the Holy Spirit comes to baptize, seal and indwell a believer, He cries out “Abba” in the heart of that believer. The Holy Spirit comes in assuring the believer of the warm, intimate and very personal relationship which exists between the believer and God.

According to **Romans 8:16**, The Holy Spirit bears witness with the human spirit of the believer testifying to him or her that he or she is indeed a child of God.

The witness of the Holy Spirit is something separate from all subjective inferences and conclusions and higher than all of them. In other words, the witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a believer is not based primarily on feelings. It is primarily based on evidence—the evidence of a changed life! Paul speaks of this in **2 Corinthians 5:17**. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away—look, what is new has come! So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away—look, what is new has come!”*

In verse **7**, Paul writes, *“So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”* In this verse, Paul explains to his readers that the fact that they possess the Holy Spirit is proof that they are the adult sons of God. He is still emphasizing the point that their position as sons gives them freedom from bondage to law, for he says that, *“you are **no longer** a slave.”* The words *“no longer”* imply that they were once slaves.

The phrase *“no longer”* is the translation of the Greek word **ouketi**: (**ook-et’-ee**), a very strong Greek negative which means, “no more,” or “no further.” The change from the plural *“sons”* in verse **6**, to the singular *“son”* in verse **7**, brings the matter of son-ship closer home to each individual reader. It drives home the point to each believer that his or her spiritual experience has set him or her free from his or her slavery to sin, Satan and law, and has given him or her a right legal standing with God the Father because he or she is in Christ, His beloved. Each believer is now and forever an adopted son of God in Christ and a joint heir with Christ to all the rights and privileges of God’s sons! Our son-ship assures our inheritance.

The apostle Peter speaks about the security of the inheritance of believers in **1 Peter 1:3-5**:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,

5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In **Galatians 4:7**, Paul argues that since the believer is a son, then he or she is also an heir of God. He says that believers are heirs “*through God.*” Therefore, their position as heirs of God is not the result of any personal merit or good works. Their position as heirs of God is entirely the result of the grace of God. The words, “*through God,*” emphasize the fact that God the Father is the sovereign initiator of grace. Jesus declared this truth in **John 6:44** and **John 6:65**.

John 6:44

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”

John 6:65.

“And he said, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.’”

Since this is the case, believers obtain the blessing of Abraham not by legalism but by maintaining their freedom from any system of rule-keeping. Paul is appealing to the Galatian believers to retain their status of adult sons under grace, instead of going back to the position of a minor and a slave under law.

Wayne Barber makes the following comments in relation to this verse:

"What are the implications of that statement, 'you are no longer a slave, but you are a son,' with full privileges in the family of God? You see, if you're not enjoying that, perhaps you have to be taught it and you still don't know it. Even though it's true, we haven't yet grasped it. Once we are free from the bondage to the law we are free from slavery. But then we have to learn to live by faith because it is faith that appropriates what is already ours in the Lord Jesus. You know what the Galatians did? They dropped out of the school of grace and they re-enrolled into the kindergarten of law. And how many times in our life have we all done the same thing? When we choose not to live in that intimacy of a relationship, we choose not to say yes to God, we choose not to let His word totally affect our behavior and our life, we choose to enroll one more time in the school of the law, the kindergarten of law. We have a choice today. We have a choice to live as a slave and we have a choice to live as a son. Slaves have no relationship with the Father and they have no relationship with the family. Only by faith do we enjoy those relationships. Even though technically, positionally, they are ours, we don't enjoy them unless we are willing to live by faith."

Off course, living by faith means to order our lives based solely on what God guarantees in His Word.

In verse **8**, Paul begins his appeal to the Galatian believers to forsake legalism and return to a sincere and pure devotion to Christ, because their acceptance of Jewish legalism represented a return to bondage. He writes, "*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.*"

John Stott summarizes Paul's appeal to the Galatian believers in verses **8-11** as follows:

"If you were a slave and are now a son, if you did not know God but have now come to know Him and to be known by Him, how can you turn

back again to the old slavery? How can you allow yourself to be enslaved by the very elemental spirits from whom Jesus Christ has rescued you?"

Warren Wiersbe makes the following remarks:

"What really happened when the Galatians turned from grace to Law? To begin with, they abandoned liberty for bondage. When they were ignorant sinners, they had served their false gods and had experienced the tragedy of such pagan slavery. But then they had trusted Christ and been delivered from superstition and slavery. Now they were abandoning their liberty in Christ and going back into bondage. They were 'dropping out' of the school of grace and enrolling in the kindergarten of Law! They were destroying all the good work the Lord had done in them through Paul's ministry."

Remember what he had written to them in verses **1-3** of chapter **3**?

1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Before the Galatian believers were saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, they were enslaved to gods such as Zeus and Hermes who were not really gods at all. They had no existence in the nature of things, but only in the corrupt imaginations of those who worshipped them.

In **1 Corinthians 8:4-6**, we read the following:

4 Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.”

5 For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—

6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

In Acts 14:8-20, Luke records an incident that occurred in Lystra involving Paul and Barnabas, which gives us an insight into the awful enslavement of the Galatians to these gods prior to their conversion.

8 Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked.

9 He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well,

10 said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking.

11 And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!”

12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out,

15 “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

16 In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.

17 Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

18 Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

20 But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

Before they were saved, Paul says that the Galatians, “*did not know God.*” The word “*know*” is a translation of the Greek word **eido: (I’-do)**, which means, “to know by perception.” **Eido** often refers more to an intuitive knowledge than a knowledge that is gained by experience. It is used to refer to fullness of knowledge, rather than a progress in knowledge. The word is in the **present tense** which indicates that prior to their conversion, the Galatian believers were in the settled state of not knowing the one true and living God. They had a knowledge of the so-called gods that they were enslaved to, but they did not know the God of gods. The Greek word translated “*not*” signifies absolute negation.

What was true of the Ephesians, prior to their conversion, as described in **Ephesians 2:11-12**, was also true of the Galatians:

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—

12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Brothers and sisters, that was our condition before we were saved by the grace of God. Every unsaved person is enslaved, whether they know it or not, to sin, Satan and the “*elementary principles of the world.*” What Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 4:3-6** is particularly instructive as it relates to this:

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, God is the only One Who is able to shine light into spiritually dark hearts. In the case of the first creation, God commanded the light to shine, but in the case of the new creation, God Himself shines into our hearts. In both the first creation and the new creation, it is God who takes the initiative. The chaos of both physical and spiritual darkness is only changed by the shining of God’s light. Redemption is as much a divine operation as creation was, and it is accomplished in a

similar manner-by the shining of the light of God. As **J Vernon McGee** says,

"Just as the Spirit of God brooded over the waters, so the Spirit of God broods over a soul. He moves in to bring conviction to our hearts. Then He regenerates us. And the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, shines in."

God commanded the light to shine **physically** out of darkness in a **creative** way in the beginning, and He shines **spiritually** into the darkened hearts of sinners in a **redemptive** way every time a new creation is brought into being.

We will give the final word this evening, and it is a very sobering word, to the champion of the Protestant Reformation, **Martin Luther**:

"But why does Paul accuse the Galatians of reverting to the weak and beggarly elements of the Law when they never had the Law? Why does he not say to them: 'At one time you Galatians did not know God. You then served idols that were no gods. But now that you have come to know the true God, why do you go back to the worship of idols?' Paul seems to identify their defection from the Gospel to the Law with their former idolatry. Indeed he does. Whoever gives up the article of justification does not know the true God. It is one and the same thing whether a person reverts to the Law or to the worship of idols. When the article of justification is lost, nothing remains except error, hypocrisy, godlessness, and idolatry..."

Those who do not know God in Christ arrive at this erroneous conclusion: 'I will serve God in such and such a way. I will join this or that order. I will be active in this or that charitable endeavor. God will sanction my good intentions and reward me with everlasting life.'...

God never promised to save anybody for his religious observance of ceremonies and ordinances. Those who rely upon such things do serve a

god, but it is their own invention of a god, and not the true God. The true God has this to say: No religion pleases Me whereby the Father is not glorified through His Son Jesus. All who give their faith to this Son of Mine, to them I am God and Father. I accept, justify, and save them. All others abide under My curse because they worship creatures instead of Me.

Without the doctrine of justification there can be only ignorance of God. Those who refuse to be justified by Christ are idolaters. They remain under the Law, sin, death, and the power of the devil. Everything they do is wrong."