

## ***Divine Intervention***

Galatians 4:1-7 - NCBC, May 28, 2017

**MAIN POINT: God moves us from slavery to sonship as His promised heirs.**

- **Until God intervenes, childish attempts at legislating righteousness only produce slavery (4:1-3)**
  - Before faith in Christ, a person is spiritually immature (1-2)
  - Before faith in Christ, a person is spiritually enslaved (3)
- **When God intervenes, He purchases freedom for those He adopts as sons (4:4-6)**
  - God sends His Son to make us sons (4-5)
  - God sends His Spirit because we are sons (6)
- **God's intervention makes former slaves beneficiaries of His promise (3:29, 4:7)**
  - Justified – Declared righteous in Christ
  - Occupied – Indwelt by the Spirit of Christ
  - Adopted – Granted the privileged position of a son

APP: Rejoice in your spiritual inheritance.

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### **Opening Announcements:**

*Memorial Day*

*First-Prayer Gathering*

<<Jesus Messiah>>



Truly Jesus is Lord of all, and we've gathered together on this Memorial Day Weekend to worship Him.

As our nation sets aside time to recognize and remember those who have died in the service of our national freedom – this morning our thankful hearts are turned towards our glorious Christ – who alone died so that we might truly be free from sin and all its lies.



You'll want to have a Bible open to **Galatians chapter 4** this morning as we worship Christ together. If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, please just raise your hand and one of our ushers will gladly give you a Bible. I believe you will find **Galatians 4** bookmarked for you in the Bibles we're handing out this morning.

As we cross the half-way point in our Galatian study, it's perhaps helpful to review what we've learned so far.



Paul's first missionary journey took him to the interior of modern day Turkey, where God's Spirit planted four new churches in the region of Galatia.

**Chapters 13 and 14 in Acts** describe the power of God at work – even amidst great difficulty and persecution among the new Gentile believers at Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

But when Paul and Barnabas returned to their sending church at Antioch of Syria – they were immediately engaged in a debate with certain Jews from Jerusalem who were saying that true Christians must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses.

So Paul and Barnabas both attended the Jerusalem Council which is described in **Acts 15** where the apostles definitively concluded that God's salvation has always been by grace through faith in the Messiah. Gentiles did not need to become Jews in order to be saved – and it was wrong for legalists to require anyone to enslave themselves under any religious law for their salvation.

So having validated the unity of all the apostles in the true Gospel of God – Paul now writes the letter we call **Galatians to the churches of Galatia**, as it says it in **chapter 1 verse 2**.

Paul has heard reports that Jewish legalists are now wreaking legalistic havoc among the new Galatian believers. These legalists are undermining Paul's authority – claiming a greater authority than Paul himself,

and thereby causing some of the believers to depart from the simplicity of God's gospel of grace, and again submit themselves to the yoke of religious legalism.



Paul's letter is brief, and his tone is very emotional. He defends his apostolic authority as a messenger of God's true Gospel in **chapters 1-2**. He warns the believers against the fear of man, and makes sure they understand that the true Gospel is God's good news of salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Only faith in the person and work of Jesus can bring new life.

Then in **chapters 3-4**, Paul argues with more of a doctrinal emphasis. His point in these two chapters is simply that salvation is only by grace through faith. A right understanding of the Mosaic law will actually reject legalism, because only faith in Christ can bring the spiritual blessings that legalism cannot earn.

In all of his argument, Paul is building to the practical climax of **chapters 5-6**, where he emphasizes how living

in the freedom of God's Spirit is the aim of the true Gospel of God. True righteousness always manifests itself in love. And the gospel of Jesus Christ practically creates one new, multi-ethnic family that is joyfully governed by God's Spirit.

So today as we start **chapter 4**,



Paul continues his emotional argument for the blessings of salvation by faith in God's promises. Our salvation, just like the Galatians, is only possible because of Divine Intervention. May our joy in Christ be increased today as our hearts marvel again at God's grace towards sinners like us.

Please stand in honor of God's Holy Word as I read from the **English Standard Translation** starting in **Galatians 3, verse 29**:

*29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. 1I mean that the*

*heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, <sup>2</sup>but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. <sup>3</sup>In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. <sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

**So reads God’s Word. You may be seated.**

**Let’s Pray.**

Since the essence of all sin is self-reliance, then God’s good news of salvation doesn’t just rescue us from selfish rebellion but also from self-centered righteousness.

Let me say that again.

Since the essence of all sin is self-reliance, then God’s salvation doesn’t just rescue us from selfish rebellion but also from self-centered righteousness.

Church – you cannot appreciate your rich inheritance of God’s grace until you realize that God has made a way for you not only to be saved from your wrongdoing, but

also to be saved from all your religious attempts to establish your own righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

A proper understanding of God’s grace affords no possibility for boasting in the flesh.<sup>2</sup> For God intervenes at the cross of Christ, causing the believer to be saved from all their self-reliance and self-will.

You see, in this first part of **Galatians chapter 4** Paul is continuing his argument for the supremacy of all the spiritual blessings of God’s promised salvation. Namely, **verses 1-7** teach us how,



**God moves us from slavery to sonship as His promised heirs.**

In **Galatians 3:6-9** Paul highlighted how believing in the Gospel promises of God means that we are declared righteous – just as father Abraham was.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 10:3

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 6:14, c.f. 1 Corinthians 1:30-31

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 15:6

In **Galatians 3:14** Paul glories in the gift of God's Spirit to all who believe God's Gospel promises.

Then in **verse 26 of chapter 3**, Paul introduces this third blessing of salvation by grace.

*In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*

God has invaded our sinful stupor and moved us from sin's slavery to blessed sonship, as joint-heirs together with Christ of God Himself!

To be adopted by the Living God is the highest privilege of salvation. The adoption of sinners by a holy God is the Mt. Everest of God's grace. All the blessings of God are ultimately realized in this truth – faith in Christ grants you the privileged position as a son of God. You are adopted – so that now God Himself is your Father, and you are indeed His very child!

And yet hearts of pride like yours and mine resist such grace. Adoption seems to place us under too much indebtedness before God. Salvation blessings seem to be too far out of reach. The legalistic heart would rather seek to achieve some righteousness on my own – apart from faith in Christ.

And so instead of glorying in the privileged position of our adoption - we arrogantly choose to live instead as if God is our boss, and we are His employee.

Employees work for their bosses. So legalists trust in their own religious works and rituals to pay off their debts.

We see this illustrated by the prodigal son in **Luke 15**. When he became convicted that he was lost in his sin, his plan was to go to his father and say, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”*<sup>4</sup>

Like all legalists, the prodigal son's self-will arrogantly excluded himself from the privileges of sonship.

Even the older brother manifests this same self-righteous heart when he angrily reacts to his father's grace saying, *“Look, these many years I have slaved for you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.”*

The legalist looks first to his own efforts, rather than to God's grace. He arrogantly seeks to manage his sin, and thereby repay at least some of his debts by his own achieved righteousness.

This is why a legalistic heart will always focus more on what God removes in salvation, rather than what God gives. Legalistic preaching emphasizes what debts have been paid by God's grace more than what blessings have been gained.

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 15:11-32, especially vv. 17-19

So Paul argues strongly against this legalistic mindset in the first **3 verses** of **Galatians 4**. His point is this:



Until God intervenes, childish attempts at legislating righteousness only produce slavery (4:1-3)

To fall back into legalism is to reject the greatest blessing of our salvation – God’s adoption of you as His own son!

Paul is clearly elaborating on what it means to be *Abraham’s offspring* – *heirs according to promise* as he writes in **verses 1-2**,

*I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is an owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.*

In other words, Paul is teaching us that,



Before faith in Christ, a person is spiritually immature (1-2)

Just like a young infant who inherits millions – while he is technically the richest one in the household he has no ability to understand or rightly steward such wealth. The young child does not yet have the capacity to rule himself or the matters of his estate. He’s still immature. So until he reaches the date set by his father – he himself is under guardians and tutors, and the estate is under managers.

So now that you understand the analogy – try to follow Paul’s argument.

Faith in Christ spiritually matures the heart in such a way that *if you are Christ’s* [by faith], *then you are Abraham’s offspring* – *heirs according to promise*. You now have received the spirit of Christ, the mind of Christ, and the life of Christ! All that is Christ’s is now yours by means of your faith union with Him. Your faith in Christ has granted you the highest spiritual blessings of Christ Himself!

So then – after receiving the blessings of God’s promised salvation – why would you go back to living *as if* you were just a child who was still under the temporary guardianship of the Mosaic law?

**Verse 3** explains further,

*In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*

In other words – when we were children – or to follow the analogy – before we received the blessings of our inheritance by faith in Christ – we were enslaved.



Before faith in Christ, a person is spiritually **enslaved** (3)

And what is our slave-master? **Verse 3** says we are enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

This same phrase is used in **verse 9** below, as well as in **Colossians 2:20**. There is some question as to exactly

what the “elementary principles of the world” are referring to. **Verses 5 and 10** seem to imply that unbelievers are held in slavery under the righteous requirements of the law. **Verse 8** takes it one step further implying that unbelievers are enslaved to demons and false gods.

So here’s what I think Paul’s point is here. Before you come to realize the benefits of God’s salvation by faith Christ – the only way you can attempt to be righteous is through your own human effort. And the religion of human achievement is nothing more than the elemental principles of the world. There’s no transformative power in just trying harder, or enforcing consequences for failure.<sup>5</sup> It’s all limited to the horizontal and human realm – were people can become impressed but our true eternal standing before a holy God remains unchanged.

Church - Any attempt that you make at legislating your own (or another’s) righteousness is just childish. You can’t produce true righteousness by legislation, any more than Congress can help our nation actually please God by passing a law. Apart from faith it is impossible to please God,<sup>6</sup> since before faith in Christ a person is spiritually immature and enslaved to the incapable religion of human achievement.

Aren’t you thankful that God did intervene in human history – and make it possible for us to move from the slavery of the religion of human achievement to the freedom of the religion of divine accomplishment?

<sup>5</sup> C.f. Colossians 2:20-23

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 11:6

For,



When God intervenes, He purchases freedom for those He adopts as sons (4:4-6)

You don't have to live as a slave anymore because God has intervened! When God sovereignly determined according to His eternal wisdom that the time was right, He Himself took action. In **verse 4** He sent Jesus for us. In **verse 6** He sent the Spirit of Jesus into our hearts.

First **verses 4-5** describe how,



God sends His Son to make us sons (4-5)

At just the right time in history – to fulfill all the prophesy and promises that God had previously revealed – God sent forth His Son.

Now notice this means Jesus already existed. He was already with the Father before He was ever born into this world.

And He is called the Son of God. That means Jesus is divine. He is God Himself – in the second person of the Trinity. God Himself took the form of a servant – and was born in the likeness of man.<sup>7</sup>

*Born of a woman* – meaning He added humanity to His very nature in a way that qualified Him to be our sin-bearer – yet without taking any sin nature upon Himself. Jesus was now fully God and fully man.

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<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:6-11



And he was *born under the law*. His very birth as a man submitted Him under the righteous requirements of God's law. But since Jesus fully personified righteousness, the law brought no accusation against Him. Rather being born under the law, and fulfilling all of its righteousness requirements – qualified Jesus to substitute Himself in our place – and take the punishment that our own sins rightly deserved.

That's the point of **verse 5** - God sent Jesus to redeem you and I – who were also under the law's demands but unable to meet its righteous standards through our own self-efforts. To redeem means to purchase.

So just let this sink in for a moment. God sent His Son from heaven for this singular purpose – so that His Son might make you His son.

The end of **verse 5** says, *So that we might receive adoption as sons*.

It doesn't say – so that we might become employees of God.

Are you living as an employee or a son?

Believe the wonder of this promise:

Jesus came to purchase your adoption by the very best Father into the most amazing family you could ever dare to dream.

Are you able to fathom the wonder of being adopted and given all the legal and relational privileges and position of an adult son of God?

Here's how the character "Faithful" in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* describes this glorious redemption from the law which enabled his adoption,

"So soon as a man overtook me he was but a word and a blow, for down he knocked me and laid me for dead... [Faithful is describing his encounter with law here...] He struck me another deadly blow on the breast and beat me down backward, so I lay at his foot as dead as before, so when I came to myself again I cried him "Mercy," but he said, "I know now how to show mercy," and with that knocked me down again; he had doubtless made an end of me but that One came by and bid him forbear... I did not know him at first, but as He went by I perceived the holes in His hands and in His side."

O how glorious is our Christ who purchases our freedom from the legal demands of the law so that we might be adopted as sons.

And then in **verse 6** Paul says that,

When God intervenes, He purchases freedom for those He adopts as sons (4:4-6)

- God sends His Son to make us sons (4:4-5)
- God sends His Spirit because we are sons (4:6)

God sends His Spirit because we are sons (6)

It is not enough for God to give us the position and right of sons – He also graces us with the experience or nature of sons.

This blessing of Divine Intervention is far superior to any possible achievement of human religion.

If you believe on Jesus Christ – you are adopted by your Heavenly Father – and because you are adopted – He permanently resides in you – so that He can be your God, and you can be His people.

By the power of the indwelling Spirit, you are now a “chip off the old block.”

This is a gloriously significant difference between God’s adoption of us – and the wonderful examples of humans adopting other humans in our world today. When a parent today adopts a child – that child brings their old nature with them. But when God adopts us and makes

us sons – He sends forth the Spirit of the Son into our hearts – so that by His divine accomplishment we are granted His own nature.

Having been so loved, we too are now able to love. Because Christ is righteous, now we too are righteous. The Spirit of Christ in us affirms our sonship – and guarantees that we are a beneficiary of all the blessings of our inheritance.<sup>8</sup>

And notice the result of being occupied by God’s Spirit at the end of **verse 6** –

*The Spirit of the Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!”*

The primary way that believers actually experience the privilege of sonship is through Spirit-powered prayer.

The text is clear – crying is a permanent and ongoing action of the Spirit – as the Spirit of Christ Himself is teaching and enabling the believer to intimately express one’s dependence and faith upon God.

“Abba, Father” is the very prayer that Jesus Himself cried out in the Garden of Gethsemane in **Mark 14:36**. In fact, every time the Scripture records Jesus praying He always addressed God as His Father<sup>9</sup> – except for the one exception when He was made sin for mankind and

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<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 1:13-14

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 11:25; 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36; Luke 23:32; John 11:41; 12:27; 17:1, 5, 11,21,24, 25

during which His relationship with the Father was temporarily broken.<sup>10</sup>

So Paul's point here is stunning – one of the blessings of faith union with Christ is that you are adopted by God and given the full rights and privileges of an adult son. And because you are a son of God – God has sent the Spirit of Christ Himself into your hearts – so that when you pray God receives and hears your prayers just exactly as if Jesus Himself was praying to Him.

Everything changes for us when God intervenes. **Verse 7** summarizes Paul's point.



God's intervention makes former slaves beneficiaries of His promise (3:29, 4:7)

Classic novels cannot compete with the amazing storyline of God's divine intervention. His grace reaches down into the mass of humanity and elects Abraham out

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 27:46

of a family of idol-worshippers – to create a people for His own glory and praise.

And God's grace is reaching out to you this morning – commanding you to repent of your wrongdoings – and to repent of your self-righteousness – all so that you might be set free from your bondage to a religion of human achievement – and be a true beneficiary of God's religion of Divine accomplishment.

The benefits of believing in Christ are manifold.



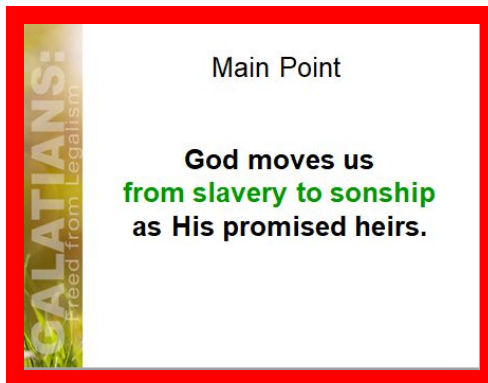
First we are **Justified – Declared righteous in Christ.**

Then we are **Occupied – Indwelt by the Spirit of Christ.**

And the greatest blessing of our salvation is that simply by faith in Christ we are **Adopted – Granted the privileged position of a son**

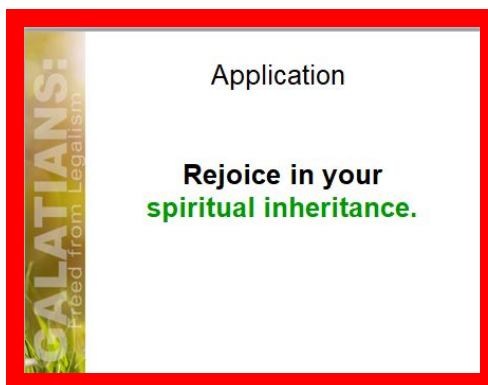
*So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and since a son, then an heir ... and don't miss the last two words which are in an emphatic position in the text,*

...an heir through God.



Our salvation is all about Divine Intervention. *It is God* who moves us from horrific slavery to bountiful sonship as His promised heirs.

So then – rather than going back to the legalism of human religion...believe in Christ and,



Rejoice in your spiritual inheritance.

God has sent His Son and the Spirit of His Son into your heart – rejoice in this freedom that God has secured for you!

Live free as sons in your Father's world. Cast off the debtor's ethic of an employee/boss relationship.

Delight in the presence of Christ – and pray with joy knowing that the Spirit Himself is continually crying out to the Father on your behalf, because you are now part of His family – all because of His grace.

**Let's pray.**



<<Be Thou My Vision>>

Let's pray our Benediction now as we are dismissed,



*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, ...according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! **Romans 16:25-27***

**Recommended Resources on Divine Intervention:**

- John 1:12
- Romans 8:14-18
- Ephesians 1:11-14; 2:13
- Colossians 1:12; 3:24
- Hebrews 1:2; 9:15
- 1 Peter 1:4
  
- <http://www.faithlafayette.org/resources/info/adoption/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/indwelling-of-the-Holy-Spirit.html>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/co-heirs-with-Christ.html>
  
- The Whole Christ, Sinclair Ferguson
- Transforming Grace, Jerry Bridges

### **Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions**

1. Review Galatians 4:1-2. How does the law of God serve as a guardian and manager until God grants saving faith in Christ?
2. Read Romans 8:14-18 and 1 Peter 1:4. What are some of the benefits inherited by faith in Christ?
3. Compare Galatians 4:3 with 4:9. What are some examples of “elementary principles” that tempt you to believe that you are more righteous if you keep/obey them?
4. Read Galatians 4:6. How does God’s gift of the Spirit of Christ change your praying?
5. Read Galatians 4:7. How do you define true freedom? How do you reconcile this truth with the other 40 NT verses that refer to the believer as a slave/bond-servant of Christ?