



SESSION 2

I AM A CHILD OF THE KING

The Point

Jesus makes us full members of His family.

The Passage

Galatians 4:1-7

The Bible Meets Life

Parents generally love their own children to a greater degree than they love other children. Parents may wish the best for others, but they will take care of their own first. God desires the best for us, even when we are outside His family. Through Christ, He made it possible for us to become a part of His family. Those who trust Jesus are no longer on the outside looking in; they are His children.

The Setting

Paul wrote Galatians, probably from Syrian Antioch, after he completed his first missionary journey, including southern Galatia (Acts 13–14). He had preached in key cities. People had believed in Christ and churches had been established. After Paul departed, questions had arisen over whether conversion to Judaism and the Jewish law would improve the new believers' standing with God. The Book of Galatians gives Paul's answer to these questions: by faith in Christ alone we are full members of God's family!

What does the Bible say?

Guardians and trustees

(v. 2)—These words refer to the first-century protectors, overseers, managers to whom a father would have assigned decision-making authority over an underage son.

Abba (v. 6)—An Aramaic word that is similar to “Daddy” in English. It is familiar and affectionate. Jesus addressed His heavenly Father as “Abba” in prayer (Mark 14:36).

Galatians 4:1-7 (CSB)

¹ Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything.

² Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.

³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements of the world.

⁴ When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

⁵ to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

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

Galatians 4:1-3 Commentary

Verse 1: Before Christ, we were each “far away” from God because of our sin (Ephesians 2:12-13). Our sin had built barriers between us and God (Isaiah 59:2). We were in bondage under a sentence of guilt and condemnation. Paul emphasized that apart from Christ, people are outsiders looking in. He compared an heir who is still a child with a slave. The heir of a rich man is in one sense the owner of great wealth. However, in the sense of actual rights and privileges during childhood, he is like a slave.

Verse 2: The heir is not his own man with practical authority over what he is destined to inherit. “Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.” In a wealthy first-century home, a trusted household slave was often the heir’s guardian. The trustee’s role was to oversee financial resources. As prudent managers, they were the decision-makers regarding resources. The heir was not yet prepared to make decisions maturely. So, the trustee, not the heir, had the practical authority.

Verse 3: Paul applied the “heir—slave” analogy by saying that “in the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements of the world.” With the words “we also” Paul grouped himself (a Jew) together with the Galatians (many of whom were Gentiles). “Slavery under the elements of the world” probably includes two closely related realities. First, the “elements” likely involve basic principles or rudiments of religion, special days and seasons (Galatians 4:9-10; Colossians 2:15-20), occasions on which religious rituals would take place. Second, the “elements” probably also involve spiritual forces that exploit religious systems and rituals to enslave persons. They are “things that by nature are not gods” (Galatians 4:8), though they may be “gods” to their devotees. Real spiritual forces can be at work to enslave people in ritualism.

Before turning to Christ, many of the Galatians had probably performed countless pagan rituals to avoid malice from and curry favor with “gods” and spirits. They had believed that good fortune depended on performing the right rituals at the right times. It is unsurprising that Paul described former pagans as having been in slavery to basic religious principles and the spiritual forces exploiting these principles. What is stunning is that Paul implied he and fellow Jews were under the same kind of bondage apart from Christ. The “elements” of the world keep Jews and Gentiles alike vainly running in their own strength rather than resting in Christ’s sufficiency.

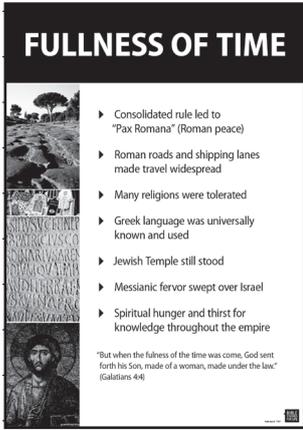
The teachers who entered Galatia after Paul and taught “a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6) were apparently saying circumcision and coming under the Jewish law with its rituals would lead to status inside God’s family. After all, Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. He said He came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). Knowingly or not, the teachers were peddling fear that Christ was not enough.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:
How can we understand these verses in light of our past, present, and future?

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Galatians 4:4-5 (CSB)

4 *When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,* **5** *to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Galatians 4:4-5.

LEADER PACK: Use **Pack Item #8**, “Fullness of Time” poster, to share with your group the cultural and historical elements of the first century that made it an ideal time for Jesus to fulfill His mission in our world.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 89): When God the Father decided it was time, He made it possible for us to take off our slave clothes, leave the nursery, and step into full-blown sonship as a part of His family. It was in that moment that “God sent His Son” (v. 4). He did so for two reasons.

- » **God sent His Son to redeem those under the law.** The people had been under the law up to this point, but the law had not made anyone a son of God. Following rules and regulations might have made people more pious, but it never made them a part of God’s family—and it never could.
- » **God sent His Son to adopt us into His family.** In the original Greek, the word “adoption” literally means “to place as a son.” While the word might be used to describe the Roman custom of bringing a young boy into the new level of sonship, it generally referred to bringing someone outside the family into the family.

DISCUSS: **Question 3** on page 89 of the PSG: **“What are some of the implications of being adopted into God’s family?”**

SAY: “When Paul wrote that believers are adopted into sonship, he was saying that we have been placed into the family of God and the only thing that has made that possible was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.”

TRANSITION: The next verses teach us about one of the greatest benefits of being adopted into God’s family: the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 4:4-5 Commentary

Verse 4: God made provision in Christ for adoption “when the time came to completion.” This means that it was the determined time. It was the right time. At just the right time, God “sent his Son.” Jesus is uniquely God’s Son. Jesus “was appointed to be the powerful Son of God . . . by the resurrection of the dead” (Romans 1:4). Jesus is “the Christ, who is God over all” (9:5). So, Jesus is the Son of God and God the Son. The deity of Christ is important for many, many reasons. One reason is that it means God Himself stepped into the world in Christ to accomplish salvation for humanity. He did not expect the Galatians or us to work our way to Him. He came to us to save us!

Obviously, Paul believed in the deity of Jesus. He also believed in the full humanity of Jesus. God saw fit for His Son to be “born of a woman.” Jesus was born to a human mother. The Son of God took on flesh. He became fully human. He could identify with the men and women whom He would redeem. In addition to being “born of a woman,” God’s Son was born under the law. That is, Jesus was born under the Mosaic law. He shouldered the requirements of the law as no one else could. He was “tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Verse 5: In His unblemished moral perfection, the Son of God was able to “redeem those under the law.” To redeem is to buy out of slavery and for freedom. Apart from Christ, all people are enslaved to sin, guilt, and condemnation. To be clear, the law is not bad. It is not contrary to God’s purposes (3:21). It is also not the way to be justified before God and access the privileges of heirs. Faith in Christ as our Redeemer is the way. “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Ephesians 1:7).

God accomplished our redemption in His Son “so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Adoption is a beautiful image for salvation. Many people are deeply moved that God set out intentionally to secure us as His adoptive children in Christ. Whether other people value and choose us or not, God values us and has chosen us in Christ. An employer, team leader, or family member may overlook or reject us. God has chosen and accepted us. We can live in the humble confidence that comes from knowing God as our Father. There is no distinction among those who “receive adoption.” There is, however, a great distinction between those who have received adoption and those who have not. Christ has done what is necessary for our adoption. We must receive what He has provided.

Galatians 4:6-7 Commentary

Verses 6-7: By adoption, we have been included in God's family. We have the status of sons. Through the Holy Spirit, we also have the wonderful assurance of experiencing closely a personal relationship with God.

"Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." The God who sent His Son to redeem us has sent the Spirit to all of us who are redeemed. Just as all who have received adoption are sons, so all who are sons have received the Spirit in their hearts. "God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5).

Christianity is about more than facts, evidence, logic, and doctrine. Christianity is not about less than these things. It is about more than these things. It is about a personal relationship with the Spirit of God! Many people wonder whether or not they are having the full experience of the Holy Spirit that God intends for His people. On the one hand, we can be sure that if we truly belong to Christ, we do have the Holy Spirit. If we don't have the Spirit, we don't belong to Christ at all (8:9). On the other hand, there may be greater fullness for us to experience. We are to "be filled by the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). We are to pray for the full measure of the Holy Spirit in daily experience. We are to yield more fully to the Spirit. We are to walk by the Spirit and increasingly bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16,22-25). This is the privilege of the child of God.

The Spirit applies the benefits of our relationship with God by prompting us from within our hearts to cry out "Abba, Father!" to Him. In a close and healthy father-child relationship there is ease and confidence in communication. A loved child can speak freely with his or her father, expressing joys and fears and longings.

The word *Abba* is a warm and familiar Aramaic word for "Father." During Jesus' earthly ministry, He used "Abba" to address His Father when He was pleading with Him in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). So, when Jesus was feeling the heavy burden of the cross bearing down upon Him and was clinging to His father, the word "Abba" rose from His heart.

In Christ's redemptive work and your experience of the Holy Spirit, you can have assurance that "you are no longer a slave but a son." The Galatians did not need circumcision and law observance to enter fully into God's family. They were in. You and I are in, if we're in Christ. Therefore, we trust in Christ alone. We live by God's Spirit. We rest in our standing with God. Each one of us is a full heir in Christ.

