Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Sons of God
Scripture: Galatians 4:1-11
Code: 1662

Turn in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 4 for our study tonight. I suppose, to give a simple title to these 11 verses that make up our study, we could call it 'Sons of God.' That's really what it's talking about, very simply. The first 11 verses of chapter 4 deal with the believer as a son of God. We'll be looking at verses 1-11 and seeing just exactly what is involved in sonship. First of all, an introduction to get us into the thought.

All religions teach that men are saved from judgment in this life and in the life after by their own good works. This is the design of religion, and all religions are the same. They may have varying good works, but all of them teach that man saves himself in this life and the next life by his own good deeds. That is not the hope of Christianity. We are very much the opposite.

We have been learning that in Galatians. If we've learned nothing else, we have surely learned that. No man is ever justified by his works, no man is ever made right before God by what he does, but it is only by faith in what Christ has already done that justification, or righteousness, or being made right with God takes place.

In the book of Galatians, Paul uses the word justified. That is a legal term that means that a certain person is declared not guilty, or just, as opposed to guilty, and to be condemned. Paul used it several times. In Galatians 2:16, Paul used the word justified. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ," he uses the word 'justified' again in the middle, and at the end of the verse, he says, "For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified or made right."

In 3:6, he says, "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for justification," or for righteousness. In 3:11, we find the same thing. "The just shall live by faith." The first of the verse says, "No man is justified by the law in the sight of God." So Paul uses the word justified over and over again, and not just in the book of Galatians. It's a very common word in the book of Romans as well.

The Hebrew word tsadaqand the Greek word dikaiosboth mean the very same thing: to declare righteous or to hold someone guiltless. Justification, then, is a judicial act of God whereby He declares a man is just, or sinless, or guiltless. He declares that on the basis of what Jesus has done. Because of what Christ has done, and because of what is imputed to us when we believe in Christ, we take on His righteousness and God looks at us as just, holy, blameless, without spot. In a simple

statement, because of what Jesus has accomplished in paying the penalty for sin, when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God grants us acquittal from all of our sins. He declares us righteous.

I suppose there are some people who would say, "This is a little bit new for the God of the Old Testament." But it isn't, in fact. There is a most interesting portion in Zechariah 3, and I thought I might do well to just go back into the Old Testament for a minute to see that God was a justifying God in the Old Testament as well. He was one who declared men righteous by grace, even then. Notice Zechariah 3:1 (if you can't find it, it's the next-to-last book in the the Old Testament). Now, this is not Joshua the leader of Israel, but a different Joshua. It says, "He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him." So there are Joshua and Satan, standing together before the Lord in this particular vision. "And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Now Joshua, apparently, was being slandered by Satan, or maligned by Satan, or rendered guilty by Satan. God says, "You're rebuked. This is a brand plucked out of the fire." In other words, God has taken this life for Himself. Notice verse 3, and we'll get a good illustration of how God justified.

"Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel." The picture is of this high priest with filthy clothes, symbolizing his sin. "And he answered and spoke unto those that stood before him, saying, 'Take away the filthy garments from him.' And unto him he said, 'Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.' And I said, 'Let them set a clean turban upon his head.' So they set a clean turban upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by."

So here, in a little vignette out of the Old Testament, in a vision given to Zechariah, you see God symbolically clothing a man with righteousness. So that is not anything new to the character of God. Now you can go back to Galatians 4. God has always been in the business of clothing people in righteousness. A righteousness graciously imputed to them on the basis of their faith in Him, whereby He takes off the old, dirty garments of sin and puts on us the very garments of Christ Himself, His own righteousness. Was Joshua the high priest sinless? No, he had dirty garments. But God judicially declared him righteous, and obviously on the basis of faith.

This is the theme of Galatians, that every man stands before God with filthy garments. He may try his own detergent, but it won't work. He cannot clean up his own filthy garments; when he gets all done, the best he has done, even his righteousness, comes out filthy rags. All he's done is turn his dirty garments into filthy rags, whatever self-effort, legalistic detergent he may apply. The only thing that can happen is that God takes away the old garment and re-clothe him with new, and that new is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's the message of the book of Galatians.

Paul has used many different illustrations and angles to teach us this same truth, that salvation is not by works but by faith. It is not what you earn, it is what God gives you, graciously and freely, simply when you put your faith in Jesus Christ. Now, as he comes into chapter 4, he is going to give us the same information all over again. You say, "Why does he keep belaboring the point of salvation by grace?" It's because, beloved, this is the cardinal point of Christianity, is it not? If you foul up on the doctrine of salvation, it's all over with. It doesn't matter what else you do if you miss it at that point.

Paul, then, in chapter 4, covers basically the same ground. The contrast between good works and faith, that good works cannot save; only faith can save. But he uses a different analogy, a different idea, to present this to us. I want you to notice that what he does here is contrast a servant with a son. The idea of servitude fits into the category of law, and the idea of sonship fits into the category of grace. Really, he's offering people a choice. "Do you want to be a slave to the law? That's fine. Why would you want to be one, however, when you could be a son of God? You'd not be treated like a slave, but like a son." That's his contrast.

I couldn't help but remember Luke 15 when I was thinking of this, where the Prodigal Son came home. He knew what he deserved, didn't he? Remember what he said to his father, "I've sinned against heaven and against you. Make me as one of your hired servants," not a son. He said, "I deserve to be a servant." What did the father make him? A son. You don't deserve to be a son either, but that's what God does anyway. He makes you a son. We are not slaves to work or earn our justification. If we do enough little things and get enough spiritual brownie points, do we earn some kind of righteousness? No. We are sons. We are born into the family. It is not a question of behavior, it's a question of birth. Do you see? The birth comes about by faith, not by something that we earn.

Paul has been carefully showing that salvation is by faith without works. He's tried to prove his point two ways in chapter 3. In verses 1-5, he tried to prove his point by the experience of the Galatians. From 3:6-4:7, he tries to prove his point by Scripture, Old Testament Scripture, and believe me, he does it convincingly. Remember that we said that the law couldn't save but the law did have a purpose. In 3:19, it tells us the law was added because of sin. In verse 24 it says it was to drive us to Christ. The law was to show us our sin and bring us to Christ. It couldn't save us, it could only reveal sin. If you want a simple statement, the law can only reveal sin, it cannot cure sin.

However, there was a group of people known as Judaizers, who had somehow landed in Galatia on their little trek to try and disrupt the church, their satanic efforts. They had told all the Christians in Galatia, along with everyone else, that the only way to be redeemed, the only way to be righteous, the only way to be received by God, was by good works. If you did enough good works, God would approve of you. They sold the whole Galatian populous, at least those involved in any way with the church, a bill of goods that salvation was by works. So Paul writes Galatians to counteract that. He shows that it's only by faith. In chapter 3, he shows it by their experience and he shows it by the Old

Testament. He quotes Scripture after Scripture after Scripture, clear through 4:7, supporting his point.

You remember how we saw that God made the promise to Abraham, then when God gave the law to Moses, it didn't annul the promise, it didn't change the promise of faith. The promise was included in Christ, and the only way a man will ever be justified is to be in Christ, for therein resolves the promise.

Now, as he comes to chapter 4, he goes over the same ground. Really, we'll see three things here in general, but we'll make a little more specific outline. In verses 1-3, he describes man under law. In verses 4-7, he describes man in Christ. In verses 8-11, he says, "So if you're in Christ, why don't you act like it?" As I read over this, again I'm faced with the problem of preaching on the same information that I preached on last week, which was the same that I preached on the week before, which is the same as I've preached on every time we've picked up our Bibles and turned to Galatians. So you begin to wonder, "Why do you keep saying this Paul? We got it!" In the first place, I remember that Paul didn't talk as long as I do, and I've probably written a 30-chapter epistle where he managed it in five or six.

On the other hand, I'm also aware that the Apostle Paul knew how important and absolutely basic this doctrine was. I'm also aware of the fact that Paul knows people learn by repetition. You always repeat, but with a different analogy, so that they listen in a different way. So that's what we have here. As we look at these verses, we see the concept of sons dominates.

As we look at Paul's analogy, I want you to see five categories of sonship. The preparation for sonship, the realization of sonship, the confirmation of sonship, the consummation of sonship, and the obligation of sonship.

First of all, let's look at the preparation for sonship. Now Paul uses an analogy here. I don't need to use a lot of illustrations with this passage because Paul uses an illustration for his point. We'll just use his. He wants to use human physical grown as his illustration. What he does is he compares the rights of an infant son with a mature son. Get this. He's still dealing with the before and after of the Christian. I'm picking up the terms in verses 26 and 29, where you have sons and heirs used there. He takes this basic thought of a son and contrasts an infant son with a mature son. His analogy is that an infant son is like a person under the law, and the mature son is like a person under grace who has been saved by faith.

In the ancient world, the process of growing up was much more definite than it is today. In the ancient world, people had a very specific point in time when a child ceased to be an infant and became a mature son. For example, in the Jewish world, when a boy had passed his 12thbirthday (and that's still true), on the very first Sabbath after his 12thbirthday, the father would take the son to the synagogue. There he became bar mitzvah, which means 'a son of the law.'

You see, in his childhood, the law had been administrated through the father. The father was responsible for the son. But now, the son has become bar mitzvah, he has become responsible himself for obedience to the law of God, a son of the law. In fact, at a bar mitzvah, the father would utter this benediction: blessed be Thou, O God, who has taken from me the responsibility of this boy. The boy prayed this prayer: O my God, and God of my fathers, on this solemn and sacred day which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my eyes unto Thee and declare with sincerity and truth that, henceforth, I will keep Thy commandments and undertake to bear the responsibility of my actions toward Thee. In other words, he became mature, he became responsible. A clear dividing line the first Sabbath after his 12th birthday.

In Greece, they also did this. The boy was under the father's care for the early years of his life. By the time he reached 18 years old, he became what was called epobas, which would translate as 'cadet.' He was made a sort of cadet of the state, and for two years, was under the direction of the government. The Athenians, for example, were separated into cities and divided into various clans within the cities. Before a lad was epobas, he was received into a clan. At that point, just before he became a cadet, he was recognized as a mature young man. They had a very interesting festival. The festival was called apaturia. What they did was take the boy, when he reached the age of becoming a cadet, and took the apaturiaand cut off all his long hair and offered it to the gods. I know there are a lot of mothers who would love to hold an apaturiaat their house today! This is what they did. Once again, there was a very clear, definite line, a very clear ceremony when the boy became a mature son.

Under Roman law, it was similar to Jewish or Greek law. Although the year was not fixed, somewhere between 14 and 17, the child would turn in his robe (toga pratexta, which is preparation) for the toga of the adult. They had what they called a liberalia; he was liberated. He became a mature son, and they hauled him down to the forum and introduced him to public life. The family made a big deal out of it. In fact, you know what the boy would do? A girl would take all of her dolls and a boy would take all of his toys, and at the liberaliaservice, they would offer those childish things as a sacrifice to Apollo. That's where Paul gets his analogy, "When I became a man, I put away childish things." That was Roman custom. All of his toys were burned.

With that in the background, let's pick up with verse 1. We'll see how Paul takes this definite change between an infant child and a mature son as the analogy for his works and grace concept. This is a human illustration. "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." You understand that? A little kid may be the heir of all you own, he may be the heir to a great estate. Imagine a child, just so we can get it clear, who is the heir to a massive estate. The estate has tremendous wealth, and the position has tremendous power, and one day it will be his. In fact, the promise is already his, so it is already his by promise. But in experience, he's just a child, a little infant. You wouldn't turn it over to him. He may be the legal heir, he may be the

master and owner of everything, maybe his father has even died. It may be his by right, but during his childhood, Paul says, "He is no better than a servant." Because he has to take orders, he can't give them as long as he's a child. He is what we would call 'heir du jour,' not 'heir de facto.' He is heir by right, but not heir in fact.

Verse 2 goes on. "He is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father." The words tutors and governors could, perhaps, be better translated as 'guardians and stewards.' The family would assign certain slaves, certain servants, to take care of the children. Sort of like the paidagogos, remember, who took him to school and back, and was the disciplinarian with the rod who whipped him into shape. These two weren't so much disciplinarians as they were sort of like governesses, except perhaps they were male rather than female. As long as he's a child, he's no different than a slave. He takes orders from governors and tutors just like any slave does. In fact, he took orders from slaves, because the governors and tutors would be of the slave category.

Until, and I like this. It's important to point it out. "The time appointed of the father." Each father had the right to fix the day when the child became a mature son. When that day came, he ceased to be under the power of the tutors and governors, and was mature and inherited what was his. Now, notice how Paul takes that analogy and turns it right around into the spiritual dimension in verse 3.

"Even so we, when we were children [spiritually], were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time was come," in other words, when the father had set the fixed time, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." In other words, we were servants under the law, in bondage under the elements of the world, until the Father's fixed time when we were freed and became mature sons.

There is a historical perspective in this verse. Paul is saying that before Christ came into the world, Jews were under the bondage of the written law. Gentiles also were under the bondage of the law of conscience. So all men were like children. There was a potential inheritance, a coming salvation, an available promise, but they were not yet mature sons to inherit it. They were still under the bondage of the law. To bring it into a general statement, every man today that is living without Jesus Christ, is living as subject to God's law, he is nothing but a slave to that law. The only thing that will make him a mature son is when he comes, in faith, to Christ. Just as a child is subject to rules and regulations, so, before the light of the Gospel dawned and we became mature sons, we were also in bondage. The 'we' there, I think, includes Jew and Gentile. For Paul is using it of himself and of all those in Galatia, and the church there was made up of both.

So all men are in bondage. For the Jew, it was bondage to the written law. I mean, they really got into bondage, bondage under the elements of the world. You know, God gave them a law, and it was to reveal sin and drive them to the Savior. Instead, they thought that the law was going to save them,

so they added more laws. They wanted to get more sacred and more religious and more pious and more sanctimonious and more godly, so they thought the way to do that was to do more things, keep more laws, make more rules. So they just tightened the noose around their necks and became all the greater slaves. The Gentile did the same things. God gave him laws in his conscience, and the laws were to expose his sin and drive him to a need for a Savior that he might fall on his face before God. But you know what the Gentile did? The Gentile also thought he could redeem himself, so he invented religion, didn't he? All the invention of all the pagan systems, they are all efforts to achieve righteousness or justification through works. So everybody was under the tyranny of legalism.

The law was given by God for a good purpose, but men twisted it and became slaves to it. They were in bondage to it. People today are in the same boat just like the Jews and Gentiles of Paul's day. Before Christ, they were living under the tyranny of the law. Every religion, whether it's theistic, pantheistic, or atheistic, is based on works and self-righteousness, self-effort, self-sufficiency. All it's saying here is that all of us were in bondage to the elements of the world, we were children, immature.

Notice the little phrase, "The elements of the world." The definition of this phrase has had Bible teachers doing cartwheels for centuries. I'm not going to offer myself as the one to give the ultimate answer, but what does it mean that they were in bondage under the elements of the world? Some say it means demon spirits, the word 'elements.' We know what world means, that's the system of the age. Some say it refers to stars, under the stars, and they would take the idea that this is some sort of a subjection to astrology. Some say that it refers to the ABCs of human religion, and I think that's getting close to the truth.

Colossians 2:8 supplies a comparative for us. It says, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy, vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world." There, you have the same idea. The elements of the world, the rudiments of the world. What is that? Without going into a long explanation, let me just say this. I feel we are safest with all factors considered, so let it refer to the elementary teachings of human religion. The word is stoicheionand it refers to first things, it refers to elementary things. It refers to basic things. The elementary teaching of rules and regulations, by means of which, before Christ came, both Jew and Gentile, each in his own way, attempted by his own efforts and in accordance with his own flesh, to achieve salvation. Luther called rules and flesh the two beggars in verse 9, the beggarly elements. That's the same word. The beggarly elements, the flesh and the law. Men are in bondage until Christ comes.

So here you see that man is like an infant, he has a potential of inheritance. In fact, the promise was granted to Abraham, the promise was granted to all those who would accept Jesus Christ or would accept God's perfect sacrifice when it came. The promise was granted to be in Christ; it was potentially available. But as long as men lived before Christ, before He came, they were in a kind of infancy, unable to receive the promise. When Christ arrived, they became in Christ and everything

was theirs in Christ. That's what he's saying. So there you have the preparation for sonship.

Secondly, let's look at the realization of sonship. Verses 4-5. Here we move from getting ready for it to its happening. But, just as a father set the time for his infant to become a mature son, so God did the same. "When the fullness of the time was come," God had set the clock, "God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons." Again, another reason that I think that the term 'elements of the world' has to do with principles of the law is because in verse 3, he says, "We're in bondage under the elements of the world," and in verse 5, he says, "To them that were under the law." So it seems to me to be somewhat synonymous.

Nevertheless, what he's saying here is that at the right time, Christ came. You know what happened when Christ came? All those people who had been living under the bondage of the legal system were freed and received their inheritance. You know, let's be frank about it. The Jews in the Old Testament really never did receive the fulfillment of the promise, they died not seeing the promise, didn't they? Isn't that what Hebrews says? Abraham died without ever seeing the fulfillment of the promise. But of course, he'll be exalted in eternity and receive all the promise fully. They still died without ever seeing the fulfillment of the promise. It's theirs by promise, they're heir du jour, not heir de facto. But when Christ did come, man was freed, and those who were infants, no better than servants, became sons the end of verse 5 says.

These are two very important verses, and we should look at them very closely because they're definitive in terms of Christian theology. Christ's coming provided the basis of freedom for men, it took them out from under the law and freed them. God set a fixed time and God is always on time. I like that phrase 'in the fullness of time.' God never does anything off-schedule; He never hurries because He doesn't have to. He's always on schedule. The time was right.

You know, you can do an interesting study of the phrase, "The fullness of time was come." Basically, it just means God's sovereign time. What is it primarily saying? When the law had accomplished what God wanted it to accomplish. But more than that, the time was really right. It was right religiously. Do you realize that everything was right in Israel for the coming of the Messiah? Israel, throughout all of its history, had been involved in idolatry, hadn't they? But you know, once they came back from the Babylonian captivity, they never were idolatrous again. Idolatry was cleaned out, and Israel had turned from idols. In addition to that, it was after the Babylonian captivity that Ezra had put together the Old Testament, all the scrolls, so they had the Word of the Old Testament. It was after the Babylonian captivity that synagogues came into vogue, so there were places where Jews were gathered in all the cities around all of that part of the world. It was a perfect setting for the Gospel. The people only worshipped the true God; the people had subscribed themselves to these local assemblies, and Paul took tremendous advantage of those. The canon of the text of the Old Testament had been completed and was in their hands, so there was something from which to jump

in terms of teaching the truth of God. So religiously, things were right and God knew it.

It was right culturally as well. Alexander had made it a Greek world and everywhere Greek was spoken, so there was a common language. The Gospel was therefore easily accessible in a brief period of time without struggling with language barriers. Alexander the Great set that all up, under the control of God.

It was right politically, because Rome had taken over the world and instituted what was called the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace. There was peace all over the world so that there was the possibility of free movement with the Gospel, and in addition to that, the Romans had built wonderful roads for all the missionaries to travel on. It was God's time. Time for the slaves under the law to be made sons. The only one who could free them was Christ, and it was time for Him to come.

I want you to notice something. Paul can't talk just about God sending His son, he's got to go further than that. We have some great phrases here in verses 4-5. First, what is this?

"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son." Jesus Christ is the son of God, and I don't want to spend too much time, because we've covered it before, but I want you to see what that means. There are some people who are very confused, they think God is God and Jesus is a created son. Jesus is God. The term 'son' has nothing to do with His essence, it has nothing to do with His nature as God, it has only to do with His role of submission in incarnation. Do you understand that? He is a son in incarnation, He is not an eternal son. Jesus is not eternally subject to the Father; He was subject to the Father when He came to earth and submitted Himself. You see, in Philippians 2 it says, "He thought it not something to hold onto to be equal with God, but He gave that up and took a place of submission in incarnation," for the purpose He Himself (God) had designed.

Look at Hebrews 1:4. It says, "Being made so much better than the angels, as he had by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they [Christ is better than angels], for unto which of the angels said God at any time, 'Thou art my son,'" no, God never said that to an angel. God called a lot of the angels 'sons,' plural, but He never said to one angel, "You're my son." Never. And then, "This day have I begotten thee." And again, "I *will be*to him a father, and he *shall be*to me a son." What tense are both those verbs? Future. Christ was not always the son. He became the son in terms of submission in incarnation. This day have I made you a son, not always, but in time. The phrase 'this day in time.' God entered the human stream in the form of a son.

I think this could be illustrated again in John 1:1, "And the Word was with God and the Word was God." Christ is God. But then it says in verse 14, "The Word was made flesh." Then in verse 18 it says, "The only begotten son." You see, He was equal with God; when He was made flesh, He became a son, in terms of His submission. In Luke 1:32, "He shall be great and shall be called the son of the Highest." Verse 35, "Shall be called the son of God." This was to be a new name.

Notice also, going back to Galatians 4, he says, "God sent forth his son." Here we get into the tremendous character of incarnation. He sent forth His son, but God didn't send Christ as pure God with nothing else. Watch, He was made of a woman. He was not only 100% God who took on the form of a son in submission, but He was 100% man, made of a woman. I don't think the emphasis of that is the virgin birth. I don't think the emphasis is on the woman, that He was made of a woman as opposed to being made of a man and woman, like everyone else, although that is true. He was virgin born, and it may be implied in the text. But what the statement of the text is that He was fully human. You see, in order for Jesus to save us, He had to be God and He had to be man. You say, "Why?"

First of all, He had to be God in order to give His sacrifice infinite value. In order to have the power to deliver us out of the realm of darkness, in order to have the power to smash Satan, in order to have the power to dominate death and bring us to God's Kingdom, He had to be God. He also had to be man. You see, He had to be man because it was man who sinned and it was man who had to pay. It was man who had to render his life to God as a sacrifice. It was man who had to satisfy the penalty, so He had to be man. I'll put it this way. He had to be God to have the power of salvation, but He had to be man to have the privilege of substitution.

Notice also, it says in verse 4 that He was made under the law. He was made under the law. What does that mean? It means He was responsible to God's law like every other man; He was responsible to the revelation of God. He was a Jew, so He was responsible to the written revelation. You know something, He kept it, didn't He? He kept it absolutely perfectly. He never violated the law at all. He satisfied the law's demand in perfection. Why does Paul say this? He wants to show you that Christ is the perfect redeemer. He had to be God, He had to be man, and He had to be perfect (verse 5) in order to redeem those that were under the law. He had to be all those things. So the deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, and the perfect righteousness of Christ qualified Him to redeem us. If He had not been righteous, it wouldn't have done any good for His righteousness to be imputed to us, would it? He wouldn't have had any, and we wouldn't have gotten any. He had to be God, He had to be man, He had to be righteous. Everything He had to be, Paul says He was. It's a great verse.

Consequently, He was able to redeem them that were under the law. The word for redeem is so beautiful; it's the picture of a man going into a slave market, bargaining with the guy, buying the slave, taking him out of the market, and setting him free. That's redeeming. The infant sons under the law were no better off than slave market slaves until Christ came, bought their freedom, and announced they were sons, not slaves.

Look at the end of verse 5. "He set us free from the law that we might receive the status of sons." I like the word 'status' best of all for that term. The status of sons. That's the idea. We have the picture, historically, of many Jews who were sons latently, in infancy. But they received full status

when Christ came, for everything was in Christ. No longer in bondage to the law, no longer in bondage to the flesh, the Jew and Gentile living under that subjection were freed when Christ arrived in this world. They were freed to receive their inheritance in Christ. So are men today, living under the bondage of sin, freed only when Christ comes into their life. There we have the realization, as well as the preparation, of sonship.

Thirdly, notice this: the confirmation of sonship. I suppose all of us have problems with faith. We say we believe God, and God says, "You're free from the law. You're a son, you have the status of a son, which means all that I have is yours. You're blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. It's all yours." We say, "Yeah, yeah," we're a little hazy. Maybe we're a little insecure about our sonship. So God confirms it for us, look at verse 6. "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts crying, 'Abba, Father.'" Beautiful verse.

Now watch. The spirit of His Son is who? The Holy Spirit. God, because you are sons, gives you the Spirit. What is the prerequisite to having the Holy Spirit? Sonship, that's all. "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts." Why? Beloved, that's the subjective experience that goes with the objective truth of salvation. You're saved when you believe in Christ, right? That's objective fact. The subjective experience that goes with it is that the Spirit enters into you and testifies to you that it is true. Paul put it this way, "The Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are sons of God." How? By giving us that cry 'Abba, father.' That's a term of endearment, it's a tender term. Like saying 'papa' or 'daddy.' In other words, the very fact that you feel intimate with God, that you can cry out to God with a sense of intimacy as a father who loves you, is proof positive that you're a son.

You know, the world stands at arm's length from God. They don't approach God like that. The fact that you do is the subjective experience that confirms your sonship. In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul said that the Father has given unto us the seal of the Spirit. The word 'seal' has to do with authentication, with security; we're sealed and secure. It also has to do with a guarantee. In the next verse, he says, "He is the security, or earnest, or engagement ring, or down payment, or guarantee." The Spirit is the guarantee of our sonship. We cry, "Abba, father."

Notice, God sent the Son that we might have the status of sonship. That's verse 5. God sent the Son that we might receive the status of sonship. Verse 6. God sent the Spirit that we might know the experience of sonship. Do you see? It's complete. The confirmation of sonship is the indwelling Spirit. Beloved, if we didn't have the Spirit, we would have absolutely no guarantee that we were the sons of God, subjectively. Here we have that most beautiful statement, "God sent the Spirit into your hearts." Just think about the fact that the Spirit lives in you.

Do you see the difference between this and the law? A person under the law, a Jew in the Old Testament, the only thing he had was what? An external authority, and he had no internal power.

You see? All he had was external rules that couldn't change his heart, they couldn't change him inside. The demands were to do this, but he couldn't do it.

I used to think about that sometimes when I was in college, when I used to run track. I ran the 100-yard dash and I knew what the world record was. I knew how to move my legs to get from the start to the tape. But no matter what I did, I knew what the objective was - to run the fastest time, try to break the school record (I was oblivious to the world record) - mostly, just to not finish last. You know, MacArthur also ran. I knew what the objective was. The problem was, I couldn't do it. I had no questions about what was expected, I just couldn't believe it.

I suppose I could have imagined living in apostolic times and if God had had some wonderful purpose in making me run fast, or if I had lived in Old Testament times and God had let me run like Elijah ran, or maybe be strong like Samson, I could have known those things. But I see in my own inabilities a graphic illustration of what it would be to live under the law, with all the injunctions to do things that you had no capacity to accomplish. In that frustration, men were supposed to be driven to a savior.

You know the difference between that and when you became a son? All of a sudden, all the externals ceased to exist and everything became internal. The Spirit penetrates the heart and transforms it. So conformity to God's standards is not a fleshly effort with any inward power, but it is an inward power with no fleshly effort. That's the difference. The life which I live, I live not in the flesh, but by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. It's Him, Christ lives in me. No longer is it a fleshly effort without inward power, but it's an inward power with no necessity for fleshly effort. That's because I have the Spirit in me.

Listen, friends, I'd rather be a son than a servant, wouldn't you? I'd rather have the liberty and power of sonship than the bondage and slavery and impotence of a servant. Hang onto that thought, because Paul's really going to wail away with that as a background in a minute.

Fourthly, we've seen the preparation, realization, confirmation of sonship; let's look at the consummation. When it's all said and done, what does sonship mean? Verse 7. "Wherefore thou art no more a slave but a son. And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Notice, it's always through Christ, because He is the one who receives everything. We only receive it as we're in Christ. It was the greatest fantastic consummation - when Christ came, the slaves were freed, not just to roam, but free to become sons! They'd had the status of slaves until Christ came and gave them the status of sons. "You're no more a servant but a son." What does that mean? It means you're an heir of God. In fact, Romans 8 says, "You are joint heirs with Christ."

I'm telling you, folks, if we could ever get a grip on that, I don't think we could stand on our feet; we'd be up in the air. Do you realize that everything God has given to Christ, He's given to you? Staggering! Men were locked up, historically, in bondage to the law. They were enslaved to self-

righteousness, enslaved to fleshly efforts, to secure their salvation. But God moved into the world at the right time and by what He did with the Son of God, He provided freedom. By what He's done with the Spirit of God, He's provided power to receive and respond to all the inheritance that is ours in Christ. That's the consummation of sonship. I'm telling you, I can get so excited about being an heir, a joint heir with Jesus Christ.

That leads to the last point, in verses 8-11. This is what I call the obligation of sonship. Believe me, all this blessing does carry some responsibility. Paul drives home the point with great potency. "Nevertheless then, when you knew not God, you did service unto them, which by nature, are no gods." Here comes the thunder. "But now, after you have known God," or rather, are known by God, "How turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements into which you desire again to be in bondage?"

You see what the Galatians have done? They've accepted salvation by grace, right? The Judaizers came by and said, "You've got to do works; you've got to do works; you've got to do works to get saved." So the Galatians said, "Fine, we'll all do works." Paul says, "What have you done? You used to do that when you didn't know God (verse 8). You worshipped those that weren't even gods! Then, you came to know the true God (verse 9). You were known by the true God. What are you doing turning backwards? Why are you going back to the weak and beggarly elements?" What are they? The flesh and the law. "Do you want to be in bondage again?

That's a staggering thing to realize. These people had come all the way to freedom in Christ, all the way to sonship, and they were going to trade it in for slavery. Notice some interesting things in verse 8. "When you knew not God, you did service unto them, which by nature, are no gods." That's the picture of the pagan. He doesn't know the true God, so he worships any other god. There aren't any others, so they're 'no gods'.

When I was over in Honolulu, we went into a Buddhist temple. That is an interesting experience, if you've never done it. They have this huge Buddhist temple with all kinds of people. They had one Buddhist priestess, I think it was a lady, but it was hard to tell. Her head was totally shaved and she had little burn marks on her head from where she had burned herself, little dots all around. Here was the big Buddha up there, and to the side were these ghastly looking idols and gods. They had the long, Manchurian mustache and the whole works. They were fearful, with swords coming out of their faces. There were adults, and even one little girl, bowing down and going through all this stuff; there was incense burning everywhere.

I walked way up to the front where Buddha was and I went behind the sacred area, and there was a lady on the ground that was bouncing little rocks. She would bounce them and look at the way they pointed, then she would bounce them again. It kept going through my mind, "Dear lady, there's nobody home. There is nobody there! Some guy made a great big gold, potbellied thing and you're

down there doing that. But there's nobody there." I'll tell you something, though, Satan moves in. My heart just broke as I watched those people. It grieved me. I went away thinking, "These poor people." Then my thought was, "These rebellious people, who have rejected the true knowledge of God and substituted idolatry." They desperately need to know the Lord Jesus Christ because they're in bondage to a system by which they're trying to earn their own salvation.

Well, here these Galatians have been set free, they've been made sons, and they were going to go back and turn their sonship into slavery. Paul says in verse 9, "But now, after you have known God, how could you do this? It seems impossible." The phrase 'known God,' there's deep meaning in that. The word 'know' implies an intimate love relationship. I like what he says next, Calvinism shows through, "Or rather, are known by God." What he's really saying is, "I recognize God is sovereign in salvation; you didn't just walk up and get acquainted. He came after you."

"How turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, into which you desire again to be in bondage?" It's reversed progress. "You can't go backwards, back to powerlessness, back to poverty, when you're rich." Look at Colossians 2:16 and let me just show you a passage that compares to this before we wrap up.

Colossians 2:16. We read this verse this morning, now let's read a little further. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an feast day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." All that stuff is gone. Here they were going back to it in Galatia. "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." In other words, don't let anyone get you off the track, off the focus of Christ, into worshipping other things.

"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the elements of the world," in other words, if that's a dead issue, all the old ABCs of human religion, "Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to those things?" Apparently, the Colossians had gotten into this too. "(Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh."

Paul says, "These things are passing. They are fleshly things. "Your religion," he says to the Colossians, "Has deteriorated into external formalism." That's exactly what he says back in Galatians 4:10. "You observe days and months and times and years, you're back on the old calendar again, under the law. You've turned in your joyous fellowship for a dreary routine." You know, the Jews had all kinds of days and months and times and new moons and festivals and Sabbaths and so forth. Paul is disgusted. He wants to get back to the simplicity that is in Christ, and his heart well-nigh

breaks as he speaks in verse 11.

"I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." What he's saying is this, "Maybe you're not even saved. Maybe all my work went for nothing. At least I can't imagine someone turning in sonship for slavery. I can't imagine it."

You know, many people are in bondage to religion, aren't' they? I was reading today the testimony of John Wesley. Let me read it to you. In his post-graduate Oxford days, he was the son of a clergyman and already a clergyman himself. Wesley was very orthodox in his belief, religious in his practice, upright in his conduct, and full of good works. The biographer says, "He and his friends visited the inmates of the prisons and workhouses of Oxford. They took pity on the slum children of the city, providing them with food, clothing, and education. They observed Saturday as the Sabbath, as well as Sunday. They went to church and to Holy Communion. They gave alms, they searched the Scriptures, they fasted and prayed. But they were bound in the fetters of their own religion, for they were trusting in themselves, that they were righteous, instead of putting their trust in Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

A few years later, John Wesley, in his own words, "Came to trust in Christ and in Christ only for salvation." This is what he said in respect to his own conversion. "I had, even then, the faith of a servant, and not that of a son." Servants are under bondage to a system, sons are free.

You know something, if you're a Christian, you ought to remember your freedom. Remember you're a son, and don't put yourself back under bondage to the law. A good example of this would be John Newton. He was an only child and lost his mother when he was 7 years old. At the age of 11, he became a sailor and went to sea. Can you imagine? 11 years old.

In the words of one of his biographers, "In the unspeakable atrocities of the African slave trade he lived. He plumbed the depths of human sin and degradation. When he was 23, on 10 March 1748, when his ship was in imminent peril of foundering in a terrific storm, he cried to God for mercy and found it. He was truly converted and he never forgot how God had had mercy on him, a former blasphemer.

He sought diligently to remember what he had previously been and what God had done for him. In order to imprint it on his memory, he had written in bold letters and fastened across the wall over the mantelpiece of his study the words of Deuteronomy 15:15. He saw it every day of his life, and this is what it says. 'Thou shalt remember that thou wast a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD thy God redeemed thee.'"

Beloved, first I say, if you have been trying to earn the favor of God, you're a slave. If you accept the free gift of Christ, you can be a son. Secondly, I say to those who are sons, remember you're a son.

Don't ever let a day go by when you don't thank God that you were a slave, but you're a son. Let's pray.

Lord, these are somewhat difficult words for us to understand, perhaps. Yet there's a simplicity to it. We pray that, somehow, between the inadequacies of the human mind and the human vocabulary, the Spirit of God has taught. We thank You for the pursuit of the Apostle Paul and for his availability to the Holy Spirit to share these truths with us.

Father, we thank you for the burden that tore into his heart when he saw a people who had known grace, who had known free salvation, who had known that justification was by faith alone, and had then become entangled in a legalistic system. Oh, the compassion with which he sought to release them! We thank You that he shared that with us through the pages of Holy Scripture.

Father, we pray two things tonight. One, that there is no one in this place that is a slave to a system of religion, be it atheistic, pantheistic or theistic. One who is trying to earn his own way to Heaven, or to justify himself in his own mind and own eyes, who is trying to accredit his own goodness. Father, may he turn in such slavery to a man-made system for the freedom that comes when he recognizes that he is a sinner and gives his life to Jesus Christ.

Father, for those of us who are Christians, may we remember always that we were slaves and deserved nothing, but by grace, You have made us sons. Father, may we live as sons. Help us never to do what the Galatians did and turn backwards to the weak and beggarly elements of trying to earn Your favor through flesh or the law. Help us always to live as sons, and may we bring honor to the Father, to Whom is all honor, and to the Son, in Whose name we pray, Amen.

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