

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S GRACE TURNS SLAVES INTO SONS

Galatians 4:1-7

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Describe a time when you have sought to persuade someone you care about to abandon a harmful behavior or relationship, etc. In general, what kinds of arguments have you sought to use to convince them to change?

If we know and love people engaged in destructive lifestyles we will seek to persuade them to leave behind the misery and adopt a better way of living. We will do this by seeking to enable them to understand how bad their situation is, that is, by showing them their misery, and also by showing them how much better things could be. We use both negative and positive arguments.

In many ways this is exactly what the apostle Paul is doing in his letter to the churches of Galatia. The false teachers have told these professing Christians that they need to obey the OT laws if they are going to live like Christians and make it to heaven. Paul has been seeking to show them that living under the authority of the law is a life of misery. He's done this by showing how the law, rather than saving a person, only condemns and imprisons people in sin more deeply. He has shown that the law was temporary in that it was given to reveal Christ and now that Christ has come we don't need the law in that way anymore. However, not only has he shown them the negative qualities of a life lived under the authority of the law but he has also shown them how great Christ is and the life that he offers. He is out to show the glory and beauty of Christ and his gospel so they will abandon this effort at law keeping. In our passage today he is using a powerful contrast to seek to persuade these professing Christians that their allegiance should be to Christ and nothing else. He is out to convince them and us that the coming of Jesus Christ into the world is the best thing that ever happened and thus Jesus should be at the center of our attention and our affections.

STUDY

1. In vv. 1-3 Paul continues to use the metaphor of "an heir" with which he ended chapter 3. How is a child who is the legal heir of a wealthy man no

different than a slave of the wealthy man? How is the child of a wealthy man different from a slave?

Just like a slave he is ruled over by guardians and trustees until the time his father sets. In other words, an heir, like a slave, can't make any decisions regarding the disposition of the property. He cannot give orders to the servants of his father's household but rather he is the one who must follow the directions and orders of others, just like a slave. This is a temporary condition, because he is an heir of the estate and there will come a time when his father will remove the guardians and trustees and he will become a partner in managing the estate with his father. In both Jewish and Roman culture there were formal/legal ceremonies that sons went through at which time they were considered adults with all the rights and responsibilities of adulthood. Our high school graduation ceremonies are probably the closest thing to the cultural practices at that time. In Jewish and Roman culture it was at these ceremonies that the children were set free from the oversight of guardians and gained the privileges of being the heir to their father's estate.

2. In v. 3 Paul uses this word picture to describe something that is spiritually true of every Christian. How does he apply the metaphor to us?

The point that Paul is making in v. 3 is this: every Christian, prior to their conversion to Christ was chosen by God to be one of his sons. Ephesians 1:4-5 says, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ according to his pleasure and will." As far as God is concerned we are his elect children prior to conversion and thus we are heirs. However, prior to conversion we are children who are like slaves in that we are under guardians and trustees until that time when the father decides to make us into sons.

3. In v. 3 he identifies the "guardians and trustees" that rule over the heir who is a child in v. 2 as "the basic principles of the world." (NOTE: the metaphor actually intensifies at the end of v. 3. Paul says, not just that we are children who are like slaves but that we actually are slaves to the "basic principles of the world.") Who or what are these basic principles to which all human beings are enslaved? (See Gal. 3:8-11 and Col. 2:16-23 where this same word is used)

Paul is not primarily thinking about sin at this point. In Romans 6 he says numerous times that outside of Christ all humans are slaves to sin. However, that is not what he is thinking about here. In vv. 8-10 it is the slavery to the

false worship of false gods. The Galatians who were Gentiles, worshipped the idols of the Greek gods. They celebrated feast days to Zeus and Aphrodite and the other gods, all of whom were represented by idols in massive temples. All false worship of false gods is full of regulations and commands, basic principles of how to live a “good and godly” life. However, he’s not just thinking about Gentile idolatry with this term. In v. 5 he says that Christ came to redeem those “under the law,” which is a clear reference to law keeping Jewish people. Thus he would say that a law abiding Jew was also enslaved to the “basic principles of the world.” Therefore, it seems most likely to me that these “basic principles of the world” are the man made, false ideas about God, about man, about how to worship God, about how to go to heaven, about how to please God, etc. Every human being who is not trusting in Christ is enslaved by the lies and distortions they believe about God and everything else. All humans, apart from the good news of God’s grace are under the rule and control of false ideas about the nature of reality. Until the father’s set time, we remain under their direction and cannot free ourselves from them. You can see the same thing in Colossians.

4. By saying that both Jew and Gentile are enslaved to the basic principles of this world, what is Paul saying that all religious systems outside of orthodox Christianity share in common?

What is most astonishing about v. 3 is that Paul is saying that the Jewish worship of Yahweh is no different than the Gentile worship of idols. In both cases humans believe that they can make the god like them by performing certain rituals or obeying certain laws. As long as you believe that it is within your power to do something that will make God like you, then you will have no interest in Christ. Christ is a Savior for helpless sinners and slaves, not for free men. Everyone who is seeking to impress God or to please God by obeying laws is a slave and not free. Our slavery is not an unwilling slavery. We naturally believe that we are free and able to do those things, which will obligate God to reward us with heaven. It is the one thing that all human religion holds in common. Whether it’s Judaism or Islam or Hinduism or nominal/formal Christianity or Native American shamanism, all adherents of these various religious systems believe they have the ability to do things that will gain salvation for them. All human religious systems teach that men can save themselves by doing the right things at the right time. All teach that we are able to obligate God to reward us by our good behavior or religious performance. This is the slavery of humanity that Paul is describing in v. 3. We are held captive by the lie that we can manipulate the deity to be kind to us. If you believe that God likes you just fine the way

you are or with just a little bit more religious performance, then you are enslaved to Satan and will have no interest in Christ. That is the condition of every human apart from Christ.

5. What are some ways you have been enslaved in the past by false ideas about God, sin, your own goodness, etc. from which the gospel of God’s grace has set you free?

The coming of Jesus Christ into the world is the best news you will ever hear because all humans are helpless slaves.

6. There are six clauses in vv. 3-4. The first 5 tell us about Christ and his coming. The last one tells us the final result of Christ’s coming in the lives of all who believe in him (the “we” of the final clause of v. 4) What are some of the things that each of these clauses tell us about the glory of Christ, his relationship to the Father and what he has accomplished by his coming?

- “When the time had fully come”

We do not live in a random universe where evil men and demons are controlling what happens. We are living in a world that is ruled over by a sovereign God who is working out his perfect plan to redeem all of his people. The birth of Jesus Christ came about in exactly the manner and at the exact time that God determined before the world began. All of the myriad of individual human choices that led to the existence of a virgin named Mary who was engaged to be married to man named Joseph, a descendant of David in the town of Nazareth were determined by God. The Roman Empire with its decree by the emperor Caesar Augustus that all should return to the town of their ancestors to register and pay taxes was decreed by God before the world began. History is “His Story”. God is ruling now as he ruled through those long millennium to bring his son the first time. He is bringing all things to that day when his son will come again, not as a redeemer but as judge and king.

- “God sent forth his Son”

The Son exists prior to his coming. This is just another of the subtle and offhand ways that the NT continually points to the divinity of Christ. He is the eternal Son of God. He did not begin to exist when he was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. He existed prior to his coming as the second person of the Trinity. This also points to the submission of the Son to the Father. Our salvation is the result of the mutual love and admiration of God the Father and God the Son. The Father loves the Son and glorifies him by sending him as the Redeemer of his enslaved people. The Son loves the

Father and glorifies him by submitting to his will and finishing his work of redeeming his people.

- “born of a woman”

The divine Son took on human flesh. As he says in Philippians 2:5-8. But this clause, “born of a woman” also connects the coming of Christ to the promises of the OT. It calls to mind the promise God made as he was cursing the serpent for his deception in Genesis 3:15 when he said that the male offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, thus destroying him. Jesus is that male child of the woman who destroys Satan. What an awesome portrait of the glorious God that Paul paints with these few words. God the Son is sent by God the Father, taking on human flesh in order to destroy the despot Satan who holds his people in willing slavery.

- “born under law”

The God who wrote the law now submits himself to that law which he gave. However, what it means for the Son of God/Son of Man to be under the law and what it means for us to be under the law are two different things. As Paul has said in chapter three, for us the law condemns us as sinners, decrees that we deserve hell for our sin, provokes us to sin more and reveals to us the promised Savior. For Christ, to be under the law means, he freely and willingly obeys the law perfectly. He loves God and his neighbor every moment of his entire life. He fulfills in his life, death and resurrection every prediction and every foreshadowing contained in the OT regarding the Messiah. But above all, he takes upon himself the curse of the law that is due to us. While he is the only human being who does not deserve to die because he has done nothing deserving death, he freely, for the glory of his father and the love of his people bears the curse due to us for our sins. In this way he redeems all who are under the curse of the law.

- “to redeem those under law”

Christ was born of a woman, born under the law for the purpose of redeeming those who are under the curse of the law. No human being has ever obeyed the law and therefore, as Paul said in 3:10, quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law.” Every human being, rather than using the life God gave us to pursue our joy in loving him and loving others has spent our God given life seeking other pleasures. We have preferred the pleasures of sin and of this world to the pleasure of knowing and loving God. It is no accident that Paul says that Christ redeems us from under the law. Redemption is an economic term that refers to the paying off a debt that is owed by an enslaved relative so he or she can become a free man or woman.

We have invested the life God gave us for serving him by serving other gods. We have squandered all the resources he has given us and we have a debt that will take an eternity to repay. Therefore, “when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law in order to redeem those under the law.”

- “that we might receive the full rights of sons”

But now notice that the ultimate goal of God in sending his son is not simply to free us from our slavery but to make us into sons. Again, Paul is not being a sexist when he keeps referring to all Christians, male and female, as sons. He is using the conditions of his day to show the exalted position of all Christians. Only sons could be heirs of their fathers in the fullest sense of that word. Daughters did not have the right to become full heirs of their father. Therefore, Christ, by redeeming us from the curse of the law which condemns us to eternal slavery sets us free from that slavery and gives us the status of sons who are no longer children but full heirs of our Father with all the rights and privileges of that status. It would be like an indebted farmer having his wealthy uncle not only pay off his debt but legally adopt him as his son and make him a full heir of his so that he would never have to be afraid of going into debt again. We are the sons of the wealthiest being of all, the creator and owner of the entire universe and thus are secure. What better news could you hear than that?

The coming of Jesus Christ into the world is the best news you will ever hear because God the Father sent God the Son to make slaves into sons.

7. According to v. 6 what is the main “right” we have received as legal “sons of God”?

God the Father sent God the Son to redeem us from our slavery and make us his sons and he also sends God the Spirit of his Son into our hearts to enable us to live like sons now.

8. What is the primary work of the “Spirit of the Son” in our hearts? Compare with Romans 8:15-16.

What Paul does here is tell us the primary work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He says that the Holy Spirit who has come into our inner being cries out “Abba, Father.” In Romans 8:15 Paul tells us that the result of the Holy Spirit’s coming into our hearts is that we cry out “Abba, Father.” Which is it? Do we cry out or does the Spirit of his son in us cry out? The beauty is that it is both because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the Son of God

who lives in us and who is the new life that enables us to consider God our Father. This is that most amazing of all realities, we, slaves and sinners have become partakers of the divine nature by the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Spirit crying out and our crying out are one because our spirit and the Holy Spirit are inseparably and eternally united.

9. What is the meaning and significance that we, by and with the Spirit, cry out “Abba, Father”? Consider when and to whom human children cry out “Daddy!” (which is the closest English translation of “Abba”) to their fathers.

The first thing to note here is that many people claim God as their father but they do not cry out, by the Spirit of the Son, “Abba, Father.” Here is the unfailing evidence that you have a true and living faith in the true and living God. You cry out to God, calling him by the most intimate of names, “Daddy.” On a daily basis my daughter Jaimee cries out, “Daddy!” She does this when I come home from work. It is the expression of her delight in me, her love for me, her desire to be with me. Her cry is almost always followed by, “Let’s go outside and play.” She tells me every night when I put her to bed, “Daddy, I love you.” We see this same affection and delight expressed by Christ in the gospels. In Matthew 11:25 he says, “I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth...” In Luke 10:21 we are told that Jesus, “full of joy through the Holy Spirit said, “I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth...” All who are born of God, who are trusting in Christ regularly cry out by the Spirit of Christ to God the Father declaring their delight in him. This is not some manipulative and formal expressions of delight but the spontaneous cry of joy in God that arises in the heart of the Christian by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the cry of love of the child for her father.

My daughter Jaimee also cries out, “Daddy!” when she is frightened or in trouble or hurt. She spontaneously cries out to me for help when she is confronted by difficulties too great for her to handle. We see this clearly expressed in Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane when he said, “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not as I will but as you will.” (Mark 14:36) So Christians, in times of great trouble and temptation cry out to their father in heaven for help. This is not some forced or dutiful or formal prayer or some magical incantation but the desperate cry of a child for the help of her powerful father to come to her assistance. Notice, it is not a demand that her father do her will but a plea that he help her in accordance with his will. Jesus is able to ask God to help, not as Jesus wills but as the Father wills, because he knows that God is his

Daddy and loves him and will do what is in his best interest. Thus do we cry out to our daddy in our times of distress.

There is a third way in which my daughter Jaimee cries out “Daddy!” She cries out “Daddy” when she is sorry for her wrong behavior. She often will tell me, “Daddy, I’m sorry for when I got mad at you for not playing outside with me.” There is no corresponding example of this in the life of Jesus, as he never sinned. Though there is an example of this cry to his Father as he was hanging on the cross and he cried out, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” So the Christian, trusting in the death and resurrection of Christ cries out to God for forgiveness, in the name of Christ, the Savior.

Finally, this crying out is a cry of confidence. We cry out to our loving Father in heaven because we know that he loves us and hears us and will come to our aid. The Spirit of Christ who has come to live in our hearts is the one who gives us confidence that God himself is for us and not against us. He it is that persuades us that we are indeed the heirs of God and can freely go to God to express our delight in him, our need of him and our sorrow to him for our sins. Here is the unfailing evidence that you have been redeemed from slavery to the basic principles of the world and made a son and heir of the God of the universe, you cry out, “Abba, Father.” Your relationship with God is one of the intimacy and the confident dependence of a child upon her father.

10. Describe occasions when you have cried out to God your Father as a little child crying out to her daddy.

The coming of Jesus Christ into the world is the best news you will ever hear because God the Father sent God the Spirit to enable us to live like sons.