

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 13 – “Full-Grown Sons of God”
Galatians 4:1-7

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Who are you? How do you see yourself? What would you say to a stranger if you were asked to describe your central core? These questions and others like them focus on the problem of our personal identity. Our nation is experiencing a significant crisis relating to self-identity. Both Christians and non-Christians cannot seem to find a clear understanding of their self-identity.

Those Paul calls the Judaizers had brought about a spiritual identity crisis in the church of Galatia. After their teachings, genuine believers were left in uncertainty about their relationship with God. They were paralyzed by questions of whether they should place themselves under the law. Was there something more to the Christian life that they were missing? To these questions Paul responds with a strong affirmation of the sonship of each believer in Jesus Christ. This position of sonship is rooted in the sending of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

As we come to the first verses of chapter four, we ought to keep in mind that the apostle sees two levels of sonship. There is the sonship of a minor who in the day was committed to the care of a slave. His status is really no better than that of a slave. But then there is the status of the full-grown, adult son who has been received into the place of privilege and liberty that belongs to an adult. This is the status into which each believer in Jesus Christ has been established. The former status is that which Old Testament people of God knew. Can you not see the folly of one who would forsake what he knows in Christ to go back to the old covenant? **Without discounting the value of the old, the apostle calls our attention to the glory of the new. IN DOING THIS, HE POINTS US TO THE ROLL OF THE SON AND THE SPIRIT IN OUR SONSHIP.**

TAKE YOUR BIBLES, PLEASE...

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:1-7 ESV).

THERE ARE TWO PRINCIPLES:

First, Our Sonship Is Made Possible by the Son (vv. 4-5).

We cannot appreciate all that is involved in being a full-grown, fully accepted son of God unless we understand what was involved in making it possible. **The apostle makes it very clear in verses 4-5. The coming of the Son is the key! Some key thoughts:**

1. **First, His coming was at the divine initiative.** The Apostle Paul writes: *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.* God determined the time. **The picture in the**

expression of “the fullness of time” is that of a vessel being filled drop by drop until it is completely filled. When the cup of time was filled, God sent His Son. It is a reminder that God is above time, in fact, He is the Lord of time itself. “Sent” carries with it the concept of sending away on a mission. Usually, as in this case it involved conveying the full authority of the one sending to the one sent. The one God sent was not a mere messenger, or representative; he was the Son. He is the One who had a unique relationship with the Father. He is the natural son of the Father. There is a clear reference to the pre-existence of the Son. He was sent away from the presence of the Father on this mission which involved being born of a woman.

2. *Second, that which made this sending possible was the incarnation.* The Son was *born of woman*. It means that through the woman He received a body; was made a man in the fullest sense of the word. The other phrase Paul uses is *born under the law*. This indicates that he was actually a Jewish man. The Son lived out his days on the Earth fully under the Law. His daily conduct was fully regulated by the precepts of the Law. He truly fulfilled all of the Law which made him capable of redeeming us. He shared our plight under the burden and condemnation of the Law so that we might share His privilege as a Son.
3. *Third, the work of the Son climaxed in redemption.* Paul clearly gives us the reason for this coming. He writes: *to redeem those who were under the law*. It is not an emphasis on the means of redemption (which we know was the cross), but the purpose of the His sacrifice. He died on the cross not because of our sin, but to redeem us from our sin. “Redeem” means to purchase or liberate by the payment of a price. God sent His son to pay the necessary price so that we might be liberated from the Law and its condemnation.
4. *Fourth, the Son makes possible our adoption as sons.* Under Roman law a free man could adopt the son of a slave. When such an adoption had been completed, the slave’s son would be accepted in the family as a natural born son. He would share freely in the inheritance. Furthermore, the Father could not disinherit the adopted son. We were not naturally the sons of God. In fact, we were by nature the sons of wrath. If we were to ever be in the family of God, God had to do something. Adoption was our only hope. This was made possible by sending the Son. Surely the God who took such drastic measure must have been desirous of having sons. If he went to this much expense to Himself, and to His Son, He must have REALLY wanted you and me in His family!

A Second Principle Is That Our Sonship is Made Personal by the Spirit (vv. 6-7).

The sending of the son involves Bethlehem and the incarnation. But, God was not finished with his work on our behalf. He wanted this sonship to involve more than a mere legal position as adopted sons. He wanted these new, fully-grown, fully accepted sons to be aware of a personal relationship to Himself. So, He sent His Holy Spirit.

NOTE: It is very important to note that we are not the sons of God because we have the Spirit. We have the Spirit because we are the sons of God, although we cannot separate the two in our experience. They happen simultaneously upon our redemption. We should think of the Spirit as being our birth certificate. He is proof of sonship. The emphasis is again placed upon the divine initiative in the coming of the Spirit. The very same verb is used in both cases. The spirit came on the Day of Pentecost having been sent just like

the Son came at Christmas. Both were on a divine mission relating to our sonship. There are two things to understand.

First, He is the Spirit of the Son because His coming is based on the work of the Son. Apart from the redemptive work of the Son, the Spirit would not have come. The curtain would still stand in separation between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies!

Second, he comes in the Son to emphasize the personal nature of our relationship. The apostle writes, *God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* The outcry is ABBA! This is the word in Aramaic that children would use in going to their father. It might actually be translated "Daddy." It is a word that speaks of intimacy, love, and confidence. It is the word Jesus used to address the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS:

Paul is obviously contrasting the old and new. Under the law, men just did not experience this sense of sonship. Remember, earlier he said the Law was our jailer and schoolmaster; it was not, could not be, our Father.

This is not the only ministry of the Holy Spirit, but it is the basic one. Nothing else He does has as much significance apart from this. No wonder Paul closes this section with the declaration that *you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.* Who could ask for more than that!

The application in our lives is exactly as the Apostle Paul intended. The Judaizers were trying to lead these Gentile Christians under the law in search of "something more." They were promised entrance into an inner circle through circumcision and other Jewish religious observances and rites. The truth is that all that they and we could ever need or desire is fully provided by our gracious God through the sending of His Son and His Spirit.