

Mini Study – Galatians 4

Heirs of God

Context

In Galatians 3 the apostle Paul reminds us that it is those who put their faith in Christ who are Abraham's offspring, heirs to God's covenant promises to him. Those in Christ Jesus to whom the blessing of Abraham has come, those who have been justified and received the promised Spirit by faith.

That the law given later did not annul God's earlier covenant with Abraham. The law which reveals sin and the need of a Saviour, a guardian until the offspring of Abraham to whom the promise had been made should come, that is Christ. So that Jew and Gentile alike might be justified by faith in Him.

For by the law no one is justified before God, for we have all failed to keep it, all except One. Jesus Christ, the One who perfectly obeyed God's law on our behalf and on the cross bore the punishment we deserved, redeeming us from the curse of the law as lawbreakers. So that all, without exception, could be adopted into God's family, heirs of God, through faith in Him.

Let's turn now to the opening verses of Galatians 4 where Paul uses an example to explain this further.

OBSERVE

READ Galatians 4:1-7 and:

- underline every reference to *heir*.
- circle the phrase *adoption as sons*.

⁴I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

³In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we [Jewish believers] might receive adoption as sons.

⁶And because you [Gentile believers] are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

DISCUSS

4:1-2 – What is the heir as long as he is a child? Why?

4:3 – Similarly – what does Paul say was the state of him and fellow-Jews, whilst under the guardianship of the law?

ENSLAVED – the apostle Paul says that whilst under the guardianship of the law, that he and fellow-Jews were no different than slaves. Those enslaved to the elementary principles of the world, a phrase that carries the idea of the elementary teaching or the ‘ABCs’ or something, which in verse three Paul uses to refer to the law covenant. Though heirs they were children, those under the management of the law, instructing them how to live and with its sacrifices and regulations pointing to the good things to come, fulfilled in Christ. The law never saving, but a reminder that God’s salvation is forever and always received by His grace through faith in His promise.

Such a statement by Paul would have been in direct opposition to the false teachers in Galatia who sought to bring Gentile believers under the slavery of the law once again, teaching that faith in Christ was not enough, but to be right with God they must also observe the law, primarily to be circumcised. But for Paul for Gentile believers to accept circumcision was to turn back the clock of redemptive history now that Christ had come. To place upon themselves a yoke of slavery; obligated to keep the whole law, severed from Christ, and fallen away from grace (Galatians 5:1-6). No small matter indeed!!

4:4-6a – What did God do so that we, Jew, and Gentile alike, could be adopted as His sons?

BORN UNDER THE LAW – God sent His Son to be born into the world, to live under the law, fulfilling God’s requirement placed upon all humanity to live in perfect obedience to it, and who on the cross bore the punishment we deserved from God as law breakers. All so we, Jew, and Gentile alike, could be adopted as God’s sons through faith in Him.

ADOPTIONS AS SONS – a reference to the ancient practice of adopting an adult male as a son and heir, who then received all the responsibilities and privileges as such. Here referring to those, regardless of race, status, or gender, who through faith in Christ have “come of age” and been adopted by God as His sons and heirs.

4:6b – How do we know we are truly God’s sons and heirs?

READ Romans 8:15-17:

¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

8:16 – What does the Spirit bear witness to in our hearts?

8:17a – What are we as God’s children?

REFLECT

How do you relate to the Father – as your slave master trying to earn His favour or as one who knows His love and who is an heir of all things (1 Corinthians 3:21-23)? Why not take time now to meditate upon the truth that through faith in Christ you are a beloved child of God with whom He is well pleased (Matthew 3:17), the recipient of every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3) and of a glorious inheritance to come (1 Peter 1:3-5).

“Adoption is the highest privilege that the Gospel offers: higher even than justification... To be right with God the Judge [justification] is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father [adoption] is greater.” - J. I. Packer