
Abba Father

Galatians 4:1-7

Dan Turner

Introduction [Introduction adapted from the booklet *God as Father; when your own Father failed* written by David Powelson]

In this is love, not that we have loved God
but that he loved us and sent his Son
to be the propitiation for our sins. (1John 4:10)

...God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

It is patently clear that the Bible teaches that God loves His people. He demonstrated it in the past through the historical event of Christ on the cross. He demonstrates it in the present through the sending of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His children. He is a loving Father and His children are His beloved.

My question for us this morning is personal. Do you know Him as a loving Father? Or maybe a better question would be: How can you know God as a loving heavenly Father?

Today marks the fourth Sunday in our 6-week series over the Names of God. The verse that helped shape this series is found in Ps.9:10. It says, "Those who know your Name put their trust in You". We aimed in this series to so pray and preach that the Lord would make Himself known through His Names so that all of us will trust Him.

This week we are looking at a New Testament Name; a name that suggests family love and fellowship, a name that communicates endearment and closeness. The Name for today's consideration is *Abba Father*. What will it take for you and me to see Him as an endearing, loving Father? And that in seeing Him as such our hearts will unquestionably trust Him and affectionately cry out to Him? What will it take?

Some advisers and teachers would have us believe that if you did not have an earthly father that displayed affectionate love you cannot understand the closeness of the heavenly Father's affection for you. That if your father was (or is) a cruel, critical or self-centered you are prevented from knowing God as a loving Father.

Is this what the Bible says? Do I, for example, have no hope of sensing the love of my heavenly Father because my earthly father abandoned my family and me back in 1962?

This morning I want to give you hope through a paragraph in the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The aim of this message is that you will leave here today knowing experientially the fatherly love of God. And you will do so if you know the truth about three matters; The Dilemma (that we all face), The Deliverer (that we all need) and the Delivered (that we all need to be). We will be looking at truth concerning these three topics with hope that the Lord will change our minds concerning how we view God. And as a result of this change in perspective our hearts will well up with child-like trust in Him.

To this end, open your Bibles to the letter to the Galatians.

As we continue in our studies of the Names of God, we are brought to the letter to the Galatians. We find in chapter four the name *Abba Father*. This is the name on which we will focus this morning.

To get a sense of how precious this Name is and how it relates to our theme a brief word concerning the letter to the Galatians may be of help.

The message of Galatians is one of liberation. It argues for the definition and experience of genuine freedom. One of my commentators, Merrill Tenney called it “The Charter of Christian liberty”. John MacArthur dubbed it as “A Christian Declaration of Independence”. In our culture of free love and free speech the book of Galatians is like a mountain top of crisp truth and grace. This letter makes clear what freedom is and what it is all about.

The book can be divided into three basic sections.

1:10-2:21

After a brief yet sobering introduction (vv.1-9) Paul puts forth his apostolic qualifications. This was to set the foundation that his gospel was the only gospel. And that to challenge his authority was to challenge the true gospel. Therefore, he confronted the defiant and dangerous teaching of the Judaizers by making clear his legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

3:1-5:12

After laying the rationale for his unquestionable authority, Paul moves to the core of the letter. This is found in 3:1-5:12. In this section Paul makes clear the difference between the Judaizers interpretation of Christianity and Paul’s interpretation of Christianity. The Judaizers, as they are called, were a group of Jews whose teachings were contrary to the one true gospel. They taught that for one to be saved one certainly needed to accept the life, teachings and death of Jesus Christ. But that wasn’t enough. One also had to add to Christ’s life and work by becoming circumcised, and keeping all the Jewish ceremonies. This was causing chaos in the churches in the region of Galatia (the middle section of modern day Turkey whose size was approximately 150 miles wide and about 250 miles long).

What Paul is saying in this section is that if one is to be called a child of Abraham and to share in his promises he must seek salvation not in the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Paul wants the readers to know the true significance of the law and the true freedom of believers from the law.

5:13-6:8

In the last part of the letter (5:13-6:8) Paul shows that this freedom from the law is not a freedom from love and morality. Genuine freedom is not to indulge in anything the flesh desires. That's slavery. On the contrary, Paul in this section points out the nature of this freedom. Freedom in the Spirit breaks the bondage to sin and frees us to love people.

Paul ends the letter with a final warning against the false teaching and a personal appeal to the churches that they remain loyal to the gospel.

Now, for our purposes today (to highlight another name of God so to know His character and trust Him; cf. Ps.9:10), we will move to the core of the letter to notice the freedom of a right relationship with God.

We pick up this topic by noticing in chapter 3:23-29 how the subject has changed. It no longer is the difference between promise and law as a means of salvation as seen in vv.15-22. The subject now becomes the great change that took place in the coming of Christ. This great change is described in terms like "heir", "children", "sons". All of this terminology points to the believer's relationship to God. In v.29 the heir stands in relationship to Abraham. But in our text for today, 4:1-7, heir stands in relationship to God.

In other words, Paul is making plain that to be a child of Abraham through faith is the same as to be a child of God through faith. And to be a child of God is to be an heir to the full inheritance. If Gentiles can be legitimate children of Abraham, they are also legitimate children of God. And this status is solely by faith in Christ; not by the works of the law.

Let's think together on these benefits of being the adopted children of God so that we will know the love of God; both in an objective and subjective way. Follow along with me as I read our text for this morning <read vv.1-7>

The Dilemma

vv.1-3

An analogy

vv.1-2

There is no good news without bad news. Therefore, it is no surprise that Paul begins this breathtaking paragraph with the dilemma (vv.1-3). This dilemma is made known as Paul makes use of an analogy (that is, a figure of speech, a word picture). He begins to talk about human physical growth (vv.1-2). Notice that the heir is a child. Until he grows up and reaches maturity, he does not receive any benefits of the estate. Therefore the heir, while still a child, is really no better off than a slave, though in reality "he is the owner of everything" (v.1).

As seen in verse two, in ancient times, a family would hand over loyal slaves to take care of such a child. The child would take orders from these slaves (in the text the slaves are referred to as "guardians and managers") until he came of age. Then when the day set by the father came the child ceased being under the authority and power of the guardians and was declared an adult. He was ready to inherit what was always his.

An application

v.3

In verse 3, Paul applies the analogy of heir and an estate to the situation at hand. “When we were children, we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world”. Here we see the dilemma. The phrase “elementary principles” literally means “in a row” as in perhaps the ABC’s. It is something which is basic or foundational.

The term “elemental” or “elementary” has given rise to various ideas by interpreters. For some commentators, they argue that the Greek term refers to angelic powers. And they appeal to verse eight for their basis. Though there are good commentators who go down this line of thinking, the context seems to point in a different direction.

The direct connection of this term with immaturity and the fact that the law is seen here as an instrument of bondage would support the argument that “elementary principles” is more likely referring to elementary and imperfect teaching. In other words, to accept the Jewish law or something like that as a system to get right with God is to come under slavery to some distorted doctrine (and perhaps demons behind the distorted doctrine).

The phrase “elementary principles of the world” appears to carry the notion that we can be declared righteous before God based upon merit or rewards earned through obedience to a law. In our day it would be like saying “good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. And since we are born good and most stay this way through education and by trying to be nice or good or productive, then most go to heaven and the notorious criminals go to hell”.

That American, false doctrine of salvation by good works is not found in the Bible. Paul’s theology, on the contrary, is that all people are sinful and under condemnation. Only those in Christ are given eternal life and the forgiveness of sins.

The Deliverer

vv.4-5

With vv.1-3 as the dilemma all humans face, Paul sets up the reader to anticipate the solution. And this is what we see in vv.4-5. It is not the Law that delivers nor is it the resolutions we make to keep the law. Paul shifts from talking about “enslavement” to “deliverance”. He talks about the Deliverer.

His timing

Fullness of time

First we see Paul teaching on his timing. After building up the situation so that the Galatians understood that they were slaves to self righteousness, Paul points to the gracious act of God sending his Son on behalf of sinners. The phrase “But when the fullness of time had come” tells us that Jesus came just at the right moment in history. God was not panicking as he oversaw His history. He never looked upon sin and societal evils as out of control. He had the precise date and time in mind from eternity past. All of history is orchestrated by Him. This phrase helps us to see the sovereignty of our loving God.

His identity

Second we see Paul teaching on his identity. Who will save us from the bondage to sin and the bondage to man-made rules?

His Son sent forth

Paul identifies the Redeemer as the Son of God. We have a Trinitarian teaching within this text. We find the Father, Son and Holy Spirit working to accomplish the salvation we all need. The Father is seen in sending His Son. It is the Father's work to choose out a people for Himself, a work that he accomplished before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:3-6; Acts 2:39). Jesus Christ is the One sent forth by the Father to accomplish the work of redemption through laying down his own life at the cross (1Tim.2:5-6; Romans 3:21-26). The Holy Spirit applies this work by causing sinners to be born from above, sealing them in Christ and securing them for the day of final redemption (Tit.3:5; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30).

The Bible says of the Son that in Him "all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form" (Co.2:9). It is Him before whom the angels of God worship (Heb.1:6; Rev.5:11-12). It is of him the Scriptures say "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross" (Phil.2:6-8).

"God sent forth His Son". Paul is trying to recapture the hearts of God's people by demonstrating what the Almighty has done for poor sinners like you and me. He sent forth from the perfections and glories of Heaven His own Son. This Son is infinitely glorious, yet to redeem us, He left His exalted throne to dwell among men. It was not mankind that called Jesus from Heaven. It was God Himself, according to His great mercy and wondrous purpose, who sent forth His Son to accomplish what we could not accomplish on our own.

Born of woman, born under the law

This Son did not come into the world with His radiance of eternal glory. The text before us tells us that he was "born of woman, born under the law". Paul continues to make known the Son's identity by saying that he was born of woman. This means that Jesus was the very substance of humanity. What Paul is stressing is that Jesus had an actual human body like ours and faced the same sort of trials and temptations we face as humans, yet was without sin (cf. 2Cor.5:21). This was necessary if He was to bear the punishment for our rebellion.

The text also tells us that he was born "under the law". Jesus came as a man living in submission to the divine law. He completely fulfilled the divine law. He was born into Judaism, was circumcised, and fulfilled the Law by perfect obedience. He did this in order that He might qualify to redeem us from the penalty of the Law and to give us His perfect obedience.

His mission

Having briefly looked at the Deliverer's identity, Paul now points the Galatians to the Deliverer's mission. What was the task Jesus Christ was given right from the start?

To redeem

Jesus Christ came to redeem those who were under the law. This is why the incarnation; God the Son became a man. This is why Jesus was given human nature without losing his divinity. So many in our day place the emphasis on Jesus as the example. That is, how we are to live our lives is determined by how Jesus lived his (eg. the “wwjd” bracelets). While He certainly is and gave the perfect example, that was not why He came to earth. He came that he might redeem sinners from the curse (3:10-14).

This term “redeem” describes a marketplace where slaves were regularly sold. It literally means “to buy out of the marketplace” or “to ransom from slavery”. Redemption involved a price and a person to pay the price. The slave had no way of personal deliverance. Jesus Christ came to earth in order to be nailed to a cross so that he might bear the wrath of God on our behalf. That was the price. He was the Person. And we were the slaves.

To adopt

As we read more of this paragraph we come to the next clause that introduces us to another aspect of Christ’s mission. The clause “so that we might receive adoption as sons” tells us that Christ came not only to deliver us from the penalty of sin but also to bring us into a relationship with the Father as sons and daughters.

Up to this point in his letter, Paul has dealt extensively with the legal aspects of our salvation. The truth of our justification in Christ is in and of itself an astounding truth! To think that God would send His Son to bear my guilt before His just wrath is virtually incomprehensible. These Galatian believers who were struggling with their salvation were reminded anew of the work of Christ that alone satisfies God’s demands in justifying sinners. Sinners are forgiven and declared righteous not on the basis of works but on the life and death of Jesus Christ.

But if that is not enough, the Apostle adds to the magnificence of justification and redemption. He states that we are adopted as sons. God sent forth His Son to not only redeem us out of slavery, but also to procure for us sonship in His family. We who have been enemies of God are now, by faith in Christ, adopted into God’s family. To be free from sin’s dominion and curse would be glory enough. But God goes still farther. What more can He do for undeserving sinners than to bring them into His own family?

The Delivered

Vv.6-7

What does it mean to be adopted into God’s family? Why is it important for us to have an understanding of and believe in this truth?

The strength to experience new life and to press on in the demands of life are wrapped up in the truths that the Apostle unfolds for us in this passage.

New status

One thing we notice about the implications of sonship is that of a new status. Verses 5-7 repeatedly tell us that we are sons through our union with Jesus Christ by faith. We are no longer slaves to the elementary principles of the world. We are no longer under the dominion of Satan. We are not orphans! We must not live with the attitude of slavery. We who are trusting God are sons and daughters of God!

The context of the Judaizers pressing their legalism upon the Galatians comes into play at this point. To revert back to rules and regulations for their standing with God put the Galatians into a position as slaves. Paul assures them, “You are no longer a slave but a son”. To view God as a slave owner whose commands are to be kept in order to obtain His favor shocked the Apostle. This new status as sons of God changes everything. You are no longer one of God’s enemies. You are one of His children.

New assurance

We notice something else about the implications of sonship. Not only do we have a new status but we also have a new assurance. Verse 6 says, “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying “Abba! Father!”

Here is the wondrous assurance granted by the witness of the Holy Spirit. Notice the ministry of the Holy Spirit as it relates to the name of God in this verse. We are not to merely memorize the names of God and spout them off as if doing so will help. This 6-week series on the Names of God has an aim of reaching our hearts. The Bible says, “those who know your Name put their trust in You” (Ps.9:10).

This verse is at the heart of the agenda for this series. Knowing God’s Names has an experiential reality to it. To trust the Father means that we know him experientially and sincerely as our endearing heavenly Father.

Dr. Piper, when writing about this phrase talked about the reason for Paul’s use of terms. He said, “...the reason Paul uses the word "cry" and the Aramaic word "Abba" is because both of them point to deep, affectionate, personal, authentic experience of God's fatherly love. Doctrinal affirmations [about the Fatherhood of God], as important as they are, don't make children. What he said was that the testimony of the Spirit that we are God's children is that from our hearts there rises an irrepressible cry – a cry, not a mere statement, a cry: "Abba! Father!" We don't infer logically the fatherhood of God from the testimony of the Spirit. We enjoy emotionally the Fatherhood of God by the testimony of the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit is not a premise from which we deduce that we are children of God; it is a power by which we delight in being the children of God”.

New hope

Our text lays one more claim to those who are redeemed and adopted into God’s family. Verse 7 brings Paul’s thought to a conclusion. “Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son; and if a son then an heir through God”. The glorious reality of sonship doesn’t stop with our earthly life. There is more ahead! All the riches of belonging to God will one day be unfolded for the child of God. When the world attempts to lure you into its

snare, tempting you with temporal delights, cast your gaze ahead to the inheritance that is yours as a child of God. You are to see that you are an heir through God's gracious act on your behalf through Christ.

God, through Paul, is telling us this morning to live like sons not slaves. Trust Him for eternal life. Live as those who have an inheritance through God. Be identified with your future and not trapped by legalistic strivings. Understand that whatever you face in this life, the inheritance laid up for you is infinitely greater than anything you can imagine because your inheritance is full and forever enjoyment of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, we've seen three things.

Conclusion

1. Our dilemma: All of us are sinners hopelessly enslaved to the thought that if we just do better we can earn favor with God. This is called legalism. We act like orphans when we try to win the support of God through being nice or productive or a thousand other ways of earning salvation. This, the Bible calls, is bondage and leads to everlasting judgment.
2. The deliverer: Due to the fact that we cannot get out of our own sin, God, rich in mercy, sent His perfect Son to do two things. 1) He came to redeem us from the slave market; to liberate us from the cruel bondage to sin and Satan. 2) He came to adopt us into His family. To have the Almighty Father as an endearing Father and the Almighty Son as an endearing brother comes from the work of Christ on the cross.
3. The delivered: Those who see their dilemma and see that their only deliverance is Christ put their trust in Him. They are saved from the tyranny of sin and the thought that we can earn favor from God through self-righteous acts. Those who hope in God through the life and work of Christ are sons and daughters of the King. And as a result have the Holy Spirit poured out into their hearts. They now can know experientially the love of God. They now can sense His closeness and care. They now cry out with heart-felt affection and trust to the One who loves them most; God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Gal.1:3)

If these three topics are starting to thrill your heart this morning there is but one thing to do.

► Draw near to God.

James 4:8. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

In reverence

Psalm 95:6. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

In confidence

Ephesians 3:12. In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

Not by works but by faith

Ephesians 2:8-9. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.

Able and ready to help us

Ephesians 3:20. Now to him that is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...

As children to a father

Matthew 7:9-11. Or which one of you if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Come to Him. Cry out to Him. Trust Him today as your Abba Father!



Abba! Father!

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