

SONS OF GOD--NOT CHILDREN
Gal. 4:1-7

Intro: In Gal. 3 Paul tells us that God had two purposes in giving the Law through Moses to Israel--and neither one has to do with earning our own salvation. They are instead:

- (1) "Because of transgressions," ^(3:19) i.e., to make men realize that they were sinners, or transgressors in the sight of God. Cf. Rom. 7:7.
- (2) "The law was our schoolmaster" (3:24). This means that God expected His people to keep the Law, not for salvation, but as a guide to please Him in their daily lives.

Both are stated as having limitations in time:

- (1) "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come," or, until Christ came. This is 3:19.
- (2) "The law was our schoolmaster . . . but after that faith (Christ) is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (3:24, 25).

So the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ changed all of this.

To bring this out, Paul makes a statement in 3:26 which has tremendous significance in his argument. Unfortunately our translators have not given us the most accurate translations, and so the significance is not as strong as it might be.

"Children" should be sons. (Comment on the way the liberals of our day would read this verse.)

What is Paul actually saying? Is he saying that no one was in the family of God until Christ came?

No. Read Isa. 63:16, "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting."

Or, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Psa. 103:13).

BUT THE REFERENCES TO GOD AS FATHER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT ARE VERY RARE. THE EMPHASIS BEGAN DURING THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST, AND THEN IT BECAME ONE OF THE STRONGEST DOCTRINES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES.

As we come to chapter 4 in Galatians, Paul is going to tell us why, and it centers on his use of these two words: "child" in 4:1 and "sons" in 4:6.

We have here an illustration in vv. 1, 2. Then Paul makes an application in vv. 3-6. Finally, he gives a declaration in v. 7.

- I. THE ILLUSTRATION (vv. 1, 2). Paul goes to Roman law, well known to the Galatians, for his illustration. He has already hinted at it by his reference to the "schoolmaster."

We can almost make our own illustration. This is election year. In November we will go to the polls to vote. Let me raise a question which is controversial right now, but it will help us to understand Paul's illustration.

How old do you have to be to vote? Twenty-one.

Now you might think that this has been set rather arbitrarily, but the Romans did not come of age until they were 25. Then they were legally of age. They could transact business for themselves and do anything that any other Roman citizen could do according to their law.

Before we reach the age of twenty-one we are considered minors; afterwards we are considered to be legally of age. (I realize that there are some differences for girls, but this is the rule for voting and for many legal affairs.)

Now Paul is talking about the child of rich parents. He is placed under the authority of a trusted servant who acts as a "schoolmaster," or as a tutor or governor. The servant may have nothing, and the child may be heir to great riches, but as long as he is a minor child he does not even have the authority that the servant over him has.

These "tutors and governors" were charged with the care and training of the minor children "until the time appointed by the father."

Actually the time of reaching legal age was set by Roman law, but the father was given some liberty to choose the exact time when this would take place.

WHEN HE REACHED THIS TIME, THE SERVANT WHO HAD BEEN HIS TUTOR, OR GOVERNOR, OR SCHOOLMASTER, NO LONGER HAD ANY AUTHORITY OVER HIM. He was expected to do from his own heart the things which were expected of him as a responsible citizen.

You see, coming of age meant that the time had come when a young person's family and friends could expect some maturity from him. AND, CONTRARY TO OUR WAY OF DOING THINGS,

he could even claim a portion of his inheritance, if not all!

Cf. Luke 15:11, 12. When he said in Luke 15:19, "And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants," he is actually saying, I do not deserve to be of age; treat me as you did before I became of age.

Anyway, this twofold division is Paul's illustration. Now how will he apply it?

II. THE APPLICATION (vv. 3-6).

First of all, note

- A. The period during which Israel was under the Law before the coming of Christ (v. 3).

All OT saints were minor children of God. They never got out of this relationship. Their schoolmaster was the Law. They were under the authority of the Law. It was elementary, and preparatory, the ABC's of spiritual truth.

Note this proof that revelation is progressive.
(Comment on Griffith Thomas' statement regarding Genesis as a foundational book.)

- B. The coming of Christ (vv. 4-6). Think of this in connection with what, how, and why.

1. What? "God sent forth his Son." And He did this "when the fulness of the time was come."

This was a time pre-determined by God when the purpose of the Law should have completed its course. God set that time, and at its conclusion, He "sent forth His Son."

2. How?

- a. "Made of a woman"--His human nature, but more when we realize that genealogies were recorded by the father. Here there was no human father and so we have "the seed of the woman"--the Virgin Birth of the Saviour.

But He became a human being.

- b. "Made under the law." From v. 5 we can see that this means that He took His place under the curse of the Law in order to meet our needs.

3. Why?

Two reasons are expressed by the Gk word appearing 2x in v. 5.

- a. "To redeem . . ." This same verb is used in 3:13. Christ took the penalty demanded by the Law to set men free from the curse of the Law. God's righteousness has been satisfied. There is no need to try to satisfy God for salvation. HE IS ALREADY SATISFIED WITH THE WORK OF HIS SON.
- b. SONSHIP. THIS IS THE MAIN POINT OF THE PASSAGE.

First of all, let us make it perfectly clear that we are not adopted sons. This is not what it means.

It means that the time when God's children should remain minor children under the schoolmaster has FOREVER come to an end. FROM THIS TIME ON, EVERY CHILD OF GOD ENTERS THE FAMILY AS SONS WHO HAVE COME OF AGE--WITH ALL THE PRIVILEGES OF SONSHIP.

What are those privileges?

Paul mentions two here, but so much is included in these two.

- (1) Just as He sent forth His Son, then He sent forth His Spirit. This is the reason for Gal. 3:1-5. How privileged we are to live in this age!
- (2) "Abba, Father." It is only as sons that we can really enter into the enjoyment of the truth that God is our heavenly Father.

Why would anyone want to leave these two blessings to go back to OT ground?

III. THE DECLARATION (v. 7).

"A son . . . an heir through God"--not through works, not through merit we have gained, but "through God."

Concl: This is the grand teaching of the NT. We are not longer limited as minor children under the Law, but we can enter as never before into all that it means that we are the sons of God. By His grace, let us live as SONS, never even considering the life of bondage that legalism always brings.