

Lesson 11 13 July 2014

The Greater Privileges of the Gospel

Lesson Scope: Galatians 4

Lesson Focus

Galatians 3 and 4 form one unit of thought. Salvation and the privilege of sonship come by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works of the Law. Chapter 3 closes with the declaration, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." An heir is entitled to receive an inheritance, but if he is immature, it may be placed in escrow until the child comes of age (Galatians 4:1-7). Similarly, the Old Testament saint, though by faith enjoying provisional justification through the atonement of animal sacrifices, could never enter fully into the privileges of mature sonship.

The apostle again voiced his surprise and disappointment that the Galatian believers were forfeiting Gospel privileges for something so inferior (Galatians 4:8-18). How tenderly and graciously he expressed his deep longing for their spiritual success (Galatians 4:19-20)!

This chapter closes with the allegory of Hagar and Sarah and the sons born of them to Abraham. The younger son, born by promise, was the true heir and did not share his inheritance with the older son, who was born of the flesh. As these two could not coexist, neither can the New Covenant coexist with the Old.

New Testament believers enjoy the honored position of mature sonship. They are sons (and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18) and heirs, not mere servants; they are children of the free, not children of bondage.

God created man to enjoy a close relationship with Himself. Before Adam and Eve sinned, He walked and talked with them. But sin placed a great gulf between God and man. Gradually yet persistently, God has been working "all things after the counsel of his own will" to reconcile man unto Himself. With the coming of the Gospel, God lives within the hearts of all believers. We look forward to the next development, when God "will dwell with them, and they shall be his people."

Too often we fail to realize the full potential of our spiritual privileges in the Gospel. Help your class to understand that the Christian who

comes to God with Scriptural confidence is not presuming on God's love. We need to not only comprehend the Father's desire to give good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13) but to apply the full provisions for Christian victory.

Lesson Aim: To understand the greater privileges of the Gospel over those of the Old Testament.

Theme Verses: [Romans 8:16-17](#). The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Lesson Text

The Believer's Position

[Galatians 4:1-7](#) ¹ Now I say, *That* the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; ² But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. ³ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: ⁴ But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁵ To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ⁶ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. ⁷ Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

The Believer's Identity

[Galatians 4:8-9](#) ⁸ Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. ⁹ But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? [Galatians 4:21-31](#) ²¹ Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? ²² For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. ²³ But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman *was* by promise. ²⁴ Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage,

which is Agar. ²⁵ For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. ²⁶ But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. ²⁷ For it is written, Rejoice, *thou* barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. ²⁸ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. ²⁹ But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him *that was born* after the Spirit, even so *it is* now. ³⁰ Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free-woman. ³¹ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Questions for Study

The Believer's Position

1. List some similarities between a child and a servant.
2. Why was Jesus "made of a woman" and "made under the law"?
3. What does receiving "the adoption of sons" involve?
4. How does the Holy Spirit enable the believer to realize the meaning of sonship?
5. What does the believer's inheritance include?

The Believer's Identity

6. What makes any substitute for the Gospel "weak and beggarly"?
7. What main point does the allegory of Galatians 4:22-31 develop in its context?
8. How should understanding that "we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" affect our daily lives?

Analyzing the Passage

Paul contrasted the tutelage of an immature son with the position of a mature son (Galatians 4:1-7). An Israelite who lived under the Law was like a son in his nonage. Though by inheritance "he be lord of all," he is treated more like a servant than a son. In contrast, Christ empowers believers to "receive the adoption of sons."

The doctrine of adoption does not refer to entrance into God's family, which occurs only through the new birth. Rather, adoption refers to the dignity of position to which God immediately elevates the born-again

believer; he is received as a mature son and full heir, with all the freedom and privileges of such a relationship. Compare Romans 8:15-29.

Hagar and Sarah are an allegory of the two covenants (Galatians 4:22-31). Hagar represents the Old Covenant, given at Mt. Sinai, and answereth (corresponds) to the ceremonial bondage that "Jerusalem which now is" (the Judaizers) was promoting. Hagar, a bondwoman, "gendereth to bondage"; that is, she gives birth to slave children. Ishmael, then, typifies one who seeks justification by Old Testament methods, or by extension, by the power of the flesh.

Sarah represents the covenant of grace manifested in the church ("Jerusalem which is above"). Verse 27 is a quotation from Isaiah 54:1, which the apostle here applies to the church. Isaac, the son of promise and the heir to the promise made to Abraham, represents those who are the children of promise, who are justified by faith in Christ, and who are born after the Spirit.

Principles and Applications

The Believer's Position

1. The Gospel elevates the believer to the position of mature sonship (Galatians 4:1-5). Whereas the Old Testament saints were as children, understanding only the ABCs, New Testament believers experience the full reality of Christ's redemptive work. We have no excuse for remaining in spiritual infancy—uninspired to dig into the meat of the Word, unable to articulate "a reason of the hope that is in [us]," unconfident of drawing "near with a true heart in full assurance of faith," and unable to rise above mere law motivation to Christlike victory.

2. Sonship privileges include the indwelling of the Spirit (Galatians 4:6). "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16), giving us a wonderful intimacy with the Father. The Holy Spirit is integrally involved in the new birth (1 Corinthians 6:11) and in continued Christian living and growth (Romans 8; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Indeed, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

3. As a son, the believer both enjoys and anticipates being "an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:7). Jesus was willing to become "poor, that [we] through his poverty might be rich." Presently, this involves all grace abounding toward us and having "all sufficiency in all

things, [so that we] may abound to every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). In the future it will mean glory that will make any present suffering seem insignificant (Romans 8:18).

The Believer's Identity

4. The Gospel enables the believer to remain free from bondage (Galatians 4:8-9). How readily human nature reverts to bondage or exchanges one form of bondage for another! "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19).

5. The Gospel provides a new freedom through a new lineage (Galatians 4:22-26). Whereas the Law continually produced bondage, the Gospel offers a new birth, through which believers find release as "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Rather than yielding a careless, lawless life, this freedom issues into growth in the Christian graces (2 Peter 1:5-8).

6. The universal Gospel has opened the way for an unlimited expansion of God's family (Galatians 4:27). God's spiritual kingdom can be entered only by spiritual birth. As many as receive Christ—whether Jew or Gentile—receive "power to become the sons of God" (see John 1:12-13).

7. The Gospel provides an identity that links the believer to all the divine promises (Galatians 4:28). In the birth of Isaac, God began to fulfill His promise to Abraham. Now through Christ, the ultimate promised Seed, all who are Christ's are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:16, 29). How urgent that we "be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12).

8. Old Testament provisions and New Testament privileges do not mix (Galatians 4:29-31). Hagar and Ishmael were cast out so that Sarah and Isaac could hold their rightful places. Likewise, the Old Covenant has been completely done away so that the far more glorious New Covenant can stand. As "children ... of the free," we enjoy Gospel liberty, free from any misguided sense of obligation to keep the onerous demands of the Law (Acts 15:10), free from the constant failure of mere outward motivation (Romans 7), free to fulfill "the righteousness of the law" (Romans 8:1-4), and free to glory "in the cross of our Lord Jesus

Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

Important Teachings

1. The Gospel elevates the believer to the position of mature sonship (Galatians 4:1-5).
2. Sonship privileges include the indwelling of the Spirit (Galatians 4:6).
3. As a son, the believer both enjoys and anticipates being "an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:7).
4. The Gospel enables the believer to remain free from bondage (Galatians 4:8, 9).
5. The Gospel provides a new freedom through a new lineage (Galatians 4:22,26).
6. The universal Gospel has opened the way for an unlimited expansion of God's family (Galatians 4:27).
7. The Gospel provides an identity that links the believer to all the divine promises (Galatians 4:28).
8. Old Testament provisions and New Testament privileges do not mix (Galatians 4:29-31).

Answers to Questions

1. List some similarities between a child and a servant.
Both a servant and a child have a limited understanding of their master's long-range purposes (John 15:15). Both serve under restrictions and discipline, which are different from the liberty of a mature son.
2. Why was Jesus "made of a woman" and "made under the law"?
Jesus was "made of a woman" because only by partaking of human flesh could He identify with humanity and offer a perfect sacrifice. He was "made under the law" because the Messiah had to come of Jewish lineage and had to demonstrate, through a perfect life, the holy standard of the Law in order to fulfill the Law and usher in the superior New Covenant.
3. What does receiving "the adoption of sons" involve? The New Testament doctrine of adoption never refers to the means by which one enters God's family; that entrance is only through the new birth. Adoption involves the dignity of the relationship to which the Father immediately elevates a born-again believer. It emphasizes the placing of a believer in

the position of a mature son and full heir, with the freedoms, privileges, and responsibilities of such a relationship.

4. How does the Holy Spirit enable the believer to realize the meaning of sonship?

The Holy Spirit helps the believer to experience Christian assurance. The Spirit seals the believer as belonging to the Father and dwells in the believer's heart as the pledge of future inheritance. The Spirit is integrally involved in the believer's new birth. The Spirit helps the believer to crucify the flesh and to walk in newness of life. The Spirit provides power and inner motivation for holy living. The Spirit enables the believer to experience the Father's love so that he responds, "Abba, Father."

5. What does the believer's inheritance include?

Believers inherit "all things that pertain unto life and godliness," such as abounding grace for victorious living, spiritual fellowship within God's family, spiritual illumination and power, the divine nature implanted within, and all the Christian graces that flow from this relationship. In the future, believers will share in the marriage supper of the Lamb and will partake of the tree and water of life. In the eternal state, they will be delivered from the limitations of mortality and enjoy unbroken fellowship with the Father.

6. What makes any substitute for the Gospel "weak and beggarly"?

Every substitute for the Gospel—attempts to be justified by works, attempts to divorce faith from works, or anything else—is weak in that it is absolutely powerless to deliver a person from the pull of the fallen human nature. Every substitute is beggarly in that it is utterly without the means to purchase pardon and eternal life.

7. What main point does the allegory of Galatians 4:22-31 develop in its context?

The apostle Paul's main purpose in writing the Epistle to the Galatians was to refute the doctrine of the Judaizers, who were attempting to mix the Old and New Covenants. This allegory is the capstone of his argument that the only true Gospel is that which proclaims justification alone through faith in Jesus Christ. (In the remainder of the epistle, the apostle turned to the practical outworking of this great truth.) The main point of the allegory is that the Old Covenant (Hagar) always produces spiritual bondage ("gendereth to bondage") and must therefore be total-

ly done away ("cast out"); the New Covenant (Sarah), however, produces true spiritual liberty ("children of promise"). The two competing heirs could not coexist in Abraham's home; the two Covenants cannot coexist as means of justification.

8. How should understanding that "we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free" affect our daily lives?

Understanding that we are "children ... of the free" releases us from any misguided sense of obligation to keep the onerous demands of the Law, delivers us from the constant failure of mere outward motivation, enables us to fulfill "the righteousness of the law," and causes us to marvel at the great provisions of the cross.

Summarizing the Lesson

The Law was a system of outward ceremony and provisional atonement. By obeying the Law in faith, the worshipers gained a limited sense of forgiveness and a limited access to God, but they lived with constant reminders that redemption was not yet complete and the way to God was not yet fully open. The Gospel, however, provides "salvation, full salvation free." The "adoption of sons" gives us "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." We now "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." What a privilege to rest as a son in the Father's love!

Research Guide

1. For another allegory or commentary on the two mountains and the heavenly Jerusalem (church), see Hebrews 12:18-24.
2. Study Romans 8 as a parallel passage to Galatians 4. Note the removal of condemnation through Christ, the Christian's liberty, the meaning of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life, the enmity between the flesh and the Spirit, the meaning of adoption, and God's love for His children.