

Lesson 11 19 July, 2020

The Superiority of the Gospel

Lesson Scope: [Galatians 4](#)

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

“Then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs.” What kind of heirs? How does this privilege differ from the claim that Jews by birth claimed as biological descendants of Abraham? Paul explains with the analogy of a young heir under the care of teachers and mentors. Whatever his future work and authority will be, right now he is a child. The “Jews by nature” of the Old Covenant were like that immature heir whom his father deemed unprepared for the adult responsibilities that his position would bestow upon him. An heir in training naturally anticipates the time when his father pronounces him prepared to exercise the full privileges and responsibilities of his title.

Anyone who returns to the Law is like the heir who flinches from his destined role and prefers the security of childhood under tutors and governors. This is spiritual regression rather than advancement. The heir grown to maturity is not a child to be trained, or a servant to be paid his wage, but a son and partner entitled to his full share of privileges. New Testament believers enjoy the honoured position of mature sonship. They are sons and heirs rather than servants; they are children of the free, not children of bondage.

There are two spiritual families in this world: the family of God and the family of Satan. As a result of the Fall, every man is born with the sinful, Adamic nature. This automatically places us in Satan’s family. Only by the supernatural working of God’s grace can we be born again into God’s family. Challenge your class to display, through righteousness and brotherly love, the characteristics of God’s children (1 John 3:7-10).

Lesson Aim: To see the greater privileges of the Gospel.

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

“Ye Are Sons

[Galatians 4:1-7](#)

¹ (KJV) 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.

“Known of God”

[Galatians 4:8-11](#)

⁸ (KJV) 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? ¹⁰ Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. ¹¹ I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

[Galatians 4:19-20](#)

¹⁹ (KJV) My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, ²⁰ I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

“The Children of Promise”

[Galatians 4:21-31](#)

²¹ (KJV) 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 freewoman.³¹ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Questions for Study

“Ye Are Sons”

1. List some similarities between a child and a servant.
2. What privileges accompany the adoption of sons?

“Known of God”

3. Describe the “weak and beggarly elements” mentioned in 4:9.
4. How should being known of God affect our thinking and conduct?
5. What are some things that could turn us from sonship to bondage again?

“The Children of Promise”

6. In what ways does the friction between Ishmael and Isaac represent the relations between good and evil today? How does the resolution apply today?
7. In what ways does being a child of the freewoman affect your everyday life?

Analysing the Passage

The concept of heirs, training, and eventual responsibility is one that we readily understand. In this chapter, it does not refer to individual believers. Rather, the illustration describes the situation of saints in the Old Covenant in contrast to the New Covenant, which was introduced in the fullness of time through the coming of Jesus Christ. His coming and work enable believers to be adopted as mature sons. Believers now receive the Spirit of God and personal access to God the Father.

Yet regression remains a constant temptation. What is the attraction of the “days, and months, and times, and years”? To one who knows God and is known by God, such things are repressive and sap spiritual vitality.

The discourse thus far follows the passionate rebuke from 3: 1. Paul now shifts to a more tender and personal appeal in verses 12-20. He walks the Galatian believers through the consequences of their thought processes. They had not hurt him by rejecting his teaching; they had hurt only themselves. He asks them to recall his ministry to them, done in spite of human frailty, from a heart of compassion for their welfare. Which of the Judaizers was so motivated for the Galatians’ spiritual benefit?

In his concluding statements about the superiority of the Gospel, Paul presents an allegory of the two covenants illustrated by two sons, two mothers, and two cities—one on earth and one in heaven. A slave mother bore a son through natural means. A freewoman bore a son through the direct intervention of God Himself. The city on earth was enslaved by foreign captors. The city in heaven will always be free. Unlike the two sons in the allegory, we may choose to be either free or enslaved.

Principles and Applications

“Ye Are Sons”

1. Man’s position before the Gospel was one of bondage without sonship privileges (4:1-3). Under the Law, man related as a servant to the Father. Servants often served with a sense of fear and obligation. Adoption in this analogy refers to the heir coming of age and receiving the full privileges and responsibilities of a son who enjoys his father’s love.
2. Gospel privileges are realized only through the condescension of God’s Son (4:4). Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8).
3. Jesus Christ redeemed man from bondage to a mature relationship of a son (4:5). As sons, we may “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (He-

brews 4:16). Because we are sons, God reveals His will and purposes to us (John 15:15).

4. The indwelling Spirit is a privilege of God's sons (4:6). God's presence within us allows us continual sweet fellowship with Him. The Holy Spirit facilitates our daily spiritual growth as He comforts us, teaches us, and guides us into all truth.

5. Sonship opens the way to receive an inheritance from God (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).

"Known of God"

6. Gospel privileges can be lost through turning from grace to the works of the Law for salvation (4:8-11, 19-21). How readily human nature reverts to bondage. Salvation is a gift of God. It cannot be earned by keeping the Law or by doing good works. Rather, we accept God's gift and live holy lives that are acceptable to Him.

"The Children of Promise"

7. The privileges of the Gospel are experienced by those who trust God's promises (4:22-24). Through faith, we identify with faithful Abraham. In Christ, those eligible to receive the promises expanded to include "whosoever believeth." By these promises we can "be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Through this spiritual birth, we are privileged to become the spiritual sons of God.

8. Freedom from fleshly bondage is a privilege of the Gospel (4:25-26). Being born from above frees us from the bondage of this world and the god of this world. We are no longer in bondage to the lusts of the flesh. We now possess the power and inner motivation for righteous living.

9. A spiritually fruitful life is the privilege of the Christian under the Gospel (4:27). Just as the children of "the desolate" became an innumerable company, so the Christian brings forth abundant fruit. Jesus has provided abundant resources that are more than sufficient for us to be able to prosper spiritually.

10. A deliberate choice for God's plan of salvation keeps us enjoying the privileges of the Gospel (4:30-31). Our flesh, the old nature, must be crucified daily so that nothing can draw us away from our service to

God. By putting off the flesh and allowing God's spirit to reign within us, we can experience full liberty in Christ.

Important Teachings

1. Man's position before the Gospel was one of bondage without sonship privileges (4:1-3).
2. Gospel privileges are realized only through the condescension of God's Son (4:4).
3. Jesus Christ redeemed man from bondage to a mature relationship of a son (4:5).
4. The indwelling Spirit is a privilege of God's sons (4:6).
5. Sonship opens the way to receive an inheritance from God (4:7).
6. Gospel privileges can be lost through turning from grace to the works of the Law for salvation (4:8-11, 19-21).
7. The privileges of the Gospel are experienced by those who trust God's promises (4:22-24).
8. Freedom from fleshly bondage is a privilege of the Gospel (4:25-26).
9. A spiritually fruitful life is the privilege of the Christian under the Gospel (4:27).
10. A deliberate choice for God's plan of salvation keeps us enjoying the privileges of the Gospel (4:30-31).

Answers to Questions

1. List some similarities between a child and a servant.
Both a servant and a child have a limited understanding of the Master's long-range will and plan (John 15:15). Both serve under restrictions and discipline different from the liberty of a mature son who is an heir. Both have an immature relationship with the Father.
2. What privileges accompany the adoption of sons?
We can have an intimate relationship with God. The gulf of guilt and fear from our sinful state is healed. The distance and aloofness that the Old Testament saint so keenly perceived is closed. We have victory over sin in a way that was not possible before. A clean conscience enables us to look on the world with an open face.
3. Describe the "weak and beggarly elements" mentioned in 4:9.

Paul was referring to ceremonial rites that had no power to release man from his sinful habits. They were too poor (beggarly) to purchase the pardon and eternal life that are available so abundantly through Christ.

4. How should being “known of God” affect our thinking and conduct? We become responsible to use this greater understanding to grow. Inaction and drift are unacceptable. We must rise above the “beggarly elements” that appeal to those of an immature state of development.

5. What are some things that could turn us from sonship to bondage again?

By placing our confidence in our good works or on our membership in a Biblical church, we would be turning from grace to embrace legalism. A wrong view of Christian liberty could take us back into bondage to the flesh.

6. In what ways does the friction between Ishmael and Isaac represent the relations between good and evil today? How does the resolution apply today?

The families of good and evil, whose fathers are God and Satan, represent the conflict between the two kingdoms. The evil persecutes and harasses the good. Thus it will always be. Good and evil cannot both reside in our own hearts. The solution is to “cast out” the evil!

7. In what ways does being a child of the freewoman affect your everyday life?

Those who are free are not in bondage to either religious ceremonies or to the passions of carnal nature. They are free from the crushing weight of guilt. Instead of a wild and slavish fear of God, they can often exercise their privilege to call on their Abba Father. They yearn to grow spiritually to become all that God would have them to be. The free are able to avoid fleshly gratification and to choose a destiny and accept its pathway. They can prioritize activities for both the workday and life-work. The free exercise the spiritual discernment necessary to understand doctrinal truths, such as are handled in the book of Galatians, and are able to evaluate the messages of the Judaizers of their time.

Summarizing the Lesson

The age of the schoolmaster is over. We live in the age of full spiritual maturity and fruitfulness. A healthy person has no need of life support. Were a healthy person to go on life support, his physical capacities for

life would wither and death would result. Likewise, any reversion to the age of the schoolmaster will only sap spiritual vitality and cause spiritual death. The superiority of the Gospel brings a richer relationship with God, freedom from the bondage of sin, and greater fruitfulness in the kingdom of God.

Research Guide

1. Read the story of Hagar and Ishmael and the conflict between Sarah and Isaac in Genesis 21:9-13. The symbolism of the event was apparent even then in verse 12, but a much fuller significance of the ancient event is revealed in this chapter.
2. Read Mark 14:36, the first recorded instance of God being addressed as “Abba, Father” in prayer. The context of that first occasion is the reason that we also are welcome into intimate communion with God.