

GALATIANS

THE FREEDOM OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel Makes Us Heirs - Galatians 4:1-31

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)

Warm-Up

1. What is something you have been very glad to leave behind and would never willingly go back to?

Read Galatians 4:1-7

2. Read Galatians 4:1–7. What picture does Paul use in verses 1–2 to describe an heir who has not yet received their inheritance?
3. According to verse 3, what was humanity's condition before Christ came?
4. What do you think Paul means when he describes people as being enslaved to the "elementary principles of the world"?
5. Look closely at verses 4–5. What did God do "when the fullness of time had come," and what was Jesus sent to accomplish?
6. What does the word redeem communicate about what Jesus has done for us?
7. Paul says that Christians "receive adoption as sons." Why is the language of sonship and inheritance especially significant in the context of the first century?
8. According to verse 6, what evidence does God give that we really are his children? What does the Spirit enable us to cry?
9. How should knowing God as Father, rather than merely Master or Judge, change the way we relate to him?
10. Verse 7 says that the Christian is "no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir." Which part of that identity is easiest for you to believe? Which part do you find hardest to live out?

Read Galatians 4:8-20

11. What makes the Galatians' decision to turn back to slavery so shocking to Paul?
12. Paul says the Galatians have come to know God—or, more importantly, "to be known by God." What difference does it make to know that God personally knows his people?
13. What are some apparently "good" things—religious habits, church traditions, morality, service, reputation or achievement—that could become forms of slavery if we begin relying on them for God's approval?
14. Read verses 12–20. What do these verses reveal about Paul's love and pastoral concern for the Galatians? Why is his strong language ultimately an expression of love?
15. The sermon ends with the warning to STOP and remember who you are. Where are you most tempted to pursue performance for God rather than intimacy with God?
16. How could the truth that you are redeemed, adopted and filled with God's Spirit reshape that area of your life this week?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, thank you for freeing us from bondage to the elementary things of the world. Thank you for the freedom that we have in Jesus. Please help us to remember who we are, please keep us from running back to slavery, and remind us of your presence with us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TITLE: The Gospel Makes us Heirs

PASSAGE: Galatians 4:1-31

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: Through Jesus Christ, we have been adopted into his family as his child to receive a great inheritance.

STRUCTURE:

- No Longer Slaves [1-7]
- Don't Turn Back [8-20]

- *There's a universal rule when it comes to action heroes and explosions in movies or on TV.*
- *And that is: cool guys don't look at explosions - they blow stuff up and they walk away.*
- *It's the cliché ending shot of an action movie - the hero is all muddy and filthy from the fight, walking away in slow motion while the building they come from spectacularly blows up behind them.*
- *They don't turn back.*

- *Or let's say you've been rescued by someone from the jaws of a shark or something - you don't turn back, you swim away!*
- *You don't go back to the danger, you don't go back to the thing you've been saved from, but you enjoy the new life and new freedom that you have!*

- And Paul writes that we all have had a great redemption or rescue. We've been rescued from the curses and chains of the law that we were destined to experience, and we have been given the status of a son of God.
- We've been redeemed from slavery - to be a free child of God!
- But the Galatians were turning back to slavery. They were turning back to the law, they forgot the freedom that they had, they were pressured into law following! And so here in Galatians 4 - Paul sternly urges them to remember who they are in Jesus.
- Remember their freedom. Remember that they are no longer slaves - but sons.

- **No Longer Slaves**
- Now last week, Paul was making the case that the Law was almost like a guardian. It didn't nullify salvation by faith, in fact salvation by faith predated the Law!
- But the law was given in order to reveal just how much we need faith. It was designed to drive the nation of Israel back to God in faith!
- But now, since Jesus has come and died and rose for us - a new era of salvation has come!
- Salvation through faith in Jesus has been made completely clear in Jesus' death and resurrection and thrown open to all nations and all backgrounds!
- Anyone who has turned to Christ in faith, becomes a child of Abraham and gets to receive the promised salvation.
- We are heirs. We get to receive the inheritance! We don't have to work for it, prove ourselves for it, pass a test for it - we simply get to receive it by having faith and trusting in the giver of the gift!

- And Paul continues in that vein in Chapter 4 - he illustrates what it means to receive an inheritance:
- V1 "I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.
- Paul is calling the Galatians and himself - former children. That is - formerly minors!
- Now, just like in modern day times, children in the first century were able to receive an inheritance as written in the will of their parents...
- However, in the case of particularly large inheritances, when a parent died when the child was particularly young, a guardian was appointed to execute the will at the appropriate time so that they didn't go off and spend all their money at once.
 - *If you had given me a large sum of money when I was a kid, there's no doubt that I would have spent it immediately with no thought of savings! My bedroom would have suddenly been full of guitars, or computers, or model trains or something like that...*
- But in the will of the parent, they would have set a date for that guardianship to end and then the child could then receive the inheritance.
- Now - Paul likens this status of a minor to the status of a slave!

- Of particular note - is the fact that a slave couldn't receive an inheritance, just like a minor couldn't!
 - Paul doesn't mind mixing his metaphors here!
- So then with this all in mind:
- V3 "In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world."
- When we were minors, we were slaves. Forced to be a slave.
 - He's talking about our former status before Jesus here - so remember that...
- But what were we enslaved to? Paul says the elementary principles of the world...
- Now - this could mean a number of things. And commentators can't make up their mind.
- It could mean:
 - The fundamental components of the world - like air, earth, fire, and water;
 - It could mean elementary teachings or truths. Essential principles for life.
 - It could also potentially mean spiritual beings -
- Now for the Gentile Galatians, they were formerly pagan worshippers. That is - they were worshipping other gods. Perhaps in physical ways - using the fundamental components of the world - earth, fire, and water..
- For the Jewish Christians - they were formally torah followers. They used physical elements in their worship such as circumcision (that's very physical!), Paul said in 4:10 that they were observing religious feasts! They were burning sacrifices!
- So for both Jews and Gentiles - they were enslaved to serving the created things. Enslaved to the elementary principles of the world!
- For us here today, before Jesus, we too could have been enslaved to all kinds of earthly things...
 - We could have been enslaved to money, or reputation, or career - enslaved to keeping up appearances, to perfectionism, enslaved to addictions, - enslaved to fierce independence, enslaved to having to prove yourself to others,
- Paul's point being - is that no matter if you were Jew or Gentile, or millennial, or baby boomer, or Gen Y or X or Z - or Alpha - before turning to Christ, we were slaves to something.
- But - that's all been put to an end.
- V4 "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"
- When the time was right in God's eyes - God sent Jesus. As a man - that is he was born of a woman; and he was a Jewish man - born under the law. In order to redeem and adopt!
- He came to free us from slavery, pay the downpayment or the ransom price due to us!
- He has liberated us.
- He liberated the Jews from the age of the law and their bondage to it;
- He liberated the Gentiles from the curse of the law, from their separation from YHWH by the law; he liberated us from all that kept us from the Father!
- Through his death and resurrection, he took the curse of the law, he paid the penalty for sin that the law revealed, he made atonement for sin that the law could never do, and rose victorious as the eternal international powerful king of all!
- The old has gone and the new has come - and we have been declared God's sons. We have been adopted as sons.
- Now as we saw last week - this isn't Paul being sexist here, he is being very deliberate with his words here.
- Those who come to Christ have been adopted as sons because in the first century it was only the sons who could receive the inheritance.
- Women and men in Christ both become inheritors of the promise, receivers of the promise that was promised to Abraham and to the nation of Israel - blessings for all nations. Salvation from God.
- And God's presence as well. God has sent his Spirit into our hearts.
 - This was promised through the prophet Ezekiel chapter 36 where YHWH tells his people in exile that he will give them a new heart of flesh, he will put his Spirit within them.
- Well - that time and new age of salvation is now here through the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- And that Spirit doesn't help us to cry to God saying "Master, Master" OR "Lord Lord" OR "Your Majesty, Your Majesty" - BUT the Spirit cries "Father, my Father!"
- We are no longer slaves or servants, but God's Sons.

- What an amazing privilege this is.
- God chose to adopt us! To ransom us! In his great love he came for us! In his great compassion, he loosened the bonds of slavery to the things of this world!
- We have his Spirit in us and with us!
 - Jesus told the story once about a son who rejected his father, asked for his inheritance there and then, and went off into the world. He spent it on all kinds of things, wild living, prostitutes maybe...
 - It was all fun and games until the money ran out and famine came...
 - So he thought to himself that he would go back to his father, he'll say that he's not worthy to be called his son but he'll ask to be a slave instead...
 - But his father saw his lost son coming back up the driveway...he hitched up his robe, but on his best asics running sandals, bolted to his son and before the son got any words out about being a slave - the Father embraced his son and put on a feast. Because his son was lost, but was now found.
- That's who we are! Sons. Not slaves, but Sons and Daughters.
- So then -
- We are no longer slaves...so Don't turn back.
- **Don't Turn Back**
 - *There's a video meme that comes across social media every now and then.*
 - *It's a 30 second or so video of a sheep being rescued from a hole in the ground. It's bleating and crying out to be saved as a man pulls the sheep out.*
 - *And the bloke manages to pull the sheep out! The sheep runs around, it's clearly happy and joyful!*
 - *And then leaps up high - and ends up right back in the hole again.*
 - *Usually people post it with captions that go along the lines of: Me learning from my mistakes; OR me trying to give up chocolate;*
 - Well if Meme's existed in the first century - Paul would probably post this, with the caption: The galatians going back to slavery - with like an eye-roll emoji or something like that.
- Because the Galatians were turning their back on God and going to slavery to the Law!
- V8 "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?"
- Guys - how can you go back to that hole that you were rescued from? How can you go back to the people that enslaved you?
- They came to know God - and what's even more crazy is that God knew them!
 - *In the first century - the pagan gods weren't interested in their subjects. People thought that these gods paid no attention to them. So to be known by a god was a great honor!*
- They had this honoured position with the God of the universe, but were turning away - not to pagan worship but to Jewish law following, which Paul is now saying is practically no different to pagan worship!
- This is radical!
- Craig Keener writes this in his commentary:
 - "So wholly and sufficient is Christ that turning back to slavery under anything elementary, whether the law or things that by nature aren't gods, is deemed apostasy."
- Even things which may seem good - if jew or gentile turns to anything or anyone else other than Christ for salvation, then that is deemed apostasy by Paul...unbelief.
 - If we turn to dry religious observance of a set of rules.
 - If we turn worship into a meaningless tick box to do just on a Sunday;
 - If we think we need to perform before God to earn his approval;
 - If we turn to our own good deeds;
 - If we turn to Anglicanism;
 - If we turn to any of these things or anything else other than Christ - then we are turning back to slavery. Slavery to weak and worthless things.
- But that's what the Galatians have done in their practise:
- V10 "You observe days and months and seasons and years! 11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain."

- Paul is saying here: Why aren't you using those brains which God has given you! How can you possibly turn from your great freedom back to slavery! How can you be so thick!
- Especially when it was so good before!

- In V12-20 Paul gives a great emotional appeal to the Galatians. He writes that even though he had some kind of bodily sickness - the Galatians still welcomed him in. In fact, they would have even given their right arm for Paul!
- But these Judaisers have come charming them, courting them, making much of them - but for no good purpose!
- Paul loves the Galatians, his heart burns for them - but the Judaisers don't care for them.
- Paul writes that he is in anguish for the Galatians - he is like in labour for them! Toiling hard and anxious for them - working to see that Christ is formed in them and that they mature in him!
- And so V20 "I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."

- Sometimes Paul is seen as a bit angry...a bit full on and over the top...But we see here Paul's heart for his people - he doesn't like getting worked up in his letters but he does it for good reason!
- *Our two year old Hudson just doesn't stop. Whether it's running around the kitchen island bench at home or running around the park - he just doesn't stop!*
- *He's also very tall - and his reach is just insane and he loves being involved - especially when I'm outside cooking the BBQ. And so last night as I was cooking - I looked away for one second and in came Hudson in front of me reaching for the hot BBQ - I yelled STOP STOP STOP!! And managed to intervene before he seriously burnt himself!*
- Well - Paul is telling the Galatians to STOP STOP STOP!!
 - Don't go back to slavery when you are now free!
 - Don't turn your back on the redemption that Jesus has given you!
 - Don't turn your back on the Spirit God has given you!
 - Don't go to the Law for salvation!
- In V21-31 Paul uses the example of Hagar and Sarah as a bit of a parable or example.
- The main point of it is this: the law of the Judaisers (the present Jerusalem) is done away with. It leads to slavery - so cast it away. Those who turn to Christ are children of freedom, not of slavery...

- If you're tempted to base your approval from God on your performance as I so often am - STOP!
- If you're tempted to pursue perfectionism or performance **for** God rather than intimacy **with** God as I so often am - STOP!
- STOP and REMEMBER who you are - God's Son or Daughter, Redeemed from slavery for freedom, Filled with his Spirit for relationship with him.

- And so 5:1 "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."