

Slaves Vs Sons (Part 1)

Key Verse:
“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:26

Read: Galatians 3:26 – 4:20

Last month we closed our lessons with the consideration of the glorious fact that by faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, we can rejoice in the complete forgiveness of our sins and acceptance with God. Amazingly, as Paul explains in our reading today, “there’s more!” Faith in Christ brings us the incredible honour and blessing of adoption; God adopts us as His own children!

SONS

Paul expands on this wonderful fact, by explaining that not only are we adopted as ‘children of God’; we are in fact adopted as ‘sons.’ Of course, in the culture in which Galatians was written, and indeed in many cultures still, the first-born son enjoyed a privileged position of honour. It was he who was heir to the father’s estate and who would inherit everything. Daughters and slaves had few (if any) rights and privileges. But Paul wants the Galatians to really understand this clearly; ALL Christians (males and females) are EQUAL IN STANDING before God, and treated relationally, as ‘Sons.’

It makes no difference what our circumstances are at the time we acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Saviour and gratefully accept what He did on our behalf at Calvary. Our race, our gender, our job, our education, our bank balance, our earthly family connections - all are irrelevant to Him! He accepts us all through faith in Jesus Christ and faith alone. There are no distinctions among Christians in terms of our standing before God and our relationship to Him.

Of course, the issue of differing functions and roles within the ‘church’, the family, and society is a separate issue, which Paul deals with in other passages such as 1 Timothy 2-3, 1 Corinthians 14, and Ephesians 5. This does not detract from the wonderful fact that, as Christians, we all enjoy the wonderful spiritual position of ‘full inheritance’ as adopted sons of the Living God (Hebrews 9:15).

His Holy Spirit lives in all true believers, giving us the right to address God as, “Abba Father.” ‘Abba’ is an Aramaic word, used to reveal the deepest level of intimacy and love in the relationship between child and father. That is now the Christian’s privileged relationship with the living God! Do you realise what a powerful and loving Father you have? One who will never leave you, who will never let you down? One who always knows what is best for you, and who will always be on your side? It’s amazing!

SLAVES

I guess that’s why Paul was so concerned about the Galatians and their activities (v11). They had been born again. They had received all the promises of God. They had witnessed signs and miracles to attest to God’s faithfulness. They had freedom to enjoy a fulfilling and joyful relationship with God. Yet now, when they had everything, it seems they were choosing to submit to rules and regulations about how they were to love God.

Now they were returning to the belief that they had to earn God’s acceptance, with the inevitable result that their joy in the Lord had disappeared! (v15) We can almost feel the Apostle’s puzzled frustration, as he pleads with them to remember what it was like when they first accepted the true gospel!

Consequently, Paul warns them of the real motives of the Judaisers. They were trying to place rules for living over the Galatians, not for their benefit, but to gain power over them. Their desire was to have the Galatians as their own followers; to draw them away from following Christ. They wanted to destroy the personal relationship the Galatians had with God. Paul was amazed: why would anyone give up all the blessings of sonship to be a slave again? Yet that is what these foolish Galatians were doing!

Extra: What do you think our inheritance is as children of God?

Level 5 lesson 5

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What added honour and blessing does faith in Christ bring?	.....
2. Christians come in all shapes and sizes. Why is there no distinction between them?	.....
3. How did the Galatians lose their joy?	.....
4. What was the real motive of the Judaisers?	.....
5. Christianity is a religion of sons not slaves. What do you think of this?	.....

My Name is Age

Slaves Vs Sons (Part 2)

Key Verse:
“Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.”

Galatians 4:28

Level 5 Lesson 6

Extra: How does God save us from the slavery of sin?

Read Galatians 4:21-31

ABRAHAM’S SONS: To further enlighten the Galatian believers on this vital doctrine of sonship - and its practical repercussions for them and us - Paul reminds them of the historical background. God had promised Abraham that he would have a son with his wife, Sarah. At that time both Abraham and Sarah were very old, and had been unable to have any children.

After some years had passed, Sarah suggested that Abraham should take Hagar, his Egyptian slave-girl, as his wife and produce a son through her (Genesis 16:1-4). This Abraham did and a son was duly born to Hagar, whom Abraham named Ishmael. However, this was not what God had intended or promised! Some years later, when Abraham was 99 years old, God visited him again and reconfirmed His covenant with Abraham, promising him that he would be the ‘father of many nations’ and that Sarah would bare him a son.

Finally when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90, God ‘visited’ Sarah and miraculously enabled her to become pregnant (Genesis 21:1-2). She gave birth to a son, called Isaac. The first of Abraham’s sons Ishmael was born ‘in the natural way’, but Isaac his second son was born miraculously, ‘as the result of God’s promise’ (Galatians 4:23)

FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM: Paul points out that the two son’s mothers are figures of two different covenants; Hagar, the slave-girl, represents the covenant of Law given by God to Moses on Mt Sinai. Yet because of sinful man’s inability to keep it, it only brought slavery and bondage. Ishmael represents, in a very real way, ‘man’s efforts’ to fulfil God’s will.

Sarah was a free woman, and represents so clearly ‘God’s efforts’ and marvellous provision for mankind. It took a miraculous work of God for Abraham and Sarah to have a son, and likewise it takes a miraculous work of God for us to be made true children of God and freed from the bondage of sin. Like Ishmael, we are all born ‘in the ordinary way’ into slavery.

We can try to be good and follow God’s laws and regulations, but we all fail. We are bound by sin, and it makes our lives miserable and ultimately hopeless, for by ourselves we will never find acceptance with God.

However, it does not always have to be that way; God Himself has made it possible - and this is the fantastic news of the Christian Gospel! All those who will cease from their own efforts to please God and instead place their faith and trust in the One He has provided, Jesus Christ, are accepted into the family of God. It is a miracle!

Just as Isaac was born through the working of God’s Spirit, so we who have believed in Jesus to save us from sin are no longer under the supervision or condemnation of the Law. We become God’s children ‘of promise’! (v28) God said that He would reconcile us to Himself, and through Christ He has done that. In Christ, we are no longer slaves, or children of the slave-woman, but children of the free-woman and true sons of our Heavenly Father!

Paul wanted his readers to understand this glorious truth, so that the Galatians (and us too) might live as true sons. We must live gratefully each day under our Heavenly Father’s love and guidance, not striving in our own futile effort to become sons by trying to keep the Law.

At that time the son born in slavery (Ishmael) persecuted the one who was born by God’s Spirit (Isaac), and it is the same today. The teachings and behaviour of those who are not true children of God are in conflict with those who are. We are to reject these false teachings, and rejoice instead in our freedom and inheritance as true children of God!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What was the major difference between Abraham’s two sons?

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2. What do the two son’s mothers represent?

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3. How can we be set free from sin’s penalty and find God’s acceptance?

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4. Why is it important to understand the truth of ‘sonship’?

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5. What are some practical ways of dealing with persecution?

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Sinful Vs Holy Living (Part 1)

Key Verse:
“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourself be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Galatians 5:1

Extra: How do you put to death the old sinful nature?

Level 5 Lesson 7

Read Galatians 5:1-26

TRUE FREEDOM

All those who have been born again by God’s Holy Spirit, are really free! The Christian freedom Paul describes is freedom of conscience; freedom from the dreadful struggle to keep the Law, trying to win God’s favour and acceptance by our own efforts. Stand firm in this freedom!

The false teachers in Galatia taught that faith in Christ was not enough for salvation. Many today have a similar mind-set, teaching that unless we DO certain things we can have no certainty of our salvation. Paul warned the Galatians strongly against this type of thinking: “If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you.”

In other words, we cannot have faith in our own efforts and faith in God’s! It can only be one or the other. We must choose once and for all to place our complete faith in Christ and all He accomplished for us on Calvary’s Cross. To return to living under the law, is to lose the benefit of what Christ has done and all He offers us. We must choose between a religion of law or a religion of grace.

We wait for this salvation by faith (v6). We cannot work for it. Faith in Christ does not mean we live as we please, for the Christian life is a life in the Spirit. The faith that saves is a faith that works, because the Holy Spirit (who lives in us) produces good works of love (v6, 22, 23)

WATCH OUT FOR THOSE WHO SEEK TO ENSLAVE

Paul again attacks the false teachers. Their teaching was not from God (v8). Its influence was spreading in subtle, incorrect ideas about righteous living. They taught merit instead of grace. Those responsible will eventually be punished by God.

SPIRITUAL LIVING IN FREEDOM

To ‘live by the Spirit’ (v16) means to depend on, obey and let the Holy Spirit direct your life. As we learn to walk in the Spirit, the flesh becomes increasingly subdued. In fact, our old attitudes and desires will be replaced with the attitudes and desires of the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul calls the ‘fruit’ of the Spirit (v22-23). “Love, joy, peace” - graces that are given us by God and reflect our attitude to God. “Patience, kindness, gentleness” - these speak of our relationships with other people. “Goodness, faithfulness and self-control” - these seem to describe the reliability of a Christian and the control that God enables us to have over self. Of course, the ‘flesh’ and the Spirit remain, and the conflict between them is fierce. Like fruit, these things grow to maturity within us. So don’t fret if they’re not there all at once!

TIPS FOR LIFE

Paul also has some good tips for Spiritual living. First, we can only have such a life by faith in Christ. Those who belong to Christ have put to death their old sinful nature; its passions and desires no longer control them.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit has given me life and now lives in me. Now, as I walk day by day in obedience to the written Word of God, I “set my mind on the things of the Spirit.” His Spirit does the leading; I do the following.

Lastly, true Christian relationships are governed by service not rivalry. The correct attitude is not ‘I’m better than you and I’ll prove it’, nor ‘You’re better than me and I resent it’, but ‘You are a person of importance and it is my joy and privilege to serve you’.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Compare the false and the true way of Salvation.	.....
2. Why does Paul disagree with the false teachers?	.....
3. What does it mean to say Christ set us free? (see the Key Verse)	.....
4. What does ‘live by the Spirit’ mean?	.....
5. State some good ways to help set our minds on Spiritual things.	.....

Sinful Vs Holy Living (Part 2)

Key Verse:

“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, what counts is a new creation.”

Galatians 6:15

Extra: Why does Paul say we should do good, especially to believers? (v10)

Level 5 Lesson 8

Read Galatians 6:1-18

In this marvellous letter Paul has reminded us of the Christian’s liberty: the tremendous fact, that ‘in Christ’ we are all treated as God’s ‘sons.’ Now he concludes with practical advice concerning the outworking of that fact in our Christian life and conduct.

HUMBLE RESTORATION: Note carefully how we should respond if one of our fellow-Christians sins: We must not harshly judge and reject, nor ‘turn a blind eye.’ Instead, we are to graciously “restore” them. This involves helping them to see their sin for what it is and to repent of it (v1).

However, there is to be no spiritual pride on our part; no thought that, “I would NEVER do that!” Rather, it is to be done lovingly; humbly acknowledging our own weakness and tendency to sin, and carefully - unless we are tempted and fall into a similar sin! There may be occasions where a person will not repent. Church fellowships then have the responsibility to discipline them, until they repent and desire to be restored to fellowship again (Matthew 18:15-17)

THE ‘LAW OF CHRIST’: We are ‘brothers and sisters’ in God’s family, and as such, we are to care for one another in love and humility (v2). In this way, Paul says, we “fulfil the law of Christ” (see also Romans 13:8-10). What is this law? Jesus Himself said that “to love God with all our heart, soul and mind and our neighbour as ourselves” was the basis of ALL the Law (Matthew 22:34-40). Unregenerate, sinful man can never love God or our neighbour in such a way, because he is controlled by the ‘law of sin.’

However, as Paul explains in Romans 6, as new creations in Christ, we are no longer ‘slaves to sin.’ We have “been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Romans 6:18). Let me illustrate: the ‘law of aerodynamics’ enables a huge jumbo-jet to over-ride the ‘law of gravity’ and fly. The law of gravity does not cease to operate, it is simply over-ridden by a more powerful law. So long as those engines keep providing the necessary power, the fulfilment of the law of aerodynamics is seen in the plane flying! So we as Christians have been born again and are now governed by a new law - the law of Christ. As we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit He enables us to ‘fly’ -

i.e. to love and obey God and care for our fellow man as we never could before (1 John 4:7-21). The fulfilment of Christ’s law is seen when Christians love and obey God, and when they reflect His love by loving and caring for people - especially their Christian brothers and sisters! (v10)

ENCOURAGE OTHERS: So we are to practically and prayerfully encourage and help each other through difficult times and situations by “sharing their burdens” (v2). We can encourage someone by telling them how they have helped us and by sharing what we’ve learned from the Scriptures with those who have taught us (v6). We are not to do any of this with pride, but love.

We should test our motives constantly: “Am I doing this out of love for God, that His name will be honoured and glorified, and that perhaps I might be able to share the gospel with others? Or is it to make me look good?” If we know our motives are right before God, we won’t need to compare our actions with those of others and so have cause for envy or pride (v4). God’s job for us is not necessarily the same as His job for someone else!

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE! If you plant cabbage seeds, cabbages grow. If you plant selfish actions, bitterness grows. When a Christian plants good deeds, peace grows. Get the idea? Your actions and attitudes show the sort of person you are (v7). Doing good and having right actions and pure thoughts is “sowing to the Spirit” (v8). There will be times when doing good will be inconvenient, tiring, and even a downright nuisance - but don’t stop! God will bless in His own time (v9).

OUTWARD SHOW vs NEW LIFE WITHIN: The Galatian message is simple: as Christians we are no longer bound to try and earn merit with God by following rules and putting on an outward show. Instead, through Christ’s death and resurrection, we are accepted! Now, by the miraculous working of His indwelling Holy Spirit, we’ve become brand new creations (v15).

We are free sons and daughters of the one true Living God! In His grace, it is our incredible privilege to respond in love and reflect His wonderful character. We must display the fruit of His Spirit as we live for Him each day, so that we ‘shine like stars in the universe’ in this dark and needy world. (See Philippians 2:15)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What should be our response if our fellow Christian sins?

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2. How do we fulfil the Law of Christ?

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3. What are some ways we can encourage others?

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4. What good things can we ‘sow’ to please the Holy Spirit?

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5. What has been the most important lesson for you from these Galatian studies?

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