

Sermon Outline

“ABBA! FATHER!”:
KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

“ABBA! FATHER!” (ROMANS 8:15)

I. The Greatest Privilege

II. Justification By Faith in Christ Alone

- A. The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Galatian Christians to fend off a false teaching that was making its way into the Galatian Church.
—According to this teaching, Gentile Christians had to observe the Law of Moses order to be fully accepted by God.
- B. Since the Galatian Christians were coming under the sway of this teaching, Paul wrote his letter to reinforce a very important truth—*justification by faith alone in Christ alone*.
 1. We are counted righteous by God and given God’s Holy Spirit not by doing the works of the Law, but simply by putting our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 2:16).
 2. Because we are sinners, we cannot rely on our attempts to obey the Law for our salvation, because the Law always condemns those who break it—and we break it continually (Gal 3:10).
 3. For us to come into a right standing with God, we must receive our righteousness in Jesus Christ, because Jesus alone is the righteous and faithful One who has obeyed God in all things.
- C. Just before Galatians 4 begins, Paul closes chapter 3 with the following thoughts.
 1. Those who “were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”
 2. Those who are Christ’s are now “Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”
—This idea of “heirs” will appear again in chapter 4.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why did the apostle Paul write his letter to the Galatians? What major truth was Paul emphasizing in this letter? (2) How does Paul end chapter 3? What theme will he carry over into chapter 4?

III. Before Christ (Galatians 4:1-3)

- A. In 4:1, Paul picks up from the end of chapter 3 and continues on his theme of being an heir of God's blessings.
- B. He says, "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."
- C. Paul was speaking of the practice in Greco-Roman culture.
 1. In Greco-Roman society (and perhaps in most societies), a son does not get to enjoy his full inheritance until he reaches a certain age that was predetermined by his father.
 2. Until the son reaches that age...
 - a. he will be treated as a slave, even if he is, by right, a son.
 - b. he would be subjected to tutors, guardians, governors and other overseers his father may have placed over him.
- D. Paul compares our pre-Christ/pre-Christian condition to this state of immature sonship—this state of slavery (v 3).
 1. "In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world."
 2. "In the same way" connects verse 3 to verses 1 and 2.
 3. Paul is establishing a comparison here between the immature child of the Greco-Roman society to the individual in the pre-Christian/pre-Christ state.
 4. Just as that young Greco-Roman son would be subjected to "guardians and managers until the date set by his father," so too were we.
 5. Before we became Christians, we "were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world."
 6. The "elementary principles of the world"—whatever they may be—function in a similar way to the guardians and managers in the life of the young Greco-Roman child—they kept the child in check and often under a condition of strict and harsh discipline.
- E. What exactly are these "elementary principles of the world" that Paul is has in mind?
 1. F.F. Bruce explains that the "elementary principles" (Greek: *stoicheia*) refers to things that are "placed side by side in a row" (*The Epistle to the Galatians*, 193).
 2. *Stoicheia* can refer to the letters of the alphabet, the ABCs, and whatever basic rules, principles, or regulations we may have learned early on in life.
 3. To understand what elementary principles Paul has in mind in Galatians 4:3, we must look to the surrounding passages for help.
 - a. The elementary principles include the Law covenant of Israel.

- i. Galatians 3:23-24: “Now before faith came, we were *held captive* under the law, *imprisoned* until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our *guardian* until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.”
- ii. The holy Law of God itself—the whole system of moral law, civic law, and ceremonial law—is included amongst the “elementary principles of the world.”
- iii. What was it about the Law of Moses that put people in a condition of slavery?
 - (A) What made the Law a guardian/jailer was the fact that the Law came with punishments.
 - (B) The Law of Moses was given as a part of a covenant that obligated God’s people to obey him—or else.
 - (C) This may explain why Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3: “‘Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”
 - (D) When Paul talks about the Law, he’s not just talking about the Law as a revealer of God’s holy character.
—He’s talking about the Law as a covenant that binds God’s people to rewards and punishments: Life for obedience; death for disobedience.
 - (E) Since God’s people are sinners and do not obey the Law in its entirety, the Law ends up becoming a like slave master who imprisons God’s people and holds them down in a state of perpetual punishment.
 - (F) The Law oppresses when it is used as a condition for acceptance with God.
- b. The elementary principles also include the false gods and religions of the pagans.
 - i. In Galatians 4:8, 9, Paul links idol worship to the elementary principles:
—“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?”
 - ii. The elementary principles include all the false religions and man-made superstitions and traditions that keep people in slavery. They would probably include...
 - The astrological zodiac
 - *Feng shui*
 - Lucky charms and talismans
 - Magical powers in numbers, dates, colors, and words

4. In summary, the elementary principles include...
 - a. The Law as a condition for acceptance with God.
 - b. The curse of the Law
 - c. The false religions and oppressive superstitions and cultural traditions that Gentiles were trained in.
 - d. Sometimes, the elementary principles were good:
 - They kept us in check and make sure that our sinful behavior does not go too far.
 - e. Sometimes, the elementary principles were hurtful:
 - They held cultures down in fear, ignorance, and injustice.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Paul describe the pre-Christian/pre-Christ existence? What example from life does he use? (2) What are the elementary principles of which Paul speaks? (3) How does the Law become an oppressive “elementary principle”? What was it about the Law of Moses that put people in a condition of slavery? (4) What elementary principles were non-Jews trained on? (5) What elementary principles were you raised in during your pre-Christian days?

IV. God Sent His Redeeming Son (Galatians 4:4, 5)

- A. How do we leave these principles behind to attain the inheritance of adulthood?
- B. Just as the Greco-Roman father decided when his son would leave the oversight of his guardians, so God the Father decides when we leave the elementary principles behind.
- C. The good news is that the time has already come.
 - With the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has granted us freedom from the elementary principles.
- D. The Gospel in summary: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”
 1. The Gospel is what Christ did to save us from our sins and bring us back to God.
 2. In this case, we see that Christ saved us from our sins by saving us—as strange as it may sound—from the rule of the Law itself!
 3. In what sense were we redeemed from “under the law”?
 - a. We were redeemed from the Law not in the sense that God’s basic moral standards no longer apply to us.
 - b. We were redeemed from under the Law in the sense that we are saved from the curse of the Law.
 - Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...”

- c. We were redeemed from under the Law in the sense that we are freed from the need to rely on obedience to the Law as a means of justification.
—P. Ryken: “In Christ the law has been destroyed as a way of getting right with God” (*Galatians*, 71).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How has God enabled us to leave behind the elementary principles? (2) In what sense are we redeemed from under the Law? (3) What can happen now that we redeemed from under the Law?

V. God Sent the Holy Spirit of His Son (Galatians 4:6)

- A. On this note, we now come to our main verse: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”
 - 1. Paul is developing the point he made earlier in Galatians 3:26: “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”
 - 2. So now that we are sons, what is a consequence of that fact?
—“...God has sent the Spirit of his Son [Jesus] into our hearts,”
 - 3. Notice how the verb “sent” is used here again.
 - a. The sending of the Spirit in verse 6 accompanies the sending of the Son in verse 4.
 - b. The Holy Spirit who was upon Jesus when he was in this world, the Holy Spirit who was then given by Jesus to his disciples on the day of Pentecost, that same Holy Spirit has now been placed by God into the hearts of each believer.
- B. The fact that God placed the Holy Spirit of his Son into our hearts is important.
 - 1. As Jesus himself taught us, the heart is the seat of the will, and the desires, and the thoughts, and the emotions.
 - 2. The fact that God placed the Holy Spirit of his Son into our hearts means that the presence and the life of Jesus himself is in us.
 - 3. By implication, it means that our hearts will be conformed to Jesus himself.
 - a. The Holy Spirit of Jesus in us begins reprogramming us from the inside.
 - b. A key result of this reprogramming is also the ability to relate to God as our dearest Father (Rom 8:15).
- C. But what we see in Galatians 4:6 is interesting.
—In this verse, it is the Spirit of Jesus, not us, who calls God by those terms of endearment!

- D. How do we reconcile Romans 8:15 with Galatians 4:6?
1. Galatians 4:6 gives us added insight into *how* we are able to experience God as our dear Father.
 2. We are able to experience God as our Father because our experience is itself a result of the Spirit's own experience.
- F.F. Bruce: Abba “is the voice of the Spirit of Jesus (on the lips of his people)” (*The Epistle to the Galatians*, 199)
- E. Galatians 4:6 deepens our understanding of how our relationship to God the Father actually happens.
1. We are made to share in the Spirit's own experience of God the Father.
 2. Our union with God through Jesus Christ is so great that we are literally borne along by will and the affections of the Holy Spirit himself!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Now that we are sons of God, what has God done for us? (2) What significance is there in the sending of the Holy Spirit into our heart? (3) In Galatians 4:6, who is the one who cries “Abba! Father!”? (4) How is our crying out to God related to the Spirit's crying out to God?

VI. No Longer a Slave, But a Son of God (Galatians 4:7)

- A. As a result of the Spirit being in us, Paul writes in verse 7, “you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”
- B. This verse tells us in no uncertain terms that because we are sons, we are heirs through God.
- C. We are now free by the decision and the power of God in Jesus Christ to enter into a fuller experience of God's blessings.

***Questions for reflection:** According to verse 7, what is the result of the Spirit indwelling us? What has happened to our condition of immature slavery?

VII. Embracing God as Our Dearest Father

Because we have been made sons of God by the work of the entire Trinity—by the will of God the Father; by the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the indwelling Holy Spirit's own loving communion with God the Father—we ought to run to God like children to their father. We ought to freely embrace God and enjoy him as our dearest and beloved Father!

- A. We embrace God as our beloved Father by *crying out to him in time of need*.
- B. We embrace God as our beloved Father by *talking freely to him*—even if there are no pressing needs on our hearts.
- C. We embrace God as our beloved Father also by *seeking to please him*.
—Not as a slave, but as a grateful son.
- D. We embrace God as our beloved Father by *enjoying him for who he is*.
 - Psalm 37:4: “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
 - Isaiah 58:14: “then you shall take delight in the LORD....”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Now that we have been made sons of God by the community of the divine Trinity, how should we respond to God? (2) What are some ways that we embrace God as beloved Father? (3) In which of those ways do you find your greatest struggle? (4) Where are you still relating to God as a slave instead of a son? Why do you struggle with knowing God as Abba Father?