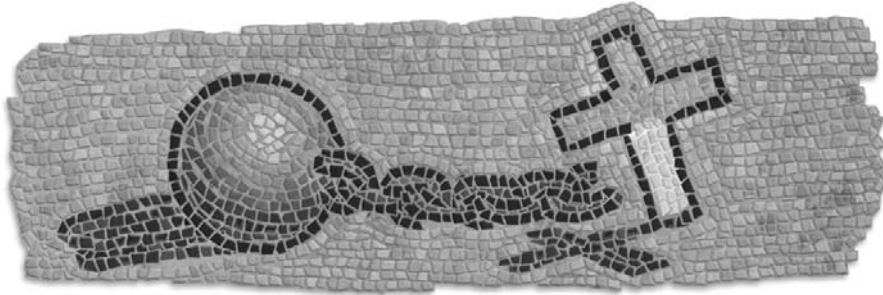


From Slaves to Heirs¹



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 3:26–4:20; Romans 6:1–11; Hebrews 2:14–18; Hebrews 4:14, 15; Romans 9:4, 5.

MEMORY VERSE: “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Galatians 4:7, ESV).

PAUL TELLS THE GALATIANS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT LIVE AND ACT AS SLAVES BUT AS THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD. They, too, have the rights and honors that belong to God's children. Their situation was almost the same as the story of a discouraged new convert (believer) who came to talk with Chinese Christian, Watchman Nee.

“‘I pray hard. I try hard. But I just cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm [I am] losing my salvation.’ Nee said, ‘Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained. He never makes a mess. He is obedient. He pleases me very much. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess. He throws his food around. He makes his clothes dirty. He is a total mess. But who is going to inherit [receive] my kingdom? Not my dog! My son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ's heir because it is for you that He died.’”—Adapted from Lou Nicholes, *Hebrews: Patterns [Guides] for Living* (Longwood, Florida: Xulon Press, 2004), page 31.

We, too, are God's heirs, not because of our own worth but because of His grace.² In Christ we have much more than we even had before Adam's sin. This is one of the points that Paul is trying hard to teach the Galatian believers, who are quickly losing their way.

1. heirs—receivers of God's promise.

2. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 13**OUR CONDITION³ IN CHRIST
(Galatians 3:26–29)**

With Galatians 3:25 in mind, read Galatians 3:26. How does this verse help us understand what our relationship to the law is, after we have been saved by Jesus?

The word *for* at the beginning of verse 26 (ESV; KJV) shows that Paul is making a direct connection between this verse and verse 25 with this example. In Bible times, a master's son was under a teacher only as long as he was underage. Paul is saying that those who come to faith in Christ are no longer underage. Their relationship with the law is changed because they are now adult "sons" of God.

The word *son* is not meant for males only. Paul clearly includes females in this group (Galatians 3:28). Paul uses the word *sons* instead of *children* because he is thinking of the family inheritance⁴ that was passed on to male children. The wording "sons of God" was the special choice of Israel in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 14:1, ESV; Hosea 11:1). In Christ, Gentiles (non-Jews) now also enjoy the special relationship with God that had been reserved for Israel only.

According to Galatians 3:27, 28; Romans 6:1–11; and 1 Peter 3:21, what is it about baptism that makes it such an important event?

Paul's use of the word *for* in verse 27 (ESV) shows once again his well-thought-out list of reasons. Paul believes baptism is a very important step in joining our lives with Christ. In Romans 6, Paul describes baptism as a symbol of joining with Jesus, both in His death and resurrection (return to life). In Galatians, Paul uses a different symbol: baptism is the act of being clothed with Christ. Paul's use of words helps us remember wonderful verses in the Old Testament that talk about being clothed with righteousness (God's goodness) and salvation (read Isaiah 61:10 and Job 29:14). "Paul believes baptism is the moment when Christ, like a robe, wraps Himself around the believer. Paul does not actually use the word 'righteousness.' But he is describing the righteousness which is given to believers like a robe."—Adapted from Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), page 145.

Baptism is a symbol of our union (joining as one) with Christ. This means that what is true of Christ also is true of us. Christ is the "Seed" of Abraham. For this reason believers are "joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17) or heirs to all the covenant promises⁵ made to Abraham and his future children.

Think about the thought that what is true of Christ is also true of us. How should this wonderful truth influence every part of our lives as Christians?

3. condition—the way a person or thing is or becomes; a state of being.

4. inheritance—money, property, and so on that is received from someone when that person dies.

5. covenant promises—the blessings God will give to us if we obey Him.



Baptism is the moment when Christ, like a robe, wraps around the believer.

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 14

ENSLAVED TO ELEMENTARY (BASIC) PRINCIPLES (IMPORTANT RULES) (Galatians 4:1–3)

In Sunday’s study, Paul compared⁶ our relationship to God with that of sons and heirs. Now he explains his example further by including the theme of inheritance in Galatians 4:1–3. Paul’s example describes a situation in which an owner of a large estate has died and left all his property to his oldest son. But his son is still underage. As it is often true with wills today, the father’s will requires that his son be under the supervision of guardians and managers until he reaches adulthood. The son is master of his father’s estate by title, but as he still is underage, he is still a slave in practice.

Paul’s example is almost the same

as that of the schoolteacher in Galatians 3:24. But in this case, the power of the guardians and managers is greater and much more important. They are responsible for the growth and development of the master’s son. And they are also in charge of all the financial and business affairs until the son is old enough to take over those duties himself.

What is Paul saying in Galatians 4:1–3 that should make clear what the purpose of law is in our lives as Christians?

What does Paul mean by the wording “elementary principles” (Galatians 4:3, 8, ESV)? The subject is still arguable. The Greek word *stoicheia* means “elements.”⁷ Some think it means a description of the basic elements that make up the universe (2 Peter 3:10, 12). Others think the elements are demonic powers that control this evil age (Colossians 2:15). Still others believe they are principles of religious life (Hebrews 5:12). But Paul has made a point about humans as “minors”⁸ before the coming of Christ (Galatians 4:1–3). This suggests that he is talking about the basic principles of religious life. If so, Paul is saying that the Old Testament period, with its laws and sacrifices, was merely a shadow (example) of the gospel to come that listed the basics of salvation. The ceremonial laws⁹ were important as a

6. compared—to show how two or more things are the same.

7. elements—basic things of the earth, such as air, stones, minerals, water, fire, and so on.

8. minors—people who are not adults yet.

9. ceremonial laws—the laws dealing with the sanctuary (the house where God was worshiped by the Jews in Bible times). The sanctuary services helped the Jews to better understand God’s plan for saving them from sin.

teaching tool to Israel. But they were only shadows of what would come in the future. They never were meant to take the place of Christ.

To force one's life to be lived around these rules instead of Christ is the same as wanting to go back in time. Suppose the Galatians wanted to return to those basic elements after Christ had already come. That would be the same as the adult son in Paul's example wanting to be a child again!

A childlike faith can be positive (Matthew 18:3). But is it necessarily the same thing as full spiritual growth? Or could you argue that the more you grow spiritually, the more childlike your faith will be? How childlike and "innocent" and trusting is your faith?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 15

"GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON" (Galatians 4:4)

Paul's choice of the word *fullness* (KJV) shows God's active role in working out His purpose in human history. Jesus did not come at just any time. He came at the right time God had prepared. History tells us that this time was known as the *Pax Romana* (the Roman Peace), a 200-year period of peace across the Roman Empire. Rome's control of the Mediterranean world brought peace, a common lan-

guage, favorable means of travel, and a common culture that helped with the fast spread and growth of the gospel. The Bible tells us that this period also marked the time that God had set for the coming of the promised Messiah (Chosen One) (read Daniel 9:24–27).

According to John 1:14; Galatians 4:4, 5; Romans 8:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:5–8; Hebrews 2:14–18; and Hebrews 4:14, 15, why did Christ have to become a human to save us?

Galatians 4:4, 5 hold one of the shortest stories of the gospel in the Bible: "God sent forth His Son" (NKJV). In other words, the coming of Jesus into human history was no accident. God took the first step toward our salvation.

Also clear in these words is the fundamental Christian belief in Christ as eternal God (John 1:1–3, 18; Philippians 2:5–9; Colossians 1:15–17). God did not send a heavenly messenger. He, Himself, came.

Christ was, and is, the eternal Son of God. But He was also "born of woman" (Galatians 4:4, NKJV). His virgin birth¹⁰ is suggested in this wording. But it points to His birth as a human.

The phrase "born under the law" (Galatians 4:4, NKJV) points to Jesus' Jewish background and the fact that He accepted our guilt as sinners.

It was necessary for Christ to be a human because we could not save ourselves. By uniting His divine nature¹¹

10. virgin birth—meaning that Jesus was born of a woman (Mary) who never had sex but who got pregnant through the power of the Holy Ghost.

11. nature—the particular aspect or quality of something that makes the thing what it is; the heart and mind.

with our fallen human nature, Christ was able to become our Substitute, Savior, and High Priest. As the Second Adam, Jesus came to reclaim all that the first Adam had lost by his disobedience (Romans 5:12–21). By His obedience, Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law’s requirements. So He paid the price for Adam’s terrible failure. And by His death on the cross, Jesus met the justice of the law, which required the death of the sinner. In this way, He gained the right to save all who come to Him in true faith and surrender.



God sent forth His Son.

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 16

THE HONOR AND RIGHTS OF ADOPTION (Galatians 4:5–7)

In Galatians 4:5–7, Paul continues on his theme. He points out that Christ has now “redeemed [saved] those who were under the law” (verses 4, 5, ESV). The word *redeem* means “to buy back.” It meant to pay the price to

buy the freedom of either a hostage or a slave. As this theme shows, the price paid for the sins of humans suggests a negative background: humans are in need of being freed.

But from what do we need to be freed? The New Testament presents four things: (1) freed from the devil and his tricks (Hebrews 2:14, 15), (2) freed from death (1 Corinthians 15:56, 57), (3) freed from the power of sin that enslaves us by nature (Romans 6:22), and (4) freed from the punishment of the law (Romans 3:19–24; Galatians 3:13; and Galatians 4:5).

According to Galatians 4:5–7; Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:15, 16, 23; and Romans 9:4, 5, what positive purpose has Christ gained for us through the redemption¹² we have in Him?



We are in need of being freed from Satan, death, sin, and the punishment of the law.

We often speak about what Christ has done for us as “salvation.”¹³ While this is true, the word is not as

12. redemption—the process by which Christ, through His death on the cross, bought us back from sin.

13. salvation—the process of being saved.

descriptive as Paul's special use of the word *adoption* (*huiiothesia*). Paul is the only New Testament author to use this word. But adoption was a well-known legal process (method) in the Greco-Roman world. Several Roman emperors during Paul's life used adoption as a way of choosing a successor when they had no legal heir. Adoption guaranteed a number of rights: "(1) The adopted son become[s] the true son . . . of his adopter.¹⁴ . . . (2) The adopter agrees to bring up the child properly and to give food and clothing. (3) The adopter cannot turn down his adopted son. (4) The child cannot be reduced to slavery. (5) The child's natural parents have no right to reclaim him. (6) The adoption establishes the right to inherit."—Adapted from Derek R. Moore-Crispin, "Galatians 4:1–9: The Use and Abuse of Parallels [Things That are Almost the Same]," *The Evangelical Quarterly*, volume 61, number 3 (1989), page 216.

If these rights are guaranteed on an earthly level, just imagine how much greater are the honor and rights we have as the adopted children of God!

Read Galatians 4:6. The Hebrew word *Abba* was the endearing (loving) word children used to address their father, in much the same way the word *Daddy* or *Papa* is used today. Jesus used it in prayer (Mark 14:36). As God's children we have the honor of calling God "*Abba*" too. Do you enjoy that kind

of closeness to God in your own life? If not, what is the problem? What can you change to bring about this closeness?

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 17

WHY TURN BACK TO SLAVERY? (Galatians 4:8–20)

What is Paul's main point in Galatians 4:8–20? How seriously does he take the false teachings among Galatians?

Paul does not describe exactly what the Galatians' religious practices were. But he clearly has in mind a false system of worship that ends in spiritual slavery. Paul judges it to be so dangerous and destructive that he writes a very strong letter. In the letter he warns the Galatians that what they are doing is almost the same as turning away from sonship¹⁵ to slavery.



A false system of worship leads us away from sonship in Christ to slavery.

14. adopter—a person who is responsible for adopting someone who will inherit his or her things.

15. sonship—the state of being a son.

Paul did not say what the problems were. But what does he say in Galatians 4:9–11 that the Galatians were doing that made him so unhappy?

Many have interpreted Paul's words about "days and months and seasons and years" (Galatians 4:10, ESV) as a complaint against ceremonial laws and against the Sabbath too. But such an interpretation goes beyond the facts that are there. For example, if Paul really wanted to single out the Sabbath and other Jewish practices, it is clear from Colossians 2:16 that he easily could have listed them by name. Additionally, Paul makes it clear that what the Galatians are doing has led them from freedom in Christ to slavery. "If keeping the seventh-day Sabbath leads a man to slavery, it must be that the Creator Himself entered into slavery when He kept the world's first Sabbath!"—Adapted from *The SDA Bible Commentary [Explanation]*, volume 6, page 967. Also, why would Jesus keep the Sabbath and teach others how to keep it if Sabbath keeping kept people from the freedom that they have in Him? (Mark 2:27, 28; Luke 13:10–16.)

Might there be any practices in Seventh-day Adventism that take away from the freedom that we have in Christ? Or what about our attitudes (feelings) toward the practices? How could a wrong attitude lead us into the kind of slavery that Paul warned the Galatians about so strongly?

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 18

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "In the council of heaven, God planned that sinful humans should not die in their disobedience. Instead, through faith in Christ as their Substitute, they might become the chosen of God through adoption by Jesus Christ. God desires that all men should be saved. And so, He has made His plans accordingly. So it was planned that His only begotten Son will have died as our Substitute. Those who die will die because they refuse to be adopted [received] as children of God through Christ Jesus. The pride of man prevents him from accepting the gift of salvation. But human works will not admit a soul into the presence of God. The only thing that will make a man acceptable to God is the grace of Christ through faith in His name. Humans cannot depend on works or feelings as proof that anyone is chosen by God. Only those who have accepted Christ are chosen to be saved through Christ."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, "Chosen in Christ," *Signs of the Times*, January 2, 1893.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Think more about the idea of what it means, and what it does not mean, to be like children in our walk with the Lord. What parts of a child's nature are we to copy in showing our faith and our relationship with God? At the same time, what are ways in which we can take this idea too far? Discuss.

② What is it about humans that make them so afraid of the idea of grace, of salvation by faith alone? Why is it that many people would rather try to work their way to salvation if that were possible?

③ As a class, go over the final question from Thursday's study. In what ways can we as Seventh-day Adventists get caught up in the kind of slavery that we have been freed from? How could this happen to us? How can we know if it does? And how can we be set free?