

The Gospel in Galatians From Slaves to Heirs

Lesson #8 for August 19, 2017

Scriptures: Galatians 3:26-4:20; Romans 6:1-11; Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-15; Romans 9:4-5.

1. This lesson covers some very significant issues in Christianity. Paul was determined to break down any barrier that might remain between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. When we join ourselves to Christ through baptism, we are to become a part of the body of Christ; every human being is eligible. There are no distinctions remaining. Paul was born in Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. He was a Roman citizen from birth. Paul was a Pharisee and a member of the tribe of Benjamin.
2. Many times in his earlier days, Paul must have prayed the famous prayer of the Jewish male: "Lord, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." As recorded in Galatians 3:28-29; Romans 3:22; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11; and Ephesians 2:15, Paul went all out to reject Jewish male exclusiveness. Modern Jews hate Paul for these words.
3. The Jewish males were not the only ones who had such attitudes. The Greek males also felt quite superior. Today, do we males have that attitude? Is that the attitude displayed in the church?

Much of the Greek tradition could be summarized in the thanksgiving variously attributed to Thales, Socrates, and Plato that "I was born a human being and not a beast, next, a man and not a woman, thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian." (*Diog. Laert* 1.33; *Lactant. Div. Inst.* 3.19)

4. But, Paul did more than just eliminate former distinctions. He invited every person who was baptized into the body of Christ to become a true heir—one with Christ Himself. Paul was doing everything he could to tear down walls. Does that remind you of Ronald Reagan in 1987 standing at the Brandenburg Gate near the Berlin Wall and saying: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." And we know what happened soon thereafter.
5. The Chinese Christian Watchmen Nee put it like this when asked about it by a new convert who was discouraged:

"No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm 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 is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ's heir because it is for you that He died."—Lou Nicholes, *Hebrews: Patterns for Living* (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2004), p. 31. (Also quoted in an old *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, November 12, 2011.)

6. We may be sinners; we may do all sorts of bad things. But, if we claim to be Christians, God is ready to accept us as His children and heirs. Shouldn't all of us be heirs?
7. Paul used the word *sons* instead of *children*. Why was that? In biblical times, the sons

were the ones who received the inheritance. Daughters were expected to marry and become a part of a different family. Furthermore, the children of Israel came to be known as the “sons of God.” Paul wanted to be clear in stating that Gentile sinners could also be a part of that family—children of Abraham. (Galatians 3:29)

8. But, the physical act of baptism does not accomplish such a change. It is supposed to happen inside of us first. We must be born of the Spirit and clothed in Christ. (Romans 6:1-3) This means that Christ becomes the Center of our lives. If we are going to receive that amazing inheritance, then Christianity—our new identity—must affect every part of our lives.
9. How does that actually work? By beholding, we become changed. How do we become like Christ? We look to Him and try to copy His life.

It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence. Man will never rise higher than his standard of purity or goodness or truth. If self is his loftiest ideal, he will never attain to anything more exalted. Rather, he will constantly sink lower and lower. The grace of God alone has power to exalt man. Left to himself, his course must inevitably be downward.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 555.2 (1888); *The Great Controversy** 555.1; *Mind, Character, and Personality,** vol. 1, 331.1; *Mind, Character, and Personality,** vol. 2, 418.4. [Bold type is added.]

10. Do our friends and associates at work and even our casual acquaintances recognize Christ in us? (Matthew 5:16) What change takes place so that people see God instead of us? Could people actually see the difference in us?
11. What is implied by *being an heir with Christ*? Doesn't the whole universe belong to Him? Think of the incredible privileges that are included with that designation. Just as Jesus ascended to His Father, we—in association with Him—are invited into that intimate relationship. (John 17) At the third coming, God is going to move His headquarters to our planet! (Revelation 21) But, there are also huge responsibilities. In the Old Testament, the children of Israel lost their special relationship with God because they ignored the responsibilities while claiming all the privileges of that special relationship. Are we going to make that same mistake?
12. During the last evening that Jesus spent with His disciples on this earth, after washing their dirty feet and seeing Judas get up and leave, He said to the eleven: “I don't want you to be slaves any longer; I want you to be My friends.” (See John 15:15.) Which would you rather be? A slave? A son or daughter? An heir? Or, a friend? Which do you think is truly closer to the Father? A slave? A son or daughter? An heir? Or, a friend? Not every son is close to his father. He may be the inheritor of the father's estate; but, they may not even be on speaking terms.
13. But, Paul went on to say that those who become a part of the body of Christ become so close to Him that they refer to Him as *Daddy* or *Papa*. (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6) Would we dare to address God in that way? What is unique about a child's relationship with his father? As Watchman Nee has suggested, the child may not be very responsible. But, does the child have to earn his father's love? Or, his mother's love? Children may still require a *paidagogos*—a guardian and guide, someone to discipline them and teach them

the right way—but, they are still children of their parents.

14. Read Galatians 4:1-3. What is implied by *the elemental things of the world or the ruling spirits of the universe* in Galatians 4:3? In light of the way Paul used this expression in other places, (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 5:12) it seems likely that he was talking about the “elementary steps in the Christian life.” “Baby” Christians may feel like they are bound by rules and laws that did not affect them in the past. But, when they have accepted Christianity, they are working their way through the “alphabet” of the Christian life.
15. Are those elementary things somehow analogous to the “shadows of the good things to come” described in Hebrews 10:1-4?
16. Read Matthew 18:3. In what sense are Christians to be childlike? Many people point to this verse and suggest that *to be childlike* means to be willing to believe even things that are somehow unbelievable. Does this mean that true Christians are to be gullible?
17. What is the most important characteristic of a child? Isn't it his capacity to grow? We become alarmed if a child fails to grow physically and even more if he fails to grow mentally. Would it be true that if a child fails to grow spiritually, that is great? Or, would that be a disaster? (Ephesians 4:13-16; Hebrews 5:11-6:3) Children ask a lot of questions! They want to learn. If your picture of God has not grown in the last year, you are worshiping a graven image.
18. Read Galatians 4:4. What is the meaning of *the fullness of time*? Several things have been suggested as an answer to this question. What about the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 which predicted the coming of a Messiah? Rome ruled the world, and there was relative peace, the *Pax Romana*. There was a common language as well as relatively easy communication and transportation. There was a common culture which made it easy to spread the gospel.
19. But, there is another reason why that was the fullness of time even though it is often not recognized or acknowledged. The sect of the Pharisees had come to dominate the culture in Palestine. They seemed to be the super-religious people. But, it was those same Pharisees who were most determined to get rid of Jesus Christ. They were people who seemed to dedicate their whole lives to serving God; however, they ended up crucifying the very God they claimed to be serving! The Pharisees were no better than the pagans! This demonstrated that the ditch on each side of the road is just as deep and just as treacherous!
20. Do you think the Jews of the Old Testament would have killed Christ? Or, would they just have ignored Him as they did so many of His prophets? Why this difference?
21. Why was it necessary for Jesus to become fully human, to be born to a human mother, and to live the life of an ordinary human being? Many answers have been given to this question. He could not have died either the first death or the second death unless He had become human. (John 1:14; Galatians 4:4-5; Romans 8:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-15) These verses suggest that Jesus needed to live a perfect, yet fully human, life in order to prove that it can be done. He demonstrated His glory, the righteousness of God, and the attitude of a servant. By His death He destroyed the Devil, and He dealt with sin—even “doing away with sin.” He came to show us what a Christian life is really like—to be our Example. Coming to this earth as a Human was not necessary so that God could learn something that He/They did not know as some seem to imply. He came so that we could see what God is like.

22. Read **Galatians 4:4-5**:

⁴But when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might become God's sons and daughters.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Galatians 4:4-5). New York: American Bible Society.

23. What is implied by these words? Is this what is supposed to happen when someone is baptized? What does it mean *to be redeemed*? In the first two or three centuries after Jesus's death, there was a popular theory of why Jesus had to die known as the *Ransom Theory*. When our first parents sinned, they, in effect, sold themselves into the control of Satan. That theory says that when Jesus came to live on this earth, the Father said to Satan: "I will give you Jesus in exchange for all of the souls of sinners." Satan had always wanted to be in the position of Christ; so, he agreed. Later, after the crucifixion and the burial, Jesus arose and escaped Satan's control and returned to heaven. Thus, according to the Ransom Theory, God won the great controversy by deceiving and tricking the Devil! Does that sound right to you?
24. Implicit in Galatians 4:4-5 is the idea that Christ was fully God. What do the Scriptures say about that? See John 1:1-3,18; Philippians 2:5-9; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-14.
25. Many of our Christian friends would suggest that it was necessary for Christ to come and live and die in order to be legally qualified to "pay the price for sin." What does that mean? Does justice require the death of Someone to pay for sin? Who is it specifically that is requiring that death? Is it the Father? Did Jesus need to do something to assuage or propitiate the Father's wrath against sin? Does that suggest that the Trinity is not always in perfect harmony? Does the Son need to plead with the Father to forgive us? That is pure paganism! See John 16:26-27 where Jesus said that He will not plead with the Father because the Father Himself loves us already.
26. What really happens to a person when he is baptized? The physical baptism in water is not the key point. What God is looking for is a true baptism by the Spirit. If we become true children of God, then we can believe that our sins have been buried with Christ. More than that, as He was raised to life, so we can live a new Christian life. If we do that, God will count us as His heirs, and we will be eligible for all of the rights and privileges of children alongside Jesus Christ. Do we become actual children of God? Or, have we always been the children of God?
27. How well did Jesus deal with Satan when He was on this earth? Look at His handling of Satan during the temptations in the wilderness. (See Matthew 4:4-11.)

God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. **Rebellion was not to be overcome by force.** Compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. **God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.**

[Usually when two armies face off, they are somewhat equal in power. But, when Satan faces off with God, he uses force, power, deceit, lies, trickery, etc. while God limits Himself to using only truth and love. Does that seem fair?]

It was God's purpose to place things on an eternal basis of security, and in the councils of heaven it was decided that time must be given for Satan to develop the principles which were the foundation of his system of government. He had claimed that these were superior to God's principles. Time was given for the working of Satan's principles, that they might be seen by the heavenly universe.

Satan led men into sin, and the plan of redemption was put in operation. For four thousand years, Christ was working for man's uplifting, and Satan for his ruin and degradation. **And the heavenly universe beheld it all.**—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 759.1-3. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

28. This earth is the theater of the universe? (1 Corinthians 4:9) God tells us that when we are baptized, He adopts us into His family. What does adoption mean to Christians? What did Paul promise, and what does God promise to those who are adopted? See the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday, August 16.

- 1) Final victory over the Devil and his temptations. (Hebrews 2:14-15)
- 2) Final freedom from death. (1 Corinthians 15:56-57)
- 3) Freedom from sin and all that implies. (Romans 6:22)
- 4) Freedom from the condemnation of the law. (Romans 3:19-24; Galatians 3:13; 4:5)

In light of these statements, have we truly become the children of God?

29. Even in the Greco-Roman world, there was a well-known legal adoption code. It included the following provisions:

- 1) The adopted son became the true son of his adopter.
- 2) The adopter agreed to bring up the child properly and provide the necessities of food and clothing.
- 3) The adopter could not repudiate his adopted son.
- 4) The child could not be reduced to slavery.
- 5) The child's natural parents had no right to reclaim him.
- 6) The adoption established the right to inherit. (See Derek R. Moore-Crispin, "Galatians 4:1-9: The Use and Abuse of Parallels," *The Evangelical Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 3 (1989), p. 216.) (Referenced in the *Bible Study Guide* for Wednesday) [Some of the famous Caesars were adopted as children.]

30. We can see even from this ancient law code that the privileges of an adopted son or daughter are essentially the same as those of a true child. Thus it is that we can be free to call our heavenly Father, "Daddy" or "Papa." (Galatians 4:6) What is the difference between a child and a friend? Could we be both?

31. How far did Paul go in associating with Gentiles? Was he ever able to overcome his Pharisaical prejudices? Was it easy for him? (1 Corinthians 9:21)

32. How can we become more and more like God? Jesus had an incredible relationship with His Father even while He was living on this earth as a human being. Did God actually direct His life moment-by-moment?

But the Son of God was surrendered to the Father's will, and dependent upon His power. So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans

for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 208.2; compare *Signs of the Times*, November 21, 1892, par. 2; HDL 18.3; MH 478, 479 (1905); 2MCP 734.1.

What role should our devotional life play in our relationship with God? (Mark 1:35-39)

33. Read Galatians 4:8-20. Finally, Paul became almost exasperated in dealing with the Galatians. In effect, he asked: “You really don’t want to become slaves again, do you?”
34. What is implied by paying attention to certain days, months, seasons, or years? Was Paul referring to the seventh-day Sabbath? If Paul meant to include the seventh-day Sabbath, he certainly could have mentioned it specifically as he did elsewhere. (Colossians 2:16) Paul suggested that those legalistic requirements being promoted by the Judaizers in Galatia were leading the Galatian Christians back into bondage. Do we really believe that God would give human beings a law that led to bondage?
35. Would Jesus have kept the Sabbath if He thought it was a sign of bondage? Or, is it our attitude about these things that mostly involves the bondage?
36. Even in our day, conservative Christians tend to follow a lot of rules. Those rules include dress codes, what is appropriate in worship, diet, etc. How do these requirements fit into the idea of Christian freedom?
37. Human beings tend to be very selfish—even to the point of harming themselves. Do we ever refuse the help that God offers because we want to “do it ourselves”?
38. Those of us who believe in the larger view, great-controversy, trust, healing model of the plan of salvation believe that God has a wonderful plan for our lives. We are to become more and more like Him by beholding and studying His life and incorporating more and more of the Christian ideals into our lives. (See again *The Great Controversy* 555.1 as quoted in Item #9 above.) Isn't that what children do as they watch their parents and grow to become like those parents? In the same way, are we becoming the children of God? Or, are we too occupied with the things of this world?

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Last Modified: June 12, 2017

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