

GALATIANS - SERMON 16
GALATIANS 4:1-7 — TRANSITION OF COVENANT COMMUNITY, PT 1
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INTRODUCTION:

Read Galatians 4:1-7

Paul has emphasized and contrasted both the temporary nature and the restraining function of the old covenant with that of the new covenant. The old covenant guarded, nurtured, and restrained the covenant community like a strict baby-sitter until the time of the coming of Christ. At that time the covenant community of the people of God entered into their maturity as adult sons of God; the new covenant replaced the old covenant as the organizing principle of that community. No longer was the temporary baby-sitter required.

Paul in chapter four continues this emphasis upon the transition between the two covenants. He does so by appealing to two great illustrations, that of the family (vv 1-11) and to the sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac (vv 21-31). We begin with the first of those two illustrations, the family example.

OUTLINE:

- I THE CULTURAL ILLUSTRATION, vv 1-2
- II THE COVENANTAL APPLICATION, vv 3-7

I THE CULTURAL ILLUSTRATION, vv 1-2

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

Paul has turned to a well known practice among Greek and Jewish children. In that practice children of prominent citizens were considered under one of two categories. The first category or status was called the children's minority and the other the children's majority. When a child was in its minority it was in the time before his or her maturity. A child's majority was that time after having reached maturity. The specific age of this transition is irrelevant to our passage. However, the fact of this transition is germane to the argument Paul is presenting.

The picture presented in these verses is that of a family in which there is a father, a son, an estate, managers, and servants.

The word used here for *child* (νήπιός) refers to a very young child. In the Greek this word literally refers to one who cannot speak. A νήπιός is one considered to be intellectually immature, not able to think well. This one is not able to govern himself and is in need of supervision. Even though this child is destined to rule and manage his father's estate when he comes of age, as a child he is in a state parallel to that of a slave. Even though he is heir to the whole estate, he is, nevertheless, while in his

minority, obliged to submit to those who rule over him. He is not able to manage his own affairs. He must obey those who rule over him, the tutors of verse 2.

A tutor was one who was entrusted with the management of property and persons. He oversaw the estate.

A governor was a house steward who oversaw the household and its affairs.

Under these two the child was to submit. The child/heir was not at liberty to do other than what the tutor and governor required.

The status of a minor son was both temporary and preparatory. It was time devoted to preparing the son for that time when he would experience more freedom and more authority. This preparatory time was to be born patiently and obediently until the appointed time. When a child at last reaches the age of majority (maturity) and enters into this new freedom and authority it was unthinkable that he should cling to his minority.

II THE COVENANTAL APPLICATION, vv 3-7

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Paul begins with the words *even so we* by which he establishes his purpose of comparing the analogy of the tutors and governors with that of the old covenant. In other words Paul is saying 'in the same fashion as addressed in the natural realm where minor children are managed by tutors, so God manages His covenantal children'.

A The parallel condition of the covenant community.

In verse 3 Paul draws parallels between the cultural conditions of verses 1-2 with that of the covenant community under the old covenant.

Even so we, when we were children - Who are the *we*, the *children* that Paul speaks about here? They are the covenant community of the people of God.

Paul is speaking about the people of God when they were in that time called childhood (covenantally speaking). The word for *children* here is the same as in verse 1 (νήπιός). When the covenant community was in a state of minority, under the old covenant, the knowledge of divine truth was limited and immature. The nation as a whole was morally and intellectually immature in terms of its knowledge of and understanding of God's redemptive plan and purposes. As we read the account of the people of God in the Old Testament, under the old covenant, we do see the immaturity of them. They truly acted like children. They were rebellious, temperamental, inconsistent, ignorant, and they needed continual chastisement. They failed to understand much of what God had revealed to them.

The people of God under the old covenant are said to be in *bondage*. This word means to be under servitude. As the child differed none from the servant so also were the people of God, though His people, differed little from slaves.

The people of God are said to have been in bondage to something in particular - *under the elements of the world*. The word *elements* refers to any first thing from which others belonging to the same series take their origin (alphabet). Elements in science are the starting components out of which various compounds are composed. An *element* simply refers to the first thing from which others belonging to the same series take their origin. The old covenant was the first element of the covenant community. It was the beginning and first principles of God's revelation to the world. Out of this all else which would provide and fuller expression was to arise.

In Galatians 4:9-10 it becomes clear that this word *elements* refers to the old covenant and the things of that covenant.

But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years.

You observe days and months and seasons and years is a reference to all the Jewish observances, feasts, and the additional Sabbaths which they observed.

The *bondage* of verse 3 is a bondage unto the elementary ceremonies and rituals in which the covenant community was kept in submission to restrict and confine. The old covenant community was in a state of servitude. They were kept under great particulars and details. There were many rules to follow. Being under the old covenant was akin to a state of slavery.

This is the parallel condition of the old covenant community to that of servitude.

B The promised emancipation of the covenant community, vv 4-5.

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law (old covenant), to redeem those who were under the law (old covenant), that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Even as it was not the intention of the fathers to keep their minor sons under the tutors indefinitely, so also it was not the intention of the Lord to keep His people under the bondage of the old covenant indefinitely. An appointed time was set for the maturing of the minor child and the release from bondage to the tutors. Likewise with the people of God there was an appointed time for release from the restriction of the old covenant.

This appointed time was the coming of Jesus Christ. It is called the *fullness of time*. That particular time is identified with that time when *God sent forth His Son*. This is a reference to the prophecy of Daniel. In that prophecy there is established a time frame from the commanding to rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of Jesus Christ.

Daniel 9:24-27

"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy (all this was accomplished with the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ) "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."

There is a definite time assigned for the coming of the Messiah dated from the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This is probably Paul's reference in his use of the phrase *in the fullness of time*.

The word *sent forth* means to send someone forth to execute or accomplish a mission or commission. That mission was accomplished in the context of not only being God's Son, but also of becoming a man *born of a woman*. This is a strong text for the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. His deity and His humanity are supported by this one verse.

Paul also states that the Lord Jesus Christ was *born under the law* or under the administration of the old covenant. Jesus Christ was under the authority of the old covenant, not so that He might simply exist under it like others, but more importantly that He might deliver us out from it.

Galatians 4:5

. . . to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Jesus Christ came to deliver us from the oppression of the old covenant. He did this in two ways.

- 1 As the substitute for His people He fully obeyed and perfectly kept all of the precepts of the old covenant.
- 2 He completely bore and entirely exhausted the curse of the old covenant for the violation of this covenant endured at the hands of the elect.

The terms of the old covenant were completely fulfilled by Jesus Christ and thus honorably terminated. The old covenant was not discarded in disgrace. It was completed by the Lord Jesus Christ. (Analogy: a student can exit high school by one of two ways. He can drop out dishonorably or he can graduate honorably.)

Jesus Christ set the people of God free by fulfilling the old covenant completely, obeying its precepts and satisfying its curse. He did so in substitution of His people. It was thus necessary for Jesus Christ to become a man and to live under the terms of the old covenant.

Thereby Christ won for His people a new liberty and a new status with God. This new liberty and status is referred to as the *adoption of sons*, vs 5.

The word *adoption* does not denote a person newly brought into the family who was not there before (this would be our meaning for it). It refers to the state of one already in the family who is then elevated to a new level of authority within the family. Contemporary Jews have a ceremony called bar mitzva. When a young man reaches a certain age he undergoes this ceremony which symbolizes the passing from minority to majority within that family.

Adoption as sons is set in contrast to childhood (νήπιός, v 1). In this verse 5 the word is not child but son (υιοὶ). The reference is to a full grown son. The text literally reads, *in order that we might receive the adult son placing*.

Having passed from minority to majority the former arrangement with tutors and governors (old covenant restrictions) was no longer suitable. Yet this was the very thing the Judaizers were trying to re-impose upon the Galatian Christians.

Galatians 4:6

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Because the covenant community has passed into its majority, having left behind the old covenant and entered into the new covenant, God has given to the community the inheritance of the Father. What is that inheritance? It is the gift of the Holy Spirit. This obtaining of the inheritance occurred on the day of Pentecost to the covenant community collectively, Acts 2. That which happens to the community collectively also happens to the covenant members individually. Though these things occur to the individual believer, Paul's emphasis at this place is not to the individual but to the community as a whole.

The child of verse 1 is going to eventually become an heir, lord of all, and receive the father's estate at the appointed time. That time is when the father determines that time. The analogy applied is that the Father will and has brought out His people from their bondage to the old covenant at the time when He sent forth the Lord Jesus Christ and instituted the new covenant. The inheritance is the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 15:1

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

What was the great promise made to Abram? It was God Himself - *I am your shield ...reward*. The inheritance God has laid up for His people is Himself. This is why the Holy Spirit was given rather than a mere bit of real estate. The Holy Spirit given to us is like a down-payment ('a part of the whole') for something greater yet to come. God has given

to His people the Holy Spirit as a promissary portion of that which they will one day have in heaven the whole triune God. This is the significance of the day of Pentecost.

Conclusion:

The significance of this material is that we should see that Paul (the Lord) is speaking in regard to covenantal position rather than from an individualistic point of view. God is speaking to us about the transition from old covenant to new covenant and not to us as individuals passing from lost to saved (personal salvation).

Hymn # 290