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**CHILDREN BY GRACE — Galatians 4:4-7**

**by Tom and Alberta Ecker**

"It is doubtful if there is any greater joy on earth than the joy of being free. And the ecstasy is heightened if a person **has once been in bondage**, held captive by a power that is **impossible** to overcome. Being liberated from such clutches brings pleasure beyond description." Charles Swindoll

AT for THIS DAY THAT BEGIN THIS NEW YEAR of 2012 is:

**Galatians 4:4-7 Text**

**<sup>4</sup> but when the set time had fully come, God sent his, Born of a Woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. <sup>6</sup> Because you are his sons, John sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup> therefore you are no longer a slave, but God's child and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.**

**IN A NUTSHELL**

In chapter 4, Paul explains the **glorious reality** of what it means to be **God's children** and how awful it would be **to forfeit** such a privilege. Thus he wants his readers not to listen to the **false teachers** seducing them away from Christ and back into **slavery to the law** rather than **freedom in Christ**.

When we are **not on the same page with God** in understanding Grace we can quickly fall into **confusion and chaos**. Grace brings us into a **privileged relationship with God** as his sons and daughters; we are no longer out of the Old Testament law.

**THE COOKIE THIEF**

Amazing things can happen when you are "not on the same page" with someone else. Chuck Swindoll in his book **Simple Faith** tells the story of a traveler who, between flights at an airport, bought a small package of cookies. She then sat down in the busy snack shop to glance over the

newspaper. As she read her paper, she became aware of a rustling noise... Above the newsprint, she was **shocked** to see a well-dressed gentleman sitting across from her, help himself to her cookies. **Half-angry** and **half-embarrassed**, she reached over and gently slid the package closer to her as she took one out and began to munch on it.

A minute or so past before she heard morosely. The man had gotten another cookie! By now there was only one left at the package. She was **flabbergasted**; but she didn't want to make a scene, so she said nothing. Finally, as if to **lead** insult to injury, the man broke the remaining cookie in half, pushed one piece across the table towards her, ate his half, and left without even saying thank you. She was **dumbfounded!**

Sometime later, when her flight was announced, the woman opened her handbag to get her ticket. To her **shock**, she discovered that her purse per package of open cookies. Somewhere in the same airport another traveler was trying to figure out how that strange woman could have been so **forward** and **insensitive**. That man and woman were "not on the same page," so there was **confusion** and **chaos**.

In the first-century church, Judaizers had invented their own edition of the gospel by combining **grace** and **legalism**. They were **falling apart spiritually** because they were "not on the same page" with God. By combining grace with Old Testament law, the Judaizers were producing a **dangerous hybrid of Christianity**, and other gospel that was, in fact, **no gospel at all**.

In **Galatians, chapter 4:4-7**, Paul presents his argument for the **superiority** of Grace over OT law from the **new** sonship of the Jews and the Gentiles and their **new** personal relationship with God. Paul was concerned that the **Jews** were **professing Christ Jesus** and **creating a hybrid gospel** as much as he was concerned for the Gentiles who were listening to them. **Paul wants both sides to understand salvation by grace and how grace is lived out in faith toward Jesus Christ.**

#### **The Coming of Christ (Part 1 = Gal. 4:4)**

**<sup>4</sup> But when the set time has fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law,**

**4:4. But let us set time had fully come.** God marks with **his perfect and sovereign timing the divine answer** to man's slavery under the Law. The law had accomplished its purpose and man was ready for release from the bondage of the law, **God sent his Son.** He came right on schedule, arriving at the earth when the time had fully come. **Verses 4-5** contain one of the most compressed and highly charged passages in the entire letter because these verses present the objective basis, the Christ and salvation foundation, for the doctrine of justification by faith. The introduction, "**but when the time had fully come,**" is an expression that connects this passage to the illustration of the minor heir entering into his full

Next is the announcement of God's supernatural intervention in the mission of Jesus Christ, "**God sent his Son.**" inheritance at father's pre-appointed time. This sending formula is followed immediately by two parallel participles describing the condition and status of the incarnate Son as he came into the world: he was "**born of woman**" and "**born under the law.**" The early incorporation of these verses into the traditional liturgy of Christmas also points to their appeal is a basic proclamation text. **Some suggest world conditions were right for the right of the gospel.** The birth of the Messiah occurred during the *Pax Romana*, the Romans had ushered in an era of relative peace law and order. The Roman network of roads and travel more convenient, an urban civilization made possible the rapid spread of the Christian message. **Widespread use of the Greek language simplified communication.** At the same time, the proliferation of empty religions among many people creating a spiritual hunger for something genuine. *The Son had the qualifications to bring salvation to human beings.* He was human, **born of a woman**, facing the same case – temptations and problems every human faces. He faces the same expectations each person did, **being born under law.** Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's law, being without sin, but he didn't just as a human being is all ways as we are.

While Jesus' conception was supernatural, His birth was perfectly normal; his birth was that of a poor peasant in ancient Palestine. Not only was he a man, but he also was a Jewish man, circumcised on the eighth day as all Jewish males were. He grew up in a Jewish home reading the Torah, praying to his Heavenly Father, attending synagogue, faithfully fulfilling, as no one before or after him has ever done, all the precepts **and** demands of the law. To some extent Jesus' life "**under the law**" was comparable to the

heir of **Gal 4:1-2**. However, *Jesus always acted in perfect freedom of perfect obedience to the Father*. Jesus was not enslaved to the bondage of the elemental spirits but was victorious over them throughout his ministry — casting out demons, still when, cleansing lepers, raising the dead. As **F.F. Bruce** has noted, while Jesus was "**under the law**," he was nevertheless **not under sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21)**. Thus "**he himself had no need of slave-attendant, guardian or steward...**" Jesus came to set his people free from their bondage to the law and to the elemental spirits.

### **The Purpose of Christ (Part 2 = Gal 4:5)**

**<sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship**

**4:5**. Christ came for two purposes: First, he came to **redeem those under law**. Christ paid the price for his death to free us from the slavery of the law. Second, Christ came **that we might receive the full rights of sons**. These rights, as **a gift**, no human effort can never secure them.

**4:5** In this verse Paul turns to Jesus Christ and **his saving work and redemption and regeneration**. The of God became a human being and was put under the law in order (1) to **redeem** those who were under the law and (2) so that **we might become** God's sons. *Jews and Gentiles alike* are the bondage of the law include its curse (the death penalty same); therefore, just outside of Christ, no less than Gentiles with their pagan, *can only be brought into God's family through personal faith in the Messiah*. **The whole purpose of Galatians 3 and four is to show that we are justified by faith, not through the flesh.**

*The purpose and goal of Christ's incarnation humiliation, his being made "in the likeness of sinful flesh," as Paul put it in Rom 8:3, was precisely so that God could condemn sin in the flesh and so receive as righteous all those who find in Jesus Christ the sole and sufficient substitute for the sin debt that they owed but could not pay. If redemption implies a basically negative background — we are redeemed **from** the curse of the law, from the slave market of sin, **from** the clutches of the hospital elemental spirits — Paul went on to show the positive purpose of Christ's sacrificial suffering and death. The son of God was born of woman and law in order **to redeem us from the law** so that we might receive "**the full***

**rights of sons."** The Greek word translated "**full rights of sons**" in the NIV is *huiothesia*, literally "**adoption.**"

Adoption was a commonly known legal procedure in the Hellenistic world. The Roman process of adoption would certainly have been known to Paul's Gentile converts in Galatia. They could well have identified with the idea of **being chosen by the Father and stated as new members** of God's family given their own former life as idolaters and devotees of false gods.

Believers who are **baptized** into the messianic Son of God and take up his very cry of 'Abba!' to the Father participate with him in the *Davidic promise of divine adoption* and in the *Abraham the promise of universal sovereignty.*"

Paul's adoption language speaks in a positive, powerful and encouraging way of the **tremendous transformation in our relationship to God**. Through **God's gracious initiative** we have been delivered out of slavery unto sonship, however bondage to sin and the powers of destruction produced by it into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This **radical change** is further explained now in terms of the indwelling Spirit within.

### **The Spirit Within (The 3 = Gal 4:6)**

**4:6. (Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, father."**

As son and heir, **each Christian receives the Holy Spirit**, the down payment of his or her inheritance (**Eph 1:14**). The Holy Spirit moves believers to pray to God as **Abba, Father**. **Abba** is the equivalent of "Daddy." **It shows the closeness children of grace have left their Father**. No slave of the law had such an intimate relationship. This intimate relationship comes through the Spirit not through the law. Similar to **Rom 9:14-17**, Paul reiterated God's **gracious act in sending** His Son and His Spirit. "**Through His Son we become sons**" is one of the mottos of Galatians. It is interesting to note that the Spirit who was mentioned so frequently in chapter 3 in reference to our becoming Christians (**see verses 2, 5 & 14**) is now called "**the Spirit of His Son.**" This shows the works of Spirit: (1) the Spirit **draws** us to Christ; and (2) the spirit forms Christ at us (**cf. John 16:7-15**). *The ministry of the Son and the Spirit has always been closely identified.*

**"Crying, 'Abba Father'"** This phrase contains both Greek and Aramaic terms for father. The term **Abba** was the Aramaic word for the intimate family relationship between a child and his father (**cf. Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15**), very similar to or use of "Daddy." Familial expressions such as this highlight the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father. *Because of our response to God's offer in Christ, we have the same access to the Father (cf. Rom 8:26-27).* Truly, we are adopted sons! Jesus addressed God as Abba when he prayed (**Mark 14:36**) auntie taught his disciples to pray the same way (**Luke 11:1-2**). Many of Jesus' opponents became offended at this, *thinking Abba was too familiar a term to use in addressing the high and holy God.* Jesus' usage established the **pattern for the church's view of God and for each believer's relationship with him**. Paul said we can cry out to God, "**Abba,**" because he **has adopted** us into his family (**Rom 8:15**).

Just as God **sent** his son into the world, so also he **has sent** the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. *We should not imagine, of course, that the Holy Spirit was ever absent from the Father or the Son in the divine accomplishment of salvation.* The Holy Spirit shared fully in the eternal decrees including the decision to create human beings in the divine image ("**Let us make man,**" **Gen 1:27**). The Holy Spirit brooded over the primordial creation, bringing cosmos out of chaos (**Gen 1:1-2**). The Holy Spirit guided the nation of Israel and gave insight to the prophets of old. Likewise, the Spirit was sent to Nazareth to overshadow the Virgin Mary, enabling her to give birth to the Messiah apart from the agency of a human father. Also the Holy Spirit was sent upon Christ at his baptism, giving visible manifestation and audible confirmation of his messianic destiny. In fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, the Holy Spirit **was sent** to the early church on the Day of Pentecost, inaugurating a new era in redemptive history. The **sending of the Spirit** Paul referred to in this verse presupposes all of the others but moves beyond the referring to the *bestowal of the spirit at believing individuals*.

Paul began this section of his letter (**Galatians 3:1**) by reminding Galatians of their first experiences of the Spirit and **then showed** how the presence of the Spirit in their lives implied that they were true sons of Abraham, heirs of the promise, **chosen and adopted** by God. We realize **God sovereign adoption** and the **regenerating ministry of the Spirit in our hearts** are both aspects of the same reality. The best commentary on

this text is Paul's parallel statement in **Rom 8:15-16**: "**For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship (huiiothesia). And by him we cry 'Abba, Father.'** The Spirit himself **testifies** with our spirit that we are God's children."

The Holy Spirit is the **sign and pledge of our adoption** so that by *his presence in our hearts we are truly convinced that God is for us, not against us*, that indeed he is our Heavenly Father. The evidence Paul gives here for this wonderful assurance **is not** that through the Spirit we are empowered to do miraculous works, receive ecstatic visions, or any other kind of sensational phenomena. **Rather, the first, most basic indication of our adoption is that we have a new form of address for God.** The Spirit invites us to join in his invocation, crying "Abba, Father."

The word **Abba** is a familial intimacy that can still be heard through the Middle East as a word of address used by young children to greet their father. Abba is an Aramaic expression that may have derived originally from the first syllables uttered by a pamphlet (cf. corresponding *immā*, "mother"). However, we over sentimentalize this word what they refer to it as mere baby talk and translate it into English as "daddy." The word **Abba** appears in certain legal texts of the Mishnah as a designation used by grown children in claiming the inheritance of their deceased father. As a word of address, **Abba** is not so much associated with infancy as it is with intimacy. It is a cry of the heart, not a word spoken, we will personal detachment and reserve, the word we **"call" or "crying out" (krazō)**.

The fact that the word Abba is given here in this text and also stated in **Rom 8:15**, and both Aramaic and Greek indicates the **bilingual character** of early Christian worship. Throughout the history of the church various Christian groups have attempted to canonize one particular language as the authorized sacred tongue of religious discourse. Some Orthodox Christians have done that with Greek, traditional Roman Catholics with Latin, and certain Protestants with the English of the *King James Version*. However, the fact that in Jesus Christ there is no longer Jew or Gentile does not mean that we must stop speaking Hebrew/Aramaic or Greek. *The Spirit who cries out "Abba, Father" from our hearts enable gospel to be heard in many, if not most of the world's languages on the day of Pentecost.* The same Holy Spirit

**still blesses the translation of the Scriptures** into the many diverse languages and dialects of the world today.

The word **Abba** directly links the Christian believer as an adopted heir and son of God to Jesus himself, the unique Son of God, *for it was he who first dared to use this term all familial intimacy in his own prayers to the Father (cf. Mark 14:36)*. If J. Jeremiah is right, this same word was originally used in the opening petition of the Lord's Prayer, "**O Abba, our heavenly Abba.**" Some of the shock implied it is a this word as an address for God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, is seen as a vestige of the Latin liturgy in which the worship leader introduces the Lord's Prayer with the rubric *audemus dicere*, "**we might bold to say.**"

The idea is that it would be presumptuous and dairy beyond all propriety to address God as **Abba** had Jesus himself not bidden us to do so. The sense of awe, wonder, holiness that accompanied the praying of the Lord's Prayer in the early church was doubtless related to this fact. Something of this kind of reverent ecstasy must have been experienced by the Gentile believers of Galatia *when having been saved from religious superstition and the worship of idols* they **discovered through faith in Jesus Christ a welcome access into the very heart of God**. The new relationship they had with God evidenced by the **Abba** prayer, had been effected through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Already they were the children of God and heirs of promise. All of this had happened through the grace of God, the God who **sent** his Son and who **had now sent** his Spirit into their hearts. *Thus there was no need for them to be circumcised or to seek the favor of God by keeping the works of the law.* With **confident boldness**, they could approach the throne of God **crying, "Abba, Father!"**

#### **God's Child and Heir (Part 4 = Gal 4:7)**

**<sup>7</sup> Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also and heir.**

**4:7** This verse summarizes everything Paul had sent from **Galatians 3:6** onward. The opening "**therefore**" on this versus linked directly to the preceding verses, which have outlined **the plan of salvation in terms of my Trinitarian confession very similar to that on which the apostles Creed was later modeled**. I believe in **God the Father, the God** who planned from all eternity to redeem his people and who in the fullness of

time sent his Son. I believe in **Jesus Christ, the Son of God** who became fully human and "suffered under Pontius Pilate" the curse of the law. I believe in the **Holy Spirit** who effects the forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with the Father. **"Therefore," because all of this is true, you are no longer a slave, but a child (a daughter or son).** You are no longer under subjection to the elemental spirits. No longer a minor heir with no rights to the inheritance. No longer is your relationship to God determined by your race, rank, or role. No longer are you on the tutelage of the *paidagōgos* (**law as the schoolmaster**). No longer are you shut **up** in the prison house of sin. No longer are you under the curse of the law. **The promise** given to Abraham and fulfilled in the prophetic Seed, Jesus Christ, has now been extended to all of those who through faith in him have become science, crying **"Abba!"** and heirs of the living God. **Grace is adulthood. Law is childhood.** In 2012, let's follow Paul's heartening words and enjoy the privileges of adulthood, and with our thoughts, actions and words be sure to grow in the nature and character of the triune God and not regress back to the works of the law!

## CONCLUSION

### On God's Page

To have a deep and satisfying relationship with God, we must be **"on the same page"** with him. The Judaizers were definitely not on God's page. Erroneously, they believed that faith alone in Jesus Christ was not enough for salvation and Christian maturity. Unfortunately, they were getting the Galatians to read from their script, and consequently, the Galatians were no longer on **God's page of grace and peace**.

The woman who naïvely and accidentally ate the man's cookies experienced great harassment when she realized that she was actually the guilty party. The result of the **Judaizer's error** was far greater than emotional embarrassment. The eternal destinies of people are jeopardized when grace is fogged over by legalism. In addition, Christianity is extremely unattractive when presented with a legalistic flavor. Legalism repels, while **grace attracts**.

Fortunately, for the Galatia and for us today, Paul tackled this *legalistic* distortion head on. **Paul has proven convincingly that grace is superior to the law.**

## Prayer

**Father God**, thank you for giving all of us a relationship with you that is based on grace. Thank you that grace is maturing each of us from spiritual childhood into Christian adulthood. Let the very essence of your word is for, give us more of your Holy Spirit and wisdom, like Paul, to show that your gospel is superior to all spiritual limitations and imitators. In **Jesus Christ's** name, we pray. Amen

## PRINCIPLES

- Grace did com continually Jesus Christ and grace includes the triune God who is the spiritual parent of the Christian believer.
- Jesus' purposes always include Redemption for those under the law which focuses on our Adoption to give us rights as God's children by Grace.
- The Spirit creates a father-child relationship it was with God the Father.
- God sees us not as slaves but as children (heirs) with *Abba* family rights.
- Grace brings believers together, while law separates God's family.
- Grace gives us a deeply personal relationship with God (*Abba*, Father).

### **Grace principles by Lewis B. Smedes from his 1982, 1999 book *How Can It Be All Right When Everything Is All Wrong?***

- Grace is the one word for all that God is for us in the form of Jesus Christ.
- God's dream for human life came true in Jesus Christ.
- Jesus Christ is the profile of God's sort of person. What a person! And he (Jesus Christ) is God's image for us.
- Grace is shorthand for everything that God is and as far as it are tired sinful broken lines. Grace be with you!

## APPLICATIONS

- We can't rest the security that we are the recipients of an unchangeable covenant of grace and truth with God through the person of Jesus Christ.

- As God's child there is a definite progression away from sin so that we can praise God that he is continuously maturing us by the Holy Spirit toward spiritual adulthood
- God is always against sin so we can with confidence beside grace and live in what is the primary privilege and responsibility of being a spiritual adult in the church. Grace TEACHES US to say "no" to all ungodliness.

### **ISSUES for FURTHER PERSONAL or FAMILY BIBLE STUDY**

1. What fall rights do we have as God's children? Why would someone give up such right?
2. Describe what it means not to know God and be slaves to those who are not God. To what are people enslaved today?
3. Does someone know that you love them as much as Paul love the Galatians and that you want them to know and follow Christ as much as Paul wanted the Galatians to?
4. Who is trying to lead you away from Christ? Why?
5. Why did Paul continue to emphasize our sonship in Christ?
6. What is the threefold emphasis on verse 4 in connection with the person of Jesus?