

## **Adoption - God Sent His Son**

**Galatians 4:1-7**

By **Derek Thomas**

Now turn with me, if you would, to Galatians chapter 4. And we are considering together the doctrine of *adoption*: how God takes us who are the fallen sons of Adam, sinners by nature and by choice, and He brings us into His household, into His family; constitutes us with all of the legal entitlements of the children of God; that He makes us heirs and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

And the passage that I want us to think about this evening comes in Galatians 4, and we'll be concentrating in particular on verses 4 and 5, but let's read together the first seven verses. We'll be returning to this passage again next week. I want us next week to concentrate in particular on verse 6, and the doctrine and the wonderful truth of the Holy Spirit's role and involvement in our adoption: that He comes and makes His home and His residence within our hearts; He regenerates us and enables us to cry "Abba, Father." And that is a wonderful issue and has some parallels in something Paul says in Romans 8, and I want to leave that aspect of things entirely for a separate study all of its own. But tonight I want us to focus on Jesus. I want us to focus on the cost of our adoption. At what cost are you and I brought into a relationship with our Father in heaven that we may call Him our Father? And that we are His adopted sons at what cost? Hear with me the word of God, and before I read it let's ask God the Holy Spirit to illuminate these words to our hearts and to our minds. Let's pray together.

*Father, this is Your word; You caused it to be written. It was written in the way that You intended it to be written. Every word of it is Your word, every jot and title of it. And we pray now this evening as we turn to this particular portion of Your word and as we read it together and study it: We need Your help; we need Your assistance; we need the illumination of Your Spirit. We cannot even understand these things unless You come and make them known to us again. So bless us, we pray. Stir our Hearts. Lift us into Your presence. Cause us to see none but Jesus only. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.*

Now hear the word of God.

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

I want us to think through the cost of our adoption, what it cost the Father, what it cost the Son to bring us into His family. There's a very specific context here in Galatians 4. Some of the details need not detain us this evening unduly. Allow me to make some assertions about what Paul is saying here about the way and the cost of our receiving what he calls "adoption as sons." Our aim tonight is to see something of the great love of God for us. "What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul; to bear the dreadful curse for my soul?" That's our goal: that our knees might bow, that our hearts might melt with wonder, that our spirits might rise to praise Him for the greatness of His love to us.

### **I. Those who are under law have no rights.**

Now the first thing that I want us to see is that Paul is addressing those who are under the Law. He says it in verse 5: "to redeem those who are under the Law." He's talking about men and women who are under the Law. And I need to ask the question, what does that mean? What does it mean for Paul to say here...and specifically in this context, what does he mean by saying there are certain people who are under the Law? Basically, the apostle is arguing for a certain understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone in the life of certain people in the church of Galatia, and they were also in the church in Jerusalem and Paul is now in Antioch in the north. There were certain people who were saying and insisting that we are justified not simply by faith in Jesus Christ, but there were also other things that were necessary: circumcision was one of them; obedience to certain food laws was another. Paul has already addressed this: he talked especially about a certain incident when Peter and Barnabas come from Jerusalem up to Antioch, and, all of a sudden, they refuse to eat at the same table with Gentiles. It causes a problem. And the doctrine of justification is called into question again, and Paul is addressing that. And he's addressing certain people who he describes as "under the law."

And then Paul likens those who lived under the Old Testament, Jews, to children and under tutors and guardians. He speaks about it in verse 2: "under guardians and managers" or tutors, it's variously translated. He's talking about certain people in the Old Testament who were just like young men in Paul's day who were under tutors and guardians and managers until the time they would grow up

and mature and receive their inheritance. They may be inheritors, but so long as they were under their tutors and managers and guardians, they were just like slaves.

It's uncertain what background Paul is talking about here: he may be speaking about a Hellenistic background, and he may be speaking about a Jewish background, or he may be speaking about a Roman background. But it was the common practice of Paul's day for young men especially to be put under tutors and guardians to educate them, to instruct them in logic and rhetoric, but also to instruct them in ethics and morals until the time they would graduate from that and become men in their own standing. And they would then be inheritors. They may well be sons of great noble people, but so long as they were under these tutors and guardians they were to all intents and purposes just like slaves. Until then what he calls "a time when they would receive adoption as sons." Now, yes, sons because the metaphor Paul is talking about here is inheritance, and only sons inherited.

But even here in Galatians Paul makes that wonderful assertion that as far as spiritual things are concerned there is neither male nor female. The wonderful emancipation of womanhood under the gospel! Now a minor had no legal rights. He's a child. He's more than a child: he's a slave. And if Paul is arguing from a Hellenistic sort of background, he wouldn't have inherited until he was twenty-five years of age.

So he's talking about certain people under the Old Testament Law and its requirements, like circumcision and the food laws. And he's saying, these things belonged to the days when the church was in its infancy. Obeying these laws was just like being under tutors and managers and guardians; you haven't yet graduated from these things. And then in verse 3 he uses another expression. He talks about "the elemental things of this world." He's still talking about those who are under the Law, and he's describing those who are under the Law as those who are insisting on circumcision and those who are insisting on the food laws. And he describes them as being "like slaves" or "under tutors and guardians"; until they inherit they're like infants.

But now in verse 3 he talks about "the elemental things of this world," the elementary principles. And if you drop your eyes down to verse 9, he uses a very similar expression again, "the elementary principles of this world, the weak and worthless elemental things." Now what's he talking about? He's still talking about those who are under the Law. Some have understood this expression in verse 3 to refer to demons, and I don't particularly accept that interpretation. I think this is what Paul is saying: Those who are insisting on obedience to these external laws--like circumcision and the food laws--it's like being under the ABCs. It's like being in kindergarten. I have an office, and it's downstairs in the dungeon of First Presbyterian Church, and you'll never find it. But on weekdays-and I'm rarely here on weekdays because I'm at the seminary-but on the odd day that I'm here

on the weekday, there's a classroom right opposite, and I hear the teacher. I don't know who that teacher is, and you may be here and maybe you're not. But I hear you speak to those little children, and they look like five or six years of age. And they have to be told when to stand and when to sit and when they can go to the bathroom and when they can't go to the bathroom, and usually it's they can't go to the bathroom, and they're under the ABCs. And they're in kindergarten, and they're under laws and lots of laws and lots of laws, and woes betide them if they break those laws.

And Paul is saying, there are people that are under the Law. They're under the ABCs of the Law; they're under kindergarten; they haven't graduated yet. And he's talking about the movement from the Old Testament into the New Testament. He's saying that when Jesus comes some of these Laws are going to disappear: some of these Laws are going to vanish like circumcision, like obedience to certain food laws. You see the development of that and the argument that surrounds that in the Acts of the apostles. And it culminates, you remember, in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem counsel. They were under the Law, but when Jesus came they graduated from kindergarten. They became mature men and women. He's talking about those who are under the Law.

But not only were they insisting on things like circumcision and the food laws, but they were also saying something else, and Paul means us to catch this too: they were insisting that you need these things, and that you need these things in order to be saved; that you cannot be a Christian unless you are circumcised; you cannot be a Christian unless you obey the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. And Paul is saying, Look! It's like as though they're saying we need to go back to kindergarten. We need to go back to elementary school.

But it's worse than that because they're insisting that you need these things, that without obedience to these things a man cannot be saved. That was the whole point of Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council. That's why the Church met together: to discuss this very thing. There were those who were under the Law, not only the Law simply because there was a lot of Law--in comparison to the New Testament, the Old Testament was a lot of Law--but they were under the Law because many of them were using that Law and saying, in order for us to be saved, we need to obey this law. And the way of salvation is by obedience to the Law. And now here in Galatians 4 he's saying, Look! These folk who are under the Law are like slaves bound to keep that Law, bound to its every precept and its every exactitude to do its every bidding. And, yes, Paul has one eye, if not two eyes, on Jewish Christians in Galatia who are insisting on obedience to these things.

But he's also got an eye on Gentile Christians too, because they too are under the Law--not the ceremonial Law of the Old Testament to be sure. But as Paul argues in Romans 2, they are a law to themselves. And having the law, the moral law, written upon their hearts they excuse or they condemn themselves. They

*accuse* or they *excuse* themselves. In one way or another Jews and Gentiles are under the Law trying to earn their way into the kingdom of heaven by obedience to that Law--lots of law, multiplied law-- particularly in the case of his Jewish Christian friends.

## **II. Christ *came* under the Law**

But then Paul says a second thing. He's talking, first of all, about those who are under the Law, under the Law because there is lots of Law, and under the Law because they are using the Law in their own minds as a way of salvation. And so in the second place, he tells us this: that Christ came under the Law. "When the fullness of time had come..." The marvelous providence of God in the outworking of His great plan and purpose! "When the fullness of time had come God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under Law."

He's talked about those who are under the Law, and now he's saying something else. He's saying a second thing, and he's saying, Jesus was born under the Law. Now what is he saying? Actually he's saying three things.

He's saying, first of all, that God sent Him. That Jesus came into this world by the initiative of God, by the command of God, by the decree of God, by the request of our Heavenly Father. "God so loved the world"--God the Father, that is--"God so loved the world that He gave" what? His son. It's not just the love of Jesus that we're going to see here; it's the love of our Heavenly Father. It's the love of the One with whom we now have this wonderful and glorious relationship that we can come to Him and call Him, "Our Father who art in heaven." God sends Him: the initiative is God's. This doctrine of adoption, this blessing of adoption, is by the grace and power and initiative of God the Father. God sends Him.

But then in the second place, we're told that he is born of a woman. It sounds a little odd, doesn't it? It sounds a little wooden. It sounds a little stilted. It sounds a little offensive: "Here is so and so, and she is the daughter of this woman; she is born of woman." It sounds a little odd, but Paul is probably alluding to, first of all, Genesis 3:15: the seed of the woman that would crush the head of Satan, the seed of promise, the seed of the gospel, the seed that culminates in the coming of Jesus, that seed that you see developing in its thought and mileage all the way down the history of the Old Testament. The seed of the woman has been born. The proto-evangelion, that first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15, has come about in the fullness of God's timing. The redemptive history of God has come to its fruition and climax. Actually, the word Paul uses here is a little unusual. All our translations say "born of a woman," but actually that's not what Paul says. He could've chosen a different verb if he really wanted us to see '*born* of a woman,' and actually what he's saying is "*being made* of a woman." Being made of a woman. And many commentators--Calvin among them--see here Paul's allusion

to perhaps the virgin birth, because of the odd way that he describes Jesus being born of a woman, born in a way that you and I are not born, made, constituted, brought into existence in a way that you and I are not brought into existence. And maybe possibly Paul is alluding here to the virgin birth.

But it's the *incarnation*, the infleshment that's on Paul's heart and mind as he writes this. Jesus was sent by the Father, but He comes into this world. He's the seed of a woman. "The Word was made flesh." How does Cecil Francis Alexander put it in that line from "Once in Royal David's City"? "He came down to Earth from heaven who is God and Lord of all." He entered this world: He perforated time and space. He crossed all those barriers which Immanuel Kant said couldn't be crossed, and He did it in an instant and came into this world. He didn't cease to be the Son-the eternal Son, the divine Son, the eternal Word of God-but He became flesh, the child of a woman. He became...Think about it: He became a zygote. He became a fetus. He became a little child, minutes old. He became an infant. He became an adolescent, a teenager. He became a man, a fully-grown man. He took a human body and a reasonable soul anatomically like our own with human emotions and the faculty of choice and intellect that was breathtaking and yet finite. That of the day and hour of the second coming He did not know because the Father had not revealed it to Him. What He becomes stands in awe of what He was. Now I don't understand that sentence either, but it's true of Jesus: that what He became stands in awe of what He was. Think through that. Two natures: God and man; divine and human inseparably joined together in one person without conversion or composition or confusion, our catechisms tell us. God sent Him, and He's born of a woman.

### **III. Jesus was *made* under law.**

But Paul adds a third thing: He's made under the Law. He's made under the Law, circumcised on the eighth day. These people are under the Law, insisting on the requirements of the Law. Jesus came under the Law, wrote underneath its demands, wrote underneath its ethical imperatives, under the Torah in all of its diverse applications. The King of the Universe is subject to the elemental spirits, the ABCs. He goes into kindergarten where He has to ask, "Please, miss, can I go?" I mean that in the most reverent sense possible. That's the humility of Jesus. He descends to that level. The Son becomes a slave bound to obey, with a work to do, with no rights. Even on the cross He had no right to say, "Do you understand Who it is that you're dealing with here?" because He was a slave. He was in the form of a servant. "I do always the things that my Father asks of Me." And He obeys the Law; He comes under the Law, and He obeys it in all of its detail, in all of its facets, in all of its exactitude, in all of its demands. "Which of you convinces Me of sin?" He can say. If salvation is by the works of the Law, Jesus did the works of the Law.

And He was made under the Law, Paul says, in order to redeem those who are

under the Law. *And how?* Well you have to turn back. You have to turn back to chapter 3 and verse 30 because Paul will tell you how. "He redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us." That's how He redeems those who are under the Law: He becomes a curse for us. In the language of Zechariah, "the sword of Almighty God awoke and came down upon Him." In the language of Isaiah, "God bruised Him and put Him to open grief." In the language of Mark 15, "God forsook Him so that when He was nailed to that cross and our sins were imputed and reckoned to Him, He cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?'" He treated Him as an accursed thing, as an accursed thing, so that on the cost... This is the cost! This is the cost: "On the cross," as Luther says, "He was the greatest sinner that ever was." Not His sins, you understand, for He had none, but the sins of His people, the sins of sinners like you and me reckoned to Him, loaded upon Him, and He took its curse and drank of that cup to the full. You remember the ironic benediction, "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace"?

And do you know the cost of that? That to Jesus, to Jesus His Son, the Father would say, "I curse you, and I forsake you. And I make my face to burn against You and be angry with You. And I lift up my rod against You and give You hell." That's the cost of it for those who are under the Law, for those who are using and utilizing the Law in order to save themselves.

And Jesus is saying, cast your dead-deed-doing down, down at Jesus' feet and stand in Him, in Him alone gloriously complete.

To those who are under the Law Jesus takes that curse of a broken Law and of a failed obedience to the Law. And Paul says in Colossians 2, he takes it like an IOU, like a debt, like a great, big mortgage that's hanging around your neck. And He takes it, and He nails it to His cross. And He writes on it "paid in full." Paid in full.

O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head? Our load was laid on Thee.  
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead; didst bear all ill for me. A victim led,  
Thy blood was shed. Now there's no load for me. Death and the curse was  
in our cup. O Christ, twas full for Thee. But Thou hast drained the last,  
dark drop. 'Tis empty now for me. That bitter cup, Love drank it up. Now  
blessings draft for me. Jehovah lifted up His rod; O Christ, it fell on Thee.  
Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God; there's not one stroke for me. Thy  
tears, Thy blood beneath it flowed. Thy bruising He lift me. The tempest's  
awful voice was heard; O Christ, it broke on Thee. Thy open bosom was  
my ward; it braved the storm for me. Thy form was scarred, Thy visage  
marred; Now cloudless peace for me. Jehovah bade His sword awake. O  
Christ, it woke 'gainst Thee. Thy blood the flaming blade must slake. Thine  
heart its sheath must be all for my sake, my peace to make. Now sleeps  
that sword for me. For me, Lord Jesus, Thou hast died, and I have died in

Thee. Thou risen my hands are all untied, and now Thou livest in me.  
When purified, made white, and tried, Thy glory then for me.

That's the cost of our adoption. That's the cost of enabling us to come before our Heavenly Father in all His holiness and His righteousness and say, "Abba, Abba, Father" that you and I might receive adoption as sons. That's it: That's the cost of it. "Did ere such love and sorrow meet or thorns compose so rich a crown?" May God help us as we come before our Father in heaven and call Him "Father" to remember the greatness of the cost in the cursing of His Son for us in our room, in our stead, as our substitute and sin-bearer. Amen.

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