

Sons and Heirs
Galatians 4:1-11
Tampa Covenant Church
11 October 2026

Proposition: Since God has sent his Son to redeem us from slavery; we are called to live the Christian life as sons and heirs of God who have been set free from bondage.

FCF: Giving in to the temptation to live as a slave rather than a son who has been set free.

RHF: Through his person and work, Jesus Christ has redeemed us from slavery so that we might be adopted as sons and daughters of God and become heirs according to promise.

(#1) Introduction:

For those of you who grew up in the 90s, of all the Disney movies you've enjoyed, I'll guess the Lion King probably tops the list. Recall Simba, the son of Mufasa and heir to the throne. But after Mufasa's death, Uncle Scar convinces him he's responsible so Simba runs away and stays away for years. Then one day, Simba encounters a baboon named Rafiki, who comes on the scene singing, *"Asante sana, squash banana!"* Simba asks, *"Who are you?"* Rafiki responds, *"The question is, who are you?"* Simba says, *"I thought I knew, but now I'm not so sure."* Rafiki confronts him, *"You don't even know who you are!"* Simba walks away in reply, *"And I suppose you do?"* Rafiki hits him with the truth, *"You're Mufasa's boy!"*¹ And when the truth hits Simba, he gasps and runs after Rafiki.

Now, whereas Simba was the natural born son of and heir of Mufasa; the same can't be said of our relationship with God. Rather, we've been graciously adopted into the family of God through faith in Christ. And unlike Simba, we must never forget or runaway from who we are. Paul reminded us in chap 3 that in Christ, we're sons of God through faith. And he concluded his argument by declaring, *"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."* Today, we'll see how this happened and how we're called to live. As Paul will remind the Galatian believers of their past, their present reality, and raise a sobering question about the direction in which they're heading. And it's a sobering question we must also consider in our Christian lives. So let's go to the Lord in prayer then look

(#2) to his Word.

Their Past: (vv.1-3)

Here in the first two verses, Paul once again unpacks life under the law but this time around he likens it **(#3) to an heir² in** childhood. He writes, *"I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father."* So, here's the heir, everything is his according to promise but he can't take possession of it because he's still a child. Thus, in Paul's reasoning, he's no different than a slave. He's under guardians and managers who order him around, discipline him as necessary and keep him under tight restraint. And this arrangement remained intact until the date set by his father. And Paul makes the **(#4)** application in v.3, *"In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world."* So, Paul is telling these churches and us that before Christ came we were heirs of the promise God made to Abraham. But in our childhood; we were slaves to the elementary principles of the world.

(#5 Blank) It's difficult to know exactly what Paul means by "*elementary principles of the world*."³

Could've been the basic religious teachings and practices of Paul's day or spiritual powers associated with the created order. For us, it points to those basic rules or principles of a performance driven life. Like the boxes we check that tell us we're doing ok with God and everyone else. And Paul is saying these things don't grant freedom; they lead to slavery. Paul has already mentioned and alluded to the slavery twice in these first few verses and it will serve as the controlling idea for the rest of his argument in our text. And it should remind us what life is like apart from Christ; it's a life of enslavement.

Slavery was widely practiced in the ancient world and these Galatian believers would've picked up on what Paul was saying. To be enslaved meant you were under the authority of a master with no rights of your own. And you couldn't give yourself completely to someone else because you were the property of your master. Our context is now different in 21st America. We've grown into a society that celebrates and values freedom and autonomy. Meaning, we're free to do, be and pursue whatever we want. We don't necessarily have to answer to anyone; we just need to be ourselves. And it's really ok, as long as no one gets hurt and we're happy. Now, there's nothing wrong with freedom or pursuing legitimate happiness. But in terms of our condition apart from Christ, how free are we? Scripture is clear that apart from Christ we're slaves to sin; there's no middle ground.⁴ And no matter how free a person thinks they are; they'll never free themselves from that kind of bondage.

Think of our earthly pursuits. The success we desire, the approval we crave, the perfection we strive for and the happiness we feel we deserve. The sobering reality is that all these things and more can become ultimate in our lives. And before we know it, the very things we thought would bring us freedom are actually exercising authority over us. Telling us where to go, what to do and how to act; making us no different than slaves. But remember in Paul's illustration, the child's condition wasn't forever. Because the father had already appointed a time when everything would change. Where the child would no longer be under the supervision of guardians and managers but free to enjoy the privileges of (#6) his inheritance. And this is where Paul takes us next...

Their Present Reality: (vv.4-7)

In v.4, Paul brings (#7) the illustration home for these believers and us, "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,*" Just as the father set the date of the child's release from guardians and managers, Paul is saying this is what the Father did. At his appointed time, he sent his Son, marking the end of the law's temporary guardianship. (#8) It's what Paul has been saying all along; *now that faith has come, we're no longer under a guardian*. In being born of woman, the Christ child entered into our humanity. (#9) And in being born under the law, he entered the condition of those he came to redeem. Church, this is good news because Christ came to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. And Paul has already told us how our (#10) redemption took place, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'*" (#11) The Heidelberg Catechism asks, what kind of mediator do we need? One who is a true and righteous man (sinless), yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God (able to bear the wrath of God).⁵ And so, God became one of us in the person of Jesus Christ and sacrificially gave of his life in order that we might receive adoption as sons.

Now, God didn't just redeem us and send us on our way; *"hey you're free; now go and live your life."* No, through our (#12) redemption, we've been adopted into the family of God. In the ancient world, adoption conferred the full legal rights and privileges on the one who was adopted. And Paul wants the reader to make the connection. That all believers whether male or female, regardless of their past have been given the full status as sons and heirs, in Christ.

In v.6, Paul cites the second thing God (#13) did on our behalf, *"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"* So, not only did God send his Son to redeem us in bringing us into the family of God, he also sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!" (#14 Blank) And who's crying out "Abba! Father!"? The Spirit or the believer? The answer is yes! The Spirit is crying out in and through us, which means there's absolutely no way we're able to commune with our heavenly Father apart from the indwelling presence of the Spirit in our lives. The term of address, "Abba! Father!" denotes the intimacy of the parent child relationship. It's not a relationship characterized by distance but by belonging. And the Spirit is sent into hearts because it's the center of our inner life where our thoughts, affections and will reside. Paul is saying through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, we're able to experience fellowship with our heavenly Father and respond to his love with genuine joy and devotion.

And in v.7, Paul reveals our present reality in light of what God has done for us in Christ (#15) *"So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."* Recall our meditation Psalm, where the LORD declares to his Son, *"You are my Son; today I have (#16) begotten you, ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."* (#17) And the Psalm ends by pronouncing a blessing on all who take refuge in him. Church, this is who we are, sons and heirs of God, who've found refuge in Jesus Christ, the Son. And rest assured today that we've been given this status and privilege not through our own merit and none of it is based on accomplishment or pedigree. As we said, a few weeks ago; it's all grace, the love of God poured out on us in Christ and received through faith. As the (#18) song writer says, *"Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling; Naked come to thee for dress; Helpless, look to thee for grace."*⁶ Now that Paul has revealed their present reality, it leads to a sobering question concerning the direction they're heading. (#19) And it's a question that calls for our consideration as well.

Paul's Sobering Question: (vv.8-11)

(#20) Here in v.8, Paul says when they were pagans, they didn't know God, rather they were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. Next, he affirms what's true of them now, *"But now that you have come to know God (then Paul makes it perfectly clear) or rather to be known by God."* Like, now that you are sons and heirs of God through Christ, then please answer this question for me, (#21) *"How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more."* And now Paul describes the elementary principles of the world as weak and worthless. Meaning, they're absolutely powerless in bringing one into right standing with God and maintaining acceptance before him. Now, remember these Galatian believers were under pressure to add Jewish identity markers to their faith in Christ in order to be justified before God and accepted into the covenant community. And Paul is saying, how can you turn your back on all that you are in Christ for that

condition of slavery? (#22) And he levies an indictment, you're observing days, months, seasons and years! In other words, by treating these observances as necessary for acceptance before God, you're exchanging your freedom as sons and heirs of God for the slavery of religious performance.⁷ (#23) And Paul clearly expresses his fear, *"I'm afraid I may have labored over you in vain."* He's alarmed at the spiritual condition of his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

(#24 Blank) Contextually, we're far removed from these Galatian believers. But what Paul describes of their condition should tell us we're not as far removed as we'd like to think. And so this sobering question is also ours to seriously consider: *Where have we been tempted or how are we being tempted to live the Christian life as slaves, knowing that in Christ we are sons and heirs of God.* When I seriously consider this question, I recognize I'm more prone to think like a slave than a son who's an heir. I attend church on Sunday and manage to be here when the doors open during the week, read my bible, pray and endeavor to be faithful in my various relationships. In sum, I seek to live obediently as a child of God in light of his great love for me. I don't think I'm alone in this because this is our call as sons and heirs of God.

And knowing this to be true, the temptation is ever present to adopt a slave mentality in my relationship with God. And it's something like... If I do then God will... If I attend worship and church activities, then God will... If I consistently read my Bible and pray, then God will... and if I'm sharing my faith with others, then God will. Conversely, what happens when we don't? When we miss worship, neglect prayer or fail to share our faith? Will God withdraw his love because we've jeopardized our right standing with him? To think that way is to think like a slave instead of a son and an heir and by the grace of God; may we resist and flee the temptation.

But that doesn't mean our obedience doesn't matter; it matters and it's what's expected of us as sons and heirs of God. So, we endeavor to obey our heavenly Father because through Christ, we know who we are and whose we are. And through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit it becomes our heart's desire to live a life pleasing to him. We gather for worship, read his Word, devote ourselves to prayer, share our faith, and seek to love and serve others. And we don't do these things as slaves trying to earn a master's approval. But as sons and heirs of God; wholly and dearly loved through the work of Christ Jesus. And may this truth continue to resonate in our hearts that in Christ we're no longer slaves! We're sons and if we're sons then we're heirs through God. And may he continue to bless us and keep us in his loving care. Amen.

¹ The Lion King (Walt Disney Pictures, 1994), Rafiki and Simba scene, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FK84gBs4jP0>.

² κληρονόμος (*klēronomos*). n. masc. heir. *Someone who will inherit the possessions from a parent. According to BDAG... This is a child who's been designated as an heir. One who stands to receive something from their parent at the appointed time.*

³ στοιχεῖον (*stoicheion*): basic principles, elementary truths Some interpreters read it as elementary religious instruction applied negatively, viewing Paul as condemning the ritualistic dimensions of both Judaism and pagan religion. Early church fathers often understood the term physically, connecting it to heavenly bodies that governed calendrical observances, or as objects of worship linked to spiritual beings; a reading modern scholars frequently adopt as “elemental spiritual forces.” A more recent synthesis proposes that Paul uses the phrase to designate religious practices centered on the four physical elements, involving veneration of these stoicheia as divine and the establishment of calendar-based observances connected to them. Moisés Silva, ed., in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 379–380.

⁴ Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 8, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 1999), 83.

⁵ See Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 15-18.

⁶ Augustus M. Toplady, “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me” (1776), stanza 3, Hymnary.org (Accessed 09 Oct 26).

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 108.