

The Children of God

Galatians 4: 1-11

Our text continues the line of thought from the previous passage as Paul further argues that salvation is a gift of grace received by faith in Christ, not obtained through personal merit or works of the flesh. He again uses the illustration of children, here revealing the changes in a child as they grow into maturity. The children, or servants, depict life under the law, and those who have become mature children represent those who now live under grace in salvation.

Those apart from Christ remain under the law, condemned in their sin. Those in Christ have been adopted into the family of God, (and being children of God,) are now liberated from the demands and condemnation of the law. The law was not given to save, but to reveal the holiness of God and our desperate need for salvation.

As we examine the [changes](#) revealed in the text, I want to consider: [The Children of God](#).

I. The Prior Position (1-3) – Paul begins by discussing the position of those prior to coming to faith in Christ. Notice:

A. The Analogy (1-2) – [Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;](#) ² [But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.](#) We must understand, here Paul is referring to the lives of those prior to salvation. Although the young children are heirs of their father, as long as they remain under the direction of a tutor, they really are no different than the servants. They remained under the guidance of the tutor until the father decided their education and guidance was sufficient and had been completed. The placement and guidance of the child was directed under the wise counsel of the father.

➤ “Some scholars have seen here an appeal to that all-pervasive Roman law, under which, of course, the Galatians lived. Until he was fourteen, an heir was placed under the authority of a *tutor*, nominated by his father in his will. At the age of fourteen, the boy came of age, but he was still not free to do what he liked because the *paetor urbanus* (magistrate) then placed him under the control of a *curator* until he was twenty-five. Only then did he come into his full inheritance. That was the analogy. A minor—although heir to a noble name, great expectations, wealth, honor, position, and power—was still a minor and, for all practical purposes, no better than a slave,” Phillips.¹

B. The Application (3) – *Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.* It is interesting to note that the word, *nēpios*, translated children, speaks of a small child, literally an infant. As we consider an infant or small child, we are reminded of their inability to care for themselves and make adequate decisions. They are under the continual care of their parent or guardian. Small children are told practically every move to make – when to eat, when to go to bed, when to take a bath, when to get dressed, etc. You cannot expect a child to make reasonable decisions alone. Their lives must be guarded and their behavior and actions spelled out for them.

➤ This is an accurate depiction of our lives prior to salvation. We lived according to the lusts of the flesh. We were unable to make proper decisions regarding our lives, particularly in regard to spiritual matters. The law served to guide and direct our lives. The law reveals a list of “do’s” and “don’ts”. Such expectations give rise to excessive legalism. One is expected to keep the letter of the law, in order to be acceptable to God. Again, God desires us to live uprightly, seeking a righteous life, but He never intended for us to keep the letter of the law in order to be saved. Apart from salvation, we remained in bondage to these demands. Coming to faith in Christ, resulting in our salvation, provided the spiritual maturity necessary to be delivered from the bondage of the law. *Rom.8:14-15 – For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*¹⁵ *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

II. The Present Position (4-11) – Paul revealed the change that transpires when one is saved by grace through faith in Christ. Consider:

A. The Redemption (4-5) – *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,*⁵ *To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* Paul again argues and affirms that it was never God’s intention for the law to save. When the fulness of time had come, (according to His sovereign plan since before the world began), God sent forth His Son, born of a woman under the law, to redeem those who were in bondage to the law that we might become the adopted children of God. *Rom.8:2-4 – For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*³ *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*⁴ *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

➤ Lest there be any doubt, Paul argued the inability of man to redeem himself from the law. Apart from the perfect, sinless life of Christ, and His atoning sacrifice upon the cross to purchase our redemption, we would remain condemned by the law and eternally separated from God in sin. Christ provided what the law demanded, but we were unable to achieve in the flesh.

B. The Reception (6) – *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.* The provision of Christ, in securing our redemption, not only provided our salvation – it also provided for our adoption into the family of God, thus being reconciled to the Father. As the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, He guides us unto the Father, revealing the right relationship we now have with Him and the access that is offered unto His dear children.

➤ I am certainly thankful for those who adopt children in need of a family. However, the father in that situation is unable to impart his nature into the adopted child. The adopted child is identified with the father by name, and enjoys all the benefits of a child, but biologically there is no change. Through the Holy Spirit, our heavenly Father imparts His nature into His children. That does not imply that we become divine or sinless, but that we bear the nature of our Father. This is part of the miraculous transformation that takes place in salvation. *Eph.1:3-6 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

C. The Transition (7) – *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.* Bear in mind what we discussed in the opening verses of the passage. The young children were viewed no differently than a servant until they reached maturity. Having come to faith in Christ, we are no longer servants, bound by the demands of the law, our tutor, but we are now considered children of God. Paul declared, if we are children, then we are heirs of God through Christ our Savior. We have been delivered from the bondage of the law and now stand as legal heirs of the Father. *Rom.8:17 – And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*

D. The Obligation (8-11) – *Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. ⁹ But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? ¹⁰ Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. ¹¹ I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.* Paul challenged the Galatians, who had been saved by faith in Christ, to live as children of God rather than servants to the law. As children, they were obligated to live in a way that bore witness to their relationship to the Father. There was a time, prior to salvation, that they served the gods of man's devices, but after coming to faith in Christ, how could they return to the former ways? Were they willing to exchange the liberty they had in Christ for the bondage of the law and the flesh? Some

had returned again to the observance of days and times, seeking to adhere to the ritualistic demands of the world and the Judaizers. Such is not consistent with the Christian life.

➤ Paul further challenged them with a strong rebuke – I am afraid that I have labored among some of you in vain. Some, after hearing the truth of the gospel, and making a profession of faith in Christ, were returning to the old way of life. This was not pleasing to Paul, and it certainly wasn't pleasing to the Lord. In essence, Paul admonished – if you are truly the children of God, then behave as His children instead of returning to the desires and behaviors you had as children of the world. If you are in Christ, you have been set free from the bondage of the law and the flesh; there is no reason to return to such a lifestyle.

Conclusion: We have discussed the differences between those who remain under the law and those who have been liberated in Christ. If we are truly the children of God, there has been a significant change, a radical transformation in our lives. We must strive to live according the desires of the Lord, crucifying the flesh, and bearing witness to the family to which we belong.

¹ John Phillips, [*Exploring Galatians: An Expository Commentary*](#), The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publishers; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ga 4:1–2.