

Living Under the Law Compared to the Believer's Position in Christ

Galatians 4:1-11

Galatians 4:1-11: *"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, ² but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. ³ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. ⁸ But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. ⁹ 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? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain."*

Background Notes

The Old Testament Law that was given to Moses and the people of Israel was good. It served an important purpose. God gave the Law to reveal man's sinful condition, and the Law showed that no one could attain God's moral standards and requirements on their own merits - either then or today. In addition, the Law was given to serve as a transition until the coming of Christ, the "promised Seed." Thus the Law prepared the way for faith in Christ.

The fact that the Law was never God's intended goal is strongly brought out in verse 4: *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law."* The word that is translated "fullness" here is the Greek word "*pleroma*." In this context it refers to "the appointed time." This was the fullness of time!

Everything was leading up to this "appointed time" - the time that God had in mind for His goal of sending a Savior. God had worked every event in history together to prepare for this time, and at last the fullness of time had come. Everything was ready for God's ultimate revelation – the revelation of His Son!

Think of the many ways that God worked behind the scenes of human history to prepare the world for this "appointed time." The Greek language, which was the universal language of the world at that time, was readily available for the communication of the gospel and for the writing of the New Testament. The Roman Empire had established the "*pax Romana*" - peace between the various provinces of the Roman Empire that was upheld through Roman military strength. In addition, the Roman Empire had built an extensive road system that facilitated the missionary travels and church

planting for the apostle Paul and other early Christian missionaries. Monotheism and messianic expectations had been proclaimed from the many Jewish synagogues that were scattered throughout the Roman world.

Do you think all these things had just happened to come together by chance? No way! God was working behind the scenes throughout history, preparing the world for the appointed time. Everything was ready. Everything was in place for the appointed time. And then, *"...when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law."* What a wonderful moment of history!

Notice that both the deity and humanity of our Lord Jesus were brought out in this great verse of Scripture. *"God sent forth His Son"* declares His deity; *"born of a woman, born under the Law"* speaks of His humanity.

And notice the reason for His birth in the fullness of time: *"To redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons"* (v5). Praise the Lord - God's perfect plan was all for us! It was all for our redemption!

Doctrinal Points

1. Under the Law, the Jews were like minor children and slaves.

Verse 3: *"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world."* The phrase *"under the elements of the world"* (v3) and the *"weak and beggarly elements"*(v9). These verses described the "bondage" and "slavery" to the Law under which the Jews lived in Old Testament times, and the fear of the pagan gods under which the Gentiles lived in the Greco-Roman culture. The *"elements of the world"* were the basic principles of the world, referring to the elementary principles of religion. The basic moral requirements that God built into the moral conscience of mankind could only bring conviction and guilt, and thus bondage.

Furthermore, under the Law, the Jews were like minor children who were put under a guardian, or a tutor, or a steward. In this illustration, the children were actually the heirs of the entire estate, but they were disciplined and tutored as children until the "appointed time" - the time that was appointed by the Father - for their coming of age, when they would finally be treated as mature children.

So - under the Law, the Jewish people were like minor children and slaves. Pretty discouraging, right? But now comes Doctrinal Point 2!

2. In Christ, believers are mature sons and heirs.

Verse 7: *"Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."* What a glorious change – from slavery to sons and heirs! And it's only because of all that Christ has done for us!

Jesus Christ was born as a Man, under the Law (v4). He kept the Law perfectly. Then He went to the cross and bore the curse of the Law when He died - for us! Now those who once were under the Law are redeemed. We are set free through faith in Christ.

All believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, are brought into the family of God through faith in Christ Jesus. We now have a close relationship with God - He is our Heavenly Father! *“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying out, “Abba Father” (v6).*

“Abba” is the familiar Hebrew word for “Daddy” that is still used today by all Israeli children. Our new relationship with God is so close that we can even call Him *Abba* - “Daddy”! And we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts giving us assurance of our new position in Christ (v6). What a wonderful relationship!

The idea of “adopted sons” (v5) is not the same as adoption today. In the Roman culture of the 1st century, a minor child was under the discipline of guardians and tutors until he came of age. When he came of age he went through a formal “adoption” ceremony, and was received as a fully mature son and heir in the family. Through the “adoption” ceremony, he became a mature son with all the rights and privileges and responsibilities of that position.

What a great illustration of our position in Christ! We have not only been received into the family of God as children - but we have been “adopted” as fully mature heirs of God, with all the privileges and dignity and responsibilities of that position!

Are you a member of God’s family? If you’re not a believer, you’re not in God’s family. You need to trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior - and thus come into the family. Now, as believers, we are in the family of God – but are you a **mature** son in God’s family? Are you enjoying your status as an heir in God’s family? Are you living up to your responsibilities as a mature son and heir? Are you a good representative of the family of God?

Verse 9 emphasizes the truth that now we not only **know about God**, but we **know God**, and are **known by God**. What an amazing thought! As believers, the God who created and controls the universe **knows us individually!** He knows all about you – your strengths and weaknesses, your ups and downs, your physical needs, your emotional needs, your motives and your desires. He knows you better than you know yourself.

Believers are members of God’s family - and the best is yet to come! In Christ, believers are mature sons and heirs.

Practical Application

Let’s not live like slaves, when we’re already sons!

Before the Gentile Galatians became believers, they were involved with serving the false gods of the pagan Greek and Roman religions: *“But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods” (v8).*

Now, having been brought into the freedom and liberty of Christianity, were they going to go back under bondage by turning to the false teaching of the Judaizers?

To start observing “special days” (v10) and the other rituals and works of the Old Testament Law, they would be “going back to the basics.” They would once again be enslaved - trying as best they could to keep rules and regulations for salvation or sanctification. They would be placing themselves in bondage, and Paul would have labored in vain: “*I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain*” (v11). Why should they live like slaves when they were already sons?

If you’re not a believer, you really are in bondage and slavery to sin - whether you realize it or not, and whether you’ll admit it or not. You are living with the weight of your sins upon you, because your sins have not yet been forgiven. It doesn’t matter whether you feel good about yourself and the life you’re living or not – Jesus Christ is the **only** way of salvation, and you need to trust in Christ as your personal Savior. And when you trust in Him, you will be received as a beloved child in the family of God!

Believers are no longer slaves. We are no longer in bondage. We’re free - we’re sons! So the same question applies to us that Paul asked the Galatian believers: “Why should we live like slaves when we’re already sons?” Don’t live as a slave - you’re a son!

Why live as a slave to a rules-oriented and works-oriented religion when you’re already a beloved member of God’s family? Salvation is by faith alone – and sanctification is by faith alone! Adding rituals like Sabbath-keeping, or the wearing of distinctive robes, or restrictive rules for Sunday behavior, or burning incense, or excessive rules and ritualism – those are examples of the regulations that move us in the direction of slavery to the “*weak and beggarly elements*” of man-made religion.

Even true believers are not immune to becoming entangled in bondage to such practices, so we must be careful. We’re not in bondage - so we must guard against becoming turning back to the slavery of man-made list of rules and regulations for gaining sanctification.

We’re not slaves to rules and rituals - Christ has set us free! So let’s not live like slaves when we’re already sons!