**“SONS OF GOD”**

**GALATIANS 3:23 to 4:11**

Give me just a few of the themes we’ve seen so far in our study of Galatians. “Saved by grace thru faith alone – justified by faith;” “Jesus paid it all – we can do nothing to add to His finished work on the cross;” “Salvation has always been by faith alone.” “Faith and works, law, are mutually exclusive – you can’t mix the two when it comes to your salvation.” There are other themes in Galatians which we will see as we move forward, but these are the main themes thus far.

So, where does Paul go from here? He’s made his argument that justification is by faith by speaking in historical terms from the O.T. Now he’s going to shift gears and begin to make personal application. Remember who his audience is. It is predominately Gentile believers in Galatia. His message is for them, yes, but it also has application for us here in Rockwall TX today.

READ Galatians 3:23-29

I’ll be honest. This is a difficult passage. For starters let’s define the term “law” which shows up in v 23 and 24. What does “law” refer to? The Greek doesn’t really help us out here because the same word (*nomos*) is used for law throughout the book of Galatians, all 32 times. It’s a noun speaking of law in general. It could refer to the Law given to Moses on Mt Sinai. That was the meaning used in last week’s lesson, v 17-21. But that is not what is meant in our passage here, v 23 and 24. “Law” has several other possible meanings depending on the context it is used. It is a guiding principle, specifically, a written law. A precept. A statute. So “law” could refer to the Mosaic Law, the Ten Commandments; or it could refer to scripture in general, the Bible, God’s revealed written word. Under the latter definition are all sorts of terms applied to “law.” There is the “law of Christ” the principles by which Christ Himself lived; “law of faith” principles which demand only faith on man’ part; “law of my mind” principles which govern our new nature; “law of sin” principles by which sin exerts an evil influence on us even though we want to do what is right; “law of liberty” renewed freedom to obey Christ motivated by our desire to please Him; “royal law” or the “law of love” summarized by “love your neighbor as yourself;” “law of the Spirit of life” principles by which the Holy Spirit works in our lives; “law of righteousness” a misguided principle by which Israel pursued a law that would lead to righteousness (Rom 9:31).

So in general “law” refers to written principles that guide our lives. It is driven by action, by something we do, by our works.

So let’s go back and delve into these verses in detail…

READ Galatians 3:23-24

Let me explain what Paul is saying here from my own personal testimony. Before putting my faith in Jesus Christ, I was a prisoner to God's law. For me personally at the age of 10, I was weighed down by the burden of my own sinfulness. How did I know that I was a sinner? Several ways – it was pointed out to me in the Bible, my guilty conscience, the Holy Spirit’s conviction, etc. At some point I became keenly aware that I had transgressed God's moral law. At that point I was ready to be introduced to the answer to my sin problem. If a person sees no need for a savior they will not turn to Christ for salvation. The lifeboats that were lowered from the Titanic were only half full in large part because most people on board didn't really believe that the ship would sink. They just didn't see the need to be saved. It’s our job as believers who know the truth to warn people that their ship really is sinking, to point them to the lifeboat that will save them from eternal damnation, which is, Jesus.

Our freedom has been purchased by the shed blood of God's own son, Jesus Christ. Before faith in Christ came, Paul says, “we were held captive under the law.” We were ignorant and in bondage to sin. Later, when we heard the good news and we came to faith in Christ, then Jesus set us free.

The law, God’s revealed written moral standard, was our “guardian.” The NASB says, “our tutor.” It showed us our need to be justified. It was our guide, our mentor, and it ultimately led us to Christ. Prior to Christ's redemptive work in our lives, the law was our guardian. It warned us to stay on the straight and narrow, punishing us thru a guilty conscience whenever we strayed, and protected us until we arrived at that place where we trusted Christ.

READ Galatians 3:25-26

Now that we have come to Christ by faith, we no longer need someone to guide us and lead us to Him. We're out of prison! Once I received Jesus Christ, I was free from the law, right? It had no claim on me. Romans 6:14 tells us, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.” But you see the false teachers in Galatia wouldn't let the law stop. They had to keep the law going. They said, “Fine. You believe in Jesus. But the law is still required. Do this and do that.” Paul says, “No, no, no!” You shouldn’t just ignore God's moral and ethical standards, but they can't save you. Don't count on them for your salvation. “You are all sons (and daughters) of God thru your faith in Christ.”

READ Galatians 3:27

In Roman society in Paul’s day a young boy would come to a point in his life where he would lay aside his robe of childhood and put on a new toga. He moved into adulthood, with all rights and responsibilities. What Paul is saying is that now that you have been baptized (come to faith in Christ) it is time to put on new clothes. Not merely clothes of goodness. “Put on Christ.” He becomes the focal point of your life.

READ Galatians 3:28

The gospel of Jesus Christ unifies all who call themselves Christians. Romans 2:11 reminds us, “For God shows no partiality.” Whenever you hear distinctions being made between male & female, between black & white, between rich & poor, between the haves & the have-nots, etc., rest assured that divisive spirit is NOT from God. As a body of believers we are one in Christ!

That isn't to say that we have different roles and responsibilities within the body of Christ. The Bible clearly teaches that we do. But what this verse is referring to is that we are tied together by a common goal and that is to honor and glorify Jesus Christ.

READ Galatians 3:29

Paul ends the Chapter right back where he started, God's promise to Abraham. Our union with Christ makes us spiritually children of Abraham. All of us Christians are offspring of Abraham by virtue of the fact that we have been counted as righteous by God on the basis of our faith in Him. God made a promise to Abraham which was fulfilled in Christ. Since we are in Christ, then THAT promise is ours also. As we get into Chapter 4 we’ll talk more about what it means to be an heir of God – a joint heir with Jesus Christ.

READ Galatians 4:1-2

In the 1st Century Roman society, while a boy was still considered to be a minor, he fell under the authority of the guardians and managers, tutors, governors. These were people who were entrusted household servants appointed by the father. The boy was a future heir to his father's estate. And one day, when he had grown up and become mature enough to handle the responsibility, he would inherit and control it all. However, for the time being, while he was still a young boy, he could make no decisions and had little freedom. Not until the father felt he was ready to handle the responsibility, to handle the inheritance, would it become his. So, a young boy may be an heir by right, but not yet an heir in fact.

In this analogy, Paul takes the basic thought of a son and contrasts an immature younger son with a mature older son. The young son is like a person under the law, and the mature son is like a person under grace who has been saved by faith. Paul has been driving home his doctrine of salvation by faith and here he’s teaching it again from a different angle. He's going to keep hammering his point home until the Galatians get it!

READ Galatians 4:3

For the Jew, that was bondage to the written law. God gave them a law, and it was to reveal sin and drive them to the Savior. Instead, they thought that the law was going to save them. They wanted to be more sacred, more religious, more pious, more godly. So they thought the way to do that was to do more things, keep more laws. The end result was that they became enslaved to the law.

But let’s not be so hard on the Jews. We Gentiles did the same kind of thing. We concocted various religions. All of the world religious systems are efforts to achieve righteousness or justification thru some organized system of works. So everybody is under the tyranny of legalism in one way or another. Every religion, whether it's theistic, pantheistic, or atheistic, is based on works and self-righteousness, self-effort, self-sufficiency. What Paul is saying here is that all of us were in bondage to the elemental principles of the world, we were children. We were all enslaved until Christ came and set us free.

READ Galatians 4:4-5

“When the fullness of time had come …” At the right time, at the perfect time, in God's sovereign timetable…God acted. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ at the perfect time in human history: (1) When the Roman government had established peace, (2) When the Romans had built a road system that greatly aided travel; (3) When most of the known world spoke one common language (Greek); (4) When the Greek and Roman mythological religions were waning in popularity; and (5) When the law had completed its work by preparing people for their coming Messiah. Only then did God send His Son. The Jews waited for centuries wondering when the promised Messiah would come. They waited with eager anticipation. God does not respond to our timetable, but His timing is always perfect.

What did Christ do when He came? What was His mission? To save us, to redeem us. He freed us from the bondage of legalism. He bought our freedom for us so that we could be set free and adopted into God's family. We were NOT born members of God's family, but rather from birth we are members of Adam's family because we are born with a sin nature. We were bought with a price, the blood of Christ, demonstrating God's mercy. We were adopted as sons, joint heirs with Jesus, demonstrating God's wonderful grace!

Think about what happens when one is adopted into a new family. All of a sudden they have a new father and a new mother. The adopted child bears the last name of the adopting parents. He or she is identified with them and their family. All rights and privileges of being a part of that family are now theirs to enjoy.

READ Galatians 4:6

When you got saved you received the Holy Spirit of God Himself. He dwells in us! Nowhere in the Bible will you find a command to ask for the Spirit of God. He’s given to us at the moment we place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us seals us and signifies to us that we part of God’s family. That word “Abba” is a Greek child's term for their father, similar to English terms such as “Daddy” or “Papa.” It is a term of endearment. The fact that you feel intimate with God, that you can cry out to God with a sense of intimacy, as a father who loves you, is proof positive that you are His child.

READ Galatians 4:7

An adopted child is no longer the legal son or daughter of their birth parents. They give up all rights to their child when they place them up for adoption. When we are adopted into God's family, Satan and the flesh no longer have any claim on our lives. We now belong to God. We are the children of God!

When Christ came, the servants were set free, not just to roam, but free to become sons! From a status of servants He gave them the status of sons. V 7 says, “You are no longer a slave, but a son.” What does that mean? It means that, if we’re in Christ, we’re God’s heirs. Romans 8:17 says, “And if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ …” We are no longer merely servants, but we are children of THE King with all its blessings and privileges, both here and now and into the future.

Well, all of our blessings as heirs of God carry with it a responsibility. Look at the next few verses...

READ Galatians 4:8-11

You can sense Paul's disappointment and frustration with the Galatian believers. He wonders if all his labors, his preaching, his teaching, have been for nothing. These Galatian believers had initially accepted salvation by grace. Then false teachers came along and they bit hook, line and sinker into a false system of salvation by works. Paul says, “What have you done? You used to do that when you didn't know God at all, when you were still heathens. You worshipped those that weren't even gods! You followed a works religion way back yonder. Then, you came to know the true God. But you've moved backwards. You've placed yourself in bondage once again. You've slipped back into your old lifestyle! You've replaced grace for law, joy for works, and son-ship for slavery!”

Let me tell you a story about John Newton, the man who wrote the words to that great hymn “Amazing Grace.” John Newton was an only child and lost his mother when he was just 7 years old. At the age of 11, he became a sailor and went to sea. Can you imagine? Eleven years old! He got involved eventually in the atrocities of the African slave trade. He plunged into the depths of human sin and degradation. When he was 23 years old, on March 10, 1748, when his ship was in imminent peril of being destroyed by a great storm, John Newton cried to God for mercy and he found it. He was truly converted, changed, and he never forgot how God had mercy on him.

He sought diligently to remember what he had previously been and what God had done for him. In order to imprint it on his memory, he had written in bold letters and fastened across the wall over the mantelpiece of his study the words of Deuteronomy 15:15. He saw it every day of his life, and this is what it says: “Thou shalt remember that thou wast - a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee...”

If you have been trying to earn the favor of God, you're a slave. If you accept the free gift of Christ, you can be a son. Secondly, to those who are sons or daughters, remember you're HIS child! Don't ever let a day go by when you don't thank God that you, once a slave to sin and enemy of God, are now a son.

In Luke 15 Jesus gives His parable of the Prodigal Son. At one point the younger son, after he had squandered his entire inheritance on riotous living, made his way back home. He knew what he deserved, didn't he? When he arrived home he said to his father, “I have sinned against heaven and against you. Make me as one of your hired servants,” not a son. He said, “I deserve to be a servant.” Well, what did the father make him? He made him a son. You and I don’t deserve to be sons either, but that is what God made us anyway, His prodigal children returned home. He made us His sons! We are not slaves having to work or earn our justification. If we do enough little things and get enough spiritual brownie points, do we earn some kind of righteousness? NO! We’re sons! We have been adopted into the family of God. That new relationship comes about, not by our works, not by our good deeds or good behavior, but by our faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son.

Years ago I was a member of a church where we would close each Sunday morning service by holding hands with the people on either side of us and we would sing a chorus of Christian unity. That chorus sums up very well our position in Christ and it goes like this *[show hymn slide]*