

From Being Slaves to Becoming God's Children



SABBATH—AUGUST 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 3:26–4:20; Romans 6:1–11; Hebrews 2:14–18; Hebrews 4:14, 15; Romans 9:4, 5.

MEMORY VERSE: “So you [are not] a slave any longer. You are God’s child. Because you are his child, God gives you the rights of those who are his children” (Galatians 4:7, NIV).

PAUL TELLS THE GALATIANS they are not slaves. Instead, they are the sons and daughters of God. So, they should live their lives with this truth in mind. Martin Luther needed to hear this truth when he was a young man. Luther was a monk. A monk is a religious man who lives and works with other religious men. But Luther’s life as a monk brought him no peace. Luther believed he was a guilty sinner. He tried by his own works to receive pardon and peace. He fasted, or went without food. And he whipped himself to try to get rid of his sin. He would have done anything to be able to stand with a pure heart before God. He followed all the rules. But he could find no peace inside himself. He said, “Suppose there were a monk who could earn heaven by his works. Then that monk would have been me. I should have earned it through all I did.”—Adapted. But nothing he did seemed to work.

But then Martin Luther read Galatians. And he began to understand the truth about salvation in Christ. Only then did Luther start to have spiritual freedom. He found hope for his soul. Luther’s hope changed the world. And the world has never been the same since.



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WHAT IT MEANS TO BE IN CHRIST (Galatians 3:25, 26)

Read Galatians 3:25. Keep this verse in mind as you read Galatians 3:26. How does Galatians 3:26 help us understand what our relationship to the law is now that we have been saved by Jesus?

We learned that in New Testament times a master's son was under the control of a teacher. This control ended when the son became an adult. In the same way, Paul says that those who come to Christ in faith are no longer "children." Instead, their relationship with the law is changed. Why? Because they are now adult "sons" of God.

In Galatians 3:26, the word translated as "sons" (NKJV) comes from the Greek word *hyios*. Other versions of the Bible translate this word as "children." But in Greek, *hyios* means "a son." There are at least two reasons Paul uses the Greek word *son* here instead of the Greek word for *children*. First, Paul was thinking about the family wealth that would be passed onto the firstborn son. Also, Paul had in mind the wording "sons of God." This name was used for Israel in the Old Testament (Hosea 11:1). But now non-Jews also could enjoy the special relationship with God that only Israel had enjoyed. And not just males. Paul clearly includes females in this relationship as well (Galatians 3:28).



In Galatians, Paul says baptism means being "clothed with Christ."

Read Galatians 3:27, 28; Romans 6:1–11; and 1 Peter 3:21. What do these verses say makes baptism so special?

In Romans 6, Paul says baptism shows that we want to be joined to Jesus in His death and return to life. But in Galatians 3:27, Paul says baptism means being "clothed with Christ" (NCV). The Old Testament talks about being clothed with holiness (read Isaiah 61:10). In the same way, Paul sees baptism as the time when Christ clothes believers with holiness. Paul does not say "holiness." But holiness is what Paul means when he talks about what God gives believers.

What is true for Christ is also true for us. Christ is the "Seed" of Abraham (Galatians 3:16, NKJV). And we are "[God's] children" (Romans 8:17). As such, we are heirs to all the promises God made to Abraham and his family.

What is true for Christ is also true for us. How should this wonderful truth affect every part of our lives?

BEING SLAVES TO OLD RULES (Galatians 4:1–3)

Paul just has shown that in our relationship with God we are the same as sons and heirs. Now Paul takes this idea further in Galatians 4:1–3. He gives the example of the owner of a large property. The owner dies. He leaves everything to his oldest son. But his son is still a boy. So, the property is put under the control of managers until his son is a man.

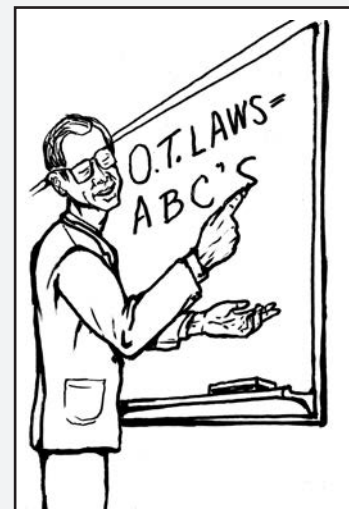
Paul's comparison reminds us of the example of the strict teacher in Galatians 3:24. But in Galatians 4:1–3, the power of the managers is much greater. They are responsible for bringing up the master's son. And they are also in charge of all the business of the property until the son is ready to take control of it himself.

Read Galatians 4:1–3. What is Paul saying in these verses that should help us understand how important the law is in our lives, now that we are in Christ?

People disagree over what Paul means by the wording “basic spiritual powers” (Galatians 4:3, NIV). “Powers” comes from the Greek word *stoicheia*. It means “elements.” Elements can mean weather conditions. But, at one time, elements meant earth, wind, fire, and water. So, some people thought Paul was talking about these basic elements of the universe (2 Peter 3:10, 12). Others thought Paul meant the demons that control this evil age (Colossians 2:15). And some people thought Paul meant the basic rules of a religious life (Hebrews 5:12). Paul's word picture of believers as children (Galatians 4:1–3) shows he means the basic rules, or “ABCs,” of religious life. The Old Testament laws were such rules. But they were only shadows of what was to come. They were never meant to take the place of Christ.

So, Christians were not to live by these rules. To do so was to go backward. And going backward was just what the Galatians were doing when they wanted to return to those rules after Christ came. Imagine that the son, in Galatians 4:1–3, received everything, but then wanted to be a child again!

A childlike faith can be positive (Matthew 18:3). But is it the same thing as being fully grown in your spiritual walk? Suppose you grow a lot in your spiritual walk. Does that mean your faith will be more childlike? How childlike and innocent and trusting is your faith?



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“GOD SENT HIS SON” (Galatians 4:4, Nlrv)

In Galatians 4:4, Paul uses the word “chosen” to show how God personally worked out His plan to save us. Jesus did not come at just any time. He came at the exact time God chose. It was a very good time in history, known as the *Pax Romana*. *Pax Romana* means Roman peace. It lasted for more than 200 years. It was a time when people felt safe and secure across the Roman Empire. Rome had conquered the Mediterranean world. This victory brought peace. It made travel easier. People also spoke the same language, and they shared the same way of life. These things helped to spread the gospel quickly. God chose this time for the coming of His Son (read Daniel 9:24–27).

Read John 1:14; Galatians 4:4, 5; Romans 8:3, 4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:5–8; Hebrews 2:14–18; and Hebrews 4:14, 15. According to these verses, why did Jesus need to become human to save us?



“God sent His Son.”

Galatians 4:4, 5 is one of the shortest descriptions of the gospel in the whole Bible. It tells how Jesus came into human history. His coming was no accident. For God took the first step toward saving us. The words “God sent His Son” teach that Jesus is God (John 1:1–3, 18; Philippians 2:5–9; Colossians 1:15–17). God did not send us a heavenly messenger. God Himself came, for only God could save us.

Jesus *is* God. He is God’s own Son. He has been with God from the beginning. But “a woman gave birth to him” (Nlrv). This verse tells us Jesus truly became human.

The wording “born under the law” (NKJV) points to the fact that Jesus was born in order to die for our sins.

Christ needed to become human. Why? Because we could not save ourselves. He is divine. But He joined Himself with fallen humans. By doing so, Christ became our legal Substitute, Savior, and High Priest. He was the “second” Adam. He came to win back everything the first Adam lost by disobeying God (Romans 5:12–21). Christ was obedient to the law. He met all the law’s holy requirements. He won the victory where Adam failed. Christ’s death on the cross satisfied the just requirements of the law. The law demanded the death of the sinner. But Christ died in our place. And His death gave Him the right to save all who come to Him in true faith and surrender to Him.

THE SPECIAL BLESSINGS OF BEING ADOPTED (Galatians 4:5–7)

In Galatians 4:5, Paul says that Christ “came to set free those who were under the authority of the law” (NirV). The wording “to set free” means “to buy back.” It pointed to the price paid to buy the freedom of a hostage or slave. This wording shows something negative about salvation. It shows we are slaves who need to be set free.

But freed from what? The New Testament lists four main things: (1) the devil and his lies (Hebrews 2:14, 15); (2) death (1 Corinthians 15:56, 57); (3) the power of sin that enslaves us (Romans 6:22); and (4) the guilt of breaking the law (Romans 3:19–24; Galatians 3:13; and Galatians 4:5).

Read Galatians 4:5–7; Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:15, 16, 23; and Romans 9:4, 5. What special blessing comes to us as a result of our being saved in Christ?

We often describe what Christ has done for us as salvation. But this word is not nearly as rich as Paul’s use of the word “adoption” (*huiothesia*). Paul is the only New Testament writer to use this word. Adoption was a well-known custom in the Greco-Roman world. Several Roman emperors during Paul’s lifetime had no legal heirs. So, they adopted the person who would rule after them. Adoption resulted in certain benefits: “(1) The adopted son becomes the true son . . . of the one who adopted him. . . . (2) The one who adopted the son agrees to raise the child and to give him food and clothing. (3) The one doing the adopting cannot refuse to accept his adopted son. (4) The child cannot be made a slave. (5) The child’s birth parents cannot take him back. (6) Adoption gives the child the right to inherit.” —Adapted, Derek R. Moore-Crispin, “Galatians 4:1–9: The Use and Abuse of Parallels,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, volume LXI, number 3 (1989), page 216.

All these rights are made certain by law. But just imagine how much greater the benefits are that we have as the adopted children of God!

The Hebrew word *Abba*, in Galatians 4:6, was the word children used for their fathers. It is the same as *Daddy* or *Papa* today. Jesus used it in prayer (Mark 14:36). It is our right to use it, as well. How does it make you feel to know we can use it, too?



The wording “to set free” shows we are slaves in need of freedom.

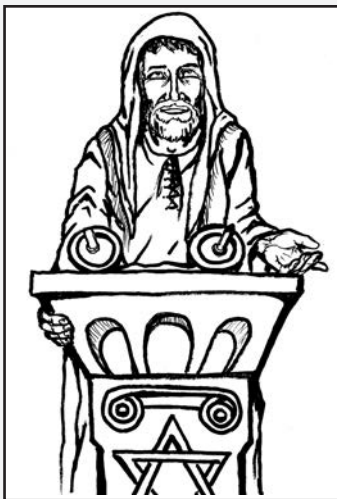
WHY TURN BACK TO BEING SLAVES? (Galatians 4:8–20)

Read Galatians 4:8–20. What is Paul saying in these verses? Write down your thoughts on the lines below. There are false teachings and customs among the Galatians. How seriously does Paul take these threats?

Paul does not say exactly what these religious customs of the Galatians are. But he clearly is writing about a false system of worship. This false worship results in spiritual slavery. Paul thought this system was very dangerous and destructive. It is what caused him to write such a strong letter of warning to the Galatians. Paul warned them that what they were doing was turning themselves away from being God's sons. They were becoming slaves again.

Read Galatians 4:9–11. Paul does not say exactly what the Galatians are doing. But he makes his feelings clear. He finds it wrong. Why does it upset Paul so much?

In Galatians 4:10, Paul talks about “special days and months and seasons and years” (NIRV). Many think this wording means Paul is against both the Sabbath and the Old Testament laws of sacrifice. But this idea is wrong. Why? First, suppose Paul really was against keeping the Sabbath and other Jewish customs. Then he could have just named them. Second, Paul makes it clear that what the Galatians are doing has led them from freedom into slavery. “Suppose that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath holy made people slaves. Then, that would mean the Creator God Himself became a slave when He kept the world's first Sabbath!” —Adapted, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 967. Also suppose keeping the Sabbath took away freedom and made slaves of people. Then why would Jesus have kept the Sabbath and taught others to keep it, too?



Suppose keeping the Sabbath took freedom away from people. Then why would Jesus have kept the Sabbath and taught others to keep it, too?

Are there things we do as Adventists that take away the freedom we have in Christ? If so, what are they? Suppose doing such things were not the real problem. What if the real problem were how we felt and thought about those things? How could a wrong thought or feeling lead us into the kind of slavery Paul warned the Galatians against?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “A plan was made in heaven to save sinners. Christ would become the Substitute for humans to save them from death. Those who believed in Him would become the children of God by Jesus Christ. This plan was exactly what God wanted. God wants all people to be saved. All that could be done to save humans was done. God gave His only Son to pay the price for our sins. Those who do not receive eternal life will die because they refused to be adopted as the children of God through Jesus Christ. Pride prevents some humans from accepting God’s gift of salvation. But none of our goodness is good enough to win us eternal life. The only thing that makes us pleasing to God is grace. [Grace is God’s gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin.] We receive this grace by faith in the name of Christ. We cannot depend on our works or feelings as proof that we are saved. We are chosen through Christ alone.”—Adapted, Ellen G. White, “Chosen in Christ,” *Signs of the Times*, January 2, 1893.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Think some more about what it means—and what it does not mean—to be as children in our walk with the Lord. Name some of the things children are or do that we should try to be or do in our relationship with God. At the same time, how can we take this idea too far?
- 2 What makes people so afraid of being saved by faith alone? Why would so many people try to earn salvation through good works instead?
- 3 As a class, go over the last question in Thursday’s study. What are the ways that we, as Seventh-day Adventists, can get caught back up in the slavery God has freed us from? How can we know if this happens to us? And how can we be set free?

SUMMARY: In Christ, we have been adopted into God’s family. Now we are His sons and daughters. We are God’s children. We have a right to all the blessings that come with such a special relationship. Suppose we wished to worship God with a relationship made only of rules and laws. Such worship would be foolish! It would be the same as the son in Galatians 4:1–3 wanting to give up being the heir so that he could become a slave!



“We cannot depend on our works or feelings as proof that we are saved. We are chosen through Christ alone.”