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## Galatians 3:26-4:7 “Accept the Privileges of Mature Sonship”

Intro. When sin entered into our world, it really messed things up! Do you realize that sin alienates us from God? By nature we are separated from God. Instead of enjoying His presence and blessing, we are left alone to face a difficult world. Sin also divides and alienates people groups. That is why we have hatred and war, even to this very day. That is why there is divorce. That is why parent/teen relationships are often so strained. Sin also causes enslavement. People who do not control their sinful impulses end up in jail, or loose other freedoms. Many are enslaved to their religion. Many are in bondage to an oppressive government. Finally, sin robs us of becoming heirs of the blessings that God offers by promise. I talked last week about the fact that God wants to bless you in so many ways. Yet, many fall far short of experiencing God’s blessing. Instead, it seems their lives are cursed!

However, I have good news! God has worked through history to accomplish His plan of saving us from sin. He called Abraham, and promised that through his seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. He raised up Abraham’s descendents, the Jews, to be a channel of blessing. He gave them His Law, beginning with the 10 Commandments. The Law would help them to recognize their sin problem, and need of a Savior. Then, v.4 of our text says, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” At just the right time in human history, about 2,000 years ago, Jesus was born to be our Savior. In this message I will tell you what Jesus did to save us from sin. Then, in order to bring salvation to the nations, Jesus called His 12 apostles, establish His Church, and sent out missionaries. Today, hundreds of millions of people from just about every nation have experienced God’s salvation from sin.

Now just as God followed a plan to save Jews, and ultimately the nations, even so each person must follow God’s plan to reach the point of experiencing all the blessings that God has for you. Follow me, as I take you on a journey toward experiencing the full blessings of God. Jesus said in John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

First of all, before I can get you to move from where you are, to where God wants you to be, you must *want* to take this journey. You have to become dissatisfied with where you are, and realize that something better is down the road. So in this journey of life, you must:

### I. RECOGNIZE THE BONDAGE OF THE PRE-CONVERSION CONDITION

In chapter 4 Paul wants to drive home the same point he introduced near the end of chapter 3: the sinners’ inferiority “under law.” The false teachers in Galatia were telling them that they needed to advance in their Christian walk by putting themselves under Jewish Law. But Paul shows here that going in such a direction will actually reverse their progress in their walk with God.

Paul states his point in v.3, “...when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” Paul is talking about the big historical picture of God’s dealings with Israel. Back in chapter 3, v.24, he had already likened his nation’s experience under the Law as being like a child under a guide and disciplinarian. So the period of training under God’s Law is likened unto the

childhood of Israel's history. For some 15 centuries, Israel had been in kindergarten and grade school, learning their "spiritual ABCs", so that they would be ready when Christ would come.

The problem is that such spiritual childhood is a time of bondage. Just as an immature child is governed by rules and regulations, so also Paul says we were in bondage to "the rudiments of the world." The word for "rudiments" (*stoicheion*) refers to any first of a series, such as the ABC's of the alphabet, or the first steps in a journey (*stoicheo*, to walk). As I see it, these "worldly rudiments" are elementary teachings regarding rules and regulations, by means of which people attempt to control sinful behavior, and achieve salvation. Look with me at vv. 9-10, "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? You observe days and months and seasons and years." In Col. 2:8 Paul warns: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the *elementary principles of the world*, rather than according to Christ." The elemental things of all human religion, whether Jewish or Gentile is a form of religious bondage. The Jewish religious leaders made it worse than God even intended. They began to add their own multitudinous rules and regulations to those previously received, so that law became their tyrant, to which they became enslaved. The same was true with respect to the prescriptions and ordinances by which the worshipers of pagan deities sought to achieve redemption.

Paul illustrates his point from a common experience in everyday life. He says in vv. 1-2, "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, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father." Although ancient customs varied, there was usually a prescribed age when a child, especially a boy, would officially come of age and take on the privileges and responsibilities of adulthood. The Roman ceremony marking that change in status was called *toga virilis*, and the Jewish ceremony was (and still is) called *bar mitzvah*. The illustration of a child coming of age was therefore easily understood by both Jews and Gentiles to whom Paul wrote. The point is simply recognizing that a child must become an adult before he is eligible to receive an inheritance, and enjoy the privileges of adulthood. Until then, a minor child is entrusted to guardians, as well as to stewards, to whom the oversight of his estate has been committed.

Kids, have you ever asked why an older brother or sister gets to do something that you are not permitted to do? Well, here is the reason. Until you are mature enough through knowledge and experience to do the right thing on your own, you must remain under supervision, with all the rules that are intended to protect you.

Then Paul drives home the point of the illustration. Though the child is the legal heir, and as such master and owner of everything, yet with respect to taking possession and exercising control over the estate, he is no better off than the slave that cares for him. The servant was commanded by the master of the house, and the child was commanded by the servant. The child was subservient to them and could do nothing without their permission and go nowhere without their companionship. Just as a slave had masters, so the child had masters. The child is far from free. So in a state of spiritual immaturity, a person is under rules and regulations.

Do you have any doubts that religion by law, even God-given Law, only leads to bondage? We also see the bondage of the law in v.5. The very purpose of the coming of Christ was "to redeem those who were under the law." This word "redeem" (*exagorazo*) is the same word used in 3:13, "to buy out of the market place," usually in reference to slaves. So, to go back into the law is to undo the very work of Christ on the cross. As we shall see, He did not purchase us to make us slaves, but sons!

Friend, legalistic religion only leads to the bondage of rules and regulations. It will not advance you down the road to God's full blessing. One of the tragedies of legalism is that it gives the appearance of spiritual maturity when, in reality, it leads the believer back into a "second childhood" of Christian experience. Legalism, then, is not a step toward maturity; it is a step back into childhood. It is important that a person know his ABCs, because they are the foundation for understanding all of the language. But the man who sits in a library and recites the ABCs instead of reading the great literature that is around him, is showing that he is immature and ignorant, not mature and wise.

Now to motivate you further to travel with me down the road to the full blessings of salvation, I ask you next of all to:

## II. RECOGNIZE THE PRIVILEGED POSITION YOU CAN ATTAIN

In several verses of this text, Paul wants us to understand the privileged position we can have in our relationship with God. He shows that faith brings men into the dignity of full-grown sons. In v.2 Paul speaks of, "The day appointed of the father." This is the time set by the father for the son to enter upon his destined inheritance. At this point, the child's status radically changed. He was no longer a child or like a slave, but a responsible adult and citizen. In fact, look at v.7. There Paul sums up this whole section of Scripture, "Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son...." He says in v.26, "For you are all sons of God through faith...." This has to do with our standing in the family of God; we are not little children but adult sons with all of the privileges of sonship.

Now when Paul talks about sonship here, he is not talking about spiritual growth. He is talking about the advance of God's people into mature sonship beginning with the coming of Christ. Again, v.2 speaks of, "The day appointed of the father." Then v.4 says, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son...." Because of what Christ has done, we can enter into privileges of sonship the moment we believe in Christ!

Then in v.29 he changes the emphasis just a bit regarding the privileged position that even Gentiles can have. There he says, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed...." He had previously made the point in v.16 that Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the promised seed of Abraham. Therefore, even if you are not a physical descendent of Abraham, you can be a son of Abraham if you belong to Christ. That means according to v.29 that you are "heirs according to the promise." We will talk more about that later.

Paul illustrates this privileged position from the familiar practice of adoption. In v.5 Paul says that Christ came 'to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.' This is an allusion to a Graeco-Roman legal device that permitted a wealthy man having no children to take into his family a boy and make him a son and heir. In fact, the word "adoption" (*huiiothesia*) literally means, "to place as a son." This honored custom gave special dignity and family membership to those who were not born into a family. Often, this privilege would even be given to a slave, who would trade his slavery for sonship, with all its privileges. Paul's emphasis here in selecting this word is to show that we are sons by grace. For you see, by nature we are not children of God. But by adoption, we can become sons of God!

Years ago, there walked down a city street a ragged little newsboy, an orphan. In the big city where he lived, he passed by a beautiful mansion. The lawn was neatly kept. The fountains were flowing. On that beautiful Lord's Day, the mansion looked so inviting. And the little lad found himself walking onto the grounds, then on the porch, and then up to the door. And before he knew it, he was ringing the bell at the door. Mr. Lowery came and opened the door and looked out

and saw there that ragged little newsboy. The little fellow, standing in front of the big man, was astonished at what he had done. And not knowing what to do or what to say, he just blurted out, "Do you have a little boy?" And the man looked at the child kind of sadly and said, "No, Son, Mrs. Lowery and I do not have any children." And the little fellow said, "Oh, I'd give everything I have, everything, if I could be your little boy and I could play on this beautiful lawn." And one of those turns of fortunes, the big man, Mr. Lowery turned and called upstairs for his wife. And said, "Mrs. Lowery, come here." And the queenly woman walked down the graceful stairway and stood by the side of her husband. And he said, "Dear, would you like to have a little boy?" She said, "O husband, yes I would." And the father turned to the lad and said, "Sonny boy, come in." And the little boy walked in that palatial home. And the first thing he did as he promised, he reached in his pocket and pulled out thirteen cents. And offered them to the big man and said, "Sir, this is all that I have." And we're just like that when we offer to God what little we have and what little we can do to buy our salvation. It is nothing. And the big man took the little boy's hand and closed it around his thirteen pennies and said, "Son, you keep them. For I have more than enough for us both." And he took the lad into his house and adopted him and he became Mr. Lowery's son. In time he inherited his estate. That is exactly what God has done for us. We were poor, ragged, and outcast. And into the glorious home of our heavenly Father, God hath invited us and bestowed upon us the privilege of sonship. He adopted us into the family of heaven. And we are an heir and a joint heir with Jesus Christ our elder brother.<sup>1</sup>

Don't try to work your way into God's family by keeping the Law, or slavishly follow human religion. By His grace God will willing to make you a son, with all the privileges of sonship. So go with me to our next stop in our journey together this morning:

### III. RECEIVE THE PRIVILEGED POSITION BY FAITH

This privilege of adoption is something we must "receive." That comes from a word (*apolambano*) that means, "to receive what is due or promised." It is also in the subjunctive mood, "might receive." It is not automatic. Faith is the condition. Faith is required. Furthermore, Paul says in v.26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." It is through faith that we become sons of God.

Now I want to share with you 3 truths about accepting sonship by faith:

A. The Object of Such Trust – Notice again it is "faith *in Christ Jesus*." Furthermore, we are to trust in Christ as Savior because of what He did to save us. Paul says in vv. 4-5a, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law...." Notice that God "sent" His Son. That word (*exapostello*) refers to the act of sending someone on a mission. This means that the person sent is to represent the sender. He is his ambassador. It also means that Jesus Christ existed before He was born in Bethlehem. He is the Son of God. And the fact that He was "born of a woman" qualified Him to be our Savior. He was fully man. Since it was man who sinned, it is also man who must bear the penalty for sin. Jesus could not have substituted for sinful man on the cross had He not taken upon Himself "the likeness of men" (Phi. 2:7). But as the Son of God, He could live obediently under the Law. So He did not die for His sin, but for ours. Then, look again at v.5. The fact that Christ "redeemed" us implies that payment of a high price. Salvation is free to you, but it cost Jesus a high price. And what was that price? In our stead He was to suffer innumerable reproaches. We (that is,

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<sup>1</sup> W.A. Criswell, Expository Sermons on Galatians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 141.

our sins) nailed him to the cross! From 3:13 we see that Christ took upon Himself the curse of the law. Oh friend, Jesus is worthy of your trust. He is the only Savior. Turn to Him. Trust in Him.

Furthermore, our text tells us concerning:

B. The Participants in Such Trust – There is a wonderful truth here. No matter who you are, you are invited to trust in Christ, and become a son of God. Notice Paul’s emphasis on the word “all” in several verses. He says in v.26, “For you are *all* sons of God through faith...” Actually, in the original Greek, the word “all” is placed first in the sentence for emphasis. Then, in v.28 Paul swings wide the door to privileged sonship. He says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are *all* one in Christ Jesus.” Let no one deny that in vital union with Christ all believers, Gentiles as well as Jews, are immediately sons of God. Although we take this truth for granted today, this was revolutionary in Paul’s day. So let no one deceive you into thinking that in order to become a Christian, you must first convert to a particular group or sect. And let no one tell you that any race or ethnic group is excluded from the family of God.

C. The Assurances of Such Trust – Paul points to two spiritual realities that accompany true faith. The first assurance comes from baptism. In v.27 he says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” It should not be any matter of controversy that “being baptized into (union with) Christ” means more than being baptized with water, for surely not all who are physically baptized have actually “put on Christ.” Water baptism is of no value alone. However, I believe that true faith will cause a person to testify to the spiritual union with Christ that baptism symbolizes. Romans 6:3 says, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” In baptism we show that we have died with Christ unto sin, and the old life. Then, baptism also shows that we have become united with Christ in the likeness of His resurrection. We have new life in Christ.

The second assurance comes from the Holy Spirit, who is given to every true believer. In v.6 Paul says, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out<sup>2</sup>, ‘Abba, Father!’” The first thing God gives the believer is Himself, in the form of His indwelling Holy Spirit. Having received the Spirit, we become conscious of our sonship. The gift of the Spirit is proof of sonship. Those who have the status of divine sonship through the Son also have the essence and the assurance of it through the Spirit. Likewise, Romans 8:14-16 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” The bestowal of the Holy Spirit gives us a consciousness of the relationship between ourselves as sons of God and God their Father.

Have you trusted in Christ as your Savior and Redeemer? Do you have the evidences of true saving faith given here? Another application is this: Paul makes the point that the experience of these signs came by faith, not works of the Law.

Now we come to the destination of our journey. Are you with me? Is anyone here today still in the bondage of sin, or bondage of legalistic religion? Has anyone here today not taken that all-important step of trusting in Christ as Savior? Most of you have. But I cannot say that most Christians have reached this final destination, and it is this:

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<sup>2</sup> “Crying out” (*krazo*) translates a word that denotes “a loud, earnest, and persistent prayer.”

#### IV. RECEIVE THE PRIVILEGES OF MATURE SONSHIP

Just because a person reaches the age of adulthood, that does not automatically mean that they will enjoy the privileges of adulthood. These privileges must be appropriated. The same is true regarding our spiritual privileges. There are four that I want you to make sure you are enjoying as a believer:

A. A Loving Relationship with Your Heavenly Father – What kind of concept of God do you have in your mind? Do you view Him primarily as a judge? Does He seem very distant, remote, and indifferent? Do you realize that as a believer, you can have an intimate relationship with God? V.6 says, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” Notice that Paul uses the diminutive Aramaic word “Abba” for father here. In English it could be translated with the intimate, affectionate term, “Daddy” or “Papa.” Jesus spoke Aramaic, and it is altogether probable that in His frequent teaching about the Father, He had often used the term *Abba*. His disciples, therefore, relished the use of this word. Naturally, the word, *Abba* had to be translated into the Greek *pater* for those who did not know Aramaic.

B. A Loving Relationship with Other Believers – V.28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Here, Paul focused on the existing, well-defined distinctions of his society that drew sharper lines and set up high walls of separation between people. The essence of those distinctions was the idea that some people were better than, more valuable than, more significant than others. Even proselytes to the Jewish religion were never fully “accepted.” After all, they were not “children of Abraham.” Gentiles, too, were often guilty of similar snobbery. And as to their attitude toward slaves, it cannot have been far removed from that of Aristotle, who called a slave “an animated implement,” a mere breathing tool. Slaves were considered to be only pieces of property. And as to the distinction between male and female, Josephus said, “The woman, so says the law, is inferior in all things to man.” Thus, women were kept confined and disrespected. The Pharisee would pray each morning, “I thank Thee, God, that I am a Jew, not a Gentile; a man, not a woman; and a freeman, and not a slave.”

However, the gospel destroys all such proud thinking that divides people. All such distinctions must be abandoned, since in Christ all are equal. One application of this truth is our unity as believers. In fact, Paul says, “you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Only in Christ is there a real basis for unity among people from different backgrounds. Those who are in Christ, in spite of historical and physical distinctions, form one great spiritual fellowship. Furthermore, as barriers to fellowship, such distinctions have no place in the Christian community. Consequently, prejudice based on race, social status, sex, or any other such superficial and temporary differences has no place in the fellowship of Christ’s church.

C. Freedom from Legalism – Remember, in v.3 Paul says that “...when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” Then v.5 we read that Christ came “to redeem those who were under the law.” Finally, in v.7 he sums the teaching up by saying, “Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son.” Thus, we are no longer under types, laws, ordinances, and rituals, but we are now free. We do not need a multitude of detailed laws to guide us, especially not from a church or denominational board.

Here, Paul drives home one main reason for this teaching. A return to law could in no way be looked upon as an advance in the Christian life. And as long as you hold on to the bondage of the law, you cannot receive the freedom of faith. Instead, as mature sons, God has given us three basic ways to regulate our lives. He has given us His Word, that we can read for ourselves. He has given us His Spirit, both to guide us and empower us. And He has given us the principle of love. Romans 5:5 says, "...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." As Paul will teach later in Galatians (5:6, 13-14), love sums up the law. A Spirit-indwelt believer can practice love, and such a believer will do what is right. We are not like self-centered little children who have to be told and made to do right. Have you experienced the freedom of mature sonship?

D. Becoming an Heir of God – Paul says in v.29, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." If believers are Abraham's seed, then all believers share in the inheritance promised to him and to his seed. We Gentile believers are heirs, not by law and physical descent, but "according to the promise," or "in fulfillment of the promise." Remember, God promised that all nations would be blessed through Abraham. Likewise, v.7 also teaches that we can be an heir of God. He says there that if you are a son, then you are "an heir of God through Christ." What an incomprehensible truth: that by giving ourselves to Jesus Christ by faith, God gives us everything His Son possesses! What a privilege it is to be a child of the King of the Universe!

Application: Entering into the privileges of mature sonship should be a goal that you set for yourself. We must move from spiritual immaturity, to spiritual maturity. Your Christian life ought to take on new wonder and meaning as you realize all that you have in Christ.

Conclusion: The very word "heir" already implies that our salvation is not our own achievement but the gift of God's marvelous grace. But since this is hard for man's proud heart to admit, Paul adds that this inheritance is "through God." [Many later Greek manuscripts read "heirs of God through Christ."] He wants to remind us that our position as heirs of God is due, not to any personal merit or good works, but to the grace of God.

So where are you on this journey of life? Have you moved beyond the childhood stage of laws and rules? Does someone have to stay after you to do what is right? Have you trusted in Christ to receive the position of sonship in the family of God? If not, do so today! And if you have already become a believer, have you entered into all of the blessings and privileges of being a son of God? If not, begin today to appropriate these privileges by faith and obedience.

Sources: W.A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); Stephen Felker, *Devotional Notes & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2004; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians & Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968); John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Curtis Vaughan, *Galatians: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Galatians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1944, 1973). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).