

How a Slave Becomes a Son

Insoo Kim

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Galatians: Free at Last

Galatians 3:19-4:7

When I was growing up I would often try to imagine what the world would be like in the year 2010. By the year 2010 we were all supposed to have these personal jet packs that would allow everyone to fly to work and school. By the year 2010, McDonalds was supposed to make Big Macs that would actually make you thinner and healthier. By the year 2010 scientists were supposed to have found a cure for AIDS, and cancer, and Male Pattern Baldness. By the year 2010, the earth was supposed to be a utopian society of peace and prosperity where people lived as one. But never in my wildest imagination did it occur to me that by the year 2010 that there would be more people in slavery than any other time in the history of the world – 27 million people! I can't even get my mind around that number! 27 million people! And yet, for me, like most of you I'm sure, there aren't too many days in the year where modern-day slaves are even on my radar. Driving to work in my nice car, going out to Chipotle for lunch with my friends, and coming home at the end of the day to a loving family, the last thing on my mind is the plight of 27 million slaves. Sure, if I stop and think about it for a minute, I get bothered, I'm moved, and occasionally I'm compelled to do something about it. But then Monday comes around, and I find my personal comfort and safety in absorbing myself into my daily routine, and 27 million slaves is so yesterday.

For the last 9 weeks, we've been doing a series on the book of Galatians, titled, "Free at Last." We've been going verse by verse through the book of Galatians. And as we will see in today's passage, Paul makes a startling statement about a slavery that affects not just 27 million people, but every single man, woman, and child who has ever lived on this planet. And while this slavery is spiritual in nature, its impact on the individual is deadly. And the story, if it ended there, would be rather depressing, but Paul says that something happened, something so wonderful and so marvelous, that these slaves are not merely set free, but actually become sons and daughters of the living God. I've titled today's sermon, "How a Slave Becomes a Son." Let's pray and we'll dig into this marvelous passage.

Please turn with me in your Bible to Galatians 3.

Galatians 3:19-4:7

3:19 What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. 20 A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. 21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. 22 But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was

promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. 23 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge of us until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. 26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. 4:1 What I am saying is that as long as heirs are underage they are no different from slaves, although they own the whole estate. 2 They are subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by their fathers. 3 So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. 4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7 So you are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since you are his children, he has made you also heirs.

From Slaves

Just to quickly recap, up to this point in the book of Galatians, Paul has been adamantly speaking out against the Judaizers, these Jewish-Christian missionaries, who are telling the new believers in Galatia that the gospel of grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is incomplete. You must also keep the laws. And Paul says in the opening verses of the book of Galatians, that this message of the gospel plus something, this different gospel, is in fact, no gospel at all. And this message so infuriates Paul that he calls down the curse of God upon all who preach this message. Twice. And that was just in chapter 1.

But let's take a step back for a minute and look at what Paul is saying through the eyes of these Jewish-Christian missionaries. Because I don't know about you, but there is a part of me that empathizes with them. We don't know a whole lot about these Judaizers, but what we can gather is that they were most likely Jewish converts to the Christian faith. So the argument that we are seeing being played out in the book of Galatians is not an argument between Christians and some group with a completely different set of beliefs. The argument is not between Christians and Hindus, or Muslims, or atheists, or agnostics. This group that Paul is so vehemently opposing are Jews who became Christians – a group, by the way, who were so passionate about what they believed that they were traveling from town to town to share their "gospel." And as Christians who were converted from being raised as Jews, the law was everything to them. So they could cry out in Psalm 119:

Psalm 119: 13, 18, 20, 44, 97

13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. 18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. 20 My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times. 44 I will always obey your law, for ever and ever. 97 Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

They would recite the law. They would memorize the law. They would teach the law to their children. And not just the Ten Commandments, but all the other laws and statutes, of which there were over 600! And as children, they were told that the law is what distinguishes them from every other people in the world, for God gave the law to only one people in the entire world, and that is the Jewish people.

So when they came to faith in Christ, they did not abandon the law. They did not leave the law behind. When they came to faith in Christ, they became Jews who were also Christians. They believed that salvation came by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, *plus* keeping the law, because this is for them, what distinguishes God's people from all the other people in the world.

And to that, some of us may ask, "Is it really that bad? It's not like they are saying that Jesus is not God or that faith is bad. They are just saying that all those things are good, and so is the law. Isn't Paul overreacting here? I mean what Paul is teaching and what these guys are teaching are so similar? Is it really that bad?"

And to that Paul says, "Yes, it really is that bad! What you guys call the 'gospel,' is really no gospel at all! Clear and simple: Salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, *plus nothing else! Plus nothing else!*"

The Law Was Given to Reveal Sin in Us

So the obvious question that would be raised by these Jewish-Christians is, "So what is the purpose of the law?" And Paul is anticipating this question as we see in Galatians 3:19-22:

Galatians 3:19-22

What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. 20 A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. 21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. 22 But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

So what was the purpose of the law? Look at verse 19 with me:

Galatians 3:19

It [the law] was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

Paul says that the law was added because of transgressions. In other words, the purpose of the law is to reveal sin in man, to reveal sin in us.

The law was given to reveal sin in us

Paul makes this same statement in Romans 3:20:

Romans 3:20

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

God gave the law so that it would reveal sin in us! The purpose of the law is to expose sin in us, and that is a good thing. When a man or a woman comes face to face with the law, it is supposed to convict. It is supposed to reveal our sinfulness. It is through the law that we see sin as sin. It is through the law that we see our depravity and our wickedness. And that is something that every person must experience on their journey to Christ.

Have you ever come face to face with the law? Have you experienced the law?

I don't know about you, but I am not a fan of mirrors. In fact, I am quite sure that all of us have a love/hate relationship with mirrors, especially perfect mirrors. We like mirrors that are a little bit bent, so that it makes us look a little taller, or a little thinner. We like mirrors that are a little bit dirty so that it hides the blemishes on our skin. We like mirrors that are far away, so we can see just enough to know that it is us, but we can let our imagination do its work in creating someone that looks better than who we really are. We all do this!

And what Paul is saying is that the law is like a perfect mirror that is held up right to your face. It hides nothing, and it reveals everything! So when you look at the law, what you see reflected back is the true you. It hides nothing, and it reveals everything!

Sarah, when you are filling out your 2009 tax forms, you somehow conveniently "forgot" to mention that extra income you got. You call it a white lie. The law calls it sin! Bill, when you speak angry words to your wife and kids when you get home from a bad day at work. You call it stress. The law calls it sin! Cindy, I know life has been hard with recession, and you've been drinking away your pain. You call it coping. The law calls it sin! Sam, when you gossip and pass judgment on your neighbor. You call it prayer request. The law calls it sin!

The law, this perfect mirror, comes to your face and says, "Sin is sin!" Period. And while it is a terrifying experience to come face to face with the law and be exposed to your very core, it is a journey that we must take on our way to Christ.

John Stott, one of the great pastors of our time, says this about the law:

Not until the law has bruised and smitten us will we admit our need of the gospel to bind up our wounds. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned us will we pine for Christ to set us free. Not until the law has condemned and killed us will we call upon Christ for justification and life. Not until the law has driven us to despair of ourselves will we ever believe in Jesus. Not until the law has humbled us even to hell will we turn to the gospel to raise us to heaven.

Have you ever come face to face with the law? Have you experienced the law?

The Law Was a Prison that Enslaved Us

And not only was the law given to reveal sin in us, but Paul says that it was a prison that enslaved us.

The law was a prison that enslaved us

Look at 3:23:

Galatians 3:23

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.

And Paul expands on this thought in 4:3:

Galatians 4:3

So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

These Jewish-Christian missionaries failed to realize that the law is a double-edged sword. They failed to realize that the lifeline that the law provided was also a binding chain of slavery. And Paul pleads with them saying, “Don’t you see that this white picket fence that you put up around your home to keep the neighbor’s dog out, is also keeping you hostage in your own home?” “Don’t you see that the metal bars you put up on your windows to keep out thieves are also making you a prisoner in your own home?”

The Law Was a Temporary Guardian Until Christ

Paul says that God gave the law in order to reveal sin in our lives, and the law was a prison that enslaved us. And third, Paul says that the law was meant to be a temporary guardian until Christ.

The law was a temporary guardian until Christ

Look at 3:19:

Galatians 3:19

It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

Look at 3:23-25:

Galatians 3:23-25

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge of us until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

And look at 4:1-3:

Galatians 4:1-3

What I am saying is that as long as heirs are underage they are no different from slaves, although they own the whole estate. 2 They are subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by their fathers. 3 So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

The law had an incredibly important job, but it was only a temporary supervisor until the fullness of time when Christ was finally revealed. The law was never meant to be an end in and of itself. That's why even the writer of Hebrew says:

Hebrews 10:1

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming

We read in Galatians 4:4, a powerful little phrase:

Galatians 4:4

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law

The bondage of the law had lasted some 1300 years! But in giving the law, God had a plan all along. You see, after 1300 years of waiting, the time of fulfillment had finally come. And everything in history was moving toward that day of days, when God himself would put on flesh and walk among us. The turning point of history had arrived. We moved from B.C. to A.D. from "Before Christ" to "Anno Domini" the "Year of our Lord." Everything is different now. Now, in the fullness of time, when Jesus Christ enters the story, there is no such thing as "Business as usual"! The Age of the Law has given way to the long-awaited Age of Christ. Now, finally, slaves can become sons and daughters of God!

So what these Jewish-Christian missionaries undoubtedly saw as a significant event, what they failed to realize was that the coming of Jesus was not just significant, but it was *the* decisive moment of all history.

To Sons

In the fullness of time, God sent this Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us.

Jesus Christ redeems us

Let's look at Galatians 3:23-25:

Galatians 3:23-25

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge of us until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

And look at Galatians 4:4-5:

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Christ enters the story as King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and when Jesus enters a room, everyone bows, and so the law is put in its proper place. When Jesus enters a story, the plot changes! When Jesus enters your life, there is no such thing as "Business as usual."

In the fullness of time, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, who walked up to the law and says, "In my perfect divinity, and in my perfect humanity, I, and I alone, have fulfilled the law. It is finished! Now, the chains are broken, and now, the slaves are set free!"

Holy Spirit Lives In Us

So, in the fullness of time, God sent Jesus Christ to redeem us. And in the fullness of time, God sent his Holy Spirit to live in us.

Holy Spirit lives in us

Look at Galatians 4:6:

Galatians 4:6

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

We are a people led by the Spirit of God. We are not led by the world. We are not led by our sinful desires. We are not led by the stock market. We are not led by our political affiliation. And we are certainly not led by the law. We are a people led by the Spirit of God.

Read Ezekiel 36:26-27 with me:

Ezekiel 36:26-27

I [God] will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

God says, “I want to make you into a new creation from the inside out. And while the law is able to tell you that something in you is broken, this thing called sin, but in order for you to be truly transformed into a new creation, I am going to put my Spirit in you and I will move you to follow my decrees. I will do this in you, because you can’t!”

It’s like when a little child is trying so hard to reach for that door knob that is just out of his reach. If he gets up on his toes, he can barely touch the knob, but he just cannot get the door open no matter how hard he tries. And the father comes to his side and says, “Let me open the door for you. I will do this for you, because you can’t.”

God gives us the Holy Spirit because to become more like Jesus is simply beyond any of our reach, no matter how hard we try. If left to our own devices, there is nothing in you and nothing in me that will allow us to call God, “Father.” You can’t will yourself to stop sinning. You can’t will yourself to become a better person. And you certainly can’t will yourself to call God, “Father.” It is only by the work of the Holy Spirit who is living in us!

God the Father Adopts Us

In the fullness of time, God sent his son, Jesus Christ to redeem us, and he sent his Holy Spirit to live in us, and here is the kicker: God the Father adopts us as his sons and daughters!

God the Father adopts us

Read Galatians 4:4-7:

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” 7 So you are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since you are his children, he has made you also heirs.

It is one thing to be set free from a prison only to have nowhere to go. But it is a whole other thing to come out of prison and be told that now your daddy is God!

At the heart of the gospel, God is creating one new people, united by Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, where there is no distinction between race, social status, or gender, as we saw last week. And the creation of this new people culminates at this point, where we can call God, “Abba Father.” “Abba Father.” Those are deeply relational words. Those are deeply intimate words reserved for those who are closest to us.

The great gospel message of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is a relational message. It is an open invitation to anyone and everyone, that they too, can call God, “Abba Father.” And because it is a relationship and not a religion, there is love. Because it is a relationship and not self-help, there is forgiveness. Because it is a relationship and not rules, there is grace. And because it is Jesus and not the law, there is salvation.

Philip Yancey, in his book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*¹, tells a story about a girl who grew up in a little town in Michigan called Traverse City. Like many kids her age, she entered a phase in her life where there was a lot of arguing and disagreements with her parents. And after one particularly emotional fight, she did what very parent fears most. She runs away! She gets on the first bus out of town and ends up in Detroit. She feels a range of emotions from fear to excitement, and a hint of sadness.

Her second day there she meets a man who drives the biggest car she’s ever seen. He offers her a ride, buys her lunch, arranges a place for her to stay. He gives her some pills that make her feel better than she’s ever felt before. She was right all along, she decides: Her parents were keeping her from all the fun.

The good life continues for a month, two months, a year. The man with the big car—she calls him “Boss”—teaches her a few things that men like. Since she’s underage, men pay a premium for her. She lives in a penthouse and orders room service whenever she wants. But after a year, when the first sign of illness appears, she’s kicked out on the street without a penny to her name. She still turns a couple of tricks a night, but they don’t pay much, and all the money goes to support her drug habit. She now sleeps on the streets. “God, why did I leave?” she whispers to herself.

In desperation she calls home but gets the answering machine. “Dad, it’s me. I was wondering about maybe coming home. I’m catching a bus up your way, and it’ll get there about midnight tomorrow. If you’re not there, well, I guess I’ll just stay on the bus until it hits Canada.”

On the seven hour bus ride, she prepares a speech for her father. “Dad, I’m sorry. I know I was wrong. It’s not your fault, it’s all mine. Dad, can you forgive me?” She says

¹ For the sake of time, this story has been edited and shortened from the original version found in *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*

the words over and over, her throat tightening even as she rehearses them. She hasn't apologized to anyone in years.

The bus finally rolls into the station. She checks herself in a compact mirror and wonders if her parents will even recognize her. Well, that's if they're even there.

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect, and not one of the thousand scenes that have played out in her mind prepare her for what she sees. There, in the bus terminal stands a group of 40 family members—brothers and sisters and great-aunts and uncles and cousins and a grandmother and great-grandmother to boot. They are all wearing ridiculous-looking party hats and blowing noisemakers, and taped across the entire wall of the terminal is a computer-generated banner that reads “Welcome home!”

Out of the crowd of well-wishers breaks her dad. She looks through tears and begins the memorized speech, “Dad, I'm sorry. I know ... “

He interrupts her. “Hush, child. We've got no time for that. No time for apologies. You'll be late for the party. A banquet's waiting for you at home.”

Do you know this “Abba, Father”? Do you know that you can call God, “Abba, Father”?

Some of you here today, outwardly, you may look great; people may even look up to you because you have a lovely family, a nice house, and a good job. But inwardly, you want so much to know this God, and not just to know him, but to know him as “Abba, Father.” And if that's you, in a minute as we close, I want to give you an opportunity to enter into this intimate relationship with “Abba, Father.”

Some of you here today have been looking in all the wrong places for what you can only find in “Abba, Father.” You've been driven to the arms of different men or women, desperately trying to fill that loneliness with something that can only be filled by “Abba, Father.” And if that's you, in a minute as we close, I want to give you an opportunity to enter into this intimate relationship with “Abba, Father.”

To know God in this intimate and personal way is available for each and every one of us. He is waiting for you right now, with a huge sign that says, “Welcome home!” Won't you run in to the loving arms of “Abba, Father” today?

As we close, let me read to you again from Galatians 4:6-7:

Galatians 4:6-7

Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer slaves, but God's children; and since you are his children, he has made you also heirs.”

Let's pray.

How a Slave Becomes a Son

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I. From Slaves

- A. The law was given to reveal sin in us (3:19)
- B. The law was a prison that enslaved us (3:23, 4:3)
- C. The law was a temporary guardian until Christ (3:19, 25, 4:1-5)

II. To Sons

- A. Jesus Christ redeems us (3:23-25, 4:4-5)
- B. Holy Spirit lives in us (4:6)
- C. God the Father adopts us (4:4-7)