

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

The Adoption of the Believer

Scripture: Galatians 4:1–11

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We're going back to the book of Galatians to take another look at the next section here, and that would be chapter 4. So you can open your Bible to Galatians chapter 4, and we'll begin at least to examine the subject of "Sons of God, Sons of God," and the doctrine, the wonderful doctrine of adoption.

By way of reminder, all religions, all religions without exception, all religions, as well as false forms of Christianity – and there are many of those – teach that people are delivered from judgment, saved from divine punishment by their own works: works of morality, works of religion. And that, of course, is Satan's big lie, and it has covered the planet through all of human history since the fall. The gospel, the true gospel of salvation by faith alone apart from works had been buried under the mountainous, monolithic power of the Roman Catholic Church for a thousand years, until the Reformation. The Reformation was all about recovering the fact that salvation was by faith alone and not by faith plus works, as the Roman system had always and still says. We cannot misunderstand the gospel without dishonoring God, dishonoring Christ, dishonoring the Holy Spirit, confusing the church, and losing the power of our mission in the world. We must understand the true gospel. Here we are five hundred years after the Reformation and the church of Jesus Christ, professing church of Jesus Christ is still trying to figure out the gospel; not surprising since Satan works very hard to overthrow the truth and place error where the truth has been removed. So we're always in every generation fighting for the true gospel. The majority of evangelical Protestants think salvation is by faith and works. That's why there was a Reformation to undo that heresy. Here we are again needing that new Reformation.

It is not only people who are false Christians who believe that salvation is by faith and works, but there are true Christians who have been bewitched, as we read at the beginning of chapter 3, "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" who have been bewitched, who have been disturbed by believing a distorted gospel, even though they themselves were converted by believing the true gospel. It is possible for true believers to be bewitched and confused, and accept a false gospel, and therefore be ineffective and virtually useless in the proclamation of the true gospel.

The apostle Paul here is writing to churches in the region of Galatia around the Mediterranean. Back in the first century he had planted churches in a number of cities by preaching the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. But some Jewish people had come from Jerusalem claiming to be believers in Christ, and claiming to have been sent by James who was the brother of our Lord and the head of the Jerusalem church, and sent with the message that believing in Christ is not enough; you must be circumcised according to the law of Moses, and

you must adhere to all the prescriptions that are in the Mosaic law. Salvation, they said, is a matter of faith, but also a matter of works. Paul says this is a distortion of the gospel. It is another gospel that is not a gospel at all. He says that in chapter 1. And anybody who preaches this distorted gospel should be damned. He says that twice back in chapter 1.

The people keep preaching a distorted gospel even today, and thus we have come to the book of Galatians which was the book that Luther was reading a couple of years after he posted his theses on the door at the church at Wittenberg. He was reading Galatians, and it was then reading Galatians and also Romans when he was converted a couple of years after he had posted his thesis of protest. He knew the religious system was wrong, but he was not yet converted until the power of the book of Romans and Galatians swept over his soul in the hands of the Holy Spirit. We have to go back and be sure we understand the gospel, and so the book of Galatians is a book for all believers in all places and all times in the history of the church to make sure we're clinging to the truth and proclaiming the truth alone which saves.

Paul is passionate about the true gospel. He is the agent of its clarification. It is God who chose him to write thirteen letters in the New Testament and spell out the essence of the gospel, and the heart of it is that salvation is by faith apart from works. And he writes Galatians to reaffirm this. And I remind you of, for example, chapter 2, verse 16, where he says, "A man is not justified" – that is declared right by God. "A man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." He says the same thing three times in one verse. "It's not by the Law, it's not by the Law, it's not by the Law; it's by faith in Jesus Christ."

Over in chapter 3 and verse 6 he uses Abraham as an illustration. He says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Abraham was saved the way all people are saved, by faith in God. And now that Christ has come, faith in Christ is required. But salvation is by faith.

Verse 9: "Those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer." Verse 11: "That no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.'" And there Paul quotes Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 4 from the Old Testament. The prophet is saying salvation is by faith.

He carries this theme into the chapter further to verse 22: "The Scripture has shut up" – or imprisoned – "everyone under sin, so that the promise" – the promise of salvation that came originally to Abraham and through Abraham to the world – "the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." Verse 24: "The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith." Verse 26: "You're all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

This is the wondrous heart of salvation. It's not something you earn, it is a gift you receive by believing. We are justified by faith. Justified means that God declares the sinner righteous in His eyes because the sinners believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. God considers such a believing sinner to be the recipient of His own righteousness. This is a remarkable reality that God justifies the ungodly who believe.

How can God do that? He can do that because Christ paid the penalty for our sins. Go back to

chapter 3, be reminded, verse 10: “As many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who doesn’t abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.’” If you’d ever broken the law of God you’re cursed.

Then we read this wonderful statement of verse 13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.” This is what we have been talking about. Christ takes our place on the cross, He dies a substitutionary death. He’s our substitute, He’s in our place. He pays the penalty for our sins. His righteousness is given to us, because our sins were placed on Him. He lived a perfectly righteous life that is credited to our account. We lived an utterly sinful life that was credited to His account, and for which He suffered divine wrath and took our punishment.

Paul has been contrasting what the law does and what faith does, and they cannot be mixed. When the Judaizers came along and said it’s faith plus works, they mixed things that cannot be mixed. The law has a purpose. Back in verse 19 of chapter 3, “Why the Law?” Not to save, “It was added because of transgressions.”

Why the Law? And I gave you four reasons for the law. Reason number one, to define sin at its broadest level. Obviously there is a law written in the heart of everybody, and we all have a conscience. So everybody knows what is right and what is wrong, and they know it because the law of God is written in the heart. But that is not a complete law; and so God revealed His law to Moses in all of its completeness to define sin at the broadest possible level.

Secondly, He revealed His law to demonstrate to us that sin is not just something wrong with us, something that’s out of whack with us that affects our relationships with other people and brings bad consequences on us sort of naturally, but the violation of the law of God is in fact open rebellion against God. It is high crime. The law then says that sin is more than a defect, it is an act of rebellion against God.

The third reason that Paul tells us we have received the law is so that we will understand that having violated the law and having rebelled against God, we are under the sentence of death. Death comes to all men. The wages of sin is death. We ask, “Why is there death? Why is their death?” Because everyone is a law-breaker. The wages of sin is death.

And the fourth reason God sent the law – the law was in place from Moses to Jesus for all those hundreds of years – was to demonstrate that the law could not save. There it was in the hands of the Jewish people who had the best opportunity to fulfill the law, to obey the law. They swore they would. They took a blood oath, back in Exodus 24, that they would obey the law.

They did not obey the law. In fact, they violated the very first of the commandments, which was to have no other gods. They went wholesale into idolatry, they violated the law of God at every point; ultimately judgment fell on their heads, they were taken into captivity, they were taken out of their land. There’s a little bit of a trickle-back, and even a few there now. But Israel still exists in disobedience and apostasy and rebellion against God in a collective sense.

So, the law of God has a purpose. Its purpose is to define sin, declare it as rebellion, pronounce death sentence, and prove historically by the illustration of Israel that the law doesn’t save anyone. That’s the law. It is not intended to save, it is intended to do what I just said. The only thing that

saves is faith, faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ. So Paul is making that distinction between the law and its work, and faith and how it receives the promise.

John Wesley was the initiator of a group of people in England called the Holy Club. That's a pretty bold name to take, a sort of self-declaration. In his post-graduate Oxford days, he was part of the Holy Club. John Wesley was the son of a preacher. He was very religious in his personal life and practice. He was moral externally in his conduct, and he was full of external good works.

He and his friends, he says, visited the prisons and the prisoners. They went to the workhouses where the poor were; they tried to bring relief to the poor. He took pity on slum children, provided food for them, clothing for them, and even funded education for the horrendous poverty that was exhibited in the slum children, many of whom were orphans.

He and his friends observed Sabbath on Saturday, and they kept the Lord's Day on Sunday. So both Saturday and Sunday they fastidiously adhered to religious preoccupations. They gave generously alms to the poor and to the church. They read the Bible, they fasted, they said prayers; thus they were the Holy Club.

But John Wesley said that he and his companions were bound in the chains of their own self-righteous religion and not fully trusting Christ. What a statement. Bound in the chains of their own self-righteous religion and not fully trusting Christ. What were they trusting? They were trusting in their works for their salvation.

A few years later, John Wesley in his own words, quote: "Came to trust in Christ, in Christ only for salvation." End quote. And then it was that he experienced for the first time in his life what he says was the assurance that his sins had been forgiven.

At that point, the point of his conversion, he looked back to his days in the Holy Club and he wrote this: "I had then the faith of a slave and not of a son." What did he mean by that? "I had the faith of a slave, because I was in bondage to the law. I did not have the experience of the freedom of being a son." He was referring to Galatians 4. Let me read you some of it, starting at verse 1.

"Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he doesn't differ at all from a slave although he's owner of everything, but he's under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

John Wesley said, "We were slaves and not sons." And that's exactly the language of verse 7.

What does that mean? What does it mean when he says, "I was a slave"? He means he was a slave to the law. And the law is a brutal and cruel taskmaster, because no matter how you endeavor to do good works, you can't do enough, and you can't avoid sin. And so the law becomes, essentially, your executioner. You violate the law, and the sentence of death is passed on you.

The law, bringing you to that point of desperation, then has the purpose – back to chapter 3, verse 24 – of becoming a tutor, a *paidagōgos*, a person intended to care for a child, someone who was kind of a personal guardian. The law was that guardian who had the task and the responsibility to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. The law is to show you hell as the inevitable reality at the end of your life, and thus in your desperation, drive you to Christ, whom you receive by faith and faith alone.

That is Paul's message throughout Galatians. And here in chapter 4, he continues with the same truth, again contrasting man's condition when he's under the law, with his condition in Christ when he is the recipient of the promise, how he goes from slavery to the law, to freedom on Christ.

Now you say, "Well, why again?" We've covered this; we've covered it. Is this repetitious? Not at all. It is rather than repetitious, expansive. It widens our understanding in profoundly wonderful and rich ways.

And keep in mind, this is so very important. The absolute importance of gospel truth is at the heart of the church's mission in the world, and it's almost as if we can't say enough about it so that everybody gets the message. The subject is still justification by faith alone in Christ alone; but the terms are profoundly rich, as we come to understand the doctrine of adoption: what it means to no longer be a slave, but to be a son.

The doctrine of adoption is one of the most precious of all Christian doctrines. Surrounding the reality of salvation you have the doctrine of regeneration, you have the doctrine of justification, you have the doctrine of conversion, you have the doctrine of union, you have the doctrine of sanctification. But you also have this wonderful doctrine of adoption.

If you look just a few pages to the right to the first chapter of Ephesians, when Paul talks about blessing, the fact that, "We are blessed" – verse 3 – "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ," – he further says – "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ."

The doctrine of election is for the purpose of the doctrine of adoption. He chose us so that He could adopt us; and that, essentially, is what adoption is. It's when you choose someone to be your child. That doesn't happen in birth, you just get what shows up. You didn't make a choice – and I know after a while many of you would maybe have like to weigh in a little more on the choice that was made on your behalf. But adoption is where you choose and you take a son that essentially comes from another family. That glorious truth is part of the panoply of the glories of our salvation. We were chosen by God out of a world of sinners to become His adopted children.

Now in these opening seven verses we learn so much about the wonders of this work of God called adoption. We'll call it "sonship." Let's begin with the preparation for sonship, the preparation in the opening three verses.

"Now I say, as long as the heir is a child," – the word for child is *nēpios*. It means "baby," "infant" – "he doesn't differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he's under guardians and managers until the date set by the father." All right, now that's the simple illustration, that's the simple

analogy.

Paul starts by saying, "Let's use a natural illustration to make the point." A child may be an heir. He may be an heir, but he doesn't differ at all from a slave, even though he's the owner of everything, because as an infant he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father when he can step into his inheritance.

In the ancient world, the process of growing up was much more dramatically identified. In the culture in which we live, we don't even know what grownup means. We've got thirty-year-olds who haven't grown up. We've got ten-year-olds have been so overexposed to things in the world that their thinking is adult. We don't define that. We have obliterated those very defining moments in human growth and created a kind of culture between childhood and adulthood, and we call it adolescence. It's a culture of irresponsibility, largely. But in the ancient world, you went from being a child to being an adult. You didn't have some middle ground.

In the Jewish world, a boy on his twelfth birthday was set to come to the first Sabbath subsequent to his birthday, and his father would take him to the synagogue; and he would be delivered to the synagogue, presented to the rabbi, and be told that he is now bar mitzvah, son of the law. He is now passed out of his father's hands and he is responsible to God for his adherence to the law.

The father uttered a benediction. This is what a Jewish father would say: "Blessed be Thou, O God, who has taken from me the responsibility of this boy." Now if you don't think there's been a change in the world, imagine turning your twelve-year-old son loose, taking your hands off your responsibility. What the father meant by that was not irresponsibility, but, "He is now subject to You and Your law."

The boy then prayed the following prayer: "O my God, and God of my fathers, on this solemn and sacred day which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my eyes unto Thee and declare with sincerity and truth that henceforth, I will keep Thy commandments and undertake to bear the responsibility of my actions before Thee." That's bar mitzvah. That was a true and ancient bar mitzvah, not what a contemporary bar mitzvah is like; it's a collection of people to give you money largely. But it was a clear dividing line in life. And people at that age would then contemplate marriage.

In Greece it was very similar. The boy was under his father's care until at some time, perhaps a little later than the Jewish boys at the age of twelve, some years after that. But the Athenians, for example, were divided into clans; and at some point, a boy would be assigned to a clan. A very special festival would take place called an Apaturia, and the boy would come to that festival, and the sign of him having reached a responsible point in life was that his long hair was cut off. I know, some of you moms are saying, "Can we please have an Apaturia at our house?" His long hair was cut off, and the girl as well had her long hair cut off, and it was offered to the god that was their idol.

A few years after having been introduced into a clan, he became an *ephēbos*. The word is "cadet," that's where we get that word. And for two years he was a cadet, he was an *ephēbos*, and he was under the direction of the state. It's like going into some kind of civil service so that you would be trained to be a good citizen.

Under the Roman law, the year was fixed somewhere between the age of fourteen and seventeen.

The family had a sacred festival called Liberalia. The child was taken to the forum in Rome and introduced into public life. It was a definitive day. It was the end of childhood, it was the beginning of adulthood; and the symbol of it for boy and girl was they brought their toys. They brought their toys and they laid down all their toys, and demonstrably put away childish things. Paul borrows that idea. Here, that's what Paul has in mind.

Everybody in the ancient world knew there was a time when an infant stepped into responsibility. Up until that time, he doesn't differ from a slave. He may be an heir. He may be the heir on an incredibly wealthy estate. He may have latent power; and one day that power will be his, it is his by promise, but not yet in experience. He is still a child, and therefore he is still under guardians and managers, even though he is the heir, and even though he is the one who will one day possess all of this, the legal owner, the master of it all. During childhood, he's no better than a slave in this sense. He doesn't tell anybody to do anything, they tell him. He is heir by right, but he is not heir de facto, he's not heir in fact. As long as he is a child he's under guardians and managers – and guardians and managers would be like *paidagōgos*, the tutor; they would be slaves.

A family trusted slaves who would be the caretakers for the children, very much like their mentors and their guardians. They watched over the child as the *paidagōgos*, that we talked about back in verse 24 of chapter 3. He can't receive his estate, he can't administer his estate, he cannot actually take his inheritance. The promise is waiting, but it's waiting his maturity. As long as he's a child he's no different than a slave. He takes orders; he doesn't give them until the date set by the father.

Now remember, we're talking about very definitive times. The father would set the date. This is the date when you become a man, when you become accountable to the law, to the law of the land if you're a Greek or a Roman, to the law of the gods or to the law of the true God if you're a Jew. It was a set, fixed time. This is the picture.

"So," – verse 3 – "so also we." Now he moves from the illustration to the application. "So also we, while we were infants, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the law." That's the period of time before we became mature sons, before.

This is true of Jews. Jews, in a sense, were given the promise. The promise came to Abraham; through Abraham it was going to go to Israel and the world. It was reiterated, as we've said, through David, through the prophets and the new covenant. The promise of salvation was given. The inheritance was waiting, but it was not available to those who were in infancy.

An infant is in bondage to those that control his life. And Paul says, "While we were children, we were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world."

For the Jew, his bondage was essentially defined by the written law of God, as well as by his father's will. To the Gentile, his bondage was also by the law of God, but the law of God written in his heart, because he didn't have a written law. And also by the decisions of his father. And just as fathers created bondage for their children, so the law – the law written in the heart for Gentiles, the law written in Scripture for Jews – created a kind of bondage. And we are never released from that bondage until we become mature sons.

Now look at that phrase "the elemental things of the world." This has caused some people a bit of a

struggle. What does this exactly mean? And if you look over to Colossians 2 for a moment, you will remember that I read it to you earlier, verse 8: “See 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.” And then back down to verse 20 of that chapter: “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world.”

What are the elementary principles of the world? They’re the things in which you were held captive before Christ, whatever they are, whatever that bondage is. To a Gentile it would be, if you’re looking at Colossians, it would be this: philosophy, empty deception, tradition of men, to the Gentiles. Or it would be, down in verse 21, certain rules, decrees, “Don’t handle, don’t taste, don’t touch.” Or down in verse 23, “The appearance of wisdom in self-made religion, self-abasement, severe treatment of the body.” There are religions that think holiness is achieved by flagellation and inflicting pain on yourself. That is a form of elementary principles of the world. But so is the law of God.

If we’re talking about the Jews, it says in verse 3, “We were children held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.” Even the law is an elemental thing. What is the word in the Greek? *Stoicheia*. It means “things in a row.” Literally means “things in a row.” It’s a word you use in elementary school: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. It simply identifies simple things.

All religion – no matter how sophisticated it may appear, even Judaism – all religion is really elementary, elementary. There’s no real maturity in any basic religion. The law was a form of religion that was elementary. It was elementary; and if you stayed there you would be doomed. The point was to get from there to Christ. In Christ comes full maturity.

The elementary principles of the world may be philosophy. “Well, what do you mean by philosophy?” Any godless idea raised up against the truth of God. To borrow the language of 2 Corinthians 10, any godless idea raised up against the knowledge of God.

Tradition. What is tradition? Simply, the pattern of the past perpetuated endlessly into the present. That is a kind of A-B-C, 1-2-3, simple, simplistic, elementary form of religion. Religion without Christ is elementary. Religion without Christ is immature. Romans 1 says they profess themselves to be wise, but they are fools. All religion apart from Christ is elementary. So that’s what he’s saying. As we talk about a child being in elementary school, we’re all there when we’re under the bondage to religion and to law. It is merely the ABCs.

It’s not bad if you happen to be a Jew, because the law of God is holy, righteous, and good, and it teaches you the truth. So if you’re going to be in elementary school it would be best to be in Judaism or in the Scriptures now of the New Testament, so that at least you know the truth. But all of us are imprisoned. We are held in bondage in our infancy, which is our pre-salvation condition, unable to take our inheritance because we haven’t reached adulthood.

So that’s the preparation for sonship. Just a few comments about the second point: The realization of sonship. The realization of sonship.

“But when” – here comes the turning point – “when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law,

that we might receive the adoption as sons.” This is just glorious language.

“When the fullness of time was come.” God’s time was perfect. God is patient. The law was around for hundreds, hundreds, hundreds, hundreds of years. When Christ finally came, with Christ came freedom from the law and adulthood. The bondage was long, the bondage was hard; but when the fullness of time came, that’s simply referring to the new age of salvation, the arrival of Christ, the messianic age.

How do you know that? Because when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son. That marks the culmination of human history. The bondage had been long and hard, waiting for a redeemer to set us free. The fullness of time, perfect time, exact time; even from a human standpoint, it was perfect time.

The law was known by the Jews, and after the Babylonian captivity when they came back into the land they never again worshiped an idol. Idolatry had been literally taken from them in their captivity. So religiously, the Babylonian captivity had resulted in Israel’s final turning from idols and focusing on the one true God. That cleared the way, in some sense, for the coming of Christ.

Also, the Canon of the Old Testament had long been completed, and they had the Law and the Prophets and the Holy Writings. So necessary to understand Christ, that’s why He said, “If you knew the Scriptures you’d know who I am.”

Culturally Alexander the Great had made it a Greek world, which meant there was a common language stretching across all those multiple ethnic groups in the Mediterranean area. They all knew a common language, Greek, which then allowed for the New Testament books to be written in a language that everybody could read. And then politically the *pax Romana*, the sweeping power of the Roman Empire had built roads everywhere so that the gospel could then be taken to the world. We read about that in the book of Acts. So from even the standpoint of just looking at what was going on in the world, it was a great time.

More importantly than that, it was God’s perfect time. He sent forth His Son. It doesn’t say He created His Son, it says He sent Him forth. He already existed. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” But John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh.” The eternal Son became man. God sent forth His Son. He is God. He is the exact representation of God. He is God in human flesh.

“We beheld” – says John – “His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of God, full of grace and truth.” And that’s why the New Testament gospels make such a clear message of the deity of Jesus Christ. He did not come into existence at this point, He was already in existence; God simply sent Him. He is called in Luke 1:32 and 35 the Son of the Most High. That is to say He bears the nature of the Most High God Himself. To Him at His baptism, God said, “You are My beloved Son.”

God sent forth His Son. He is deity. But not only deity, it says He was born of a woman, He was born of a woman – full humanity, full humanity. He had to be God to accomplish the divine person, overpower sin and death; but He had to be man in order to be the substitute for us. He had to be God to have the power of an everlasting and eternal life. He had to be God to conquer sin. But He had to be man to take the sinner’s place. He is the perfect sacrifice. He is man, our substitute; He is

God who overpowers even sin and death for us.

Further, it says about Him, was that He was born under the law. When He came the law was still in place. And He adhered to the Mosaic law in every detail. He was circumcised on the eighth day when He was an infant. He was faithful to the law. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. He fulfilled all righteousness; He kept every law that God had laid out.

He was born under the law. As any man, any Jewish man, He was responsible like every other Jewish man to the written revelation of God's law, and He kept it perfectly. And then He went beyond that and He literally, even though He was innocent, became a curse for us, chapter 3, verse 13 says, died in our place as the perfect substitute for us.

Romans 8:3, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son." What could the law not do? The law couldn't save. The law couldn't bring forgiveness. The law couldn't remove the sentence of death and hell.

What the law couldn't do, weak as it was to the flesh – it wasn't the law's fault, it's holy, just and good; but the flesh is weak – God did, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. And as an offering for sin He condemned sin in the flesh so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. He not only became accursed for us, but He fulfilled in His death; but in His life He fulfilled the law for us. So our sins are imputed to Him in His death, and His perfect life is imputed to us by faith.

He sent His Son. Why? Verse 5, "so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." He wanted to redeem us, buy us back from our bondage, pay the price.

The word "under" appears a lot here. Have you noticed that? "Under law," once in chapter 3, once in chapter 4. "Under a curse," chapter 3. "Under sin," chapter 3. "Under elemental things," chapter 4. Even, "Under a tutor." This describes the life of someone before Christ, under the law, under sin, under elemental things of basic religion, under a curse. All of this reflects our bondage.

Our Lord, it says, was born under the law, but He kept it perfectly. That's His active righteousness, His active obedience. And then He died in our place, and that's His passive righteous obedience. "And He did it to redeem us," – buy us from the bondage of sin – "that we might" – here it comes at the end of verse 5 – "that we might receive the adoption as sons." This is such an honorable privilege.

You say, "Well, wait a minute. We were born into the family of God, right? We were born. We were regenerated. We talk about the new birth, we talk about being born again. We were born into the family of God; now it says we are adopted. How can both be true?" Because both are symbols of a salvation reality. They explain two different aspects of our salvation. We were regenerated, we were given life, and we were also chosen and adopted; both are true. As I said, we are the recipients of many aspects of salvation: regeneration, justification, conversion, union, sanctification, and adoption.

But let's talk about adoption. What's our former family? "You're of your father the devil," John 8. Sons of disobedience, sons of wrath. Our home is the world system. We're in bondage to sin and death and hell. Our father is the devil; that's our family. This is the universal human condition. But God

displayed His glory through love and grace toward us. And chapter 3, verse 26 say, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

And then as we read in verse 5, He came to redeem us, that we might receive the adoption as sons." We were regenerated, given life, we were declared righteous; and now God says, "I am moving you from the family of Satan into My own family, and I'm placing you in My family, and so intrinsically into My family that I am placing you in union with My Son, in union with My Son."

John 1:12, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become the children of God." We have authority as the children of God.

I'm always drawn to 1 John chapter 3. Listen to verse 1: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God. How great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we will be called children of God." Yes, we were actually born anew so that we are new creations with new life. But we were also doubly put into God's family by then being chosen and adopted and taken out of the kingdom of darkness.

Romans 8:17 again speaks to this magnificent truth. "If children, you who are the children of God, if you're now children you are heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." This is what it means to be a son of God. And that's what verse 7 says, "an heir through God." You're no longer a slave or like a slave, being an immature child, no better than a slave. You have been delivered from that bondage; now you are fully adopted as a son.

If you live apart from the gospel of Christ, if you live apart from faith in Jesus Christ, I don't care how religious you are, how moral you are, you are in bondage. You are under the law, you are under sin, you are under a curse, and you're captive to the elemental things of this world that have no power to restrain or subdue your evil flesh, and can do nothing but deliver you to eternal judgment. You are a slave. There is promise there, but you can't enter into it until you become a son, a fully mature son; and that happens only when you come in faith to Jesus Christ.

And then the generosity of God is staggering. You literally sit with Christ on His throne in glory, Scripture says, and become a joint heir with Him of all that God possesses. Staggering grace to sinners.

Lord, we who know You love Your Word. We love to hear it. We love to understand it, because we long to obey it. And how we rejoice, Lord, in the greatness of Your kindness toward us, eternal kindness to make us so undeserving, to make us joint heirs with Your Son. Because we are in Him, all that is His is ours, the limitless, incomprehensible glories of eternal heaven.

Thank You, Lord, for giving us life, regenerating us. Thank You for adopting us with all the rights and privileges. Thank You for taking us out of our former family – a family of darkness, the world, sin, Satan – and putting us in Your holy forever family, and loving us as You love Your own eternal Son. We're so grateful. We thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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