

The Inheritance You Can't Lose

Scripture: Galatians 4:7–11

Code: 48-21

Open your Bible, if you will, to the fourth chapter of Galatians. We are looking at this wonderful epistle, which emphasizes salvation by faith alone. That is the Christian message. That is why there was a Protestant Reformation. Salvation is not by faith plus works. It's not a cooperative effort between the sinner and God – God does a little, and you do a little; and together it all works to come about that your sins will be forgiven, and you can enter God's holy heaven. But, rather, the Bible is crystal clear that salvation is totally a work of God, and all the sinner contributes is simply an open hand. We just reach out to receive the gift by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we've been saying all along, however, all false religion, all false religion, including false forms of Christianity, want to make salvation a combination of God's work and ours, faith and works – that God does a part, and we do a part, and in that kind of synergism God brings about our salvation. That is the defining heresy in all false religions, that somehow you can contribute to being rescued from judgment by your own works.

Paul preached the true gospel of salvation by faith alone in Christ. He planted some churches in Galatia, as he did many other places in the Mediterranean world back in the first century. And not long after Paul would preach the gospel and churches would be planted and people would be converted, not long until some Jewish teachers would come along and tell the believers that what Paul had told them was not true. Salvation is not by faith alone, it's by faith plus works. That was the message of those who became known as the Judaizers, because they tried to make Jews out of the Gentiles who had come to know Christ through the gospel. And what they were basically saying was, you have to keep the law of Moses; and by that, they meant the external law, as it becomes clear in the passage today – the ceremonial laws, the ritual laws, the festival laws, the dates, the days, the years, the months – all of those things that were external behaviors, and not the moral law of God.

They were prescribed by God for the purpose of insulating Israel and making them a unique people in the midst of a multi-idol world. They were to be the monotheists who worshiped the true and living God. And so God did give them some external, symbolic laws and rituals to point to Him in kind of the infancy of the development of true religion. But when Christ came, all of those ABCs, all those elemental things ceased, and the bondage of the law was done, and Christ became the substance, and all that passed away as the mere shadow. But nonetheless, there were Jews who claimed to come from James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem - claimed to be believers in Christ, and advocated that you needed to add works.

So Paul in the book of Galatians is giving a series of arguments against salvation by faith and works. And the one that we're looking at in chapter 4:1-11 is a very powerful, powerful argument. It has to do with adoption, and he is telling the Galatians, "You have already been adopted as sons of God, with all the rights and privileges that come with that sonship. Why do you think something is missing?"

Why would you want to go back to what you used to have, the shadow, when you have the substance and the reality. So this is another of his arguments for salvation by faith alone. Let me read you the opening eleven verses - chapter 4 of Galatians.

"I say, as long as the heir is a child, he doesn't differ at all from a slave though he is 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 fulness 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 has 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.

"However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."

This is so serious that Paul wonders whether his efforts have been for nothing. The Galatians had heard the true gospel of salvation by faith, believed it, put their trust in Christ, and they had become true believers. Verse 3 of chapter 3: "You have begun, you have begun by the Spirit." They were true believers. We just read you verse 8: "You didn't know God," verse 9, "but now you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God." He is affirming the reality of their salvation. "You are believers, you have begun in the Spirit, you have experienced the power of the Spirit, you have heard the truth of the gospel, your lives have been transformed; now why are you going back to a system of external behaviors?" That is the daunting question for which Paul sets up many, many arguments in this brief epistle.

Now let me just point out that in the verses I read, the issue is about adoption. He talks about a child, a child who doesn't differ from a slave when he's young. He talks about the fact that, "When we were children in that condition we were held in bondage to the elemental things of the world," that is to say, bondage to the law, bondage in the case of the Gentiles to a false religion. Then Christ came and we were redeemed. We came to a point of being adults. We were mature in Christ, and received the adoption as sons. And he says that in verse 5.

Now the theme here of adoption I want to spend a little time on this morning. Again in verse 6, "You are sons." Again in verse 7, "No longer a slave, but a son." This is all about adoption.

Paul is the only one who uses the word "adoption" in the New Testament, and he uses it in the book of Romans and in the book of Ephesians and in the book of Galatians. The word is simply a compound word in the Greek language: *huios*, "son"; *tithmi*, "to place." It means "to place someone as a son." That's what an adoption is.

Adoption from the theological standpoint, as Paul uses it, is God placing us as His sons in His family, God putting us into His own family. Now that simply stated doesn't have all the rich texture that I want you to understand about adoption, so I'm going to give you a little background on this.

As always when we're dealing with the Bible, we're dealing with an ancient book. We're talking about social customs and mores and behaviors that are two thousand years old. When we in America say "adoption" – and I think November is adoption month – when we talk about adoption we're talking about something very different from what was in the mind of a citizen of the Roman-Greek world in New Testament times. And as always with all Bible interpretation, we have to go back and recreate the social structure, the cultural structure, the linguistic structure, so we know what something meant in that day, because that's what it still means.

Sometimes you hear people say, "We need to bring the Bible into modern times." That is wrong. We don't need to do that; we need to take the modern person into Bible times and recreate the setting. And that's what we always do in studying Scripture.

When Paul mentions the word "adoption" he doesn't define it, doesn't say anything about it, doesn't give its features. And that's because he knew that they understood it a certain way, and that's the way he wanted them to understand it. And in understanding that, they would get the full, rich reality of what he was saying here spiritually, because they knew what adoption was in their world; we don't. So we need to go back. We need to separate ourselves from the contemporary concept of adoption and go back.

Now let me just say this first of all. Paul is dealing with a Roman idea here. There is no set of laws in the Old Testament with regard to adoption. Did Jewish people adopt? Yes, they did. They adopt for two reasons. They adopted, one, because they were childless, and there was a certain stigma with being childless; and so they would adopt to have a child. They adopted, secondly, very frequently when parents were in old age and needed someone to care for them; they would adopt someone who could be a kind of caretaker.

So that is familiar to any Jewish historian in terms of Jewish adoption. But, again, they have no laws on adoption, and there are no statements regarding it in the New Testament. Paul is not talking about that. He's talking to Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world. He's talking in terms that they understand. So let's see if we can't get a grip on this; it's going to completely redefine your understanding of the doctrine of adoption.

Now modern adoption is a kind of charitable action. Modern adoption is done by people who want to rescue children primarily, whether they are children from a foreign country who are in an orphanage and living a very difficult life, or whether they are even more difficult, disabled children, or ill children, children with birth defects or whatever. There are beloved Christian parents and others as well who want to relieve the suffering of those children by getting them out of those orphanages, out of that kind of environment, and they bring them into their family as babies. There are adoptions of those babies who are born to mothers who didn't want to have an abortion, but don't want to handle the child; and so those children are adopted. But typically speaking, adoption in the Western world and in our country is an adoption of babies or children, small children from foster homes may be adopted as well. But, basically, people don't adopt adults. They do not adopt adults; they adopt children.

In the ancient Roman world they did not adopt children. They adopted adults, and they adopted male adults. Very rarely was a female adopted. That is why when Paul talks about adoption he talks about sons, because adoption was done with male, adult young men. Rarely does anyone in our society adopt an adult. There wouldn't be any compelling reason to do that basically in our society.

But let me tell you a little bit about Roman adoption - almost always an adult male twenty years of age and up, even into the thirties. They were adopted into wealthy families, families of status, families with an estate, families of prominence, and virtually all those kinds of families did adoptions. Even if they had children, even if they had sons, they would adopt. If they had no sons, obviously they would adopt in order to have an heir. But if they had sons that they didn't think were suited for the future of the family, they would adopt another son.

And by the way, there was a power in ancient Rome called *patria potestas*, which essentially says "the father's power." And a father could disown a born child. More frequently than not, it would be a girl. But the father could also disown a son. He could also sell a son for adoption. He could also kill a son for whatever reason he wanted.

So the father had absolute power over his children. And if he had no sons or if he had sons that he didn't want to become the heirs of his estate, he would adopt. They were chosen, not as babies, because many babies didn't survive childhood. You wouldn't go through all the adoption to have a baby that would die. And furthermore, you didn't know what kind of a young man this baby would become.

So they waited until they were in their twenties or thirties and they could see their leadership potential, their mental skills, their physical strength, their wisdom. They were looking for someone who would be the next *patria familias*, "father of the family." The father wanted someone to take over the estate. The purpose was really singular: to bring an heir into the family who was worthy of this estate and could guarantee the future of that estate going forward.

And this would happen either because they had no son, or they had no son they felt was qualified. And there were families who had more sons than they needed. They would have sons to carry on their line, and they would be happy to have one of their sons adopted by one of these patrician families - very often adopted out of the plebeian, the common families.

In Roman times, the head of the family was both a manager of the family's estate - a bookkeeper and a financial caretaker for the family's fortune, and a priest, who basically ran the family religion - whatever gods they worshiped, whatever household gods, whatever forms of worship were part of that heritage were his responsibility. He was *patria familias*, "the family father." And so when they adopted young men they were looking for an heir who could step into that role - very, very important: be the keeper of the family's fortune and the keeper of the family's reputation in the future. Poor, again, less noble parents who had such desirable sons would gladly make those sons available to a noble family for a price, for a price. And the price could be very high. It was an honor, by the way, not a dishonor. It was an honorable act to give your son to one of the patrician families, one of the families of the senators, the people who were elite.

Keep this in mind. Somebody might say, "Well, wait a minute. If you've got a really bright, sharp young son, maybe he could take the family he's in and elevate that family and move that family up the social ladder to make them one of the elite families." Couldn't happen; didn't happen. There was an elite class of patricians in the Roman world that was essentially unapproachable and unavailable to the rest of the plebeian society. So if you wanted to advance your capable son, this would be a great way to do that, and maybe the only way to elevate him.

It wasn't secret. It was very public. It was very official. In fact, it was so official that at a high level it required senate confirmation, senate confirmation. A lot was involved. You're talking about wealthy families with estates and reputations. Many of them senators. Many of them, by the way, emperors in Rome.

So this had senate involvement. It was a long drawn out, very official, very formal ceremony, like a wedding. It was that public. It was that kind of celebration. And like a wedding when the bride gives herself to the husband, she doesn't intend to never speak to her family again. She doesn't intend to forget her family, even though they cleave together and create a union all their own; they continue to be connected to the family that was their birth family. They create a new family, but they have a connection to the family of the past in some way.

That was true in adoption. It was not a complete forsaking of your family, so that the family in the future would in some ways be able to enjoy something of the success of the adopted son as they stayed connected in some way with him. However, he would take the father's name, the new father's name, and he would bear that name for the rest of his life. He would get all of the rights and privileges of that family. In fact, he would be the heir of everything that family possessed, and he would bear the name of his new father.

Adoption – here's a definition: "The condition of a son, chosen and given to a father and family to which he doesn't naturally belong, to formally and legally declare a son who is not a son by birth, but a son by choice, granting him complete rights and inheritance." That's Roman adoption.

There were four results of this adoption. Number one: You had a new father. You had a new father. Number two: You were heir to his estate. And that's the primary reason for this adoption. And if you were adopted to become the primary heir, and the couple had more sons, those sons could never supplant the adopted son who was declared the heir. They could share in the inheritance like co-heirs, but that adopted son would be the ultimate heir.

Third thing: all the adopted son's previous debts and responsibility were wiped out. If he owed anything to anyone anywhere, that was all gone. They erased his past life, except the connection with his family. It was as if he had never lived before. Everything was set aside; everything was erased. He is now legally and absolutely the son and heir of his new father, and there is no past life to take into account.

The fourth element is: he would have to be purchased with a high price, which is one of the reasons that poor families would make this overture of a son that was desired by a wealthy family. So the results were significant.

One other thing to say - according to the Roman-Syrian law book, I found an interesting quote there on this subject. It says, and I quote, "A man cannot disown an adopted son," end quote. So once you were adopted, it was permanent.

So much care was taken about who was adopted. The adopted son – listen – then is more secure in his inheritance than a born son. The adopted son is more secure in his inheritance than a born son. A born son could be disowned, sold, adopted out, or even killed, as I said earlier.

This is such a noble event that nine of the Caesars were adopted. Julius Caesar had no children, so he adopted Augustus. Augustus had no sons, so he adopted Tiberius. Nine Caesars, nine emperors were adopted from other families into the royal line. So this is a very richly textured picture of what Christian believers experience in being adopted into God's family.

And if you look at it in the breadth of that, you begin to see what the Galatians would have understood, and what Paul intended them to understand, that what happens when God adopts us into His family is, first of all, we are in another family. We are comparatively in an impoverished family. We are in a family with no future, no hope of ever achieving what that new family possesses. We are chosen; we are chosen. We are then purchased. We are then given the name of the new family. We then become heirs of everything that that father possesses; and that can never change. That's adoption. And we say, "Abba! Father!"

We have a new Father, and we're so intimately connected to Him that we say, "Papa. Daddy." It's that intense a relationship. And we have all the rights and privileges, so that Jesus says in John 1:12, to those who believed in Him, He gave "the authority to be called sons of God." It is a position of authority. In the millennial kingdom we will rule and reign over the world with Christ. In heaven we will sit with Him on His throne. We will be, as we have read in Romans 8, "heirs and joint heirs with Christ" of all that God possesses.

By the way, in the adoption ceremony, according to one source, there were seven witnesses, seven witnesses. Why would you have witnesses of the adoption? To establish the legality of it and testimony to it, in case in the future other children of that wealthy family would contest to that adoption and say, "Wait a minute." When the estate starts getting passed out and they are overlooked, there could well be conflict in the family.

And so one source says there were seven witnesses required, which fascinates me, because we have in our text, if you'll look down at verse 6, "Because," verse 5, "we have received the adoption as sons," verse 6, "because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts." And what is the Spirit sent into our hearts to do? Romans 8 says, "To witness that we are the sons of God."

The Holy Spirit is the witness that we are the sons of God. And according to Isaiah 11:2, the Holy Spirit is the sevenfold spirit. In Isaiah 11:2 there are seven features of the Holy Spirit. They are demonstrated in the menorah with its seven flames. The fullness of the Spirit is a sevenfold fullness. And so the fullness of the sevenfold Spirit is God's witness to the legality of our adoption that can never be contested, because of the witness of the Holy Spirit.

We have seen the preparation for our sonship in the early verses: the realization of our sonship, verses 4 and 5, when we become adopted as sons; the confirmation of our sonship, verse 6, receiving the Spirit in our hearts who witnesses with our spirit that we are the sons of God. All of this is built on this incredibly rich picture of Roman adoption.

Now we come to the consummation of sonship in verse 7, the consummation of sonship. "Therefore you are no longer a slave." And by the way, slaves could be adopted; both slaves and free men could be adopted. Slaves, by the way, were not all the kind of slaves you might think. Many of them

were highly educated; many of them were professionally skilled people. That was just their social status.

“You are no longer a slave, but a son;” – and here it comes – “if a son, if a son, then an heir through God.” The point of adoption was to give the estate to that adopted son. It was that he would be the heir through God, *dia*, by the immediate agency of God. God is choosing an heir.

Think of your salvation that way. He chose you before the foundation of the world to be an heir of everything that He possesses. This is the magnanimous nature of the grace and love of God. This is astonishing, astonishing. The kind of foolish trivia that you hear from people who preach the quote-unquote “prosperity gospel,” about the fact that Jesus wants you to have a new car, a new house. Apart from being a lie is worthless dirt compared to inheriting everything that God possesses in the glory of His eternal kingdom and presence. What do I care what kind of car I drive. What do I care about anything in this world compared to the glory that is before me.

So the point of all of this is that through God’s choice and through God’s power we have become an heir. God the Father has chosen us, brought us to maturity in Christ, paid for us by the blood of Christ, made us sons and heirs; and it’s all by love and grace.

And here’s the larger point: this is what the gospel of faith did for you; this is what Christ gave you when you believed in Him. You have that inheritance. You are a son; you have been adopted. You have everything that God can give you; you have it all.

Look over at Romans 8; I mentioned it. Let me take you there for a few moments, because this is the other place where Paul waxes eloquent on adoption. We have been adopted as children of God, verse 15; “sons of God,” verse 14; “children of God,” verse 16; children of God, verse 17.

And you say, “Well, we are heirs,” verse 17, “heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ.” What does it mean to be an heir of God? It means to inherit everything God possesses, to inherit everything that God possesses. It will all be ours in the glory of heaven, and we are fellow heirs with Christ. That is to say, our inheritance is the same inheritance Christ receives, which is all that God possesses.

You say, “Well, life’s kind of tough here. I don’t feel like an heir. I mean, I’m barely making it.” Well, “You will be glorified with Him if you’re willing to suffer with Him,” verse 17, and verse 18, “I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Get your eyes where they need to be. Set your focus not on things on the earth, but things above. The suffering in this life is not worthy to be compared with the *glory* that is to be revealed to us, and that is the full glory of all of God’s possessions, and it’s stunning, staggering promises.

You say, “Well, how do I know? How do I know I’m going to receive those?” Go down to verse 28. “We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

If you’ve been savingly called into His family as a son, everything that happens in your life works together for good. Everything that happens in your life works together for good. And what is good?

Your inheritance, your eternal inheritance. No one is going to be replaced. No one is going to be disowned, because, “Whom He foreknew” - who He predetermined to know, set His love on – “He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.”

We’re all predestined by God to be conformed to Christlikeness. In heaven, Christ will then have many brothers. “Whom He predestined to that end, He called. Whom He called, he justified. Whom He justified, He also glorified,” spoken in the past tense as if it happened. From the foreknowledge of God, the predestination of God, the calling of God, the justification of God, to the glorification by the power of God, He brings us into His presence.

“What shall we say then,” verse 31, “to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?” Who could successfully overthrow the plan of God? No one. No one.

“He didn’t spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” You want to know what your inheritance is? All things. All things. If He sent His Son to *die* to redeem you, to make you an adopted son, if He did that, the more difficult thing – reasoning from the greater to the lesser – if He gave His Son to die to make you a son, then He will also give you *everything* that sonship promises.

Well, somebody might come along and make accusations against us. Verse 33: “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God’s the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?” Christ Jesus is He who died, rather was raised.” Whatever sins they bring up against you, the Lord Himself says, “By the way, I died for that. I died for that. I died for that one too. I died for all of those. That’s all paid for: paid in full, paid in full, paid in full.” He’s at the right hand interceding.

So, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For it is written, ‘For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” Why do we conquer? Why do we get all the way to our inheritance? Through Him who called us, because He loved us; and He will bring us to glory.

So, “I’m convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God loved us, that’s why He chose us; and He will bring us to the fruition of that love. Staggering, staggering realities.

“You have everything by faith in Christ,” he’s saying to the Galatians. “You have all that God possesses. You are a son, as Christ is a son, an heir and a joint heir. You have the full inheritance. *Everything* is yours. *Everything* is yours. Everything in God’s glorious heaven is yours. *All* spiritual blessings in the heavenlies are in Christ.

Now, you don’t have it yet. That’s why Romans 8 says, “We groan, waiting for the full redemption of our body. We groan in hope, but we know there is an inheritance undefiled, unfading, incorruptible, reserved for us in heaven.” We know that. That’s why He made us sons, to give us an inheritance.

Keep this in mind; it's a simple thing: adoption is for the purpose of *inheritance*. It's not about sympathy and compassion, such as our adoption. That God has. But adoption as sons in that Roman context, and therefore in Pauline language, is for the privilege, the right to have an inheritance. And what is that inheritance? Everything that God possesses, forever.

Now you have that by faith; that's what Paul's been saying. Justification by faith alone, faith alone, faith alone, no works. All you get from works is accursed – we've gone through all of that. And here come the Judaizers, and they say, "Whoa, no, no, no. You've got to be circumcised according to the law of Moses. You have to keep the days, the sabbaths. You have to keep the festivals and the feasts of the weeks and the months and the seasons and the years. You've got to do all of that, or you're not going to make it." And Paul says, "This is absolute absurdity."

Look at verse 8: "You are sons, you were slaves. However, at the time when you were slaves, when you didn't know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain." This is shocking to Paul.

"Are you going back to your old debt-ridden, sin-loaded life? Are you going back to your old impoverished family? Are you going back to childishness, back to bondage, to rituals and rites, superficial religion?" Even – listen – even Judaism before Christ is a form of paganism. Apart from Christ, Judaism without Christ is paganism. Are you going back? "Are you so bewitched," chapter 3, verse 1, "are you so foolish, that you would go back to something that is another gospel but not really another? And anybody who preaches it should be cursed." This is how he feels about *any* religious system that requires *rituals*, whether it's beads, prayers, sacraments, penance, or any other kind of external duties. "You can't possibly want to go back to that."

Now notice verse 8, because here we find the responsibility of sonship, the responsibility of sonship. Adoption brought responsibility in the ancient world. You needed to be loyal to your new father. You needed to show gratitude for his love, gratitude for his grace. You needed to show appreciation for the inheritance that you were given.

At the time before you came to know Christ, you didn't know God, verse 8. "You were slaves to those which by nature are no gods." There's only one true God in the universe, only one true God: the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The only one way to know God is through Christ: "No man comes unto the Father but by Me." So anybody who doesn't come to God, the one true God, through Christ, doesn't know God.

People talk about God; they don't know God. They have all kinds of different gods. They invent their own god. Most people just invent their own god, or they have a religion that has invented the god for them, and the god is impersonated by demons. But the whole world of religious people, apart from Christians, don't know God.

You hear people talk about God, pray to God, say, "God bless you. I believe in God. I'm a very religious person." They don't know God unless they have come to the true God through faith in Jesus Christ. They don't know God. The one they think is God is the devil. They don't know God.

When you didn't know God, in Ephesians 4, Paul describes that as being alienated, excluded from the life of God, darkened in understanding, ignorant, hard-hearted, callous, given over to sensuality and the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. You're greedy about your impurity. You don't know God.

First Corinthians 1 says to the people who don't know God, "You will never find God by human wisdom; God can't be known by human wisdom. It pleased God that He would not be found by human wisdom. Where's the scribe? Where is the wise man? And where is the sage?" They can't know God. They see the true gospel as foolishness; but they are the real fools. Romans 1 says when they knew God, at least they had innate knowledge God, they glorified Him not as God; but created non-gods, made idols.

The whole world is full of people who talk about God, but absolutely do not know God. And who they think is God is no god at all; they're worshiping at the throne of Satan, the purveyor of false religion.

"But now," verse 9, "that you have come to know God." What does the word "know" mean? "Know in a very deep and intimate sense." It says in the book of Genesis that Cain knew his wife, and she bore a son. Intimate union, as intimate as it gets in the physical world.

When Mary was pregnant, the New Testament says Joseph "had not known her." That's a euphemism for a sexual relationship, the most intimate of all human relationships.

In the Old Testament, God says about Israel, Amos 3:2, "Israel only have I known." Well, it doesn't mean that the only people God knew in the world were Jews. He means, "Israel is the only one with whom I had an intimate covenant, with whom I had an intimate love relationship."

You didn't have that. But now you have that. You have come to know God. You have that intimate love relationship with God, so that you cry out to God, "Abba, Father. Papa, Daddy." That's where you go in the struggles of life. And the reason you know God – I love this, verse 9 – "is because, or rather to be known by God." That's where it all starts.

You can't know Him until He's first set His love on you. He initiates that relationship. We love Him because He first loved us. We know Him because He first knew us.

He says to Nathanael in the early chapters of John, "I saw you. I knew you when you were standing over there." He saw him with the eyes of omniscience. He saw him with the eyes of love. He saw him with the eyes of predestination.

God knew you before you knew Him. God loved you before you loved Him. God called you before you called out to Him. First Thessalonians 1:9 says that we were rescued from idols, turning from idols to the living God. That's what it means to know God: to have an intimate relationship with God. You've come to know God because He knows you. John 10, Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them," – and He goes on to say – "and they know Me," and He means in this intimate relationship.

“You have come to know God; you are believers.” And he’s speaking, of course, in the main, as far as he knows. This is the wonder of salvation. “You who didn’t know God now know God, and cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” And you’re known by God because, “No one can come to Me,” Jesus said, “unless the Father draws him” (John 6:44).

“So now that you know God, because God knows you, how is it,” verse 9, “that you turn back?” - that’s the word for “converted” – “How is it that you are reverse-converting again to the weak and worthless elemental things.” Any form of false religion, including bondage to the Mosaic law on the part of Jews, is a weak and worthless elemental thing when compared to the true gospel in Christ. You desire to be enslaved all over again? Are you converting backwards? Are you going back to your old religion? Are you going back to Judaism, which wasn’t even your old religion? But you’re going back to a religion that once was God’s plan, but has been replaced. Are you going back to what is now the shell of a true religion, and is itself false?”

Legalism is a false religion. Going back to dietary laws, going back to Sabbath observance, going back to feasts and festivals, Passovers. “Are you going back to what you were delivered from? Are you going back to your old family, your old bondage? Isn’t sonship enough for you? Are you regressing? This is not profound.”

You know, you look at religions and you think something is kind of informal if it’s like this. And then you see depicted – you go to a cathedral or you see something like that on television, and you see all the falderal, all the costumes, all the glitz and glitter that make up that kind of stuff, and you have the feeling that that is profound. That is not advancing religion; that is regressed religion, back to the weak and worthless elemental things; back to simple, simplistic things. That is not advanced religion; that is regressed religion. That is not profound religion; that is simplistic religion. What is profound religion is to embrace your sonship by faith and not get caught up in weak and worthless elemental things that make up false religion.

“You desire” – he says at the end of verse 9 – “do you want to be enslaved all over again? You want to be like Israel?” A little bit of the history of Israel might be a good warning.

Israel was led out of Egypt. Pretty dramatic, wouldn’t you say? The plagues. Did they see the hand of God? Indeed they did. They saw the hand of God in the plagues, and their protection.

And they got out into the wilderness. In chapter 14 of Exodus, Pharaoh starts coming after them. So they became very frightened, in verse 10 of Exodus 14, and they gather to Moses. And this is what they said: “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?” That is just sarcasm. “Oh, you brought us all the way out here because you couldn’t find a place to bury us in Egypt?”

“Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt? We told you, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians.’ It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than die in the wilderness.”

And then Moses says, “Don’t fear! Stand by; see the salvation of the Lord.” And the Red Sea parts, and they walk through. And they get on the other side. “Wow!” I guess they learned their lesson.

Chapter 16, right after that: “The sons of Israel said to Moses and Aaron,” verse 3, “‘Would that we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt,’” – they hadn’t advanced at all – “‘when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” So you know what the Lord did? The Lord provided water, and the Lord provided meat. Oh, great, that’ll get them over that hump.

Chapter 17, verse 3: “The people thirsted for water, grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’” And then Moses responds by saying, “‘They’re going to stone me if this keeps up.’” They had seen miracle after miracle after miracle, including the parting of the Red Sea; water, food created; and they were seduced to go back to Egypt.

That’s what the Judaizers were trying to tell the Galatian believers to do: go back to what the Lord had rescued them from. And what was it specifically? Verse 10: “You observe days and months and seasons and years.” They were beginning to absorb the Mosaic calendar, the external rituals and ceremonies. And listen: *none* of them, none of them is bound on the church anywhere in the entire New Testament. There is no command in the entire New Testament to keep the Sabbath or any other of the Jewish calendar events - festivals, rites, rituals, dietary laws – all gone. “You’re going backwards.”

Colossians 2:16, “Don’t let anyone act as your judge in regard to food or drink or a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath—things that are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” Don’t go back to that. It’s being bewitched. It’s worse than that. “Those of you who are drifting back to that,” verse 11, “I fear for you, that perhaps I’ve labored over you in vain. I’ve labored over you in vain.”

I can think of a lady in our church; had a lot of love for her. She’s a Jewish lady, and she was converted to Christ here, and part of our church and ministering in wonderful ways, and even doing some Bible teaching. And then all of a sudden, she went back deep into Roman Catholicism, deep in the gears of Roman Catholicism. She actually became – and I guess she still is – an apologist for Romanism.

After all the preaching and all the teaching and all the conversations, I understand what Paul meant when he said, “I fear for you, that perhaps I’ve labored over you in vain, because you’ve gone back to the things from which the gospel wants to save you.” That is the idea, that you earn your salvation through your adherence to religious ritual. That is being bewitched. So how could you possibly not fully embrace salvation by faith alone, when you have become a son, been adopted, and are an heir of everything God possesses?

People who go back; were they real believers? No. First John 2:19, “They went out from us, because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have continued with us. They went out from us, that it might be made manifest they never were of us.” John 8, Jesus says, “If you continue in My word, then you’re My real disciple.”

The theology of sonship, the theology of adoption, really is the gospel. Before salvation, you didn’t know God; you were part of the devil’s family; he disguised the true condition with religion. But you were caught up in worthless, weak, elemental things. You may have been religious, but you didn’t

know God. That was your condition before salvation.

At salvation, God, who chose you before the foundation of the world, predestined you to be conformed to the image of His Son, moved on your life by His love and grace; He knew you. He joined Himself to you in love and awakened your heart, and you responded by joining yourself to Him. He came to you, and you came to Him. He knew you, and you knew Him. He loved you, and you loved Him in return. And now after salvation, you are waiting for the unfolding of your inheritance. This is the gospel. It's about what God has prepared for them that love Him in heaven.

It's not about riches on this earth. In fact, this earth is full of suffering; even the apostles knew that. This is the gospel. You didn't know God. You're in weak and worthless religion. You're in bondage to the law and sin. You're hopeless, helpless, blind, ignorant. And then God desires to have a relationship, an intimate relationship with you, and so He sets His love on you. And by the power of the Spirit through the preaching and hearing of the gospel, He establishes a relationship with you, and you with Him. He knows you, you know Him. He loves you, you love Him. You're freed from bondage. It's all by faith in Christ alone and nothing else. Now you're an adopted son waiting for the full inheritance that is reserved for you in heaven.

You don't need to add anything to that. And if you do, if you go back, then all this effort was in vain. All your past debts were canceled when you came to Christ. Your whole former life was erased; God remembers it no more. Your old family is gone; you have a brand-new family. All of this because of the precious blood of Jesus Christ being applied as a payment for your sonship.

Father, we thank You again this morning, as we always do, because we don't know what else to say. When we think about what You do for us for Your glory, just really overwhelming. Just beyond comprehension that you would grant us such eternal riches when we are so unworthy. May we never, ever think for a moment of turning back to weak and worthless, superficial, external religion - back to the bondage from which we were delivered, back to the childhood before we were mature, back to the ignorance before we knew You. But may we rejoice in our sonship, cry out, "Abba, Father," and regularly experience Your love and Your power in our lives, as You continue to pour out all spiritual blessings on Your children.

And may we patiently wait, sometimes suffering, for the glory that is to come, knowing that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared to the glory that awaits us. Grant us patience and joy until we see you face to face and receive what You have for us, and cast the crown back at Your feet, so that You may receive all the glory. Amen.

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