

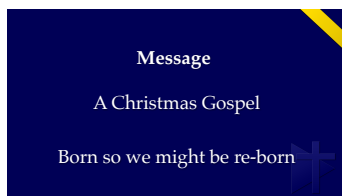
Born So We Might Be Re-born - Galatians 4.1-7

Dec 2017

Galatians 4.1-7 [ESV]

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything,² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Intro



Paul's letter to the Galatians is one of the hottest texts in the New Testament. It's a letter that vents steam as Paul takes on a group of people who were undermining the gospel he lived and breathed for. The language is raw and the message is fierce because it concerns something where no compromise is possible: how we are saved by God in Christ.

The letter focused on the question of whether Gentile believers baptized in Christ and living as his disciples also needed to also comply with the Law of Moses as Jews still upheld.

In the middle of this white-hot argument Paul offers a beautiful summary of the gospel that includes the Christmas story we are currently celebrating. So he offers us the gift of a gospel message that includes Christmas or the incarnation of God in Christ, as he points to the fullness of what God intends for those who receive Christ.

I want to open this up for us today

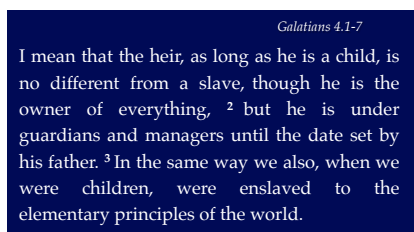
Text

What Paul had to do was show to knock out those insisting on the Law of Moses was show how the Law of Moses had been superseded by Christ and what he brought. Or, how the Law of Christ was God's upgrade on the Law of Moses.

In today's passage from chapter 4 he seeks to illustrate this with a general reference to the legal customs involved in inheritance and adoption.

The basic insight is this. Fatherhood works in different ways.

In the Greco-Roman world and surrounding societies as well, the male head of the household held power over the household and all who lived in it. His rule was absolute.



So if you were in the house of such a patriarch he determined your status and no one could challenge that. So if you were born a son in the house your first years were those of a 'young master'. In other words you were recognized as a son but you had not come into your inheritance. You had the title 'son in the house' but you had no access to resources or funds and were under the authority of others.

Paul says that a son in his minority was in effect a slave. He had a different status but not more freedom or power. This is what the so-called prodigal son was rebelling against. He wanted to live now and not wait until he was granted his inheritance.

If the patriarch was absent or died before the male heir had come of age there were standard provisions. A guardian was appointed. Think of a godfather or nominated uncle who would govern the boy until age 14. Then from 14 to somewhere into the early 20s a manager would supervise the estate and lead the young man into his inheritance.

Paul is saying to those Jesus followers being told that they should observe the full Jewish Torah that the Law of Moses was such an interim arrangement for God's children until they had come into maturity and been prepared for the full status and readiness to fulfill their calling as full sons of God.

That's quite straight forward until he mentions in v.3

In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

Part of the business of being children is learning right from wrong. It is obvious that children develop their sense of right and wrong through various phases as they develop and as with anything else, some children and adults learn and develop this more than others. Parents are the first and greatest influences in this.

The Law of Moses had a curious purpose in this regard. It established a sense of right and wrong but with a sting. Once you have the sense of right and wrong one also becomes aware of sin's enslavement. Similarly, once you begin to struggle with temptation then, you become aware of its power.

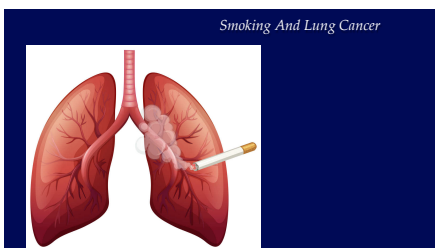
Without the Law of Moses God was a-ethical. People might prohibit things but God was not concerned. Ethics were not God's concern as is the case in other religions. The stories of Abraham illustrate this. He was not always ethical was he?

Paul is saying that as 'children' in God's house the Torah, or 'Law of Moses' brought awareness of sin and that was God's purpose until the date set by Him for his children to become sons in his house exercising the full rights of sons who have come of age and entered their inheritance.

These 'elementary principles' are very much part of life today. They are the ethical forces of guilt, shame, temptation, addiction, denial, condemnation and judgment. They are the elementary principles by which people live once their consciences are activated and sin is known. That is what the Law of Moses achieved.

I have two local examples to illustrate the extent to which these elementary principles are alive and active in the Netherlands today.

On Thursday *NOS Journaal* reported that latest figures show that cancer is now the number one cause of death among women.¹ Men and women are now affected in equal measure.



The increase in female cancer is reported to be due to an increase lung cancer.

Then came the question (as remembered) *Waar moeten wij hier de schuld voor legen?* "Where do we lay the blame for this?" - "Who is guilty here?"

¹ <https://nos.nl/artikel/2209554-kanker-voor-het-eerst-belangrijkste-doodsoorzaak-vrouwen.html>

That struck me as a typical example of the elementary principles operating around a painful story. That is what law facilitates; an awareness of right and wrong that then seeks ways to somehow address the wrong by punishment of the guilty to limit bad outcomes.

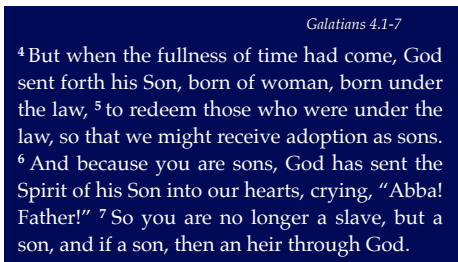


A second example from a year ago concerned use of mobile phones while cycling.² Research suggests that 20% of cycle accidents in the Netherlands involve use of a smart phone. The government had considered forbidding use of phones while cycling but it was deemed too complicated - because the punishments couldn't be set. Civil law has its limits!

In other countries the debates about harsh jail terms and capital punishment are at the same level managing the 'elementary principles'.

In term of our passage, management of sin by the elemental principles of guilt, punishment, shame and condemnation is for children and slaves. It is paternalism necessary for those who cannot or will not assume their place as God's children in God's house.

That is the case Paul makes so far. Now in v.4 comes Christmas and the heart of the gospel!



⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

When the time for God's children by Abraham to move from being guarded and managed by the Law of Moses was fulfilled through all the centuries of corporate learning and formation, God moved to bring them into their majority, that is from the status of child or slave resident in God's house but without authority to being heirs come of age.

When the fullness of time had come God achieved this by sending his own son born of a woman to purchase the freedom of those under the law and adopt them as sons in the house of the Father.

There are a number of expressions and legal elements in that statement that convey the gospel:

- 1) He was **born of a woman** which simply says he was human.
- 2) He was born into the legal economy of the **Law** which held for every one of God's children bound in their years of guardianship and management. He himself carried the yoke of the law that brought awareness of right and wrong with all the consequent features of sin.
- 3) His purpose was to **redeem**, which is a legal metaphor from the slave market to describe the buying free of people with a price on them and their life. Something had to be paid something had to be done to break that bond-price over the children of God. He came to bring the necessary **redemption** for captives.
- 4) Once redeemed the former bond-slaves of sin as determined by the law could be **adopted** to become fellow sons with him in the house, as fully entitled sons not slaves.

It began with being born of a woman and was for the purpose of redeeming to make our adoption possible.

² <https://nos.nl/artikel/2107373-mogelijk-verbod-mobiel-bellen-en-appen-op-de-fiets.html>

Only through being born as we all are could he be trained under the yoke of the Law and prevail to both satisfy it and replace it thus fulfilling its purpose.

That is Paul's vision of Christmas. God gives his son in child-birth so that we might become sons and heirs.

Now if you have been wondering about daughters let me assure you that 'sons' need to be heard in legal terms. It not about gender, its about legal standing as heir and God's desire is to see all his children enjoy that standing in his House -the woman as well as the boy child she births. As Paul has already said in this letter (3:28) "In Christ there is no male or female...".

Now to hear how Paul ends this outline of the Gospel.

⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

The adoption as Sons provided for after the redemption from the demands of the law and the consequence bondage of sin is spiritual in nature. Once redeemed in God's first son, Jesus Christ, God sends His Spirit, his very own life, into the lives of those in Jesus Christ and the reality of our redemption and adoption springs into life with the cry 'Abba – Father', My Father!

In saying this Paul is probably repeating the memory of people hearing Jesus himself express this in Aramaic, 'Abba' My Father.

In the fullness of time, God's saving work begins with the birth of his son that enables the re-birth of all God's children through being adopted and spiritually endorsed as full sons of God sharing an inheritance with Jesus Christ.

Application.

In this brief outline of the gospel is a huge invitation to grow up into the fullness of what God gives us in the child born of a woman.

Here is a sad perspective:

I think many churches have kept people living as minors or slaves and children in God's house. You can do that with an organ and lead windows church or rock band and smoke machines church. Whatever style of church that was never God's purpose in Jesus.

The purpose of God's gospel is for people to come to that place where they cry 'Abba – Father'. That is the purpose of the baby born in Bethlehem.

We are not meant to live with the elemental principles of this world as shaped by law. That is for children who never get to grow up.

Looking to 2018

Signs of growth yet to come:

- staying in the economy of shame and denial
- accepting some second class status in God's family
- being legalistic or jealous –like an 'elder son'

- If we stay in the economy of shame and denial
- If we live accepting some second class status in God's family
- If we are legalistic or jealous –like an elder son

These are the signs of stunted growth and being stuck in spiritual childhood.

In Christ we are called to a spiritual re-birth as adult children who have come into our inheritance.

So here are the questions:

- Do you know the Spirit within crying out 'Abba-Father'?
- Do you recognize things that keep you from spiritual maturity as an adult child of God?
- Are you open to taking steps to receive all what God provided you in Jesus?

If we want to be Gospel people it starts at Christmas but it ends in the Spirit crying 'Abba-Father'

This is what I would like to work on in 2018.