

FULL-GROWN SONS OF GOD

Galatians 4:1-7

Who are you? How do you see yourself? These questions focus on the seriousness of the problem of personal identity. If the people of our land have been going through a crisis relating to self-identity, so have many Christians. Just as many people have been uncertain about who they are, so have many Christians.

The Judaizers had brought about such a spiritual identity crisis in Galatia. Genuine believers were left in uncertainty about their relationship with God. Should they allow themselves to be placed under the law? Was there something more to the Christian life that they were missing? To such a question, Paul responds with a strong affirmation of the sonship of each believer in Jesus Christ. This position of sonship has been involved in everything that God has done for us. The activity of God has involved the sending of His Son and the sending of His Spirit.

As we come to this passage, we must keep in mind that the apostle sees two levels of sonship. There is the sonship of a minor who in that day was committed to the care of a slave. His status is really no better than that of a slave. But then there is the status of the full grown, adult son who has been received into the place of privilege and liberty that belongs to an adult. This is the status into which each believer in Jesus Christ has been established. The former status is that which the Old Testament people of God knew. Can you not see the folly of one who would forsake what he knows in Christ to go back to the old covenant? Without discounting the value of the old, the apostle calls our attention to the glory of the new.

In doing this, he points us to the role of the Son and the Spirit in our sonship.

I. OUR SONSHIP IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE SON.

You will not appreciate all that is involved in being a full-grown, fully accepted son of God unless you understand what was involved in making it possible. This is presented in this great passage most clearly.

The coming of the Son is the key! His coming was at the divine initiative. "But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son." God determined the time! The picture in the expression, "fullness of time", is that of a vessel being filled drop by drop until it is completely filled. When the cup of time was filled, God sent His Son. It is a reminder that our God is above time, yea, He is the Lord of time. "Sent" meant to send one away on a mission. Usually this type of sending involved the conferring of full authority. The One God sent is identified as "His Son." He is One who had a unique relationship with the Father.

He is the natural Son of the Father. There is a clear reference to the pre-existence of the Son. He was sent away from the presence of the Father on this mission which involved being born of woman.

Making possible our sonship involved the incarnation. The Son was "made of woman", made under the law. "Made of woman" means that through the woman, He received a body; was made a man. "Made under the law" indicates that He was actually made a Jewish man. The Son lived out His days on the earth fully under the law. His daily conduct was fully regulated by the law. He truly "fulfilled the law." From this we understand that He came down in the incarnation to share our plight that we might share His privilege. He became one with us in our humanity that we might become one with Him in His privilege as a Son of God.

The work of the Son climaxed in redemption. "To redeem them that are under the law." This reference does not indicate the means of redemption, which we know to be His death on the cross, but rather emphasizes the purpose. "To redeem" means to purchase, to liberate by the payment of a price. So God sent His Son to pay the necessary price so that we might be liberated from the law. The Son makes men free from the law.

But there is more! He does more than free from the law --- He makes possible our adoption as sons. Under Roman law a free man could adopt the son of a slave. When such adoption had been completed, the slave son would be accepted in the family as a natural born son. He would share freely in the inheritance. Furthermore, the father could not disinherit such an adopted son.

We were not naturally the sons of God. In fact we were by nature the sons of wrath. If we were to ever be in the family of God, God must do something. Adoption was our only hope. This God made possible by the sending of His Son. Surely the God who took such drastic action must have been desirous of having sons. If He went to this much expense to Himself, and to His Son, He must have really wanted you in His family.

II. OUR SONSHIP IS MADE PERSONAL BY THE SPIRIT.

The sending of the Son involves Bethlehem and the incarnation. But God was not through. He wanted this sonship to involve more than just the occupation of a legal position. He wanted these new, fully-grown, fully accepted sons to be aware of a personal relationship to Himself. So, He sent His Spirit.

"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba, Father". The relationship of the Spirit to our sonship is important. We are not the sons of God because we have the Spirit, but rather we have the Spirit because we are sons of God. Although we cannot separate the two

in our experience, one is actually adopted as a son before the Holy Spirit comes to live in the heart. Experientially they seem to be simultaneous. We might think of the Spirit as being the birth certificate. He is our proff of sonship.

Emphasis is again placed upon the divine initiative in the coming of the Spirit. The exact same verb is used in both cases. The Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost having been sent just like the Son came at Christmas. Both were on a divine mission relating to our sonship.

The Spirit is identified as "The Spirit of His Son". Two things can be seen here. He is the Spirit of the Son because His coming is based upon the work of the Son. Apart from the redemptive work of the Son, the Spirit would not have come. This title also relates Him to what He came to do. He came to make us personally aware of our sonship, so He can be called the "Spirit of His Son".

Did you notice the contrast in the Spirit and the Son? The Son was sent to be "made of woman". He received a body through which He would manifest Himself. But the Spirit was sent "into your hearts." Those who have been adopted as sons of God will provide Him a body. Is this not a wondrous thing! God, the Holy Spirit, has taken up residence in your hearts!

But why? Why would God send the Spirit of His Son into our hearts? His purpose was that our sonship would be personal. "Crying, Abba, Father." Those in whom the Spirit comes to dwell are made personally aware of this beautiful relationship to God. The Spirit comes in "crying." "Trying" is a strong word. It involves an emotional outcry! The Holy Spirit is the one doing the crying here. However, He does this through the believer in whose heart He has come to dwell. The outcry is "Abba." This is the word in Aramaic that children would use in going to their father. It might be translated as "Daddy." It is the word that speaks of love, intimacy, and confidence. It is the word Jesus used in addressing the Father in the garden of Gethsemane, according to the Gospel of Mark. "Father" is the normal word for "father".

In this passage, Paul is contrasting the old and the new. Under the law, men just did not experience this sense of sonship. The law produced fear and dread of God. But God sent the Son and the Spirit that we might know experientially a sense of sonship with the Father.

This is not the only ministry that the Holy Spirit performs in the life of the believer, but it is a basic one. Nothing else He does has much significance apart from this. If we are honest with ourselves, many of us would have to admit that we have lost that inner sense of sonship. We no longer feel that closeness to God. The reason could be that we have been grieving the Holy Spirit with some sin or some act of disobedience toward the Lord. We must allow the Holy Spirit to fill

and control our lives or we will not know the assurance of sonship that God wants us to know.

Paul closes this great passage with the affirmative, "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son: and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Who could ask for more!

CONCLUSION

The application to your heart of this great passage is exactly that which the apostle intended. The Judaizers were trying to lead these Gentile Christians under the law in search of "something more" in the Christian life. They were promising entrance into the inner circle through circumcision and other Jewish rites. The truth is that all that we could ever need or desire is fully provided by a gracious God through the sending of His Son and His Spirit. Receive by faith what God has already provided, and rejoice in its fulness day by day.

Someone is here who aspires to be in the family of God. You have been seeking it, only to have it elude you. The message of this text was stated by another, "But to as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." Receive the Son by faith, and you will be adopted at once into God's family.