

# “How the Gospel Changes Us”

*Galatians 4:1-11*

A few weeks ago we watched one of the Shoe Box testimonies of a young boy named Kevin. Kevin’s family had little money and couldn’t afford to buy him a lunch like the other kids did at school. So Kevin would steal money one day and buy his lunch the next day. One day Samaritan’s Purse came to his village and he received a Shoe Box. He was very excited of course. His parents examined the box to make sure it wasn’t a trick or something that could hurt him. They realized it was all good.

Kevin was then invited to church to learn about Jesus through The Greatest Adventure discipleship program where he accepted Christ. His father later said ‘From the moment he accepted Christ, Kevin changed.’ He stopped stealing and became a better child (all of 7 years old). Dad and mom saw the change in him, came to church and accepted Christ too. Later dad gave the church some of his land so they could build a building on it.

That all began with a Shoebox that maybe one of us packed. The gospel is always presented with the Shoe box distributions and on average one out of 10 children accept Christ through Operation Christmas Child. That means a lot of Kevins out there (and Kevin’s parents – that’s a statistic that’s hard to track) whose lives changed for the better and improved their community.

Here in Galatians 4:1-11 Paul continues to preach against the dangers for Jewish legalism mixed in with the gospel. Here he continues to show how the gospel changes a person’s life for their own betterment as well as society’s. Ch. 4:1 is not a new section. Sometimes the chapter and verse divisions break up a thought process when they shouldn’t. In 3:23 he began using the analogy of the Roman system of child-rearing. A child was reared by a tutor until the father declared he was an adult. The tutor was a strict disciplinarian that carried around a rod that would be used every time the child disobeyed. The Law functioned like that. A necessary tutor that showed you, you were incapable of keeping all the laws, until the time when Christ arrived.

He continues this analogy by giving more details on child rearing, this time comparing a natural son with a slave in the family.

*What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. <sup>2</sup> He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. <sup>3</sup> So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.*

Under Roman law a natural born son had no rights until he was ‘of age’. Normally that was around 14 but it was totally up to the Father to set the time. At that time they would have a ceremony called *liberalia* where the son would officially remove his *prætexta* (childhood toga) and put on a *virilis* (adult toga). At that time the son would be declared a full son with all its rights and privileges. However, if a Roman wanted to adopt a slave as his son, the slave would have the same rights as a natural son, full heirship and entitlement to be called son.

So Paul continues using this analogy to remind the Galatians of the gospel essentials. First he reminds them of

**The Need: To be Free from the Slavery of Sin**

## (4:1-3)

When a Roman was first born, they were not officially sons yet. They were on the same level as a slave. So the child officially was not declared as a son until this ceremony.

Interestingly, it's a great illustration from Roman custom that reminds us,

### **Everyone begins separated from God (v.1)**

Just as a child was not an official son until the father said so but under guardians and trustees, likewise every person born is not a member of God's family until the time set by the Father. Yes, we need to accept Christ but God is sovereignly guiding us toward that decision. When Peter declared Jesus was the Messiah in Matt. 16:16 Jesus said,

*<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."*

In Eph. 2:8-9 Paul stated,

*<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*

It's an interesting cultural illustration that teaches us that everyone begins the same way; in need of God. And, also the illustration points out that everyone is

### **'Trained' to follow the world (vv.2-3)**

Paul points out that the child was raised by guardians and trustees. The guardian or tutor was the teacher and disciplinarian. The trustee was one who looked after the things that would belong to the child. Paul uses this to say,

*<sup>3</sup> So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.*

Young children were no different than slaves. They were told what to do by others who taught them how the world works. The 'basic principles' refer to 'A, B, C's' of the world; the basic ways the world functions. How does the world function? By a works/rewards system. Work hard you get paid for it. A cause and effect system. You do well in school, you can get a good job. You treat people right, they will treat you right. The ways of the world are you look after yourself. You work for what you want. You're rewarded for your efforts.

This is how the Judaizers re-introduced the Law. You obey the Laws of God, God will be happy. God will bless you. God will let you into His presence. Paul says 'this is slavery!' You could never keep the Law completely. It was your tutor/disciplinarian that showed you where you failed repeatedly. You can't earn God's favour. So, what's ...

## **The Solution: A Payment for Sin Must be Made (4:4-5)**

See how Paul uses the Roman child=rearing analogy. The son is the same as a slave until the time set by his father. Paul says the Law reminded you that you were its slave until the time set by the Father to free you from that so he sent His Son. Notice the solution was

## **Initiated by God (v.4a)**

We can't get to God on our own so God came down to us, and His Son Jesus became one of us. Paul put it this way in Titus 3

*<sup>3</sup> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

We were in slavery because of sin. 'But when the kindness and love of God appeared'. Again, God initiated the sending of Jesus. Is. 53:10 even says,

*Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.*

God initiated the

## **The sacrifice of Jesus (v.4b-5a)**

"When the fullness of time" means when all things were completed that needed to be done in order for the Son to come. And there are many things that were in place:

- Caesar Augustus would be in power and he 'just happened' to issue a decree to force people to return to their home towns
- The Romans 'just happened' to have used crucifixion to punish criminals
- It 'just happened' to be getting to the end of the 49 periods of 7 years predicted by Daniel for when the Messiah would come
- Roman ingenuity and peace 'just happened' to make travel much easier than it was before for Jesus and later the apostles to take the gospel on the road
- Born under the Law. The Jews were still following the Law. The temple still stood.
- Born of a woman only. Virgin birth.

*<sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

God came at the right time to solve the sin problem in sending Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice for sins in order

## **To adopt us into His family(v.5b)**

Like the Roman father who sets the time for his son's adoption and establishing his right to an inheritance so the reason God sent Jesus was so that He might pay back (redeem) the price demanded by sin and adopt us as His children; with the inheritance of eternal life. This is the point of the cross; to bring sinful people like us into a relationship with God. We need to be adopted because we were never part of God's family. That's why Jesus called it being 'born again', a new birth into a new family; one large family of God where Paul said there is no class distinctions between Jew, Greek, male, female, slave or free citizen.

So how can we tell this family apart from those who are not part of God's family? This is what frustrated Paul so much. The Judaizers had convinced some of these Jews that God grades by Jew first and the rest second. That's why they were persuading people to live like Jews and follow the Law and Jewish customs. And this is where many Jewish people got it wrong. They thought by practicing these laws and customs was the evidence that they were part of God's family. Paul says in vv.6-9, here's ...

## **The Evidence: A Life Lived in Service to Christ (4:6-9)**

*<sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

*<sup>8</sup> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? <sup>10</sup> You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup> I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

What kind of evidence is there that we are now part of God's adopted family?

### **The Spirit's presence (v.6a)**

God sent the Spirit (just once) into our hearts and sealed us with a guaranteed inheritance when we heard and believed in the gospel (Eph. 1:13-14). His presence means we have God's power that now enables us to live like we're God's children. God's children show God is their Father by resembling Him; by thinking like Him (which we find out in His words that He speaks to us) and obeying Him. Treat people as He would. Forgive people as He would. Meet people's needs as He would. The Spirit speaks to our heart about how and when to do these things. Before we knew God we may have tried on our own to do some of these things but usually to impress people with how nice we are. Now we do it because that's what God expects and His Spirit prompts us to act like God. We never had those promptings before because we only responded to our selfish sin nature since we didn't have the Spirit yet.

What other evidence is there that people know we are now part of God's family? We have

### **A love for God (v.6b-7)**

That was never there before. We cry out 'Abba Father'. This is an affectionate term, daddy. 'Cry out' is usually a loud cry, sometimes even used to describe a scream. At the very least it indicates we are vocal about God. We talk about the things we enjoy. Do we talk about God? We're not ashamed when we see our fathers and say out loud 'Hey dad' are we? This is cry is a vocal, unashamed public indication that God is your Father and that you love Him. But the focus of these Jewish legalists were laws and traditions and customs, not so much on God. Although they would say that was there way of showing there love for God.

Other evidence? The more we physically grow the more it becomes apparent whose children we look and sound like. So Paul says evidence that we are God's children will be seen in ...

### **A maturing life (vv.8-10)**

V. 8 begins 'formerly' and v.9 contrasts that with; 'but now'. Before we knew God we followed other gods. We didn't think we did but actually we did. 'gods' are whatever we put first in our life. Ultimately we pursued the god of self. Whatever it was we put first. Our career, our looks, our smarts, our skills, money, things, etc. Formerly, that was the focus of our life.

'But now' ... Paul doesn't say they were following God. What frustrates him is that these Galatians had accepted Christ, had changed, and had begun the maturing process of becoming more like God's children. But then these Judaizers twisted their minds and got them perusing the Law again. This is not maturing. They were going back to the weak and miserable principles – the Law – that could never save you. It showed you couldn't save yourself; that you were under its curse. Why go back there? Why are you acting so immaturely? These Jews had convinced them that to please God you had to observe the Sabbath days and the monthly new moon festivals, and the yearly holy days like Passover and Tabernacles, etc. And even the feasts held every few years like the Sabbath year where you let your land go fallow and the Jubilee where you forgave everyone their debts (supposedly). Not that these were bad but they were observing them because they thought that pleased God; the act of doing it regardless of the heart. There's all kinds of verses in the Old Testament where God says rend your hearts not your garments. Or circumcise your hearts! Or you honour Me with your lips but not your hearts.

Spiritual maturity means over time we begin to look and act more like our Father and His Son Jesus and we do away with immature presuppositions and behavioural responses. And one more sign we are one of God's children; we show ...

## **A willingness to work hard for God (v.11)**

When Paul says in v.11

*<sup>11</sup> I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

He is talking about himself and not them. But, here's the thing. Paul – like you and I – was saved by grace but he did not use grace as an excuse not to serve God with all he had. The word for 'efforts' or 'laboured' (depending on your translation) means to work until exhaustion. Paul was committed to God and to loving people to reach them for Christ and to help disciples grow in Christ.

Serving God to the point of exhaustion is not really commendable and not very healthy. But we understand his passion and if we're honest we probably don't 'work' very hard at serving God or people. Paul uses the metaphor of a 'body' for the church in 1 Cor. 12. Every part is necessary and needed. There isn't a church out there that isn't imbalanced in the area of servers and serving, with some doing more than their fair share and others not doing much. And this would be the perfect spot for the pastor to shamelessly make his people feel guilty – which isn't right nor does it usually work. I don't want you to serve God out of guilt; I want you to serve God out of love. Love for Him and love for people. Those are the two greatest commandments. Our manner of service is often a reflection of our spiritual maturity, of how much we love God and love people. We always have needs here. The greatest needs of service relate to our children; teachers and nursery workers. Who of us doesn't love children? Most of us were children at one time and we remember the adults that made an impact on our life even today.

Paul's frustration with some of these Galatians falling for bad teaching is clearly seen here again. This time he appealed to them based on spiritual logic. You used to be slaves to sin – as we all were. You heard how God sent Jesus to pay the price for your sin and you asked forgiveness and accepted Him as your Saviour. The Spirit of God came into your life and you began to grow and serve Him by grace. So why in God's gracious Name would you go back to slavery, trying to keep all those laws? Does that even sound logical? No! So smarten up!

And that sounds like a simple solution, but when we're surrounded by a works/reward environment at work, education and entertainment, it sneaks into our thought processes. So let's resist the Satanic lies of how God approves of us based on our efforts and do what Paul says in 2 Cor. 10:3

*<sup>3</sup> For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. <sup>4</sup> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

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