

Heirs of the Promise

Gal 3:26-4:7

SS Lesson for 02/05/2017

Devotional Scripture: Rom 8:14-17

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews what the promise does for us as contemporary believers who are **Heirs of the Promise**. The **study's aim** is to learn to align our thinking with God's revealed promise, which will help us spiritually and mentally. The **study's application** is to understand and appreciate what God has done for us by including us in this promise.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Gal 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Paul's vindication of the doctrine of justification by faith reached a climax in this section as he contrasted the position of a justified sinner with what he had been under the Law. Three changes are noted.

3:26-27. First, **all** who believe in **Christ** become **sons of God**. The change in person from the first to the second (**you**) indicates that Paul turned from looking at Israel as a nation to address the Galatian believers. Under the dispensation of Law, as seen in verse 24, the Law was a discipling pedagogue, and those under its supervision were regarded as children. However, now that Christ had come, the Galatian believers were adult sons **through faith** and were no longer under a Jewish slave-guardian. Why should they seek to revert to their inferior status? The exalted position of "sons of God" is explained in verse 27 to involve a living union with Christ brought about by being **baptized into Christ**. This is the baptism of (or in) the Holy Spirit, which according to Paul (1 Cor. 12:12-13) joins all believers to Christ and unites them within the church, Christ's body. This union with Him means being **clothed with Christ**. In the Roman society when a youth came of age he was given a special toga which admitted him to the full rights of the family and state and indicated he was a grown-up son. So the Galatian believers had laid aside the old garments of the Law and had put on Christ's robe of righteousness which grants full acceptance before God. Who would want to don again the old clothing?

3:28. Second, believers **are all one in Christ Jesus**. Since all believers became one with each other, human distinctions lose their significance. None is spiritually superior over another, that is, a believing Jew is not more privileged before God than a believing Gentile (**Greek**, in contrast to **Jew**, suggests all Gentiles; cf. Col. 3:11); a believing **slave** does not rank higher than a believing **free** person; a believing man is not superior to a believing woman. Some Jewish men prayed, "I thank God that Thou hast not made me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." Paul cut across these distinctions and stated that they do not exist in the body of Christ so far as spiritual privilege and position are concerned. Elsewhere, while affirming the coequality of man and woman in Christ, Paul did nonetheless make it clear that there is a headship of the man over the woman (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3) and that there are distinctions in the area of spiritual service (cf. 1 Tim. 2:12).

3:29. Third, believers in Christ **are Abraham's seed**. As Paul previously stated, **Christ** is *the Seed* of Abraham (vv. 16, 19); therefore being in Christ makes a believer a part of that seed and an **heir of the promise** to Abraham. Any discussion of the seed of Abraham must first take into account his natural seed, the descendants of Jacob in the 12 tribes. Within this natural seed there is a believing remnant of Jews who will one day inherit the Abrahamic promises directed specifically to them (cf. Rom. 9:6, 8). But there is also the spiritual seed of Abraham who are not Jews. These are the Gentiles who believe and become Abraham's spiritual seed. They inherit the promise of justification by faith as Paul explained earlier (cf. Gal. 3:6-9). To suggest, as amillenarians do, that Gentile believers inherit the national promises given to the believing Jewish remnant—that the church thus supplants Israel or is the "new Israel"—is to read into these verses what is not there.

4:1-2. To illustrate the spiritual immaturity of those who lived under the Mosaic Law, Paul reminded the Galatian believers of certain characteristics of an **heir** as a minor **child** (*nēpios*, "infant, young child"; in contrast with *huios*, "son," in 3:7, 26). Though by birthright **he** owned **the whole estate**, nevertheless he was kept in subservience like a **slave** in that he enjoyed no freedom and could make no decisions. In fact the heir as a child was under **guardians** (*epitropous*, different from the *paidagōgos* in 3:24-25) who watched over his person, **and trustees** who protected his estate. This was true until he came of age as a son, an age that varied in the Jewish, Grecian, and Roman societies. Under Roman law the age of maturity for a

child was **set by his father** and involved a ceremonial donning of the *toga virilis* and his formal acknowledgement as son and heir.

4:3. Paul applied the illustration in order to show the contrast between the believers' former position and what they now enjoyed. Formerly, in their state of spiritual immaturity (**when we were children**, *nēpioi*), they were like slaves. The scope of that **slavery** was described as being **under the basic principles** (*stoicheia*, "elements") **of the world**. Though often interpreted as a reference to the Mosaic Law, this view does not fit the Galatians, most of whom were Gentile pagans before conversion and were never under the Law. It seems better to understand the "basic principles" to refer to the elementary stages of religious experience, whether of Jews under the Law or Gentiles in bondage to heathen religions (cf. "weak and miserable principles" in v. 9, and "basic principles of this world" in Col. 2:20) Thus all were enslaved until Christ emancipated them.

4:4. But... God marks the fact that divine intervention brought hope and freedom to mankind. As a human father chose the time for his child to become an adult son, so the heavenly Father chose **the time** for the coming of Christ to make provision for people's transition from bondage under Law to spiritual sonship. This "time" was when the Roman civilization had brought peace and a road system which facilitated travel; when the Grecian civilization provided a language which was adopted as the *lingua franca* of the empire; when the Jews had proclaimed monotheism and the messianic hope in the synagogues of the Mediterranean world. It was then that God **sent His Son**, the preexistent One, out of heaven and to earth on a mission. The "Son" was not only Deity; He was also humanity as the expression **born of a woman** indicates. The exclusive reference to His mother harmonizes with the doctrine of the virgin birth as taught in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 1:18). Further, Christ was **born under Law** as a Jew. He kept the Law perfectly, fulfilled it (cf. Matt. 5:17), and finally paid its curse (cf. Gal. 3:13).

4:5. The reasons "God sent His Son" are twofold (again both reasons are introduced by *hina*, "in order that"; cf. 3:14). First, He came **to redeem** (*exagorasē*) **those under Law**. This is not a redemption from the curse of the Law (as in 3:13), but from a slavery to the entire Mosaic system. The emphasis is not on the penalty of the Law as in 3:13, but on its bondage. Since Christ redeemed and set free those who were under the Law, why should Gentile converts now wish to be placed under it? Second, Christ's Incarnation and death secured for believers **the full rights of sons** ("the adoption of sons," KJV). All the enjoyments and privileges of a mature son in a family belong to those who have entered into the benefits of Christ's redemptive work.

4:6. God the Father not only "sent His Son"; He also sent **the Spirit**. Thus the full Trinity is involved in the work of salvation. The Holy Spirit is a gift of God to every believer because of sonship. No sons or daughters lack the Spirit. Further, He is present within each believer's heart to give evidence of that one's position in God's family. The Spirit moves the believer to pray to God, addressing Him as **Abba, Father** (cf. Rom. 8:15). The word "Abba" is the Aramaic word for "Father." It is the diminutive form used by small children in addressing their fathers. It is appropriate to see its similarity to the English word "Daddy." Used by Christ (cf. Mark 14:36), this familiar form indicates intimacy and trust as opposed to the formalism of legalism.

4:7. To conclude, Paul declared that the Galatians were **no longer** slaves, but were sons and heirs. The plural forms in verse 6 were replaced by the singular forms in verse 7 thus making the application to the reader direct and personal. In God's family, sonship carries with it heirship (cf. Rom. 8:17).

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator

As we contemplate the high calling of belonging by faith to the church of the Lord Jesus, we are led into a consideration of some very important concepts, such as inheritance. Inheritance is a rich truth in the Bible, going all the way back to the promise of worldwide blessing given through the patriarch Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). Believers in Jesus are heirs of this blessing. The book of Galatians explains that an heir is a son and will come into his inheritance in due time. A son or heir has a superior position to that of a slave or a servant. A believer in the Lord Jesus Christ becomes an heir of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. He is connected to God and to the church of Jesus Christ, having received the privilege of a rich family inheritance. Our text outlines the beautiful truth that our position as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ takes no notice of ordinary human distinctions. Three couplets are marked out for our understanding. The first couplet is racial (and perhaps religious). Among religious Jews of the first century, the sharpest possible distinction was maintained between themselves as the people of Israel and the other "nations" (Gentiles). Fellowship between religious Jews and Gentiles was not possible on any level. One group was "in" and the other groups were "out"—outside of the covenant of blessing, outside of God's grace, yes, out

as far as one can be out. But in Christ, no matter what religious or racial background one has, faith in Christ brings us into the same church, with the same salvation and the same inheritance. The former distinctions no longer count. The second distinction is class, which of course had powerful implications in the ancient world. There were large numbers in the slave class in the Roman world—estimates range from ten percent of the population to as high as sixty percent. Slaves were owned by masters and consigned to their lot in life. They had certain occupations and duties, but they could escape their predicament only in certain prescribed ways, which they did not control. The free class had all the power. One group had rights; the other group had no or very limited rights. But when the gospel was preached, slave and free received the same salvation and came into the same church. This is why we see so much teaching in the New Testament on the relationship between slave and free. It was a big deal for those two populations to mix in the same churches—and mix they did. Jesus Christ takes believers of all classes and makes them equal heirs of salvation. Finally, the distinction of gender was addressed. Both men and women are invited to drink equally of the mercies of Jesus. All who believe, whether male or female, are privileged to belong to Him as co-heirs. What wonderful unity all the heirs of salvation possess! Let us make sure we live it out. What love should be found in the church! So much of life is about unbiblical restrictions, preferences, obstacles, and prohibitions. The logic of grace destroys these common barriers within the church.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

We are not certain exactly when Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians. Research proposes dates as early as AD 48 or as late as AD 58. The arguments and the evidence are tedious to sort through, but a date of about AD 57 seems best. Despite uncertainty regarding when the letter was written, the general contours of why are quite clear: some individuals in the churches were teaching that Christians of Gentile heritage needed to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. Such converts could not belong to God's people until they did so. The reasoning for such a position was that Israel had always been distinct as the people of God. It was to Israel that God had revealed himself, given his law, and specified circumcision as the sign of his covenant (Genesis 17:7-14). So if God were making himself known through the gospel to the nations, then people from the nations who come to God in Christ should be circumcised. To this reasoning Paul had already answered no in text preceding that of today's lesson (Galatians 2:3, 11, 12). The numerous verses between that reaction and today's text serve to ramp up the intensity of Paul's line of thought. The preaching and acceptance of the gospel repairs the sin broken relationship between God and humans. As a happy side effect, the gospel also repairs human-to-human relationships. Both happen because of Christ and his work. Paul wrote to correct the wrong doctrine that the bond provided by Christ had to be accompanied by a certain kind of law-keeping.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Our Position in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:26-29)

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Brings us to Christ (26)

Bringing to Jesus as part of the fulfillment of the law (Matt 5:17-18)

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Bringing to Jesus so that Jesus can live in me (Gal 2:19-20)

19 For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Bringing to Jesus to find the true reality (Col 2:16-17)

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Bringing to Jesus so that there will be no condemnation (Rom 8:1-2)

8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Bringing to Jesus so that I can stand firm (2 Cor 1:21-22)

21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Bringing to Jesus to become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Baptizes us into Christ (27)

Baptized in Jesus and His death (Rom 6:3)

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Baptized in Jesus as part of God's unity (1 Cor 12:13)

13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Baptized in Jesus' name to become a disciple (Matt 28:19)

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Baptized in Jesus so as to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Baptized in Jesus so that I will be raised by Him (Col 2:10-12)

10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Baptized in Jesus to have a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21)

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Positions us one in Jesus (28)

One in Jesus through Jesus' prayed to God (John 17:22)

22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

One in Jesus through being on flock (John 10:16)

16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

One in Jesus through being gathered into one (John 11:52)

52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

One in Jesus through being one Church body (1 Cor 12:12)

12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

One in Jesus through Jesus being our peace (Eph 2:14-16)

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,

One in Jesus through one faith (Eph 4:4-6)

4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

Positions us heirs to the promise (29)

Heirs because of overcoming the world (Rev 21:7)

7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Heirs through faith (Rom 4:13)

13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

Heirs through the gospel (Eph 3:6)

6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7)

4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Heirs that have the oath of God (Heb 6:16-18)

16 Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

Escape from Enslavement to the World (Gal 4:1-3)

4:1 Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

Escape from being treated as a child (1-2)

Treated as a child because of being worldly (1 Cor 3:1-3)

1 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly — mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

Treated as a child because of thinking like a child (1 Cor 14:20)

20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

Treated as a child because of not allowing the Holy Spirit to interpret (1 Cor 2:14)

14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Treated as a child because of being foolish and not understanding God's will (Eph 5:17)

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Treated as a child because of not being able to bear more knowledge (John 16:12-13)

12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Escape from being under bondage (3)

Under bondage because of disobedience (Deut 28:45-48)

45 All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. 46 They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. 47 Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, 48 therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

Under bondage because of prideful leaders (Isa 39:1-7)

1 At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery. 2 Hezekiah received the envoys gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses — the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his entire armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. 3 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, "What did those men say, and where did they come from?" "From a distant land," Hezekiah replied. "They came to me from Babylon." 4 The prophet asked, "What did they see in your palace?" "They saw everything in my palace," Hezekiah said. "There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them." 5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord Almighty: 6 The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. 7 And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

Under bondage because of sin (Jer 15:13-14)

13 Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without charge, because of all your sins throughout your country. 14 I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for my anger will kindle a fire that will burn against you."

Under bondage through own fault (Jer 17:4)

4 Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you. I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for you have kindled my anger, and it will burn forever."

Redemption through Jesus Christ (Gal 4:4-7)

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

Because Jesus was born under the law (4)

What it means to be born under the law (Barnes Notes)

As one of the human race, partaking of human nature, he was subject to the Law of God. As a man he was hounded by its requirements, and subject to its control. He took his place under the Law that he might accomplish an important purpose for those who were under it. He made himself subject to it that he might become one of them, and secure their redemption.

Born under the law to fulfill all righteousness (Matt 3:15)

15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

Jesus also grew up under the law (Luke 2:21-24)

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. 22 When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Born under the law to fulfill God's prophecy (Gen 3:15)

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Born under the law to satisfy the sign of the Messiah (Isa 7:14)

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Redeemed from the law through Jesus (5)

Jesus came into the world to redeem His people (Luke 1:68)

68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.

Jesus redeemed me from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13)

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

I have redemption through Jesus' blood (Eph 1:7)

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Redemption resulting in the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:13-14)

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Redemption from all wickedness (Titus 2:14)

14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Jesus' redemption is eternal (Heb 9:12)

12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Jesus is the redemption of the saints (1 Cor 1:30)

30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Redeemed through the Holy Spirit's indwelling (6)

The Holy Spirit gives life through His indwelling (Rom 8:9-11)

9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Indwelling because of being the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16)

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

Indwelling that is the good deposit guaranteeing salvation (2 Tim 1:14)

14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you-guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Indwelling because of loving God and Jesus (John 14:23)

23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Redeemed by being an heir through Jesus (7)

Heir because of overcoming the world (Rev 21:7)

7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Heir through faith (Rom 4:13)

13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

Heir through the gospel (Eph 3:6)

6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7)

4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 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, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Heirs that have the oath of God (Heb 6:16-18)

17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

From Servitude to Sonship (4:1-5)

In chapter 3 Paul has established, on biblical and theological grounds, the superiority of grace over law, of receiving the blessings of God through faith as opposed to the curse which comes through the works of the Law. He now seeks to illustrate and apply this truth by turning to a well-known practice in the ancient world, that of an heir coming of age, so as to enjoy all that he has legally possessed, but which has been beyond his personal control.

Here Paul refers to a Roman legal process, well known to himself and his readers. According to Roman law, the heir was under the control of a **tutor** until the age of 14. This tutor was named by the father and placed in his will. From the age of 14 until the heir was 25, he was under a **curator**, at least sometimes named by the father. The **tutor** and the **curator** were not necessarily intended to be synonymous with Paul's "guardians" and "managers" (4:2). It may be that the "guardian" was in charge of the child, while the "manager" was in control of the assets of the child. When the heir reached the age of 25 (or the age stipulated by the father), he then entered into the full privileges of his possession. Until that time, the heir was in the frustrating predicament of legally owning his father's inheritance without actually enjoying its possession.

Our legal system places an estate in the hands of a trustee until the child reaches legal age, with a certain amount of funds provided during childhood as established by the father. We can hardly imagine the confinement of the "heir" of Paul's day who had someone to tell him what to do and not to do and another to spend his money for him. The closest we might come to this is with the Federal Government. The IRS takes a certain amount of money from us as a reserve fund against projected taxes, even when we may get much or all of it back. Until the government decides to give us our money, it is theirs to control.

The restrictions on the heir of ancient times were far greater. Can you imagine what it must have been like for a young man to be, as it were, a millionaire, and yet not be able to do as he wanted with this money? For all intents and purposes, the heir was no different from the slave, for he received only what the "guardians" and "managers" determined to give him (4:1).

In verses 3-5, Paul makes the analogy to the status of the Jews who lived under the Law. The "heir" under Roman law had legal ownership of his father's wealth; he did not actually possess it or enjoy it. So too the Jews had the promises of God to Abraham, yet they were not yet realized or enjoyed. Just as the Roman "heir" was under the dictates of the appointed "tutor" and "curator," the Israelite was under the Law, with all of its restrictions and mediators. The time for both preparatory periods to end was established by the father. For the "heir," it was the age determined by the Roman law or specified by the father. For the believer, the Law's tutelage ended at the appointed time when the Father determined for the Son to be sent to the earth to redeem fallen man.

The expression "elemental things of the world" in verse 3 has been the source of considerable discussion. Bruce comments:

"The word *stoicheia* means primarily things placed side by side in a row; it is used of the letters of the alphabet, the ABCs, and then, because the learning of the ABCs is the first lesson in a literary education, it comes to mean 'rudiments,' 'first principles' (as in Heb. 5:12)."

I do not see the term as it is used here to have a highly technical meaning as some have suggested. Paul is trying to show the benefits of maturity, as opposed to the restrictions of immaturity. Those principles under which a child is restrained and governed are appropriately labeled "elementary." These "elementary principles," these ABCs, have been put aside, thankfully, and replaced by something far better.

Paul seems to speak specifically here of the Jews as implied by the term "we" in verse 3, which is paralleled in verse 5 by "those under the Law." Christ was sent to the earth as one "born of a woman" (4:4). This was necessary to fulfill the promise of Genesis 3:15, and also was a necessary part of the incarnation, so that Christ could die for man as man. In addition, Christ was born "under the Law" (4:4) so that He was able to bear the curse of the Law to enable men to receive the blessings which God promised to Abraham's offspring (2:13-14). The "adoption as sons" (4:5) is that enjoyment of the promises of God to Abraham, and the passing from the restrictions and confinement of the Law to the fullness and freedom of grace.

Paul has previously taught that sonship has not only come to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. While the particulars are not identical, the process of the Gentiles coming to faith is similar to that of the Jews, and thus

similar to the analogy of the “heir” under Roman law which Paul has given in verses 1 and 2. In verses 6-11 Paul compares the sonship of the Gentiles to that of the Jews, stressing the foolishness of seeking to place themselves under the Law as the Judaizers urged.

In verse 6 Paul broadens his reference to the benefits of sonship which belong to the Gentile Galatian Christians. The “you” (4:6) refers specifically to the Galatians just as the “we” (4:3,5) referred to the Jews. The evidence of sonship is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which causes us to respond and relate to God as Father. This ministry of the Spirit was not present under the Law in the Old Testament.

Since the Galatian Christians possessed the Holy Spirit (cf. 3:1-5), the spirit of adoption (4:6; Rom. 8:15-17), they were just as certain of their sonship as the Jewish saints. Since they were sons, they could no longer be slaves. Better still, they were also “heirs” of the promises to Abraham (4:7).

While the Jews were no better than slaves under the economy of the Law (4:1), the Gentiles were truly slaves, in bondage to elementary principles. These elementary principles were somehow related to the false idol worship of “no gods” (4:8; cf. 1 Cor. 12:2; Eph. 2:1-3). How foolish it would be for them to turn back to the “elemental things,” which Paul here calls “weak” and “worthless” (4:9).

The relationship between the “elemental things” of verse 9 and those of verse 3 is perplexing to biblical scholars. Yet, while the particulars are not certain, the point is clear. Both the Jews and the Gentiles have in the past lived under “elemental things.” It would be foolish for either Jews or Gentiles to leave the better things of Christ to return to the “elemental things” of their past. I believe that Paul is seeking to convince the Galatians that since it would be foolish for a Jew to return to the “elemental things” of the Law, it would be even more foolish for a Gentile to seek to be under the Law. Both, in Christ, have come to possess something far better—forgiveness and freedom, obtained by grace through faith, and not by law-works. For the Gentile to seek the “elemental things” of the Jew is as foolish as returning to the “elemental things” of their pagan, idolatrous past.

Those things to which the Galatians returned were not the “elementary things” of their own past, but rather those of the Jewish past. In verse 10 Paul cites the celebration of certain holy days, months, seasons, and years as evidence of their turning back to the inferior things of the past. We see a very similar description in the second chapter of Colossians. One characteristic of the Law was that it distinguished nearly everything. It distinguished what was sacred from what was secular, what was holy from what was defiled, what was clean from what was unclean. In the mind of the Judaizer, it separated the Jew from the Gentile in such a way as to make the Jew superior to the Gentile. In the final analysis, the Judaizer saw the Law as superior to grace and the Mosaic Covenant as better than the cross of Christ. To Paul, all these arbitrary distinctions were overshadowed by one great distinction, the “elementary things” of the past and the “better things” accomplished through Christ. Paul’s work was in vain (4:11) if the Galatians failed to realize the superiority of Christ over the Law.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/inferiority-immaturity-galatians-41-11>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Jewish Christians of the first century were accustomed to seeing themselves as insiders and Gentiles as outsiders. But the gospel teaches something different: neither group could claim the better status. Both had their deficiencies, deficiencies canceled by Christ. Everyone was to be welcomed into God’s family not by markers of past identity, but by faith in Christ as they put on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:26, 27). None of this has changed. We dare not think of ourselves as insiders because of economic status, etc. As we understand one another in our differences, let us remember how we came to God’s people: not by our own doing, but by Christ’s.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. As children in the family of God, we must not go our own way. We need to love the members of God’s family (Gal. 3:26)
2. Let Christ be the garment you wear with pride (vs. 27)
3. Christ brings unity to His body. Jews and Gentiles alike are one in Him (vss. 28-29)
4. Just as a child in a family outgrows his tutors, so grace brings about spiritual maturity (4:1-3)
5. God operates on His own timetable. What may appear as a random event is part of His plan (Gal. 4:4-5; cf. Jas. 1:17)
6. As part of God’s family, we have the privileges of sons and heirs (Gal. 4:6-7)