

# *Studies in Galatians*

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Chapter 3:23 – 4:11

John Newton lost his mother at seven. He first went to sea at the age of eleven and later became involved in the African slave trade. By his own testimony he plumbed the depths of human depravity. At twenty-three the ship he was steering was foundering in a horrific storm. He cried out to God for mercy and received it. The experience never left Mr. Newton and he was truly converted. He became a minister of the gospel and later penned the hymn “Amazing Grace”. Throughout his years of ministry and fame, he never forgot how far he had come and who it was who had brought him. He prepared a plaque that hung over the fireplace in the study where he would retire to prepare for Sunday services and mid-week meetings. It proclaimed in large letters that combined two Scriptures, one from Isaiah 43, the other from Deuteronomy 15:

You are precious in my eyes, and honored, but you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you.

The way to live the Christian life is to remember who we were and what we have become in Christ. John Stott said the passage we will be studying this morning can be summed in two simple sentences:

Once you were slaves, now you are sons. So how can you revert to your old slavery?

We ended last week in the middle of Paul’s thoughts. He had pointed out that the law was not given to provide life but rather to reveal sin and to point us to the cross for salvation. We ended the passage at an unnatural point because of time constraints. It was not a breakpoint in Paul’s thoughts, rather a turning point. He had described our condition under the law and now turns the corner beginning in verse 24.

Read Galatians 3:24 – 4:11

The English Version standard begins this passage with the conjunction “So then”. I can imagine Paul here pausing almost as if to let the Galatians catch their breath before he pushes forward.

Galatians 3:24-27

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Paul is making a simple point to his audience which is difficult for us to grasp because of cultural differences and deficiencies in our abilities to translate his words adequately.

He compares our state under the law to that of children. He uses a metaphor familiar to the people of that time.

When he says “the law was our guardian” he uses a Greek word which described a person we would call a “strict governess”. A person who conducted children to and from school and was responsible to insure they behaved themselves as they were tutored. His point is simply that while under the law we are like children who need to learn to obey.

As the father of three almost grown boys, I can see Paul’s case clearly now. When my boys were young I controlled their actions. I expressed my will to them as their father – I defined acceptable behavior for them. I told them what to do and what not to do and I warned them of the penalties of disobedience. Sometimes I disciplined them for their transgressions. Now that they are men, they make their own decisions. Hopefully, they become productive citizens of society because of the training they received at my hand. I taught them that actions have consequences. But I disciplined them with a heart that above all loved them

In Greek society this role was undertaken by the person known as the “pedagogue”. Usually an older slave who could no longer perform more rigorous duties, the pedagogue was to train the child in acceptable behavior patterns and was held responsible if the child did not learn the rules of polite society. They often ruled the child by instilling fear in them. Ancient drawings usually show these guardians with a rod or cane in their hand and many were harsh almost to the point of cruelty.

Paul metaphor has two points. Without the law we were like undisciplined children. God gave us the law as a guardian over our behavior and to instruct us as to how to behave and to inform us of the consequences of disobedience. The law was harsh and we soon learned that no one could comply with it. It was this certain knowledge that drove us to the cross. All of this is contained in verse 24:

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

Paul makes the transition in verses 25-27:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

But now faith has come. We are no longer children who need a governess. In verse 26 where Paul says we are all sons of God, the word son in the Greek normally is used to describe adult or grown children. The image of putting on Christ pictures a boy who has become a man and has shed his children’s clothes for those of an adult.

Paul says we are baptized into Christ to point out that it was not ourselves who brought us to adulthood.

1 Corinthians 12:13

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit active in our lives who draws us to the Savior. It is not based on our merit and has nothing to do with who we are. God saves both Jews and Gentiles, slaves and freemen and in Galatians he extends this to men and women.

## Galatians 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.

All distinctions between us were leveled at the cross because its all of Him.

## Galatians 3:29

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Faith causes us to put on Christ and become sons of God.  
Being a son of God makes us a member of Abraham's seed because Jesus was.  
We, then become heirs of the promise.

## Galatians 3:7

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

Beginning in 4:1 and continuing through 4:5a he makes the same argument in a different way. Read.

Last half of verse 5 talks of adoption. He makes the marvelous point to the Galatians that God not only redeemed them but he adopted them as children of his very own family. (review the adoption process in Roman times).

He points out to them that God has adopted them and he questions why they want to return to their past.

Newton's tombstone reads, "John Newton, Clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy." But a far greater testimony outlives Newton in the most famous of the hundreds of hymns he wrote:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me,  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.  
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.  
Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come.  
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

John Newton came to a saving faith and took pains to insure he never looked back.  
Paul calls us to do the same.

