

Galatians 4:4-7 (NIV)

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

You Are No Longer A Slave, But God’s Child

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1 (NIV)

Dear sons and daughters of the King,

There’s an old legend about Alexander the Great. I don’t know if this is true or not, but the legend has it that he had a great general, who came to him when one of the general’s daughters wanted to get married. He needed a large sum of money to pay for the wedding, to pay the bride price, if that was the case. And so he asked Alexander for an astronomical sum of money—more money than anybody would reasonably ask. And according to the legend, Alexander smiled from ear to ear and beamed with pride and said, “Absolutely! Whatever you need.” Now part of the reason Alexander gave him the money was because he was a good general, but the people all around were astonished. “Why would you be so happy to give up a big chunk of your money?” And this is what he said: “This man has paid me a high compliment today. He believes I am very wealthy and I am incredibly generous.”

Now compare that story to one that Jesus told. It’s maybe Jesus’ most famous story, the story of the Prodigal Son. That’s the one where the son of the father goes away and squanders all his wealth on terrible decisions and wild living. He hits rock bottom and his stomach is empty so he comes to his senses and he says, “Hold on. Even my father’s slaves have more to

eat than I do.” So he prepares a little speech and rehearses it on his walk home and when he gets home he’s going to make a deal with his dad, not the way a son would talk to his father. He’s going to make a deal with his dad, not to have his sins forgiven but saying, “Dad, you fill up my belly and I’ll earn your love and I’ll earn my keep. I’ll be one of your slaves.” It’s a terrible insult to the father! The son doesn’t think the dad is wealthy or generous. That is relating to the father not like a son but like a slave. The punchline of Jesus’ story, the happy ending, is that before the son can even get the words out of his mouth, the father is already preparing a feast for him and falling on his neck with kisses and kisses and giving and giving and giving—not the way a master gives to a slave, not the way a CEO gives to an employee, but the way a father gives to a son.

So the question for you: Are you relating to God like son or like a slave? I mean, are you going to God like that prodigal son, looking to make a deal? Like a boss and employee relationship where you say, “God I’ve been extra patient with my family this Christmastime and I’m sure I’ll get some extra credit for that.” “God, I’ve been in church three times this week, and extra during advent, so I’m sure you’re going to be ready to give me some overtime blessings.” Or you go to God with that mindset about your wrong behavior, and you say, “Lord I know that I’ve messed up, but I’ll make it up to you.” Or, “I know I put my happiness ahead of others’ this week, but I’ll make it up to them. I’ll fix it myself, if you’ll just bless me, Lord.” See, that’s relating to God like a slave, not like a son, and we all do it.

Ancient Christians did it. The Christians in Galatia, that’s where modern-day Turkey is, in Galatia, they did not relate to God like his children because those people were a lot of new Christians. Those who had come out of Judaism related to God the way they had grown up. They didn’t think they needed to please God by keeping ten commandments. They thought they needed to please God by keeping the six hundred plus commandments that God had written in the Old Testament. Another chunk of the congregation wasn’t Jewish in nature, they were Greek or Roman pagans. They had been indoctrinated by their culture to think, “I need to relate to gods by offering enough sacrifices, enough incense,

enough prayers so that he loves me so that he takes care of me. God wanted to set their hearts straight, and he wants to set our hearts straight so that we think of God like our Father and not like our boss. So God gave them a letter through the pen of the Apostle Paul. In this letter to the Galatians, we learn this:

You Are No Longer A Slave, But God's Child.

- 1. It's legal.**
- 2. It's lovely.**
- 3. It's lucrative.**

It's Legal.

First we see that your relationship with God as a son is a legal relationship.

Galatians 4:4-5

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

This is a legal transaction, whether you feel like a son or not. Whether you sense it or not, it's legally true. This is all about God's Christmas gift to you.

God gave a gift. It was not a wrapped up toy. It was a person. Who did God give? He gave his Son. Where did God give it? He gave it into the world. For what did God give his son? Here's the for what: To redeem those under the law. That means to buy them. The Greek word for "redeem" is related to the Greek word for "market place." If we ask, "For what reason did Jesus come into the world?" The answer is, "He was on a shopping trip. He was coming to buy you and me and all of us who are born under God's law.

The price to buy a person back in ancient Greece, in ancient Turkey, it was high to buy a slave. But God says the price for a human soul is infinite. He says, no one can redeem the life another. Nobody can pay that much. It's too costly. (Psalm 49:7-8) Unless you're Jesus. Jesus is no average man,

he's God's Son. That's God's gift to you, God's own Son. He is divine, which means he has infinite purchasing power.

Jesus who has infinite purchasing power gave up some of his glory, gave up some of his riches in heaven to come and be born of a woman. Which means, that he was able to live a perfect life *under the law*. If you're under the law you have to obey it. God in heaven would not have to be subject to any law, but Jesus put himself under the law. He did obey it perfectly for you and me. You see, Jesus had the ability to purchase us because he was God's Son and he had the right to purchase us because he was born of a woman, just like you and I.

What was the result? God sent his Son into the world to redeem us, to buy us. What was the result? **"That we might receive adoption to sonship."** (Galatians 4:5) We are God's sons legally. He adopted us.

Sometimes we like to view God's law not through the lens of adoption but like a paternity test. I mean, if a paternity test shows who's the father, so often we try to say, "If I look like God, then he is my good Father in heaven and I am his child." It would be like two lily-white people, blonde hair and blue eyes, they get married have a child and go into the delivery room and child comes out dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin. What is the dad in the delivery room going to be doing? Eyes wide as saucers all of the sudden, right? "What? This is not mine!" We take a view towards God's law that says that. We think, God's law is the paternity test that if we don't look like him he's going to get eye wide when he looks at you and say, "That's not mine!" It's a terrifying way to look at God's law because God says, **"Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy."** (Leviticus 9:2) If you're not, will God look at you and say, "That doesn't look like me. He's not mine."? God's law says, **"God is love."** (1 John 4:8) Therefore **"Love your neighbor,"** (Mark 12:31) like God does. Is God going to look at you and say, "You don't love people who don't deserve it. You're not mine." It's terrifying to think about God's law as a paternity test. But that's not what this passage teaches.

We don't prove ourselves worthy of God's love by how we resemble him. We were adopted by him legally, through the work of his Son, Jesus. When

Jesus came to this earth and lived under the law perfectly, he paid the price for us. When he died on the cross, he was purchasing us. When Jesus rose from the dead, he was the walking proof of purchase, the transaction went through. We are adopted legally through his work.

That's why so much of this first couple passages, verses four and five are cold hard facts. Whether you feel it or not, Jesus was born of a woman. Whether you feel it or not, Jesus redeemed you by his life and death. Whether you feel it or not, Jesus rose from the dead to guarantee your eternal inheritance. Therefore, Jesus adopted you.

Imagine this in a regular family. There's an adopted child, he wakes up one day and he's questioning whether or not he is truly a part of the family because he looks a little different, he feels a little different. So he goes to dad and says, "Dad, I'm not sure that I'm really your son." What's the dad going to do? He's not going to say, "Well, let's compare hair color. How much do you look like me? That will tell us if you're my son." No. That's not how it works. He's not a son by resemblance, he's a son by adoption. So the dad will pull out the adoption papers and say, "Look! This is a judge's signature on it. This is notarized. This means you are legally my son."

So when you wake up and you feel like you're not quite the child of God you ought to be, when you're afraid that you don't quite resemble the God you love, God's not going to say, "Well, let's compare. How's your behavior compared to mine? He's going to pull out the cold hard facts. Jesus died on the cross. Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus adopted you. You're my son," says the Father.

Whether you feel it or not, legally you are not a slave. You're a son. But that doesn't mean that you never feel it.

It's lovely.

Being a son of most high God is a lovely thing too, It's not just legal it's lovely. That's why it says this:

**“Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”
(Galatians 4:6)**

See God sent that first gift, Jesus into the world to redeem us so that we would be adopted as his sons. Now God sends another gift. Not his Son but his Spirit. Where? Not in the world but into our hearts. For what? Not to redeem us but to call out, to proclaim into your heart. The Spirit of God is calling into your heart so that you feel inside something that is an objective fact outside, that you are his Son. He sends his Spirit to call out only one thing ever, that through the work of Jesus God is your Father. So we cry out, “Abba, Father.” What’s the result of the gift of the Spirit into your heart, the faith you have in your heart? The result is that you have God as your Abba.

Abba is one of the simplest words in the ancient Hebrew and Aramaic languages. It’s probably a word that little kids could say. The point is, that we feel about God the way little kids feel about their Abba, their dad. You don’t have to convince a little kid to trust his dad. You don’t have to teach a child to love their father. They just do, they just trust that Dad is good. Back in Jesus day, those little kids who cried out, “Abba” they were setting an example for all of us, who can cry out to our Father, “Father.”

A young girl once illustrated that for me really well. She told me about a trip that she took with her dad to compete in a national competition. On the way there dad was listening to the radio. The girls got her headphones in, she’s on her phone. And they get there and she competes, and she does really well. She gets like third place out of hundreds of competitors from all over the nation. On the way out to the car after the competition the dad stops. He takes the girl in his arms, looks into her eyes and says, “Honey, I am so proud of you.” What a thing for that little girl to experience the love of her father! Such a moment that she came back and told me about it. She told me, “I don’t think my dad has ever loved me as much as he did that day.” Now you and I know, that legally, she was no more his daughter after the competition as she was before, when she was listening to her

headphones and on her phone. She was his daughter then. But she sure felt it in her heart a lot more when he stopped and called out to her, "I'm proud of you."

That is what the Spirit of God does for you and I. He takes this objective fact that is legally true and he puts it into your heart. He makes it true for you. He puts faith in your heart so that you trust your Abba and you know he's proud of you and you know he loves you.

God in heaven once made that pride very obvious on earth, when Jesus was baptized. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan river the heavens opened and a voice came from heaven saying, **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."** (Matthew 3:17) "This is my beloved Son, I love him! I am well pleased with him." Here's the beauty of your baptism: because you are connected to Jesus through in baptism, whatever God says about Jesus is true of you. You are God's beloved daughter, his son, with whom he is well pleased. It has nothing to do with how you've been behaving! It has everything to do with your connection to Jesus in baptism. He is well pleased with you. He has never been more proud of you than he is today. That's because he is your Abba, your Father. It is a lovely thing to be feeling like God's child.

That changes the way you interact with God. It can change the way you listen to God, when you trust him like your Father rather than like a slave. So God says this, he says all sorts of things to us in his Word. One of the things God says to us is to be chaste. So single people, he says, "Reserve sex for inside of marriage." Now why do you honor that? Is it because you are afraid that if you step out of line sexually he is going to chain you to a post and get out his cat o' nine tails and whip you to punish you? That is how some Christians live, like God is just going to hunt them down and punish them for every wrong they do. That's how a slave relates to a master. But why does a son listen to his father? The father is older and wiser and he knows a thing or two about the world, and the son would hate to break his dad's heart. That's why you and I listen to our Father. Because he's been around a while; he knows a thing or two, and we would

hate to break his heart. When you relate to God, this lovely relationship of Father, that he's proud of you, it changes the way you listen to him.

It changes the way you talk to him too. You don't go to God in prayer and say, "Lord, ugh, I hate to bother, but... um, I sure would appreciate, it would be nice, I can make I to you, if you would only just please, if it's not too much to ask..." No. That's the way a slave goes to a master. No you go to your God in prayer like a Father, like you are his beloved son, because you are! Here's what Jesus taught us to pray. He taught us to pray, **"Our Father, who art in heaven."** (Matthew 6:9). Martin Luther explained, what does that mean? "With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that he is our true Father and that we are his true children, so that we may pray to him as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father." God comes to us as a Father and we can go to him as his dear children. It's a lovely thing.

A friend taught me this little visualization to remember that. If ever you are having a panic moment about your relationship with God, you can picture what he looks like. There's God the Father, beaming at you. "This is my beloved child! I love him! I love her!" And there's Jesus holding up his hand with the nail mark, proving, "Yeah, because of me your Father is pleased." And there's the Holy Spirit. What is the Holy Spirit doing? He's pointing at Jesus, pointing at Jesus, saying, "This guy!" He is calling out to your heart that this love is for you, and that God is your Father and you are his beloved child.

It's lucrative.

It's legally true. You're God's child. It's a lovely thing. And it's a lucrative thing.

Here's the final verse as we close:

**So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.
(Galatians 4:7)**

You are an heir. A slave doesn't get an inheritance from his master, but a son does. An inheritance doesn't make you rich right now, but it is the promise of riches to come. You are not a slave, you are a son and you have eternal riches that will last forever, a feast forever coming in the glories of heaven. It doesn't solve all your problems right now, but it certainly does prove God's love for you.

Sometimes earthly sons get resentful of their earthly fathers because of the little things that they do that are annoying or weird. "Why are you still giving me advice, dad?" Or, "Why are you always telling me what to do, dad." Sometimes it's helpful for earthly sons and daughters to go back to the big acts of love that their parents have done. "Why are you doing that? That's so weird dad! *But, you did help me pay for my college tuition.*" "Why are you always telling me what to do, dad? *Then again, you do provide all I need and food and house and a warm bed.*"

It's the same with our Father in heaven. He has written you into his will. He has promised us an eternal inheritance. Sometimes you may scratch your head and say, "God why is this happening? Why is that happening? *Then again, he has made you and heir. He has given you eternal riches in heaven. He has made you his son.*"

The truth is, you come to God every day not as a slave but as a son. You come like that prodigal son, with dirt on your hands with wrongs in your past, and you come to him. Let's not come to our Father making a deal. Let's not say, "Lord we'll make it up to you. Master, we'll take care of our problems. Lord, we can do it, just let us be your slaves." No, no, no. Let's come to him as dear children come to their dear father. Because before you could ever get your rehearsed speech out of your mouth, your Father in heaven is already giving and giving and giving, falling on your neck in kisses and preparing a feast for you.

There is a legal, lovely, lucrative truth that changes everything. You are not a slave. You are God's child.

Amen.