

Introduction

Illustration: I once returned from a trip through four states and discovered that I had an active arrest warrant. I traveled to Missouri to see my family, returned to Arkansas to pick up a college friend, drove through Oklahoma on my way to Texas to visit Rebecca while she lived there.

A few months earlier, a college friend needed to rent some videos to watch for a class. She did not have an account anywhere and could not get one because her address was a college dorm. So, I volunteered for her to rent the videos on my account.

However, she did not return the videos and the store owner was well-known for filing charges against people (I guess for theft). She eventually returned the videos and paid the late fees, so the owner dropped the charges. I only found out about any of this because my friend accidentally mentioned one day about the arrest warrant.

In that conversation, I went from innocence to being a criminal, then to freedom. All of these things happened while I lived my normal life with no clue what was happening behind the scenes. I was oblivious.

Overview

[Galatians 4:1-7](#) describes a similar situation, but with one major difference. We are all slaves to sin and death; however, no one did this to us. I chose to sin and subject myself to the consequence of my sin - eternal death and separation from God. [Galatians 4:1-7](#) explains that **God has redeemed His people from sin and death.**

As we read these verses, pay attention to two important details. First, this passage teaches us about the Trinity - that the Triune God has redeemed us from sin and death. Second, redemption is completely a work of God. I contribute nothing.

Apart from Christ

Why do you need Jesus? The heart of Christian faith is that you need Jesus. But that begs the question, *why can't you work out your eternal state without Jesus?* Scripture teaches that **apart from Christ, you are a slave to sin.** You might argue - slaves have sometimes freed themselves; *why do I need Christ to be free?*

The heir is a slave

Verses 1-2 use an illustration from Greco-Roman culture. [Galatians 4:1-2](#) “1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.”

In the first-century Roman Empire, there was a variety of inheritance laws. For example, Roman law stated that if a father died, his son would be supervised by a guardian of the father's choice until the son turned fourteen. The guardian would oversee the child and the inheritance. After fourteen, the government would appoint someone to oversee the son and the inheritance.

Greek law, which was still practiced in many areas of the Roman Empire, was similar. The major distinction was that the father could establish the age at which the son could take control of the inheritance. It wasn't set by law; it was the father's discretion (e.g., in *P. Oxy*, a father stated that his sons would become heirs when they turned twenty years old).

The area of southern Galatia, which is the location to which Paul writes this letter, often followed Seleucid influence, which gave complete control to the father. The father could appoint the guardians **and** determine the age at which the son received the inheritance.

Although there was some variety throughout the Greco-Roman world, there was a consistent cultural pattern of delayed inheritance. During that time, the child owned nothing and was under the guardianship of an adult. These laws and customs were in place to protect the heir and the inheritance.

Notice that verse 2 says “until the date set by his father.” Everything about the inheritance was set by the father, not the son. The son owned everything ... but not yet. Until he reaches the age set by his father, he would remain under the authority of guardians and managers. In that regard, he is no different than a slave. One day, he will own everything, but right now he owns nothing. One day, he will be free to make his own decisions, but now submits to the guardians and managers.

We were enslaved

Why do verses 1-2 mention this illustration? Verse 3 ties the illustration to the spiritual significance. [Galatians 4:3](#) “3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.”

Notice that verse 3 begins, “in the same way, we also...” So, the custom of a son who must live as a slave until the date of his freedom and inheritance **illustrates our life before Christ**.

Why do I say that this verse relates to Christ? The explanation of the illustration continues into verse 4, which describes Christ coming in “the fullness of time.” That is, just as there was an

age when the son received the inheritance, Christ's coming was the **time** in which we would receive the inheritance.

Before moving to verse 4, notice the point of verse 3. Until Christ came, "we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world." That phrase is probably translated differently in some of your Bibles; it is a difficult phrase to translate. Verses 8-11 give us some insight into the point. The elementary principles are the things to which we are enslaved apart from God. For the Gentiles in Galatia, that meant idolatry. For the Jews in Galatia, that meant the OT law. In different cultures that may take different forms. We idolize material possessions and self-sufficiency. We take pride in those things, but rarely stop to realize that we are enslaved to them. They are our gods.

This goes back to my earlier question. *Why do I need Christ to set me free?* That question fundamentally misunderstands what it means to be a slave to sin. Slavery to sin results in death. [Romans 5:12](#) "12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—" [Romans 6:23](#) "23 For the wages of sin is death..." These verses state that all people sin; therefore, all people die.

And this does not refer **only** to future death. [Ephesians 2:1](#) "1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins" Sin produces immediate spiritual death. So, the problem is not just one of setting yourself free from sin (which is **also** an impossible task). The problem is whether you can make yourself alive. Slaves may earn their freedom, but dead slaves do not earn their life.

Summary

The point of verses 1-3 is to show our need for Christ. Like the son who is still a child, there is nothing we can do to gain our inheritance. The father determined when he received the inheritance, what he received as an inheritance, and who would be his guardians until that point. The father determined everything. The son could do nothing.

God sent His Son

Verses 4-5 show how God has redeemed us from our slavery to sin and death. **The Father sent His Son to redeem us.** [Galatians 4:4-5](#) "4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

God and man

Who is Jesus? Verse 4 says that He is God's Son and that He was born of woman. Jesus's identity is an **essential** aspect of our redemption.

Jesus is God. Scripture states that Jesus is eternal. He created everything. He taught that only God should be worship, then accepted worship. He forgave sins. He taught that He was equal with the Father (and people tried to kill Him for it). He claimed authority over judgment and salvation. He claimed authority over life and death. He claimed authority over all of creation.

For example, in [Matthew 28](#), when Jesus gave the Great Commission, the disciples worshipped Him. *How did He respond?* He told them that He had **all** authority **in heaven and on earth**. Then, He told them they should make disciples of all nations, which included baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He placed Himself alongside the Father and Spirit. Making disciples also included teaching people to obey Jesus. Unlike the prophets, Jesus did not point people to someone else. Jesus pointed people to Himself.

Jesus's opponents rejected all of His claims. In fact, they crucified Him for it. Yet, He resurrected. His resurrection was confirmed by hundreds of eyewitnesses, many of whom died for their testimony. Consider the implication of Jesus's resurrection. *If Jesus **lied** about being God, who resurrected Him?* Only God, the Creator, gives life. If Jesus was not God, He could not resurrect Himself. If He **lied** about being God, then *why did God vindicate Jesus by resurrecting Him?* Jesus is the eternal God.

Jesus became a human. [Philippians 2:6-8](#) says that Jesus humbled Himself and became a human. That is the point of the phrase "born of woman." Jesus did not cease to be God, but He did truly become human. He had human limitations - hunger, thirst, exhaustion. He faced temptation. He prayed. He suffered pain and death. He was truly human.

Jesus's identity is important for our redemption. Jesus must be a human to experience temptation and suffering. He must be a human to live and die in our place. But no other human could atone for sins. Jesus must be God because only God can bear the guilt of our sin. Only God can atone for sins. Only God can forgive sins.

Sinlessness

Notice that verse 4 states that Jesus was "born under the law." Consider that phrase against the context of Galatians. This letter teaches that the law enslaves us because we are disobedient. [Gal 3:10-12](#) shows that the only way to be righteous by the law would be through perfection, which no one attains.

Jesus, however, was **sinless**. He perfectly submitted to God's commands. Even His opponents struggled to build a case for crucifying Him. Their major argument was that He claimed to be the Son of God, which was blasphemy. However, it's only blasphemy if it isn't true.

If Jesus was sinless, why did He die? [Rom 6:23](#) says that the wages of sin is death. He had no sin by which He had earned death. He was not enslaved to sin and death. He willingly

submitted to the Father. Jesus died for the sins of God's people, not for His own sins. We are righteous because Jesus's righteousness is imputed to us.

Redemption

Why did God send Jesus? [Galatians 4:5](#) “5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” God sent Jesus to redeem us and adopt us as His children.

We are all slaves to sin. God gave the OT law to show us that we are slaves to sin. The OT law does not set us free; it enslaves us and points us to Jesus. We can only be free from sin and death through Jesus. There is no other way to be forgiven of sins, reconciled with God, and receive eternal life.

Summary

Notice the point of verses 4-5. Verses 1-3 highlight that we contribute nothing to our redemption. We are slaves to sin, who are so dead that we can contribute nothing to our salvation.

Verses 4-5 shows that redemption is fully a work of God. The Father sent Jesus to be born as a human. Jesus lived a sinless life. Jesus died to redeem us and adopt us. Redemption is solely a work of God.

God sent the Spirit

Not only is our redemption fully a work of God, **our transformation and assurance is fully a work of God. The Father sent the Spirit to those who are redeemed in Christ.** [Galatians 4:6-7](#) “6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

The Holy Spirit

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is not a thing or a force. The Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit is God. Throughout [John 14-16](#), when Jesus explained that the Father would send the Spirit when Jesus ascended into heaven, Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as a person. In [Acts 5](#), lying to the Holy Spirit is equated with lying to God. In the Great Commission, Jesus said that we should baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which suggests that the Holy Spirit, like the Father and Son, is a person and is God.

Because you are sons

Who receives the Holy Spirit? Notice that verse 6 says, “because you are sons.” [Gal 3:26](#) says we are sons of God through faith in Jesus. [Gal 4:5](#) says that we are adopted as sons of God

through Jesus's work of redemption. When verse 6 says that God sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His sons, it means that God gives the Holy Spirit to all who are redeemed by Christ - those who have faith in Jesus.

The Spirit's work

Why does the Father give the Holy Spirit to His people? There are quite a few answers in Scripture. For example, since the Holy Spirit is God, the Father gives us the Holy Spirit so that we might always be in God's presence. [1 Corinthians 3:16](#) "16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" God is omnipresent - He is present everywhere at all times. However, God is with us **personally (relationally)** by the indwelling Spirit.

The Father sends the Holy Spirit to purify us from sin. [Titus 3:5-6](#) "5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the **washing of regeneration** and **renewal** of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior," The Spirit makes us holy.

The Father sends the Holy Spirit so that we can pray to God with confidence. [Romans 8:26](#) "26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." We see this also in [Gal 4:6](#), which describes us crying out to the Father (the word "Abba" is the Aramaic word for Father).

The Father sends the Holy Spirit to make us alive. [Romans 8:11](#) "11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." Dead people do not save themselves; God makes us alive by the indwelling Spirit.

The Father sends the Holy Spirit to give us assurance of our redemption. [Ephesians 1:13-14](#) "13 In him [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the **guarantee** of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (cf. [2 Cor 1:22](#)). The Holy Spirit gives us assurance of salvation.

No longer a slave

Notice [Galatians 4:7](#) "7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." Consider this verse in light of the illustration in verses 1-2. The illustration is that as long as the heir is a child, he is still a slave. Guardians and managers control the inheritance and control him until the time set by his father.

Verse 7 says, "you are **no longer** a slave." You are no longer under guardians and managers. No one controls your inheritance. You are **free now**. You are an **heir now**.

Do not view your redemption as something that is purely future. There are absolutely aspects of our redemption that we are awaiting, but there are many aspects we currently enjoy. I am a child of God now. I have eternal life now. I have a relationship with God now. I am free from sin and death now. I am sanctified and justified now. These things all happen the moment we have faith in Jesus and devote ourselves to Him in faith and repentance. We should live as sons, not slaves.

Conclusion

As long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave. The father determines what he receives, when he receives it, and who will be his guardian. Although there was an inheritance from God in my future, I was a slave to my sin and death.

How did I gain freedom from sin and death? I didn't. Paul once prayed, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" ([Rom 7:24](#)). I do nothing to earn my salvation. The Father sent Jesus to live and die in my place to set me free from sin and death. The Father sent the Spirit to give me life, make me holy, and give me assurance of my eternal relationship with God.

God has redeemed His people from sin and death.

Church, as you reflect on this passage this week and consider how you should respond, consider this. Just as I lived my life oblivious to my outstanding arrest warrant, the people you see every day live their lives oblivious to their slavery to sin and death. They ***can be free*** through faith in Jesus. As you consider how to respond to this passage, I encourage you to share the gospel with the people you see this week.

Closing Scripture: [Ephesians 2:4-5](#) "4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—"