

The Christian is delivered from the bondage of the Mosaic covenant. The law of Moses was always a burden that no one was able to bear. ^{¶1} We are redeemed from this kind of bondage altogether. We have received the Holy Spirit. We have not received the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but we have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, in whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' ^{¶2}

^{¶1} as Acts 15:10 put it

^{¶2} see Romans 8:15

1. *Low level assurance before the Holy Spirit's coming*

1. **Believers once had a low level of assurance.** There was a time, before the coming of the Holy Spirit, when believers were not so joyful as they may be today. In Galatians 4:1–3 Paul is still explaining what he was saying in 3:23–29. *'What I am saying is this. The heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, although he is the owner of all the property.'* ^{¶1} *He is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father'.* ^{¶2}

^{¶1} 4:1

^{¶2} 4:2

Paul is using an illustration. He takes childhood and adulthood as a picture of the people of God before and after the giving of the Spirit. In the days of the Mosaic covenant (before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit) the people of God were like a small child. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the people of God are like a mature adult son. What was it like to be a believer in the days before the giving of the Holy Spirit? (i) The people of God were **destined** for maturity, but the time had not yet come. (ii) The people of God were under a tough discipline. Paul has already told us about it. The Mosaic law – with its hundreds of regulations – was in authority over every believer and over every Jew whether he believed in the promises of God or not. There were regulations that prevented friendship with non-Jews. There were very heavy threats against any kind of disobedience including the death penalty for many crimes. (iii) There was not much closeness to God. A father does not tell every family secret to his little children. In the days of Moses God did not tell His children everything He could have told them. Even during the ministry of Jesus, Jesus was able to say 'I have many things to say unto you but you cannot bear them yet'. ^{¶1} (iv) The people of God had what Paul calls a spirit of bondage. They feared God in a wrong way. They lived in terror for much of the time. Consider the story in Exodus 19 – 24, when the law was given. The people worshipped God at a distance. They could not come close to Him, not even the elders). ^{¶2} ^{¶3} The people of God were like little children who were afraid of a very strict father. Paul says, *'In the same way we also, when we were children, we were in bondage, enslaved to the elementary principles of the world'.* ^{¶4} The 'elementary principles of the world' seems to mean 'the natural, legalistic way in which people try to relate to God'. Perhaps it also refers to evil spirits who deceive us and get us to try to relate to God in a wrong way. Even the Mosaic law encouraged this kind of mentality. God allowed the law to get a grip on His people, in order to deliver them from it once and forever!

^{¶1} John 16:12

^{¶2} Exodus 20:18, 19; 24:1

^{¶3} see also Hebrews 12:18–21

^{¶4} Galatians 4:3

(i) *Maturity a future prospect*

(ii) *Tough discipline*

(iii) *Little closeness to God*

(iv) *Bondage – afraid of God*

2. **When Jesus came the people of God were delivered from the Mosaic law.** Paul says, *'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law (4:4), to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons' (4:5).* (i) The timing was important. It was at the right time in the history of the world that Christ died for the ungodly. (ii) It involved the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Paul emphasizes His deity; Jesus is 'God's Son'. Paul emphasizes His true humanity; Jesus was

(i) *At the right time*

(ii) *Jesus and His blood*

(iii) Jesus keeps the law for us and bears its penalties for us

3. Freedom for the people of God

- **God's love in our hearts**
- **At ease in His presence**
- **Life without end**

'born of a woman'. Before the coming of Jesus, God's people were like little children. They saw the shadows and symbols of salvation in God's law, but there was little assurance of salvation. Now we are able to come boldly to God and experience the Lord Jesus Christ 'with unveiled face'. Jesus came and ended the tyranny of the law. 'One day with Christ is worth a half century with Moses' (as Charles Spurgeon put it).¹ The Holy Spirit shows us how Jesus' blood atones for our sins. We see more than ever how much God loves us. The law held us in bondage: 'You must not eat this, you must not go there, you must not wear this, and you must not gather that.' Jesus came to save us from all of that! (iii) Jesus rescues us by becoming our substitute. He becomes a human being. He keeps the law of God for us, and bears its penalties for us. He is our substitute before the Father. By our faith in Jesus, His righteousness is put over us to cover us. We are saved not by works of righteousness which we have done, or by holy acts which we hope to perform, but wholly by God's mercy to us through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came 'under the law'. We become sons and no more servants, because the great Son of God became a servant in our stead.

3. **The people of God enter into freedom.** 'And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"' ¹ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God'. ² God gives us the fullness of the Holy Spirit. There is a level of experience of the Holy Spirit that Old Testament saints knew little about. We are to feel God's love shed abroad in our hearts. We are at ease in His presence. We enjoy our Father and we know that nothing can separate us from Him. We have no fear except the fear of displeasing Him. It affects the way we pray. We 'cry "Abba Father"'. We know that we shall be saved forever. We do not act like slaves; we are children of a mighty King. We live joyfully on God's promises to us. We have been adopted as God's children, and God has never cancelled the adoption of any of His children yet. There is no such a thing as eternal life dying out. Anyone who is justified by the blood of Christ and born of the Holy Spirit, has a life within him which can never end. He can walk around in God's world as one who has a relationship to the Lord which neither time nor eternity can ever destroy. We know that he has a rich inheritance of blessings which He wants us to receive by persistent faith in the blood of His Son.

Note

1. I have profited from Spurgeon's sermon preached in December 1884 on Galatians 4:3-6. See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 30, sermon 1815.

¹ 4:6

² 4:7



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