

# **A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS**

## **(LESSON FIFTY-FOUR)**

### ***“ADOPTION AS SONS”***

#### **GALATIANS 4:4-5**

#### **(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)**

*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.*

In our previous Lesson we said that it is important for us to understand that God is sovereign over every event in time and eternity. To say that God is sovereign, is to say that He is **omnipotent** (all powerful). His omnipotence enables Him to override all other powers to the extent that there is nothing that can prevent God from ultimately accomplishing anything that He intends to accomplish. God’s sovereignty ensures that everything happens according to His plan and intention.

The phrase, “*the fullness of time*” refers to the time which had been predetermined by the sovereign will of God the Father, from eternity past, for Him to send His Son, Jesus Christ into the world. Our Lord came the first time in the fullness of time, and He will return in the fullness of time, not a moment before or a moment after! As a Roman, Greek or Jewish father chose the time for his male child to become an adult son, so the God the Father chose the time for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ to make provision for His people’s transition from bondage under the “*elementary principles of the world*” to spiritual sonship.

Paul says that when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, “*born of woman, born under the law.*” The words “*sent forth*” are a translation of the Greek word **exapostelló**: (**ex-ap-os-tel’-lo**), which properly means, “to send away from oneself on a mission.”

Jesus proceeded out from God the Father Himself. God sent Jesus with full authority on the mission of redemption. God intervened in the “*fullness of time,*” by sending His Son so that we might become joint heirs with Him and be set free from the “*elementary principles of the world.*” This statement clearly implies that Paul believed in the preexistence of Christ, for how could He be sent forth out from the Father’s presence if He did not preexist with the Father as God? As the distinguished Greek New Testament scholar **Marvin Vincent** noted,

“This does not mean that God then, for the first time, embodied what had previously been a mere ideal, but that he sent forth a preexisting person.”

Our Lord was sent from God and He was, “*born of a woman.*” The deity of Christ is referred to in the words, “*God sent forth his Son,*” while the phrase, “*born of woman,*” is a clear reference to His humanity. Not only was He sent forth from Heaven, but He became incarnate in the human race through the virgin birth. Not only did He become incarnate, but He was born “*under the law.*” Our Lord was born and lived His life under the Mosaic Law. He was subject to the Jewish legal economy just as any Jew was subject to it.

Why did God the Father send forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law? He did so, “*to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*” The Greek word translated “*redeem*” is **exagorazó**: (**ex-ag-or-ad’-zo**), which means, “to redeem by payment of a price to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off.”

It is estimated that there were about 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, and persons could purchase slaves in any Roman city, either to

keep for themselves, or to set them free. Jesus came to do both. He came to redeem us for Himself and to deliver us from the bondage of sin, Satan and the Law. He did not purchase us to make us slaves, but to make us sons! Under Law we were merely children, but under grace, we are sons of God with an adult standing in God's family.

The phrase "*adoption as sons*" is the translation of a Greek word which literally means, "to place one as an adult son." It means to formally and legally declare that someone, who is not one's own child, is henceforth to be treated and cared for as one's own child, including complete rights of inheritance. The idea is of being placed in the position of an adult son who possesses the same rights as the natural children of the parents.

**Warren Wiersbe** makes the following comments in respect of the word "*adoption*" in verse 5:

"The New Testament word for adoption means 'to place as an adult son.' It has to do with our standing in the family of God: we are not little children but adult sons with all of the privileges of sonship.

It is unfortunate that many translations of the New Testament do not make a distinction between **children** of God and **sons** of God. We are the children of God by faith in Christ born into God's family. But every child of God is **automatically** placed into the family as a son, and as a son he has all the legal rights and privileges of a son. When a sinner trusts Christ and is saved, as far as his **condition** is concerned, he is a 'spiritual babe' who needs to grow...but as far as his **position** is concerned, he is an adult son who can draw on the Father's wealth and who can exercise all the wonderful privileges of sonship.

**We enter God's family by regeneration, but we enjoy God's family by adoption."**

Interestingly, the apostle Paul is the only New Testament writer that uses the Greek word translated "*adoption.*" It is very likely that Paul

borrowed the word from Roman law, for it was an idea that the Jews knew nothing about. It was not a part of their legal system. It was however an integral part of the Roman legal system. We must bear in mind that Paul was a Roman citizen and he would therefore have been very familiar with the term and its implications.

Under Roman law, adoption secured for the adopted son the right to the name and property of the person who adopted him. The moment the son was adopted, he had the legal right to make such a claim. Roman law also granted to the person who adopted the son, all the rights and privileges of a father.

One commentator explains that in the Roman world, adoption was a significant and common practice. Today, we can write a will and leave our wealth and property to anyone we want, male or female. In the Roman world, with few exceptions, a man had to pass his wealth on to his son or sons. If he had no sons or if he felt that his sons were incapable of managing his wealth or were unworthy of it, he would have to adopt someone who in his opinion would be a worthy son. These adoptions were not infant adoptions as is common today. Older boys and adult men were normally adopted. In some cases, the one who was adopted might even be older than the one who was adopting him. When the adoption was legally approved, the adoptee would have all his debts cancelled and he would receive a new name. He would be the legal son of his adoptive father and entitled to all the rights and benefits of a son. A father could disown his natural-born son, but an adoption was irreversible!

Paul uses this word in order to cement in the minds of his readers the particular idea of the status of a son. It is vital that we understand and appreciate this idea because we will never enter into all the benefits of our position as sons of God unless we do. The term “*adoption*” emphasizes relationship and position. Its emphasis is not so much upon the **nature** of the son as it is upon the **status** of the son.

A person who has been adopted is not related by blood to the person or persons who have adopted him or her. Their relationship is not a **natural** one but a **legal** one. The person who has been adopted stands as the child of the person or persons who have adopted him or her, even though he or she does not actually partake of their nature. It is this distinction that Paul wants to emphasize here. Our nature as believers is not determined by adoption but by regeneration. By nature, we are children of God because we have been born-again. We have received the Holy Spirit and have therefore become “*partakers of the divine nature,*” according to **2 Peter 1:4**. But that is not what Paul wants to convey to us by his use of the term “*adoption.*” Adoption does not place emphasis upon the nature which all believers have. The term highlights the **legal** status or position of the believer, and all the privileges which come with that legal status or position. In other words, adoption may be defined as the legal proclamation of the believer as a “*new creation*” in his or her new relationship to God as a son.

By adoption we become the sons of God, not merely in a natural sense but in a legal sense and we are given the rights and privileges that legally belong to the members of the family of God. God takes believing sinners, regenerates them, and by means of regeneration, makes them His **children**. Then He “adopts” these children and by means of adoption, places them in a legal position as His adult **sons**.

There is a very great difference between children and sons. The word children has to do with our **membership** in God’s family. The word sons, on the other hand, has to do with our **maturity** in God’s family. It refers to the position we occupy in God’s family as adult sons. For example, if we see a sign on a business establishment that reads, “**John Brown and Sons,**” we know that the sons of John Brown are partners in their father’s business. They have grown up and have assumed positions of authority and responsibility in their father’s business. We never see a sign on a business establishment that reads, “**John Brown and Children!**” As God’s sons, we have become partners with Him in His eternal purposes!

The chart outlined hereunder will help us to appreciate the distinction between a child and a son.

<b>THE CHILD</b>	<b>THE SON</b>
By Regeneration	By Adoption
Entering the Family	Enjoying the Family
Under Guardians	The liberty of an Adult
Cannot Inherit	An Heir to the Father

It is by adoption that we become joint-heirs with Christ, having been raised to the status as adult sons, thereby becoming heirs of God. We jointly inherit with Christ all that He possesses as an heir of God the Father by virtue of His Son-ship and work on the Cross. This is one reason why we were predestined. We read of this in **Ephesians 1:4-5**:

*4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love*

*5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*

The word “*predestined*” in this verse is a translation of the Greek word **proorizo (pro-or-id’-zo)**, which means “to mark out the boundary or limits of a place, thing or person previously, to predestine or foreordain.” The idea is of determining or decreeing beforehand.

**Expositor’s Bible commentary** suggests that the word **proorizo** should be translated “foreordain,” explaining that the word, “is always used of God as determining from eternity.”

Paul is trying to get his readers to understand and appreciate the mind-blowing reality that God the Father predestined certain members of

Adam's fallen race, "*for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.*" And He did so, "*before the foundation of the world!*"

The other reason why we were predestined is in order to be conformed to the image of God's Son. In **Romans 8:29** Paul writes, "*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*"

Our adoption by God is one of the guarantees of the completion of our salvation. In **Romans 8:22-25**, we read the following:

*22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

*23 And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.*

*24 We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it.*

*25 But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)*

**(New Living Translation)**

Paul's argument in this passage is that because we are sons of God by adoption, we can be certain that a day is coming when even our bodies shall be redeemed. Our souls and spirits are already redeemed but our bodies are still bodies of sin. They are not yet redeemed, but one day they will be. We can be sure of this because we are sons of God. Our son-ship is an absolute guarantee of that. The guarantee of the redemption of our bodies is also a guarantee that one day we will enjoy what Paul refers to in **Romans 8:21** as "*the freedom of the glory of the children of God,*" when we shall at last be free from sin and all its evils.

This is guaranteed because God is our Father and we are His sons. Because we are the sons of God, nothing whatsoever, can happen to us that God does not allow to happen; because we are the sons of God, all things are working together for our good; because we are the sons of God, there is no accusation that can be brought against us; because we are the sons of God, we need not fear condemnation; because we are the sons of God, we are more than conquerors; because we are the sons of God, nothing can separate us from His love.