

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

## **(LESSON FIFTY-FIVE)**

***“ABBA! FATHER!”***

**GALATIANS 4:4-6**

### **(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.*

*6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into  
our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”*

In our previous Lesson we considered the phrase “*adoption as sons*” in verse 5. We said that the phrase is the translation of a Greek word which literally means, “to place one as an adult son.” 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.

We noted that Paul probably borrowed the word from Roman law, for it was an idea that the Jews knew nothing about. It was however an integral part of the Roman legal system. 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. 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 emphasis of the term “*adoption*” is not so much on the **nature** of the son as it is on the **status** of the 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 legally as His adult **sons**. As God’s sons, we have become partners with Him in His eternal purposes!

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. We must always bear in mind that it is through the **Son** of God that we become the sons of God!

In verse **6** Paul writes, “*And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’*” The phrase, “*because you are sons*” at the beginning of the verse, is an explanation, not of what Paul had previously written, but of what he writes afterwards. In this verse, Paul is explaining to his readers that the phrase gives the reason for God’s act of sending the Holy Spirit to take up His permanent residence in the hearts of the Galatian believers. God the Father sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all those whom He adopts as His sons.

All three members of the God-head are mentioned in this verse because all three are involved in the spiritual experience of every believer. The

Father sent the Son to live and die for us, and then He sent the Holy Spirit to regenerate us and indwell us.

In verse **4** Paul had informed his readers that God, “*sent forth his Son.*” Now in verse **6**, he informs his readers that God, “*sent the Spirit of his Son.*” The Father’s sending of both the Son and the Spirit is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in **Isaiah 48:16**: “*Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there. And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.*”

This sending forth of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers brings about a change in their position from that of **minors under law**, to that of **adult sons under grace**. The bestowal of the Holy Spirit gives to each believer a consciousness of the familial relationship between themselves as sons of God, and God as their Father. Instead of considering ourselves to be in a forbidding courtroom in the presence of an offended judge, we now consider ourselves to be in a warm family circle in the presence of a loving Father with whom we have the privilege of living as His sons. The fact of our possession of the indwelling Holy Spirit should be enough to demonstrate to us that we are no longer under law, but under grace.

In this verse, Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as, “*the Spirit of his [God’s] Son.*” Paul does so because it is the Holy Spirit Who regenerates the believer and places him or her “in Christ,” and it is the Holy Spirit Who forms Christ in us through the process of sanctification. Indeed, the Holy Spirit always seeks to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. In **John 16:13-14** our Lord says,

*13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.*

*14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

Paul says, “*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’*” The word “*crying*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to cry out, cry aloud; to speak with a loud voice.” This word emphasizes the earnestness and intensity of the Holy Spirit’s utterance within the heart of the believer. In the Greek, the word is associated with the Holy Spirit, not with the believer. It is the Spirit Who is doing the crying.

In **Romans 8:14-17**, Paul writes,

*14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

*15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*

*16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

*17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

**John Piper**, in his comments relative to this passage, explains that the Holy Spirit is poured out into the hearts of believers in order to confirm their adoption. The Spirit does so by replacing the fear of a slave toward a master with the love of a son toward a father. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to change our slavish fears toward God into confident, happy, peaceful affections for God as our father.

In verse **14** Paul writes, “*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* How does the Spirit lead believers? He does so not by stirring up slavish fear within them, but by stirring up family affection within them. He does not force us to kill sin by making us slaves who obey God out of fear, but by making us sons of God who act out of faith produced by love. In **Galatians 5:6**, Paul writes, “*For in Christ Jesus*

*neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”*

The **Message** translates the verse as follows: *“For in Christ, neither our most conscientious religion nor disregard of religion amounts to anything. What matters is something far more interior: faith expressed in love.”*

According to **Galatians 4:6**, The Holy Spirit comes into our hearts crying, *“Abba! Father!”* and according to **Romans 8:15**, the response of believers is an echoing of the same cry. *“Abba! Father!”* Both these cries reverberate loudly and passionately within the heart of every true believer. It is not an external cry but an internal one.

**Piper** remarks that,

“The witness of the Holy Spirit that you are a child of God is not a testimony to a neutral heart with no affection for God's fatherly love so that your neutral heart can draw the logical conclusion that it is a child of God and then try to muster up some appropriate affections. That is not the picture. No. The witness of the Holy Spirit that you are a child of God is the creation in you of affections for God. The testimony of the Holy Spirit **IS** the cry, *'Abba! Father!'*”

And the reason Paul uses the word 'cry' and the Aramaic word 'Abba' is because both of them point to deep, affectionate, personal, authentic experience of God's fatherly love. He didn't say that the testimony of the Spirit was that we affirm doctrinally that God is father. The devil knows that doctrine. **Doctrinal affirmations, as important as they are, don't make children.** What he said was that the testimony of the Spirit that we are God's children is that from our hearts there rises an irrepressible cry—a cry, not a mere statement, a cry: *'Abba! Father!'*

We don't **infer logically** the fatherhood of God from the testimony of the Spirit. We **enjoy emotionally** the Fatherhood of God by the

testimony of the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit is not a **premise** from which we **deduce** that we are children of God; it is a **power** by which we **delight** in being the children of God."

According to Paul, when the Holy Spirit comes to baptize, seal and indwell a believer, He cries out "Abba" in the heart of that believer. The Holy Spirit comes in assuring the believer of the warm, intimate and very personal relationship which exists between the believer and God.

The witness of the Holy Spirit is something separate from all subjective inferences and conclusions and higher than all of them. It consists of a certainty the Spirit's presence and work continually within us. The Holy Spirit witnesses to our human spirit assuring us that God is our Abba by among other things, comforting us, motivating us to pray and study God's Word, convicting and rebuking us when we sin, and encouraging us to good works.

The Holy Spirit bears witness with the human spirit of the believer testifying to him or her that he or she is indeed a child of God. The Greek word translated "*bears witness*" literally means, "to bear witness with (or in support of another), to provide credible supporting evidence to one's case by giving testimony or by testifying. To show to be true, give evidence in support of." The Lord God knows that believers need this support in regard to the assurance of their salvation and He has made abundant provision for our need.

The word is in the **present tense** indicating that the Holy Spirit continually bears witness with our spirit "*that we are children of God.*"

Every believer at various times in his or her life harbours doubts concerning the genuineness of his or her salvation. This is primarily because, in the believer's mind, the process of growth in personal holiness in his or her life is proceeding too slowly. The Spirit, however, does not base His witness to our spirit on our progress or lack of progress in the Christian walk. The cry of the Holy Spirit in us and our cry in response to His witness is, "*Abba! Father!*" We must look away

from ourselves and look to God Who established the parent-child relationship.

The word “*Abba*” is the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek word for “father” **pater**. Aramaic is the language which the Jews spoke in Palestine in the first century. Paul translates the word *Abba* for his Greek readers who were not acquainted with Aramaic. *Abba* was the term used in the everyday language by children to address their fathers. The word conveys a warm, intimate sense just as with our terms “Daddy,” or “Papa.”

**William Barclay**, states that our Lord’s use of the word *Abba* in addressing God is unparalleled in the whole of Jewish literature. While the term was used by children to address their fathers, no one used it in addressing God. But Jesus did! Jesus addressed God using the everyday family word that children used to address their earthly fathers. He spoke to His heavenly Father in as childlike, trustful, and intimate way as a little child would speak to his or her father. And that is the privilege of all believers who are God’s sons by adoption.

Our Lord’s most poignant use of the term was in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. In **Mark 14:32-36**, we read the following:

*32 And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”*

*33 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.*

*34 And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.”*

*35 And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.*

*36 And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”*

That is how Jesus spoke to God the Father. Even when, as a human being, He did not fully understand what His heavenly Father was doing, even when His one conviction was that God was urging Him to die on an old rugged Cross, He addressed Him as Abba, as might a little child. Our Lord exhibited a supreme trust in God in His darkest hour, for He knew God as His Abba, and we too can also have the same trust in that same God whom we also know as Abba.

**Wayne Barber** makes the following comments relative to the word “Abba”:

“When a person is under the law and living after his own flesh, then he is under a curse. He has put himself there and there is no forgiveness in the law. However, when a person is under grace and he chooses to walk and live that way, he can cry out when he fails because he is not going to be condemned. There is no condemnation of those who are in Christ Jesus, and he can cry out ‘Abba, Father, I have failed again,’ and God immediately surrounds him and the forgiveness is his; and he can stand up and continue to walk in the newness of life that God gives to him. We don’t have that under law. We have that under grace. Now technically, positionally, it is always ours, but we can refuse it when we choose to do things our own way...If I choose to walk by faith I enter into the fullness of that relationship even though positionally I have always had it. I get to enjoy it for myself.”

We will give the last word this evening to **Donald Barnhouse**:

“We received the Holy Spirit of God when we were made alive in Christ. One of the first effects of this stupendous and miraculous work is that we know that we have become children of God. We have not received the spirit of bondage that we might relapse into fear, but we have received the Spirit of God in our public manifestation as sons. We immediately are the objects of a spiritual experience. We cry ‘Abba,



Father,' the Holy Spirit Himself testifying along with our human spirit that we are the children of God.

Several things about this experience must be examined closely. **First, it must be understood that no spiritual experience is valid in itself. Every experience can be counterfeited, and therefore, no experience is valid that is not solidly based in correct theology. It is disastrous to build one's theology upon some experience; it is always necessary to explain our experience by the Word of God.** In the course of the past centuries of church history abundant evidence has been accumulated to show that it is possible to mistake the voice of Satan for the voice of God, and that it is even more possible to mistake the voice of self for the voice of God. That is why we must always be willing to turn to the Word of God, why we must repudiate any voice that speaks contrary to the Word of God, **and avoid any experience that is an end in itself.** We want no 'inner light' experience, 'divine voice' experience, we want no ecstatic mysticism that feels rather than thinks. **The certain fact of our reception as sons of God must be based objectively on the written Word of God, and then, subjectively, on the fact of the Holy Spirit's joint witness with our spirit...**

The assurance of our salvation does not depend entirely upon the external testimony of the Holy Spirit, but there is an inward conviction which belongs to us, ourselves. We know that we have passed from death unto life; we have the inner conviction that we have become children of God. We find something within ourselves that turns outward and upward to God, so that we find ourselves crying, "Abba, Father." The Holy Spirit's testimony joins this testimony of our own inner being, confirms it, so that at the mouth of the two witnesses this thing is established."