

“From Slavery to Sonship?”—Galatians 4:3-7

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “From Slavery to Sonship?”, is Galatians 4:3-7 → *In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

In Divine Service *Setting Three* of our hymnal there is a declaration of grace which reads: “Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins. To those who believe on His name He gives the power to become the children of God and has promised them His Holy Spirit.” (LSB p. 185) This service is basically “The Order of Morning Service” (or page 5) from The Lutheran Hymn of 1941 and Divine Service I from the Lutheran Worship hymnal, published in 1982.

Aside from dispensing with the archaic language in this declaration of grace, those who compiled Lutheran Worship in 1982 and Lutheran Service Book in 2006 made one interesting change. Here's how it read in The Lutheran Hymnal of 1941: "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, hath had mercy upon us and hath given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgiveth us all our sins. To them that believe on His name He giveth power to become the sons of God and hath promised them His Holy Spirit." Did you notice a significant change in the wording? It is so subtle that most people will not catch it but it is a word packed with meaning and significance for you in your standing and relationship with God as He defines it in His written Word! They replaced the word "sons" of God with "children" of God.

Scripture is packed with relationship language as it describes a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, Who is referred to as His Son (cf. John 3:16), the Church's Bridegroom (cf. Revelation 18:23) and our Brother (cf. Hebrews 2:11). Christians are referred to as brothers, sisters, children and sons. Interestingly enough, they are not referred to in Scripture as "sons and daughters." All Christians, male and female, are referred to as God's sons. Speaking to the Christians in the region of Galatia Paul expressed the basis of this relationship in Galatians 3:26-27 → *In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put*

on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In the midst of the expression of this relationship in obedience to God's Law the devil can get a foothold, tempting you to define your relationship with God on the basis of your performance of His Law rather than faith in Jesus Christ as **His sons**. Such a relationship is futile because the Law demands perfection by every human being who, without faith in Christ, cannot give such perfect performance as people enslaved to sin. In this sense, it leaves them *as children . . . enslaved to the elementary principles of the world (Verse 3)* who define a relationship with God on their own terms, not His. The focus of relationship with God must be your deliverance from slavery in sin to becoming God's sons **by His own doing!**

Thus, verses 4-5 of our text describe God's desire for a lasting relationship with you in His time and in His way: *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* Since we could not free ourselves from our slavery to sin God did it for us! He sent His only-begotten Son into our flesh to live obediently to God's Law **for us** and pay the punishment which our disobedience to God's Law deserves through His death on the cross. He did it so that you *might receive adoption as sons!*

Why is sonship so important? It has to do with the everlasting nature of God's covenant and faithfulness. The closest we can relate to this concept is being a father or mother. Once a father, always a father. Once a mother, always a mother. There is nothing which your child can do which will change your love for him. You may not approve of his decisions and actions but it doesn't affect your love. In fact, your love will move you to guide him properly! Even in death a parent's love for his child continues. It is a relationship which you take with you to your grave. That love in this relationship is even passed on to a child after the grave in the form of an inheritance, however that looks. Sonship provides the relationship within which the blessings of a father's love can be experienced beyond the grave.

In the case of your relationship with Yahweh His love is expressed for you in the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. You are adopted as God's Son's through faith in Jesus Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit in your baptism (cf. John 3:5; Acts 2:38-39). Verse 7 of our text says that *you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God*. The inheritance is yours through faith in Jesus Who died and rose again to provide you with **all** the blessings of eternal life and fellowship with God and one another beyond the grave! In this relationship as God's sons through faith in the Person & Work of His Son, Jesus, **you get it all!** Jesus once said in John

8:35-36 → *The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. Only as God's sons are you freed from the power of sin, death and the devil even as you struggle with the presence of sin, death and the devil daily!*

There are many who view their relationship with God, the Creator of the Universe, as their Father, while refusing to trust in Jesus as their Savior. This is a relationship perspective based upon enslavement *to the elementary principles of the world*. Thus, a “belief” in Jesus many times is paramount to simply believing that He did what He did for everybody in the world but not trusting in what He did for the forgiveness of **my sins**. In this enslavement people view death as a friend to be welcomed rather than the last enemy to be destroyed at the coming of Jesus on the Last Day. (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:26) They will view God either as the Cosmic Gift-Giver Who is supposed to make sure all goes well with them or as the Cosmic Kill-Joy Who is an authoritative Father they can't seem to please. Sin will have no bearing on their relationship with Him or, at the very least, they will recognize it and think God accepts it because “He understands.” After all, it is His nature to forgive since He is love!

This is why relationship with God must always be defined by Him, not us! It has to be a relationship created by the Holy Spirit and revealed in His written Word, not something of our own imagination! His defining you as sons

is completely bound up in Jesus and what He has done for the forgiveness of your sins so that you can live in a close relationship with Him daily! In verse 6 of our text Paul says: *Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* Abba is an Aramaic term describing a relationship of confidence, peace and security in much the same way many think of their "dad." Such supplication can only be possible in relationship with God through faith in Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.

We live in a gender identity crises society which goes from bad to worst on a daily basis. 1 Corinthians 4:4 says *the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God.* We are thankful that Yahweh is not involved in a gender identity crisis. He knows who His children are and has no reservations about calling them His sons as they call on His Son, Jesus Christ, in faith! He has delivered them from their slavery to sin and *the elementary principles of this sinful world*, adopting them as His very own sons because of the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ! He has given them His Holy Spirit so that they can live as sons in the presence of their Dad Who loves them with an everlasting love. Amen.

*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers,
nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth,*

*nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

(Romans 8:38-39)

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