

# “No Longer a Slave”

## Christian Liberty

Galatians 4:1-7

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### Introduction

The Judaizers told the Gentile Christians that they couldn't be Abraham's seed unless they were circumcised and submitted to the Mosaic law. Paul's argument against this false teaching reaches its climax in 3:26 where he says, “*You are **all** sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*” By adoption the Gentiles are Abraham's seed. By adoption the Gentiles are “*heirs according to the promise.*” (3:29) In 4:1-7 Paul is clarifying what it means to be adopted by God.

### The Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q.34: What is Adoption?

A.34 Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.”

*“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God...” John 1:12*

### I. Our Situation Before Adoption (4:1-3)

Slaves were commonplace in the Greco-Roman world. No doubt many of the Galatian Christians were slaves. Because of this, slavery provided a valuable metaphor for Paul's teaching.

In verses 1-2 Paul is saying that our situation before adoption is like that of a child who has not come of age. He is the heir to his father's estate. But until he reaches the age “set by his father” the inheritance is under guardianship. By title he owns everything. By right he owns nothing. He is “no different from a slave”.

In verse 3 Paul applies this illustration to us. Before we were adopted and became “*sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*” we were children under guardianship. In essence “*we were in slavery*”. In slavery to what? “*We were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.*”

### Stoicheia

1. Fundamental components of the cosmos – earth, air, fire and water (2 Peter 3:10-12 trans. “elements”)
2. Essential principles of an area of study – the A, B, C's (Hebrews 5:12 trans. “elementary truths”)
3. Elemental spiritual forces of the world – seems to fit with 4:8-11 (NIV 2011)

Two passages from Colossians shed some light:

*“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles (stoicheia) of this world...” (Colossians 2:8)*

*“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles (stoicheia) of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch’... Such regulations*

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*indeed have the appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” (Col. 2:20-23)*

### **II. The Ground of Our Adoption (4:4-5)**

Verses 4 and 5 tell us HOW we became sons with the full rights of sons instead of slaves with no rights. *“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...”*

Here we delve into two great doctrines regarding the PERSON of CHRIST:

1. The Incarnation – Sent forth (pre-existence); Born of a woman (incarnate)
2. The Hypostatic Union – Deity (pre-existence); Humanity (born of a woman)

*“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony given IN ITS PROPER TIME.” - I Timothy 2:5-6*

Then Paul tells us that the Son was *“born under the law to redeem those under the law...”*

Here we have two great doctrines regarding the WORK of CHRIST:

1. His Active Obedience *“Born under the law”*
2. His Passive Obedience *“to redeem those under the law”*

*“If he had not been man he could not have redeemed man; if he had not been a righteous man he could not have redeemed unrighteous men. If he had not been God’s son he could not have redeemed men for God or made them sons of God.” – John R. W. Stott, The Message of Galatians*

### **III. Our Adoption Papers (4:6-7)**

*“I am Solomon Northrup. I am a free man; a resident of Saratoga, New York. The residence also of my wife and children who are equally free. I have papers...” – 12 Years a Slave*

In verses 4-5 God sent his SON. In verses 6-7 God sends his SPIRIT. God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was sent into the world to redeem us. God’s Spirit is sent into our hearts to ASSURE us that we are his adopted sons. It is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity that bears witness that we are SONS and that we have a new intimate relationship with God as our FATHER.

It’s hard not to notice the similarity with Romans 8:15-17 where Paul writes:

*“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”*

John R. W. Stott writes:

*“Thus, God’s purpose was not only to secure our sonship by His Son, but to assure us of it by His Spirit. He sent His Son that we might have the status of sonship, and He sent His Spirit that we might have an experience of it. This comes through the affectionate, confidential intimacy of our access to God in prayer, in which we find ourselves assuming the attitude and using the language not of slaves, but of sons.” – The Message of Galatians*