

Galatians 4:1-10 Discussion Guide

What Does It Mean to be Adopted?

In Galatians 4 Paul gives extended usage to a metaphor to describe our relationship to God as well as the former relationship that God's people had to the law. That metaphor concerns how the relationship of an heir to his father changed over time under Roman law.

An heir becomes such because he is the son of his father. Nothing can change that. But the way that an heir would function in that role would change depending on the age of the heir. An heir of a young age would not be able to be distinguished from a slave because they lived the same way. But at the appropriate time, every heir takes possession of an inheritance and moves from living as a slave to living as one who shares the authority of his father.

The Gospel is even more beautiful when we realize that we were not simply given a position as an heir because we existed, but that we were selected by the father and adopted as his children.

It would seem quite incredible that a person who reaches the point where he enjoys all of the benefits and lifestyle of an heir would long to go back and live as a slave. Yet that is exactly what a Christian does when he places himself under a law that is not intended for him. Why would we ever want to pretend that we are not loved and given incredible riches by our Daddy?

Read Galatians 4:1-10 together.

1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 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!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. 8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years! (Galatians 4:1-10)

Discussion Questions

- How does it happen that an heir to kingdom of God would live as a spiritual slave?
- What are the "elementary principles of the world?" (v. 3)
- What does the "fullness of time" represent in terms of God's plan for salvation? (v. 4)
- How does Jesus' life fulfilling the law make possible our adoption into God's family?
- What is the significance of being allowed to cry "Abba Father?"

- Why is the position as an adopted son better than the position of a slave under the law?
- In what ways are you still living as a slave?
- What is causing you to ignore your adoption?
- How can you know that you are loved by Abba on a daily basis?
- What difference will it make to your life to cry Abba, Father?