

Galatians 4:1-7 – Littlebourne - Sunday 8th June 2024 – PH

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is under age, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. ² The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. ³ So also, when we were under age, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. ⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Last week we looked at the covenant God made with Abraham. God's covenant is timeless because he didn't put a time restriction on it. Human covenants are often limited in time but can also be timeless... in perpetuity covenants. You can put a restrictive covenant on a piece of land: our old house in Mount Road had a covenant made by the original owner of the land before anything was built to forbid the use of the house as a place to sell beer, wines and spirits while the house I lived in as a child had a restriction that there was only to be a single dwelling on its plot. Every subsequent owner took this covenant on board but the people who could enforce it were all long dead as were their heirs who might have known about these covenants as well. When my father sold the house with its single plot restriction, he had to pay £300 in 1971 as an insurance premium to a Lloyds syndicate that specialises in the unlikely event a covenant is challenged in Court, knowing that it wouldn't be enforced. The developer my father sold the single detached house to was going to build two blocks of flats on the plot and next door which had the same covenant on their plot – 12 dwellings in all instead of just the two! The planners ignored the covenant when planning permission was given. A covenant where no one is willing to enforce it is worthless. In Canterbury undeveloped land was given to the Council by a worthy local landowner wanting to do a good deed, stipulating that he gave the land for the enjoyment and recreation of the citizens in perpetuity. But that didn't stop the Council building on part of it long after he died, nor did it stop them fencing off another part of what was left as school playing fields. Protests to stop this were ignored because the condition upon which the Council accepted the land a hundred years ago was able to be ignored as unenforceable. Like all laws, with no one to enforce them, they may as well not exist. What motivated the Jews to obey the laws of Moses? Fear of God? Fear of others trying to enforce the law's punishments for breaking the law? Love of God? Knowledge that the law was good for society and everyone benefitted from obedience?

Why do we keep the law if there is no one around to enforce it? Paul keeps on telling the Galatians that Christians do not have to obey the whole law of Moses because Christ is the final sacrifice for the sins of mankind and all those animal sacrifices for sin are no longer relevant. Present day Jews don't sacrifice lambs, oxen, and doves on altars to be burnt as sin offerings. Their excuse is that they claim that there is no Temple for these sacrifices to be made, but the law of Moses never specified where sacrifices were to be made, nor was

there a temple in existence either! Clinging to laws regarding garment fringes, no work on the Sabbath and diet, while disregarding the sacrifices, the obligations to the poor and widows (Jesus criticised the Pharisees for that) would seem like selective obedience to the law of Moses. But in Paul's day, the Temple was still there and Jews could still go to Jerusalem on the feasts mentioned in the Law.

Coming back to this passage, Paul wants believers to know that they are children of God and no longer slaves in bondage to the law of Moses. Slaves are in bondage to their owners, and they have no control over their affairs. Likewise, children who have inherited something are unable to access their inheritance until they come of age. In addition, they are subject to the control over them by responsible adults – parents, guardians, trustees – who must act as stewards to ensure that their inheritance remains intact. When are we made heirs in Christ?

Verse 2 *The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.* The time set or previously appointed by the father is explained in Ephesians 1:8b-11

With all wisdom and understanding,⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...

We come to a passage that Calvinists would claim backs up predestination as if we have no choice ourselves as to when we are saved. It's a bit of a circular argument, because God is timeless and the past, present and future are all known to him... so he knows what our choices will be before we make them, yet we are usually unaware of any pressure from God to force us to make choices we might not want to make. All of us have chosen to follow Jesus because of what he offers. Here are some examples: salvation, joy, freedom from guilt, forgiveness of sin, and purpose. The law of Moses was all about trying to please God with good works and obedience, and even though "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength" is at the centre of the Law, the joyfulness, contentment and assurance we experience in our human loving relationships is not seen that often in the Old Testament. For Christians filled with the Holy Spirit - love, joy and peace are at the forefront of who we are.

³ *So also, when we were under age, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.* What does Paul mean by slavery under the "elemental spiritual forces" of the world? The Greek word is "stoicheia" which means "things placed in line or in a row". Are we under the influence of what the world offers whether material things or ideas, philosophies or religious observance? So much of how we see the world is influenced by what bombards our senses daily. Yesterday there was an event in the Dane John celebrating a lifestyle that does not match what Jesus expects from us, and probably everyone there doesn't see anything wrong with what they are promoting. They may see

this celebration as entirely acceptable and even desirable. Some will be virtue signalling their acceptance and even affirmation of the choices others make, even though they are not their own choices. Hardly anyone will be thinking that pride is one of the deadly sins, and not something to be celebrating. The traditional seven deadly sins are lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. Yet many in society find attraction in some, if not all of these sins. All of them contrast with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit – wisdom, understanding, fortitude, counsel, knowledge, piety and fear of God (Isaiah 11:2 *The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD*). The world today is full of unwise decisions, misinformation, weakness, recklessness, ignorance and hedonism. Above all there is complete fearlessness of God's wrath for so many in society without faith in God – whether in positions of authority or just ordinary folk. The seven fruits of the Holy Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – are all positives in the lives of mankind, while the seven deadly sins are all negatives in the lives of mankind leading to hate, unhappiness, conflict, impatience, unkindness, badness, unfaithfulness, brutality and insubordination. All through the Bible, men have sought to do evil in the sight of God, but there was a remedy when the time was right.

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Paul tells us that God sent Jesus to pay the price for all mankind to be freed from the slavery of the law and the slavery of sin. Instead of being slaves, we have been freed to be sons of God. Adoption involves gaining the privileges of being a naturally begotten son and heir. Enabling Holy Spirit to dwell in us enables us to be natural born children of God. God makes the sons of men into sons of God. The reverse of making the Son of God a son of man.

⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Some of the Jewish converts to Christianity believed that the Gentile converts had to observe the law to receive the grace of God, and Paul throughout his letter is emphasising how misguided they are. By faith every believer is a son of God and can have such a closeness with him to call him Daddy or Papa rather than father alone. We are heirs of all the promises made to Abraham, the promises made to Israel, the promises made by Jesus because we are his children.

What can we take from this passage?

We are redeemed because of Jesus; we are children of God and in receipt of his promises. Here are 10 promises:

1. **God will be present with you** (Isaiah 43:1-2) God does not promise His people that we won't go through trouble. But He does promise He will go through it by our side.
2. **God will provide for your needs** (Matthew 6:25-33) – Jesus assured us that the Father knows our every need and will meet it. Sometimes His provision doesn't look exactly like what we expected. So, although we cannot trust in a specific provision, we can trust in our divine Provider.
3. **God loves you** (Romans 8:39) – No matter the quality of your other relationships, as a child of God, we can always depend on our heavenly Father's love for us.
4. **God will ease your fears** (Psalms 34:1-7) – God is greater than anything that can hurt or harm us. He can deliver us *from* trouble and whatever He does allow into our lives He will deliver *through* it, even if it's all the way to glory. We have no need to fear what today or tomorrow holds because God holds us.
5. **God will trade His peace for our anxiety** (Philippians 4:4-10) – When we bring our anxious thoughts to God and meditate on His good things, He will trade our anxiety for His peace.
6. **God will give you soul rest** (Matthew 11:28-30) – This world gives us lots of burdens to carry. But God invites us to lay them down and experience His rest.
7. **God gives us spiritual protection** (1 Peter 1:3-5) – When we enter into a saving relationship with Jesus, we never have to wonder if we will “get to heaven.” God spiritually shields and protects those who belong to Him.
8. **God will always provide a way to say no to temptation** (1 Corinthians 10:13) – We do not have to give in to temptation. God promises to show us a way out and the strength to say “no.”
9. **God gives contentment in any situation** (Philippians 4:10-13) – No matter our physical circumstances – plenty or need – Jesus will give us the strength to be content.
10. **God will make all things right** (Revelation 21:1-4) – At the end of history, when Jesus comes again, God will abolish all sin, grief, death, and mourning!

We can rely on these promises and they give us hope and assurance of God's love. Amen

Isaiah 43:1-2 But now, this is what the LORD says – he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Matthew 6:25-33 ²⁵ ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your

life? ²⁸ ‘And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Romans 8:38-39 ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Psalms 34:1-7 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. ² I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me: let us exalt his name together.

⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. ⁶ This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Philippians 4:4-10 ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Matthew 11:28-30 ²⁸ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

1 Peter 1:3-5 ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation^[c] has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Philippians 4:10-13 ¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice

from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'