

Studies in Galatians (13/22)

The Adoption of Sons.

Galatians 4:1-7

It is absolutely impossible to exhaust any portion of Scripture. The more one studies it, the more one sees in it, and not only that, but the more one becomes conscious of the fact that there is much more in it than appears to view. The Word of God, like Himself, is absolutely unfathomable. It can not therefore be wearisome if in this study we frequently review that which we have previously passed over. Indeed one's understanding of any given portion of the epistle depends on the thoroughness of his knowledge of that which precedes it. Let us therefore give a little further attention to that portion of the third chapter which treats of

The Seed.

First of all it must be borne in mind that Christ is the Seed. That is plainly stated. But Christ did not live for Himself, and He is not heir simply for Himself. He has won an inheritance, not for Himself, but for His brethren. God's purpose is to "gather together in one all things in Christ." He will finally put an end to divisions of every kind, and He does it now in those who accept Him. In Christ there are no distinctions of nationality, and no classes and ranks. No Christian thinks of any other man as English, German, French, Russian, Turk, Chinese, or African, but simply as a man, and therefore a possible heir of God through Christ. If that other man, no matter what his race or nation, be also a Christian, then the bond becomes mutual, and therefore still stronger. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." It is for this reason that it is impossible for a Christian to engage in war. He knows no distinction of nationality, but regards all men as his brothers. But the chief reason why he can not engage in warfare is that the life of Christ is his life, for he is one with Christ; and it would be as impossible for him to fight as it would be for Christ to seize a sword and wield it in self-defense.

But we are not now engaged in discussing war. We referred to this simply to show the absolute unity of believers in Christ. They are one. There is therefore but one seed, and that is Christ; for however many millions of true believers there may be, they are only one in Christ. Each man has his own individuality, but it is in every case only the manifestation of some phase of the individuality of Christ. With those who have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him, "there is neither Greek nor

Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all." Col. 3:11.

In Christ's explanation of the parable of the tares and the wheat, we are told that "the good seed are the children of the kingdom." Matt. 13:38. The man would not allow the tares to be pulled out of the wheat, because in the early stage it would be difficult to distinguish in every case between the wheat and the tares, and some of the wheat would be destroyed. So he said, "Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." It is in the harvest that the seed is gathered. Everybody knows that. But what the parable especially shows is that it is in the harvest that the seed is fully manifested; in short, that the seed comes at harvest-time. But "the harvest is the end of the world." So the time when "the seed should come, to whom the promise was made," is the end of the world, when the time comes for the promise of the new earth to be fulfilled. Indeed, the seed can not possibly be said to come before that time, since the end of the world will come just as soon as the last person who can be induced to accept Christ has done so; and the seed is not complete as long as there is one grain lacking.

Read now, in the nineteenth verse of the third chapter, that the law was spoken because of transgression, "till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made." What do we learn from that?—Simply this, that the law as spoken from Sinai, without the change of a single letter, is an integral part of the Gospel, and must be presented in the Gospel until the second coming of Christ, at the end of the world. "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law." And what of the time when heaven and earth pass, and the new heaven and the new earth come? Then the law will not be needed written in a book, for men to preach to sinners, showing them their sins, for it will be in the heart of every man. Heb. 8:10, 11. Done away?—Not by any means; but indelibly engraved in the heart of every individual, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God.

With the truth concerning the seed before us, and the parable of the wheat and the tares fresh in our minds, let us proceed in our study.

The Text for Study.

"But I say that so long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bond-servant, tho he is lord of all; but is under guardians and stewards until the term appointed of the father. So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world; but when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou art no longer a bond-servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God." Gal. 4:1-7, R.V.

A Statement of Fact.—The first two verses explain themselves. They are a simple statement of fact. Altho a child may be heir to a vast estate, he has no more to do with it until he is of age, than a servant has. If he should never come of age, then he would never actually enter upon his inheritance. He would have lived all his life as a servant, so far as any share in the inheritance is concerned. Now for

The Application.—“So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world.” If we look ahead to the fifth verse, we shall see that the state here known as “children” is that before we receive “the adoption of sons.” It represents the condition before we were redeemed from the curse of the law, that is, before we were converted. It does not, therefore, mean children of God, as distinguished from worldlings, but the “children” of whom the apostle speaks in Eph. 4:14, “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” In short, it refers to us when we “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

The Bondage.—When we were children we were in bondage under the rudiments of the world. No one who has read the Bible needs to be told that the rudiments of the world is “not after Christ.” Col. 2:8.

It is “after the tradition of men,” wholly fleshly, the life of the natural man who receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither knows them. It is the same bondage that is described in Gal. 3:22-24, before faith came, when we were under the law, “under sin.” It is the condition of men “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Eph. 2:12. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof.” 1 John 2:16, 17.

All Men Possible Heirs.—It may be asked, “If such is the condition of those here referred to as ‘children,’ how can they be spoken of as heirs?” The answer is plain. It is on the principle that it is not manifest who constitute the seed, until the harvest. God has not cast off the human race; therefore since the first man created was called “the son of God,” it follows that all men are heirs in the sense that they are in their minority. As already learned, “before faith came,” altho all were wanderers from God, we were kept under the law, guarded by a severe master, “shut up,” in order that we might be led to accept the promise. What a blessed thing it is that God counts even the ungodly, those who are in the bondage of sin, as His children! Wandering, prodigal sons, but still children. This probationary life is given us for the purpose of giving us a chance to acknowledge Him as Father, and to become sons indeed.

"The Fullness of the Time."—Christ came in the fullness of time. A parallel statement to this is found in Rom. 5:6: "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." But the death of Christ serves for those who live now and for those who lived before He was manifested in the flesh in Judea, just as well as for the men who lived at that time. His death made no more change eighteen hundred years ago than it did four thousand years ago. It had no more effect on the men of that generation than on the men of any other generation. It is once for all, and, therefore, has an equal effect on every age. "The fulness of time" was the time foretold in prophecy, when the Messiah should be revealed; but the redemption was for all men in all ages. If it had been God's plan that He should have been revealed in this century, or even not until the last year before the close of time, it would have made no difference with the Gospel. "He ever liveth," and He ever has lived, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

"Born of a Woman."—God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, and therefore a veritable man. He lived an average lifetime on this earth in the flesh, and suffered all the ills and troubles that fall to the lot of "man that is born of woman."

"Born under the Law."—Being born of a woman, He was necessarily born under the law, for such is the condition of all mankind, and "in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Heb. 2:17. He takes everything on Himself. "He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." He redeems us by coming into our place literally, and taking our load off our shoulders. "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Cor. 5:21, R.V. In the fullest sense of the word, and to a degree that is seldom thought of when the expression is used, He became man's substitute. That is, He permeates our being, identifying Himself so fully with us that everything that touches or affects us touches and affects Him. If we will but recognize and acknowledge the fact, then we drop out entirely, so that it is "not I, but Christ." Thus we cast our cares on Him, not by picking them up and with an effort throwing them on Him, but by humbling ourselves into the nothingness that we are, so that we leave the burden resting on Him alone. Thus we see already how it is that He came

"To Redeem Them That Were under the Law."—He does it in the most practical and real way. Whom does He redeem?—"Them that were under the law." We can not refrain from referring for a moment to the idea that some have that this expression, "to redeem them that were under the law," has a mere local application. They would have it that it means that Christ freed the Jews from the necessity of offering sacrifices, etc. Well, suppose we take it as

referring only to the Jews, and especially to those who lived at the time of His first advent; what then?—Simply this, that we shut ourselves off from any place in the plan of redemption. If it was only the Jews that were under the law, then it was only the Jews that Christ came to redeem. Ah, we would not like to be left out, when it comes to the matter of redemption! Then we must acknowledge that we are, or were before we believed, “under the law;” for Christ came to redeem none but those who were under the law. “Under the law,” as we have already seen, means condemned by the law as transgressors. But the law condemns none but those who are amenable to it, and who ought to keep it. Therefore, since Christ redeems us from the law,—from its condemnation,—it follows that He redeems us to a life of obedience to it.

“That We Might Receive the Adoption of Sons.”—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” 1 John 3:2. “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12. This is an altogether different state from that described in the third verse as “children.” In that state we were “a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord.” Isa. 30:9. Believing on Jesus, and receiving the adoption of sons, we are described “as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” 1 Peter 1:14. Christ said, “I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.” Ps. 40:8. Therefore, since He becomes our substitute, as described in the last paragraph but one, literally taking our place, not instead of us, but becoming us, and living our life in us and for us, it necessarily follows that the same law must be within our hearts when we receive the adoption of sons.

The Spirit the Badge of Sonship.—Christ as the only-begotten Son of God was filled with the Spirit. If we yield to the same Spirit, then we are His brethren indeed; for the Spirit is the life; “there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one.” Then if we have the Spirit, we have the blood; and if we have the same blood, then we are blood relations,—sons of God.

“If a Son, Then an Heir.”—When the prodigal son was wandering from the father’s house, he differed nothing from a servant, because he was a servant, doing the most menial drudgery. In that condition he came back to the old homestead, feeling that he deserved no better place than that of a servant. But the father saw him while he was yet a long way off, and ran and met him, and received him as a son, and therefore as an heir, altho he had forfeited all right to heirship. So we have forfeited our right to be called sons, and have squandered away the inheritance; yet God receives us in Christ as sons indeed, and gives us the same rights and privileges that Christ has. “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the

Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." He is doubly "our Father." "And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift."

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