

Sabbath School Lesson #8 – From Slaves to Heirs – 12-18 August 2017

Christ has redeemed us, from being slaves to being heirs with Him. “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:7). We pick up from last week’s Lesson, and we first read Galatians 3:27-4:7 to continue with this week’s Lesson.

Putting on Christ by Baptism – “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?” (Romans 6:3). It is by His death that Christ redeems us from the curse of the law; but we must die with Him. Baptism is “the likeness of His death.” We rise to walk “in newness of life,” even Christ’s life (Galatians 2:20). Having put on Christ, we are one in Him. We are completely identified with Him. Our identity is lost in His. It should be said of one who has been converted, ‘He is so changed you would not know him; he is not the same man.’ No, not the same, for God has turned him into “another man.” Being one with Christ, he has a right to whatever Christ has, and a right to “the heavenly places” where Christ sits. From the prison house of sin, he is exalted to the dwelling place of God. This, of course, presupposes that baptism is with him a reality, not a mere outward form. It is not simply into the visible water that he is baptized, but “into Christ,” into His life.

One in Christ, the Seed – “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” (Galatians 3:28). ‘There is no difference.’ This is the keynote of the Gospel. All are alike sinners, and all are saved in the same way. They who would distinguish on the ground of nationality, claiming that there is something different for the Jew than for the Gentile, might just as well make a difference on the ground of sex, claiming that women cannot be saved in the same way and at the same time as men, or that a servant cannot be saved in the same way as his master. No; there is but one way, and all human beings, of whatever race or condition, are equal before God. “Ye are all one in Christ Jesus,” and Christ is the One. So it is that “He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ.” “For ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). There is but one seed, but it embraces all who are Christ’s.

Christ Not for Himself – Christ did not live and die for Himself. It was not necessary that He should bear the curse of the earth in order to possess it as the Son of God for His Father; for it never passed out of God’s ownership. Christ came as the Son of man, to win back as man, for man, that which man had lost. “He taketh on Him the seed of Abraham.” Hence, it is that it is impossible that the seed should be complete in Jesus alone, as a single individual. He is the representative man. God’s purpose is to “gather together in one all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). So the seed includes every soul who can be induced to accept the Lord Jesus, and become one with Him. This gives the glorious assurance that whatever Christ has is ours in Christ.

A Statement of Fact – Galatians 4:1-2 explain themselves. They are a simple statement of fact. Although 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. “So we also, when we were children, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world” (verse 3). 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 Ephesians 4:14, “we *henceforth* be no more children, 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.” It refers to us in our unconverted state, when we “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3).

The Bondage – When we were children we were in bondage under the rudiments of the world. No one who has the slightest acquaintance with the Lord needs to be told that the rudiments of the world is “not after Christ” (Colossians 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 (see Romans 8:5-8). It is the same bondage that is described in Galatians 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” (Ephesians 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 “Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38), it follows that all men are heirs even that those who accept are in their minority. As learned last week, “before faith came,” although 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. God has made all men “accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). This probationary life is given us to acknowledge Him as Father, and to become sons indeed.

The Fullness of the Time – Christ came in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4). A parallel statement to this is in Romans 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 in the New Testament than it did in the Old Testament. 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 – “Seeing He ever liveth to make intercession,” for He is “the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever” (Hebrews 7:25; 13:10).

“Made of a Woman, Made under the Law” – 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.” Being born of a woman, Christ was necessarily born under the law for us, 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” (Hebrews 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” (Isaiah 53:6). 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 Corinthians 5:21). 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 recognise and acknowledge the fact, then we drop out entirely, so that it is “not I, but Christ” (Galatians 2:20). We cast our cares on Him, not by picking them up and with an effort throwing them on Him, but by humbling ourselves to nothingness that we are, so that we leave the burden resting on Him alone.

“To Redeem Them That Were under the Law” (Galatians 4:5) – 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. 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 do 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. Since Christ redeems us from the law, from its condemnation, it follows that He redeems us to a life of obedience.

“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 a different state from that given in Galatians 4:3 as “children.” In that state we were “a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord” (Isaiah 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” (Psalm 40:8). Therefore, since He becomes our substitute, as already described above, literally taking our place, not instead of us, but coming into 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 God’s Spirit. If we yield to the Spirit that Christ had, 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” (1 John 5:7). If we have Christ’s Spirit, we have His blood; and if we have the same blood, 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. 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, although 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” (Galatians 4:6). He is doubly “our Father.” “And if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift.”