



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas
December 30 & 31, 2017

Heirs of the Kingdom

Galatians 4:4-7

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.

Galatians was one of Luther's favorite books. His commentary on Galatians is arguably his greatest literary masterpiece, for in it he expounds the Pauline doctrine of justification by grace through faith apart from the Law. Of course, we know, don't we, that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is the cornerstone of the Reformation; it's the doctrine which sets the Lutheran church apart from all the rest.

Along with his letter to the Romans, Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia demonstrate, beyond a shadow of doubt, that this doctrine of justification is the cornerstone, not just of the Lutheran Reformation, but also of true Christianity. In Romans, Paul presents faith as opposed to works; here in Galatians, he presents faith as opposed to the Law. The distinction draws a fine line between works and the Law (and justifiably so), for it's really the Law that calls for works. So, while there's a slight change in focus between the two, the message is clearly the same: We're saved, not because of what we do, but because of what Christ has done, the grace by which He offers His works to the Father as payment for our sin, and we receive that salvation through faith in His works; faith receives and accepts His free gift of grace.

The reason Paul stresses faith as opposed to the Law is that there had been such an emphasis on obedience to the Law in the Galatian churches, partly because of the teaching of Peter and others. Paul recognized that this teaching was wrong. He writes earlier in his letter how he confronted Peter and pointed out his error, which, by the way, is a good model for us, isn't it. Error must be confronted, not simply for the sake of confrontation, but so that the error may be abolished and healing begun. This was Paul's goal, and because of his confrontation, Peter repented of his error, and the church was once again united.

In today's text, Paul refers to us Christians as heirs of the kingdom of God. How did we get to be heirs? We weren't born into His kingdom; in fact, we were born His enemies.



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So, how did we get to be heirs? In the previous chapter, Paul writes: "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). So, how did we get to be heirs? We became heirs through faith in Jesus, and this faith we receive through the means of grace. In this case, Paul specifically mentions baptism. Through baptism we've received the gift of faith, and through faith, we've been adopted into God's family. Through faith, we've become His children.

The children of God have always been His through faith in His Son. Even in the Old Testament, before He came to earth, His children were adopted into His family through faith in the Messiah. For many, many years, His children were just that – children, waiting to grow up into adulthood. Paul points out that this is precisely what happened when Jesus came. "When the time had fully come," he says in verse four, "God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." When Christ came, He brought us into adulthood. Now we, as His children, have grown up and have come into the inheritance that is ours as heirs.

But, what is this inheritance? What do we receive as His children? Drawing the parallel from human children, Paul demonstrates that, just as human children are subject to guardians and trustees, so we also had been subject to the Law, which would teach us to watch and wait for the Messiah. But, now that we've come into adulthood, just as the child then takes possession of his rightful property, we now take possession of what is ours as heirs of the kingdom. We are now free to exercise our full rights as sons.

Well, what does this free exercise entail? What are we free to do? We're now empowered to do freely what we once were driven to do by the task-master called the Law. The Ten Commandments are no longer merely rules by which we're forced to live, but, now, more accurately, they're descriptions of the life of a Christian. A Christian has no other god but God. A Christian does not take the Lord's name in vain. A Christian remembers the Sabbath day and keeps it holy. A Christian honors his father and mother. A Christian does not murder. A Christian does not commit adultery. A Christian does not steal. A Christian does not bear false witness against his neighbor. A Christian does not covet his neighbor's property or family.

These Commandments are no longer task-masters for you who've put on Christ. You're now free to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. You're free to refrain from cursing, swearing, using witchcraft, lying, and deceiving. You're free to call upon the name of God in every trouble, to pray, praise, and give thanks. You're free to hold worship in God's house as sacred, to come and gladly hear and learn God's Word. You're free to honor, serve, and obey your parents, to hold them in love and esteem. You're free to avoid



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hurting or harming your neighbor, and to help him in every bodily need. You're free to lead a chaste and decent life, clinging only to your spouse. You're free to keep from taking what doesn't belong to you, or cheating and misdealing. You're free to refrain from betraying, slandering, or defaming your neighbor, and to speak well of him, and to put the best construction on everything. You're free to avoid craftily seeking to get your neighbor's inheritance, and to help and be of service to him in keeping it. You're free to keep from enticing your neighbor's family or servants away from him, and to urge them to stay and do their duty. Indeed, you're now free to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself. This is the freedom you have as a Christian.

Now, if this is true, if this is an accurate description of the life of a Christian, what can be said of those who call themselves Christians but don't exhibit this freedom? If I call myself a Christian, and yet I covet my neighbor's family and home, what sort of Christian am I? If I profess to be a Christian, and yet I always make the worst of what people say, and betray, defame, and slander whomever I please, what kind of Christian is that? If I say I follow Jesus, but I steal, hurt, and harm people, live an adulterous life, or dishonor my parents, by what right may I claim to be a Christian? Can a person call himself a Christian and avoid church, take the Lord's name in vain, or worship other things in place of the one true God?

If we answer that question with a "no," if we say that a person cannot do these things and be a Christian, then we in fact are condemning ourselves to hell. The truth is that we all at times are guilty of sinning against one, many, or even all of these Commandments. Does that nullify our salvation? Does that mean we're no longer a Christian? If we forget to exercise our freedom, does this mean we've fallen out of faith?

What this really means is that we've once again been reminded of the fact of our sinful nature. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh quite frequently entice us into forgetting to exercise our birth right as children of God.

Have you been forgetting to exercise your Christian freedom? Have you been worshiping any of the many gods our society offers instead of the one true God? Have you been taking the Lord's name in vain? Have you not been remembering to attend His house for worship and Bible study? Have you been disrespectful to your parents or others in authority? Have you been hurting other people? Have you been unfaithful to your spouse? Have you been stealing? Have you been slandering or defaming others? Have you been coveting your neighbor's home, property, or family?

Let me remind you of the words of our text: "When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might



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receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."

Brothers and sisters, claim your rights! You have the right to live the way God has meant for you to live. You have the right to exercise your Christian freedom! You have the power, from the Spirit of God living inside you, to claim your freedom and be unshackled from the slavery of sin. Let God break your chains. Let Him empower you to live a life pleasing to Him. You are His child – a child of the King! Claim your rights as His children! When Satan tries to make you forget your rights, when he tempts you to let him re-shackle you, take up the Word of God and wave your adoption papers in his face, saying, "Away from me, evil one, for I am a child of the King!" He will – he must – flee from you and leave you alone, free to live as God's child, free to exercise your rights, free to be the Christian you are by virtue of God's grace which He poured out on you in the sending of His Son.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen