

Christian Liberty Galatians 4:1-16

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christian liberty and the reality of freedom in Christ, which brings us into a relationship with God as our Father and gives us the highest freedom and true devotion to him.

Scripture: Galatians 4:1

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Christian Liberty"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the doctrine of justification by faith in his sermon to the Galatians, illustrating that while Christians are heirs of God, they must first learn obedience and endure the initial burdens of their faith. He draws parallels between the growth of a child and the Christian journey, highlighting that true freedom comes through submission to God's law. Miller points out that the transformation from bondage to freedom is through Christ, who enables believers to become children of God. He encourages Christians to embrace their identity and privileges as heirs, reminding them that true liberty is found in devotion to God's will. Ultimately, Miller asserts that Christian freedom is not a license to sin but a joyful commitment to live according to God's law.

Transcript

When Paul sent his message to the Christians of Galatia, he emphasized emphatically the great doctrine of justification by faith, for this was the preaching they most needed. After saying that all Christians, without regard to nation, were children of God by faith in Christ, he went on to tell of the condition of the heir while under age, "What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate." This is illustrated in the infancy and early years of royal children.

An interesting little story is told of the late King Edward of England. When he was a child he once refused obedience to his governess and appealed to his dignity and rank as heir to the throne of England. Prince Albert was called, and bringing a Bible, he read this verse to him and chastised him. One application here is that in entering upon a Christian life, its requirements and restraints may seem at the beginning burdensome.

The first duty of a child of God is absolute and unquestioning obedience, and obedience may not at first be a delight. Yet we are to obey, whether it is a pleasure or not. The fact that we are children of God and heirs of eternal glory--does not free us from the most commonplace duties that our earthly relations impose. Freedom has to be gotten through submission to law.

"Even when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world." All learning is bondage at first. We listen to a fine player on the piano. Her fingers wander over the keys without a pause or mistake. But there was a time when every note had to be picked out on the keyboard, and when the simplest exercise cost painful effort. There was bondage under the rudiments, before there was freedom. So it is in reading; the child begins with the A B C, and learns to spell syllables and frame words. It is a slavish process. But in a few years he takes up and reads any page with fluency and ease, never thinking of the letters and syllables. It is the same in all arts and in all learning. So it is in Christian life. Duties have to be learned, sometimes painfully, and repeated over and over until they become gracious habits. The value of this truth here is to press the importance of perseverance in all Christian duties, however irksome and hard at first, until bondage becomes freedom and delight.

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." A gentleman interested in the education of the Indians has many photographs of parties that have passed under his notice. One day he picked up three pictures and was struck by the order in which they lay. The first was a group of Indians at the time of their arrival at Hampton, in all their wild savagery of feature and dress. The third picture was of that same group at the close of their course at Hampton, when they wore all the marks of civilization and Christian refinement. Then between these two pictures there had slipped by mere accident a photograph of one of the famous paintings of the Savior. The suggestion was very beautiful. Between the state of savage rudeness and Christian refinement, there was Christ. It was, indeed, Christ who had wrought the wondrous transformation. It needs only to be pointed out here that between the bondage and freedom of these verses--there is Christ and his redemption.

"That we might receive the adoption of sons." It is a blessed relation, into which redemption brings all who receive Christ. Even to be made God's servants, in the lowliest places, would be a high honor; but we become God's children.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." It is said that when a convert in India was translating these words of John, he said, "Surely it cannot mean that"; and he wrote instead, "That we should be allowed to kiss his feet." But the words are not thus to be toned down. The adoption is real. "As many as received him," said John again, "to them he gave power to become the sons of God." All, therefore, who truly receive Christ as their Savior and Lord become God's children. The Holy Spirit is given to them, and thus they are born again.

Some people seem almost ashamed to be known as Christians. They act as if it were something unmanly or unwomanly. But when we learn into what dignity it exalts us--we should rather glory in being Christians. The children of Queen Victoria are never ashamed to be recognized as such. They do not try to hide the fact. Why should any human being be ashamed to be known as a child of the infinite God?

"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." This is the way God "seals" his children, that is testifies that they are his children. He gives them the Holy Spirit. It is in this way, too, that he changes their hearts.

One day in Africa a chief of one of the tribes said to Dr. Livingstone: "I wish you would change my heart. Give me medicine to change it, for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always." Dr. Livingstone lifted up a New Testament and was about to tell him of the only way in which the heart can be changed--but the chief interrupted him, "Nay, I will have it changed by medicine to drink, and changed at once, for it is always

very proud and very uneasy, and continually angry with someone." Yet there is no medicine that will change a heart. But when the Spirit comes and enters the heart, it is changed--and one of the evidences of the change is a new feeling toward God. For the first time we feel toward him as a Father, and call him out of our hearts with loving joy, "Our Father."

"You are no more a servant--but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." It takes many Christians a long while to realize this. They do not seem to understand their privileges, their dignity. There is a picture which somewhere I have seen described, which, looked at in the ordinary light, shows but a figure of a wearied and defeated pilgrim, stretched in his last sickness on a straw pallet in the poorest sort of a city garret. But when you look at the picture in the light the artist meant it to be seen in, you see that above the head of that outcast and dying man--that the air is all thronged with angels, and the light that streams down from the heavenly home points out the pathway there. In the picture, as at first it appears, we see the man as he seems; in the other view we have the man as he really is, a child of God, an heir of glory.

If all Christians but realized their glorious dignity and destiny--what joy it would inspire in their hearts! This was the freedom that Paul had. See him in the jail at Philippi, in the inner prison, his feet fast in stocks--but his spirit was as free as the eagle that soars in the sky. That is a glimpse of his whole experience. He could not be bound. Nero might thrust him into the Mammertine dungeon--but it was the tyrant and not his prisoner--that was the real slave. A child of God who realized his dignity, cannot be robbed of his liberty.

"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods." Many people think they are free only when they keep away from Christ and out of his service; and that if they become Christians they would become slaves. But really they are slaves while they live in sin, and can only become free by taking Christ's yoke.

"But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?" They had gone back from the blessed liberty of Christ to the old ceremonies of the Jewish Church, and had made themselves slaves again to its burdensome observances. There are Christians now also who are slaves to ritualism. They can worship God only in certain forms. They observe special days and minute rules. Their liturgies written or unwritten are to them what the lame man's crutches are to him. A Christian who has the true liberty of Christ worships God in Spirit, and is not dependent on the mode. He uses all helps and means of grace--but is himself above all.

Yet it must not be inferred that Christian liberty is freedom from the law and will of God. Liberty is not license. Rather, it is the bringing of the whole heart and life into such perfect subjection to God, that the highest freedom is the truest devotion to him. The child that is free--is not the prodigal who has torn away from the restraints of the home--but the one who is lovingly and faithfully doing filial duty. Christian freedom is consecration to Christ's will. He who can say, "May Your will be done," and say it sweetly and lovingly, whether it be a hard duty or a painful submission, is free. So it is not freedom from God's law--but in God's law, which is the Christian's privilege.

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