

No Longer a Slave

Sonship, Adoption, and Inheritance

Galatians 3:26–4:7

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A Galatians Doctrinal Library

Booklet Six

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No Longer a Slave: Sonship, Adoption, and Inheritance

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Where a verse is mentioned, it is written out in this edition, so the reader does not have to leave the page. This booklet is the sixth of nine readings from Paul's letter to the Galatians. The booklets may also be issued as one volume.

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Introduction

If the Law's work as tutor has ended, who is the believer now?

Galatians 3:26–4:7 gives Paul's answer: a son and an heir through Christ. He moves from faith and belonging in Christ to adoption, the Spirit, and a relationship with God as Father.

Some believers know they are forgiven but still approach God like employees who must keep earning a place in His house. Paul gives them a different starting point. We will follow his argument in order, so that the comfort of sonship rests on what Christ has done rather than on a feeling we must manufacture.

If you have been trained to look first for what you must do, this booklet will ask you to begin somewhere else: with what God has already done in Christ, and with who you already are in Him.

A Word to the Reader

Some hurting Christians already know they are forgiven. What they have never been allowed to believe is that they are family. They were treated as employees of God: work well and you may stay; fail and the Father's house becomes a probation office. They learned to keep a timesheet for love.

This booklet is written so that the believer can hear Paul name the new identity without adding a second supervisor. The tutor is gone. You are not an unpaid intern in the kingdom.

You are a son.

And if a son, an heir.

Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son.

Contents of This Booklet

- A Word to the Wounded
- Part One — You Are All Sons
- Part Two — One in Christ
- Part Three — Heirs According to Promise
- Part Four — The Child Under Guardians
- Part Five — God Sent His Son
- Part Six — Therefore You Are No Longer a Slave
- Conclusion — Sonship Opens the Door to Knowing God

The house has a Father. The next question is not how to become a son. It is what sons do with the One who already knows them. That is Booklet Seven.

Part One — You Are All Sons

Booklet Five ended with Paul saying that believers are no longer under the Law as a tutor. A newer reader may wonder what takes the tutor's place. Paul answers by naming the relationship God has already given those who believe in Christ.

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:26, NKJV

Notice, “all.”

Not the most mature Christians, pastors, apostles, theologically sophisticated believers, or the most obedient. All who are in Christ through faith occupy the position Paul calls sons of God.

That is identity.

Paul does not say, “Behave like a son until God adopts you.” He says you are sons through faith in Christ Jesus. Sonship is received through Christ. Spiritual growth begins with who you already are rather than what you are trying to become.

Religion reverses that. Religion says, “Perform like a child of God—and perhaps God will treat you like one.” The Gospel says, “God has made you His child—now learn to live from that relationship.”

Look at Paul's movement:

Promise → Law → Christ → Sonship → Spirit → Inheritance.

Paul moves forward.

Religion often reverses the movement:

Christ → Law → Performance → Fear

The tutor brought you to Christ. Now you are sons. Do not return to the schoolmaster as though sonship never happened.

Identity Before Improvement

A wounded believer has usually been disciplined in the opposite order. First prove. Then perhaps belong. First get the behavior inside the lines. Then we will talk about family.

Paul will not start there. He names the person before he trains the person. That does not make sin small. It makes the house large enough to tell the truth in. A slave hides failure because failure threatens the contract. A son can bring failure into the house because the house is not a contract.

Listen to how a wounded person prays when identity has not been settled.

Lord, if I get this week right, will You come near? Lord, I know I am saved, but I do not know if You like me today. Lord, I will do the thing, if You will not leave.

That is not unbelief in Jesus' existence. That is unbelief in sonship. Paul answers it with a present-tense verb.

You are. All. Sons.

The word all also protects the quiet believer in the back row. The person who does not teach, does not lead, does not have a testimony that fills a microphone. Religion has a way of making sonship feel like a promotion. Paul makes it a birthright in Christ.

If you are in Him by faith, you are not waiting to be upgraded.

Baptized into Christ, Clothed with Christ

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Galatians 3:27, NKJV

The controlling phrase is into Christ. Paul is describing identification with Christ. This is larger than adopting Christian beliefs. You were joined to Christ. You now belong to Him. Your deepest identity is no longer established by your previous religious classification. It is established in Christ.

Paul does not say you have put on a better religious system, Moses plus Jesus, a denomination, or improved morality. He says Christ.

Booklet Four established Christ lives in me. Now Paul describes the believer as clothed with Christ. Christ is not simply someone outside you whom you admire. Your life is now identified with Him.

We define ourselves in countless ways: nationality, race, family, education, job, income, sex, social position, political identity, religious background, achievements, and failures. Some of those distinctions are real. Some matter greatly within ordinary human life.

Paul is not saying human beings cease having history, bodies, cultures, responsibilities, or relationships. He is saying none of those things establishes your standing or inheritance in Christ. That belongs to Christ alone.

Part Two — One in Christ

Paul now describes what believers share because they belong to Christ. In his world, being Jewish or Gentile, enslaved or free, male or female affected a person's place in society. Those differences did not give anyone a higher standing in Christ.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28, NKJV

Neither Jew nor Greek

Neither Jew nor Greek lands directly in the controversy Paul has been addressing. Gentiles were being pressured toward Jewish religious identity—circumcision, Moses, and Law.

In Christ, Jewish status does not give someone a superior position before God. Gentile status does not make someone spiritually inferior. Christ defines belonging.

Remember Antioch. Peter moved away from the Gentile table. His behavior communicated a distinction. Paul confronted him because the table was preaching something Christ had not established. Now the theological reality is explicit.

The Jewish believer does not occupy a higher spiritual category. The Gentile believer does not need to move upward into Jewishness. Both stand in Christ. Circumcision cannot become a staircase into greater acceptance.

Neither Slave nor Free

In the Roman world, that distinction affected nearly everything about a person's earthly life—power, freedom, economic position, and social status. Yet it cannot create separate levels in Christ.

The believing slave does not receive a lesser Christ. The socially powerful believer does not receive a larger inheritance because of status. God does not give the wealthy Christian first-class access and the poor believer economy seating. Both belong to the same Father.

The world constantly measures people: rich or poor, educated or uneducated, influential or unknown, successful or ordinary. Religion can import those same measurements. The person with the large ministry must be more important. The person with the degree must understand God better. The senior pastor must have greater access to God.

Paul tears down that hierarchy where standing in Christ is concerned. You may have different responsibilities, gifts, and roles. There are not different levels of sonship.

What 3:28 Does—and Does Not—Say

Standing and Inheritance

“Neither male nor female” is about standing and inheritance in Christ. Paul is not claiming bodies disappear, erasing marriage, or saying every earthly responsibility becomes identical. Sex does not determine access to Christ, sonship, belonging, or inheritance.

Women do not receive a reduced portion of Christ. Men do not receive a superior spiritual inheritance. In Christ, you are all one.

Paul's answer to human classification is not that every difference is meaningless. His answer is that none of those differences can compete with Christ as the basis of belonging.

- Different earthly circumstances. One spiritual foundation: Christ.
- Different histories. Same Life.
- Different responsibilities. Same Father.
- Different gifts. Same inheritance.

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Galatians 3:29, NKJV

The condition is if you are Christ's—not: if you become Jewish, keep Moses, are circumcised, or satisfy a religious institution—then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Abrahamic inheritance is located in belonging to Christ, not in Jew/Gentile, slave/free, or male/female distinctions.

Human distinctions are real, but they do not determine standing, belonging, sonship, or inheritance in Christ.

If you are Christ's, you are Abraham's seed and an heir according to the promise.

Part Three — Heirs According to Promise

God promised Abraham a family and an inheritance long before the Law was given through Moses. Paul has argued that the promise reaches those who belong to Christ. Now he tells the Galatians what that makes them: heirs.

Employees Think in Wages

Booklet Five introduced the difference between Law and promise. Law says, “do.” Promise says, “God will.” Now Paul adds another word: heir.

An heir does not receive his inheritance as wages. An heir receives because of relationship. That changes the entire posture of Christian life.

An employee thinks, What have I earned? An heir thinks, What has my father provided?

An employee works toward payment. An heir receives from relationship.

An employee negotiates compensation. An heir lives from a family provision already established.

That does not mean the heir never works. It means work is no longer the basis of belonging.

Much religious thinking sounds like this: if I pray enough, God will bless me; if I behave, God will accept me; if I give, God will repay me; if I serve, God will value me; if I fail, God may withdraw; if I succeed, God may come closer.

That is wage thinking.

THE GOSPEL INTRODUCES INHERITANCE THINKING.

I belong; therefore, I receive. I am loved; therefore, I respond. I am a son; therefore, I serve within the family.

The Son Who Kept a Timesheet

Imagine a man who owns a family business. His adult son works beside him. One afternoon, the father notices the son recording every task: arrived, swept the floor, answered a customer, unloaded a truck, etc...

The father asks what he is doing. The son says he needs to keep track so the father will know whether he earned the right to remain a son tonight.

How would the father respond? Probably with heartbreak.

“Son, you do not work here to become my child. You work here because you are my child.”

The work matters. Responsibility matters. Faithfulness matters. None of those things creates sonship. Sonship changes their meaning.

Someone will immediately ask: *are you saying obedience doesn't matter?*

No.

A son may work hard, receive correction, learn responsibility, serve faithfully, sacrifice, mature, and obey his father. He does not do those things to purchase sonship. He does them because he is a son.

That difference may appear small on paper. In the heart, it changes everything.

Religion often says, “Behave—then we will tell you who you are.” The Gospel says, “Know who you are—then learn to live from it.” Identity precedes growth.

Paul does not say, “If you eventually live well enough, you may become sons of God.” He says you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Then Christian maturity develops from that settled reality.

What the Wounded Do with a Timesheet

If you grew up in a church that paid in approval, you already own that notebook. You can feel it in your bag on Sunday morning.

Did I pray enough this week to sit near God?

Did I confess the right way?

Did I serve visibly enough that the leaders will still count me safe?

The notebook is not humility. It is a slave’s tool in a son’s hand.

Paul is not mocking the desire to be faithful. He is naming the lie underneath it: that belonging is a daily wage.

Close the notebook. Keep the work. Change the reason.

Some readers will feel almost angry at that sentence. The notebook was how they survived. It was how they stayed in the room. It was how they made an unpredictable religious system feel predictable.

Paul is not asking them to become careless. He is asking them to stop using labor as a substitute for belonging.

The Father already put their name on the door.

An employee thinks in wages. An heir receives by relationship.

Part Four — The Child Under Guardians

In Paul's picture, a child can own an inheritance and still live under guardians until the father's appointed time. That arrangement helps explain what the Law did before Christ came—and why returning to its supervision would be a step backward.

“Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.”

Galatians 4:1–2, NKJV

Booklet Five already told you the tutor's job and its end: the Law brought us to Christ, but it was never meant to govern sons forever. This page is not another argument against living under religious Law. It is the name of the person who is no longer under that arrangement: a son.

Heir in Title, Slave in the Day's Experience

There is a paradox. The child is an heir, yet his daily experience may resemble a slave. Why? Because he is still under supervision. He has not yet entered the mature exercise of his position. The inheritance belongs to him in principle. But he is not living in its freedom.

A person can possess something legally and still live as though he does not possess it experientially. Christians do this constantly. They possess forgiveness, acceptance, the Spirit, sonship, inheritance, and access to God—yet they live like spiritual employees trying to earn a daily wage.

Notice again: “until.” Booklet Five showed the Law as tutor. Here Paul extends the illustration. The child is under supervision, but the supervision is not the destination. The father has an appointed time. The goal is maturity.

The Railing and the Father

Ask a child why he will not walk across a room without holding the wall. He is not rebellious. He is unfinished. Guardians exist because children need them.

The tragedy is not that Israel had the Law. The tragedy is a church that treats grown sons as if the appointed time never came.

Wounded Christians often confuse the railing with God. The railing told them when to stand, when to sit, when they were clean, when they could come to the table.

Remove the railing and they do not first feel the Father. They feel drop-off. Pastors who love control will interpret that panic as proof the railing must return. Paul interprets it as the moment sonship becomes possible.

You can honor the railing without moving back under it. You can say the Law did its holy work. You can even thank God for every true thing it showed you about your heart. Then you can walk into the room where Abba is already standing.

Permanent Childhood Is Not Maturity

Imagine a forty-year-old man whose father still chooses what he wears, when he sleeps, what he eats, where he goes, whom he talks to, and how he spends every dollar. At some point, we would ask why this man was never allowed to grow up.

Yet religion often presents permanent spiritual childhood as maturity: always needing a human guardian, someone to decide, someone to approve, and external control.

Paul's picture moves in the opposite direction. The guardian has a purpose. Then the appointed time arrives.

“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.”

Galatians 4:3, NKJV

Paul now uses the language of bondage. The childlike supervised condition belongs to something before. He is preparing another historical transition: childhood, bondage, then the fullness of time.

Booklet Seven will press what it means to turn back to weak and beggarly elements, as though sons were still slaves. Here the point is the appointed movement forward.

There is a deeper pattern beneath religious childhood. Human beings naturally attempt to live by continually evaluating good and evil, right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, blessed and cursed—then try to secure Life through correct choices. Tell me the rules. I will do the good. Avoid the evil. Then perhaps I will be accepted.

Christian life does not ultimately mature by becoming increasingly obsessed with an external scorecard. Maturity is learning trust, relationship, dependence, and Life with God.

Rules can feel safe. Tell me exactly what to do, how often, how much, what is permitted, what is forbidden—then I can measure myself.

Trust feels more vulnerable. Trust says I must know the Person. I must listen, depend, respond, walk, grow. That is harder to institutionalize.

Sons are not called merely to become excellent rule-followers. They are called into relationship with their Father.

The guardian had a purpose, but the guardian was not the destination. The appointed time has come in Christ.

Part Five — God Sent His Son

Paul has described the child waiting for the appointed time. He now names what God did when that time arrived. The Father sent His Son to redeem those under the Law and bring them into the family as sons.

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

Galatians 4:4–5, NKJV

The Father Appointed the Time

The fullness of the time.

The Father had an appointed time. Then He sent His Son. The transition does not happen because humanity finally becomes mature enough. It happens because God acts. Again, grace begins with God.

Paul does not say God sent another Law, another tablet, another religious institution, another improved system of rules. He sent His Son.

The Gospel is not finally about moving from bad rules to better rules. It is about moving into relationship with God through His Son.

- **Born of a woman:** Jesus entered human existence. He truly became man. He did not rescue humanity from a distance. He entered our world, our weakness, our history, our mortality—yet without sin. The Son of God entered the human condition to accomplish what humanity could not accomplish for itself.
- **Born under the Law:** Jesus entered the legal relationship under which Israel lived. He did not stand outside it and criticize. He entered it. He fulfilled His calling within it. And ultimately, He bore its curse at the Cross.
- **To redeem those who were under the Law:** Christ did not come merely to help those under Law remain under it more successfully. He came to redeem them—buyout, deliver.

This fits what Booklet Five already established: Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law. The movement is under Law, then redeemed.

But redeemed for what? That we might receive the adoption as sons.

Redemption has a destination. Not merely out from something, but into something. From bondage to sonship. From guardian to Father. From external supervision to family relationship.

Adoption Is Not Probation

Many Christians understand salvation mainly as escape: escape hell, condemnation, punishment, sin’s consequences. Those things matter.

Paul describes salvation positively. God does not merely get you out of prison. He brings you into the family. He does not merely cancel the debt. He gives an inheritance. He does not merely remove the slave master. He gives you a Father.

Before adoption: not a child.

After adoption: a child.

That is a change of status. The Christian does not live on probation hoping God eventually decides whether to keep him. Paul's language is son. Belonging. Family. Relationship. Inheritance.

The Christian life must begin from that position.

Religion often says, "Yes, God adopted you—but behave, because if you fail badly enough He will treat you as an outsider again. Yes, you are forgiven—but today's sin may place you back outside the door. Yes, you are His child—but your daily performance determines whether you receive His favor."

That turns adoption into probation.

Paul does not.

Sonship first. Then life from sonship.

Because You Are Sons

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"

Galatians 4:6, NKJV

Notice the order. Not: God sent His Spirit so that perhaps someday you might become a son. He says, "because you are sons."

Identity precedes experience. Sonship is the settled position from which that which follows occurs.

The Christian does not merely receive a new legal designation. God comes near. More than near. Within. The Spirit of His Son enters your heart. That is relationship at its deepest level.

The Father does not leave the son with only a rulebook. Imagine adoption occurring, papers signed, the child brought home—then the father says, "Here is the employee handbook. Follow it. I will check back in thirty years." That is not family.

God gives the believer the Spirit of His Son. The Christian has more than external instructions. He has God within. Walking in the Spirit will be developed in Booklet Nine, where Paul turns to life by the Spirit. Here the point is identity:

THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT CONFIRMS THE RELATIONSHIP OF SONSHIP.

"Abba, Father" is not religious vocabulary from a distance. It is family language—personal, relational, and intimate. The Christian does not stand outside heaven shouting toward an unknown deity, "Please let me in." The Spirit within cries, Father.

That changes the entire posture of prayer. Under performance, the dominant question is, “What must I do?” Under sonship, the relationship begins with, “Abba.”

You are no longer standing on the front porch trying to earn admission. You are inside the Father’s house.

What Changes When God Is Father

A slave wonders what mood the master is in, whether he has done enough, whether he is allowed near, whether he will be punished.

A son says, “Father.”

That does not mean disrespect. It means security.

Prayer becomes less about negotiating access and more about relationship.

Failure changes. A son who breaks something in the house should tell his father. He may need correction. There may be consequences. Trust may need rebuilding. But the broken lamp does not suddenly make him not a son.

Christian failure should lead toward honesty, correction, growth, dependence—not toward I must now re-earn my place in the family.

- **Confession Changes.** A slave confesses to reduce punishment. A son speaks honestly because he belongs. Confession is family conversation, not a transaction that reactivates forgiveness. Father, I was wrong. I hurt someone. I acted from fear. I followed my flesh. Help me understand. Lead me. Change me.
- **Obedience Changes.** A slave obeys primarily because he must. A son can learn obedience because he trusts his Father. The outward act may sometimes look identical. The source is different: fear on one side; trust, love, gratitude, and participation on the other.
- **Service Changes.** A spiritual employee serves to establish value. A son serves because he already belongs. Same hands. Different heart.

Correction does not end sonship. Children need correction. Sons grow. They can act foolishly, resist wisdom, and hurt people. Grace does not mean the Father never corrects. It means correction happens within the relationship. The goal is growth—not repeated reentry into the family.

God did not merely redeem believers out of bondage. He brought them into sonship.

“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”

Galatians 4:6, NKJV

Part Six — Therefore You Are No Longer a Slave

The word “therefore” gathers up Paul’s argument. God sent His Son, gave believers the Spirit of His Son, and taught them to call Him Father. The status he announces follows from what God has already done.

“Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

Galatians 4:7, NKJV

Therefore.

Because God sent His Son. Because Christ redeemed. Because adoption was given. Because the Spirit of the Son entered the heart.

“Therefore, you are no longer a slave.” Paul wants that conclusion to settle.

Paul’s Gospel repeatedly moves people out of former relationships. He does not say live like a slave who has been given better benefits. He says you are not one.

Here is the tragedy. God says, son; religion says, employee. God says, inheritance; religion says, wages. God says promise; religion says, performance. God says, Spirit; religion says, try harder. Sincere Christians spend years attempting to earn what God has already placed in the family account.

LIVE FROM THE INHERITANCE—NOT LIVE IN ORDER TO OBTAIN ONE.

God has already given the believer His acceptance, His love, His Spirit, and His Life in Christ. Living from abundance, instead of lack, changes what sin advertises. Sin promises Life from something that cannot give it. The heir who knows what he already has, is less easily sold what he does not need.

Sonship Does Not Produce Laziness

Responsibility without slavery is possible. A son can work harder than an employee precisely because he is not trying to purchase his place. Prayer can be more honest, not less. Failure can be faced instead of hidden. Service can be freer because it is no longer a bid for value. Expectation can rest on the Father’s character rather than on this week’s performance.

You do not have to earn God’s attention.

You are not a tolerated guest.

The Father wanted sons.

You are not the family servant who may eat in the kitchen if the work is satisfactory. “If a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

The inheritance flows through Christ. Do not try to earn it. Live from provision.

Maturity is not independence from the Father. From rules to relationship does not mean from truth to feelings. A mature son knows the Father’s heart. He does not invent his own morality because the tutor ended. He lives with the One who gave him Life.

If you have been hurt by church defection, this is the place the series wants to land in you. Not a new technique for managing God. A name.

Son.

Heir.

Abba.

The guardian has finished the job. Do not hire him back because freedom feels unfamiliar. Unfamiliar is not the same as unsafe.

The first weeks out from under a tutor often feel like walking without a railing. That sensation is not proof you should return to childhood. It is proof you are being asked to know the Father instead of the schedule.

Conclusion — Sonship Opens the Door to Knowing God

The tutor is gone.

Now who are you?

Paul's answer is not "a new supervisor."

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Baptized into Christ. Clothed with Christ. One in Him—Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. If you are Christ's, you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Galatians 4:4-5, NKJV

The heir as a child may live like a slave, though he is master of all. Guardians have an appointed time.

"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" ⁷Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Galatians 4:6-7, NKJV

That is not a slogan. It is status. It is family. It is the end of religious childhood as a governing relationship. Sit with that before you turn the page. If it is true, then a great deal of the exhaustion you have been carrying was never holiness.

IT WAS A JOB YOU WERE NEVER HIRED TO DO: KEEPING YOURSELF IN THE FAMILY BY OUTPUT.

Paul has taken that job away.

What remains is Life with the Father.

Which raises the next question.

If you are a son, what is the relationship with the Father actually like? What happens when people who have been known by God turn back toward weak and beggarly elements as though they were still slaves?

Paul is about to speak of knowing God, and of being known by God.

That is where Booklet Seven begins.