

**Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!**

Today, we dive into the heart of Paul's letter to the Galatians, a passage that thunders with the gospel's liberating truth. In Galatians 3:23–4:7, Paul declares that through faith in Christ, we are no longer imprisoned by the law but are adopted as God's own children, heirs of His eternal promise. This is no abstract theology—it's the reality that shapes our identity, our hope, and our lives. Today we'll unpack this text verse by verse, letting Scripture speak for itself. Holy Spirit open our hearts to receive your Word here in Galatians.

### I. Imprisoned Under the Law (3:23–24)

Paul begins in verse 23: "Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed." The law, God's holy standard, was a jailer. It exposed sin, restrained evil, but could not save. It locked humanity in a cell of condemnation, showing us our guilt without offering a way out. Verse 24 adds, "So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith." The Greek word for "guardian" (*paidagōgos*) refers to a strict household slave who disciplined children until they matured. The law was a temporary overseer, preparing us for Christ.

This truth hits home when we consider our own attempts to earn God's favor. Like a prisoner rattling the bars, we try to justify ourselves through good works, but the law's demands are unrelenting. Martin Luther himself knew this struggle. Before his conversion, Luther was a monk consumed with guilt, fasting, praying, and confessing for hours, desperate to appease God. He later wrote, "I tortured myself with prayer, fasting, vigils, and freezing; the frost alone might have killed me... Yet I still felt like a prisoner under God's wrath." The law showed Luther his sin but offered no escape—until he discovered the Bible's teaching about justification by faith. Luther's breakthrough in understanding Romans and Galatians set him free, sparking the Reformation. Like Luther, we want to see the law's role: it diagnoses our sin but cannot cure it. Only Christ can.

Application: Have you ever felt trapped by your failures, trying to "be good enough" for God? The law shows us our need for a Savior. Don't let it drive you to despair. Let it drive you to Christ.

### II. Freed by Faith in Christ (3:25–26)

Paul continues in verse 25: “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” The coming of Christ changes everything. The law’s role as jailer and guardian is over. Why? Verse 26: “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” Through faith in Christ’s perfect life, death, and resurrection, we are justified—declared righteous before God. We are no longer slaves but sons, not by our works but by trusting in Christ’s work for us.

This radical shift from slavery to sonship echoes through church history. Consider William Wilberforce, the 18th-century British parliamentarian. As a young man, Wilberforce lived a carefree life, relying on his charm and wealth. But the law’s demands weighed on him, exposing his shallow existence. Through a friend’s witness, he encountered the gospel and placed his faith in Christ. Transformed, Wilberforce became a son of God, no longer bound by guilt or worldly approval. His faith drove him to lead the fight against the slave trade, enduring decades of opposition to see it abolished in 1807. Wilberforce’s life shows how faith in Christ frees us from the law’s curse and empowers us to live for God’s glory.

Application: Faith in Christ is your freedom. Trusting in His finished work, you are no longer defined by your past or your performance but by your status as God’s child. Live in that liberty!

### III. United in Christ (3:27–29)

Paul expands the implications in verses 27–28: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Baptism clothes us with Christ’s righteousness, uniting us to Him and to one another. The distinctions that divide—ethnicity, class, gender—lose their power to separate in the family of God. Verse 29 concludes, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” Through faith, we inherit the promise God made to Abraham, fulfilled in Christ.

This unity in Christ was powerfully lived out by Elizabeth of Hungary, a 13th-century princess and saint. Born into royalty, Elizabeth was married to a German nobleman but devoted her life to serving the poor. After her husband’s death, she gave up her wealth, founding a hospital where she personally cared for lepers and the destitute. In Christ, Elizabeth saw no distinction between herself and those she served—they were all one in Baptism. Her radical love, rooted in her identity as a child of God, shocked the nobility but reflected the unity Paul describes. Elizabeth’s life reminds us that Baptism makes us one family, heirs of the same promise.

Application: In a world divided by race, class, and ideology, the church is called to reflect Christ's unity. Your baptism unites you to every believer, past and present. Live out that oneness in love and service.

#### IV. Adopted as Sons (4:1–5)

Paul shifts to an illustration in chapter 4, verses 1–3: “I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” Before Christ, we were like underage heirs, enslaved to the world's futile systems—whether pagan idolatry or legalistic religion. But verses 4–5 deliver the gospel's climax: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” At the perfect moment, God sent Jesus, fully human and subject to the law, to redeem us by fulfilling the law and bearing its curse on the cross. Through His work, we are adopted as God's sons.

Adoption is a profound image. In Roman culture, adoption was permanent, granting full rights as heirs. God doesn't merely forgive us; He makes us His children. In the bustling city of Rome, under the golden sun of 50 BCE, lived Lucius Marcellus, a respected senator with no heirs to carry his noble name. His grand villa echoed with the laughter of servants but not of children. One day, while overseeing the construction of a new aqueduct, he encountered a young boy named Gaius, an orphan scavenging near the worksite. Gaius's quick wit and earnest eyes struck Lucius, who saw in him a spark of potential. Moved by compassion, Lucius decided to adopt Gaius through the ancient Roman process of adoption. In a solemn ceremony at the Forum, with witnesses and a magistrate present, Lucius formally relinquished Gaius's old status and welcomed him into the Marcellus family. The legal act severed Gaius's ties to his past, granting him a new identity as Gaius Marcellus, son of Lucius. The transformation was profound. Gaius was draped in a toga befitting a Roman citizen, a symbol of his new rights. Lucius presented him with a family ring, signifying his inheritance of the Marcellus estate and wealth. At a feast that night, Gaius sat at the head table, no longer a servant but an equal, sharing in the privileges of the household. Lucius taught him to read scrolls of law and philosophy, preparing him to one day take his place in the Senate.

Years passed, and Gaius grew into a respected young man. When Lucius fell ill, Gaius managed the family's affairs with skill, proving his worth. Upon Lucius's death, Gaius inherited everything—lands, titles, and the sacred duty to honor the family's ancestors. The adoption, once a gesture of kindness, became a testament to Rome's belief in the fullness of family bonds, where love and law intertwined to give Gaius a life beyond his wildest dreams.

Application: You are not a hired servant, scraping by to earn God's favor. You are His adopted child, loved and secure. Let this truth anchor you in life's storms.

## V. The Spirit of Sonship (4:6–7)

Paul concludes in verses 6–7: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” The Holy Spirit seals our adoption, enabling us to cry “Abba,” an intimate Aramaic term for “Father.” The Spirit assures us of our relationship with God, transforming our hearts from fear to filial love. As heirs, we share in Christ's inheritance—eternal life and the new creation.

This intimate cry of “Abba” echoes in the story of Johann Sebastian Bach, the 18th-century Lutheran composer. Bach's life was marked by hardship— orphaned at ten, losing his first wife and ten of his twenty children. Yet his music, like the St. Matthew Passion, reflects a deep trust in God as Father. Bach inscribed his compositions with “S.D.G.” (Soli Deo Gloria), dedicating them to God's glory. His faith, rooted in the Spirit's assurance, enabled him to cry “Abba” amid suffering, producing works that still draw hearts to Christ. Bach's life shows how the Spirit empowers us to trust God as Father, even in pain.

Application: The Spirit in your heart cries “Abba!” You can approach God with confidence, not fear. Pray boldly, live joyfully, knowing you are His heir.

## Conclusion

Galatians 3:23–4:7 is a symphony of grace. The law once imprisoned us, but Christ has set us free. Through faith, we are united as God's children, adopted as sons, and sealed by the Spirit who cries “Abba!” From Luther's liberation to Wilberforce's zeal, from Elizabeth's unity to Corrie ten Boom's resilience, from Bach's worship to our own lives, this gospel transforms. As conservative Lutherans, we cling to this truth: salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You are no longer a slave but a son, an heir of God's promise. Live in that freedom, love as God's family, and trust your Father's care. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.**

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