

1197 God's adopted sons, spiritual interpretation of Bible, and loving others - Gal(4)1-(5)15 (by Whirlwind)

First, it mentions that the Bible says we are all born with sin—that is, as slaves to Satan—and discusses how we are God's adopted children, redeemed through Jesus Christ, with the indwelling Holy Spirit as a pledge, and that we are not to keep the Law. Second, it discusses how Paul endured the pains of spiritual childbirth until Christ was formed in their hearts, because some, led astray by zealous division, had strayed from the truth. It points out that the Old Testament clearly states we receive spiritual healing through faith. Third, we discussed in detail the spiritual interpretation of the two women as representing the two covenants; therefore, spiritual interpretation is sometimes necessary. Finally, we addressed not being tempted by a distorted gospel that claims salvation requires circumcision, and explained that, on the premise of loving God, the entire Law is encapsulated in the phrase "love your neighbor as yourself."

Please note that this article is an expansion of the topicwise Bible study held on Sunday (7/5/26). Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. If this article refers previous articles, they can all be found on our website, '<https://a-christian-voice.com/>'; click on 'Understanding Spiritual Life'.

1. God's adopted sons through redemption

"Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."(Galatians 4:1-11)

First, we note that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, just as this passage says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."(John 3:16) Here, Jesus redeems us to become God's sons—that is, adopted sons. This is made clear by the fact that "what God tells us through the Bible is consistent," so we are merely adopted sons.

Since adopted sons also inherit the estate, we once again see that Paul's logic is very clear. He uses a human analogy: "...the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith."(Galatians 3:24) Before Jesus came—that is, while we were still

children—we were under the care of tutors and guardians until the time appointed by God arrived, that it when "...the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."(John 1:14) Please note that here it is stated once again that He is the Father's only Son; we, of course, are merely redeemed adopted sons. We also see that this passage reiterates the same point: "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him."(1 John 4:9)

We know that "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."(Romans 3:20) Therefore, redemption is absolutely necessary. And once we have been redeemed through faith, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son (the Holy Spirit) into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" "(Galatians 4:6) This clearly refers to the indwelling Holy Spirit crying out within us. "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge."(2 Corinthians 1:22) At the very beginning, the indwelling Holy Spirit is merely a pledge—much like a down payment when buying a house, with the remainder to be paid off in installments. This corresponds to walking the path of sanctification on our spiritual journey. We are heirs through God, not through the Law: "However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods."(Galatians 4:8) In other words, from the moment we were born, we were slaves to Satan through sin, as we can see in the Old Testament.

The Scripture says, "When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth."(Genesis 5:3). At that time, Adam was already a sinner because of his disobedience to God; therefore, as the Scripture states, Seth was born with sin, and so were his descendants. We are all descendants of Adam, so we too are born with sin. This is what Paul meant when he said, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."(Romans 3:23) By the way we liked to mention, "To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD."(Genesis 4:26) Since "Seth lived one hundred and five years, and became the father of Enosh."(Genesis 5:6), it follows that after Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden, at least 235 years passed without anyone calling upon the name of the Lord. We see, then, that the human heart has been hardened from the very beginning. "Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."(Genesis 6:3) Moses lived exactly one hundred twenty years (see Deuteronomy 34:7). We do not live that long today, so we really must not let our hearts grow so hard that we miss our chance altogether!

Now that we are known by God, we must move beyond the elementary stage; we truly must not go back to "...observe days and months and seasons and years."(Galatians 4:10). No wonder Paul said, "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain." (Galatians 4:11).

2. Paul suffers again from spiritual labor

"I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."(Galatians 4:12-20)

Paul made it clear from the start that they had not wronged one another at that time; he had always been one who never wronged anyone. He also gave an example of how they had not wronged him at that time: even though he was ill then, the text clearly describes how they endured the trial, to the point that "...if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me."(Galatians 4:15). Please look at the passage for yourselves.

Clearly, some people have now been led astray by zealous divisiveness and have strayed from the truth. That is why he says, "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."(Galatians 4:19-20) We see that although he wished to change his tone, his honesty told him he could not. Even so, he encouraged them to do good—not just when he was present, but to be consistent in word and deed, and not to do things merely for show, for that is useless.

We note that physical illness is specifically mentioned here. The Bible does not say what this illness was, so I do not understand why some people would make unfounded speculations that show a lack of respect for God. When the Old Testament speaks of Jesus, it says, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed."(Isaiah 53:5) Some teach that since Jesus was indeed scourged for us, our physical bodies will be healed. In fact, we are not healed every time, so this must absolutely refer to spiritual healing. Are we not justified by faith?

Regarding the point that this is spiritual healing, the Bible explicitly states about Timothy in this passage, "No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."(1 Timothy 5:23) Did Jesus not suffer the scourging for Timothy? He suffered it for everyone, yet God still allowed him to have physical ailments, and the Bible does not record that he was healed. Therefore, spiritual people are not necessarily free from illness; it is not as I once believed—that God would heal the physical ailments of spiritual people.

In fact, God has absolute sovereignty; sometimes He deliberately chooses not to heal the illnesses of spiritual people. Paul is a case in point. The Scripture says, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."(2 Corinthians 12:7-9) Did God not deliberately leave Paul's thorn unhealed for Paul's own good?

3. The two women as a spiritual Interpretation of the two covenants

"Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For more numerous are the children of the desolate Than of the one who has a husband." And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman." So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman."(Galatians 4:21-31)

We see that Paul uses the story of Abraham's two sons in the Old Testament here to illustrate spiritual interpretation; therefore, spiritual interpretation is sometimes necessary. But this does not mean we can interpret Scripture arbitrarily. The New Testament clearly provides examples of spiritual interpretation, and we must remember, "He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel."(Psalm 103:7). Spiritual interpretation must conform to the principles set forth in these examples.

The two sons refer to the following: When Abram (Abraham) was eighty-six years old, his maid "...Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ..." (Genesis 16:15-16) This was because "...Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai." (Genesis 16:1-2) So he was born according to the flesh. But when Abraham was a hundred years old, "...Sarah conceived and bore a son (Isaac) to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him." (Genesis 21:2) Isaac was born to Sarah, the free woman, and it is clearly stated that he was born through God's promise.

Paul then interpreted this spiritually, saying that the two women represent the two covenants. "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children." (Galatians 4:25) Sarah represents the free, heavenly Jerusalem, which is described in Scripture as follows: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelation 21:2) The passage then quotes Isaiah 54:1, which mentions one who has not been in labor; therefore, this does not refer to Sarah as a person, but to the New Jerusalem. This also explains why the present Jerusalem is in bondage. In the New Testament, this passage from the Old Testament is clearly interpreted spiritually.

Indeed, "...you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise." (Galatians 4:28) When Abram "went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight." (Genesis 16:4) Although the Bible does not explicitly state it, Ishmael was likely on the same side as his mother at that time, which is why it is said, "But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also." (Galatians 4:29) In fact, from this passage, we can indeed see that Ishmael stood on the same side as his mother, which is why this statement is made. We also note that this was true not only in Paul's day but remains true today; everywhere we see persecution of Christians who are in the minority. Therefore, we must remember, "...In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

The text then essentially quotes this passage: "Therefore she said to Abraham, 'Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.'" (Genesis 21:10) We are "...all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). "So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman." (Galatians 4:31)

4. Be not tempted by the altered gospel that teaches salvation must come through circumcision

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves. For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall

love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.”(Galatians 5:1-15)

It was stated right from the beginning: "...if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."(John 8:36) You have the freedom not to sin; you are no longer in the state of "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want."(Romans 7:19) Know this: "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."(Galatians 5:13) This echoes the following passage: "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."(Jude 1:4) Those who insisted on circumcision must have been false brothers even then; truly, do not be led astray by the altered gospel that claims one must be circumcised to be saved.

For Christians, "...in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love(G26, God’ s love).”(Galatians 5:6) As for Timothy, Paul had him circumcised because of the needs of the gospel (cf. Acts 16:1 – 3). Titus’ s situation was entirely different. His case was as follows: "But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage."(Galatians 2:3-4) Paul indeed acted in accordance with this Scripture.

Paul repeatedly emphasized that those who insist on circumcision are under a debt to keep the entire Law, are separated from Christ, and have fallen from grace. We are "...through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness."(Galatians 5:5) As we just mentioned, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love (G26, God’ s love, noun).”(Galatians 5:6) We must obey the truth to be in harmony with the Lord who called you. Paul is concerned that "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough." (Galatians 5:9) He wants people to know that salvation does not depend on circumcision, but on justification by faith. He then went on to condemn such people in different terms, speaking very clearly and condemning them a third time: "But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves."(Galatians 5:11-12)

Finally, he says, "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love (G25, God’ s love, verb) your neighbor as yourself.” "(Galatians 5:14). This, of course, is on the premise of loving God, because Jesus made it very clear: "And He said to him (a lawyer), “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” "(Matthew 22:37-40) Truly, "...if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another."(Galatians 5:15)