

Confusing slaves, sons and heirs

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[0 : 00] I forgot to mention that I've put on the bookstall a number of this booklet called The Law of Promise. We've been dealing with the place of the law in relation to grace in chapter 3 very much.

There's a lot more that would need to be said than we've been able to deal with. And some of those things I've written in this little booklet called The Law of Promise. The law as it functions within the world of God's grace.

So if you've got an interest in that, there's some on the bookstall there. Now, Galatians 4, 1 to 11. My title this evening is this, Confusing Sons, Slaves and Heirs.

It's sometimes said that what we need in church is a lot less theology and a lot more of the practical. More to do with directly living as Christians or our Christian experience.

Now, there is a kind of theology, a dry, a speculative, fruitless kind of sterile theology that is worthless. Sadly, unfortunately, there's far too much of that around often in the training for ministry.

[1 : 15] But when we're talking about true theology, that is, understanding the gospel of God and the dynamics of the gospel and what it really is and how it really works, the view that says what we need is less theology and more practical things is utterly mistaken.

Utterly mistaken. Dangerously mistaken. If that were true, Paul's letters would have been a lot shorter and easier and much more popular than they are.

Probably like my sermons. But they're not. Because it's not true. In fact, the opposite is true. The reality is that grasping true theology and a proper understanding of the gospel of the Bible is the only thing that liberates Christian people personally and practically and in every other way.

The only way to a truly free and joyful Christian experience is an understanding of the gospel of God properly. That's simply what theology really is.

Disaster and bondage and apostasy in Christian lives and in Christian churches and in Christian homes lies in an abandonment of that quest to truly understand the gospel.

[2 : 43] And friends, that is a lesson that we desperately need to learn and to understand today. Something that needs to be understood by Christian churches, especially, I think, those of us who are Christian parents.

We're often so easily deluded. We're desperately desiring for our children to grow up in the Lord. But this is the reality.

Unless your children, unless your young people, unless you yourselves, all of us, really grasp the gospel and really grasp its implications for our lives, for every area of our life, for our Christian experience, for everything, unless we truly grasp that and our young people grasp that, their Christian experience will be truncated and weak and slave-like.

And that is why people begin to fall away. The word Paul uses in verse 9 of chapter 4 for turning back is literally apostatized to the weak and miserable elements of this world.

And friends, that is why he wrote this letter in such passionate terms, and with such fierce concern for the Galatians, to correct their theology, to overcome a distortion in their thinking that was vital to do, else they would be lost.

[4 : 09] He didn't put on a special event to try and cheer them up. He didn't write them a book of worship songs to give them a better praise experience. He didn't suggest to them all sorts of practical things like changing the way they do their worship.

No, he wrote to them a letter about theology to address their minds and their hearts and to correct them on their misunderstanding of the gospel and all its implications.

And to tell them that they must let the gospel and all of its implications be the only thing that dictates their life together as a church and their individual lives as believers.

And that, says Paul, is the only way to freedom in Christian experience. That's what his letter is all about, freedom. Any other way, he says, leads to bondage, to slavery.

And that is the route that leads to apostasy, to falling away from faith. So there is nothing more practical, is there? There's nothing more desperately needed than the continuing renewal of our minds to grasp the gospel of God.

[5 : 21] That's how people are really transformed. That's what Paul says in Romans 12.

Transformed by the renewing of your minds. And the reason that so many Christians today have such a dissatisfying experience of faith is exactly the same as it was in first century Galatia.

Failure to grasp the true depth of the true gospel of God in Christ. So Paul's message to the Galatians here in the first century is vital to us today, to old and to young, to adults and to youngsters alike.

Because all too often we are foolish like the Galatians. We get taken in by exactly the same kind of errors as they did, unawares, just as they were. And so we need to hear Paul's teaching.

We need to hear his rebuke as he rebuked the Galatians. And it is a rebuke. Remember chapter 3, verse 1? O foolish Galatians, who's bewitched you? He began with their experience.

Don't be absurd. He says, remember what things were like when you began the Christian life. It was real, wasn't it? Then he goes on to a long theological argument that we've been looking at in these last weeks to back it up.

[6 : 37] The whole doctrine of justification by faith alone was there right from the beginning of the story in history, and it's there right to the end. Don't be foolish. It's always been by faith alone.

But it's always been by God's promise, not by what you do. God's promise is permanent. Always been about salvation by faith, for all peoples.

God's law, he says, was a parenthesis. It was only for a time. It was only for the Jews in particular. But it was always heading to its climax in Christ. And the people of promise, Paul says, have always been envisaged by God right from the very beginning as one people in Christ alone, by faith alone. Now, in these verses that we're looking at tonight, he's coming to the end of this long rebuke section before, in verse 12, he begins to start requesting the Galatians, asking them to do things, imperatives.

And remember, it's always in that order in the New Testament, in the Bible as a whole. First, the indicatives, the facts of the situation, the theology, and then the imperatives, the commands, the requests, the things that flow from it.

[7 : 51] And so Paul is showing us what a powerful and stark contrast there is between what the Galatians have now and what they used to be. The difference of the era before Christ, the era of the law, the era of this world, as he calls it, and the era after Christ, the era of being found in Christ, in the new creation.

And he then asks them this question that shows up the absurdity of their behavior. Verse 10, do you see it? How can you possibly be turning back again? It's a very stark question.

The word he uses for turning back literally is apostatized, turn away, total rejection of God. That's what he's saying. And it's an absolutely extraordinary statement.

Just look at it carefully. Paul is equating these Gentiles turning to take up the religion of Israel, Moses' law, the God-given faith of national Israel.

He's equating that, what the missionaries were saying to the Galatians, was the way on to advancement, to a greater knowledge of God, to a greater experience, to a greater intimacy of God.

[9 : 03] Paul is equating that with pagan idolatry. You are turning back again, he says, to weak and miserable things.

Things that are not gods. Things that are idols. They thought, we're going on to higher spiritual life by adding this to the gospel that we believe with Paul.

The reality, Paul says, is they're going right back into apostasy to worship idols. Instead of the one true living God. Isn't that extraordinary? They think they're going on and Paul says, you're on the way, you're on the way to hell.

Idolatry. It's what causes God's anger. It puts us under God's curse. So you see, because they got their theology all wrong, the Christian experience was heading for disaster.

Their very eternity was in jeopardy. So that's a pretty practical thing at stake, don't you think? And that's why Paul had to get them straightened out.

[10:12] It's all about grasping the big story of God's salvation once again. It's all about understanding what the fulfillment of God's plan in human history means. And it's all about the difference that that fulfillment of God's plan in human history makes in human experience.

In other words, if you want the fancy words, it's all about a proper biblical eschatology, the last things beginning to happen, or the accomplishment of God's redemption.

And it's all about a proper biblical soteriology, about salvation, about redemption applied. What it means in history and what it means for you and for me.

So let's follow his argument in these verses under four headings. They're all about the fact that the coming of Christ and the climax of God's redemption in him bring in the age of fulfillment, the age of maturity, the age of destination.

And in these verses, he calls it the age of sonship. So first of all, in verses one to three, Paul is concerned here to talk about the era of sonship.

[11:21] God's fatherly relationship with his people is now matured with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in history. And first of all, in these verses, Paul is speaking historically.

Just look at them carefully. He's talking in terms of Israel. Israel as a whole and how God's relationship with his family of faith has changed so radically with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses one and two are very simple really. It illustrates what he's already talked about in verses 22 to 24 of chapter three. He's talking about what it means to be imprisoned under the law in the old age.

And actually here, it's quite a positive picture, isn't it? Here's a picture of a child in a great house who's a minor. Now he's the young master. Everything belongs to him, really, effectively.

And yet, while he remains a minor, well, he's really no better than a slave because actually in charge are the guardians, the managers. Until, verse two, the date set by his father.

[12:22] The date when he makes that passage into the full rights of the adult son. Rather like a regency period. Do you remember King James VI of Scotland came to the throne?

I think he was three, wasn't he? Mary, Queen of Scots, son. And he was looked after by a whole succession of regents until he was 21 and he could take the throne. And that's the picture Paul has here. And just so with us, says Paul in verse three.

So it was with us. When we were children, we were just the same, enslaved. Who's the us? He's talking about in verse three. Some commentators think it's everyone, all human beings, Jews and Gentiles.

Others think he's referring here just to Jews. Actually, I think it's both, if that can be. Paul's emphasis is clearly here. He's arguing that both Jews and Gentiles were in reality in the same position prior to the coming of Christ.

Both Jews and Gentiles were in bondage. But here he is referring specifically to the Jews. So I would translate it like this, verse three. In the same way, we also, including us Jews, were once enslaved.

[13:34] But enslaved to what? To the elementary principles of this world or the elemental spirits as some versions have it. Again, there's a bit of controversy over that exact phrase.

What does it mean? Does it mean just the basic things, the rudiments of religion, the ABCs? Well, perhaps, perhaps more persuasively, does refer in some way to demonic forces.

Paul uses the same word in Colossians chapter 2, verse 8, where it's translated in my Bible, elemental spirits. In verse 15 of that chapter, he seems to be referring to these as rulers and authorities that Christ triumphed over in his cross.

We'll come back to that because the phrase comes again in verse 9. But for now, notice what these things are of, the end of verse 3. They're of the world, this world. And so the point is clear.

All, including Israel, were slaves to the things of this world. Remember, Paul called it in chapter 1, verse 4, the present evil age. The era of the flesh that he says in chapter 5, verse 25, is now crucified to him.

[14:43] In chapter 6, verse 14, the world, which is now crucified to me and I to the world. And what he's saying is that even the privileged son of God, Israel, the nation, even Israel, nevertheless, lived through an age of something vastly inferior to the era that has now begun with Christ coming.

The age of minors, the age of preparation, the age of this world, which has now given way to the age to come, the new creation in Christ. So, chapter 1, verse 12, we've been rescued from this

present evil age.

In chapter 6, verse 15, neither circumcision, that's Judaism, or uncircumcision, being a Gentile, matters, none of that matters. The only thing that counts is the new creation in Christ.

And as a mark that the new age has begun, Paul is saying we have entered the era of sonship. The latter days, the age to come, the age of the Spirit, the prophetic hope, everything that was pointed forward to in the past has now arrived, it's been fulfilled, and it's marked by a transition from slavery into sonship, from bondage into freedom.

It's the era of sonship. But, the era of sonship is not just something that naturally develops, rather like a calendar, you know, you go through winter and spring and summer, and then two days later you're back to winter again, at least here.

[16:20] No, he's not, he's not talking about something that just happens naturally, rather he says it was something that was brought about by a dramatic intervention in history, something that effects a decisive change.

And so secondly, he talks about the effecting of sonship in verses 4 and the first half of verse 5. In other words, he talks about God's fatherly relationship with his people now being secured through Christ on the cross.

The work of Christ for us in history. Verse 4, when the fullness of the time had come, God intervened. You get lots of discussion in the commentaries about what this means, the fullness of time.

Oh, it's because the Roman Empire had good roads and communications and the world was ready and all that sort of stuff. Well, that all may be the case, but really, above all, what Paul is talking about here, is the fullness of God's time in his plan for redemption.

It's the end, Paul says, of the era of this world, of this evil age. And it's the beginning of the new age, the new creation, the one which will last forever, the one marked by sonship.

[17:35] The fullness of time is therefore the climax of history, it's the fulcrum, it's the hinge point after which every single thing changes and will never be the same again when God sent forth his Son.

Some commentators think verses 4 and 5 are a creed of the early church. It's very symmetrical and Paul sometimes does insert these things in, but whether it is or not, the point is clear. Christ came, he says, under the law.

In other words, he came as a Jew to redeem those under the law, verse 5, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And so the picture of slavery that he's using here changes in verse 5, doesn't it? He's not now emphasizing a slave, a son who once was a slave and graduates.

Rather, the emphasis here is on a slave that becomes a son, but not naturally. How does he become a son? By adoption. And so again, the point is clear in verse 5.

[18:45] So that we, even we Jews, might receive adoption. In other words, both Jews and Gentiles were once in slavery, in bondage, and both Gentiles and Jews can only become sons, can only become full members of God's family by adoption.

by something received from outside themselves. Something received by faith alone. That's why I read verse 26 of chapter 3. In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God.

How? By faith. By adoption. Yes, one group had a privileged bondage, if you like.

They came into that full sonship of God from near, from nearby, the Jews. The other group, the Gentiles, were in bondage far away to idols. But both receive adoption through the work of Christ and only through the work of Christ.

The work of Christ that affects redemption in history. And therefore that affects the experience of sonship in the Jew and in the Gentile in just the same way.

[20:03] The picture is very clear here. You see the picture of redemption. It's a slave market. It's a picture of slaves changing hands by the payment of a price. But notice what Paul says.

It's not just a setting free from bondage, from the past, from sins, from slavery. That picture isn't enough for Paul. It's fused here with this other picture, this picture of adoption.

And these two pictures are inseparable for Paul. Just as two other things are inseparable for him in these verses. The effecting of sonship in history, the accomplishment of redemption in the cross of Christ and the experience of that sonship personally.

That redemption applied by the Spirit of Christ. And that's why in verses 4 and verses 6 there are two inseparable sendings of the Son of God. Do you see them?

Verse 4 God sent His Son in history. That's Christ on the cross for us. But in verse 6 God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.

[21 : 09] That's Christ by His Spirit in us. And you can't separate ever, ever, ever these two things. The work of Christ for our salvation on the cross and the work of the Spirit applying that salvation in our hearts.

You cannot separate these things in the Gospel of the New Testament. And many people having done that over the last 50 years or so by speaking about salvation and then a second work entirely separate of the fullness of the Spirit of God has led to total confusion and chaos and misery in many people's lives.

You cannot put asunder what Paul has joined together here. the work of Christ on the cross and the work of His Spirit applying that work and none other into our hearts.

So you see for Paul here to insist on binding together these words about the effecting of the era of sonship with the Spirit leads us to the third thing the experience of sonship which he goes on immediately to in verses 5 and 6.

not only is God's fatherly relationship matured in His people when Christ comes not only is it secured by Christ's work on the cross but rather it's also assured by God's Son in our heart the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

[22 : 44] By Christ's work on the cross we are redeemed legally from being slaves by Christ's work in our hearts by His Spirit we are reborn in experience as sons.

One writer says this rescue from slavery is of a sort that inevitably makes us sons. Isn't that an extraordinary fusion of pictures? There's nothing naturally to put those two things together.

We're not just redeemed we're not just set free from the bondage to the law from the curse of the law through Christ who bore our curse as Calvin says he took our chains upon him and so we are freed.

Yes we are but that's not all. Also everything that was his everything that belonged to him as the Son of God as the Master of the house by rights everything of that becomes ours by adoption.

We don't just go from being slaves to free men and women we go from being slaves to being sons and heirs of God himself. Verse 7 You are no longer a slave but a son and an heir.

[23 : 54] The best illustration I've found of that is from the story of Ben Hur. You know Wallace Lou's tale of the Christ. Do you remember Ben Hur is a galley slave and there's a battle and in the surviving of the shipwreck the Roman captain Quintus Arius is saved by the slave the galley slave Judah Ben Hur and in just one act Quintus Arius declares his slave free and also adopted as his son.

Listen to these words from the text of the play. Upon his return from the cruise Arius had a warm welcome on the mole at Mycenae. The young man attending him very early attracted the attention of his friends there and to their questions as to who he was the tribune proceeded in the most affectionate manner to tell the story of his rescue and introduced the stranger omitting carefully all that pertained to the latter's previous history that is his slavery.

He called Ben-Hur to him and said with a hand resting affectionately on his shoulder good friends this is my son and heir who as he is to take all my property if it be the will of the gods that I leave any shall be known to you by my name.

I pray you all to love him as you love me. A totally new identity a son and an heir and because he's an heir of the future he'll bear my name now.

Reborn you see with a totally new identity that's something that we receive by adoption and friends notice that is the primary work of the Holy Spirit within us.

[25 : 43] The work of the Holy Spirit is not all about gifts and charismata and tongues and all sorts of other matters those things are utterly peripheral whatever your view may be on them but utterly central here is what Christ has secured on the cross the Holy Spirit assures in our heart and experience Christ frees us the Spirit brings that into our heart and we are reborn as sons of the Father.

He's the agent of adoption if you like. He's the one who makes all the paperwork real in our experience and makes it happen. And what happens do you see in these verses it's all about intimacy of relationship with a new father.

Sinclair Ferguson in his book says adoption is the apex of creation the goal of all redemption. Jim Packer similarly says it's the highest privilege the gospel offers.

I often used to say to my teachers in theology school when they were berating the Westminster Confession and they berate it for anything they could think of but one of the things they used to say was well of course it's got many deficiencies there's no chapter on the Holy Spirit.

I would say well it's the only Reformed Confession that has a chapter on adoption because adoption is the primary work of the Holy Spirit. It brings us into the intimacy of relationship with our Heavenly Father.

[27 : 17] It's the true coming of age. It's the becoming by the gift of the Spirit making our redemption and adoption real becoming true near intimate children of our Heavenly Father.

No longer held away by even the best of religion of Moses. Not separated utterly as many were by utter paganism.

It's the goal of the new creation. It's the whole purpose of redemption. Notice the marks of this intimacy. Verse 6. Total immediacy in prayer.

The Spirit himself cries out from within us to God. Abba Father. Not quite right to say Daddy but it's close to that. It's intimate.

He quotes this word which is Aramaic because it was the actual verbal language that Jesus himself used to his father and Paul saying it's your language. It's that intimate.

[28 : 22] The word cries out is an intense word. It's an instinctive cry of a child to a parent that knows it'll be heard. knows that the presence of the father is real.

Like a little child who cries out in the night Daddy! And he knows Daddy will come. Or walks around the door in a busy meeting and you have all sorts of other important people there.

And maybe you're ignoring the telephone or you wouldn't answer the door but Daddy! A cry of anguish perhaps. And you will answer that cry.

That's adoption. That's what the Holy Spirit brings us. Secondly, verse 9, it's an intensity and intimacy of knowledge. We are known by God and we know him.

The whole concept of knowing as you know in the Bible is an intimate one. It's the word used of a husband and wife coming together in intercourse knowing one another. In its privileged access he's talking about here, he's not talking about being known of somebody.

[29 : 33] Sometimes people say, do you know someone? And you'll say, well, no, but I know of him. No, this is more than that. It's knowing him. Somebody was telling me that they know of Ralph Davis who writes these wonderful commentaries that many of you have read and many of you know of him can't understand it.

I'll email Ralph Davis. And because he knows me, he'll email me back. That's the difference. That's adoption. Or it's the child you see coming downstairs and walking in on the posh dinner party.

And they don't care if it's not the right thing to do or the moment or the soup's getting cold. They just pad over in their bare feet and jump into daddy's lap. Because there's an intensity, there's an intimacy of knowledge.

That's ours in adoption. That's the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Verse 7, there's an irreversible freedom and confidence.

We're no longer a slave, but a son and an heir. There's a total change of status taking place. It's an objective fact. And that gives us all the security spiritually and psychologically all the security that comes from a total new life, a new identity, a new future.

[30 : 58] Think of an adopted child. We were visiting friends just recently who adopted two young boys who had been very badly abused in the past. And they come from that background into a wonderful loving home.

And yes, it takes time for them to adjust and begin to understand and gain the security and the certainty that they never had before. It will take time, perhaps years.

But it was true from the very first moment that they entered that new home and had new parents. And all of that, the privileged access in prayer, the intimacy, the privileged status, the freedom, the confidence, all of that is ours by faith alone, through something given to us, through adoption, through the work of the Holy Spirit, applying Christ's work on the cross in our hearts.

Formally, verse 7, you were enslaved, all of you, some by the very best of religion, the Jews, others by the very worst of religion, the pagan Gentiles. But now, verse 6, you are all Jew and Gentile, including you former pagans, sons and heirs through God, received by the gift of adoption, no other

way.

Richard Longenacker puts it brilliantly in his commentary, relationship with God does not have its basis in man's seeking, that's mysticism, doing, that's legalism, or knowing, that's Gnosticism.

[32 : 39] But it originates with God himself and is carried on always by divine grace. You see the sequence there, verse 5, verse 4 and 5?

We're redeemed, we're adopted, the Spirit comes into our heart, it's all from God to us, and then we pray. We receive and we respond.

It's grace, grace, grace alone and always that enables us to respond to what we've received. and unless we grasp that, we will be living in bondage.

And once you've known something of this intimacy with God, once we've tasted of the stuff of the world to come, of the new creation, because that's what it is, having the Spirit within our hearts, the deposit of the new creation, once we've experienced that to go back to the former things of this world, even to the very best of religion.

And the Jewish Torah was the very best of religion, it was God-given. But it's to go back to something now that's dead, that's rotting. And it's just the same, Paul says, as going back to something that's always been dead and rotten.

[33 : 59] That's the really shocking thing he's saying in verses 8 to 11, and it is shocking. Look at it, verse 8, you, former pagans, used to be enslaved to rotten, evil things, to know gods.

That's the Old Testament language for idols, non-gods. But now, verse 9, having been known by God and knowing him intimately in Christ, going back to that whole realm of the formal evil age of idolatry, you're doing that by embracing the Mosaic law, by embracing the Israelite faith.

How can that be? Isn't that a shock? How could possibly going to the good things that God once gave Israel be the same as going to dead, rotten idolatry?

Well, Paul says, now that Christ has come, the old world is gone, the new age has begun.

Everything in the old, the best and the worst, is now past, finished, gone, decayed, decomposing, rotten.

And to go back to it's like embracing a dead body, a corpse, something that's decomposing. You wouldn't dream of doing that. When your friend or your loved one was alive, of course, you'd embrace them and touch them and kiss them.

[35 : 25] Absolutely right. But when their body is decomposed in the grave, to dig them up and do that would be grotesque. And that's the shocking truth that Paul's saying to these Galatians.

You think that adding this to the gospel that you believe, of the grace in Christ, will take you on, verse 10, these Jewish observances, these holy days, these rituals, all these things Moses gave for a good reason and a good time.

But no, verse 11, it's wrong. Doing that might mean everything's lost. You're heading for damnation, that's what apostasy means.

And along the way, heading back into a life experience that is dominated by slavery. Now, if it's as obvious as that, how on earth could the Galatians be so foolish?

Well, the answer is that there are enemies of sonship. God's fatherly relationship with his people is endangered by the power of the weak and worthless things, by the power of idolatry.

[36 : 36] And he has a paradox, you see, in verse 8, Paul is clear. These enslaving things are not gods. Verse 9, they're weak and miserable. They have no power to save, but they have great power to harm.

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul talks about this sort of thing, and he's absolutely clear. Idols, he says, have no real existence, because there's no God but one. Later on in 1 Corinthians 10, he goes on to say that behind these empty things lie very real spiritual forces of evil, so that you could be in fact sacrificing to demons by offering to idols.

And Paul's quite clear all through his letters that this world, this present evil age, is still under the power of evil forces. You know Ephesians 6, our enemies are rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of the present darkness.

In Ephesians 2, he talks about the Gentile Ephesians, having once followed the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit at work, and those who are disobedient. In 2 Corinthians 4, he speaks about the God of this world, this age, blinding the eyes of unbelievers, so they can't see the gospel of the glory of Christ. And these evil powers do exactly that.

[37 : 49] They use the things of this world to blind us to the reality of the new creation in Christ. That's the very essence, the very power of idolatry.

In Romans 1, verse 21, Paul is talking about the fact that God has plainly revealed himself to all people, his invisible attributes, his power, his divine nature, so that everyone is without excuse. But, he says, people have become futile in their thinking, their minds are distorted. They've become darkened in their hearts, their desires, their affections have become distorted, so that they exchange the glory of the immortal for the mortal, exchange the truth of God for a lie.

A lie is another Old Testament word for idols. Worshipping the created, not the creator. Do you see? Earthbound. Earthbound to think that the present visible world is all that there is.

And that's the position of the unbeliever, says Paul, blinded by the God of this world. But, it's also, friends, the great danger of the Christian believer. As Paul says, that can lead us back into this blindness, lead us back to become enslaved by these weak and miserable things.

[39 : 12] But why do they have such power over us? Well, the answer lies in the end of verse 7. we are heirs through God.

You see, there's a not yet about our experience of salvation. We're no longer slaves, yes. We are now sons, yes. The full rights of sons, but we're also heirs.

And heirs implies a future fulfillment that's still to come, doesn't it? The New Age has begun in history, and it's begun in our experience by the Holy Spirit, but not yet is there a fulfillment of everything that the gospel promises, of a totality of experience, of the whole creation itself being renewed, of our bodies and our minds and our hearts utterly made as they will at one stage become forever.

And so there's an inevitable tension. There's a struggle in the Christian experience. We've tasted the future, we long for that fulfillment, and yet we struggle with the realities, the wars.

of the Christian life now. I thought I'd think of poor old Prince Charles. He's been made the Prince of Wales, he's fully a prince, he's got his palace, he's got all the privileges, but he's not yet king.

[40 : 30] If his mother lives as long as her mother, he might never get to be king. But in a sense, that's the way it is with us as Christians. Our adoption has begun, the new life has begun, but it's not yet complete.

Let me read to you Paul's words in Romans chapter 8, which are very illuminating and helpful here. Romans 8, 15. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs. But listen, heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him he subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay, and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[41 : 50] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the fresh fruits of the Spirit, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly, what for?

Adoption as sons, which is the redemption of our bodies, the resurrection. For in this hope we were saved, and I hope that is seen is not hope.

For if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. You see, we're saved in hope, we are adopted, and yet we eagerly are awaiting the finality of that adoption, the resurrection of our bodies.

But now, we're in an age when we have not yet seen that. And so we have to hope with patience, with perseverance, in an age of struggle, in an age of sin.

And that's what Paul goes on to talk about in Galatians chapter 5, that we have to walk in the Spirit. Why? Because we're in a war with the flesh. And it's a struggle to walk in the Spirit, when we're living in bodies of flesh.

[43 : 07] And that is why idols are so powerful. They want to blind us to the reality of the new creation, which is not yet complete.

They want us to focus all our minds and our thinking and our desires on this age now, the things that we can see. And what idols do is they offer us peace now. They offer us now, falsely, the things that the Gospel promises us only.

with the final adoption of the redemption of our bodies. And it's so attractive, isn't it? Just like Mr. Chamberlain on the steps of the airplane.

Peace in our time. And it's so attractive and everybody says, yes! But it's all a lot of tosh. It's shallow.

It's a delusion. And friends, so many Christians fall prey to that delusion. We're blind to the reality of the not yet of our adoption in Jesus Christ.

[44 : 12] Our minds become distorted. We think that struggles are a sign of our failure. We think they're abnormal instead of normal. Our hearts become distorted and we set our affections on this world and this world alone.

Things that promise to give us peace now. And idols hold up the things of this world and say, this, this is, this is the thing that will give you satisfaction in your Christian experience right now.

And if you think, as you follow the Lord Jesus Christ, that you should have peace and prosperity and physical healing and perfect holiness now, well, of course, you'll fall for these things, won't you?

You may be an earnest Christian believer seeking to follow the Lord and distressed with the sin in your life and somebody offers you this, you'll say, yes! But Paul says, if you do that, you'll be following the things of this world right back into the present evil age.

Many people have become slaves to a quest for healing. Such a pitiful sight sometimes. I think of the mother of a young boy who was desperately afflicted with mental illness.

[45 : 33] She was convinced that God must be going to heal. And she became enslaved to endless prayers with increasing and increasing intensity and fervency. Endless traipsing off to visit various healers, even going around the world.

Because God was going to heal in this spectacular way. Eventually we became utterly exhausted and totally disillusioned. Yes, of course, God may in his grace and providence sometimes does heal today.

But by very definition, it's the exception, not the rule. Otherwise no Christian since the time of Jesus would ever have died. The redemption of our bodies is not yet.

We're heirs. But if we allow this world to blind us to that, we can become slaves. Beware. Beware of these powerful idols.

And some of the most powerful ones are things that seem very pious and very holy and very spiritually advanced. The Judaizers, you see, were full of that. This is the full New Testament experience.

[46 : 37] The full history of God's people. Paul says, no, it's idols dressed up as orthodoxy. In this present struggle of faith, living in the now and the not yet, the forces of this world also want to blind us to what already is ours in Christ.

By adoption, by faith alone. This amazing intimacy with God that is already ours. The glory of the adoption, the spirit in our hearts. All of that is ours now, by faith and by faith alone.

But if our horizons are just on this world, we can forget that also. Because it seems too good to be true, doesn't it? Grace is such a hard thing for us to grasp.

And so this struggling Christian goes out some weekend and gets hopelessly drunk. They come home and they're utterly crushed by guilt and despair. And it just seems so utterly impossible that they still can really have that access to God in prayer that they had last week.

Or they can really have the forgiveness and the acceptance with God, despite all of their own sin that the gospel seems to say. They doubt that they really do have any longer that identity as cherished sons and daughters of God.

[47 : 57] They just can't really believe it's all true. Because it's invisible, isn't it? There's nothing to see. It has to be by faith. But idols, you see, they offer sight.

They offer the things of this world to satisfy the tastes of this world. And so impressive religion that says you can do something. Makes you feel better.

You can see something. And so you feel so much more secure. That's a great attraction of the Roman priest and the confessional, isn't it? You can go along to somebody in fine clothes. He'll sit in a box and absolve you.

And they'll give you things that you can do. Prayers and penances and all sorts of things. And you'll feel better. That's the draw of a dramatic, charismatic exorcism or something like that to free you from the demon of drink or smoking or drugs or sex or whatever it might be.

And it's visible. It's impressive. You feel better. But, no, says Paul, you're being enslaved. Back to the slavery of this world.

[49 : 03] To the present experience. To dead and rotten things. Because there'll be a next time and a next time and a next time. And gone will be that intimate, immediate access to your Heavenly Father.

You'll need religion to help you. You'll be distant again. You see, that's all due to wrong theology. It's all due to the distorted thinking of idolatry.

Distorted affections of lust that desire us to satisfy ourselves with the things of this world. The things that we can see. And at root, it's a failure to grasp two things.

The greatness of grace. Because we think we must contribute something to our own salvation. No, says Paul, we're sons. We've received adoption.

And distorted thinking about sin and its greatness. Because we're mad to think we can contribute anything. No, says Paul, you were slaves. You had to be redeemed, bought by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[50 : 16] Friends, so much of our Christian experience is more akin to slavery than it is to the enjoyment of being sons and heirs.

And it's all because we don't grasp the greatness of the reality of all that is ours in Jesus. What we are now, sons, accepted, beloved, intimate with God, you have it all in the gospel by adoption, received by faith.

But we're also heirs of a future, a new creation, something yet to be revealed. Browning was right, the best is yet to be. And that's just as true as the other.

So don't let the appetites of this world overcome the true appetite for what is lasting, what is ultimate, what is eternal.

Don't let it. That's the great deception of idolatry. It takes good things and elevates them to the level of the ultimate, makes them into gods and fools us into seeking satisfaction and happiness and power in these things which are just things of the world, created things.

[51 : 35] And the most dangerous are often the most worthy when they're kept in their right place. Just think. Think of music. Think of music in the church and the power of music to become an idol becomes the ultimate thing where people seek their satisfaction, their fulfillment and everything.

How easily we can become enslaved to that and it's an idol that wrecks and destroys. Or fellowship in a church.

We can become so obsessed with fellowship together and enjoying our time with one another. That become an end in itself. We forget. It's all about fellowship for the sake of the gospel and the kingdom.

Think about service, Christian service and ministry. So, so easy for us to seek all our security, all our assurance in our performance in what we're saying for God and doing for God.

All of these things, Paul says, leading us into bondage and ultimately, verse 11, everything having been in vain. So, Paul says, open your eyes to the glory of the gospel in Christ alone.

[52 : 49] Make him your only joy. Make him your only satisfaction, your only security, your soul acceptance. And now, long for his coming forever as you stand and what he has given you now.

You're no longer a slave but a son and an heir through God. Quite simply, all he's saying is this, be what you are.

Think what spirit dwells within you now. And we're going to sing in a moment the hymn that I love.

Think what spirit dwells within thee.

What a father smile is thine. What a saviour died to win thee. Child of God, shouldst thou repine. Be what you are. Have what is yours.

Think what the spirit of Christ within you has brought to you from the Christ who died on the cross for you. Well, let's sing that hymn in that wonderful verse number 843.

[54 : 02] Jesus, I my cross have taken all to leave and follow you. Son of God, I my cross have taken all to leave and follow you.