

Galatians 4 (Part 1): 1-7 • Grace vs. Karma

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And we'll get into our study in Galatians. We're in Galatians chapter 4, starting the 4th chapter today. So Galatians chapter 4, and we're going to read through verse 7, and then we're going to pray, as we're continuing our study through Galatians here on Sunday morning, and making our way through 1 Chronicles on Wednesday night.

We're going to be finishing 1 Chronicles, Lord willing, this coming Wednesday. We just have two chapters left before we get into 2 Chronicles. Anyway, but that's Wednesday. Alright, you ready? The first 7 verses of the chapter, yeah, chapter 4 go like this:

“¹ 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, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” (ESV)

Stop there, please. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for giving us the time today to dig into your word. We pray that your Holy Spirit would move mightily in this place, opening hearts and minds.

And Lord, we just invite you to be the teacher here today and to instruct us and help us, Lord, to lay hold of the truths that are here in the Word so that we can put them into practice in our lives. We ask this all in the name of Jesus, amen.

All right. I wanted to start here this morning with just these first 7 verses of the chapter because they're pretty important. They speak to you and I of an aspect of family life that we're not at all familiar with because we don't live in this

culture. The culture that Paul is referring to, the ancient culture of how men would come of age and receive their inheritance at a certain time or whatever, that's something we don't deal with necessarily in our culture today.

The Jews had their own traditions, when a young man turned 12, and that seems really young to me, but when a young man turned 12, on the first Sabbath after his 12th birthday, he would be taken to the synagogue, and there he would go through a ceremony where his father would speak to him in the presence of the other men of the community, and they would declare him to be a son of the law. And at the age of 12, he would now have the right and the privilege to comment on the scriptures when they were read every Sabbath in the synagogue. So that was, that was a real epoch, obviously, in the growth of a young Jewish man.

But Paul is not writing here to Jews, the churches in Galatia were Gentiles, and he's writing about things that they would have readily understood as it relates to when men, young boys, rather, come of age. And he's referring to a particular example of growing up in the ancient world where things would be available to them at a certain age.

Look with me again in verses 1 and 2. Verses 1 and 2 in your Bible, it says, *“I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is (really) no different from a slave (your Bible may say servant), though he is the owner of everything,² because (why?) he is under guardians and managers until the date set for his father.”* Again, not things that we do in our culture today, but in the ancient world, growing up was very, very different. And before a child came of age, they really had no rights and very few privileges.

And we think of it differently, I mean, in our culture today, it's like, 18 is the magical age when you can vote and when you're considered to be no longer a minor under the law, and all that kind of stuff.

But when a child was a minor, even though they were an heir to a vast estate, lots of money perhaps coming their way or something like that, as long as they were a minor, they had no right to any of that money. They couldn't spend any of it. They had no ability or right to make decisions concerning the estate until they came to a particular age, they had no legal right to anything that they had until they came of age.

And for all practical purposes, Paul is relating to that by saying, really, they're no different than a servant at that point or a slave. Because just as a slave or a servant has people over them telling them what they have to do and so forth, so the minor, in this case has guardians and people who are telling him what he can

do and what he can't do and he's not in control of his affairs. Okay. That's why Paul writes what he does in verse 3.

Look with me in your Bible, it says, "*In the same way we also, when we were children...*" And now he's not talking about children by chronological age. He's relating this to us as people, children before we came to Christ, okay? You, I want you to think of it that way, because Paul's using almost like a parable to describe growth.

And he's using chronological age to talk about ancient cultures, but now when he's talking about you and I, he's abandoning the chronology of age and saying when we were before Christ, before we came to Jesus, before we entered into an understanding of grace and so forth, we were children.

Look what he goes on to say, "...*(we) were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*" We were enslaved, he says. In other words, we were under the guardianship, we were being directed by. And then he talks about, we were directed by the elementary principles of this world.

Now, if you have a different Bible translation on your lap this morning, you'll notice that you have different phraseology there. If you have a New American Standard Bible (NASB): "*it's the elemental things of the world.*" The New King James (NKJV), I don't really care for, it says, "*the elements of the world.*" The old NIV says. "*the basic principles of the world.*" I like that. And the new NIV is wacky, it says, "*the elemental spiritual forces of the world.*"

The reason that there's such a little bit of a diverse rendering of that is, that's one Greek word, one single Greek word. And it's difficult to describe, and you and I would probably, if we were describing, or using this concept in English, we were describing it to someone, we would probably use different words. But I'm willing to bet somebody in this room would probably use the word, karma because that's basically what it means.

The basic elemental principles of this world is like karma. And I'm not into Hinduism or Buddhism, don't worry. It's just that we have adopted that word to describe, you get what you deserve. In fact, somebody might have something happen to them, that's nasty or whatever, and we go, well, karma. I guess it's karma, it's that idea that you get what you deserve.

In fact, this idea that you and I might describe using the word karma or not, you might just actually just say you get what you deserve. This is a concept, you guys, that literally permeates our humanity. It is hardwired into our DNA, this

idea that you get what you deserve. And it runs very heavily through paganism. It runs very heavily through superstition. Those of you who might have been superstitious in the past, regardless of whether somebody is a pagan or whether they would admit to being superstitious.

We all operate, believe it or not, on this basic principle before we come to Christ. And this principle rules our life, you get what you deserve. Everything we see around us seems to solidify that idea, you get what you deserve.

Now, the Greek word, and I told you it's just one single Greek word here that has just a lot of meaning. It's actually used elsewhere. Paul uses it when he wrote his letter to the Church of the Colossians, and in reading that passage gives us a little more insight into this idea of karma, or you get what you deserve. I'll check it out here on the screen from Colossians chapter 2, beginning at verse 20.

Colossians 2:20-22 (NIV84)

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.

It says, "Since you died with Christ (and here is that Greek word) to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules (because this principle has rules that go along with it, like): "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" And then Paul says this, "These are all destined to perish with use (why?), because they are based on human commands and teachings." Ah, it's very interesting.

Colossians gives us some greater insight into what the basic principles of the world are. And they have commands that go with them: Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch that! And why do people come up with rules? Well, because they're trying to protect themselves from karma.

It's just hardwired in us, we don't want things, it's like, hey, don't touch that, or this is what's going to happen. Don't taste that, because if you do, once you taste, I might even be talking about things you taste with your mouth. It might be things you taste other ways, as soon as somebody tastes a sense of freedom, eh, boy, walk out. Or don't touch, don't handle that sort of a thing. We're all trying to cheat this thing called cause and effect from doing its thing, karma from playing out in our lives. And by the way, if you think you're a little too smart to even be bothered by those sorts of things, think again.

When's the last time you were cruising down the street in your car or whatever and you're just driving along, minding your own business, probably not even thinking about much of anything, and all of a sudden a black cat goes right across your path and you're thinking, oh crud. And you know better...and then you start telling yourself, you give yourself a little pep talk, now that's stupid.

But why did you even notice? When's the last time you broke a mirror and wondered if the seven year rule is still in effect. Hey, listen, why do you think coaches put on their lucky shirt, tie, socks or underpants before a game? It's because they're superstitious and they have this idea of karma going through their mind, that somehow this is going to make a difference.

And that's, by the way, why we also knock on wood before we do something important. Because once again, we're trying to hedge our bet that things might turn out a little bit better than we deserve. Because there's this innate sense, or fear, that we don't deserve much. So all the help I can get, I'll take it, right? Karma.

So Paul tells us here that we are all slaves to this thinking. It's hardwired, we grow up with it. And here's the point, here's the point of all this. Let me bring it around to what Paul has been saying to the Galatians. You'll remember that in the previous chapter, Paul told the Jews that they were in a very similar situation as it relates to their relationship to the law. And what I mean by that is that Paul is likening the fact that the Jews in their relationship to the law and the Gentiles in their relationship to karma, this idea that you get what you deserve.

He's likening both of those things to childhood. He's saying that's what it's like to be a child in a sense, but not a childhood like you and I might think. It's childhood as the ancients saw childhood where a child is considered no better off than a slave as long as he's a child, right.

So what happens when we come to Christ? What can we liken that to? Well, Paul tells us, if you look in your Bible in verses 4 and 5, it goes like this, verse 4, *"But when the fullness of time had come (which means at just the right time), God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law..."* Or in the case of the Gentiles, born under the elementary principles of this world, the basic principles of karma, cause and effect, what did he come to do?

Look at verse 5: *"...(He came) to redeem those who are (in their slavery) under the law..."* And also, I'm adding this, to redeem those who are in slavery to the basic principles of this world. And then he goes on to say at the end of verse 5, *"...so that we might receive the adoption as sons."* And that means, so that we

might grow up and get past this childish thing and that we might enter into the full rights of our inheritance and stop living this idea with God of this idea of karma.

And here's the message. Jesus came to redeem people from what held them captive. For the Jews, they were captive to the law. Why? Because the law condemned them. They were under a curse. Isn't that what Paul said? Everyone who tries to be righteous before God is under a curse. The curse of the law says, you can't measure up, you can't do it. Right? (Galatians 3:10)

What about the Gentiles? They didn't really know the law, they hadn't received the law, but they were under a similar slavery, because they have this concept of karma, you get what you deserve, and you can't get past it, and you're a slave to it and, you can't break free, and what in the world, and so you just live in fear. And what did they do because of their fear?

They came up with all these weird religions, paganism. Paganism is primarily predicated upon fear, I'm afraid of what this God's going to do to me, so I got to appease him, or her. And so there's things we have to do to make this God happy, or try to get him out of their slump, so they're not going to give us a bad crop or hurt us in some way by maybe a flood or a famine or a drought or something like that. We don't want that to happen, because they believe there were gods for all these things in life and you got to appease these gods. And it's just one big slavery. They literally are in slavery to fear.

And this concept is just so pervasive in our lives, it literally imprisons us. Whether you're a Jew imprisoned under the law, or whether you're a Gentile imprisoned under karma, you get what you deserve, so there, deal with it, sort of a thing.

That's why Paul's writing to the Galatians here. He's exhorting them to grow beyond this childish thinking, and to grow up into their understanding of God's grace. See, what was happening in Galatia and these churches there is that they were being led back to the law. Paul had given them the gospel of grace: You're saved by grace through faith. (Ephesians 2:8-9) That's what he taught them.

And now these other people are coming along saying, oh no, no, no. You have to do and do and do, in addition to believing. And Paul is saying, do you understand what they're doing? They're putting you back under slavery. They're putting you back under fear. They're putting you back under a curse. Do you understand that? And he's writing this letter and speaking of the fact that when we come to Jesus, we're set free from all that stuff. We're literally redeemed,

purchased out of that slavery to fear that we were once under. And coming to Christ introduces us to the reality of grace.

Listen, this is very important, grace contradicts the principle that you get what you deserve. Did you hear what I said? Grace contradicts the principle that you get what you deserve. Here's why God does not deal with us according to what we deserve. Thank you, Jesus.

You know why king David was such a man after God's own heart? Because he understood this principle, even living under the Old Testament law. At a time when very, very, very few people understood grace, David understood grace. And you go leafing through the Psalms, and you hear and you read David saying things that will blow your mind, not from a New Testament perspective, but when you think of it from an Old Testament perspective.

Psalm 103:10-11

[God] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;

He wrote this, he said, *“God does not treat us as our sins deserve (or he says, God does not) repay us according to our iniquities.”* And then he says, *“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.”*

And you read that in the context of the law, your blown away. And you're thinking, how in the world did David transcend the thinking of his day to understand God does not treat us as our sins deserve?

David understood what a lot of Christians don't understand, grace, the idea of grace. And with the coming of Jesus and grace, we have learned, at least I hope we have, or that we're learning that God's blessing and God's favor is given to us apart from cause and effect or karma, or, we'll say it this way, what you deserve.

God's favor and blessing is given to you apart from what you deserve. We don't, when God blesses you, do you really think you deserved it? Of course not. By the same token, when something nasty happens in your life, and you're looking around and you're thinking, I don't understand what's happening, I'm trying to walk with God as best I can. You can understand that those things don't have to condemn you. That's what Paul wanted us to understand. That's why he's writing this letter. He's wanting us to understand that our goodness and our

works cannot possibly earn us a place in God's favor. They can't. You can't earn your way into God's favor.

Guess what? You can't sin your way out of his favor either. That's the message that used to make Paul's detractors crazy. They would say, Paul, you just can't tell people that. You can't tell people that they can't sin their way out of God's love. What's to stop them from sinning? If there's not this constant fear of the sword of the Lord standing over their neck. You got to keep it there. It's what every legalistic church knows. You keep that sword hanging right above their head and make sure they walk the way they should because if they step wrong somewhere, whoosh, there it goes, eh, sorry, karma. Got what you deserved. Sorry.

Listen, we walk with God for completely different reasons, not because of fear of His sword in our lives. Yeah, He disciplines us, but if you sin, He's not going to destroy you. With the coming of Jesus, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, we've learned that God's blessing and favor have nothing to do with us and everything to do with Him. And man, is that a hard lesson for some people to get. I mean, that's just like one of the hardest things for them to grasp, and some more than others. And I don't know why, I don't know what personality dynamics come into play here, but I just know that there are some people that, I mean, we all struggle with the idea, but there are some people who struggle a little bit more.

Sometimes we'll be worshiping the Lord and we'll get a glimpse of grace. Have you, has it ever happened to you where you're just like worshiping, you just get lost in worship. You got, it's like you're all alone in the room. There's nobody around and just, and there's some music going on and you're worshiping the Lord and there's just this wave that just goes by. And it, for just this fraction of a second, you understand grace. You can't put it in words, but you get it. For just a moment and you're just like, like we were singing this morning, I'm overwhelmed, we can sing those words and not be overwhelmed.

But there are those times when we just— I'm just, I'm overwhelmed. And honestly, there are times during worship I can do nothing but just cry. It's all I can do is just cry because there's that moment where I understand His love for me is unconditional. And there's nothing that I can do to mess my way out of it. You know what I mean? Nothing can separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus and it's overwhelming. But then, as quickly as we're in it, we're out of it again. You know what I mean? It's like it's something that passes by and I'm like, no! Come back! You know? I want to keep that because there's this natural tendency for me to go back to that idea of deserve and cause and effect.

And so many people, so many people come down for prayer on a Sunday or whatever, and they'll be, it's like, well, how can we pray with you? Well, I don't deserve, I just feel so unworthy. I just feel like I don't deserve God's love. And, we have to very gently say to them, you're absolutely right. You don't deserve God's love, but thank God, here's the good news. He doesn't give it out according to whether you deserve it. He gives it out to those who, by faith, embrace what Jesus did on the cross, right? And that's—listen, listen, when we get a hold of this, you guys, it transforms our life. This is the truth: grace will transform your life because it's so, other. It's so different from the way our human minds want to think along the lines of karma.

You ever stop to think about why the Hindus and Buddhists even came up with karma? There's no surprise at all, it's hardwired in all of us. In fact, if you take God out of the equation, if you take Jesus and what he did out of the equation, and you just say, I'm going to come up with a religion, it's going to be a religion of works. Because if you don't have grace, what you have is deserved. You have karma.

You think those Mormons going door to door aren't working their way somewhere? You think they're not doing that to deserve a better place with God? You think, really, they're just out doing that because they like you? How about those Jehovah's Witnesses? You think they're not earning something?

Listen, you look at every world religion other than Christianity, and they're all about earning something. Everyone is about something you've got to do in order to earn your way. But Christianity is the only system of faith that says you can't earn your way. It's impossible. You're lost. You're dead. You're dead in your sins and trespasses.

But Jesus Christ came and made us alive, and now all you can do is trust in Him, and know that His grace fills your life, and that you're no longer living by a set of rules and regulations. But you're living and walking by grace.

Listen, listen, I'm not here to tell you that cause and effect is no longer a force in this world. It is. And the whole idea of karma and deserving and getting what you deserve, it still plays out in some aspects of life. You want some proof? Just drive 25 miles an hour over the speed limit in front of a police officer, and you'll be reminded very quickly that certain activities have some a deserving result. I wish I wasn't speaking from experience, but here's what I'm saying: You can't apply that to your relationship with God, okay? Cause and effect, sure, it comes into play in some areas of life, but it cannot come into effect in your relationship with God.

Here's our final point. You probably, I'm sure you remember earlier, Paul was using, as we started off, an example of a child who was underage and who is not yet in possession of his inheritance because of the fact that he was underage.

And back in verse 2, He said something and I want to put it on the screen so we can see it together. He said,

Galatians 4:2 (ESV)

...he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

...he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

And we've already touched on this, but Paul wants to remind you and I that was the role of the law. In fact, at the end of the last chapter, he even asked the question, so why did God even give the law? What was the purpose of the law coming? Well, the law was that guardian he was talking about, that custodian that was meant to keep you in check during your childhood years.

But now that you've come to Christ and you've experienced grace, which we do, by the way, by the understanding of which comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Now we are likened to someone who has come of age. And we have entered into the full rights of that Sonship. How do we know we've come into the full inheritance rights that we have?

Look with me in verse 6 in your Bible: *“And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”⁷ So you are no longer a slave (you're not a slave anymore to those old principles) but (you're) a son, and if (you're) a son, then (you're) an heir (you're an heir) through God.”*

Does this passage sound familiar to you? It is actually very similar to a passage that Paul wrote in the book of Romans. I'll put it up here.

Romans 8:15-17a (ESV)

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—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery (Paul says) to fall back into fear...” Stop there for just a moment. What is he talking about? Slavery to what? To either the law or the principles of this world. Right? The old karma, you get what you deserve. That's not the spirit you were given to, to fall back into that thing of slavery and fear that goes with it, when is God going to get me, for what I've done and stuff?

Romans 8:15-17a (ESV)

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—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...

Rather, he says here in this passage, “...you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (And he says) *the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*” This is some of the most amazing stuff in scripture.

Here's my question to you. Do you know and understand grace and are you walking in it? Do you know that it's not possible to earn God's love and favor? And have you stopped trying? Have you stopped striving to earn God's love and favor? And have you determined in your heart just to accept His love for you and His forgiveness and His goodness? Apart from what you can earn, apart from what you can do, trying to be a good person, trying to live the life. Oh, what an exercise in futility.

Listen, the life that we are called to live, we live by faith, that faith in God and the power of His Holy Spirit. We're supposed to be led by the Spirit, not by karma, or by rules, or what we deserve or anything like that. It's funny, we have this natural tendency to want to go back to rules very quickly.

Sometimes people will come up to me and they have a big decision they have to make in their life. They'll say, Pastor Paul, I need some help making a decision. And as we talk through it, I can tell what's really going on is they're looking for a rule. And so, and some of them just come out and say, just tell me what does the Bible say about this?

Because again, what they're looking for is a rule, give me the rule. I want to follow the rule. It's all I got, just give me the... And they're always a little frustrated with me when I say, well, you just need to pray about it and be led by the Spirit.

Oh, come on! You know, it's like Really? I just want a rule, just give me a rule. I'll follow it. No. See, as Christians, we're to be led by the Holy Spirit. It's not to be these external rules that guide and direct our lives. We are to be led internally. Why am I not following an external law? Because I have something so much superior living in me.

The law giver is now living right here! Right? The one who wrote that law upon stone tablets is now living in here. And the dynamic of that life and that wisdom and the application of wisdom is now off the charts in terms of what God can now communicate to the human heart. The problem is, you and I are so unaccustomed to tuning into God's heart and voice with our spirit.

Our spirit is like a limb we haven't used, ever. And then we come, and I get it. You know, even though it's been activated. When the spirit of God came to live inside of you, when you met Jesus, your spirit was made alive, okay? It was dead before, unto God. But it has been made alive. And now you have that ability to communicate with God. And He can speak to you and He can direct your course and so forth and so on.

But it's something in our lives that is completely unused. It's atrophied in that physical sort of a sense of the word. And, we're sitting here trying to, we're being told to walk by the Spirit.

And we're going to, by the way, get into this as we get into Chapter 5. Paul's going to have a lot more to say about it, walking in the spirit, living in the spirit, not in the flesh. And we hear those things and we're Aargh! I don't have any clue what he's even talking about because you see, this whole spiritual thing in me is so unused, I've not learned how to lay hold of it. And now, my pastor tells me to listen for God's voice. Well, what's all that about? You see?

Listen, we've got to start somewhere, guys. It's time to grow up, it's time to grow up in our faith, not be people who are looking to rules and karma and deserving and this and that, but people who are looking to the Spirit and understanding grace, grace and the moving and leading and directing of God's Holy Spirit in our lives, the very Spirit who now within us causes us to cry out, Father, Abba, Father, a term of intimacy and connectedness to God.

You can always hear somebody who has a very distant relationship with the Lord when they talk about God. It's just like talking about another person. If they don't have a relationship with that person, they refer to them in very impersonal terms. But somebody who has intimacy going on with God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son, usually tends to express that intimacy in

terms that are very revealing. You know, the impersonal way is well, I brought that need before the man upstairs. Yeah, real personal.

It's like getting one of those letters, to a current resident. It's like, oh, they know me really well. You know, you suppose that's what God's looking for out of you? Dear current resident of heaven, but rather Abba Father. That's the moving of the Spirit that draws us past the basic principles of this world and the way we're, we normally think, the way pagans think. And leads us to an intimate and close relationship with God, whereby we understand nothing can separate me from his love. The kind of a relationship that caused David to say, 1,000 years before the birth of Christ, He does not treat us as our sins deserve.