

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Galatians		Pastor/Teacher
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THE GREATEST COMMISSION

“The atonement,” wrote John Murray, “as a completed work of Christ, must always be viewed in the light of the *inter-Trinitarian economy of salvation*.”¹ Herman Bavinck has explained it this way: “Father, Son, and Spirit share one and the same Divine nature and characteristics. They are one being. Nevertheless, each has His own name, His own particular characteristic, by which He is distinguished from the others. The Father alone has fatherhood, the Son alone has generation, and the Spirit alone possesses the quality of proceeding from both. To that order of existence in the Divine Being the order of the three persons in all Divine work corresponds. The Father is He *from whom*, the Son is He *through whom*, and the Spirit is He *in whom* all things are. All things in the creation, and in redemption, or re-creation, come from the Father, through the Son and the Spirit. And in the Spirit and through the Son they are come back to Him. It is to the Father that we are particularly indebted, therefore, for His electing love, to the Son for His redeeming grace, and to the Spirit for His regenerative and renewing power.”² The passage in Galatians that is before us is laden with references to the Trinitarian outworking of redemption. John Stott helpfully points out the context, “We have seen how in Galatians 3 the apostle Paul surveyed 2,000 years of Old Testament history. In particular, he showed the relation between three of the great figures of biblical history – Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ. He explained how God gave Abraham a promise to bless all the families of the earth through his posterity; how He then gave Moses a law which, far from annulling the promise, actually made it more necessary and urgent; and how the promise was fulfilled in Christ, so that everyone whom the law drives to Christ inherits the promise which God made to Abraham. Now in Galatians 4:1-11 Paul rehearses the same history again, contrasting man’s condition under the law (verses 1-3) with his condition when he is in Christ (verses 4-7), and basing on this contrast an impassioned appeal about the Christian life (verses 8-11). His sequence of thought might be summarized thus: *Once we were slaves. Now we are sons. How, then, can we turn back to the old slavery?*”³

- I. **THE MISSION OF THE SON.** Paul has been arguing that the Law acted as a preparatory instrument. I want you to notice how the Apostle develops his case in light of God’s program. It has design and purpose. The expression “when the time had fully come” (NIV), “when the fullness of time had come” (ESV), indicate that the divine program of the ages is ultimately under the sovereign oversight of God the Father. He *determines* the exact time and circumstances under which the Son shall enter human history to accomplish the Father’s will.

- A. ***He was Sent by Divine Commission.*** The majestic statement “*God sent forth His son*” is filled with doctrinal content. The verb *sent forth* (*exapesteilen*) suggests the fact the Lord Jesus came out from God Himself and must, “in view of the apostle’s belief in the pre-existence of Jesus, as set forth in 1 Corinthians 8:6; Philippians 2:6ff; Colossians 1:15, 16 and of the parallelism of verse 6, be interpreted as having reference to the sending of the Son from his pre-existent state into the world.”⁴ Notice that He is called God’s Son (not His child); He was sent as *the Son* (Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1).
- B. ***The Manner in Which He Came.*** He was *made* (KJV) or *born* (ESV) of a woman. He possessed true humanity. In this one passage we therefore have a clear reference to the uniqueness of Christ. We have the pre-existent Son sent forth from God, assuming true humanity in order to make redemption.
- C. ***The Condition in Which He Came.*** He was born under the Law. This relates Him to the Law of Moses (Luke 2:21, 22, 27; Matthew 3:15, 5:17). This pertains to Christ’s *active* obedience to the Law. He perfectly fulfilled all that the Law required. “The obedience of Christ,” wrote John Flavel, “hath a double relation, *relation legalis justitiae*, the relation of a legal righteousness, and adequate and exactly proportioned price. And it hath also in it *ratio superlegalis meriti*, the relation of a merit over and beyond the law.”⁵ Brandon Crowe further elaborates that, “The fulfillment of Scripture, the ceremonies, and especially the sacrifice(s) of Luke 2:21-24 provide insight into the vicarious nature of Jesus’s life and obedience. As we have noted, Luke explicitly identifies these events as being in accord with the Torah (the law is mentioned four times in 2:22-24, 39). Certainly we should emphasize the obedience of Jesus’s parents in these verses, but if the Gospels are indeed Christology in narrative form, then our attention must not stray too far from Jesus himself in these law-conforming events. In this light, we can see Jesus’s humiliation in the way that he was born under the law (cf. Gal. 4:4), was subject to its regulations, and met those regulations completely. The conformity of Jesus’s life to the law of Moses as a small child in Luke is similar to what we see in Matthew, where the infant Jesus is in full accord with God’s scriptural design for salvation. Likewise, the incarnation in Luke entails Jesus’s conformity to biblical precepts for the consecration of the firstborn son. Jesus’s conformity to the law in Luke 2 further indicates that all of Jesus’s life – even his infancy – must be understood in light of the fulfillment of Scripture.”⁶
- D. ***The Purpose of His Coming.*** There are two stated purposes of His coming (note the two *hina* purpose clauses).
1. *Redemption.* He came to *redeem* (*exagprazō*, to buy back). Note that Paul does *not* speak of this in terms of *conditionality*. Christ did not come merely to make redemption a possibility, but He actually redeemed. Paul’s language is that of *certainty* (cf. Galatians 1:4; 3:13).
 2. *Adoption.* Christ does more than just rescue slaves – He makes them sons! The verb *receive* in verse 5 (*apolabōmen*, literally *to get from*) is an intensive one and describes the receiving in full of the status of sonship.
- II. ***THE MISSION OF THE SPIRIT.*** God confirms or attests that the adoption is genuine by sending forth His Spirit. How is the Spirit’s presence made evident?

- A. ***He works in the heart.*** In distinction from the Law, which is solely an *external* authority and cannot by itself change the heart (cf. Jeremiah 31:33), God sends the Spirit into our innermost being (John 7:37-39).
- B. ***He is the Spirit of Christ.*** (cf. Romans 8:9; John 16:13, 14) Note how the inter-Trinitarian activities of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are highlighted.
- C. ***His manifestation.*** How do you know you have the Spirit? He prompts the sons to cry *Abba Father*. Abba is Aramaic for father. The term is one of deep affection and is very personal.⁷ Jesus used the word in Mark 14:36 and now believers have the same privilege.

CONCLUSION: The Apostle has destroyed the position of the Judaizers. They are legalists and are still under the bondage and guardianship of the Law. Under the Gospel of Grace believers have received Sonship – why go back to infancy with all its burdens? The glorious work of the Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit – has worked in beautiful concert to bring about the salvation of God’s people, and God’s people should respond with the Apostle: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33)!”

ENDNOTES

¹ *The Collected Writings of John Murray II* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 143.

² Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, translated by H. Zylstra (rpt. Baker Book House, 1977), p. 159.

³ J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (IVP, 1968), p. 103.

⁴ E. DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (T&T Clark, 1977), p. 217.

⁵ *The Works of John Flavel I* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), p. 189.

⁶ B. D. Crowe, *The Last Adam: A Theology of The Obedient Life of Jesus in The Gospels* (Baker, 2017), p. 98.

⁷ Joachim Jeremias has shown that Abba was exclusively a family word. A neighbor might ask a child if his father is home, and the child would respond, “Yes, my Abba is home” – but the neighbor would never say, “Is your Abba home?” Only the children could call their fathers “Abba.” Cf. *The Prayers of Jesus* (Fortress, 1978), p. 95.