

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:1-7

TITLE: *WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT CHRISTMAS?
BEFORE AND AFTER FAMILY SNAPSHOTS – B.C. vs A.D.*

INTRODUCTION:

What's the Big Deal about Christmas? Secularists today continue to try to minimize Christmas. They do everything in their power to have the name of Christ blotted out from the very day that celebrates His great incarnation – **the Word** becoming flesh and dwelling with man; the arrival of **Immanuel** = “*God with us.*” What's the big deal about a baby being born to the Virgin Mary (that's a pretty big deal) and laid in a manger in the stable in Bethlehem? What's the big deal about the shepherds in the local fields and the wise men from afar coming to worship this baby and bringing presents of great value?

There's no question that Christmas is a big deal to all of the retail businessmen in our economy. Their whole year hinges on the amount of sales they can generate during this frenetic shopping season. Now we have the convenience of never leaving our couch but ordering anything we can imagine online and having it delivered to our door in a couple of days. Ask your friend who works for UPS – no question that Christmas is a big deal.

There's no question that Christmas is a big deal to our Hollywood entertainers and the music industry. Every night there is one television special after another with the most bizarre people you can imagine associated with celebrating the holiday season. I wouldn't be shocked to see Miley Cyrus twerking some obscene rendition of a popular Christmas carol. Most of the music centers around the secular icons of Santa Claus and Christmas trees and mistletoe . . . but even the sacred songs seem misunderstood as they are sung by cultic religious groups like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir – what do they know about the significance of Christmas?

Certainly our very calendar testifies to the fulcrum point in history of the arrival of Jesus Christ, the prophecied Son of David, the promised Messiah of the Jewish nation. We date everything by His birth – either **B.C.** – *Before Christ* . . . or **A.D.** -- *Anno Domini* is Medieval Latin, translated *In the year of the Lord* – pretty impressive; no other individual has had that type of impact on the world. But the world remains blind to His true significance.

What's the Big Deal about Christmas? The Apostle Paul unfolds it in our passage from Galatians for today. It changed everything with respect to our relationship to God the Father.

BIG IDEA:
THE COMING OF CHRIST ELEVATED OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD TO THAT OF PRIVILEGED SONS AND HEIRS – that's a Big Deal

(3:23-29) CONTEXT: BEFORE AND AFTER SNAPSHOT #1 -- FULL SONS AND HEIRS

We are all familiar with Before and After pictures – I love the weight loss ones – Here is Big Bubba in his bloated fashion ... compare this to the slimmed down, svelte Body Builder

A. (3:23-24) Before Justification by Faith in Christ Came – Time of Preparation / Restrictions

1. Timeframe -- "*But before faith came*"

Is Paul talking about Jews in OT times (probably) or anybody in their pre-conversion days (more of an application)?

Refers back to the specific faith in Jesus Christ referenced in vs. 22

Guthrie: In the Greek there is an article which should be observed in English if the full meaning is to be brought out. Paul is thinking not of faith in general, which had, after all, been seen in Abraham's experience, but in the particular kind of faith to which reference has just been made in **verse 22**, i.e. faith centred in Christ.

2. Limitations of the Law -- Only a Schoolmaster

- a. Function of Guarding -- but not Delivering
"we were kept in custody under the law"

Gromacki: "... under constant surveillance. They were in the prison house of sin with no way of escape. The law was like a jailor or a sentry, watching every act of moral disobedience. They were being guarded at all times."

For the Jews, this was the law of Moses ... but for the Gentiles this was the law of conscience given by God as described in Romans 2 – we all have some understanding of God's requirements; some restraint system curtailing our depravity

- b. Looking Forward to the Coming Faith
"being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed"

3. Purpose of the Law = to Lead us to Christ

"Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith."

Deffinbaugh: The Law did have its purpose in the fulfilling of God's promises to Abraham. The Law made the problem of sin painfully obvious. The Law defined sin and actually resulted in multiplying sin to where it could not be denied. The purpose of the Law, however, was provisional and was never intended to be permanent (3:19). The Law was not in opposition to the promises of God, for this economy pointed men to the promises and proved every means of obtaining them, other than faith, to be futile. The Law did not oppose faith, but prepared for it and promoted it as the only means to

receiving God's promised blessings through Abraham (3:22-24). Since the Law was provisional and preparatory, it was set aside after the coming of Christ, and it thus ceased to make the old distinctions between Jew and Gentile, which was the basis for the pride and zeal of the Judaizers.

MacArthur: not the teacher but . . . a disciplinarian who carried a rod and whacked the boys when they didn't conform.

B. (3:25-29) After Justification by Faith in Christ Has Come -- Fulfillment / Enjoyment of Privileges

1. (:25a) Timeframe -- "*But now that faith has come*"

2. (:25b) Graduated to a Higher Level
"*we are no longer under a tutor*"

Gromacki: "Thus, the law as a *paidogogos* performed a needed function before justification, but it has no authority over the regenerated child of God. The redeemed sinner does not have to obey the law to maintain his justified position or to achieve sanctification. Of course, at all times he is '*not without law to God, but under the law to Christ*' (I Cor. 9:21). He must never be morally lawless; rather he should always be submissive to the righteous, eternal law of God which transcends all ages and which reflects the holy character of God."

Paul is not saying that the law no longer has any function at all; it still can point to God's righteous standards and reveal our sin – how far short we fall and how much we are in need of the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But the law no longer restrains and disciplines us as a tutor.

Deffinbaugh: The Judaizers of Paul's day had also wished to return to the past and to take the Gentile Galatian saints with them. They painted a glorious picture of life as it had once been under the Old Testament economy of the Law. While they were willing to concede that faith in Christ was necessary for salvation, it alone was inadequate, and thus the Law must be added as well (cf. Acts 15:1,5; Gal. 3:1-5).

3. (:26) Full Sonship
"*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*"

Paul is speaking to believers here – both Jews and Gentiles; you are either in the family of God or outside of His family; God commands men everywhere to repent of their sins and place their faith in Christ Jesus alone for salvation

4. (:27-28) Fully United with Christ = No Distinction
a. (:27) Fully United with Christ
"*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*"

Not looking for any post conversion elite Holy Spirit baptism that will elevate you to a holier brand of Christianity. Every true believer is characterized here as having been baptized (immersed) into Christ and so identified and united with His life that now we are clothed with Christ.

Gromacki: "This change of spiritual clothing was taken from a cultural custom. In ancient times a Roman lad wore the *toa praetexta*, a toga with an elaborately embroidered purple hem. When the boy reached manhood he put off this sign of immaturity and put on the white toga. Thus, under law, a person could never merit the clothing of spiritual sonship."

b. (:28) No Distinction

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The law created all types of differences -- between Jews and Gentiles; between clean and unclean animals; etc.

Not advocating for a denial of the difference between the sexes; not advocating that we share the same bathroom; live in the same dorm rooms, serve identical roles in the family and in society

5. (:29) Sons of God by Faith / Full Heirs

"And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

THE COMING OF CHRIST ELEVATED OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD TO THAT OF PRIVILEGED SONS AND HEIRS

(4:1-7) BEFORE AND AFTER SNAPSHOT #2 -- FULL SONS AND HEIRS

I. (4:1-3) BEFORE CHRIST CAME – PREPARATION / RESTRICTIONS

A. (:1) A Child Lives Like a Servant

"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."

Difference between legal position and enjoyment of all the privileges and responsibilities

Like a trusteeship – money is there; protected; designated for you – but you can't draw against it until you reach the age of maturity

When you look at how people live – not much difference between a child and a slave

- Both told what they can and cannot do
- Restrictions
- But a child is being prepared for future independence

Look at that phrase “*Owner of everything*” – gives a little foretaste to what our position is as sons and full heirs

Right now we live as **stewards** ... transitioning to living as owners of everything

B. (:2) A Child Chafes Under Supervision

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

Especially true of royal princes – they have no lack of guardians and managers

There is a date set by the father – His eternal decree

C. (:3) A Child is Restricted Under Bondage

"So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world."

benefits of **maturity**, as opposed to the restrictions of **immaturity**.

Look at all that was involved in the basic principles of the OT law – including all of the ceremonial and ritual cleansing regulations – to these the Pharisees and then the Judaizers had added even more restrictive elements; no freedom in having to obey all those regulations

Wiersbe: "This word *elements* means *the basic principles, the ABCs*. For some 15 centuries, Israel had been in kindergarten and grade school, learning their 'spiritual ABCs,' so that they would be ready when Christ would come. Then they would get the full revelation, for Jesus Christ is *'the Alpha and the Omega'* (Rev. 22:13); He encompasses all the alphabet of God's revelation to man. He is God's last Word (Heb. 1:1-3)."

Dr. Wayne Barber: The word “elemental” there is the word *stoicheion*. *Stoicheion* means the ABC’s of something. It’s the basic set of rules that determines behavior, and begins to frame conduct and morality. Now what is he referring to? Many people wonder what these ABC’s are. There are a lot of opinions, but I think if you will let Scripture speak for itself, it tells you what it is. ABC, as he speaks of here, is religion of any sort, any form, any shape. Look down in **Gal 4:9**, and he uses the same term and defines what he’s talking about. He says, “*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,*” notice how he categorizes them, “*elemental things [stoicheion] to which you desire to be enslaved all over again. You observe days and months and seasons and years.*” And he goes on to explain.

It’s clear as a bell what he is talking about. Why would you go back up under this old immature system called religion when you can walk in the adult privileges of being a mature son of God? Why is it that you would want to do that? You see, on one side there’s a relationship. On the other side there’s a religion. In the Gentile world religion and philosophy were carefully brought together. And whatever system that was, it had

its own set of rules. In the Jewish world it involved a system of rabbinic teaching. Whatever it is, he says, religion of any kind, be it Islam, be it Buddhism, be whatever it is, you put it over here. It's for the immature that need a set of rules and it doesn't save you in any way, shape or form.

II. (4:4-5) FULCRUM POINT = THE COMING OF CHRIST

These 2 verses are the heart of the message

A. Timeframe –

"But when the fulness of the time came"

Marking the completion of the old era and the dawn of a new era

1. Fullness in terms of Prophecy

The details had been incrementally unfolded by way of progressive revelation ... Starting with the very basic intimation in the early chapters of Genesis of the seed of the woman that would come to reverse the Fall and recreate Paradise

- Promise to Abraham
- Promise to David
- Virgin birth – Isaiah
- Bethlehem birth – Micah 5:2

2. Fullness in terms of Advantageous Time to Preach the Gospel

Alistair Begg:

- Marked by Expectancy in the Jewish world – looking for a Messiah; when will these prophetic passages come to fruition?
- Marked by Security – Roman Empire – established peace and security; built roadways that made possible movement
- Marked by Clarity – Greek language for communication across national and ethnic boundaries
- Marked by Futility – particularly in the religious realm; looking for religious experience that was real and satisfying

3. Fullness in terms of God's Timetable and Decree

Guthrie: In the context it is clear that his thought is still centred on servitude to the law and the most reasonable assumption, therefore, is to regard the “fulness” as the limit of God's testing time under the law, during which the hopelessness of man's servitude was fully demonstrated. Paul is convinced, as the early Christians were generally, that the coming of Christ was not by accident but by divine appointment.

- John the Baptist came as a forerunner to announce that the time had come
- Jesus preached that the time had come as well – **Mark 1:14-15** “*Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’*”

B. Divine Plan –

"God sent forth"

Sending out from a previous state

Implies the pre-existence of the Son from all eternity

John 3:16

C. Qualifications to Redeem

1. Fully God – *"His Son"*

2. Fully Man -- *"born of a woman"*

Phil. 2 – demonstrates how Jesus humbled Himself

Pinnock: "The humanity of Christ is one of the underdeveloped doctrines of orthodox Christianity. We have been so zealous to preserve a good testimony to the deity of Christ that we have often allowed His humanity to become unreal and obscured. Yet the New Testament is eager to stress God's self-disclosure in our flesh and history. The chief Christological heresy it had to combat was docetism, the denial of His full humanity. Paul teaches that God entered fully into the conditions of human life."

3. Fully Obedient to God's Law -- *"born under the Law"*

Under obligation to keep all the requirements of the law and establish righteousness

our Substitute to bear the full penalty of the law

D. Mission = Accomplishing Redemption

"in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law"

to pay a ransom to secure somebody's freedom.

to purchase somebody off the slave block.

- Deliverance from bondage to the law
- Deliverance to something better = sonship and full heirship

E. Goal = Full Sonship (Implied Heirship)

"that we might receive the adoption as sons"

Adoption is a beautiful things – both for the parents and for the child
Usually a very expensive process
Brings someone into a new family unit with full rights and privileges

III. (4:6-7) AFTER CHRIST HAS COME – FULFILLMENT / ENJOYMENT OF PRIVILEGES

Gromacki: "How can a person know that he is a son? What are the evidences of the fact that he is no longer a spiritual child under legal supervision? The opening causal clause (*'because ye are sons'*) introduces the reader to two spiritual realities that will exist in the life of every genuine Christian. They are results of sonship which actually confirm that position."

A. New Privileged Experience of Full Sonship

"And because you are sons"

B. New Privilege of Intimacy (through the indwelling Holy Spirit)

"God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

MacArthur: "*Abba* is a diminutive of the Aramaic word for father. It was a term of endearment used by young children of their fathers and could be translated 'daddy' or 'papa.' The Holy Spirit brings us into a personal, intimate relationship with our heavenly Father, whom we may approach at any time and under any circumstance, knowing that He always hears us and lovingly cares for us, because we are truly His own."

C. New Privileged Expectation of Full Heirship

"Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Deffinbaugh: far from producing a greater spiritual maturity, being under the Law was proof of the opposite—**immaturity**. The theology of the Judaizer was that grace alone was not sufficient to save (cf. Acts 15:1) nor to sanctify (Gal. 3:3). Their solution was to add law to grace. In other words, the Law was necessary to produce godliness and maturity in the life of the Christian, whether Jew or Gentile. Paul nullifies this theology by associating the Law with childhood and immaturity. He describes the period during which Israel was under the Law as the time when they were children (Gal. 4:3) It is necessary to restrict and confine a child because children are too immature to make wise decisions. We do not let our children make important decisions, because they are neither wise nor mature enough to do so. Thus, by associating the Law with the immaturity of a child, which requires tutors, custodians, and stewards, Paul indicates that the need for rigid rules and regulations is the mark of immaturity. How then do the Judaizers dare to promise a higher level of spirituality through a return to the Law?

CONCLUSION:

Rom. 8:12-17

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of religious cults or other religions teach some form of reliance upon keeping a set of laws? What are some of those laws? How do we use laws in our household?
- 2) Is there a different emphasis in the NT being being a "*child of God*" and being a "*son of God*"?
- 3) How does this baptism into Christ compare to the type of Holy Spirit baptism which is one of the core distinctives for those of charismatic persuasion?
- 4) If the role of parents is to prepare their children for independence and maturity and adulthood ... do some parents continue to provide too much direction to their adult children? How is this harmful?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: "No matter how wealthy a father may be, his infant son or toddling child cannot really enjoy that wealth. In the Roman world, the children of wealthy people were cared for by slaves. No matter who his father was, the child was still a child, under the supervision of a servant. In fact, the child himself was not much different from the servant who guarded him. The servant was commanded by the master of the house, and the child was commanded by the servant."

Hendriksen: "In the figure here used the '*pedagogue*' is the man--generally a slave--in whose custody the slave-owner's boys were placed, in order that this trusted servant might conduct them to and from school, and might, in fact, watch over their conduct throughout the day. He was, accordingly, an escort or attendant, and also at the same time a disciplinarian. The discipline which he exercised was often of a severe character, so that those placed under his guardianship would yearn for the day of freedom."

MacArthur: "*The fulness of time* refers to the completion of the period of preparation in God's sovereign timetable of redemption. When the law had fully accomplished its purpose of showing man his utter sinfulness and inability to live up to God's perfect standard of righteousness, God ushered in a new era of redemption. When He sent

forth His Son, He provided the righteousness for man that man could not provide for himself.

When Jesus was born, everything was right for the coming of the Messiah. First of all, the time was right religiously. During the Babylonian captivity, Israel once and for all forsook the idolatry into which she had so often fallen. Despite their many other sins and failures, including the national rejection of their own Messiah, no significant number of Jews has ever again turned to idolatry.

Also during the Exile, Jews developed synagogues, which they used as places of worship, as schools, and as courts. In addition to that, they at last had the completed Old Testament, assembled by Ezra and others after the return from Babylon. Those features facilitated the proclaiming of the Messiah's gospel among the people of Israel.

Second, the time was right culturally. Christians who propagated the gospel during the first several centuries had a common language with those to whom they witnessed and with whom they worshiped. Alexander the Great had thoroughly established Greek culture and language throughout the known world, and these continued their dominating influence long after Rome succeeded Greece as world ruler.

Third, the time was right politically. Rome had instituted the *pax Romana* (Roman peace), which provided economic and political stability. The apostles and other early preachers and teachers could travel freely and safely throughout the empire and could do so on the magnificent system of roads built by the Romans.

Each of those factors was in some unique way a key to the spread of the gospel. God's timing was perfect."

Alistair Begg (:4-5) Our culture confused about why Jesus came to live and die and who Jesus is? Journalistic questions: Who, What, Why, Where, When ...

I. When did this happen? In the fullness of time

The moment that was determined by God's eternal decree; the issues of time are under God's control; coming of Christ was divine appointment not accidental intervention; "*at just the right time God died for the ungodly*"; God determines the times and seasons; stands Himself outside of time and invades time in the person of His Son Jesus; we spend a lot of time trying to pinpoint what time it is;

Illustration: G.K. Chesterton – came around corner and got knocked down by man carrying unwieldy grandfather clock; looking up he commented: "Why can't you use a wristwatch like everyone else"

Palestine uniquely positioned for spread of gospel around the world – to Europe, Africa, Asia

Could argue that contemporary culture trumps all of these; not the main reason for the phrase "fullness of time" but not irrelevant either

Keep the verse in its **context** – talking in chap. 3 about 3 historical figures – Abraham -- promise, Moses – law (to reveal sin and draw men to Christ) and Jesus (the end of the law – has silenced the law's condemnation); the law had brought men to despair – people lack sense of peace, security and hope despite their engagement in religious

pursuits; the more they are confronted with the standards of righteousness the more they are aware of their failings; law not a ladder to climb up to heaven but a mirror to reveal to our sin and inconsistency; Where may I be washed? Salvation is not a reward to be earned but a gift to be received;

The time has come for men to repent and put their faith in Christ

II. What happened? God sent His Son

Sending out from a previous state; the life of Jesus did not begin in Bethlehem; When our children ask: Where was I before I was born? You did not exist.

Pilate asked Jesus: Where did you come from? Jesus did not answer him.

Without ceasing to be what He was = God; He became what He was not = Man; John 1; Jesus is perfectly qualified to do what is required of Him; Veiled in flesh the Godhead see ...;

Subject to the Jewish law; regarding baptism: *“Thus it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness”* – obeyed the law in all detail and perfection; What sins do you accuse me of? Bearing the penalty of the law as our substitute

Jesus is the only Savior – only one qualified to be a Savior; If God must save, then the Savior must be God; not some minor differences among religions; fundamental and huge differences

III. Why?

- In order to provide Redemption
- In order to adopt those whom He redeemed

Sons Not Slaves – vs. 7

You have been set free as a result of the Lord Jesus Christ; Mark 1:15 – fullness of times; the exact moment set by God’s eternal decree;

The very law that was given by God to prove to me that I need a Savior becomes in the hands of external religion a mechanism to prove to me that I don’t need a Savior – “just do what the law says and you will be saved”

Sent His Son to die for us; sent His Spirit to live in us; Jesus is a Son by nature; willingly took on form of a servant so that we who are by nature the slaves of sin might become the sons of God by the adoption of grace; what the Son has procured by His death the Spirit applies in our life; Adoption is a beautiful thing; the legal status precedes the objective experience of that reality

Illustration: “Daddy, I need a new shoelace”

MacArthur: In the Jewish world for the first eleven years of the young man's life, he was instructed in the things of God; he was led very carefully. If dutifully his father performed the task that he was given to the place where he understood how to live as a man, he understood the law of God, the word of God, the responsibilities of the society and the community, and at the time that he reached his twelfth birthday there was a very definitive moment in time when he passed from being a child to being a mature son.

The first Sabbath after his twelfth birthday, that young man was taken to the synagogue and there he became a son of the law, Bar Mitzvah, no longer the son of his father, no longer the son of his mother, which he was very early on. He is now obligated not to them but to God. He is the son of the law. His authority is the law of God. He has reached the point where he is mature enough to come under its adjudications, judgments and demands. And the father as it is, yields him up to personal responsibility to obey the law of God, that, the first Sabbath after his twelfth birthday.