

***“Christmas Heirs”*** (Galatians 4:4-7)

First Sunday after Christmas (the 5<sup>th</sup> Day of Christmas)

Sunday, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Merry Christmas! Yes, it is appropriate to give this greeting during the 12 days of Christmas. The world has it all wrong: in the world, Christmas starts too early as it forgets about Advent and then, Christmas ends too soon as the full 12-days of Christmas are ignored. Not so for us Christians! We simply cannot rejoice too much nor too often when it comes to our Savior’s first coming to rescue us from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

But we have to admit – and not that this is inappropriate nor is it surprising – that the Christmas proclamation is a *universal* one. Christ was born for the sins of *all* people and not just for some, so that the Christmas heralding is truly for the whole world: Jesus was born to save all sinners in all times, in all places, in all circumstances. This is part and parcel the power of the Gospel unto salvation first to the Jew and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).

However – and it never fails – the evil one attacks this proclamation. This is the way of sin and evil. It attacks what is good and what is holy and seeks a privation of that good and holy thing. A privation is a deprivation or a taking away of something good, trying to make the good thing something that becomes less than whole and the lack of wholeness bends the good thing so that it is no longer in alignment with God. This helps us to understand sin and evil. These are not created things. God does not create sin, nor does He create the active and intentional manifestation of sin called “evil,” but sin and evil are attacks that occur when the free agents -- like angels and people -- created to be good and holy *choose* to fight against God. The evil one is always trying to mess things up. This is why when you hear someone ask the skeptical question, “But why did God create sin?” we must understand that this is nonsense. It is a classic category mistake. Not only is God incapable of creating anything contrary to His good and holy nature; but sin itself is not even a *created thing*. The whole question is mumbo-jumbo. But do you think that this slows the evil one down from trying to generate confusion?

Now in the case of the universal Gospel for ALL people, the devil once again tries to take what is good and attack once again! His attack in this case sounds like this: “So, yes, it is true the Gospel is universal and for the whole world, but you know, the world is an awfully big place with over 7 billion people. That’s a lot of people! Maybe, just maybe, this so-called ‘universal Gospel’ – which always says, ‘for the world, for the world, for the world,’ -- isn’t quite as ‘universal’ as you might think...maybe, just maybe, this Gospel is not for *you!*” So the attack is

established, the good and holy and powerful Gospel that is for ALL people is called into question: “But does it really include *you*?!”

And in our sin we are all over jumping on the evil one’s band wagon that always, always, always questions the Word of God. His strategy has never changed. He questioned God’s Word in the Garden (Genesis 3), and he continues to do it today. His evil ways have not changed and will not change until Christ comes again in glory.

And in our sin we go along with it too often. In our sinful nature, we allow the powerful universal Gospel to be questioned also in our consciences. We suspect that perhaps we are not really a saved child of God. We wonder if we are truly rescued from sin, or fear that we are in fact really overcome by our sin, still slaves to sin, still bound to sin, still following sin as our master, not living in the righteousness of Christ, but living instead in the unrighteousness of sin. Maybe we are among those who suspect – deep down – that we are really among the vessels of wrath (Romans 9:22).

But some of you might give an easy reply, “Geez! Why be so pessimistic about oneself?” Unfortunately, there is a good reason for this pessimism and it is explained in the first few verses of Galatians 4 just before the verses in our epistle reading. It is actually important to keep the whole section verses 1-7, and not just 4-7, intact. In the prior section – verses 1-3 – the Word makes it clear that while these words in Galatians 4 most certainly apply to the Jews, these words also include *all* people (since all people have the law of God in their consciences, Romans 2). And let’s explain why it is so easy for people to lose confidence about being right with God: they remain in a state of confusing the Christian faith with a religion of law. To remain under the law, however, removes all confidence, since we can *never* satisfy its perfect standard!

But the effort or idea that being a “Good Christian” is based on behavior modification sticks to us. We confuse the faith with moralism; we confuse faith with good feelings about God; we confuse living in our baptism with the general idea of “being sincere and believing in God.” And then we wonder why our confidence is chopped up and turned to minced meat.

Those who remain under the law are called in Galatians 4:1 “child,” and this particular word (*napios*) is someone who is under the supervision of law. That is the person is a slave and under the control of the law. The law is like a baby-sitter for such a person and as a result they have no voice and no say. They are a non-speaking one with no rights. They are under the crushing and accusing control of the law. Such a person is no different than a slave under a guardian and under a manager. Again, they have no say. At every turn they are “put in their

place,” they have no real freedom and since they are divested of having a voice, all they can do is remain speechless in the face of the law’s condemning control. This is a state of bondage.

As long as our idea of being a Christian is to do this and do that -- keeping commands and prohibitions -- in order to be good and as we answer to the standard of the law, then we are divested of any rights quite simply because we keep blowing it! We are like slaves who can never, ever keep the standard of being a good boy or a good girl. The law says you’re not and therefore you must mind your place and that place is not to have confidence before God, never, ever.

Under such conditions, people lose their confidence and once your confidence is gone, you start to go along with the temptation to live in accord with the identity you think you’re stuck with. If you believe you’re condemned, then you will live like it. These go along with Satan’s lies and his efforts to keep you stuck in this wrong understanding of the Christian faith. And before you know it, your confidence in personal salvation is gone and John 3:16 about the “world” is too universal to include you.

But Saint Paul goes on to write in Galatians 4:4-5: ***“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”*** This is an amazing Scripture, because it is revealed that Jesus the perfect and holy Son of God entered our status of being under the law and then the Word of God goes on to tell us why Jesus did this; and I will tell you ahead of time that the two reasons given to us in Scripture are intended to eradicate, destroy and pulverize Satan’s attack to call your salvation into question. These words restore all confidence; they are designed to make you positive of your belonging to God!

Why did Jesus join us poor sinners under the law? Two reasons:

- 1) Verse 5: “to redeem those who were under the law (that’s you).”
- 2) Verse 5 again: “so that [you] might receive adoption as sons.”

And get a load of this: the Scriptures say that when this happened, you went from a non-speaking, having-no-rights *napios (mere child)* to a “son,” an *adopted heir of God with full rights that are seen and heard through the invitation, ability and frequent practice to speak up...to pray to God in the Name of Jesus and to be heard*! How did this change in status occur?

Again, the first reason given is “to redeem those who were under the law.” And again, this is about you! These words actually bolster the universal Gospel as they clarify its power. When Christ did what He did for you: entering your life, joining you under the law, becoming your brother and sacrificial representative as well as your Lord and Savior, He “redeemed” you. This is an exciting concept. It is a warfare word. Victors took defeated prisoners of war while the prisoners’ people back home would raise funds for the required amount to forward to the land of the victors in order to buy back their captured brothers. This is the process that the ancients called “redemption”. They used the verb “redeem” for it and anyone who carried it out was a “redeemer”. The sum of money was called the “ransom” (Morris, *The Atonement: It’s Meaning and Significance*, p 108).

How does this contribute to your confidence? This saving work of Jesus is not to be treated in a general way, but in a very precise way: what saved you specifically was the ransom of the blood of Christ given to the Heavenly Father for you dear Christian. Jesus shed His blood for you. He was the Redeemer who gave His blood ransom in order to redeem you/to buy you from destruction and to the glory of the Kingdom of God. What is the basis for your confidence? It is not your morality. It is not your behavior. It is not your effort. It is the glorious, royal, powerful, life-giving, ransom blood of the Lord Jesus Christ! So our catechism says clearly, “[Jesus] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood....”. (Luther, *The Small Catechism*, “The Creed,” from the explanation to The Second Article)

Let me put this simply: your confidence is found in the blood of Christ. This He shed for sinners. You must be a sinner to qualify. If you are, then there is NO doubt that this saving blood is for you. No doubt whatsoever because Jesus came for sinners...so here’s your checklist for your confidence: 1) Do you qualify as a sinner? If yes, then go to box #2: 2) Jesus paid His blood as a ransom to redeem such people. Thanks be to God that this Gospel is about you!

Still, we demolish the devil’s attack against the wonderful universal Gospel in an even more effective way and this is the second reason given in Galatians 4:5: ***“so that we might receive adoption as sons.”***

This is where the universal Gospel gets personal and individual, where it is about you. Technically speaking this is the transition from objective to subjective justification. This Gospel turns you into a son. Again, the non-speaking child status is replaced with the full-rights heir status. Thus when you were baptized into the body of Christ, it was YOUR baptism and when you receive the body and blood of Jesus, the Sacrament is put into YOUR mouth and then your

confidence is manifest in your new status as a heir with full-rights who is no longer a slave, but as one who speaks up and speaks out and prays and prays and prays...this is what we do. We have access, we have rights, we have the way to God's ear and the path to God's heart and God is no longer simply "God," but now that we are heirs of Christ, God is our Heavenly and Loving *Father* who hears and listens to His heirs.

In this new status, Saint Paul writes, ***"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"*** ***So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."***

Luther ought to be shared at this juncture:

"It is not evident, of course, that we have been renewed in our minds and that we have the Holy Spirit. Yet our very ability to judge, our speech, and our confession are evidence enough that the Holy Spirit is in us with His gifts.... Externally there is not much difference between the Christian and another socially upright human being. The works of the Christian are cheap in appearance: He does his duty according to his calling; he rules the commonwealth; he runs the household; he tills the field; he helps, supports, and serves his neighbor. The unspiritual man does not praise these works but thinks of them as common and as nothing, as something that laymen and even heathen do. For the world does not perceive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14); therefore it forms a distorted judgment of the works of the pious....Therefore we must not doubt that the Holy Spirit dwells in us; but we must be sure and acknowledge that we are, as Paul says, 'a temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 6:19). For if someone experiences love toward the Word, and if he enjoys hearing, speaking, thinking, lecturing, and writing about Christ, he should know that this is not a work of human will or reason but a gift of the Holy Spirit. For it is impossible for these things to happen without the Holy Spirit....Those in whom there is some glow and yearning for the Word should acknowledge with gratitude that this feeling has been infused into them by the Holy Spirit. For we are not born with this feeling; nor can we be instructed to acquire it by any laws. It is the right hand of the Most High, pure and simple, that has changed us (Ps. 77:10). Therefore when we are glad to hear the proclamation about Christ, the Son of God, who was made man for us and subjected Himself to the Law to redeem us, then with and through that proclamation God surely sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts." (Luther's Works, Volume 26, pp 375-377)

So this is your confidence dear Christian: the blood of Christ that has redeemed you and your new status that now loves and yearns for Christ Himself...this can't happen without the Holy Spirit who leads you to speak up and speak out in Christ and to the Father as a true heir: "Abba! Father!"