

OUR FELLOWHEIR

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. And if children, also heirs, heirs together with God and fellowheirs with Christ if indeed we are fellow-sufferers, that we may be also fellowglorified ones” (Romans 8:16,17) (Author’s Translation).

We are heirs together, sufferers together and glorified together with Christ. We are indeed His brethren. There is no truth in the Bible more clearly presented than the truth that we are God’s children and not His “charges.” We are not a labor force, although it is our privilege to serve Him, if we have the desire to do so. We are not members of a religious order, although there are common concepts that unite us. We are not members of an organization or club. We are certainly not slaves, although it is our privilege, if we choose, to regard ourselves as “bondservants,” as did the Apostle Paul. We are formally adopted children, and as such, we are “jointheirs,” or “fellowheirs” with Christ.

Paul makes our position in Christ very clear to the Galatians. ***“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, who came through a woman, who came under the law, in order that He may redeem those who were under the law, in order that we might receive adoption. And because we are children, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father”*** (Galatians 4:4-6) (Author’s Translation). Clearly, our position is one of formal adoption. We are the legitimate heirs of God, and therefore brothers and sisters of Christ. God willed it so and Christ desires it so. ***“Wherefore He is not ashamed to be called their brethren”*** (Hebrews 2:11).

Moreover, our relationship is an integral one in which we are imbued with the very Spirit of Christ. So, not only are we legal heirs, but, with Christ, partakers of the nature of God, our Father. The familial nature of our relationship to God is at the very heart of the New Testament message. The children of Israel were also considered part of God’s family, but in a more collective or national sense, and more contractual than spiritual. That is to say, that the Spirit of God was not permanently imbued in their spirits. Although He did touch the lives of many prophets and servants (notably Moses and David), it was not until Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came to dwell within the individual on a continuous basis. Under the Old Testament the people of Israel had external regulations and, guidelines to their relationship to God, but not the indwelling Spirit as a functioning motivational force. As long as they gave heed to the regulations in the Tora (law) they were accepted by God, but when they chose the path of rebellion and apostasy, they were cut off.

This truth was brought out in a number of the parables of Jesus. Classic examples are the vineyard and orchard parables. Fruitless branches were cut off. Paul says that the natural branches of the Olive tree were cut off and others (Gentiles) grafted in. So, the parable of the vineyard of John 15. The branches to be burned are not Christians who have been remiss in their duties, but Israelites who had been apostate, and were cut off from God. In another figure, Israel’s failure was allegorized in the slothful servant of the parable of the talents. The penalty for hiding the talent was eternal death. This parable can never be used of Christians employing their gifts, since the penalty was not

simply disfavor, but outer darkness forever. (The attempt to put believers under legal regulation has often been supported by the misapplication of such parables, which pertain to Israel alone.) Christians are certainly enjoined to use their gifts, but never with the death penalty as the leverage.

Paul deals with the contrast between the Old Testament position of Israel and the New Testament position of the family of Christ in the story of Hagar and Sarah in Galatians 4. It is important to note here that much of our knowledge of God comes from such narratives that illustrate in lucid form the meaning of our relationship to God. (Propositions about God can be easily misunderstood). The story begins with Abraham, who is called “the father of us all,” with important reason. Though redemption was prophesied to Adam immediately after the fall (Genesis 3:15); and Noah preserved the human race through the cataclysm of the flood; it is Abraham who is identified as the true father of the redeemed. It was not Adam who was the father of the fallen, nor Moses, who was the executor of the law; nor Jacob who was the father of a special people. (yet to have a special place); but Abraham who rose up out of the pagan cultures of Ur of the Chaldees (in the area now called Iraq). He was the true symbol of the power of God to lift fallen man and make him an heir of God without conditions. It is through Abraham that we all have our place of inheritance, and not Israel.

As the story goes, Abraham was touched by God in some way (not revealed to us), when he was in the midst of a pagan society—Ur of the Chaldees. We have no evidence of a heritage of faith from his forbears. Symbolically, his calling was completely of grace—without any hint of merit or predilection. The result of his encounter with God (or God’s encounter with him) was that he made a monumental trek with his family across the fertile crescent (Mesopotamian valley) to Palestine, where he established his claim to the land.

More importantly, Abraham established the viability of the personal interaction between God and the human spirit—on the basis of an ongoing redemptive process, a continuous personal association and the promise of an everlasting inheritance. The promise is given in Genesis 13:14-16—**“and the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered”** The word “everlasting” gives the promise of both an earthly and heavenly inheritance. Moreover, the promise of limitless numbers has not been fulfilled in Israel. The present-day claim of Israel to the land of Palestine goes back to that promise.

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul picks up the heavenly or spiritual side of the promise. He quotes Genesis 12:3—**“In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed”** (Galatians 3:8). In the application of the meaning of Abraham to the process of redemption, Paul sees Abraham as the progenitor of the spiritual family of God, as well as the earthly. Thus, his progeny, usually identified with Jacob (Israel) and his children, really extends to all nation’s (called the *Goyim*), to all who identify with God in faith. Gentile and Jew alike, who are so

identified, are considered to be the seed of Abraham through Isaac, “the child of promise.”

But back to the story. In God’s promise to Abraham of an everlasting inheritance, there was the promise of a son. Abraham and Sarah, both approaching a hundred years in age, were, of course, quite beyond normal childbearing. Abraham had accepted God’s word (indeed was credited in Romans 4 with “*not staggering at the promise of God in unbelief,*” but apparently faltered as time dragged on, and went to Hagar, Sarah’s maid (probably with Sarah’s approval) to ensure the fulfillment of a promise. The child born to Hagar was not accepted by God as the “child of promise,” but did become, in the providence of God, an important symbol of the first covenant of God with Israel—a covenant of law and servitude. Later, Sarah did in fact bear a son who was the true heir, and symbolic of the second or new covenant—a covenant of the liberty and grace enjoyed by a son rather than a servant or slave.

In Galatians 4 (see the entire chapter), Paul drives home the contrast. All who have joined with Christ in faith have been adopted as legitimate heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ on the strength of the promise made to Abraham. Abraham, through Isaac, was to produce a people “more than the sands or the stars,” comprising all people for all time, who have identified with God in faith—Jew or Gentile.

In the story of Sarah and Hagar. Paul sees an allegory that defines the difference of the law under Moses and the covenant of grace established in the sacrifice of Christ. In lucid, unmistakable terms Paul shows that Hagar’s son, Ishmael, legally (in those days) was a son of Abraham, but not the true heir. Unacceptable by today’s standards, it was quite legitimate for a man to bear children by a servant in the home (as with Jacob). Ishmael was a son according to the law, but not a son according to promise. Therefore Hagar and her son were sent away to make room for Isaac, the son of promise by Sarah. Let it be noted, however, that God did not abandon Hagar and Ishmael, but provided for them in the miraculous well of *Beer-Lahai-Roi* (the well of the one who lives and sees Me).

According to Paul, Hagar and Ishmael represent the Old Covenant based on the law of Moses—a condition of bondslavery. Sarah and Isaac represent the New Covenant based on the sacrifice of Christ and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit

It must be pointed out, however, that the position of Israel though no different in outward appearance from the bondslave, was more like the child who is the heir, and yet because he is so carefully regulated, does not differ from the slave, even though he is technically “lord of all.” The position of the son under the New Covenant is that he has come into full stature as heir, and is now free from the regulation of governors. He is therefore no longer like the slave at all.

Paul concludes this section by telling the Galatians to “***stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage***” (Galatians 5:1). We are as free as Christ, our brother and fellow heir. We are no longer under regulation in the legal sense, but

governed rather by the inner motives and desires of the Spirit. The one who possesses the Spirit of Christ within has come into the fullness of the promise made to Israel in Jeremiah 31:33. **“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, said the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they will be my people.”** Paul picks this up and applies it to the family of Christ in his letter to the people of Corinth—*“forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart”* (II Corinthians 3:3). The law is in the heart—not in the law code. We serve Christ out of an inner desire—not out of an outward obligation. Having the Spirit of Christ in us, we sense what He wants—what kind of life is pleasing to Him. We know what we should do (though we do not always do it).

And our service is voluntary, as becomes a son, and not mandatory as becomes a slave. Our service arises out of the gifts we are given rather than out of obligation to “pay for our redemption.” It is not that the sacrifice of Christ was not of infinite value, but rather that we are bankrupt and can’t pay. Thus, excused from debt, we are free to give our service from our hearts as God gives the gifts to us. When God has a task for us, he gives us the gift—both the capacity and the desire to do it.

So we are fellowheirs with Christ, as He is the heir of God. All that God possesses is ours through Christ, **“whom God has appointed heir of all things”** (Hebrews 1:2). Let us enter into the privileges of our inheritance. We are no longer under the governance of the law, which was only our pedagogue (schoolmaster) to bring us to Christ. We are heirs, not slaves, or merely pupils. **Everything Christ gives to us is a gift; and everything we give to Christ is a gift.**

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free”
(Galatians 5:1).

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