

Galatians 4:4-7 Redeemed From Under Law

I hope your Christmas celebration was wonderful and festive; with friends and relatives, feasts and gifts, all wrapped in the knowledge that we celebrate God's love through Jesus, the only Son.

In my case there was a near catastrophe (not really) when on Christmas Day the oven decided not to work. The meal was to be a pot roast and the oven refused to stay on long enough to cook it. At one point I started looking around at restaurants that might be open. It did not look good.

Two of my sons were with me, and we did not want to go out to eat anyway. It was such a lazy day; there were 5 NBA games on TV, and 2 NFL football games, including one involving the Eagles, and one of my sons is a devoted Eagles fan; along with the recurring cycle on one station of, "A Christmas Story," which played over and over all day long.

The temperature was cold, of course, and with the snowfall that began on Christmas Eve and stayed around most of the evening, enough to make everything white but not really enough to go out and play, we just wanted to stay in and "make ourselves at home," as the saying goes.

Home

Interestingly, part of the common human experience is desire to be at home; or at least the experience of pilgrimage, which means being away from home. It may start out as a kind of literal homesickness when we reach that age that leads us away from our childhood home. There is no time like Christmas that causes people to long for home. This longing shows up in popular Christmas songs like:

"I'm Dreaming of A White Christmas,' just like the ones I used to know . . ." A song associated with WWII era soldiers away from home during the war, especially those in the Pacific theatre where the tropical summer was perpetual.

Or "'I'll Be Home for Christmas,' you can count on me, there'll be snow and mistletoe, and presents on (instead of under, for some reason) the tree."

And as well, we have euphemisms for searching that are a part of our cultural language. Sometimes we say that a person is searching for themselves, and in the Book of Hebrews, when the author tallies up all the lives of the saints, the great cloud of witnesses, by saying that they made it clear by all their actions that they were searching for a homeland.

Family

One of the images that we find in Paul's letters is the idea of sonship. This image really comes from the family idea that is seen in Jesus,

“Who are my mother and brothers and sisters, but those who do the will of the father . . .”

And, “No one who has lost mother or father, sister or brother for my sake or the sake of the gospel, will not receive 100-fold in the kingdom of heaven.”

In this sense the searching is not so much for a homeland as it is for a family. Very often, we speak of our church as a “family.” One of the most satisfying and yet perplexing experiences happens sometimes among believers when one's Christian family seems more like a family than one's biological family does. It is really quite remarkable and does not always happen.

Law

So it is interesting that Paul speaks of life under “law” in the context of “sonship.” At first, being under “law” seems to mean being confined by the basic principles of the universe. One gets the idea of being bound by rules and regulations.

The “Law” is, however, a broad biblical concept, more than a simple collection of rules, Paul puts it in the

context of the household. To be under law means to be a servant or slave. To be free from law means to be a son (or daughter), that is, an heir.

To be under law is like being trapped in a place that is not home, among a people who are not family, where there is no chance of making oneself feel at home. The world is a strange place even for people who stay in the same geographical location all their lives.

Relationships

I might also add that in the Bible home is less connected to a place or a building than it is to a people. One might challenge me on this point because there is a strong emphasis on “homeland” and in the dispersion, in which the Jewish people were largely displaced - even Jesus was a Galilean Jew, away from his Judean homeland like many Scottish people who live in England, close to home but yet still in exile, there is an emphasis on the homeland.

I still maintain that in the Bible, home is more connected to people and relationships than to places and lands and buildings. “Where two or three are gathered . . ., there I am also.” Home is where the Lord is.

God

But most of all, our sense of estrangement is from God. To be “under law” is to be separated from God. There is no intimate relationship. It is like being a guest in a motel, never to even know the owner. The separation is spiritual, of course; there is no escaping living in God’s universe, but one can live as a stranger in it.

Separation from God is our homesickness and Paul illustrates it by noting the difference between a servant and child.

But When

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive full rights as children.”

The long and short of it is that we are God’s family. And that is really good news. When someone accepts Christ by faith they become a part of God’s family; this means meaningful relationships, living to God’s purpose, and even though the earth is our temporary home, we are assured of a permanent heavenly home in the presence of God and God’s people. That is our inheritance.

And our New Year’s prayer is that in 2018 each of us will get in touch with this truth, that when the time came, God sent the only Son, that we might no longer be servants, but sons and daughters, heirs of the estate, home at last, every last brother and sister among us.

Turns out that the upper element was still operational so I was able to broil the roast and it all turned out well, we were able to stay home on Christmas Day after all.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)