Galatians 4:1-31
Key Verse: 4:6

“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

In last week’s passage, we learned that self-righteous sinners can be redeemed from the curse of the law and become the children of God when they believe in Christ crucified. Self-righteous people want to take comfort in observing laws and rituals that others can’t or won’t observe. But the word of God makes it clear that no one be justified before God by observing the law. Rather, the law is a curse for sinful mankind, because it unmercifully reveals our sin and shame, declaring the whole world to be a prisoner of sin. But, as God promised, so God sent his Son Christ Jesus into the world to die on the cross and thus bear the curse of the law on himself. We cannot imagine the pain and terror that filled Jesus’ heart and mind when God the Father turned his face away and let him bear the full brunt of the law’s condemnation for the sin of the world. He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46b) But he bore everything to redeem us from the law, so that by faith we might receive the Spirit who makes us the children of God. Praise Jesus, with whom we die to sin and live for righteousness. Let’s believe in the sufficiency of Jesus’ sacrifice for us more and more, until the promise of God is fully ours. In today’s passage, St. Paul teaches us what it means to be children of God. Children are absolutely confident in their parents’ love and plan for their lives. Children know that their home is wherever their parents are. But human parents are flawed, and they cannot last forever. So, we have wounds and sorrows that no one can heal because of our frustrated expectations based on our parents’ love. And the devil channels into our hearts through our feelings of sorrow and despair, making us captives of the power of sin. But God sent his Son into the world to make us his sons by faith. Those who know that God is their Father can solve their fear and sorrow problem, and drive out the devil’s despair and the power of sin. Those who know that God is their Father wait patiently for the inheritance that has been promised them. And they can call on God, saying “Abba, Daddy”. Let’s learn from St. Paul how God disciplines us as his children so that we might use our freedom in Christ to build up the kingdom of God while on earth.

First, the heir as a child. In St. Paul’s time, slavery was very common. In fact, slaves far outnumbered free people. They say that slavery under the Romans was terrible. Slaves were generally treated as property, often made use of for sport, and then cast out when they were no longer useful. To be a slave was to have no freedom, no rights and no property whatsoever. To be a slave was tragedy itself. In the movie “Ben-Hur”, the Roman commander told the slaves rowing in the galley ships, “We keep you alive to row this ship. Row well, and live.” Jesus Christ, in his teaching, used the reality of slavery to help the Jewish leaders understand the nature of sin. He said to them in John 8:34-5. “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.” There is no greater difference between human beings, than between that of being a son and heir, and being a slave. However, there is a time when that distinction is not so clear. Look at verses 1 and 2. “What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.
He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.” Of course, when they are children, slaves and heirs play together without the slightest thought that one has an inheritance and a place in the family, and the other does not. What is more, the heir is not free nor in charge of himself, let alone anyone else. He is placed under the supervision of guardians and trustees, who most often were slaves belonging to his parents. These guardians were given full authority to discipline the heir, often by cracking him on his back with a stick if he weren’t paying attention in school. The father disciplined the child in this way, until he was ready to assume the responsibility for managing and directing the estate. Only when he had come into his full rights as a son would the distinction between slave and free man become clear.

St. Paul uses this analogy to explain to the Galatians how God raised up for himself children from among men. Look at verse 3. “So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.” God, in his wisdom and love, had made a plan for world salvation, to call to himself all who would believe so that they might be together forever in his kingdom, one people under one God. This was God’s unswerving plan from the moment of Creation through his calling of the nation, Israel, until he sent his Son Jesus to fulfill his plan by dying on the cross for the sin of the world. Therefore, Paul taught that all who believe in Jesus and live by faith in him were predestined to be the children of God. It simply means that God’s intention all along has been to save us and make us his children. But there was a time when God’s full intentions had not been revealed. Instead, because of sin, God introduced the law which held the whole world prisoner until the coming of Christ Jesus. God treated slaves and sons alike, confining them by the law and revealing through it the wrath and condemnation we have all earned because of our sins. Why would God treat sons like this, subjecting them to his wrath and anger, forcing them to submit to the basic principles of the world? It is because God wants his children to know that the inheritance we have, we have only by faith in his Son, Christ Jesus. No one earned this inheritance. Rather, all were bound to disobedience. In this way, God showed his mercy to us all (Ro 11:32). This is God’s discipline for his children. None of them were born into their inheritance in the ordinary way; but all can receive their inheritance by faith in the promise, which Christ Jesus fulfilled through his coming. It is God’s wisdom by which he is raising up for himself a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you might declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Second, our rights as sons. Look at verses 4-5. “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” God did not discipline his children forever. When the right time came, God fulfilled his promise and sent his son Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God to redeem us from our slavery and make us his children. To redeem means to purchase one’s freedom. Slaves in Rome could become free, but only at a price. No one could purchase our freedom from sin, for the price of sin is our lifeblood. But God sent his Son, born of a woman with flesh and blood, born under law, to redeem us by offering his flesh and blood in place of ours. It was so that, at the right time, each of us could know God’s mercy and salvation, and come into the inheritance God had prepared for us.

God’s timing is very mysterious. God had promised a son, an heir, to his servant Abraham.
Abraham and Sarah, his wife, waited patiently, believing that God would send them a son right away. But after 10 years of living in the promised land, they still had no son. Then Sarah became very depressed. In her depression, she gave her maidservant Hagar to Abraham as a concubine, and she bore Ishmael to Abraham as his first son. But God did not accept Ishmael as the first born. Fourteen years later, God came to Abraham and rebuked him for his unbelief. Then he promised him, “About this time next year, your wife Sarah will have a son” (Gn 18:10). Abraham and Sarah laughed at God’s ridiculous promise, for Abraham was 100, and his wife Sarah was 90. Nevertheless, a year later, Sarah bore to Abraham Isaac, the child of God’s promise. Abraham and Sarah had been depression patients, thinking that God had not chosen them. But in God’s time, God revealed the fullness of his blessing to his children, and they could not contain their laughter and joy. Sometimes, God’s children wonder whether they aren’t crazy to believe the promise and live by faith in this wicked and corrupt generation. But we must know that when the time has fully come, all of God’s blessings will be revealed, and our joy as his children will be beyond measure.

Look at verse 6. “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’” In this verse, we can learn the best gift that we receive as the sons of God. Let’s read verse 6 together, again. As children of God, we have come out from under the harsh and terrifying supervision of the law, and we have come under the firm and gentle Spirit of his Son, Jesus Christ. There is a place for the restriction and terror of the law, much as we must respect those teachers over us who demanded absolute perfection, and humiliated us for producing anything less. The law teaches us that we must fear God, and run away from evil. However, we only become hypocrites if we claim to like such teachers. They are good in that they reveal to us our weaknesses and failings, and refuse to accept our half-hearted attempts. But they only crush and destroy the weak. And even those who pass through are not unscathed. They too, in their pride, become wounding-machines like the pharisees, who ruthlessly condemned the woman caught in the act of adultery and Jesus’ disciples for eating without washing their hands. The children of the law are slaves, and like slaves, they are miserable and without hope. But the children of the promise are filled with the Spirit of the Son, and they are free and full of joy.

Many people are confused about being Spirit-filled. They want to claim all kinds of gifts and freedoms from restrictions, even claiming freedom from having to support themselves or their children, like children of a rich father might use their daddy’s credit card to get whatever they want. But this is not a life under the control of the Spirit. According to Jesus himself, the work of the Holy Spirit first of all is to convict us of all our sins, one by one. John 16:8 says, “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” The law reveals God’s wrath and judgment of sin. But the Holy Spirit comes in and holds court, applying the law unswervingly to root out the power of sin from our hearts. The Spirit, however, does not condemn those who let him in. Rather, he leads us to repentance before Jesus, who is God’s righteousness. And from then on he leads us into all truth and shows us what is yet to come, encouraging our hearts to persevere in the face of one worldly discouragement after another. In short, the Spirit takes control, and guides us so that we might be cleansed and grow in holiness and righteousness as children pleasing to God. In some sense, the Spirit is simply the law of God made living and active in the hearts of those who believe. But he is more than that, because he is the Spirit of Christ Jesus.
Jesus, while he was on earth, was not guilty of sin. But Jesus’ obedience to the law was not negative. He didn’t simply avoid sin. Jesus applied the law of love to help sinners be changed and enter the kingdom of God. Because he had the Spirit of Sonship, Jesus didn’t obey God formally. Jesus obeyed God’s command out of love, wholeheartedly and sacrificially. On the night he was to be arrested and sentenced to be crucified, Jesus was in agony of soul in anticipation of bearing the burden of men’s sins on the cross. Jesus cried out to God in prayer, “Abba, Father. Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mk. 14:36). Jesus Christ obeyed God when it was impossible to obey God, out of his untold love and affection for his Father God. Because of his love, Christ Jesus fulfilled God’s world salvation plan on the cross, and revealed the love of God for all sinners by redeeming us from our slavery to sin. God sent the Spirit of Christ Jesus into our hearts when we believed, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit of his Son reveals the true character of the law of God. The law of God is the law of love. And the Spirit comes to fill our hearts with love; love for God our Father, and love for one another as brothers and sisters in God’s family. The source of this love is God himself, who gives us sonship and the inheritance of the kingdom of God by his one-sided grace and mercy. May God help us to believe in the death of Jesus for our sins. May God fill us with the Spirit of Jesus, so that we might live by the law of love that compels us to love God and love all of God’s children as our brothers and sisters. All glory and honor to God, Abba, Father!

Third, Don’t be enslaved again! Paul was in deep distress to realize that the Galatian believers had come so far, only to turn back, fearing that faith in Christ was not enough. They were tempted to depend on rituals and animal sacrifices for their righteousness. When they believed, they were filled with the joy and confidence of God. They were so ready to serve God and God’s servants, that they would have torn their eyes out to help Paul in his work. But they became fearful, because their consciences were not yet clean. They could not believe that just by believing in Jesus, God would accept them as sons. We can understand the Galatians very well. The children born of the promise are not welcomed by those who live under law. Those who live under law condemn those born by the Spirit, out of their jealousy and the torment of their souls. But we have a promise. Look at verses 28-30. “Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same way now. But what does the Scripture say? ‘Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance of the free woman’s son.’ Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.” By faith in the promise of God, the Spirit of God is in us, working to convict sin in us, and to free us from the power of sin to live by the law of love. May God bless you never to listen to Satan’s deception and turn away from this grace and this Spirit. May you live by faith from first to last, until Christ Jesus himself is fully formed in you, and your place in the kingdom of God is assured.

As the children of God, there is a time to receive discipline and training, and there is a time to take up our mission from God and practice the law of love in order to advance the kingdom of God. May God bless you to know the love of God through Christ Jesus, and to love God and love others by the Spirit of Christ Jesus in you. May God restore Christian America, and help her to fulfill God’s unswerving purpose as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.