

Sons of God

Galatians 4:1-7

The First Sunday after Christmas, December 31, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Why do you pay your taxes?

I am not asking for your position on tax policy or whether or not you vote for big government or for small government. Right now, I don't care about that. I am asking for your motivation to pay taxes. When you sit down and write out the check to the United States Treasury, why are you writing out that check?

If you are a son of God, there are only two possible reasons why you are writing out that check.

The first reason is conscience. Our tax dollars among other things go to support the people who devote their full time to governing. They are public servants. They deserve a salary for their public service. They devote their full time to it. Many of them devote their lives to it. Thus since the government is a good creation of God and no government exists except by God, then because of conscience the sons of God give their tax dollars to the government so that it may perform its vocation of punishing those who do wrong and praising those who do right so that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life.

The second reason that the sons of God pay their taxes is so as to not offend those who rule. In our case those who rule are those who are elected by the majority. The only other reason besides conscience for which a son of God pays taxes is in order not to offend public officials elected by the majority.

Let me give you the account to which I am referring. It is in Matthew, chapter 17. At the end of the chapter Peter encounters some tax collectors who ask him if Jesus pays taxes. Peter tells them that Jesus does pay taxes. When Peter gets to the house of Jesus, Jesus already knows about the conversation that Peter had with these people. The Lord asks Peter, "From whom do the kings of the earth take tax or toll? From their own sons or from other people's sons?" Peter answers, "From other people's sons." The Lord replies, "So the sons are free." Then our Lord says this very important thing. He says, "But in order not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast your hook. Take the first fish that comes up and in its mouth you will find a shekel. Take it and pay the tax for you and Me."

Get a load of that! The Lord tells Peter to pay the tax in order not to offend them. If that is the only reason that Peter pays a tax that means that Peter is a person who does not pay the tax by compulsion. If Peter does not pay the tax by compulsion, that means that he is a son. He is a son of the king because the kings of the earth take toll and tax from other people's sons not from their own sons.

Read correctly in light of Galatians, chapters three and four, our Lord is instructing Peter and any of the Lord's disciples that they are sons of God and therefore the only reason to pay taxes is not to offend those in authority or to do so because of conscience to support those who give their full time to governing.

Any other reason is the sign of a slave. In other words if you write out your tax check to the government and the only reason that you are writing out that check is because if you don't you know that the government will come after you to get their money, then you are not a son of God. You are a slave. You are slave to the government and you are a slave to any other power in this creation that can threaten you in order to get you to do something.

If you are not paying your taxes because of conscience or in order not to offend them, then you are a slave. You are not sons. You do not yet realize what God has done for you in Christ Jesus.

In order to change slaves into sons a change in status must occur. In human vocations in order for a slave to go from being a slave to being a son, the master must release the slave and then once the slave is released, the master must adopt the slave as a son and grant him all of the privileged of inheritance that sons have. In human vocations this involves a change of heart on the part of the master toward one of his slaves. It involves paperwork and an alteration in the transfer of wealth.

Before God things work a little differently. If God is going to take His slaves and make them into sons such that they inherit from God, what can they inherit from God except the creation itself? There is nothing else for a son of God to inherit except the creation. That is why your Lord states in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." He means that literally. They shall inherit the new earth when He comes again in glory.

In order to do that those who are slaves before God must undergo more than a simple change in status. Or to put it another way in order for a person to have their status changed before God who is the creator of all things, the creation of the person in question must also be changed. A person cannot go from being a slave before God to being a son before God, unless God makes that person anew. Once the person is made anew, then they are a new creation. They have gone from being a slave to being a son.

A person who is a slave before God does what God wants because if he doesn't God will damn him to hell. God has to coerce slaves in order to get His will done among them. They do not do His will willingly or because they want to. They do His will because they have to. If left to themselves, they would gladly not do God's will because they don't want to do it anyway.

A person who is a son before God willingly does God's will because He loves God. A son of God resembles God as sons resemble their earthly fathers. Since God is righteous a son of God will resemble the righteousness of God. Because a son of God resembles the righteousness of God, a son of God will do the righteous things of God's will because it is his nature to do so. If God commands something, the son of God gladly does it. Even without any threat of damnation a son of God will do what God wants because God wants it. Even when no one else is watching him, a son of God will do what God wants because he is a son of God and therefore resembles God.

This is why a person does not go from being a slave before God to being a son before God unless God creates him anew.

This is why the Bible speaks so frequently in terms of a new creation. Our Lord tells Nicodemus, "Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." Our Lord is talking about a new creation. Ephesians chapter two tells us that we were dead in our trespasses and sins until God raised us from the dead and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. When a person rises from the dead, he is a new person. Finally, the Bible talks about people in Christ Jesus being new creations. When our Lord and John the Baptist exhort people to be penitent, they are delivering the report that makes the hearers of that exhortation into new creations.

The only way to go from being a slave before God to being a son of God is for God to make that person a new creation.

The only way to go from being a person who pays his taxes out of coercion to being a person who pays his taxes in order not to offend them is if God makes you anew.

Now here is the deal people: God has already made you anew. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Here is the reason why: as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ.

Baptism is an act of creation! God is creating a new person when He baptizes him. The person being baptized goes from being a slave to being a son. The reason is that everyone who is baptized into Christ has put on Christ.

When the Bible says that you have put on Christ, it means that you have put on Christ like you have put on clothes in the morning. You go from having your night clothes on to having your day clothes on. You go from having your own righteousness which is of the law to having a righteousness that is Christ's righteousness. When you go from having your own righteousness which is by the law to having a righteousness that is in Christ, you are a new creation. You have become a son of God. This is why the book of Titus states that baptism is a washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. It saves you.

This is not a legal fiction. It is a new creation.

This is the problem with analogies. They often give the impression that God has created a legal fiction. God has not created a legal fiction. In other words when I tell you that when God baptized you, you put on Christ like you put on your clothes in the morning, that makes it sound like you are a big sinner and you are wearing Jesus on the outside. That is a legal fiction. That is not what God means when He says that you have put on Christ. If by putting on Christ in your baptism you have become new creations in Christ Jesus such that you are no longer slaves, but rather sons of God, then putting on Christ means that when God baptized you He joined you to Christ. He joined you in such a way that you were transformed from being a slave of God to being a son of God because Christ is the Son of God and you have been joined to Him! You have put Him on!

You are not wearing Jesus in front of God like you are a big sinner and Jesus hides the fact that you are a big sinner. You are wearing Jesus such that you are joined to Him and His righteousness and it makes you a son of God.

And just like any son of God you do God's will out of the righteousness that is in Christ Jesus to whom you have been joined and not out of coercion. You don't keep the law because if you don't you will go to hell. You are a son of God! You keep the Law because the Law is God's will and what son would not do His Father's will?!

When God became flesh He altered the creation. Think of it! The immortal, omnipotent, omniscient, only true God and maker of all things is made into an infant, the son of Mary and Joseph. That is an alteration of the creation that is unspeakable just in and of itself! Here is God growing up among us and experiencing what we experience. Here He is walking around answering our questions and restoring the creation before our very eyes!

And then if that were not enough this God who has become human dies! God the immortal, the omnipotent, the almighty, the eternal, dies. And He doesn't just die. He dies for sinful creation. He dies for evil and wicked and godless people. He dies for self-righteous, self-centered people who are trying to impress Him with their good deeds when the real reason that they are doing what they do is because they believe that if they don't do they are going to hell. He dies for self-centered people who are trying to take credit for everything even their own faith and their own salvation. They are trying to be their own saviors and He dies for them. He dies for the fleshly, the lustful, the greedy. He dies for the violent, the murderer and those who disobey their parents. He dies for those who do not even believe that He exists, much less trust in Him for their salvation. He dies for them all to redeem them from the curse of the law. When He dies they stand forgiven and are set free from the law. When they are set free from the law they are no longer slaves before God. They are sons. They will inherit the Father's kingdom. Their Father is God.

When Jesus dies the righteous for the unrighteous the entire creation is turned upside down. Nothing is the way that it was any more. And just to demonstrate how real things are that they are no longer the way that they used to be, He rises from the dead and never dies again. The creation is permanently altered. And it should be pointed out in light of cosmic history that it is put to rights. For the creation was altered when human beings lapsed into sin and death. It is put to rights when Christ Jesus dies and rises again. What baptism is the objective impartation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to you personally. It is God's declaration that you are a son of Him. It is joined to water so that there may be no doubt that the declaration that you are a son of God applies to you. The water was put on you. And like all things when God declares something it comes to pass in creation. God declared light to exist in the beginning and light which did not previously exist came into existence upon God declaring it to exist. In the same way you who were previously slaves have now become sons of God because God in your baptism has declared you to be sons of God and what God declares comes into existence.

Therefore through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus you are sons of God. And it doesn't matter whether you are a man or a woman. It doesn't matter whether you are white or black. It doesn't matter whether you are enslaved to other human beings or a freeman. As soon as God baptized, He declared you to be His Son. You are therefore His Son. You are freed from the Law. Your sins are forgiven. You may now serve God because you want to as any son of God would, as the Son of God would.

This is why when we pray we call God, "Our Father."

When you were baptized God did not give you a spirit of slavery again to fear. When you were baptized He gave you the Spirit of His Son. And by that Spirit you cry out to Him in the same way that your Lord cries out to Him, "Abba, Father!"

And just like any son and just like the firstborn Son of God, you will inherit everything that God the Father has.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.