

## Galatians: Faith Alone in Christ Alone

*Sons Not Slaves* (Galatians 3:26-4:7)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on June 23, 2024

### Introduction

- ❖ As we've been walking through the book of Galatians, we've seen Paul argue that, before Christ comes into our lives, we're imprisoned under sin. Held captive under the Law. (3:22-23) **That in our natural state, we are enslaved to a life of perpetual futility – trying to earn God's approval; to justify ourselves in his eyes.** By keeping the rules. By obeying the Law. But because of our inherent sinfulness tainting all that we do, it's never enough. We are cursed to constantly perform. To strive to no end.
  - **But in the fullness of time, Christ came. And he performed in all righteousness. Which included his work on the cross.** So that all who trust in him are liberated. We're free in Christ – living under the gospel. But this is why Paul is baffled as to how the Galatians – to whom he preached this gospel – could now be so bewitched. **So persuaded to submit their necks again to the yoke of slavery under the Law.** Don't they realize that they're free? That they're no longer slaves?
  
- ❖ **The letter to the Galatians could be read as an Emancipation Proclamation – declaring your Christian freedom from under the yoke of slavery.** Which is a fitting analogy considering how we just celebrated Juneteenth this past week. In case you're not familiar with the holiday, Juneteenth commemorates the date, June 19th, 1865, when freedom was finally proclaimed to all black slaves living in the United States.
  - Over two years earlier, Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had already taken effect (Jan 1, 1863) – declaring all slaves in the Confederate states to be free. But, of course, there was still a Civil War being fought over that. A war that didn't conclude with a Union victory until April of 1865. But news travelled slowly back then. So after the war's conclusion, there were approximately 250,000 black slaves in Texas, who had yet to hear the good news that they were free.
  
- ❖ But, on June 19th, standing on the balcony of Galveston's Ashton Villa (a historic house you can still visit today), **Union General Gordon Granger proclaimed the good news of total emancipation for all slaves in Texas.** For two whole years, they trudged around under the heavy yoke of slavery. Emancipation had been accomplished. But they had yet to hear and believe the good news. But now, from that day on, they knew. They knew they were free.
  - But imagine if some of them simply returned to their master's plantation and continued to live and behave like slaves. **They hear this amazing Emancipation Proclamation. They receive it. And yet they go on living as though nothing has changed.** Still living under the yoke of slavery.
  
- ❖ And that's where we're at in our text. **Paul is baffled as to why these Galatian believers are still submitting themselves under the yoke of the Law.** You're not slaves anymore. That's not who you are at the core of your identity. You are sons. Sons of God. That's who you are. So why aren't you living that way? That's his point.
  - This morning's text gets to the very heart of the Christian gospel. **It addresses the all-important subject of identity.** Who are you at the core? Because how you perceive yourself at the core determines how you live – how you behave.

- ❖ **Ask any parent who has adopted older children, they'll tell you that it takes some time for these children to realize that they're no longer orphans.** That that's not their core identity anymore. But until that sinks in – until they have a true conviction that they are legitimate children in the family – they'll keep behaving like orphans. Squirreling away food. Hoarding items. Flinching when you try to put a hand on their shoulder. What they need is to embrace their new identity.
  - **This morning we're going to see how Paul appeals to these same metaphors of slavery and adoption to help us grasp our core identity as Christians.** I'm not surprised if many of us are still living and behaving like slaves or like orphans. Not yet embracing our true identity in Christ. Not yet experiencing the true freedom and true joy of the Christian life.
    - So to that end, let's consider our text and three exhortations for us to hear. (1) Enjoy your status as sons of God. (2) Enjoy your privilege as heirs of the promise. (3) Enjoy your closeness as children of the Father.

### Enjoy Your Status as Sons of God

- ❖ Let's look at the first exhortation to Christians – to enjoy our status as sons of God. This encouragement is found in Galatians 3:26-29. It builds off what we talked about last week, especially as vv24-25 ended with the imagery of a guardian serving within a typical 1st-century, Greco-Roman household. **A guardian was one of the household slaves given charge over the children before they come of age.** They were responsible to teach proper manners and oversee their behavior. Many of them had the reputation of being quite strict. Really keeping you under their thumb.
  - Paul knew his audience. That these Galatians all knew what life was like under the authority of a guardian. And how liberating it was to come of age and to no longer need one anymore. **So his point is that, before Christ came, God gave his people the Law to function like a guardian overseeing their moral behavior.**
- ❖ But now that Christ has come, God's people have come of age – a new age of salvation – where they no longer need the guardianship of the Law. Look at v26, *“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”* **And as sons of God, we don't just have to obey the Law. We want to obey the Law.** That's where Scripture speaks of having the Law written on your heart (Jer 31:33) That's characteristic of all sons of God who have come of age and no longer need the Law as a guardian. Our hearts have been fundamentally changed.
- ❖ Paul alludes to this in v27, *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* That language of being baptized into Christ is a reference – not just to our water baptism – but to the spiritual reality that baptism points to. To being baptized by the Spirit of Christ. That's how chapter 3 started. With an emphasis on having received the Spirit (3:2). And that's how our text ends in v6. With a reminder of how God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. Changing them so that we *want* to obey. **God's Law is no longer hanging over us making demands. Now it's in us creating desires.** Desires to do the Law. That's characteristic of all who *“have put on Christ.”*

- ❖ **That language of putting on Christ speaks directly to our identity.** Paul frequently speaks that way in his letters. Putting off the old self. Putting on the new. He's thinking of clothes. **When you're baptized into Christ – when you put him on – it's like you're clothing yourself with Jesus.**
  - And think about how clothes function – how they identify you. Have you ever vacationed with a lot of extended family? Do you have that one relative in your family who loves to make matching t-shirts for everyone? So that no matter how crowded it might be on the cruise or at Disneyworld, all of you are easily identified as members of the same family. The same goes for everyone in the family of God. **We're all wearing matching clothes. We've all put on Christ.** We've all been clothed in his righteousness.
  
- ❖ God has been doing this for his people since the Garden of Eden. The first time he clothed humanity, it was to cover their sin and shame. But that was with mere garments of skin from a sacrificed beast. It was never enough. But now, according to the gospel, God sufficiently covers our shame with the righteousness of Christ. **So that when he looks at us, he doesn't see our bare depravity. He sees what we're now wearing. He sees Christ!** That's what it means to be justified in God's eyes by faith alone in Christ alone.
  - This idea of being clothed with Christ; being in Christ; in union with him – this explains how we've been given sonship. How we've received the status as sons of God. **If our core identity is found in the Son of God – if we have put on God's only begotten Son as our identity – then it's no surprise that he sees us as sons.**
  
- ❖ **Now before we keep going, I think it's only fair to acknowledge that our sisters in Christ might find this idea of sonship a bit awkward.** You might be thinking it would've been better if v26 had been translated, *“for in Christ Jesus you are all sons and daughters of God.”* That would be more inclusive.
  - But to be honest, I don't think any of you ladies would want that when you consider the ancient context in which Paul was writing. **To force some kind of gender inclusive language, in this instance, would be to blunt the good news of this text.** Because Paul's original female audience would've celebrated the idea of receiving sonship. Since in most ancient cultures, daughters couldn't inherit property. That's a common reason why people adopted sons back then – if all you had were daughters. **To be counted as a son of God is to be counted as a legal heir of his promises.** Which is a welcomed reality for women who are in Christ. **So you'd be stripping yourself of that good news if you rejected the identity of a “son of God”.**
    - And just to be fair, as a man, I'll admit that it's initially awkward when Scripture says I'm a part of the Bride of Christ. It's not my go-to imagery when I think about my identity in Christ. But I would lose so much in my understanding of God's intimate and committed love if I rejected the status of a Bride. So in the end, I'm thankful that's my identity.

- ❖ But just because Paul uses an analogy set within an ancient patriarchal context where only sons were considered heirs – it doesn't mean Paul is affirming that kind of gender bias. He's not suggesting that sons are better or that men are closer to the image of God. **No, he makes a point in v28 to stress that all Christians are equal in God's eyes – we're all one – because we've all been clothed with the same Christ.** We all share the same core identity in Christ Jesus! Look at v28, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*
  - All the secondary aspects of our identity related to ethnicity or class or gender – they often divide society and are used to justify inequalities. That's just the way it is – the way of the world. But that's unacceptable in the Church. **We can't allow secondary differences to negate the unity established by our primary identity in Christ.**
  
- ❖ That's been Paul's concern in Galatians. Especially in navigating the ethnic and cultural differences between Jews and Greeks in the same church. His solution is not to ignore or deny differences between cultures; or between social classes; or between men and women. He's not suggesting these categories are irrelevant in general. They're just irrelevant in determining who's an offspring of Abraham – who's an heir according to the promise (v29)
  - **Paul understands that divisions and fractures will occur within a body of believers whenever they lose sight of their core identity in Christ.** And those fault lines usually run along the categories of ethnicity, class, or gender. But now in our contemporary context – within the divided and fractious evangelical community today – I'll add another fault line. The category of politics. Just as there's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female – **there's neither Republican nor Democrat, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**
  
- ❖ **It's tragic how many Christians are losing sight of their core identity and seeking to be justified by their political views.** Or justifying others – counting them right – if they hold to whatever's considered the right political opinion.
  - How do you know if you're guilty of this? Consider this. If you think there's no way a Christian could vote this November for “him” – and it doesn't matter which him you think I'm referring to – **to even think that one's party affiliation or political opinion is relevant in determining who's an offspring of Abraham, means you've lost sight of a Christian's core identity in Christ.** You need to go back to the basics of the gospel and what it means to be justified by faith alone.
    - And I'm not saying the ideological differences between the parties don't matter at all. I'm just saying what matters infinitely more is our common identity in Christ. Our shared status as legitimate sons of God.

### **Enjoy Your Privilege as Heirs of the Promise**

- ❖ So our first exhortation is to enjoy our status as sons of God. The second is very much related since we already explained, that in most ancient cultures, only sons were legitimate heirs of the family inheritance. So as sons of God, we should enjoy our privilege as heirs of the promise. Paul unpacks this starting in v29.

- “<sup>29</sup>*And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. <sup>1</sup>I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, <sup>2</sup>but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.*”
  
- ❖ Paul continues to build on this analogy of the Law as a guardian. He points out how, in a 1st-century Greco-Roman household, there was a difference between being a child versus being a slave. No one would deny or downplay the vastly greater privilege of being a child versus a slave. **But Paul’s point is to highlight the fact that both lack freedom.**
  - A child – just like a slave – is under strict authority. Overseen by a guardian or manager until the date set by his father. **But one day, he’ll come of age and finally experience the freedom and responsibility of grown sons within the family.** That’s the familiar custom and context that Paul’s original audience would easily understand.
  
- ❖ But he feels compelled to explicitly explain the analogy. Look at v3, “*In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*” Now most of us would’ve assumed that Paul would’ve said that when we were like children – we were enslaved *to the Law*. Because that’s been his focus so far. But instead he refers to “*the elementary principles of the world.*”
  - Now there’s a lot written on this trying to identify what he’s referring to. I think the most convincing is the most common usage of that word for “*elementary principles*”. A Greek-speaker in those days would’ve used that word to refer to the four basic elements (elemental spirits) – earth, water, air, and fire. And within pagan Greek religion, those elements were worshipped and given names – earth (Demeter), water (Poseidon), air (Hera), and fire (Hephaestus).
  
- ❖ Now what is Paul doing here in making reference to Greek myth and pagan religion? I think he’s trying to make the point that the Greek’s enslavement to idolatry is similar to the Jew’s enslavement to the Law. **Legalism and paganism are both founded on the same basic principle. In both, the focus is on you and your performance.** How well can you satisfy God and his Law – or the gods and their whims – based on what you do or don’t do?
  - Paul’s point is that, in both cases, you’re enslaved. You’re stuck under a curse. Because both the Mosaic Law and pagan religion are equally unable to deal with the root problem – human sinfulness. **God had to step in and inject his Son into a world pervaded by legalism and paganism.**
    - Look at v4, “<sup>4</sup>*But 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.*”
  
- ❖ When the fullness of time had come – at a date set by God the Father – he sent forth God the Son. Born of woman – meaning he’s able to identify with humanity. Born under the law – meaning he’s able to identify with life under the burden and curse of the Law.

- ❖ **But unlike us, the Son of God was able to bear the yoke in perfect righteousness.** He fulfilled the Law's demands – even bearing its curse for us as he hung on the cross. And through his obedience in life and death, he redeemed those who are under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.
  - This **language of redemption** – redeeming those under the law – originated from the world of ancient slavery. In those days, people sold themselves into slavery as a means to cover a financial debt. You would be enslaved for as long as it took to pay off your debt. **But at any point, a kind benefactor could show up and pay off the remainder of your debt – and thereby redeem you.**
    - If you're a Christian, that's what Christ has done for you. He showed up and paid off the debt you owe because of your sin. He redeemed you. By fulfilling the Law's demands. By living the life you should have lived. And by dying the death you should have died. That's the good news of the gospel!
  
- ❖ But notice how Paul doesn't stop there. Look at the remainder of v5, "*to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*" God adopted us. He gave us the legal status of sons. We used to beg for scraps at the city gate. Now we're seated at the King's Table, feasting in his presence.
  - **Redemption and adoption – these dual blessings, secured in the gospel, must never be separated from each other.** But, sadly, it happens all the time. Many times we're only focusing on Jesus redeeming us – taking our punishment, removing our curse, paying the penalty for us. But we overlook the glorious truth that he made us sons. He adopted us as legitimate heirs, securing for us a glorious inheritance.
  
- ❖ When you overlook the blessing of adoption – you easily fall into this pattern where you know you're pardon by God, but you think you have to live a good life if you hope to maintain God's love or favor. **That's the burden of pardoned criminals. They no longer have to carry their punishment. But, from now on, they carry a stigma.** Everyone knows them as criminals who evaded punishment.
  - It makes me think of **OJ Simpson** who died a couple months ago. I read an obituary on him. It acknowledged that a jury of his peers declared him Not Guilty of murdering his ex-wife and her lover. But the thrust of the obit was about the stigma he carried for the rest of his life – as a murderer who got away with it.
  
- ❖ My point is that the good news of redemption – that Jesus pardoned my sin – is glorious. I could sing a thousand hallelujahs just for that. **But I don't want to live under the stigma of a wicked sinner who evaded punishment.** Who was fortunate enough to be pardoned. I don't want to carry that baggage. **Because if I assume that into my core identity – if I see myself as merely a pardoned sinner – then I'll just keep working to prove myself to God.** That I was worth it. That he didn't waste his pardon on me.

- ❖ This is why the blessing of adoption is so crucial. **Because when God adopts us as sons, we receive a new reputation. It touches our core identity and transforms it.** Being a pardoned sinner is a true statement about us. But it doesn't describe our core identity. For Christians, at the core, we are sons of God. Legitimate heirs according to promise.
  - **Think back to those orphans who have been adopted but have yet to embrace that as their core identity.** Once it finally sinks in. Once they embrace their identity as legitimate members of the family. Then they're no longer obeying to be loved – they're obeying because they're loved. They're no longer striving to be accepted – they're enjoying their acceptance. Adoption makes all the difference.
- ❖ So what about you? **Perhaps, for some of you, pardon for sin is actually what you need right now.** All this talk of sonship has no bearing on you until you've been forgiven in Christ. So go to Jesus and be redeemed. Receive his pardon for your sins.
  - **But I'm sure some of you have already been pardoned, but you're not enjoying your status as sons or your privilege as heirs of the promise.** What you need is to dig deeper in the Scriptures. To have a better grasp of what it means to be adopted in Christ. Romans 8 and Ephesians 1 would be two other relevant texts to study.

### Enjoy Your Closeness as Children of the Father

- ❖ But I think some of you might say that you already know this. **You know you're adopted in Christ intellectually. The problem is that you don't feel it experientially.** Right now it's more of a theoretical truth that you can't deny. God is your Father and you are his child. You know it's true. But it doesn't do anything for you. You still struggle with the same fears and anxieties as any orphan or child without a father figure in their life.
  - Paul understands what you need. He anticipates this. Which is why he reminds us, in vv6-7, that God does more than just secure our legal status as sons and heirs. He gives us the Spirit of sonship. **He sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts so that we gain experiential knowledge of our adoption in Christ.** Which is essential to our third and final exhortation – to enjoy our closeness as children of the Father.
    - Look at v6, *“<sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”*
- ❖ If you're looking for biblical evidence of the Trinity – of the Three-Personed Godhead – that phrase *“the Spirit of his Son”* deserves a closer look. God the Father. God the Spirit. God the Son. **All three persons working together to make sure that sonship is not just a concept you'll find in a theology book. But a reality hidden deep in your heart at the very core of your identity.**
  - Notice how Paul characterizes our relationship with God when it really sinks in that we're his children. He says we'll freely cry out to him. That word is used throughout the NT referring to loud cries, to shouts. Now that doesn't mean when we pray to the Father, it has to be with loud shouts. It's not about our volume. **It's about the audacity that only children have to cry out to their parents.**

- ❖ Only my kids feel free to cry out to me. Yelling “Daddy” from the other side of the house. They have no concern for formality or protocol. They just cry out for this or that; for any reason really; at all hours of the day. When they have a question or problem, they just shout.
  - **If that’s how children interact with their parents, then why are we hesitant to cry out to our Heavenly Father?** Why would we think there needs to be an air of formality in the way we pray? Christian, you’re encouraged to talk to the Lord with the same freeness that a child feels as she cries out to her father.
  
- ❖ **And you’re invited to address him with a sense of familiarity.** You don’t have to be formal. Abba is the Aramaic word for father. It’s the word that any 1st-century Jewish child would’ve used. It’s how Jesus addressed God. We read in Mark 14:36, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus was in a vulnerable moment of deep desperation and despair, his instinct was to cry out “Abba Father!”
  - **As those who have put on Christ, it makes sense that we can enjoy that same degree of familial closeness.** Actually using the Aramaic word *Abba* in addressing God is up to you. Or maybe you prefer to use a more colloquial term in your own heart language or to just stick with “*Our Father who art in Heaven.*” The actual words you use to address God are not as important as your heart attitude.
    - **Now that doesn’t mean there’s no need for having a healthy reverence towards God – a proper fear of the Lord.** It’s the same for any child. I’m honored when my kids address me with terms of endearment. But it’s possible to cross the line. To get downright disrespectful. So I’m not saying words don’t matter.
  
- ❖ **What I am saying is that I don’t think most of you struggle with being too casual (and borderline disrespectful) in the way you speak to God.** If anything, your prayers are too stiff. Too formal or formulaic. You’re too afraid to offend.
  - **If anything, you need to more deeply embrace the Spirit of sonship he’s given you.** And with the Spirit’s help, you need to look up to see a loving Father welcoming you to chat with him.
    - The Holy Scripture has reminded you this morning of your core identity in Christ as adopted sons of God. Now it’s the Holy Spirit’s job to lead you to your Father in prayer.