

GALATIANS 3:26-4:31

More to the Promise: Gospel Adoption

Memory Verse

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

Galatians 4:4-5

Real-life Problems

Orphans

We have all experienced times when we felt completely alone, lost, and afraid. It can seem like we have no one to turn to, no home in which to find rest. Weary and burdened by sin, we can't seem to escape no matter how hard we try. We long for someone to carry us, take us in, and love us despite ourselves.

The Good News

The salvation we are offered through God's miraculous grace is worthy of eternal praise. But He offers even more! Not only did Jesus come to redeem us, but He came to adopt us as sons and heirs to His kingdom. His Spirit lives within us and pulls us closer and closer to Him. Jesus didn't just die for our sins—He died for US.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: What does it mean to be a son or daughter? Who is responsible for you? Who loves you? Whom do you obey?

Idea #2: Have you ever made an agreement with someone, and then they changed the rules of the deal afterward? How did that make you feel?

Idea #3: Has a hard or painful thing you had to endure ever led to some surprising and good outcomes?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Galatians?

The apostle Paul wrote Galatians. In the early church, an apostle was someone sent with divine authority, and Paul received his message directly from Jesus (Gal 1:12, 15-23).

2) Who was the original audience?

Paul wrote "to the churches in Galatia" (v. 2), indicating a number of churches scattered throughout the region of Galatia in central Turkey. Many members of Paul's original audience were Gentile converts to Christianity.

3) Why was the letter to the Galatians written?

Paul wrote to correct and encourage the churches, which had been divided by theological and racial issues because of false teachers.

What's going on?

REMIND

Last week, Paul turned his attention to the Galatians, lamenting that they had been misled by false teachers. By trying to add adherence to the law as a requirement for Christian salvation, they were trying to "perfect" or "sanctify" themselves with their own behavior and to earn God's favor by their performance. But, as Paul reminds the Galatians, God gave the law as a guide and guardian, not as a means to save ourselves.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

The "Good News" gets even better. Not only are we saved by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, but also, through Jesus (not our own works) we have become sons of God. We are heirs to His kingdom and are no longer enslaved to sin. Once again, Paul uses Abraham as an example to demonstrate God's original purpose for the law, and he shows where we fit in as children of the promise.

- 1) By faith, we are sons and heirs of God (vv. 3:26-4:6)
- 2) How sons of God are freed to act (vv. 4:7-20)
- 3) We are—and always have been—children of the promise (4:21-31)

Read

Read **Galatians 3:26-4:31** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) According to Galatians 3:26 and 3:29, what are we in Jesus?

In contrast to "slavery" and "captivity" under the law, we are sons of God through faith. Moreover, verse 29 declares that we are children of Abraham and "heirs" to the promise God gave Abraham.

Tough Topic

SONSHIP

It's easy to read this passage and wonder why Paul says that "you are all sons of God" (v. 3:26 ESV). Why doesn't he say "sons and daughters"? Why not "men and women"? While some modern translations (NIV, NLT, NRSV) have begun to translate this passage as "children" to be more gender-inclusive, it is important not to miss what Paul is really saying. Paul chose the male-gendered noun on purpose. And he wasn't being backward or discriminatory; in fact, Paul was revolutionizing gender roles!

In ancient Near Eastern cultures, sons had all the legal rights, privileges, freedoms, and obligations of inheritance, while women were considered little more than property. But all Christians, male and female alike, are deemed sons of God. By calling all believers "sons," Paul is referring to the legal status of sonship and inheritance that men and women both receive in Christ. In the ancient world, stating that women also received this inheritance—not simply from a human father but from a heavenly one—was a remarkable elevation of a woman's status. So when Paul is saying "sons" throughout the rest of Galatians, know that he is speaking to guys and girls alike. The significance of sonship should not be lost. This was and is an astonishing promise of God for all people!

2) What analogy does Paul use to describe our spiritual state before and after the law? What are we freed from? (Gal 4:1-3)

Because we belong to Christ, we are heirs in God's family. Using the analogy of an ancient wealthy family, Paul clarifies his message. Everyone who belongs to Christ today has always been an heir, but before we knew Christ, we were like young children. That is, we had an inheritance before us, but we were too young and naive to understand or accept it. We were in bondage to the law as our guardian and manager, and to the "elementary principles of the world." But now that we know Jesus as Lord, we have been set free from the law, and we can grow up as free heirs.

3) When did Jesus come? Why did God send His Son (vv. 4-5)? What now dwells in us, and what do we cry out (v. 6)?

God sent Jesus "when the fullness of time had come," reminding us that everything is and always will be according to God's plan.

He sent Jesus for two purposes: first, to redeem us from the law. Second, and as result of Jesus' first mission, Jesus came so that we could be adopted as sons of God.

As sons, the Spirit of God dwells in us so that we cry out "Abba! Father!"

4) According to verse 13, why was Paul able to preach to the Galatians in the first place? How did they receive him?

Paul was only able to preach to them because of a "bodily ailment." We don't know exactly what that was, but it seems that Paul was struck by an illness and had to change his plans, and as a result, he ended up in Galatia for an extended period of time. He was able to preach to the Galatians despite his suffering. They welcomed him with open arms, treating him like Jesus Himself, even though he was physically a burden.

5) What do the false teachers desire (v. 17)?

More than anything, the false teachers wanted to build themselves up. They wanted to build the Galatians up so that the Galatians would "make much of them." False teachers are all about themselves, while genuine teachers are all about God.

6) What Old Testament figures does Paul reference in verses 21-31? What are the two covenants he references?

Once again, Paul points to Abraham, and he references the famous story of Sarah's barrenness. One covenant is the covenant of Mount Sinai, the covenant of the flesh, or the covenant of slavery; he connects this covenant to the children of Hagar. The other covenant is the covenant of the promise, the covenant of freedom; he connects this covenant to the descendants of Sarah.

NOTE: Paul is clear that he's interpreting the story allegorically; this is not an exegetical interpretation of the Genesis story. If we were to take Paul's words here as an authoritative exegesis of the Genesis story, it would seem to place a lot of blame on Hagar and demonize her descendants, but we shouldn't receive it as such. Paul did not intend for this to be a serious spiritual interpretation of scripture, but instead he retold a familiar story in order to make a point.

B. SO WHAT?**1) What do we have to do to earn sonship? Why is it significant that we are "sons"?**

Nothing! Sonship (biologically speaking) is not something we achieve, but it is what we are born with. We don't have to do anything to be the child of our parents: it is a biological fact. Likewise, our sonship to God is part of His grace, not our own doing, and is an essential part of the gospel message. By believing in Jesus, we are adopted and accepted as firstborn sons and heirs. God doesn't simply invite us to dwell with Him as guests, but as heirs. We are irrevocably His. No matter how badly we mess up, God will never disown us. We are permanently and eternally His.

In the ancient world, the division between slavery (under the law) and sonship (in Christ) was stark. Slaves had no rights or inheritance, while sons were loved, accepted, and heirs of their father. Legally, sons had privileges, status, and freedom that slaves could not dream of having.

2) In Galatians 3:27-28, what have we "put on"? What is being erased in Christ? What does this signify? Why do the Galatians need to hear this?

In baptism, we have "put on Christ." We have dressed ourselves with His perfection, His sacrifice, and His love, and God the Father sees us just like He sees Jesus, as redeemed and justified. In Christ, the distinctions between races (Jew and Greek), classes (slave and free), and gender (male and female) all fall away. He is not

saying that everyone is uniformly the same, but he is reminding the Galatians that everyone is equal in Christ. There is no distinction, no hierarchy. In the midst of their crisis concerning Greek believers being forced to follow Jewish law, this message was especially powerful for the Galatians.

Put On

In verse 27, Paul says that "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." In the original language, the words "put on" refer to getting dressed, or putting on clothes. What Paul suggests, according to Martin Luther, is that "Christ is our garment." When we are baptized, we dress ourselves in Christ, "not with the law, nor with works, but with an incomparable gift...with remission of sins, righteousness, peace, consolation, joy of spirit, salvation, life, and Christ Himself."

Like a beautiful wedding dress that makes the bride radiant, when Christ is our garment, He adds His flawless beauty to us and magnifies the God-given loveliness within us. Remarkably, when we "put on" Christ, this is how the Father sees us; as children, justified and righteous, and heirs to His kingdom. Jesus covers our sin and brokenness with His holy perfection. Moreover, when we "put on" Christ, we are faced with responsibility in this life; we are now emissaries of Christ in the world, a burden we ought not take lightly.

3) What is significant about the descriptors of Jesus in verse 4? What work does the Son do in us? What work does the Spirit do in us? Why do we cry out?

Paul specifies that Jesus, God's Son, was "born of woman" and "born under the law" to remind us that Jesus was fully human. He was under the law like all of us, but He was also God's own Son. Jesus' mission was twofold: to redeem us from the law and to prepare us for adoption as sons.

The Spirit, meanwhile, works in us and cries out to God on our behalf. Even when we don't know where to turn, the Spirit is within us, crying out to God, drawing us closer and closer to Him. By the Spirit, we have the desire and ability to seek God.

The exclamation "Abba!" is significant for a few reasons. First, Abba translates to "daddy" or even "dada," indicating our childlike love, affection, and need for God our Father. It is a recognition of our need for God, our loving father. Second, not only do we desperately need God, but this is the exact same phrase Jesus used in Mark 14:36 when He prayed in the garden before His crucifixion. It is a word of desperation, intimacy, and confidence in God our Father.

4) Why is Paul so bewildered in verses 8-11? What is he really saying?

Paul knows that he taught the Galatians the true gospel, and that they accepted the freedom and sonship only possible through Christ. But now, they are rejecting God's best gift to them—Himself—and returning to their lives of slavery.

Logically, this makes no sense at all! Imagine a former slave who was adopted into a family as a child. What would it be like if that child insisted on continuing to live as a slave to his former master? Not only would it be unnecessarily painful to continue living as a slave, but doing so would devalue the father's act of adoption. Being enslaved to religiosity and following the Jewish law is the same as being enslaved to the paganism they knew before Christ. Now that they belong to God, why do they act like they are still slaves to sin? Paul is astonished and horrified that they have rejected the gospel and returned to their lives before they knew Jesus.

5) How does God use Paul's suffering for good?

Physically, Paul suffered an ailment that interrupted his missionary journey and kept him in Galatia much longer than he anticipated. Paul's physical suffering made him a burden to the Galatians, but it also opened the door for him to preach to them. Through Paul's suffering, God opened doors for Paul to minister to an entire region. Sometimes, we can clearly connect the dots and see how God can turn our suffering into good for His kingdom.

6) What does Paul's allegory tell us in verses 21-31? What does it mean that some are born "according to the flesh" or "through the promise"? How do these "two covenants" apply to the Galatians and to us today?

Paul reads the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar as an allegory for our own spiritual lives. Though the Judaizers claimed to be literal descendants of Abraham, Paul harkens back to the Old Testament to argue that they act like children of Ishmael through Hagar more than children of Isaac through Sarah. In other words, they live enslaved to the law rather than freed by grace.

Though God had promised Abraham a son through which He would build a nation, Abraham and his wife Sarah were barren in their old age, and they took matters into their own hands. Sarah suggested that Abraham sleep with Sarah's servant Hagar, and Abraham agreed. Hagar bore a son (Ishmael), but Sarah grew jealous and persecuted Hagar. This, according to Paul, is like living under the law. We often try to do things on our own, according to our flesh, but we will always come up short and remain under the curse of the law. This is what the Judaizers were teaching, and it runs contrary to the gospel of grace. On the other hand, Paul points to Sarah as an example of the covenant of the promise. Eventually, God opened Sarah's womb, and she bore Isaac. This blessing came from God, not her own efforts, and it represents God's faithfulness to His promises. In other words, Sarah is a picture of God's grace.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) Make a list of things that are true about you, things that you can do and feel, if you are truly a child of God. Then, make a list of ways that you may be living like an orphan instead of living into your identity as a child.

2) Like the Galatians, many different barriers can come between us and God. What barriers do you see in your life, and what can you do to help erase them?

Barriers can look like any number of things in our lives. It can be a physical separation from part of God's community, such as never coming into contact with the materially poor. In our country, the church is still very segregated, and race remains a boundary in many places. Other things like class, gender, nationality, and politics can play a role individually and as a church. Even friend groups, parents, rivalries, and sports could serve as things that divide rather than unite the body of Christ.

3) To what are you enslaved? Do you live like a child of the flesh, or a child of the promise?

Answers may vary. Living as a child of the flesh can range from living in constant rebellion to God, adhering to strict moralism.

Main takeaway

Not only are we justified by faith in Jesus, but by God's grace, we are adopted as sons and heirs. Set free from bondage and captivity to the law, we are freed to live under grace, living in loving obedience and fellowship with God, while His Spirit works within us. As sons by grace, we are not only heirs to the promise God made to Abraham, but we are co-heirs with Christ in God's kingdom.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

God's miraculous grace saving us from our sins is worthy of eternal praise. But He offers even more! Not only did Jesus come to redeem us, but He came to adopt us as sons and heirs to His kingdom. His Spirit lives within us and pulls us closer and closer to Him. Jesus didn't just die for our sins—He died for US.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father God, we thank You that we can call You Father, and that You call us Your sons. You love us more than we will ever be able to comprehend, but by Your Spirit in us, we come before You humbly and simply cry, "Abba, Father!" Lead us to live freely by grace and not in bondage to the law, and teach us how to live obediently as Your children and heirs. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) How does it feel being called a son of God? Do you feel like a son and an heir? If not, take a moment to talk to God and ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. If you do feel like a son, what freedoms and obligations come with sonship?
- 2) What is one barrier you recognize that divides people rather than unites them? How can you work to treat everyone equally and justly rather than based on some hierarchy?
- 3) Do you live like a child of the promise? If so, how? If not, what enslaves you, and how can you surrender it to God? Take a few minutes to talk to God in prayer and ask Him to help you let go of things you're clinging to so that you can find peace in Him.

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Who are the members of your immediate family? How is it similar to God's family? What is different about God's family?
- 2) As a family, talk about potential barriers to the gospel, particularly barriers that can lead us astray into treating people or groups differently from others. Where do you see inequality around you? What does the gospel say about inequality?
- 3) How can you support one another as fellow children of the promise? What would it look like to live under grace instead of under the law?