

Heirs of the King Galatians 4:1-7

At a previous church I served there was a man who was troubled because he had two adult children still living in his home. They were in their twenties and they showed no signs of moving out. Sometimes they worked part-time jobs and one took about one or two college classes every semester. But they spent nearly all their time on-line or watching TV or playing video games locked behind their bedroom door. And this man loved his children. They were in no danger or losing his love. He just desperately wanted them to grow up and mature and develop some of the God-given potential they had been given. And as we talked about how he could handle this situation and he said, "I just can't believe this is who they are supposed to be."

His adult kids were stuck living like children.

There was a wide-ranging survey of the Church taken a few years ago that revealed that many Christians are stuck living like spiritual children. They have a commitment to Jesus. They go to Church. They believe they will go to heaven when they die. But they are spirituality immature. About half of all Christians had no idea how to describe what a healthy, mature spiritual follower of Jesus looks like. And although nearly 60% said they had grown in their faith in the last year, only three percent showed any tangible proof they had done so. And, by the way, I don't want to let pastors off the hook either. Pastors in the survey also struggled to define what spiritual maturity looks like. When Pastors were asked how to define spiritual maturity, only about 1/5 could give a specific answer.

Today we wrap up the sermon series called "Id'd" taking at look at Galatians and I want to address this question of what it means to grow into spiritual maturity. Jesus said that unless we have faith like a child, we will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven—but Jesus' intent is for us to grow into mature sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, to flourish as we mature into His image. And the final question we will address in this sermon series as we look at our identity, "Who am I supposed to be?"

Paul wrote to the Galatians that there are two ways for Christians to live.

Paul said we can live like children.

Or, Paul said, we can become mature sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. That is who we are supposed to be. Salvation in Jesus is about so much more than slogging through this life to get to the end and die in peace because you will die and go to heaven. Salvation is about growing into the fullness of Jesus made you to be—in this life. The Lord God is deeply invested in you and I living an abundant, triumphant life of consequence and undying, eternal, purpose right now—at this very moment. All the resources of Heaven are aligned to help you become a fully-devoted, spiritually mature follower of Jesus Christ.

So, let's lay out these two paradigms that Paul gives us in Galatians.

Paul said, "All of you are heirs to your Heavenly Father. But not all of you are living like it. Some of you live like children and some of you live mature sons and daughters."

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, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved

to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Galatians 4:4-7

Lets walk through these two ways of living.

A child lives like a slave

A son or daughter of God lives like an heir.

Now, to be clear, both the person who lives like a child and the person who lives like a son or daughter of God are heirs. Paul isn't talking about salvation. He is talking about how we live like someone who not only their eternity is secure and teeming with life but so is their present, so is this life.

But only one lives like it. Only one lives like the person Jesus has redeemed them to be. The other lives like they are waiting to die so they can really know God's blessings and abundance then.

They live like a slave.

Enslaved to what?

Paul says when we live like children, we are enslaved to “elementary principles of the world.”

What does that mean? When Paul uses the phrase, “elementary principles” of the world he is talking about worldly things, fallen things, man-made things, things that we can see, taste, touch and feel. He means that we are giving ourselves to things that are less than God and taking something that is earthly and attempting to plug into a God-shaped hole in our soul. We are making for ourselves what Pastor Tim Keller calls a counterfeit God.

And the counterfeit God doesn't fill us—no matter how hard we try.

And there is a specific Biblical label for earthly things, counterfeit gods, that we try to fit into the Divine hole is our soul, to meet the need that only God can fill.

The word is idol.

And idols, the Bible teaches, enslave us.

We are enslaved to those things we choose before God. We live enslaved to the very things we give ourselves to, work for, invest in, place on a pedestal, spend our time and blood and sweat and tears serving to get the good life we think that man-made thing can give us. Idols always disappoint.

Children pursue idols.

Just think of all the things, and they seem so silly now, when we were younger that we thought would make us complete and fill the God-shaped hole in our soul—getting what we want for Christmas, winning at dodge ball in gym, starting at 3rd base for the high school baseball team, going with the right person to prom, getting into the right fraternity or sorority. As we get older but remain a child spiritually, the things we want to fill the God-shaped hole in our soul, the counterfeit gods, the idols, only become more and more encompassing, esoteric and destructive.

And our pursuit of those counterfeit gods causes us children of the King, to live like slaves—so very far from Jesus' intention for our lives.

A son or daughter of God lives like an heir.

What is an heir? An heir is someone who knows they have an inheritance that will meet all their needs. In Paul's time, it was common for people of nobility and wealth to adopt a young man, even an adult to be their heir. And the adopted man would take on the family name and take on the family way of life and they would live as part of the home, near to their adopted father. The most famous of these adoptions in the ancient world was the man who was the Emperor of Rome when Jesus was born.

His name, at least at the time of Jesus' birth, was Caesar Augustus. But his birth name was Octavian. He was adopted by his uncle Julius Caesar and from his uncle, his adopted father, he received his name, his estate, his title, his armies and everything belonging to him.

Octavian lived knowing his destiny would be the most powerful man in the world. Octavian lived knowing that his destiny was to have every material need met, to be invested with staggering authority and purpose, to become, at least in the historical sense, eternal.

How would you live if you knew that was your destiny? How would you live if you knew things, oh I don't know, like this:

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

Or this:

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.

1 John 5:4

Or this:

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Or this:

The Lord will fight for you, you only have to be still.

Exodus 14:14

Or this:

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."

2 Corinthians 9:8

Or even this:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Matthew 7:7-11

And we could go on and on and on literally all day with promises from God's Word. And we have access to all these promises for one reason—because we are heirs. We have an amazing inheritance and the Bible teaches that the proof of that astonishing inheritance is the deposit of the Holy Spirit living in us now. And this brings us to the next way we can determine if we are spiritual children or living like mature sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father.

A child lives under a guardian or manager.

A son or daughter of God lives by the Holy Spirit.

There has been a shocking story in the news over the last few weeks. The one-time teen-aged pop star Britney Spears, who is now 39 years old, and has earned at least \$350 million during her lifetime was living under a conservatorship—a legal arrangement that left her with very limited freedom over her own life. Britney's father along with a financial company managed his daughter's finances and net worth and she had absolutely no control over any of the money she had made. She lived on kind an allowance given to her monthly. And although she lived well, she lived like a child. She was not free.

Who are the guardians and managers that a Christian lives under?

I know a lot of good people who live by the law. They really try to do what it is right. But their moral code, the law they follow is a burden. And they only do whatever they have to. They follow the law mainly out of fear of getting caught doing something wrong and being shamed for it. They follow the letter of the law so they don't get in trouble. And it's a constant burden.

When I was a kid, I always found ways to get around the rules that my parents, teachers and others laid down. I was always looking for a loophole, an angle, a way to not comply. As a kid I used to hate to take showers. So, I would fake it. I would go in the bathroom, lock the door, run the water, and just wet my hair down. I did the same thing brushing my teeth because all I wanted to get was a pass. And when it came to homework or chores or practice for baseball or football I found every shortcut I could possibly take because

my goal wasn't to learn or grow at all but to just get it done and get back to doing whatever I wanted to do.

Does this sound like our life as Christian to anyone? We do just enough to fake it? We have no interest in doing anything that might be beneficial or good for us or change our lives. Instead we do the bare minimum to either keep up the appearance of faith or get by and tick off the box, by doing just enough to meet the requirements of what the law says we should do.

And the law becomes a tyrant and master. We are always looking over our shoulder, worried we are being judged for not following it or trying to find a way to meet its bare minimum requirements, to tick a box.

Galatians tells us that because Jesus, as his brothers and sisters and the head of humanity, has redeemed us from being under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because we are sons and daughters of God, we receive the Holy Spirit. Every believer receives the Holy Spirit. God pours out His very person into our lives.

But children live resisting the Spirit and His Work. Mature sons and daughters of God live by the Holy Spirit.

What does it look like for a Christian live by the Holy Spirit?

Second Corinthians 3:17-18 tells:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

When we live by the Holy Spirit, we don't need the law to be our guardian. We don't need the law to manage our lives because the Spirit compels us. One of the iron rules of culture is that when you have strong relationships, you don't need as many rules. The number of rules you need for community, group or culture exists in inverse proportion to the strength of relationships. If you are in a strong marriage, you probably don't need a lot of rules because your relationship is what binds you. If you work for a good company with good people and good relationships, you are constantly thumbing through a six-inch-thick employee handbook.

And the same goes for our relationship with God. When we live by the Holy Spirit, God's rules, God's law is barely a consideration because the Holy Spirit carries us along. We are not always looking over our shoulder because we believe we are falling short or searching for a way to meet the bare minimum requirement of what God says we must do. We simply want to do what His word says we should do and we know what to do intuitively.

1 John 5:3 promises: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commands and His commands are not burdensome."

And this leads us to the final way we can distinguish how a child lives differently from a son or daughter of God.

A child is distant from God.

A son or daughter is intimate with God.

We are promised that when the Holy Spirit enters richly and fully into our lives, He puts a cry on our heart:

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

Galatians 4:6

The term “Abba” is a Greek word which means “Daddy.” It is a term of intimacy, closeness. It might even be one of the first words a child learns, almost like “Dada”. The Holy Spirit unites us to God, brings Him close, fills our heart with love for our Heavenly Father and makes Him seem real rather than a distant, harsh, judgmental old man with a long white beard sitting on a throne. And if this sound too good to be true, that spiritual maturity is a gift from God, simply given to us by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, Ezekiel 36:36-27 promises exactly that:

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

And if this still sounds too good to be true, that spiritual maturity, moving beyond childlike ways in our faith, and developing a rich relationship with God is the work of the Holy Spirit above all else—then consider this.

What do you want the most from the people you love?

Do you want them to perform for you? Do you want to experience their achievements? Do you want them to demonstrate for you their goodness, their morality, their responsibility? Or do you simply desire to be with them? Do you desire their company? Theologian Tom Oden put it like this:

It is unthinkable that a prize offered to parents for the talents of their children might suddenly become more important to them than the joy of actually touching and embracing their children. So it is with God’s delight in the life of human creatures made and restored in His image. God’s experience of humanity is in itself God’s delight.

In other words, God doesn’t delight in your work, in your accomplishments and achievements. God delights in you.

If we only knew that fully. If we only realized how much God delights in us, how we are fearfully and wonderfully made by the very hand of God and how close He truly is and seeks to be. If we only understood that our number one role in this world, our number one task above all else, to which everything we do comes second, is to connect with God, to cultivate and nurture His presence in our lives.

It would change how we approach everything—our work, our relationships, our self-worth, our stewardship—everything.

What is one thing we can do today, right now, to cultivate intimacy with our Heavenly Father? What is one thing we can do to realize the answer to the question, “Who am I supposed to be?”

The man whose adult children were living like kids, in one of our last conversations, shared with me a solution to his dilemma. His 20-something children spent all their time in the bedrooms with the door shut and locked.

So, he took the doors off. One day, while the family was away, he took a hammer and a flat screw driver and took the doors right off the hinges and put them in storage.

No longer could his adult children go into their rooms, close the door and seal themselves off from the world. It was not met with enthusiasm, to say the least, but he preserved. But that's not all he did. He began going into their rooms and hanging out with them—engaging them in conversation, re-building the relationship. He was persistent over many months and years and things changed. Conversations moved from the bedroom, to the hallway, to the living room and the kitchen and the back porch. And finally, their own apartments. As he re-engaged with them, they grew to become adults instead of children.

So, today, if you want to live like a son or daughter of God, rather than a child, your first step isn't to impress God by doing anything. Remember, you don't have to earn His approval. You are already an heir of the Kingdom.

Instead, take the doors off. What is that barrier you have placed between yourself and Jesus? Chances are it's an idol or counterfeit God. Chances are it is something you have chosen to define yourself rather than Jesus and it's become a barrier between you and God. And if you struggle to know what that is, just ask the Holy Spirit to show you and He will. God's Word promises He will.

Take the door off and let Jesus come in.

Open your life up to your Heavenly Father who has aligned all the resources of Heaven, allow Him to come in and sit with you. Move the conversation to your school, your work, your car, the baseball and football field, the grocery store wherever you find yourself. Carry on the relationship wherever you go and watch how the Holy Spirit grows you into maturity.

Remember Jesus doesn't want anything from you. He simply wants to be with you. And in that relationship with Jesus, through the word of the Holy Spirit, we find out not only who we are, we realize our identity, but one day we turn around and discover, quite miraculously, that we are who we are supposed to be.

Amen.