

Adopted, Heirs, Sons

Galatians 3:25–4:11

Galatians 3:25–4:11 — ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

^{4:1} 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, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

PRAY for help, power, illumination, understanding

A New Family — 3:25 – 29

Faith changes everything. **Now that faith has come**, says **v. 25**.

Faith changes our relationship with the law. It changes, most significantly, our relationship with God, vertically, through the Son, placing us in Christ and Christ in us. Christ *in* us changes what we want, what we pursue during this life. So we are fundamentally different inwardly in affections, vertically with God, and horizontally in relationships with God's people. All of these necessary changes become indicators, or fruit, of the blessing of salvation. They show that we have moved from death to life, from Adam to Christ.

Our new relationships horizontally form a new family in kind, a new order that transcends genetics and biology. That is the massive truth of **v. 26** — **in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God**. We will get more into the meaning of this in a moment, but let me first deal with the issue of "sons of God,"

2

rather than sons and daughters of God. The language here is deliberately masculine because Paul is dealing in a legal sense with the place and position of a son. In 1st Century culture, women were little more than property. They were second class citizens. It was the sons who were heirs. While the adoption into Christ is for both male and female, sons and daughters, if Paul had said you are sons and daughters of God, the inclusion of the term “daughters” would have actually weakened the understanding of what God has done in Christ. By saying we are sons — regardless of sex — he is saying we are all heirs and recipients of the inheritance of Christ. There are no second class “daughters,” but all are elevated in Christ as full heirs of the kingdom.

All, regardless of sex, status, or race, are elevated to the status of sons and made one in the body of Christ through faith: **“Now that faith has come.”** As many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Note the clear order here: Baptism follows faith. **Faith first secures the union with Christ; Baptism signifies the union with Christ through faith.** That why we call it believer’s baptism... those who *believe* enter into Christ and are baptized.

Now, our union with Christ is not through earthly or created things — not through racial identity or heritage; not through social status or economic status, as though one should strive to be richer, or whiter, or blacker, or Jewisher, or more influential or more popular... We are not elevated or united with Christ by goals or pursuits, nor by political position, or place, or prominence or status. We are made one with him and made heirs with him by union with Christ through faith, nothing else. Through faith in him, all are one in Him.

We all enter the same way: not by citing someone else’s privilege, as though that would earn us merit, or by noting that someone else was worse than us... those are not unifying elements. We all enter through the gifts of faith and repentance, confessing our sinfulness and need of forgiveness. We humble ourselves and trust that Christ has paid the price for sin. The only status we have on our own is the status of condemnation. The fact that we are heirs is singularly based on the work of Christ.

Oh, what a contrast is the unified body of Christ to a Cancel Culture world that seeks self-elevation by destroying others! Elevation and equality are experienced in the body of Christ, alone, based on his converting and adopting work. Here there is no one-upmanship, no effort to get even — those things are anti-Gospel. Contemporary anti-racism is actually ancient anti-Gospel.

3

Consider the beauty of the body of Christ, the church. The modern self is turned inward to itself for authenticity and meaning — “this is who I am, validate me.” The Christian is turned to the community of brothers and sisters in Christ as expression of authenticity of faith — we are his undivided body! — Purpose and authenticity is found in building one another up in the objective truths of the faith. It is not merely that we manage to clear the low bar of not being racists; rather we joyfully embrace unity in Christ of people from every tribe, language, people, and nation, displaying the reality of his one family, adopted sons without regard to ethnicity, social strata, economic class, or cultural background. This new adopted reality in Christ turns standard human distinctions totally upside and completely restructures life, authenticity and purpose.

The only hope for racial harmony is in the Gospel, not social and political constructs. Let us live out the reality of faith in Christ, loving, serving, and deferring to one another. This is what adoption looks like. As his family, let’s shine like lights in the midst of this crooked and twisted generation so that they see the reality of being God’s family. We are different from the world through adoption! God’s family is enduring and trumps passing genetic, ethnic, or religious ties. His family orients itself to, and serves his Kingdom, declaring his glory.

Paul fully gets this new family that Jesus points to in **Matthew 12:48–50** — “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Unity in purpose, work, and spirit is the practical outworking of adoption. The opening verses of Galatians Ch. 4 deal with the legal standing of heirs of God. In Galatians, we can never lose sight of the fact that what is being argued is that we are justified by faith — that is, made right with God through faith, not by our works. So Paul, in 4:1, begins pushing deeper than the fruit of being one in Christ, and deals with the root of *how* we are made one in Christ: through adoption, not the keeping of the Law.

Adoption

Apart from Christ, this is how God describes us, as the children of Adam: To those who required keeping of the Law in **John 8**, Jesus said, “you are of your father, the devil.” Before faith, we are

4

children of wrath, rebels, travelers on the broad road to destruction. We are without hope and without Christ.

To be adopted by God and made heirs is nothing less than the total recovery of life and communion that was totally lost in the fall in Genesis 3. To be adopted is to be joint heirs of Christ's resurrection and his eternal life rather than eternal death earned through rebellion.

In **vvs. 3 and 8**, Paul makes the argument that before adoption we were slaves: Slaves to the elementary principles of the world. This is a difficult passage to translate and interpret, and scholars note the difficulty in translating the word. In fact, different English translations render the phrase differently. It can either mean elementary principles, or elements — which would be created things, like stars, and planets, things of the earth. We won't get too far in the weeds, but I want to cover both possible meanings, because both have legitimate .

Elementary principles — This would refer to the most basic building blocks of moral conscience. In the same way the A-B-C's are taught to the youngest of students, the Law provided the rudimentary training of the conscience that drove us to Christ. Hold that thought and let's consider the other option.

Elements of the world, or kosmos — meaning earth, wind, fire, planets, stars.

Now let's consider how both of those would enslave us, as Paul describes negatively here.

When we were children — the context here of *children* is metaphor that means **before Christ came**, as **v. 4** tells us — so, before Christ came, before we entered through faith, we were enslaved.

Let's use the first interpretation that we were enslaved to the rudimentary teaching of the law — the ABC's of moral conscience. Note that in these verses the law is painted in a negative light. We know the law is not bad, but actually good because it exposes our sin and drives us to the Promise in Christ. So if the word means the elementary principles of the Law, we have to look deeper to understand why the law is portrayed negatively. As we do, we discover a demonic strategy that misuses the Law and therefore puts it in a negative context. In other words, the Law is good when it drives us to Christ. But we have an enemy, and as John Piper says, Paul exposes a satanic strategy to misuse the law to drive us to despair. John Stott breaks it down clearly like this so that we

5

understand the difference between the good and proper use of the law, and the improper, bad use of the Law:

God intended the Law to reveal sin and drive men to Christ. Satan uses the law to reveal sin and drive men to despair.

Consider that your enemy would misuse God's Law — the elementary principles, the exposure of sin — to enslave you to hopelessness and guilt.

Do you remember the battle that Christian has with Apollyon in *Pilgrim's Progress*? This is what Satan is doing in accusing and reminding Christian of all of his sin. Apollyon begins the attack on Christian recounting a litany of sinful things he has done.

Apol. Thou didst faint at first setting out, when thou wast almost choked in the Gulf of Despond; thou didst attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy burden, whereas thou shouldst have stayed till thy Prince had taken it off [Christian had tried to work his way out of sin]; thou didst sinfully sleep and lose thy choice thing...

And so Satan accuses Christian of violating the word of God. But Christian sees through the attempted enslavement, finally responding after even more accusations, which were all accurate:

Chr. All this is true; and much more which thou hast left out: but the Prince whom I serve and honor is merciful and ready to forgive. But besides, these infirmities possessed me in thy country; for there I sucked them in, and I have groaned under them, been sorry for them, and have obtained pardon of my Prince.

So we see both how the Law can enslave us, and brilliantly how this satanic strategy of enslavement is to be defeated: **I have obtained pardon of my Prince!** Yes!

But the other valid interpretation deals with enslavement to elements — that is, the elemental things of creation. How could there be enslavement to that? Let's remember that these Gentile Galatians had come out of paganism and polytheism. It would not have been unusual that their pagan worship consulted the alignment of stars, or planets, in the same way that contemporary paganism worships the sun, or consults horoscopes. We see this in druid worship at the winter solstice, and the ongoing use of horoscopes that falsely ascribes power to created things to govern life or to provide some sort of wisdom for living.

6

A side note here: If you are reading horoscopes, you are reading paganism. The stars and planets are controlling nothing. God is controlling the stars and planets. We read in the Call to Worship from Ephesians 1 that God sets forth his purpose. He governs all things by the counsel of his. God ordains whatsoever comes to pass. He is preeminent over all creation, as we memorized in Colossians 1. If you are consulting horoscopes that are rooted in the elemental things, you are enslaved to pagan darkness, you are playing into Satan's schemes, and you are bowing to a false god.

“Well, it doesn't hurt to read it for entertainment.” STOP! You are toying with Satanic schemes! Worship God! He is the Creator. He is wisdom incarnate. Repent of wickedness that enslaves all those who are on the broad road to destruction!

So we have two legitimate interpretations of what enslaved us before Christ came and we entered into him by faith. Either the misuse of the Law, or the paganism of worshiping things which cannot save.

Which one is correct? Which one should we be warned against? Both! Obviously we repent of idol worship and paganism and those chains that would drag us to Hell. It's clear and obvious that faith in Christ delivers from that, and we must not return.

But the misuse of the Law looms large in Galatians. In faith, we flee to Christ who perfectly kept the Law on our behalf. We don't fall prey to Satan's schemes that cause us to despair that our sin is so bad that Christ's atoning work needs some additional law keeping on my part in order to be justified.

Being made right with God is based on the exact right timing of the Son's incarnation to redeem us from the curse of the Law. Here Paul says in “the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.” **Romans 5:6** *ff* describes it like this: For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

There is nothing accidental, left to chance, or left undone in the atoning work of Christ — not even the day that he showed up. God sovereignly orchestrates and accomplishes all of it. Galatians, you heirs of the Promise through faith — once you were slaves, guilty under the Law, trapped in idolatry and pagan worship of created things, trying to find your own way to work it all out. That's slavery. Once

7

you were slaves, but now you are sons of God. How could you ever go back and leave the freedom that is yours in Christ?

You are heirs! Christ is made our brother, and what is Christ's is now our inheritance — it is ours through faith, to the everlasting praise of the Father's pursuing, redeeming love. Through our union with Christ, when he paid the penalty for sin, our penalty was paid. When he died, we died! When he was resurrected to eternal life, we were resurrected to eternal life! Galatians, have you even experience the new birth in Christ if you turn back to trying to better what has been accomplished in Christ? That's what he is asking them in v. 11 — "I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain." Do you know this God you claim? Does he know you?

We'll close with this warning in knowing God — that is, to come to him by faith and experience his transforming grace that reorients everything about your life and places you in Christ, on his agenda as sons of the King. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, Jesus fast forwards to the Great Day of Judgment and addresses those who were busy working, working... They engage in all manner of religious works and deeds to gain entrance into God's kingdom:

Matthew 7:21–23 — ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [\[I add here from the Gospel of John that the will of the Father is that we believe on the Son — that's faith. Continuing on:](#)
] ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

How do you keep from hearing that on the Great Day? How do you move into Christ and find safe refuge and righteousness? Look way from yourself to Christ. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Believe in Christ, and that enslavement of false gods, pagan worship, vain religious works that cannot earn favor... all of these chains that promise what they cannot provide are broken and prisoners are set free, rebels and children of wrath are made sons of the Kingdom, receiving their inheritance of righteousness and eternal life from Christ, the Savior of the world.