

Church Illustrated

The church, as a family

Galatians 3:23-4:7

MAY 22, 2022

HDBC

We are just a bunch of sheep who needed a shepherd. Thankfully, the good shepherd found us & saved us. Together, with other sheep in a common flock called the church, we trust and follow the shepherd. We are not literally sheep & Jesus is not literally a shepherd, and the church is not literally a flock. But that is a great illustration of the church.

We are just bunch of body parts, arms & legs, elbows & fingers, eyes & ears that are united together in one body, controlled and directed by one head. We are not literally body parts, but that is a good picture of the church. We are connected together as intimately as the various parts of a human body are with Christ as our head.

We are just a group of brothers & sisters, joined together in one family, with God as our Father. That's also an illustration of the church found in the N.T. The church is like a flock. The church is like a body. **The church is like a Family.** Throughout the New Testament we find multiple references to God as our Father, to believers as His sons & daughters of God. It's the picture of a family, the family of God. And unlike the image of the flock and of the human body, this one is more than a metaphor. **It is a reality.**

We really are a family. God really is **our Father**. We really are **His children**. We really are **brothers & sisters in Christ**. These truths are taught in a number of places in the New Testament. But I think one passage offers a good summary of what this means. **Galatians 3:23-4:7. Read it.** Then note four things.

1. Life outside the family of God (3:23-24)

Not everyone is in the family of God. Some people are still outside.

If you are in the family, there was a time when you were not. **Chuck Swindoll** offers a pretty clear picture of our pre-family-of-God life based on this passage.

Every one of us was born as a prisoner in a labor camp. Regardless of social status, religious upbringing, race, ethnicity, gender, or intelligence, you and I were reared with shackles on our feet and the gaze of an exacting taskmaster fixed on our backs. That taskmaster is the Law. The shackles are our own sins. And the laborious task is to work ourselves deeper and deeper into death and condemnation. That says it pretty well. **Read 23-24**

Before faith came we were kept in custody under the law. We were literally prisoners of our own sin because we were unable to live up to the law. That was true of everyone and is still true of all who are outside of God's family. The Law declares that you are a sinner and therefore condemned, with no ability to escape or work your way out. Paul uses **two analogies for the Law**. It is like a jailor and a tutor.

Like a jailor it keeps us under guard and refuses to let us escape. Every attempt to reform and do better is met with a harsh reminder that you have not done enough. You are still lacking. You have not & cannot measure up to the Law. Every time you think you are making progress to save yourself, the Law knocks you back down, and keeps you in its prison.

The law is also like a tutor. On the surface this may sound like a positive picture of the law. But the word refers less to a kind teacher who is pointing the way and more like a strict disciplinarian who forcefully keeps you in line. **Rather than the teacher in the classroom helping you understand, the law is like the lunchroom monitor telling you to stop talking and sit quietly.**

The picture painted by Paul of life outside the family of God, is bleak. Yet that is where many people prefer to stay. They think that they are living in freedom, not realizing they are actually in spiritual bondage. **But God made a way** for any who are on the outside to be brought inside. There is an invitation for every **spiritual prisoner** to find freedom in Christ and for every **spiritual orphan** to find a family in which to belong.

So, just how does one get into the family of God? Everyone comes the same way. There are three things to note in this passage about how one is brought into the family of God.

2. Entrance into the family of God (25-27; 4:4-5)

1) It is made possible through what Jesus did (4:4-5)

God did not leave us without a means of escape from the bondage of the Law. At the right time, He sent His Son to rescue us. He was **born of a woman**, which means He became fully human. He was **born under the Law**, which means He subjected Himself to the same standard of perfection that has crushed us and kept us enslaved. And why did He come?

That He might redeem those who were under the Law. To redeem means to buy out of slavery. Through His **perfect life and sacrificial death** Jesus purchased our freedom and offered it to us. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. But this does not mean everyone is automatically brought into the family. God made the way, sends out an invitation, then waits for a response. **Like an invitation to a party with RSVP.**

2) It happens through personal faith in Jesus (3:23-26)

Five times in four verses Paul mentions our faith in connection with our being set free from the Law and brought into the family of God. Simply put, your move from Law to grace through faith. You move from bondage under sin to freedom in Christ through faith in Christ. You move from being outside God's family to being a loving member of God's family through faith.

It's not just any faith. It's not faith in a vacuum. It must be faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, faith that he died and was resurrected for your sins. A faith that involves the surrender of your life to Him as Lord.

3) It forever settles our place in God's family (4:5)

Upon our personal faith in the finished work of Jesus, we are adopted into God's family. Through a legal declaration a person who had not been a part of a family is suddenly and permanently declared to be a part of the family. The picture here is of one's official status as a member of the family. **I've witnessed this many times in physical families. It's always a reason to celebrate.** The same is true spiritually. Instantly, you become a child of God, with all the benefits, privileges and responsibilities that brings. What happened when a person was adopted under Roman law?

Adoption under Roman law

- a. Past obliterated (debts, obligations, rights)
- b. Legal heir of new father immediately
- c. Never be disinherited

When you are adopted into God's family you gain new relationships.

3. Relationships within the family of God

1) Change in your relationship with God (4:6)

When you were outside the family, you knew God as creator, sustainer, judge, overseer, manager. You knew Him as the one who would one day judge sin and hold all sinners accountable. But when you came into His family all that changed.

Though He remains the same, meaning He is still all of those other things, your relationship with Him has changed, and His relationship with you has changed. He now looks at you as His child and you look to Him as father.

The most important relationship you have in the family is with God as your Father. As a father He is our teacher, protector, provider, defender, nurturer. He encourages, corrects, instructs. The language Paul uses is of the tenderness between a daddy and his son or daughter. No formality, just love, acceptance, nurture and intimacy.

2) Change in your relationship with believers (3:27-28)

Before they were spiritual strangers to you. They had something that you did not. They had a relationship with God that you lacked. But when you were adopted into the family, you instantly gained a bunch of siblings.

The family of God is the ultimate blended family. **Like the Brady Bunch, a million times over.** Every other believer in Jesus is your brother or sister in Christ. And that brings with it a set up expectations. Because we are in the same family, have the same father and are heading for the same heaven, there are some things that we need to do for one another, beginning now.

Love one another. **Accept one another.** Forgive one another.
Help one another. Grieve with one another. **Serve one another.**
Celebrate with one another. **Encourage one another.** Support one another.
Suffer with one another. Stick with one another. **Build up one another.**

4. Inheritance for those belonging to the family of God (4:7)

A slave is not a member of the family and has no expectation of an inheritance. However, one who is adopted into the family immediately becomes an heir and therefore has a legitimate expectation of an inheritance.

That phrase *Abraham's descendants* is not a reference to physical ethnicity, you don't become a Hebrew when you are saved. It is a reference to the promises made to Abraham, for all who would come to know God through faith in Christ. By the way, don't miss what Paul is communicating in the 4:1-3.

Even before Christ came, and even before we were saved, in the heart and mind of God, we were already His children. He knew we were going to trust in Him. In His mind we had already moved from death to life, from slavery to sonship. However, until Christ came and until we placed our faith in Christ, we were like children with the promise of inheritance but who have not yet experienced it. Then notice two phrase that highlight the part Jesus played and our response of faith to what Jesus did.

Divine Initiative: *But, when the fulness of time came God sent His son . . .*

Human Response: *That we might receive the adoption as sons.*

With both of those things accomplished, we now enjoy the inheritance provided by our loving Father. But just what is that inheritance? Is it Heaven? Yes. But it is more than that. It involves all the blessings that have already come with our relationship with God.

In Ephesians Paul explains that God has ***blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*** This includes our salvation, the forgiveness of our sins, our immediate, unlimited access to God, our membership in Christ's church, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the

promise of eternal life, the promise of a resurrected body that will be perfected, and certainly the assurance of a place in Heaven.

And all of it given to us by the grace of Jesus, upon our faith in Jesus.

A few years ago a Craigslist ad gained internet fame after a group of friends in their twenties posted a request for a "generic" dad to barbecue burgers and hot dogs at an outdoor party. The ad listed several "dad-like" activities as desirable, including "grilling hamburgers and hotdogs ... referring to all attendees as 'Big Guy,' 'Chief,' 'Sport,' 'Champ,' etc." and "talking about dad things, like lawnmowers, building your own deck, Jimmy Buffet, etc."

Additional requirements included a minimum of 18 years' experience as a father, 10 years' experience grilling, and a preferred name of Bill, Randy, or Dave. After the ad went viral, the group of organizers said that their new hope was to have Bill Murray respond to the ad.

You don't need a generic dad. You need the real thing. He is the powerful creator of the universe who wants to be your father and wants you to be His son or daughter.

It is made possible through what Jesus has already done.

It becomes a reality when you place your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

It brings you into a new relationship with God and with other believers.

It gives you all the good things that God gives to all His children.