

Galatians: No Other Gospel
Galatians 3:15-4:7
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We are in week three of our series on Galatians. This series more than maybe any other has challenged me and maybe you as well to read and understand God's Word in context. What was happening in Galatia at the time? Why did Paul write them this letter? And what can we take from it today?

Pastors Layne and Evan have done a great job of laying the groundwork for us, and if you are just joining us, I encourage you to go online and get caught up on the first couple of chapters. Last week, Pastor Evan helped us to see that the Jewish Christians living in Galatia saw the foundation of their faith—the heart of their religion—as obeying the law. Paul in his argument points to Abraham, the one they claim as the father of their faith, and says, “Look at how it all began.” It wasn't following the law. It was belief. Abraham believed! If this nation of Israel, this religion, was founded on a moment of belief and of faith, then Paul says, “Be true to that story. Stop requiring Jesus followers to obey the law. True Israelites, true people of God, true people who are in covenant with God are not those who obey a law; they are ones who believe.”

We continue today with Paul's argument to the Jewish Christians in Galatia with Galatians 3:15-18. I want you to notice Paul's word choice here at the beginning. Up to this point, the letter has been harsh in tone, so Paul's word choice here is intentional, for we are entering into a discussion about the family of God.

“¹⁵ Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the

promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.” (Galatians 3:15-18)

The promise spoken to Abraham that Paul is talking about here is found in Genesis 22:18, which says, “and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” Paul is saying that God promised to bless the whole world not through the Jewish people—plural—but through a singular person, and now we know who that person is: Jesus, who is the Christ. Paul says the law of Moses came 430 years after God promised to bless the world through Jesus to Abraham. When the law came, it didn’t void God’s promise.

Let me say it another way by continuing to use the example of family. Once God’s people received the law (the rules for how to flourish within the family), they then threw out the birth certificate (the promise). They thought the laws superseded the birth certificate and that the laws replaced it. But it was the promise—the birth certificate—that brought them into the family. And that was a promise of unconditional grace.

Paul says our relationship with God was always founded on a promise of unconditional grace. The law was never meant to define the relationship. The promise of grace through Jesus is what defined the relationship—always.

You may be wondering: why, then, have the law at all? Great question. Paul addresses this next in Galatians 3:19-22.

“Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

²¹ Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²² But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.” – Galatians 3:19–22

Why was the law given? It was given because of transgressions—because of sin. The mediator here is Moses, and according to several passages, the law was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai through angels, and Paul says that the law was added because of transgressions. In other words, as we sinned, God gave us the law to reveal the sin.

This is the first purpose of the law: the law was given to reveal our sin. The worst thing about us as humans is not that we sin; it's that we are convinced that we don't. God gave the law not because He thought we could keep it. He gave the law because He knew we couldn't. But we didn't know that. We thought we could keep the law. God gave the law to bring to light our sin, to expose our sin.

The second purpose of the law is to drive us to faith in Jesus Christ. Think of the law first like an x-ray machine. It's given to reveal what is actually going on inside of us. And secondly, think of the law like a prescription meant to push us to the physician, the only one who can heal us from what is going on inside of us.

And how does Jesus heal us? Galatians 3:23-25, says:

“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”

God uses the law to drive us to Jesus, who heals us by justifying us as we place our faith in Him. We are not justified (what makes a person righteous in the eyes of God) by our works but by faith. Paul wrote the same thing to the Romans a few years later, when he said in Romans 3:28, “For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” Their attempt—our attempt—to keep the law in our own strength actually keeps us from throwing ourselves at Jesus, the only true law-keeper.

The purpose of the law of Moses is fulfilled when it exposes us to be such sinners that our only hope is to fix our eyes on Jesus. Don't miss this: according to Galatians 3, God gave the law to prove to us that we can't keep it and to point us to the only one who can: Jesus.

We are going to switch gears now. We will arrive at the same shore (justification by faith, not the law), but we are going to take a different boat—a boat that was for ALL captained by Jesus.

It's considered one of the most if not the most significant and foundational questions anyone can ask of themselves. Psychologists and socialists say your answer to it will define your present and determine your future. They say your answer to this question will affect every single area of your life. The question is: Who am I?

Never in human history have people been more obsessed with finding out the answer to "Who am I?" I'm an 8 with a 9 wing, right? I'm an INTJ. I'm an introvert. I'm an extrovert. We are consumed as a culture thinking about the question "Who am I?" What do I like? What do I not like? What inspires me? What gives me joy? What mark do I want to make in this world? What legacy do I want to leave? These are all just different questions to ask the same question: Who am I?

Paul is not only telling the Galatians who they are. He is telling us who we actually are. As I read this part of Paul's letter, I want you to hear it as if he was writing it directly to you today.

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. ² The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. ³ So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. ⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So

you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir." – Galatians 3:26-4:7

We are ALL children of God. Who am I? I am a child of God. Period. None of the rest of it matters: job title, married or single, extrovert/introvert, Republican/Democrat, Eagles or Cowboys. It doesn't matter. We are children of God, and our identity must be squarely in God and in Him alone.

Paul uses "all" three times in the first three verses of this section. Nowhere else in Galatians does Paul spell out the vastness of the love of God for ALL. This is his thesis. This is his main point. He says:

- You are all children of God (v. 26)
- All of you were united with Christ (v. 27)
- There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ (v. 28)

In fact, the extra things that we add to our identity—cultural mandates (Jew or Greek), social mandates (slave or free), sexual mandates (male or female)—simply divide us. The thing and maybe the only thing that unites us is being called a child of God.

Regardless of who you are, if you believe, you get to inherit the promise given to Abraham. The promise, the birth certificate, your birth certificate no longer says your name—"Jennifer Audrey Souter born to Budd and Julie Souter"—but rather "child of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Just like I did nothing except be born to earn my legal birth certificate, I did nothing but to be born in Christ to earn the title "child of God." Friends, I never want to become numb to this. I never want to take for granted this gift of grace. This love so amazing. Paul says it this way in 4:4-5: "God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."

Now before I move on, I want to clarify something for us. You might be wondering, "Why does Paul use the word sonship here? Just a few lines above, he says we are ALL children of

God. This was his main point. What happened?” Remember the most important word in reading the Bible: context.

Paul, if you remember, opens up chapter 4 with “what I am saying is that,” and he goes on to give the people of Galatia an illustration with an analogy. He is giving them a picture that they would understand. At that time, only sons could inherit their father’s estate—not daughters. If a father only had daughters, they would go out and adopt a male heir. The Greek word for adoption to sonship here is a legal term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.

Thankfully, our culture doesn’t live under the same rule, so it is fair for us as we move forward here in Paul’s letter to understand that every time he says “sons,” he also means “daughters.” And as we will see, sonship really has nothing to do with gender at all.

So who is this Jesus that we are to fix our eyes on? To cling to? Since we cannot keep the law, what did God do? “God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship” (Galatians 4:4–5).

Jesus was born of a woman. Have you ever wondered why? Why didn’t He just walk out on an ocean or something, 30 years old ready to do some healing? Why the whole birth event? He had to be fully God and fully human to represent us on the cross. He had to enter in—all the way in, even to flesh. What does this mean? At a minimum, it means He can relate to us.

Friends, we don’t worship a god who prefers to stay a safe distance away. We don’t worship a god who says, “Okay, but that’s too far for me. That’s too painful. That’s too messy.” God saw our mess and entered in, all the way in, even into flesh. Therefore, He can relate to everything you are going through:

- Are you weary? He entered in.
- Are you sick? He entered in.
- Are you lonely? He entered in.
- Are you afraid? He entered in.

In Jesus, God enters in—all the way in. And Jesus didn’t just enter into flesh, but He entered into the law to redeem us. To purchase us. To buy us back so that we can be free from

sin. Scot McKnight, a New Testament scholar, gives us meaning to sonship, and this is the first one: sonship means being free from the curse of the law. The law no longer has a hold on us. To be a son, a daughter of God, means that we have been set free from the curse of the law. We no longer have to suffer the guilt of being a sinner. We no longer have to fear the wrath of God. Jesus came and said “You are free,” and He didn’t stop there. Jesus said, “Better yet, you are mine. You are God’s son. You are God’s daughter. You are adopted into my sonship.” God is saying, “I made you. I lost you. And now I have sent my Son to buy you back. You, Christ follower, are doubly mine.”

My question to you is: do you know in your heart that you are free? That you are God’s beloved? How could it get any better than that? And yet it does. “Because you are his sons, his daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Galatians 4:6).

Second, sonship means being led by God’s Spirit. God sent His Spirit. God doesn’t just come to us. God comes into us. The good news of the Gospel is that God has entered in—all the way in to the flesh, the law—and now into our hearts. The great gift God gave to us because we are his sons and his daughters is the gift of the Spirit. Scot McKnight says this: “Sons of God, Christians, are led by the Spirit. What prompts their actions, what stirs their emotions, what guides their behavior, and what determines their careers is God’s Spirit.” So, are you allowing the Spirit to guide you?

The Spirit doesn’t just guide us it allows us to be able to call out, Abba, Father. Lastly, sonship means being intimate with God. For Paul, this sonship—being a son, a daughter of God—is one who learns to call God “Abba.” Calling God “Abba” is the most intimate language of the family in the Jewish world. “Abba” is a word of intimacy, of deep relationship, of familial relationship. The closest English word to Abba is “daddy.” Friends, we get to call the God of the universe “daddy.” It doesn’t get more intimate than that.

We develop intimacy with God through prayer. We can talk to God as our daddy and listen to Him speak to us as His children. You might be familiar with this word “Abba” because it was the cry of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane during His darkest hour. Before Jesus was arrested, put on trial, and convicted to die, He prays in Mark 14:36 “Abba Father.” He begs God

to step in, to take this cup from Him. Jesus says, “Not what I will but what you will.” “Abba” is Jesus’s cry of distress to His loving Father. It’s His cry for help.

Paul tells us that because God has redeemed us and adopted us, we can now talk to God like Jesus talked to God. At the cross, Jesus did what had to be done so that we could cry “Abba.” We can cry out to God for help. “Abba, help.” “Abba, do something.” “Abba, be here with me.” “Abba” is the prayer you pray when you get the worst news of your life. And when we cry out to the father in our darkest moments, unlike Jesus but because of Jesus, we receive mercy, grace, and love in our time of need. We receive this intimate relationship with God. How would you describe your relationship with God? Would intimate be a word you use?

God sent His Son as a baby who would grow into a man so He could relate to us. This Son, who fulfilled the law perfectly His entire life—every minute of every day—would die because you and I couldn’t. He redeemed us so that we could be called sons and daughters of God. Friends, if this isn’t the best news you have ever heard—if this doesn’t make you want to jump for joy, say amen, hallelujah—I don’t know what will. Who is this God? He is amazing!

So what do we do with this part of Paul’s letter? I don’t know about you, but his argument to the people of Galatia is powerful.

Who are you? You are no longer a slave, but a son and a daughter of God and an heir to the promise of Abraham that you are saved by faith in Jesus.

Jesus has entered in, all the way in to the flesh, so He can relate to us. He has entered in, all the way in to the law, so He can redeem us and call us mine. He’s entered in, all the way in to our hearts through the Spirit, so that He can respond to our needs intimately.

I challenge you to allow Jesus to enter into your life and your heart today. Do you need to know that He relates to you? Allow Him to enter into that space. Do you need to know that He has saved you, redeemed you, and calls you mine? Give Him permission to remove the guilt and shame you may feel. Do you need to know that He is with you? Cry out to your Abba today and allow Him to minister to you intimately. Or maybe you simply feel the need to give thanks and praise to God your father for Jesus, for it is because of Him that we get to be called sons and daughters.

I know what I am asking you to wrestle with is hard. It requires courage and vulnerability. When things are difficult, it is easy to keep silent and not make a move. I sense this morning, though, that God through His Spirit in your heart is going to give you what you need to make a move. He is going to give you the courage to share with someone today. You are His son, His daughter, and He loves you so much. You can trust Him. Trust Him.

Jesus is here. He has proven over and over again that He is a God that enters in. All the way in. Give Him permission to enter into your life today.