

UNDER MOSES, IN CHRIST
PART 7

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:23-29

November 28, 2010

INTRO/REVIEW:

In Galatians 3:23-29, we have seen how Paul compares and contrasts life “under law (Moses)” versus life “in Christ” and shows the different effects that result from each. Once again, Paul is bringing into sharp focus a clear distinction between the law and gospel (Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants). Nothing is more important or fundamental to the Christian faith and message than clearly distinguishing between conditional and unconditional covenants.

I. LIFE UNDER MOSES EQUALS BONDAGE. vv. 23-24

- A. PRISON, v. 23
- B. PEDAGOGUE, v. 24

II. LIFE IN CHRIST EQUALS BLESSING. vv. 25-29

- A. FREE FROM HARSH DISCIPLINE, v. 25

We are no longer under law as a pedagogue because we are all now sons of God through faith.

- B. SONS OF GOD, vv. 26-27

We have been brought into the Father’s household not by physical birth but by spiritual birth, not by works of the law but through faith in Christ. Our new privileged status as sons of God is confirmed to us by baptism (v. 27). Baptism confirms to us that we are in such close union with Christ that God now views us as having done everything Christ did for our salvation. When understood in this way, baptism breaks our addiction to self-justification.

In addition to this, by appealing to baptism in v. 27, Paul lays the groundwork for what he says concerning the church’s unity in v. 28.

- C. UNITY IN CHRIST, v. 28

In Christ, we belong to God as adopted sons and we belong to one another as brothers and sisters. Everyone who is in union with Christ is also in communion with each other.

The good news that Paul is proclaiming in v. 28 is this: When it comes to salvation, God is no respecter of persons. It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. None of these things are of any consequence before God when it comes to salvation and none pose any barriers to fellowship with one another. The reason this is so is because everyone before God is equally condemned under Moses and equally justified through faith in Christ. The grace of adoption doesn't depend on works of the law but rather faith in Christ alone.

Paul reveals how it is legalism (as taught by the Judaizers) that divides the church and it is the gospel unites the church. And so the question of unity must always revolve around the great central message of the gospel (i.e., justification apart from works of the law).

Through faith, Paul says, "all" have "put on Christ" (which baptism signifies and seals) and are thus covered by the same garment (i.e., Christ and His righteousness, v. 27). Thus, unity and fellowship are possible precisely because all bear the likeness of Christ, which baptism signifies and seals.

Baptism stands as an ongoing reminder that through faith alone Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women have all been brought into union with Christ, justified, and adopted as sons of God.

This leads to the fourth blessing Paul specifies for those who are in Christ.

D. HEIRS OF PROMISE, v. 29

The gospel reveals that the Christian is destined to inherit a family fortune in Christ. Here in v. 29, Paul begins to show what this inheritance entails. Galatians 3:29 serves as a climactic conclusion to the argument Paul began in 3:6-7 (Note: It also lays the groundwork for what Paul sets forth in 4:1-7). In chapter 3, Paul has been answering the question: Who truly enjoys the privileged status as a son of Abraham (3:7)? In other words, who is a true child of God (Christian)?

The Judaizers insisted that the physical descendants of Abraham and the recipients and keepers of the Law were the true sons of Abraham. Paul, however, insists that union with Christ through faith alone is the only way anyone becomes a son of Abraham. "All" (vv. 26, 28) people, irrespective of their ethnicity, social status and gender, have received a rich inheritance.

Look at what Paul says, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Literally the beginning of v. 29 can read, "if you are of Christ." In other words, to be "in Christ" (vv. 26-28) is to be "of Christ." To be "in Christ" is to belong to Christ. In Titus 2:14, Paul says that Jesus Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for *His own possession...*" (emphasis mine). In his farewell address to the elders in Ephesus, Paul warned, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you

overseers, to care for the church of God, *which He obtained with His own blood,*” (emphasis mine).

The church is Christ’s prized, purchased possession. “All” who belong to Christ belong to God the Father as His adopted son (v. 26). Also, to belong to Christ is to belong to one another as brothers and sisters (v. 28). And lastly, Paul says to belong to Christ is to belong to Abraham (v. 29). Consequently, as a newly adopted son, the believer possesses a new Father, a new family and a rich spiritual heritage.

In 3:16, Paul says that God made His promises to Abraham and to Abraham’s offspring. Paul says that Abraham’s offspring is Christ, the unique Son of God. If Christ is Abraham’s offspring according to God’s promise (v. 16), then those who are in union with Christ through faith are also Abraham’s offspring (v. 7).

“All,” irrespective of ethnicity, social status or gender, who are “in Christ” through faith alone are sons of Abraham. All who belong to Christ also belong to Abraham.

Paul’s argument was important for two reasons. First, as we have learned, the Judaizers insisted that if the Galatians wanted to come into possession of the blessings promised to Abraham, they had to come under Moses.

Gentiles could not become a son of Abraham unless they met certain pre-conditions (e.g., the necessity of being circumcised, keeping certain Jewish dietary laws and observing certain holy days on the Jewish calendar).

Paul, however, says all that is needed to become a member of God’s household is faith in Christ. If anyone would be a son of God, then he must be in Christ through faith (v. 26). It is through faith in Christ alone that a Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female are adopted into God’s family as sons.

Once again, the repeated theme of law and gospel is brought into sharp focus in this letter. The question, “How does one obtain the inheritance promised to Abraham?” immediately raises the question of the role of the law and promise.

In v. 28, Paul shows that the barrier between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female is broken down not just because the laws of ethnic, social and gender distinctions are set aside but because law as a principle was never intended to be the way of receiving the inheritance promised by God to Abraham. The Scriptures clearly teach that the means of inheritance is and has always been faith in the promise and never by works of the law (Gal. 3:6, 8, 10-13).

Second, Paul’s argument is important because in Paul’s day only sons could receive the inheritance. This is why Paul’s statement was so shocking. Sonship was not just a matter of gender. It was not a privilege for a Jewish male. Women as well as men inherit this privileged status not by virtue of their gender but rather because of who Christ is and what He has done. Neither was it a matter of ethnicity or social status. Jew and Gentile,

slave and free, male and female are all heirs according to promise. This privilege is for “all” precisely because sonship is found “in Christ” and not in ourselves.

“All” through faith in Christ receive the inheritance of justification, the promised Holy Spirit and the grace of adoption. “All” are “heirs of promise” because they “belong to Christ.” Again, Paul sets forth the centrality and sufficiency of Christ. All the riches of one’s inheritance are found in union with Christ through faith. John Calvin, commenting on the Christian’s benefits of being in union with Christ, writes,

“We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ (Acts 4:12). We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is ‘of Him’ (1 Cor. 1:30). If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in His anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in His dominion; if purity, in His conception; if gentleness, it appears in His birth... If we seek redemption, it lies in His passion; if acquittal, in His condemnation; if remission of the curse, in His cross (Gal. 3:13); if satisfaction, in His sacrifice; if purification, in His blood; if reconciliation, in His descent into hell on [on the cross- J.F.]; if mortification of the flesh, in His tomb; if newness of life, in His resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in His entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in His Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given to Him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in Him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other,” (*Institutes of The Christian Religion*, 2.16.19).

An important question that we must ask is this: How do we know that we will receive the inheritance that God has promised? This question is critical in light of our ongoing failures and poor performance as believers. The temptation is to question, “Does this inheritance really apply to me?”

The Good News is yes. First, as Paul has made clear, our justification and adoption as sons is not based on our performance but rather God’s promise. We must always seek to structure our lives around God’s promise rather than our performance. If our inheritance were based upon our performance, we wouldn’t receive anything (cf. 3:10). There will be no “victorious” Christians who receive their inheritance only ungodly “justified” believers (cf. Rom. 4:5; 7:15-25).

Second, we are assured of our inheritance because of the Holy Spirit who is given to us (cf. Gal. 3:14; 4:6). In 3:1-5, Paul directs the Galatians to recall the way the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them when they first heard the gospel. And then in vv. 6-14, he shows the link between being justified and receiving the Holy Spirit. All believers have been redeemed from the curse of the law through the death of Christ (v. 13) so that all might receive the blessing of Abraham. Paul reveals that part of this blessing is the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 14).

The gift of the Spirit, just like justification and adoption, is equally given to all believers irrespective of who they are (v. 28). It is crucial to note that for Paul, the reception of the Spirit was through justification. Though both of these blessings of the gospel are not identical they are indivisible.

Those whom God declares to be righteous through faith alone have the Spirit of God poured out upon them. The gift of the Spirit is God's vindication of our justification and it is confirmation of our adoption as sons. The presence of the Spirit is the evidence and assurance that we belong to Christ ("if you are Christ's....," v. 29a). In Romans 8:9, Paul writes, "...Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him."

The Holy Spirit is the initial down payment/guarantee of the believer's inheritance. Listen to Paul in Ephesians 1:13-14, "¹³ In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee (lit. down payment) of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory."

A "*down payment*" (ἀρραβών) was the first payment or first installment of money or goods, which served as a guarantee or pledge for the completion of a transaction. Paul says that the gift of the Holy Spirit is God the Father's guarantee for the completion of our salvation. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee that the fullness of God's promised blessings will one day be completely fulfilled (cf. 2 Cor 1:22 and 2 Cor. 5:5).

The Spirit testifies to us that we belong to Christ and are members of God the Father's household. We will come to see in Galatians 4:6 (cf. Rom. 8:15-17) that the resulting filial cry of "Abba, Father" is undeniable proof that we belong to God's family as His adopted Sons.

It is this "hopeful cry for deliverance," a cry that is grounded in the hope of the gospel, that runs deep in the heart of every believer. It is an intense outward expression of a deep inward groaning for God to complete the work of redemption that He has begun.

In Romans 8:23, Paul writes, "not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

The same cry for deliverance that went forth from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when He cried out, "Abba Father," is now placed in every believer by the Spirit. We too cry out for deliverance (i.e., the consummation of our adoption).

And the Good News is that the presence of the Spirit evidenced by this cry for deliverance is God the Father's confirmation in the present (already) that our inheritance is secure in the future (not yet).

REFLECTION:

The blessings Paul has revealed in vv. 23-29 are incalculable and immeasurable. We have seen that “in Christ” God is no longer our judge. “In Christ” we are no longer prisoners awaiting the final execution of our sentence. “In Christ” we are no longer immature sons living under the harsh discipline of the law.

“In Christ” we are all adopted sons of God and God is now our Father. “In Christ” we no longer live in fear of God, with a constant dread of punishment because through Christ, we have been forgiven and accepted into His favor and household.

“In Christ” we find our true identity. Being “in Christ” John Stott writes “enables me to answer the most basic question of all human needs, ‘Who am I?’” (*Galatians*, p. 102). In vv. 26-29, we have seen how Paul establishes the Christian’s identity in 3 ways. In relation to God, the Christian is a son of God (v. 26). In relation to believers, the Christian is a brother or sister in God’s family (v. 28). And in relation to history, the Christian is related to Abraham (v. 29).

Through faith in Christ our identity is first and foremost “sons of God” (3:26) rather than the typical sociological (e.g., Generation Xers, Millennials, Baby Boomers or Busters), political (republican, democrat, conservative, liberal) or personal and professional demarcations (college student, high schooler, soccer mom, accountant, attorney, decorator, administrator, doctor, etc...).

As believers, the gospel declares that we are first and foremost sons of God. Michael Horton notes that the most decisive demographic location for a Christian is “in Christ” (*People and Place*, p. 209). The gospel and baptism locate us “in Christ.” The gospel creates and sustains this identity and baptism along with the Lord’s Supper confirms and nourishes it.

Because we gain a sense of our true identity “in Christ” we now have a sense of belonging and acceptance. One of the deepest longings of the human heart is the desire to be accepted and to belong. John Stott noting the benefits of being “in Christ” writes, “The unattached become attached. They find their place in eternity (related first and foremost to God as His sons and daughters), in society (related to each other as brothers and sisters in the same family) and in history (related to the succession of God’s people down the ages),” (*Galatians*, p. 101).

There is no greater privilege than a sense of belonging to God as a son and having Him as a Father. That God the Father has brought us into a relationship with Himself is the essence of the Christian gospel. Through Christ our alienation from God and one another has been removed.

God the Father accepts us because through Christ He has dealt with our estrangement by taking us from being “children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2) and adopting us as sons into His household.

Are you a member of God's family? Are you an heir of the blessings promised to Abraham?

As Paul brings this section of Galatians to a close, remember this: An inheritance is received not earned. When you receive an inheritance, you sit down and listen to the last will and testament as it is read and you simply receive what is promised. You do not work for or earn an inheritance. You are simply a recipient of someone else's labors and goodwill.

Christ is the key that unlocks the door of the Father's house. Christ is the one who labored for you and merited your inheritance. He kept the Law for you. He died on the cross for you. He was buried and raised for you. He ascended for you. He intercedes now for you. And He will come again for you.

Jesus is truly the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). We are merely the recipients (heirs) of all that He is and has done on our behalf. As Paul says, all who belong to God's family are heirs according to promise not performance!

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