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Galatians 3:26 - 4:7

Sons of God in Christ through Faith

I am very grateful for my childhood; I was blessed to grow up in a very loving home, where I never once doubted that my dad loved me. Every day he told each of us four kids that he loved us.. Every morning when he left for work, my dad would tell each of us goodbye and that he loved us; and when he got home, he was also excited to see us, and with a smile on his face, would tell us that he loved us. All my life growing up, whenever I was scared, sad, lonely, confused, or hurt, I *always* knew that I could run to my parents and they would love me and care for me. In fact, I can even remember disobeying, being disciplined sternly by my father, and then *immediately* knowing and being assured that my dad still loved me the entire time, and was doing it all for my good. I can remember my dad hugging me and assuring me of his love, even when I was in trouble. Growing up, I just took this for granted, thinking, “Of course my father loves me! That’s what fathers do!”

Now, I know that is unfortunately *not* everyone’s experience - not everyone gets to grow up in a loving home, with loving parents. And that *breaks my heart*. But I think we can all easily imagine what a loving father *should* be like to their children. But all too often, as Christians, I think we struggle to believe and feel in our hearts that God really is a loving Father to us - that we really are His beloved children. Maybe you’re tempted to feel like God’s the kind of father who’s always angry with you, or like you have to walk on eggshells around him, being careful not to upset God, or else He will be angry with you. You may feel like God doesn’t love you, that He’s distant, most of the time. But *God is not an absent or angry father; He is a good father and loves you more than you know!* Maybe, when we’re weighed down with conviction and guilt over our sins from that day, or the night before, or the big fight we just had with our spouse or children or parents, we might start to think, “Well, I blew it; God’s angry with me now.” You still believe the gospel, you know you’re forgiven by grace - and yet, you don’t *feel* loved by God; you feel lonely, like God is distant, like He doesn’t care about you. We can believe we’re saved and at the same time struggle to feel *personally loved and close to God*.

And that’s why all of us need to remember and believe that *we are God’s beloved children, beloved sons of God!* We need to hear the truth of this passage: that we are God’s sons

and heirs in Christ; that our identity and value is rooted firmly in the infinite value of Christ; and that our sonship and inheritance isn't rooted in what we do or our value and status in the world, but is rooted firmly in what Christ has done for us in the gospel.

I. All Who are in Christ by Faith are God's Sons, Just Like Christ Is (3:26-27)

This passage is all about what it means to be *sons of God*. And Paul begins by telling us *who can be rightly called sons of God*: it is those who are in Christ through faith. V.26 says: "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." Throughout chapter 3, we've seen Paul argue that the true sons of Abraham are those who trust God's gospel promise. Now, Paul ratchets the claim up a level: if we trust in Christ, we're not just sons of Abraham - we're *sons of God!* But notice who are called sons of God: it's *not* everyone in the world - it's specifically those *who put their faith in Jesus Christ*. We become sons of God *through faith in Christ Jesus*.

The moment we become Christians - the moment we repent from our sins and turn to trust in the gospel of Christ alone for our salvation - we become *united to Christ*. We move to a new location, a new home: we move to being *in Christ*. We are united to Christ by grace through faith. We're *personally, intimately connected* to Jesus; he identifies with us, He represents us. When we're *in Christ*, then what's true of Christ becomes true of us. Jesus is the true Son of God. When we're united to Christ through faith, that becomes true of us as well!

Paul is getting at this same idea of *union with Christ* in the next verse, v.27: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." To "put on Christ" is another way of saying that we're "in Christ" or are united to Christ. The image here is putting on Christ just like we put on a jacket or a new change of clothes. When you change out of civilian clothes and put on a police uniform or military uniform, that says something about who you are, it changes the way people look at you. It's the same idea here: when we "put on Christ," our identity changes; God takes what's true of Jesus and applies it to us.

But we need to pump the brakes for a second. In verse 26, Paul says we're in Christ *through faith* - the moment we believe. Why, then, does Paul say that we put on Christ when we were *baptized* in v.27? Does this mean that baptism itself is what unites us to Christ and saves us? No, we know that's not true; after all, this entire letter has been Paul arguing that we are justified through faith, not works! So here's what's going on: the biblical view of baptism is that it is our *profession of faith*. To be baptized is to profess faith in Christ, to claim to be a Christian, and to be recognized as a Christian by the church. Paul assumes that every one who is baptized is

a Christian, because baptism is meant to happen *when someone becomes a believer*; it's an outward sign of our faith. Therefore, the New Testament often talks about "when we were baptized" as shorthand for "when you came to faith in the gospel of Christ and became a Christian."

The Bible doesn't talk about "altar calls" or sinners' prayers; the way the Bible gives non-believers to respond to the gospel in faith is *baptism*. Therefore, when someone seems to respond well to the gospel and seems to repent and believe in Christ, we should make sure they understand and believe the gospel and then encourage them to be baptized as a way of *publicly proclaiming their faith*. Baptism doesn't save anyone, but it is the first outward sign that someone is a Christian. This is why Baptist churches have historically always required people to *be baptized* before they join the church or take communion. It's not because Baptism saves anyone; it's because Baptism *is our public profession of faith*. When someone becomes a believer, they are called to make that known to others through baptism. It's a badge we put on, showing that we have put on Christ through faith.

So then, these two verses are saying: the moment you all trusted in Christ and became believers, you *put on Christ*, being united to Christ through faith. What's true of Jesus is now true of you: you are sons of God! In Christ, God adopts us as His children. But not just His children - we become *sons*. Now, you may be thinking, "well, *sons and daughters*." In a sense that's true - but in another sense, *every Christian* becomes a *son* of God - and not just a son, but an *heir*. In the time of the Bible, only the firstborn son typically received the family inheritance. Christ is the eternal Son of God. He is the firstborn, the heir. But the amazing thing about the gospel is: when we're in Christ, *what's true of Jesus becomes true of us!* God looks at us and sees Jesus - God considers you *his son, His firstborn son*, even His heir! We become co-heirs with Christ. When God looks at us, as Christians, He sees Jesus - He considers our sin debt paid, because we've been crucified with Christ; He considers us righteous, because we have put on Christ's righteousness; He counts us His children, His sons and heirs, just like Christ is.

In other words: when we become Christians, *our entire identity changes*. Which brings us to point number two...

II. Our Identity is Found in Christ, Not from the World (3:28-29)

Since we're united to Christ through, meaning what's true of Jesus is now true of us, then this means that our truest identity, worth, and value is found in who we are *in Christ*. We see this

in v.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.”

Everyone in Christ (that is, every believer) has the same, equal value and standing before God; and that’s not a low value, not the value and worth that our sins failures deserve! No, we have a new identity: forgiven, redeemed, justified sons of God! When God looks at us, He sees the value and worth that Jesus Christ Himself deserves, and He declares it ours! That’s where our identity is found: not in ourselves, but in Christ, in who we are in Him, through faith in what He’s done for us!

First, Paul tells us that there is “neither Jew nor Greek.” In Christ, we are all part of God’s people, even Abraham’s sons, and therefore heirs of the promise, regardless of whether or not we are Jewish or Gentile. As we saw last week, Jesus Christ is the promised “offspring” of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). But now that we are *united to Christ*, what’s true of Jesus is now true of us - we are now considered Abraham’s offspring! V.29 makes this clear: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring.” Our identity as God’s children is not based on our cultural or ethnic background - it’s based on whether or not we have faith in Christ! Therefore, anyone in all the world can belong to Him!

The world around us - especially in the day of identity politics - tells us that our identity is found in our race, ethnicity, and culture; even in whether we’re part of a majority or minority culture. Ethnicity and culture are important, but *they are not what ultimately define us*; that’s not where we find our identity and value. Our identity isn’t ultimately found in being Jew or Gentile, white or black, hispanic or asian, American, Russian, or Chinese. Our identity is to be rooted in being sons of God, citizens of Heaven! And this is exactly why racism has absolutely no place in the Christian life or the Christian church! This gospel is for everyone. Being part of the church - every local church, *this* local church! - is not based on our race or ethnicity, not about our shared culture, not based on being white or black or American, but it’s for *anyone who trusts in the gospel and is united to Christ through faith!* So then, let’s not place too much value on our ethnic or cultural background. DON’t root your pride in it. Nor should you be ashamed of it! There’s nothing wrong at all with the color of your skin - white, black or brown! We shouldn’t bear any shame for being our ethnicity, nor any resentment towards other cultures. Why? Because we “are all one in Christ Jesus!” (v.28).

Secondly, “there is neither slave nor free.” Now, we don’t have slaves in our modern culture (nor should we!). But the concept of “slavery” here is different than American slavery was. Basically, in the Greco-Roman world, to be “slave” or “free” was an indication of your social class and your economic status. But our identity, value, and worth isn’t found in our social class, not in being first, middle class, or lower class; it’s not found in how much money you make, or your political or social status. In Christ, *we’re all free!* We’re no longer slaves to the law; no longer slaves to sin; no longer slaves to the ungodly ways and value systems of this world! We are free citizens of the kingdom of God - and not just citizens, but *sons of the King!*

The world tells us that our identity and value is found in what kind of job we have, in our level of education, in our social class, and in how much money we make. But that is not what God says! That is not our identity! Your value and worth is not found in your bank account or the size of your house or the type of work you’re in! Your value is found in the fact that you are a son of God! You’re a co-heir with Christ - an heir of all things! Christ’s inheritance is literally the whole world, the very kingdom of God, all the money and everything valuable in all the universe! If you’re in Christ, *that’s your inheritance!* You’re worth so much more than the dollar signs on your check that you bring home every month! You’re in the family of God now; there’s no family richer, no higher pedigree: you’re a son of the King, a son of God!

Thirdly, “there is no male and female” in Christ. Now, we need to be very careful here. Many people in our culture no longer know what a male or female, what a boy or girl, is. Just this week, the new nominee to the Supreme Court, Kitanji Brown Jackson, sat before the Senate confirmation hearing; when she was asked what a woman is, she said she couldn’t answer that,, because she’s not a biologist. When we have supreme court justices that don’t know the difference between boys and girls, there’s a problem. And that’s because it’s very *clear* that being male and female are real, objectively definable realities. God made them! God made us male and female. It’s no mystery what a woman or a man is. But the problem is, our culture has undergone a moral, sexual revolution; our culture tells us that we find our identity in our gender and sexuality; and therefore, our “gender” and sexuality can be whatever we want it to be. But let us be very clear: *the Bible leaves no room for that way of thinking.* God made us male and female; those are the only two gender options we have, and they are defined by our biological anatomy that we’re born with. This is God’s good design, and if we try to go outside of GOD’s designed

plan, if we try to find our identity *outside* of what God has said is good, then we will only find lies, frustration, confusion, and disappointment.

So when Paul says “there is no male and female,” he’s *not* saying that gender doesn’t matter or doesn’t exist. After all, our ethnicity doesn’t stop to matter in Christ; you and I still speak English, after all, since we’re from an American culture! We’re still male and female, and these realities matter. We still need to live according to what the bible says about God’s distinct, complementary design for men and women. Men and women are different; we’re different biologically, and we’re wired differently in other ways, too. We have different, complementary roles, especially in the home (as Paul says, for example, in Eph. 5), and even in the church (as Paul makes clear in 1 Tim. 2). But though we are different, men and women have *equal value and worth*. That’s what Paul is saying here. Men aren’t better or more valuable than women; women aren’t better or more valuable than men. And this is because, in Christ, *we are all sons of God*.

Now, why would that be the case? Why does Paul say that all Christians, even female Christians, are “sons” of God, not daughters? Again, this *isn’t* because men are better or more valuable than women. But it’s because, back in Paul’s day and age, typically only sons - usually the oldest, firstborn son - were *heirs*, who received the family inheritance. But we’re united to Christ through faith; what’s true of Jesus is now true of us! Jesus is God’s son, the one who receives the promised inheritance. In Christ, then, you and I are all *sons*, all *heirs of God*! As v.29 says, “heirs according to promise.” We all inherit God’s promised inheritance - even eternal life and righteousness in the kingdom of GOD, the New Heavens and New Earth - because Christ’s inheritance becomes ours when we are united to Him!

This is who we are: *sons of God, co-heirs with Christ*! That’s our identity! That’s where our value and worth is found! Brothers and sisters, we must firmly root our identity in who Christ is, and therefore, *who we are in Christ*! Your identity, your value, your worth, is found in the fact that you are a Son of God through faith in Jesus! Therefore, we must root our identity in Christ by focusing not on ourselves, but on the gospel that we place our faith in. Which is exactly what Paul does in the last part of our passage, bringing us to our final point...

III. We’re no Longer Slaves of the Law, Sin, and the World, but are Sons and Heirs of God (4:1-7)

Chapter 4:1-7 is a bit of a recap, a summary, of Paul's argument of chapter 3, but from a slightly different angle. He's zooming back out to show how the gospel of Jesus Christ brings us out of our slavery to the Law, to sin, and to the powers and authorities of this world, in order to be God's sons and heirs of the promise of God.

Paul gives an illustration in vv.1-2: "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." Picture with me a wealthy household estate, where there are slaves (or servants) that live there alongside the wealthy family. Now, this family has a son who is not a slave - he's a part of the family. In fact, this son is the *heir* of the household. The entire estate, wealth, and assets of the family will one day belong to him. But when he is a child, his life looks a lot more like that of a *servant* rather than *master*. In fact, you might even have a situation where one of the servants is actually *put in charge* of the son (the heir), as his "guardian" or "manager." As I said last week, wealthy families during this time often hired one of their servants (or slaves) to be a "guardian" or "tutor" for their son; it was this guardian's job to take care of the son, protect him, and also oversee his education. So this would mean that even though the son was the heir, and not a slave, he might very well have to obey and be under the authority of a slave, even one of his own servants, while a child!

Paul's point in chapter 3 was that the Law of Moses that Israel was under, in the Old Testament, was like this "guardian" or "tutor" that God placed over Israel until Christ came. But now, in verse 3, Paul takes this and applies it not just to Israel, but to Gentiles - to the whole world - as well: "In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world." Now, at first, we expect Paul to say the same thing he said above - that we were once "enslaved," or "held captive" and "imprisoned" under the Law of Moses; but he doesn't - he says we were enslaved "by the elementary principles of the world." Now what does that mean? He uses the same word later on, in verse 9, where the "elementary principles" they were enslaved under clearly refers to their previous idolatry.. They were enslaved to the ungodly, idolatrous ways of the world. But Paul uses the word "we" here - but Paul wasn't a pagan, he was a pharisaical Jew! He wasn't under idols, but under the Law before he became a Christian! In essence, he's saying Jews were not only enslaved under the law, but were also enslaved under the "elementary principles of the world," just like pagan Gentiles!

And I think Paul's point is: all of us, whether Jew or Gentile, whether pagan or legalist,

were all *enslaved to sin* before we became Christians; we're all born slaves to sin; we all deserve God's holy wrath, even death, even eternal death in Hell. Every single one of us is a sinner. Every single person in this room, and in the entire world, was born into this world a *slave to sin*, enslaved to the idolatrous ways of this world.

And then verse 4 begins with a beautiful little word: "But." We were slaves to sin, "but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (4:4-5). The "fullness of time" means the time that God had appointed - namely, a set time in history, 2,000 years ago. At that time, "God sent forth his son" - that is, the eternal God the Son, who is one with the Father and has no beginning, actually *stepped down into the world* to become man! He was "born of a woman," born of the virgin Mary, being fully God *and* fully man, at the same time! And he was born a Jew, in Israel, "born under the law." And He did what no other person could ever do: he *perfectly obeyed and fulfilled God's righteous demands in the Law*. He was perfectly righteous in every way; Jesus never sinned! He perfectly loved God and loved others, even His enemies! Even sinners, who didn't obey or love God (sinners like us!). In fact, he loved us sinners and enemies of God so much that He lived that perfect life *for us!* Then He died on the cross *for us, in our place*, bearing our sins and the wrath of God we deserve as slaves of sin! Then, on the third day, he rose again, crushing sin and the penalty of the law, even death itself, underneath His feet! He did all this, as verse 5 says, "to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons"! Jesus came to redeem us, freeing us from our slavery to sin, to the law's demands of wrath, to the wicked ways of the world, in order that we don't have to be slaves anymore but can truly be *sons of God* simply if we repent and believe in this good news!

[Illustration] When I was a kid, one of my favorite movies was *Aladdin*; and even when I watched the new remake a couple years ago, I still loved the story, even as an adult. I love it because it's a great "Rags to Riches" story. The story of *Aladdin* is about a young, likable scoundrel. Aladdin a ruffian, a "street-rat," coming from nothing. He's an poor orphan: no family, no money, no home. He lives on the streets as a criminal, stealing food to survive; his only friend is a monkey. But then, the incredible happens: a magic genie changes his life, and by the end of the story, Aladdin marries the princess and becomes one of the most powerful men in

the kingdom: the son of the Sultan (the king)! No longer poor, but rich; no longer a criminal, but a prince; no longer alone, but part of a family; no longer an orphan - he's now a son!

The story of the gospel is the ultimate "rags to riches" story. Before Christ, we were enslaved to sin; not GOD's children, but His enemies, children of wrath; not righteous, but wicked; not sons, but slaves. But Christ came to redeem us from our sin! And if you're trusting in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in your place, then you are no longer a slave to sin, the curse of the law, the world, Satan, or even death! YOU are now *God's child - God's son!* You're not an orphan - we've been adopted into the family of God! Here verses 6-7: "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." You're not a slave anymore - you're a son of God! And not just a son, but an *heir* to the very inheritance of God - the inheritance of salvation and eternal life that Christ himself deserves!

If you're in Christ through faith, God wants you to know just how much He loves you - that you are His precious, beloved child! God put his own spirit, the Spirit of His Son, Jesus, into our hearts, so that we might personally know and believe in our hearts that we are God's sons! So that we might have personal, experiential assurance of the reality of God's love for us as His own children!

When you don't feel like God's beloved child, cry out to the Lord, and ask God to show you, in your own heart, just how much He loves you! God will do this, because He loves to show His children just how much He loves us! GOD wants you to be completely assured that you are His beloved child. Let the gospel define your identity, your value, and your worth. When God looks at you, He sees the infinite value and worth of Jesus! You are God's son, God's precious child, God's heir! THE same inheritance that Christ deserves - the inheritance of eternal life with God, salvation from sin and death - this is yours, in Christ through faith!

And if you're not a Christian this morning, this can be your identity, too! Stop looking to yourself, to the world, and false beliefs to define you and give you value. Repent from your sin and simply look to Jesus! Believe the gospel, and trust that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection really are sufficient to save you from your sin, make you a son of God, and give you the inheritance of eternal life! Believe that in your heart this morning; then, show that you really believe this by professing your faith in baptism and joining Christ's church! If you have any questions about this, I would love to speak with you. Let us pray.