CHILDREN OF GOD THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS

Galatians 3:15–29

Key Verses: 3:26,27

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

The main theme of Galatians is living in the grace of Christ (1:6). Living in the grace of Christ is the gospel, the good news. It’s a life of true freedom (2:4; 5:1), the best life there is. This wonderful life lived in grace is available to anyone, no matter who we are or what we’ve done. We all can live in his grace as we learn to live by faith (2:16). Galatians teaches us that life lived in grace is not about keeping a bunch of outward laws, but about experiencing the changing power of being crucified with Christ (2:20). And it’s about learning how to live by the Spirit (3:2–5; 4:6; 5:5,15ff.). In today’s passage we learn that living in the grace of Christ goes really deep: it matures us and shapes even our very identity and sense of where we belong. Today we especially want to think about the new identity the grace of Jesus gives us, and how we can grow in this identity. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

Paul begins this section of his letter explaining how God’s grace changes our relationship to the law. Look at verse 15. The main trait of a human covenant is that it can’t be changed. In ancient times it was even stricter than it is today. People had to file a covenant in the courts, and once they did so, if they tried to change it the courts would dismiss any revision. Paul takes this everyday example and applies it to God’s covenant with Abraham. God made that covenant with Abraham, based on his promises, and it can never be changed. Look at verse 16. Paul’s point here is that God’s covenant with Abraham was actually spoken to his offspring, Jesus, "the Seed." It means that in Jesus, God is making all the promises he made to Abraham available to all who believe. This, too, is amazing grace. Then Paul explains how the coming of the law didn’t change God’s covenant with Abraham. Look at verse 17. The Jews had gotten so wrapped up in the works of the law that they forgot about the meaning and foundation of God’s covenant with Abraham, which was based on God’s promise. Read verse 18. The Jews inherited God’s covenant with Abraham based not on the law but on God’s promise. We too inherit God’s covenant with Abraham by God’s grace, based on his promise to us in Jesus, which we simply need to believe. Paul goes on to explain further. Look at verse 19a. “Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promises referred had come.” What does it mean that it “was added because of transgressions”? Here “transgressions” means sins. God had to add the law because his people were so sinful. If he just let them run wild, he would not have been able to keep his promise to Abraham to send Jesus through them. In verses 23–25 Paul will further develop this understanding of the law as it relates to our Christian lives. Paul also says here that the law is inferior because God had to give it through angels and entrust it to a mediator, Moses, due to his people’s sinfulness; but God’s covenant is superior because in giving it directly to one person, Abraham, God revealed that he is one (19b,20).

Then Paul clears up a potential misunderstanding. Look at verse 21a. “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not!” Just because God gave the law didn’t mean he was doing away with his promises to Abraham. Paul goes on to say how limited the law is: The law can’t impart life, meaning it can’t give us spiritual life (21b). No matter how much they tried to keep God’s laws to earn righteousness, God’s people remained spiritually dead. Read verse 22. Here, “Scripture” is another way of saying “the law.” In a sense, Scripture exposes how sinful we are, and how helplessly in sin we are to change ourselves. God’s promises aren’t fulfilled in laws; they’re fulfilled in Jesus, and they’re given by his grace to those who believe.

So as Christians, what's our new relationship to the law? In verses 22,23 Paul repeats that we used to be “locked up” under the law. In a sense, we all *had* to be locked up, because we couldn’t be trusted. How did our situation change? Read verses 23–25. Here Paul says the law is our "guardian." It’s an ancient word used to describe a slave that would protect a child until he or she became an adult. We need God’s laws to protect us from ruining our lives and also to help us see how sinful we are, until we can be ready to receive Jesus. But once we receive Jesus, we don’t need the law in those ways anymore; it’s just like children who grow up and no longer need a babysitter. Someone who has received Jesus but is still trying to live by the law is as weird as a fully adult person hiring a babysitter to watch over himself or herself. We also notice in verses 23–25 how Paul repeats that “faith” would eventually “come.” It’s God's hope. Faith changes our whole focus, away from trying to keep laws, to humbly depending on Jesus. Just as a guardian waits for the day when a child becomes a mature adult and no longer needs constant supervision, so God was waiting for the day when people would become spiritually mature by really trusting in Jesus.

Faith in Jesus not only gives us freedom from the law; it gives us a new identity. Read verses 26,27. The first thing we notice here is that Paul says we are “children of God,” not children of Abraham this time, but actually the very “children of God.” He’s going to explain this further in chapter 4. Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism became children of Abraham through circumcision. But Christians become children of God through faith in Jesus. It’s God’s amazing grace! Why? It's because in our sin we were nothing but objects of God’s wrath. In our sin we had no right at all to ever become a child of God. But because of his amazing grace to us in Jesus, God makes even sinners like us his own precious children. It happens, as it says in verse 26, “through faith.”

Faith in Jesus doesn’t involve physical circumcision, but something else. Read verse 27 again. Here, being baptized into Christ and clothed with Christ replace the need for circumcision. Being baptized into Christ and clothed with Christ give us this new identity as a child of God. Today so many people vaguely assume they’re Christians because their parents are Christians. But their own Christian identity is actually pretty superficial. It’s because they haven’t personally been baptized into Christ or clothed with Christ. Here, “baptism” doesn’t mean a ritual with water. It means experiencing a deep, transformative faith. It means believing that God himself created me and designed me to be good, but sin has made me broken. It means turning from my sin and turning to God, believing his promise to save me from my sin through Jesus. It means receiving the Holy Spirit and being changed by Jesus until I can recover from my sin and pursue God’s design for me. Basically, being baptized into Christ means believing that through his death and resurrection I can live a new life (Ro6:3–5).

Read verse 27 once more. It says that when we’ve been baptized into Christ, we clothe ourselves with Christ. In a way it relates to a child becoming an adult. In ancient times a young boy would signify that he’s now a man by putting on men’s clothes and no longer wearing boys’ clothes. In the same way, we shouldn’t remain as spiritual babies; we need to clothe ourselves with Christ. Other people can’t spiritually dress us; we need to do it ourselves. But what does it really mean to “clothe ourselves with Christ”? It means to resist living in spiritual darkness and sin, and instead, to choose each day to identify with Jesus, to put on the new self he gives me, by his grace, and to imitate him (Ro13:13,14; Eph4: 22–24). “Clothing ourselves with Christ” means living in his grace practically. It means letting his grace empower me every day to renounce my old self and my old sins. And in this grace my new identity is to become more and more like Jesus. The more we hold onto his grace and choose to identify with him each day, the more like Jesus we become. We don’t need to be looking like the world, or like famous people, or even like some super-religious people we may know; "clothing ourselves" with Christ means we all need to be looking like Jesus. As we live in his grace and identify with him, we do look more and more like him. Have you clothed yourself with Jesus? Do you look like him?

Living in the grace of Christ also gives us a new relationship with other believers. Read verse 28. Now, by faith in Jesus, we identify with all those who live by faith in him and who have this new identity. In ancient times human distinctions were very important. It made all the difference whether you were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. We human beings still classify one another in so many ways. It happens even in the church. It’s actually destructive. It’s also directly against living in the grace of Christ. We should not be judging one another based on race or age, education or gender, appearance or income, or any other standard. Instead, we should accept as a dear brother and sister anyone who puts their faith in Jesus (cf. Ro15:7). We should include people in fellowship with us based simply on their faith in Jesus. To do this, we have to struggle against our selfishness, our pride and our hidden prejudices of many kinds. In Galatians Paul was fighting for this, so we need to be fighting for it, too.

Then Paul comes to a conclusion. Read verse 29. If we belong to Christ, we should never let anyone make us feel like we’re a second-class Christian. If we belong to Christ, we’re full-fledged children of God who inherit all the spiritual blessings possible. Living in the grace of Christ means living with this conviction.

Today we mainly thought about the new identity we have in the grace of Christ. May God help each one of us be baptized into Christ. May God inspire each one of us to clothe ourselves with Christ every day. And may God help each one of us to identify with our Christian brothers and sisters and accept people based on their faith in the grace of Jesus.