

EXPERIENCING GOD'S GRACE

Part 6: Adopted by God's Grace

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"Father I would rather be your slave than your child."

Who would ever make such an odd request of our parents? Yet that was the folly of the Galatians under the influence of their false teachers.

The way for us to avoid the Galatians' folly is to let God's word keep telling us what we have and are in Christ. one of the greatest purposes of daily Bible reading meditation and prayer is just this to get ourselves correctly oriented to remember who and what we are adopted into God's family.¹

I. GALATIANS 4:1-20 (NLT)

A. We used to be like slaves, but now we are adopted (4:1-7)

"Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had.² They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set.³ And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world ⁴ But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.⁵ God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves

¹ (Stott, Larson and Larsen 35)

to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.⁶ And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."⁷ Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

B. Why do you now want to go back to being like slaves? (4:8-11)

Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist.⁹ So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world?¹⁰ You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years.¹¹ I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing.

C. Learn to live as I live...in freedom (4:12-16)

Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles-- free from those laws. You did not mistreat me when I first preached to you.¹³ Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News of Christ.¹⁴ But even though my condition tempted you to reject me, you did not despise me or turn me away. No, you took me in and cared for me as though I were an angel from God or even Christ Jesus himself.¹⁵ Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then? I am sure you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible.¹⁶ Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?

D. These false teachers are trying to trick you (4:17)

Those false teachers are so eager to win your favor, but their intentions are not good. They are trying to shut you off from me so that you will pay attention only to them.

E. I'm in anguish over you (4:18-20)

If someone is eager to do good things for you, that's all right; but let them do it all the time, not just when I'm with you.¹⁹ Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives.²⁰ I wish I were with you right now so I could change my tone. But at this distance I don't know how else to help you."

II. COMMENTS

A. We used to be like slaves (4:1-7)

- Paul expands on the analogy of a child coming of age (see 3:24-26) contrasting believers' lives before salvation (as children and servants) with their lives after salvation (as adults and sons).

- (4:1) children. The Greek word refers to a child too young to talk a minor spiritually and intellectually immature and not ready for the privileges and responsibilities of adulthood.
- (4:2) whatever age their father set. This age varied depending on its culture.
- (4:4) But when the right time came. In God's timetable when the exact religious cultural and political conditions demanded by his perfect plan were in place.

B. Why do you now want to go back to being like slaves? (4:8-11)

- While salvation is the free gift of God it brings with it serious responsibility.
- God requires believers to live holy lives because they are children of a holy God and desire to love and worship him.
- (4:10) observing certain days or months or seasons or years. This is referring to the rituals, ceremonies, and festivals of the Jewish religious calendar which God had given but we're never required for the church. Paul warns the Galatians against legalistically observing them as if they were required by God or could earn favor with him.
- (4:11) I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing. Feared that his effort in establishing and building the Galatian churches might prove to be futile if they fell back into legalism.

C. Learn to live as I live...in freedom (4:12-16)

- Having sternly rebuked the Galatians, Paul changes his approach and makes an appeal based on his strong affection for them.
- (4:12) for I have become like you Gentiles. Paul had been a proud self-righteous pharisee trusting in his own righteousness to save him. But when he came to Christ, he abandoned all efforts to save himself trusting only in God's grace.
- (4:13) Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News. Some think the illness refers to was malaria.

D. These false teachers are trying to trick you (4:17)

- (4:17) The Judaizers appear to have a genuine interest in the Galatians, but their true motive was to exclude the Galatians from God's gracious salvation and win recognition for themselves.

5. Tony Merida, in his book on Galatians, asks the question “do you think most people in your church view the church as a singular family, a group of small families, an event, or a building? Explain your answer.

6. Families are defined by their last names. How do you think we would act toward each other if we all had the same last name?

7. When did you first realize that you were a child of God? Explain how this revelation affected your view of life.

8. Leader's questions (optional).

IV. APPLICATION

Remember, as a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been *adopted* into his family.

1. Your adoption is _____ (John 10:27-29)
2. Your adoption was _____—it cost the adopter a lot. (His only Son--John 3:16)
3. Your adoption cancels any former _____ (all sins are forgiven-- Eph. 1:5-7)
4. Your adoption places the believer under the father's _____ (discipline--Heb. 12:5-7; Prov. 3:11-12)
5. Your adoption gives the adopted child _____ with all other children. (Gal. 4:4-5)

Sources used in this study

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