

Introduction

Context

[Galatians 2:21](#) “... if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” [Galatians 3-4](#) is based on that contrast between righteousness through the law versus righteousness through faith in Jesus. [Galatians 3](#) argues that righteousness is by faith alone. No one is righteous by the law; in fact, everyone is **unrighteous** by the law. The only hope we have is God’s grace and mercy through Jesus’s substitutionary death.

Galatians is clear that you cannot pursue God by **both** personal obedience **and** faith in Jesus. If you pursue God by works, then you are **under the law** and in your sin. If you pursue God by faith alone, then you are **in Christ**.

Main Idea

What does it mean to be in Christ? [Galatians 3:23-29](#) answers that question. This passage gives four answers, which can be summarized as **in Christ, we are children of God**. That is, faith in Jesus reconciles us into a relationship with God.

My prayer this morning is that [Galatians 3:23-29](#) will lead you to rejoice in that relationship. As we read these verses, I pray that you are struck by the significance of God’s grace. We contribute **nothing** to our reconciliation with God, but in His grace, He makes us His children.

If you do not have that relationship with God, I pray that you would see the message of the gospel in these verses. You are separated from God because of your sins. Yet, God is **gracious** to those who have faith in Jesus. He will forgive your sins and establish an eternal relationship with Him.

What does it mean to be in Christ?

Free from the Law (23-25)

First, verses 23-25 explain that **in Christ we are free from the law**. [Galatians 3:23-25](#) “23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,”

Apart from Christ, we are slaves. Verse 23 says that we are held captive and imprisoned under the law. Verse 24 says that the law is our guardian. Some versions will say guardian; some will say tutor. The word refers to a household slave who would be responsible for

taking care of the children of the house until adulthood. [Gal 4:1-7](#) describes this in more detail. The point of this illustration is that the heirs (sons of God) are ironically **lower than a slave** until they are in Christ. The law is the slave to whom we are enslaved.

We are slaves apart from the law as well. [Rom 6:16-23](#) explains that we are **slaves to sin**. A 4th-century theologian named Pelagius claimed that all people are inherently capable of obeying God. That is, he claimed that people were born without a nature to sin. [Romans 6:16-23](#) refutes Pelagius's claim. We all have a sinful nature; we cannot help but sin. We are sinners because we sin, but we also sin because we are sinners. It is the nature we inherited from Adam.

[Heb 2:15](#) says that we are **slaves to death**. That is, all people are spiritually and eternally dead because all people are sinners ([Rom 3:23](#)). **Benjamin Franklin** wrote, "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." People sometimes evade taxes. You cannot escape death. *Have you considered your eternal future (what comes after your death)?*

Although we are slaves apart from the law (to sin and death), the law imprisoned us. [Gal 3:22](#) says that Scripture (which includes the law) imprisoned us under sin. That is, the law **reveals** that we are slaves of sin. That is the great benefit of the law.

However, Christ set us free. Verse 23 says we were captive "before faith came" and "until the coming faith would be revealed." Verse 24 says that the law was our guardian "until Christ came." Verse 25 says that we are no longer under the law "now that faith has come."

What does this idea of "coming faith" refer to? This does not mean that faith was not present until the New Testament. [Gal 3:6](#) quotes [Gen 15:6](#) which describes Abraham's faith. Faith was present in certain individuals before, during, and after the giving of the law.

I think that "coming faith" refers to the coming of the **object of faith**. Abraham had faith in God's promises, but his faith alone did not atone for his sins. He was still a sinner and still under eternal death. The **object of our faith is Christ**. "Until faith comes" and "until Christ comes" are the same idea.

[Rom 7:1-6](#) explains our relationship with the law through the illustration of a marriage. If a married man dies, his wife is no longer bound to him. Christ, who perfectly **obeyed** God, died without personal guilt, but bore my guilt in His death. In Christ's death, I am no longer bound by the law. I am set free from sin, death, and the law.

What does it mean to be in Christ? Verses 23-25 says that one aspect of being in Christ is that **we are set free from the law**.

Adoption (26-27)

Second, verses 26-27 says that **in Christ, we are adopted by God**. [Galatians 3:26-27](#) “26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

We are sons of God. This word “sons” does not apply only to men. In fact, the NIV translates it “children.” Greek, like many languages (e.g., Spanish), will often default to the masculine word when referring to both men and women (cf. [1 John 3:1-10](#)).

There are a couple of ways Scripture describes us becoming God’s children. [Rom 8:14-17](#) describes becoming children of God by means of **adoption**. If you continue reading in [Romans 9-11](#), you see that Scripture explains that adoption is - those who were not God’s people **become** God’s children through faith in Jesus ([Rom 9:26](#); [Hos 1:10](#)). Some people have a very low view of adoption and, as a result, may miss the significance of this doctrine. Adoption does not make someone your child in **name only**. Adoption makes someone just as much a child as if you gave birth to them. In the same way, we are not children of God in name only. We are **truly and completely** children of God by adoption.

[John 3:1-8](#) describes becoming children of God by **new birth**. That is, by my biological birth (born of flesh), I am a child of my biological parents. That birth does not give me a relationship with God, whether I am born as a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or whether I am born as a descendent of Christian parents. Jesus says in [John 3](#) that in Him we are **reborn**. The Holy Spirit makes us alive and unites us with Christ. We are sons of God by new birth.

What does it mean to be “baptized into Christ (vs 27)?” When we are “baptized into Christ,” we “put on Christ.” I don’t think this is saying that baptism in **water** makes us children of God. Now, this verse may refer to water baptism (I am uncertain), but, in the NT, water baptism is presented as an physical display of a spiritual reality.

[Matthew 3:11-12](#) makes that comparison clear. John the Baptist said that he baptized with water, but Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit. That is, water baptism illustrates Spirit baptism. This does not refer to a second filling of the Holy Spirit as Pentecostals claim. All who have faith in Jesus receive the Holy Spirit. I think that [Gal 3:27](#) refers to receiving the Holy Spirit, through whom we are born again as Jesus described in [John 3](#).

In Christ, we are adopted by God.

One Family (28)

Third, verse 28 says that **in Christ, we are one family of believers**. [Galatians 3:28](#) “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.”

There are no distinctions in Christ. This verse does not mean that those distinctions do not exist. There are some who are born of **Jewish** descent and some who are not - that birth does not change when you come to faith in Jesus. Some people are **free** and some are **slaves** - slaves who come to faith in Jesus may still be slaves. In modern-day terms, faith in Jesus does not free you from **poverty** as Prosperity Gospel preachers claim. Likewise, the distinction of male and female does not change in Christ. Our culture attempts to remove a distinction that God Himself established. God made male and female.

However, those distinctions do not affect our standing in Christ. [Galatians 6:15](#) makes that point that the only thing that “counts for anything” is whether we are a new creation. Whether I am a son of Abraham, a son of Christian parents, or a son of atheists - my relationship with God comes from Christ. Whether I am slave, free, rich, or poor - my relationship with God comes from Christ. Whether I am male or female - my relationship with God comes from Christ.

We are all one in Christ. [Ephesians 2:11-22](#) says that Christ has torn down any anything that divides us, made us a new creation without division, and reconciled us all together into one household of God.

*Why do I say that verse 28 teaches that we are **one family of believers**?* Verse 28 does not say anything about family. It says that we are “all one in Christ.” However, the context suggests that this is talking about family. We were under a guardian (a household slave) until Christ ([Gal 3:24-25](#)). We are sons of God in Christ ([Gal 3:26](#)). We are heirs in Christ ([Gal 3:29](#)). If we continue reading, most of chapter 4 is devoted to explaining that we are **God’s children**. So, I think the point of describing our unity in relation to our adoption is that the church is a family.

There are a lot of ways that people do not treat the church like a family. The boy who dates your daughter for 10 years but refuses to marry her - he has chosen to not be part of the family. Many people are comfortable attending church services without committing to a local church in membership. They are dating the church, but choose not to be in that family. *Would you think that I am justified if I abandon my wife and kids because we have too many differences?* Yet, many people are willing to walk away from a church because they of disagreements to join another church with whom they will eventually disagree.

I am grateful that God has united me with this church family. Just as I rejoice when someone is born into my family, I rejoice when someone becomes part of this church family. Just as I

mourn when someone dies in my family, I mourn when someone leaves this church family. Even when my interactions are less-than-pleasant, I thank God that we are a family.

[1 Cor 1:10-13](#) makes the point that those who stir up division in the church are dividing Christ, Himself. When we go beyond disagreement and allow our disagreements to hinder relationships in the church, then we are **working against Christ**. Jesus said that the world will know that we are His disciples by our love for one another ([John 13:35](#)). **The gospel unites us ... division says the gospel is a lie.**

In Christ, we are one family of believers.

Heirs of promise (29)

Fourth, verse 29 says that **in Christ, we are heirs of God**. [Galatians 3:29](#) “29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

In Christ, you are Abraham’s offspring. [Galatians 3:7-9](#) makes this same point. Abraham was justified by faith alone. Those who have faith in Jesus are children of Abraham; that is, we share in God’s blessing to Abraham. Like Abraham, we are justified by faith alone.

I think the reason that the idea of being sons of Abraham is restated so many different ways in Galatians is because many **first-century Jews** relied on their **birth** as the basis of a covenant relationship with God. John the Baptist addressed that belief in [Matthew 3:7-12](#). He warned them that they were on the cusp of God’s judgment; therefore, they should not trust in their birth, believe in the coming Messiah.

In Christ, you are heirs of God’s promise. *What do we **inherit** from God?* Scripture gives a few answers. [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#) says that we inherit God’s kingdom (cf. [1 Cor 15:50](#)). [Hebrews 1:14](#) says that we inherit eternal life. [Hebrews 11:7](#) suggests that we inherit righteousness by faith (like Abraham and Noah). [1 Peter 3:7](#) says that we inherit grace.

I don’t think these are very distinct. I think they all relate to our covenant **relationship** with God. He says, I will be your God and you will be my people. Knowing God is our inheritance - which includes the kingdom, eternal life, righteousness, and grace. Do not exalt the blessings of the inheritance over the God of the inheritance. **We are heirs of God.**

Conclusion

*What does it mean to be **in Christ**?* [Galatians 3:23-29](#) says that **in Christ, we are children of God**. *Do you know God?* If not, you can know Him by genuine faith in Jesus. You are separated from God by your sins (as are all people). But Jesus died to bear the guilt of the sins of those who have faith in Him. In Christ, you can be forgiven of sin and know God.

If you know God, then I hope these verses give you reason to rejoice. We were made for a relationship with God and only in Christ do we know Him. God did not save you for religious activity. He saved you for an eternal relationship - for eternal sonship. **In Christ, we are children of God.**

Closing Scripture: [John 1:12-13](#) “12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”