

LIVE LIKE A CHILD OF GOD

3 ²⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus; ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have “clothed” yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, and with regard to the promise you are heirs.

4 Now I tell you that as long as the heir is a minor, he is no different than a slave, even though he is lord of all; ²but he is under [various] guardians and trustees until the date appointed by his father. ³So we, too, when we were minors, were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born by means of a woman, born under the law, ⁵so that he might redeem those who were under the law [and] so that we might be adopted as sons. ⁶Now because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and he is crying out [to God,] Abba, Father. ⁷So then, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, you are also an heir—[this is] through God.

⁸At that time, not knowing God, you were in bondage to those spirits who by nature are not gods. ⁹But now that you know God—or, rather, are known by God—how is it that you are reverting back again to the weak and worthless rudiments all over again? ¹⁰You are observing days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹I have fears concerning you, that somehow I have labored among you in vain.

¹²Become as I am, because I also became as you are. Brothers, I plead this of you. In no way have you treated me unjustly. ¹³You know that it was because of a physical malady that I preached the gospel to you the first time. ¹⁴Even though my physical condition was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. On the contrary, you received me as [though I were] an angel from God, as [though I were] Christ Jesus [himself]. ¹⁵What has happened to your [sense of] blessing? for I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

¹⁷They are zealously courting you; but not for your benefit. On the contrary, they desire to exclude you, so that you will zealously court them. ¹⁸Now it is always good to be zealously courted for a good purpose—and not only when I am present with you.

¹⁹My little children—with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—²⁰I wish I could be present with you now and change my language, because I am disturbed about you. (Gal. 3:26-4:20)

Introduction

A pastor in Philadelphia remarked that whenever he would take his children’s friends along for dinner he would observe a distinct difference between their behavior and that of his own children.

The difference was not so much seen in their manners or their etiquette, but in the way they ordered their food. More precisely, **what** they ordered from the menu. Once again, the difference was not to be found in the kind of food they ordered, but in the price of the entrees they chose.

When they sat down at the table and the menus were brought, the pastor would always inform his children's friends that they could order whatever they desired. But inevitably the same thing would always happen: while his own children might order the most expensive entrée on the menu, their friends would always order some less expensive item.

Why? While his children knew that he was their father and that he loved them, their friends were conscious of the fact that they were not a part of the family and so they hesitated to accept the privileges that belonged by right to the children.

That pastor went on to make the following observation: Sometimes we as Christians hesitate to accept our position as children of God and relate to our heavenly Father more like guests and strangers rather than like sons and daughters. That is just what was happening to the Christians in the province of Galatia: they were forgetting their identity as children of God and reverting back to a life of spiritual bondage.

Because we have become children of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us be sure to live like children of God.

I. Live Like a Child of God, ...Because You have been Adopted by God (3:26-4:7)

In chapter three, verse 26, the Apostle Paul declares, *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."* The Jewish believer is no longer a minor under the severe tutelage of a guardian; he now shares in the status of the Son of God Himself, having full and direct access to the Father's throne. The writer of the Book of Hebrews emphasizes this fact to the predominantly Jewish Christian believers to whom he writes:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess ... ¹⁶Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:14,16)

The Gentile believer is no longer a slave to sin and separated from the household of God; he, too, now shares in the status of the Son of God Himself, as the Apostle Paul assures him:

... you were at that time without Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and being without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were "far away" have been brought "near" by the blood of Christ ... ¹⁹So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the family of God. (Eph. 2:12-13,19)

Paul emphasizes the fact that we have become sons of God *“through faith in Christ Jesus.”* The Apostle John writes: *“to all who did receive him [Christ Jesus], to those who believe on his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God”* (Jn. 1:12.)

In verse 27 Paul goes on to explain, *“all of you who were baptized into Christ have ‘clothed’ yourselves with Christ.”* To be spiritually “baptized into Christ” means to share in His death so as to also share in His resurrection life, note Romans 6:3-4,

... do you not know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3-4)

True faith in Christ means not only trusting in Christ’s atoning death on our behalf, but also entrusting ourselves to Him, allowing ourselves to become spiritually joined with Him in His crucifixion and entering into His resurrection life. To *“clothe” yourself with Christ* means to be identified with Christ, to share in His identity. By way of illustration, a young boy may put on the jersey of his favorite football player in an attempt to become identified with him.

In chapter four, verses 1-3, Paul reiterates the spiritual situation that existed prior to the coming of Christ. The Old Testament believing Jew, (the one who trusted in the LORD for his salvation and looked forward to the coming of the Messiah,) had the spiritual status of being a “minor,” or, an “adolescent child,” in his Father’s house. He belonged to the family of God but was not able to assume the privileges and responsibilities that come with full maturity; he was under the supervision of a spiritual “guardian” in the form of the Old Testament ceremonial law, note, again, Galatians 3:24-25 *“the law became our guardian for Christ, so that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that the [one in whom we place our] faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”*

The Gentile unbeliever had the status of being a slave in the Father’s house. He was not a member of the family and had no part in the inheritance. The words the Lord Jesus spoke to the unbelieving Jews also describe the spiritual status of the unbelieving Gentile:

Jesus answered them, I tell you the truth, Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵And the slave does not remain in the household forever; the son remains [in the household] forever. ³⁶If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (Jn. 8:34-36)

But, according to verse 4, *“when the time of fulfillment came, God sent forth His Son.”* He did so in order that *“he might redeem those who were under the law.”* That is to say, He did so in order that He might redeem the Old Testament Jew from both the penalty of the moral law as well as from the oppression of the

ceremonial law. Furthermore, He did so in order that *“we might be adopted as sons.”* By means of Christ’s atoning work, God redeemed the believing Gentiles from their status of slaves to sin and adopt them into the household of God. Note: When the Apostle Paul writes, *“so that we might be adopted as sons,”* he, as the apostle to the Gentiles, is identifying himself with the Gentiles.

In verse 6 the apostle assures us as believers in Christ, *“God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, and he is crying out [to God], Abba, Father.”* Just as God sent forth His Son into the world to save all who receive Him (vs. 4,) so God sent forth the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all who receive His Son (vs. 6.) From His residence in the believer’s heart, the Holy Spirit raises up the cry to God of *“Abba, Father.”* This is the cry by which the eternal Son of God Himself addressed His Father. Praying to His heavenly Father in the garden of Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus cried out, *“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. However, not what I will, but what you will”* (Mk. 14:36.) Since it is the Father Himself who sent the Spirit to carry on such a ministry, this is the guarantee that the Father will receive the Spirit’s intercession on behalf of His children who have been redeemed by the blood of His Son Jesus Christ.

Note that it is the Spirit Himself who is directly addressing the Father on behalf of the believer. This is a spiritual intercession being made on behalf of the believer, not a personal plea being made by the believer himself. Consequently, the grounds for assurance are founded upon the work of God, not based upon the emotions or the prayers or the endurance of the individual Christian.

So then, concludes the Apostle Paul in verse 7, *“you are no longer a slave, but a son.”*

Let us therefore live like a child of God, because we have been adopted by God and have become sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

II. Live Like a Child of God, ...and Not Like a Spiritual Slave (4:8-12a)

In verse 8 the apostle reminds these Gentile Christians of their spiritual condition prior to the time they came to faith in Jesus Christ. At that time they did not know God; i.e.; they had no personal relationship and acceptance with the true and living God. They had shut Him out of their lives and consequently they were given over to spiritual ignorance and darkness and bondage; note Romans 1:18-19, 21, 25, a passage in which Paul describes the Gentile condition,

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ... ²¹although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were

darkened ... ²⁵They exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.
(Rom. 1:18-19,21,25)

Furthermore, they were in bondage to those spirits who by nature are not gods. That is to say, they were enslaved to the practices of idolatry and under the dominion of the devil and his demonic spirits, note Ephesians 2:1-2, a passage in which *“the ruling prince of the air”* is a reference to the devil: *“you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you once walked in accord with the course of this world, [which is] in accord with the ruling prince of the air, [that is,] the spirit who is now working in the sons of disobedience.”* Prior to coming to Christ, they were adrift in a sea of darkness; not knowing the “polar star,” they set their sights on “falling stars” that led them in circles of frustration, confusion, guilt and despair.

But now, Paul continues in verse 9, you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God. They have met the Lord Jesus Christ, He has set them free from their spiritual bondage, He has granted them the forgiveness of their sins, He has brought them back to God and has brought them into the very household of God. Now they *“are known by God,”* they are accepted by God and received as members of His household because of their relationship with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So why is it, asks the apostle in verse 9b, that the Galatians are now turning back to a life of spiritual and religious bondage? The Galatians were not returning to their old pagan bondage of idolatry; rather, they were allowing themselves to be brought into a pseudo-Christian bondage by the false teachers who were troubling the churches throughout the region of Galatia. Verse 10 is referring to the Old Testament ceremonial laws that were being re-introduced by the false teachers as a mandatory requirement for salvation. The apostle calls those laws *“weak and worthless rudiments”* because in themselves they had no power to save, they were intended to stimulate a desire for salvation and illustrate the sanctifying and purifying work the Savior would accomplish in the lives of His people. The false teaching being propagated among the churches of Galatia was instructing Christians to take their focus off of Christ and re-focus on themselves and their own efforts to make themselves acceptable to God by means of their adherence to the requirements of the law, and especially their compliance with the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament.

Sometimes as Christians we can make the same mistake as these Galatians. We do so whenever we take our eyes off of the grace and strength of Christ and seek to produce our own “good works.” By way of illustration, we do so whenever we view ourselves as “laborers” in a fruit packing plant, with the Lord serving as the “foreman” who assigns us our daily task and quota of fruit we must produce; rather than recognizing the truth that the Lord Himself and He alone is the

Source and Producer of all good spiritual fruit—we must depend upon Him and yield ourselves to Him.

We as Christians make the same mistake as the Galatians whenever we take our eyes off of the cross of Christ and seek to atone for our own sins. Returning to the illustration of the workers in a fruit packing plant, whenever we fail our Lord, we have the tendency to seek to make amends by ourselves, “working overtime” or “avoiding the boss,” rather than coming directly to our gracious Lord, confessing our sins and asking for His mercy, forgiveness, and restoration unto newness of life. We tend to entertain such fears as “I’m going to have my wages deducted and lose my job!” But the Lord Jesus assures us, “I have paid the price for you and have caused you to be adopted into the Owner's own family. Just trust Me and draw on My grace.”

Let us live like children of God, and no longer live like spiritual slaves—by virtue of the work of Christ we have been adopted into the household of God.

III. Live Like a Child of God, ...by Remembering the Hour You First Believed (4:12b-20)

“Become as I am,” urges the Apostle Paul in verse 12a, *“because I also became as you are.”* Paul is remembering the day he first met Christ, the day he was first confronted by the divine righteousness of the Son of God and discovered that Christ graciously offered to supply him with that righteousness so that he might become acceptable to God. Consequently, Paul abandoned all trust in his own efforts to make himself acceptable to God and by faith received the righteousness of God offered in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, note Philippians 3:7-9,

... whatever things were gains to me [i.e.; all his past efforts to produce his own righteousness] these things I now regard as losses on account of Christ. ⁸But much more than that, I regard all things as losses on account of the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I have suffered the loss of all things. Indeed, I regard all such things as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹and be found in him—not having my own righteousness that is derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God receive by faith. (Phil. 3:7-9)

In verses 13-15 Paul reminds the Galatians of the reception he received from them when he first brought them the good news that Jesus saves. He writes that it was *“because of a physical malady that I preached the gospel to you the first time.”* His coming to Galatia was due to some physical malady that had caused him to alter his scheduled itinerary.

He goes on to indicate that his physical infirmity was of such a nature as to tempt the Galatians to reject him. Either due to physical repulsiveness of his

condition, or the assumption that such an affliction must be a sign of God's displeasure, the Galatians were naturally tempted to reject the apostle and his message. But rather than reject him, the Galatians welcomed him as if he were an angel from God, indeed, as if he were the Lord Jesus Himself. They considered themselves to be blessed by having met the apostle and having received the gospel from him—they viewed his coming as a great source of spiritual blessing to themselves, which, indeed, it was. They were willing to do anything for Paul—even going so far as to be willing to pluck out their own eyes, (no doubt the apostle is here speaking figuratively for emphasis.)—so deep was their gratitude to him for having brought them the message of salvation.

Paul now calls upon the Galatians to remember their initial response to the gospel and the joy and blessing they received when they put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as He was offered through Paul's preaching.

Let us live like children of God, by remembering the hour we first believed. Let us recall the hour when, like Paul, we recognized that Christ is our only hope of salvation, and when we realized that He graciously offers His great salvation to us. At that time we were joyfully conscious of the fact that He was inviting us, welcoming us, into the household of God, presenting us to His Father as newly begotten children of God. Let us recall the hour when, like the Galatians, we rejoiced that at last we were free from our bondage to sin and its dreadful penalty. Through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ our status had suddenly and irreversibly been changed from that of spiritual bondage to that of adoption into the household and family of God.

Let us remember the hour we first believed: we did not produce and present a "resume" of personal merit, we simply trusted in Jesus and rejoiced in the wonder that we had received the forgiveness of our sins and had now become a child of God. Let us remember that day, and let us live each day with that same trust and joy in Jesus Christ our Savior

Conclusion

This is what was happening to the Christians in Galatia: they were forgetting their identity as children of God and reverting back to a life of spiritual bondage.

Let us be sure that we do not do the same thing. Because we have become children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, let us daily live like children of God.

As "*sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,*" may the words of the hymn writer, Hattie E. Buell, be the song of our hearts:

I once was an outcast stranger on earth,
A sinner by choice and an alien by birth!

But I've been adopted,
My name's written down,
An heir to a mansion, a robe, and a crown.

I'm a child of the King,
A child of the King!
With Jesus my Savior,
I'm a child of the King!