

The Glory of a Being a Christian

Galatians 3:23-29

Intro: Boys and girls, when I was a boy, I remember my mother reading me a book entitled "Are You My Mother?". I hope your parents have read it to you – it's a very good book. It's the story of a little baby bird who pops out of his shell when his mother is away looking for food. And so, the little bird decides to go looking for his mother - but he has no idea what she looks like. So, the little bird begins to ask everyone he meets the same question: "Are you my mother?" He asks a kitten and a hen and a dog and a cow – but obviously, none of them are his mother. He even asks a boat and a plane – but none of them are his mother.

I won't give away the ending – but you can imagine how badly that little bird wanted to find his mother. He needed a mother to provide food, protection, and most importantly, a true understanding of who he was and how to live in the world. Without a mother that little bird was as lost as you can possibly be. Because this little bird did not know his mother's identity, in a profound sense, he did not know his own.

We live in a world full of people who are profoundly lost – not only in a spiritual sense, but in a psychic sense. They don't know who they are. They have no sense of why they are here. The purpose of life is a mystery to them. They have no over-arching meta-narrative which would give them their psychic bearings. No sense of family history that would inform their identity and place and purpose in the world. And so, people wander aimlessly through life wondering "who am I? Why am I here? What am I for?"

This is, in part, what makes the gospel such glorious good news! It gives us an identity. It gives us a Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. He provides for us and protects us and explains exactly who we are and why we are here.

At the heart of the good news of the gospel is the message that, by faith in Christ, God Himself becomes our Father. We become His sons. The redemption story is, at heart, an adoption story. A Christian is someone who is able to say, with full joy and confidence: "God is my Father, and all His riches are freely mine in Christ Jesus my Lord."

It is an indescribably magnificent thing to be a Christian! And so, the title of my message this morning is, "The Glory of Being a Christian".

In our text Paul explains the glory of being a Christian by contrasting life "before faith came" (vs 23) and life "now that faith has come" (vs 25).

I. Before Faith Came

Paul outlines both the history of world and the biography of every Christian as a story of “before” and “after”. “Before faith came” means, before Christ came, before the gospel came in all its fullness. The history of the whole world can be summarized as the age “before Christ” and the gospel age - “but now Christ has come”. But this is also the personal story of those who come to faith in Christ – there was the time “before faith came” and there is the glorious “but now”, the time of living by faith, united to Christ.

In verses 23 and 24 Paul uses two analogies to explain what life was like “before faith came”: prison and tutelage.

A. A time of prison

23 “Before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.”

The Greek word Paul uses for “we were held captive” means “to protect by military guards”. He isn’t saying that the time before faith came was sort of like a prison experience. He’s saying that’s exactly what it was.

What does it mean to be held “captive under the law”? It means that the commands of God stood as military guards over our life – inexorably chaining us to our guilt before God. The law says “thou shalt not” and the law says, “the soul that sins shall surely die”. And that law cannot be avoided, the penalty can’t be escaped. Through the law every sinner is bound fast to their guilt and shame waiting to be handed over to the death that they deserve. That’s the function of the law.

Paul uses this strong language of “held captive” and “imprisoned” to show us how hopeless and helpless we are before the mighty and holy law of God. Before faith came, we had no ability whatsoever to escape this guardian or in any way avoid the eternal condemnation we deserved.

B. Tutelage: A time of discipline, rules

24 “So then, the law was guardian until Christ came”.

The Greek word used for guardian is “*paidagogos*”. It was a commonly understood duty, usually given to a slave or servant to act as baby-sitter for young boys.

F.F. Bruce, “The **παιδαγωγός** was the personal slave-attendant who accompanied the free-born boy wherever he went, from the time he left his nurse’s care. It was

his duty to teach the boy good manners (with the use of the birch, if necessary), take him to school...wait for him there, then take him home and test his memory by making him recite the lessons he had learned.¹

Ancient drawings of guardians usually depict them with a spanking rod in their hand. Their primary task was not to teach but to discipline. They were there to make sure that their charge kept the rules and to punish him when he failed to do so.

Paul says that this is what life was like before faith came. It was a life of rules and discipline. The law of Moses was full of rules and regulations touching every aspect of Jewish life. There were rules concerning what you could eat, what you could wear, sacrifices that needed to be offered, feasts to observe, rituals to perform. The law was rule upon rule - and punishments for violations of the rules. That was the law.

The law acted as prison guard and tutor "until Christ came"! The good news of the gospel comes to people who are imprisoned, helplessly chained to the burden of their own guilt. It comes to people who are under the rules and regulations of the law – rules and regulations that prescribe a righteous life but can only condemn a sinner. But that was all "before faith came". In the gospel there is a glorious new era! "But now!"

II. "But Now that Faith has Come"

When Christ Jesus came into this world, he brought with him a new era, a new age, a new reality for those who would believe in Him. This is the age of faith, the age of grace. Most importantly, it is the age of Christ Jesus! Notice, in the next few verse how often Paul mentions Christ.

- In Christ you are all sons of God
- Baptized into Christ
- Put on Christ
- You are all one in Christ
- If you are Christ's

This new age is defined by Christ. It is the experience of union with Him. In the following verses Paul explains that in Christ we have gained a new status, a new family and a new destiny.

A. A New Status (vs 25-27)

¹ Bruce, F. F. (1982). [*The Epistle to the Galatians: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 182). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 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.

One of the most important categories of the new gospel reality is the category of status. We don't tend to think of ourselves in terms of status – but in the ancient world status was essential to your self-understanding. You were either a citizen of Rome, with all the rights and privileges of that status - or not. You were either a free man or a servant or slave. You were either a man or a woman. A child or a man. All your rights and privileges in society, such as right to vote, right to own property, right to a fair trial, etc, was determined by your status.

In verses 25-27, Paul explains that by faith in Jesus Christ, we have gained the highest status with the most glorious privileges possible for mankind – sons of God with all the rights and privileges thereof. Paul will talk about this more in chapter 4, but for now, let's just let this astonishing truth sink in – by faith in Christ Jesus we have been made sons of God!

Ryken, "There is no higher status a human being can ever achieve than to be called a son of the Most High God."

To be a son of God means that all the rights and privileges of heaven are yours!

- A son of God has the right to take shelter in the loving, omnipotent arms of God.
- A son of God has the right to boldly approach the eternal throne and ask things of their heavenly Father.
- A son of God has the confident assurance that he or she is eternally loved – for God the Father dearly loves His children.
- A son of God knows that his Father will one day give to him the glories of heaven – all freely, by virtue of our sonship in Jesus Christ.

All this comes to a sinner freely by faith and through faith. Jesus came to his own and his own received him not.

John 1:12–13 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.

What a wonderful thing it is to be a Christian! God has brought us out of the lost alienation and captivity of our sin and made us, freely and fully, sons of God.

Now some might wish that Paul would say “sons and daughters of God” – but that would miss the point. In Roman times, daughters didn’t receive privileges. Ever. They couldn’t vote. They couldn’t own property. They never gained “sonship” status. But in Christ, every man and every woman **does!** Regardless of your status in human society, all who are in Christ receive the same glorified status in heavens society. All are sons of God.

This is at the essence of what God has done for us. The whole point of redemption is to make sinners into sons. The Christian name for God is “Father”.

Verse 27 deserves a sermon all by itself. But the short explanation is this – when we come to faith in Christ we are united to Christ – that’s the meaning of baptism. Baptism is the outward sign of the inward reality of union with Christ – and by virtue of that union, all the status of sonship that belongs to Jesus now belongs to us! By union with Christ, we are made God’s children. We have the status of sons. It is the highest privilege of love the Father could bestow upon us.

1 John 3:1 “Behold what manner of love that we should be called the children of God – and that is what we are.”

B. A New Family

In our union with Christ, we gain not only a loving Heavenly Father, but a whole family of spiritual brothers and sisters!

²⁸There 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.

All human social distinctions of ethnicity, rank and sex are superseded by the heavenly spiritual distinction of sonship. This doesn’t mean social distinctions are eradicated – we maintain our ethnicity and social rank and gender. But these things, though they are the ultimate defining distinctions in this world, become secondary distinctions in the kingdom of God. All these distinctions fall to the background in the presence of the great new reality of sonship in Christ.

I think this is a critically important truth to remember in our time. There is a teaching that is gaining wide acceptance in our society and even in the church that views all the world as divided into two groups – the oppressed and the oppressor, the marginalized and the dominant, the victim and the perpetrator. And those distinctions are ultimate. They define who you are. Well, this teaching, known as Critical Theory, is a blatant denial and repudiation of the gospel truth. The gospel sees the whole world in terms of unity, not division. We are all created in God’s image and all fallen in Adam. And what does

distinguish us – rank, ethnicity, and sex and whatever other distinction you might name – all these fade in significance in the presence of this glorious new unity and kinship we share in Christ.

I think it's just magnificent to know that I can travel anywhere in the world and meet people who are very different from me in every way the world counts differences – and find a genuine, eternal brother or sister in Christ.

I remember the first time I went to Haiti with Eric Hausler. I'd never seen such poverty. We visited a where a child was sick. The mother was haggard, middle-aged woman: as impoverished as humanly possible, little to no education, didn't know my language – and yet as we talked with her about the things of God, the joy in her face and the light in her eyes revealed the eternal bond we shared. This was my sister. My precious sister in Christ. It is a priceless and holy thing to be able to say that. What an amazing gift to belong to the family of God.

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.

The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above!

What amazing good news we have to declare to this lost and alienated world. Come to Christ and find your true heavenly Father. Come to Christ and gain a whole new family, bound by ties that are more precious than blood.

C. A New Destiny

²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

If you are Christ's, then you are an heir. There is a great and vast inheritance promised to you. You are heirs according to the promise. What promise? The promise God made to Abraham and to his offspring – I will be a God to you. I will be your shield and your very great reward. I will give you this land – signifying the eternal inheritance of a new heaven and earth. To be a Christian is to be fabulously, unspeakably wealthy.

Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, is worth \$182 Billion.

Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, is worth \$118 billion.

Elon Musk is worth \$105 billion.

These men are pitiful paupers compared to your riches in Christ. By faith in Christ, you have an inheritance that is so vastly beyond the wealth of this world that you can't compare it. What dollar value can you place on being a son of God? What dollar value can you place on having God Himself as your great reward? What dollar value will you

give to the wonder of Christ dying on the cross for you? What monetary value could you place on the glory of having all your sin freely forgiven, to be freely justified by God, thoroughly sanctified by His Spirit, miraculously glorified by His power? What does this world have that can compare to the sheer overwhelming worth of one day stepping into the presence of Christ and dwelling with God forever in a new heaven and earth?

Do you see how wonderful the gospel truly is?

1. It promises a glorious status for rebels and sinners. By faith in Jesus we become the beloved sons of God with all the privileges and honor and glory of that title.
2. It creates a new family where once there had only been division. The gospel is the only power on earth that is able to heal racial divides and bring peace between men and women, to bring together the rich and the poor. The gospel brings deep love and fellowship where the world knows only discord and distrust.
3. The gospel brings what we needed most – it brings us into the embrace of our Heavenly Father. Jesus did so that we could call His Father, “our Father”. And having God as our Father and Jesus as our Savior – we are the richest and most blessed people in the world. All by grace and all through faith and all because of Jesus.