

## Galatians 3:26 - 4:20 ~ Sons of God and known by God ~ Discussion Questions

**Review:** In verses 3:15-24, Paul uses the example of Abraham to reiterate his earlier points. He says that God made a promise to Abraham and has not revoked it. God blessed the world through Abraham by sending Jesus as one of Abraham's descendants. The law was given to Moses many centuries later for two reasons: on the positive side it reveals the nature and will of God and shows people how to live. On the negative side, it points out people's sins and shows that it is impossible to please God by trying to obey His laws. Paul then wrote of the superiority of salvation by *faith* over trying to keep the Jewish laws. God knew that we were the prisoners of sin, but he provided a way of escape—faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Would you like to be part of a different family? Why? What one would you choose?
2. In verse 3:26, Paul says, "You are all sons of God." Does that really mean that *everyone* is a child of God? (Romans 8:13-17, John 8:44)
3. What rights, privileges, and responsibilities do we have as earthly sons and daughters? How do these correspond with the rights, privileges, and responsibilities we have as children of God?
4. How can being "clothed with Christ" (v. 27) help us to break down cultural barriers? (v. 28) Give an example—either positive or negative—from your own life. (Romans 10:12)
5. In verses 4:1-7, Paul gives an analogy involving children, heirs, slaves, and sons. Can you describe this relationship in your own words?
6. As a Christian, do you feel you have more rules and regulations you feel you have to follow than you did before or that non-Christians have to follow?
7. In verses 4:8-11 Paul asks the Galatians why they are turning back to their old ways? Do we ever do that today? How? Why?
8. In verses 12-16, Paul contrasts the way the Galatians treated him before with the way they are now responding negatively to his teachings. He praises them for having treated him in the past "as if I were Jesus himself." How do you respond to people who are sick, depressed, chronically ill, homeless, hungry, or otherwise less able than you? Would your response be any different if you resolved to treat them "as if [they] were Jesus himself"?
9. Describe a situation in which you did or did not respond to a trying situation in a joyful manner. (4:15)
10. Why did some believers turn away from Paul? (4:16) Do you ever do that? What motivated the Judaizers to turn the Galatians against Paul? (4:17) How does this happen today?

**1. Would you like to be part of a different family? Why? What one would you choose?**

**2. In verse 3:26, Paul says, "You are all sons of God." Does that really mean that everyone is a child of God? (Romans 8:13-17, John 8:44)**

It's important not to include the second part of the sentence, "You are all sons of God *through faith in Christ Jesus.*" Two verses back (3:24) Paul said the law led us to Christ that we might be justified by faith in him and, then, by adoption, the justified believer becomes a full heir in God's family, with all the attendant rights and privileges, which Paul will describe in 4:1-7.

In v. 26 and v. 29 (the grand finale to this section), Paul brings the discussion back to who are the true 'children of Abraham.' In v. 26, those who have faith in Christ Jesus are God's children, while in v. 29 those who belong to Christ are Abraham's offspring (seed); the expressions are synonymous. By now, any listener (or reader) will be well aware that one's standing before God is not grounded on observance of the law, but on faith.

Recall that Galatians and Romans move along on parallel paths with one often clarifying the other. So let's look at what Romans says about 'sons of God.'

Romans 8:13-17 – <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, <sup>14</sup> because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, " 'Abba,' Father." <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

So we see that God is the father of all in the sense that he created all humans, and his love and care are extended to all. But *not* all are his children. Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews of his day, "You belong to your father, the devil." (John 8:44) People become children of God through faith in God's son. In 8:15, Paul speaks of the 'spirit of *sonship*,' or 'adoption,' which granted to the adopted son all the privileges of a natural son, including inheritance rights. So while Christ is God's son by nature, Christians are God's adopted sons by grace.

**3. What rights, privileges, and responsibilities do we have as earthly sons and daughters? How do these correspond with the rights, privileges, and responsibilities we have as children of God?**

**Rights.** A right is an inherent, irrevocable entitlement held by all citizens or all human beings from the moment of birth. The earthly or human right we generally think of first is the right of inheritance. But we also have the right to a surname and the right of citizenship. In earlier days and in other countries, human rights would include position (lordship vs. commoner, free person vs. slave), profession, education, wealth, and care.

Interestingly, Thomas Jefferson and the framers of the U.S. Constitution believed that rights from our creator (God) were broader than human rights. They felt that everyone had the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These, Jefferson and his collaborators agreed, are gifts from the creator that can't be taken away. Put slightly differently, they're universal birthrights.

The Constitution and its amendments added meat to these bones. Initially, they guaranteed such birthrights as free speech, due process, habeas corpus (requires a person under arrest to be brought before a judge or into court), speedy public trials, and secure homes and property. Others have since been added.

**Privileges.** In contrast to a right, a privilege is conditional and granted only after birth. Rights and privileges overlap somewhat, but privileges would include things such as freedom of choice (choose a religion, for example), status, rank, protection, acquire a job, etc. It goes without saying that people in the western world have far more privileges than Muslims or people in China, Russia or most third-world countries.

With respect to God, our major privileges are being an heir of God, having salvation and eternal life in Heaven simply for having faith in Christ and God's amazing grace to us and love for us.

**Responsibilities.** Earthly rights cannot be taken away from us, but privileges can if we don't live up to our responsibilities. Obvious responsibilities including obeying the laws of the land, paying income tax, behaving responsibly (feeding our children, driving safely, not doing drugs, taking care of your health, etc.), taking care of our parents, serving in the military, and so on. People have different feelings about taking care of needy people, the environment, animals, history, and a whole range of services provided by charitable organizations. And here, of course, is where our responsibilities to God come into play.

Earlier in Galatians, Paul emphasizes that with Christ's death on the cross, we are no longer slaves to the law and we are redeemed from its curse. Nevertheless, the law is still a very good guide to our *responsibilities* to God and others—loving God, keeping the Sabbath, loving one another, caring for our parents, not killing, lying, stealing or committing adultery.

[See additional notes at the end of Galatians 2:11-21 pointing out the Hebrew (the language of the OT), term *torat moshe* is best translated into English as “the Teaching of Moses” but when it was first translated into Greek (known as the Septuagint) it was translated as “the Law of Moses” rather than “teaching” or “instruction” thus leading to a great deal of confusion and controversy, which continues to this day. The point is that this instruction or teaching is still very useful to us today in understanding our responsibilities as sons and daughters of God.

#### **4. How can being “clothed with Christ” (v. 27) help us to break down cultural barriers? (v. 28) Give an example—either positive or negative—from your own life.**

Unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social, and gender distinctions.

Romans 10:12 – <sup>12</sup> For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup> for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

#### **5. In verses 4:1-7, Paul gives an analogy involving children, heirs, slaves, and sons. Can you describe this relationship in your own words?**

Paul opens this section with an illustration from regular life namely that a young child is not much better off than a slave because he has to obey his guardians and trustees until he reaches the age of inheritance. Nevertheless, the heir to an estate is in a better position than a slave for, unlike the slave, he knows that one day he will inherit some of his father's property. Paul says that's the way it was with us before Christ came; we were like children enslaved “under the basic principles of the world.” (v. 4:3) This means false, worldly, religious laws (teachings) such as circumcision, kosher eating and drinking, observing

religious festivals, etc. However, our freedom was made possible by the sending of God's son, Jesus, to redeem us that God might adopt us as his very own that we might be heirs and receive the full rights of sons.

**6. As a Christian, do you feel you have more rules and regulations you feel you have to follow than you did before or that non-Christians have to follow?**

Even though we are the heirs to God's kingdom and no longer subject to the "Law," does it sometimes feel that you have more rules and restrictions on your life than other people do? Walking in God's ways and obeying his commands can sometimes feel restrictive: be compassionate, be kind, don't gossip, be absolutely honest, don't be lustful, go to church, don't grumble, provide for others, love your enemies, work hard, don't show anger, spread the Good News, and so many more.

**7. In verses 4:8-11 Paul asks the Galatians why they are turning back to their old ways? Do we ever do that today? How? Why?**

After going through the market Street Mission program to beat an addiction, where do they tell graduates to absolutely not go? Back to the old neighborhood where you got in trouble with drugs and alcohol—Paterson, Jersey City, Newark. And how many guys feel they are strong enough, they can handle it, they won't go back to their old ways? About one-third. And how many of those relapse in the first six months? Almost all.

Look at the end of verse 9: "Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?" Paul was perplexed that Christians that were known by God, that were heirs to the kingdom of God would want to turn back to "those weak and miserable principles" and their old life of slavery. The crazy thing is that it's no different today, 2,000 years later.

**8. In verses 12-16, Paul contrasts the way the Galatians treated him before with the way they are now responding negatively to his teachings. He praises them for having treated him in the past "as if I were Jesus himself." How do you respond to people who are sick, depressed, chronically ill, homeless, hungry, or otherwise less able than you? Would your response be any different if you resolved to treat them "as if [they] were Jesus himself"?**

**9. Describe a situation in which you did or did not respond to a trying situation in a joyful manner. (4:15)**

**10. Why did some believers turn away from Paul? (v. 4:16) Do you ever do that? What motivated the Judaizers to turn the Galatians against Paul? (v. 4:17) How does this happen today?**

Paul felt that people were turning away from him because he was telling them the truth. You've heard the slogan, "the truth hurts," and it often does, but it's generally better than lying. A saying: "The truth hurts but it doesn't kill. The lie pleases but it doesn't heal."

Paul didn't shy away from telling the truth as we all too often do. When a person does poorly in a job, most bosses will say something. But when a volunteer does a poor job on a project, the leader will often still praise them (or not say anything at all) because, after all, you don't want to discourage your volunteers. But in the long run, this lack of truth doesn't help anyone—the organization doesn't get done what it should and the volunteer continues doing a sub-par job thinking it's just fine.

The Judaizers wanted to shut the believers off from Paul so they would get their attention and loyalty. Basically, they wanted to build themselves up by having lots of followers. Like politicians, perhaps? Entertainers? Tweeters? Church leaders?

## Galatians 3:26 - 4:20 ~ Scripture Verses

### Sons of God and known by God

<sup>26</sup> You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Ch 4: <sup>1</sup> What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. <sup>2</sup> He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. <sup>3</sup> So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. <sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, " 'Abba', Father." <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

### Paul's Concern for the Galatians

<sup>8</sup> Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? <sup>10</sup> You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! <sup>11</sup> I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

<sup>12</sup> I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. <sup>13</sup> As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. <sup>14</sup> Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. <sup>15</sup> What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. <sup>16</sup> Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

<sup>17</sup> Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. <sup>18</sup> It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. <sup>19</sup> My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, <sup>20</sup> how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!