

Clothed In Christ

Galatians 3:26-29

With Study Questions

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Haves and Have-Nots

Have you ever been made to feel as if you were a second-class citizen in the kingdom of God? Paul has been dealing with this throughout this epistle. Certain people in the churches of Galatia were seeking to stratify the church between the *haves* and the *have-nots*.

The *haves* were the people who were still operating under the Mosaic ceremonial law. They took great pride in their having been circumcised and were seeking to compel others to join their little club of superiority. The requirement to participate in their Christian sub-culture went all the way to accusing others of not being saved. For them, faith alone in Christ alone was insufficient; more had to be added.

Paul dismisses anything any person can do to augment their own justification before God. He then spent a little time explaining the purpose of the ceremonial law (washings, sacrifices, temple rituals, etc.), which was to foreshadow the cross and lead people to be justified by faith in Christ.

The Great Equalizer

Now Paul will give further explanation of how faith in Christ is the great equalizer in the church. In terms of finding favor with God, or being justified before God, or having peace with God, there is no room in the church for the *haves* and *have-nots*. It shouldn't be too difficult to realize what an insult it would be to the blood of Christ to suggest that one covered by that blood is somehow insufficient before God.

Who then What

At this point, one might ask "But doesn't God have requirements? Are we not called to live a certain kind of life?" The answer to this is clearly "yes," and will be addressed in the later chapters of this epistle. But it is absolutely critical for Christians to understand who they are before they understand what they should do. To teach challenging moral behavior without emphasizing God-given, gracious sonship will merely turn the church into a bunch of people working ever so hard to obtain something that they can never truly have.

Understanding who I am in Christ and what God has done for me, not only grants me unwavering peace with God – having been built upon the rock, who is Christ – but is also the biblical springboard into holy living. For eleven chapters Paul taught the Romans who they were in Christ and how it was so. Then, with the mercies of God at the forefront of their minds, he challenges them to a certain kind of behavior.

The evolutionists tell our youth they descended from slime and then wonder why they act accordingly. The Christian is to know he is wonderfully and fearfully made. The Christian is told that he is saved by grace through faith, then there is the mention of the good works (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Let us now look at who we are.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26-29).

The sum of these verses is the son-ship and promises of God are acquired by faith in Christ rather than ethnic or religious lineage, gender, or societal status. Paul starts,

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26).

Universal Brotherhood

It would be easy to skim over verse 26 without appreciating the magnitude of Paul's proclamation. Spirituality is at an all-time high. It is not uncommon for people to appeal to the brotherhood of man and a universal childhood of God.

Certainly there is a sense in which all men are brothers. We have a similar psychological, biological, and intellectual make-up which separates us from animals and plants. Men have souls which will last forever. One can even say that all are God's creatures and made in His image. But none of this is the same as being a son.

Behold!

Being a child of God is something which causes John to halt in his writings and direct his readers to pause and consider the glory of such a calling.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1)!

Being a child of God is not merely being a creation of God. Being a child of God is the result of God's love. But how do we know we are numbered among those who are called His children?

Knowing You're a Child

We know we are God's child, initially, by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:14-16).

This doesn't just happen out of thin air. The means by which this takes place is the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:14-17). When hearing of the atoning work of Christ upon the cross, the Spirit will testify that this is the true gift of the Father for His child. This is how we know it, but what actually takes place?

Born of God

But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the sons of God, *even to them that believe on His name:* ¹³ Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12, 13).

When one receives, or lays hold of, Christ, they are given the power to become sons of God. This receiving of Christ is not a result of bloodline or human volition. The receiving of Christ which results in the power to become a child of God is a gift from God Himself. This is further demonstrated by Paul's words in Ephesians.

...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:5, 6).

Our son-ship is a result of God's eternal decree to adopt us. The reason behind our adoption lies not in the beauty, will, or power of the child but rather in the good pleasure of God to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Rejoicing in Son-ship

A proper understanding of son-ship, therefore, decimates the attempt to stratify the church between the *haves* and *have-nots* — the *super-spiritual* and the *not-so spiritual*.

Getting back to the text before us, Paul is assuring us that our son-ship is not according to circumcision or any other human effort. Being a child of God is a result of God-given faith. May that never diminish in value!

We are easily tempted to merely salute this great son-ship while being dissatisfied for not having obtained greater riches. When will God grant our desired power and success and serenity? When will He answer our prayers? But God's children are lacking nothing. Hear and believe the words of Jesus:

Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:9-11)!

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27).

Baptism

In this next verse Paul gives us a glimpse as to the nature of our own faith. I will not deal with the nonsensical argument that Paul is here referring to water baptism for it is clear from both Scripture and observation that not everyone baptized is donning the righteousness of Christ. This is not to be judgmental but demonstrated often by personal testimony.

This baptism is by the Spirit of Christ whereby which we are united with Him in His death and resurrection (Romans 6; Colossians 2:11, 12).

Putting on Christ

Necessarily connected with this baptism is putting on, or being clothed in, Christ. Here we see again something universal to all believers. They all wear Christ's righteousness like a garment. Luther states it well when he wrote,

...the putting on of Christ, according to the gospel, consists not in an imitation, but in a new birth and a new creation; that is to say, in putting on Christ's innocence, His righteousness, His wisdom, His power, His saving health, His life, and His Spirit!¹

Read also in Isaiah,

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments, and as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels (Isaiah 61:10).

Zechariah 3:1-5 also gives a glorious picture of being clothed in righteousness. Perhaps we can now see how Paul has equalized the church – not to the lowest common denominator but the highest – Christ Himself. For all who by faith trust in Christ to

¹Luther, M. 1996. *Commentary on Galatians*. Index created by Christian Classics Foundation. (electronic ed.) (Ga 3:27). Christian Classics Foundation: Simpsonville SC

wipe away their sins are viewed by the Father as having the righteousness of Christ Himself – without spot or blemish.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

How easily we can now understand these words. Written at a time when Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, male and female, were barely considered part of the same species, we are informed they were all one in Christ. God is no respecter of persons (Ephesians 6:9).

And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).

Since they are one in Christ they are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. It is just here that dispensational theology seeks to rob the Christian of two-thirds of the holy text and its glorious promises. Walvord states,

They inherit the promise of justification by faith as Paul explained earlier (cf. Gal. 3:6-9). To suggest, as amillenarians do, that Gentile believers inherit the national promises given to the believing Jewish remnant – that the church thus supplants Israel or is the "new Israel" – is to read into these verses what is not there²

Certainly there were land promises given to Israel, all of which were fulfilled (Joshua 21:43-45). The purposes of the land promises were to preserve the seed who is Christ. But to suggest, as the dispensationalist does, that the promises given to God's chosen people in the old covenant are not for God's chosen people in the new covenant is to tear this passage asunder.

The dispensationalist believes, for example, "I will bless those who bless you" is a promise and warning given to protect the ethnic nation of Israel. Let us do a quick comparison.

Earlier in this chapter we read of the promise given to Abraham.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."⁹ So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:8, 9).

²Walvoord, J. F. 1983-c1985. *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Ga 3:29). Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

Compare this to the original promise.

“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:2, 3).

Who is being blessed? All the families of the earth – this must mean those who trust in Christ, i.e. the church. And what does that blessing contain? God’s blessing for those who bless the church and His curse for those who curse the church. So you must ask, “who is reading into verses that which isn’t there?”

God has made a promise. The recipients of that promise are those, who by the grace of God, have called upon His name. If you believe, the promise, and all the inheritance, is yours – to the praise of His glorious grace.

Questions for Study

1. In what ways have you been made to feel like a have-not when it comes to your faith (page 1)?
2. How is the blood of Christ the great equalizer in the church (page 1)?
3. Why is it important to know who we are in Christ before we consider a course of behavior (pages 1, 2)?
4. In what way are all people brothers? In what ways are they not (pages 2, 3)?
5. How do you know you're a child of God (page 3)?
6. How does one become a child of God (page 4)?
7. Why is it important to ponder our son-ship (page 4)?
8. Of what type of baptism is Paul writing (page 5)?
9. What does it mean to put on Christ (pages 5, 6)?
10. How does all this remove gender, ethnic, and social distinctions in the church (page 6)?
11. What does it mean to be Abraham's seed? What does the promise include (pages 6, 7)?