

Sermon Outline

“ABBA! FATHER!”: KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

CHILDREN OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS (GALATIANS 3:23-26)

I. Introduction

II. Those Who Are “of Faith”

- A. When Galatians 3 begins, Paul is in the process of making his case that we are justified before God by faith in Christ alone.
- B. In Galatians 3:7, Paul states that it is those who are “of faith,” i.e, those who have put their faith in Christ, are considered the true children of Abraham.
- C. In 3:8, we see that God promises the blessing of nations in Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) because he had prepared a day when the Gentiles to be justified by *faith* in Christ as opposed to *works* of the Law (or what little they had of the Law): “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’”
- D. Paul writes in 3:9: “So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”
- E. In 3:19, Paul asks the question that would be on the minds of his readers: If right standing with God comes through faith, what is the purpose of the Law? Why would God give the Law if he would justify mankind through their faith in Christ and through the Law?
 - 1. Paul’s response: “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made...”
 - 2. The promise in view was the promise that was made to Abraham back in Genesis 12:1-3; the promise that in Abraham’s offspring, all of mankind would be blessed.
- F. Paul expands on his answer in 3:22: “But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”
 - 1. The Law was added as a means of keeping the world in check.
 - 2. The Law, especially its system of rewards and punishments, was given to keep sinners behind bars, in a state of guilt and humility as it were, *until* they could be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 3. The Law was added as a way of preparing the human race for the age of Faith.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Who, according to Gal 3:7, are the true sons and daughters of Abraham? (2) Why was the Law given if God would eventually justify mankind by faith? How does Paul answer it in 3:19, 22?

III. The World “before Faith Came” (Galatians 3:23)

- A. Verse 23 begins with the words, “Now before faith came...”

- B. When Paul talks about *faith* here, we must be clear as to what he is talking about.
- C. When Paul talks about faith, he was *not* saying...
 1. that people had no faith in God before this age of faith.
 2. that people were not saved prior to this age of faith.
- D. Instead, when Paul talks about faith, he is talking about the great *emphasis* of this age—faith refers to the age of faith in Jesus Christ.
 1. “Faith” denotes that time when the Savior is revealed and people are called to be reconciled to God only by placing their faith in Jesus Christ.
 2. Through faith in Jesus Christ and his good deeds, the world is brought into right standing with God.
- E. Prior to this age of faith—“before faith came”—the condition of Israel and the world was captivity under the Law.
 1. Paul writes: “we were held captive under the law...”
 2. This is the same language of imprisonment or jail terminology that we encountered back in 3:22.
 3. Mankind was captive under the Law because the Law emphasized *doing* its commandments.
 4. Since mankind is sinful, mankind is unable to do the Law entirely.
 5. For that reason, the Law became our jailer, our punisher.
 6. The world came under the same words of condemnation that God pronounced upon the corrupted priests in Malachi 1:10: “I have no pleasure in you.”
- F. From what Paul writes, we see that God did not intend for the world to be imprisoned forever.
 1. The next clause tells us that the world was “imprisoned *until*”—the word “until” assumes that there would be an end to that period of time—“the coming faith would be revealed.”
 2. The Law was put in place until salvation-by-faith-in-Jesus Christ as the obvious way of salvation was revealed.
- G. God’s plan for the giving of the Law and imprisoning mankind is clearly seen now.
 1. God is moving history in such a way that his Son might be exalted as the Savior of the world.
 2. God the Father wants his Son, Jesus, to be the hero of our story.
 3. What better way for Jesus to be the hero of our story than for us to find our salvation only in him?

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Prior to faith, what was the condition of Israel and the world? (2) What is the difference between Law and Faith as Paul presents it in Galatians? (3) What can we say is God’s ultimate aim in calling us to be justified by faith in Christ?

IV. “Until Christ Came” (Galatians 3:24)

- A. In verse 24, we see that the purpose of the Law is precisely to prepare us for the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ as our only Savior and our Redeemer.
- B. Paul says, “So then, the law was our guardian [*paidagōgos*] until Christ came...”
 1. The Law and its punishments kept Israel in check the way an ancient Greco-Roman disciplinarian (*paidagōgos*) might keep a young ward in check.
 2. The Law was meant to discipline Israel for their sins.

3. Even for the rest of the world that did not have the Law of God to the same extent that Israel had, the little aspects of the Law they had also functioned as a *paidagōgos*.
—Even the most consistent atheist knows something about respecting law and order.
 4. Whether we are Jew or Gentile, the Law keeps us in a state of guilt and humiliation, without which we would sink further into evil.
 5. Yet, God is merciful: God loves the human race and does not wish for it to remain in this state.
 6. There is indeed a way out of this universal condition of guilt and humiliation.
 7. But to get out of this state, we must use God’s way and not our own.
 8. The way out of guilt is not...
 - a. by pretending that we have no such thing as sin, as the secularists want us to do.
 - b. by trying to make peace with every conceivable spiritual power that is out there, which is what pagans and animists do.
 9. The only way out of sin is ordained by God himself—and it is through Jesus Christ.
- C. Continuing with Paul’s train of thought, the Law was our guardian/disciplinarian until Christ came “in order that we might be justified by faith.”
1. To be justified is to be considered innocent and righteous by God.
 2. Justification does not in itself make you a righteous person.
 - a. By itself, justification does not change one’s character from bad to good.
 - b. Justification is simply the *pronouncement* of the judge that the person in question is righteous.
 3. How then can God pronounce us sinners righteous?
—God pronounces sinners righteous not on the basis of our own good deeds, but on the basis of the good deeds of another, the good deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 4. And you and I receive Jesus’ righteousness and God’s pronouncement of our righteousness “by faith”; that is, by putting our trust in Jesus Christ.
- D. Paul teaches that faith in Christ is the means of justification.
1. Galatians 3:22: “But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise *by faith in Jesus Christ* might be given to those who believe.”
 2. Galatians 2:15, 16: “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through *faith in Jesus Christ*, so we also have *believed in Christ Jesus*, in order to be justified *by faith in Christ* and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”
- E. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ: Reconciliation with God has been achieved for us by Jesus Christ on our behalf.
- F. We therefore do not have to bear the weight of trying to save ourselves.
1. When we try to save ourselves, bad things happen.
 - a. We end up putting up a false front, pretending to be better than we really are.
 - b. We open ourselves to being deceived by all kinds of false spiritual teachers that are out there.

2. While these acts may make us feel good in the short term, none of them can save us from the Judge of heaven and earth.
3. The only way for us to be justified by God is by abandoning all hope in ourselves and casting all hope on Christ; in other words, by receiving Jesus as our righteousness before God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What role did the Law play before faith came (Gal 3:24)? (2) According to Galatians 2:15, 16 and 3:22, how are we set right with God? (3) Who has achieved reconciliation with God for us? (4) What could happen if we try to save ourselves outside of Christ?

V. “In Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:25, 26)

- A. When we put our faith in Christ, we become sons of God, the Household of the Most High.
- B. Paul writes: “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”
- C. By putting our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are no longer under the Law as a guardian or disciplinarian.
—Instead, we are now under Christ Jesus; or as Paul words it, “in Christ Jesus.”
- D. Behind the phrase “in Christ Jesus” seems to be the assumption that Christ is the federal Head/Representative of his people.
 1. You and I are in Christ in the sense that we have been *incorporated* into Christ.
 2. Thus, wherever Christ is, we are considered there as well.
 3. When God sees Christ, God sees us.
 4. Since Christ is the beloved Son of God, those who are in Christ Jesus, young or old, rich or poor, male or female, are now beloved sons of God as well.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does “in Christ Jesus” mean? (2) What happens when we put our faith in Jesus Christ?

VI. God Is Our Father through Christ Jesus His Son

Our knowledge of God as our *Abba* Father is a mediated experience. We know God as Father not directly by ourselves and through our own efforts; but only through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is himself the beloved Son of God. Apart from Christ, you and I can never know God as our Father. The most we can know of God is that he is our Creator, Law-Giver, and Judge. In that sense, every human being, whether he or she is an atheist or an animist has a kind of relationship with God. Just because you don’t believe in the true God doesn’t make him disappear from your life. God always has a claim on your life. No one can escape that. But to know God as *Abba*, as one’s dear heavenly Father—that’s something else entirely. In order for a sinner to know God with such friendship and affection requires the work of a Mediator, which is where our Lord Jesus comes in. God sent his perfect Son Jesus into the world so that sinners can finally become sons of God through faith in Jesus.

VII. The Benefits of Being Children of God in Christ Jesus

- A. We are no longer imprisoned under the Law.
1. The Law is no longer our guardian, our jailer.
 2. This does NOT mean...
 - a. that the Law is now irrelevant to us.
 - b. that the Law ceases to teach us God's will for our lives.
 - c. that God ceases to be displeased with the sins of Christians.
 - d. that God completely ceases to discipline Christians for their sins (Heb 12:7).
 3. No longer being under the Law (as Paul speaks of it here) means that...
 - a. the ultimate curse of the Law no longer hangs over us.
 - b. many of the specific punishments of the Law no longer apply to us.
 - c. the Law no longer determines our final standing with God—our failure to obey the Law cannot change the fact that we are now God's beloved sons because of Jesus Christ. God will not expel us.
 4. Puritan scholar Samuel Bolton helps us live with the Law and the Gospel.

Maintain your liberty in Christ by refusing to look any more to the law for justification, and by refusing to fear its words of condemnation. You are to live, in respect of your practice and obedience, as men who can neither be condemned by the law nor justified by it. It is a hard lesson to live above the law, and yet to walk according to the law. But this is the lesson a Christian has to learn, to walk in the law in respect of duty, but to live above it in respect of comfort, neither expecting favour from the law in respect of his obedience nor fearing harsh treatment from the law in respect of his failings. (Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 219)

- B. We have God as our beloved heavenly Father, who is well pleased with us in Jesus Christ.
1. We share in the blessings of the Davidic covenant, because Jesus is the Davidic Christ (cf. 2 Sam 7:12-17). In Jesus the perfect Son of David...
 - a. We are possessed by God.
 - b. We are promoted by God.
 - c. We are being purified by God.
 - d. We are preserved by God.
 - e. We have the Presence of God with us forever.
 2. We share in the blessings of Israel because Christ was the perfect Israelite (cf. Rom 9:1-5).
 - a. We have the adoption.
 - b. We have the covenants.
 - c. We have the Law of God, no longer primarily as a disciplinarian but as a teacher.
 - d. We have the promises of the Gospel.

- C. We have an identity that transcends race, money, even gender (Gal 3:27, 28): “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have *put on Christ*. 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*.” We are in Christ Jesus.
1. This means:
 - a. We do not have to use wealth and education to lord it over others.
 - b. We do not have to use gender as a means of oppression.
 - c. We do not have to use race as a means of self-esteem.
 2. God saves us from the control of money, gender, and race not by taking those good things away—but by giving us a new identity that *transcends* those things, a new identity that *controls* and *shapes* our use of those things.
 3. The Gospel is truly revolutionary: It forms a new kind of human society that recovers the proper place of money, gender, and race.
- D. We are Abraham’s offspring (Gal 3:29): “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What are the benefits of being sons of God in Jesus Christ?
(2) How does each blessing apply to you?