



“To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 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. 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. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:15–29).

One thing we all share in common in this room is we all have a dad. What was your dad like? Was he a great father? Maybe you never even met your dad. Maybe he was never there because of work, divorce, etc. Maybe he was there, but absent, quiet—you never knew the man and he never knew you. Did he pass away early? Was he an alcoholic or was he abusive? Did he break promises? Maybe you never felt safe or felt like you belonged. Maybe you’ve never known what it’s like to be a son or a daughter.

When you really think about it, what changes your life is relationship. Truth, ideas, experiences, sermons, books are great, but unless these things take place in the context of significant relationships, people don’t change much. Martin Lloyd Jones

said it so well: “The fundamental thing is that Christianity is about Jesus...Christianity is not a teaching—it is a person...The Lord Jesus Christ was the theme of the preaching of the early church...This is the tragic thing that has been forgotten at the present time. ‘What we need,’ people say, ‘is the application of his teaching.’ But it is not. What you need is to know him and to come into relationship with him.”

In Galatia the false teachers made the church forget about “him” and the relationship with him. This passage reveals three realities about our relationship with God that change everything: Promise, Sonship, Belonging.

Promise

When people think about God or Christianity, they don’t think about promise, they think about law. The Bay Area mentality is that Christianity equals law, rules, and legislation. It’s like how John Steinbeck described the Christian wife in his novel, *East of Eden*, “A tight hard little woman humorless as a chicken. She had a dour Presbyterian mind and a code of morals that pinned down and beat the brains out of nearly everything that was pleasant to do.”

Or it’s like me and the Highway Patrol. I always think their eyes are fixated on me, waiting for me to do something wrong. Many people think having a relationship with God is like having a relationship with the Highway Patrol.

Is this what it means to have a relationship with God? The Bible does talk a lot about God’s law. The word “law” shows up eight times in today’s passage. What is all this law-talk about? Paul asks this question in verse 19, “*Why then the law?*” He’s raising the question, What is the purpose of the law, what is it for, and what is it designed to do?

The law was a gift, an instruction on how to live in relationship with this rescuing God. “*Blessed is the man [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, ...on his law he meditates day and night*” (Psalm 1). But the law was never meant to be a system of salvation. This was the mistake of the Pharisees. Why then the law? What was God’s chief purpose in giving the law? Paul answers the question in verse 19, “*Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions.*” The primary purpose for why God “added” the law to how he’d already been operating with his people for hundreds of years was to reveal to us our sin, to point us towards our need for a Savior.

The process of getting to know God always begins with the law. The law “comes at us” and shows us God’s holiness and convicts us of our sin and then drives us towards the only way we can relate to a holy God: by promise. Andrew Jukes said: “Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law, which God gave to prove us sinners.” The law makes us desperate. The law drives us to God’s promise.

The word “promise” appears eight times in today’s passage. And with this word Paul gives the Galatians a history lesson, a theology lesson, and a relationship lesson all in one. In these verses Paul says that from the beginning the way God has set up relationship with sinful people is through promise and the later addition of the law doesn’t change that. In fact the reason God gave the law was to highlight that a relationship with him can only be by promise.

Abraham was a pagan that God justified by faith/promise. God promised to be Abraham’s God, to care for him and bless him and change the world through him. Instead of singing “Father Abraham,” the Galatians were singing “Father Moses.”

What’s at stake here is this question: How do you please God? Through keeping laws, or through faith? Is Christianity fundamentally about working or believing? Is this whole deal—relationship—about performance or promise? A relationship based on promise is so much better than a relationship based on law. A law asks for performance; a promise asks for belief. For a law to work, it has to be obeyed. For a promise to work it only requires belief. ***“The promise...might be given to those who believe”*** (v.22). Think of an orphanage. A man shows up and promises to be your dad, to adopt you. All you have to do is believe. Or, a man shows up and gives you laws and conditions. You have to obey and there’s no assurance.

Your salvation, your relationship with God, doesn’t rest on laws that you will inevitably break, but on a promise that can never be broken. ***“I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians”*** (Exodus 6:7). The only way to receive a promise, the only way to operate in a relationship based on promise, is to believe, trust, rest, receive.

I think we have a hard time relating to God on the basis of promise because we’re so used to getting burned. But God is different. God doesn’t make promises in order to break them. He keeps his promises. Another name for God is “Promise Keeper.” He will keep his promise to be your God, to be faithful to you, to love you and care for you and guide you.

Actually, God is like the Highway Patrol. His eyes are always on you, always watching, but not to grade your performance or write you a ticket. He never takes his eyes off of you because he promised to be your God. You have an extraordinary relationship.

He loves you. ***“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands”*** (Isaiah 49:15–16).

Big promises make big demands on our faith. Have faith. Believe. What a God we have!

Sonship

It’s pretty interesting how Paul talks about the law in this passage. In verse 23 he says ***“we were held captive under the law, imprisoned...”*** And in verse 24 he says ***“the law was our guardian until Christ came....”***

The greek word *paidagog* means “guardian” and it’s a significant word. In the 1st century world, in many Greek families, children were put under the supervision of a paidagog. From ages 7-17 children didn’t have much contact with their father. All their time was spent with their guardian. The guardian was hired to supervise, train, and punish a child. The relationship wasn’t intimate or close. In ancient drawings, guardians are depicted with a rod or cane in their hand. A guardian relationship was a fear-based relationship.

In the process of getting to know God we all pass through this “guardian phase.” We become aware of God, aware of his law, aware of our sin, and this creates a lot of fear and a resolve to reform things and get right with God.

Many people mistakenly think they’ve become Christians when they encounter the law, when they encounter the guardian. Many Christians can look back on a phase in their life when they thought they were believers, but really they were living this fearful, orphan-like, religious life. The three words Paul uses to describe living under the law describe what they thought was a true relationship with God: captive, imprisoned, guardian. In moving towards a relationship with God, the law must always “come in.” There’s first this relationship with the guardian before you come into the family.

John Stott said: “After God gave the promise to Abraham, He gave the law to Moses. Why? Simply because He had to make things worse before He could make them better. The law exposed sin, provoked sin, condemned sin. The purpose of the law was...to lift the lid off man’s respectability and disclose what he is really like underneath—sinful, rebellious, guilty, under the judgment of God, and helpless to save himself.

“And the law must still be allowed to do its God-given duty today... We must never bypass the law and come straight to the gospel. To do so is to contradict the plan of God in biblical history...in our modern evangelism we cast our pearls (the costliest pearl being the gospel) before swine. People cannot see the beauty of the pearl, because they have no conception of the pigsty. No man has ever appreciated the gospel until the law has first revealed

him to himself. It is only against the inky blackness of the night sky that the stars begin to appear, and it is only against the dark background of sin and judgment that the gospel shines forth.

“Not until the law has bruised and smitten us will we admit our need of the gospel to bind up our wounds. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned us will we pine for Christ to set us free... Not until the law has driven us to despair of ourselves will we ever believe in Jesus.”

Has the law driven you to despair of yourself? Every Christian passes through this phase. It's part of the journey.

Now here's where we are at in the journey and it's good news! ***“We are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith”*** (verses 25–26). Traveling from Abraham to Moses to Jesus, we've become sons of God.

This is new to the Galatians. Adoption is more important than Justification. It's not a legal idea, but a family idea. When you become a Christian you don't just get things taken off of you, you get things put on you: sonship, sonship status, you become a son. Everything changes when you discover Galatians 3:26, when you discover that you're a son. You ditch the boss/employee relationship you have with God: laws, rules, drudgery, timecards, performance reviews, fear. When you discover your sonship, when verse 26 sinks in, new vistas open up for you. You see that you're not an orphan any more. Your whole identity changes. You're a son! You're a daughter! You have a Father.

In the story of the Prodigal Son, there were five verbs to describe what the father did: saw, felt compassion, ran, embraced, kissed. Have you felt the Father's kiss? Have you heard the Father say to you “my son,” “my daughter”? Do you know what it's like to be a “son,” to be a “daughter”?

J.I. Packer said: “What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father...If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means he does not understand Christianity very well at all.”

Are you still waiting for your earthly father to complete you? Last week we learned that the Greek word *epiteleo* means “completion.” Your dad is probably never going to give you what you're looking for. You're looking for a Fantasy Father that doesn't exist. Give up. See that you have something better. God is your Father!

Author and speaker Ravi Zacharias said: “I came to know Christ on a bed of suicide when I was seventeen—desolate, desperate. My father just finished telling me I'd be a total failure in life. I was born a failure, he said. Somebody brought a Bible to my

bedside. I'm so thankful to my heavenly Father that my dad lived long enough to write a letter to me—my dad died fairly early—and said, ‘Will you ever forgive me for the things I said?’ And yet, in the dark of the soul, I found the heavenly Father to be closer than I'd ever realized.”

No other religion has Sonship. No other religion gives you a Father. No other religion gives you the assurance that you're a son, you're a daughter of the Father and that will never change. The future looks bright for you. What awaits you is more of the Father's love and care.

Belonging

Do you ever feel like you just don't fit in anywhere, like you don't belong? Our modern, mobile world is an increasingly disconnected place. We don't have the ties, the tradition, the family, the heritage, the sense of belonging that people used to have.

The Bay Area is a place where a lot of people feel like they don't fit. Do you ever wonder if there's a place out there somewhere or some people out there where if you just moved there or just made those relationships you'd finally feel like you fit, like you belonged, like you'd come home? In the final few verses of our passage, in eight short verses, Paul covers 2,000 years of history and brings together Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and you and me. Paul's telling us that we fit in this story—we fit, you fit in this big, long, colorful, story of God and his dealings with his people. ***“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”*** (v.28). Gal 3:28 doesn't obliterate distinctions, but says no matter your distinctions, in Christ you've found where you most deeply belong.

In verse 29 Paul goes even further. He says when you have a relationship with God through Christ, you have a heritage, you're part of a people that stretches all the way back to Abraham. ***“And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise”*** (v.29). John Stott said: “In Christ I am a son of God. In Christ I am united to all the redeemed people of God, past, present and future. In Christ I discover my identity. In Christ I find my feet. In Christ I come home.”

A relationship with God through Jesus Christ gives you the belonging you've always been looking for. Vertically, you belong with the Father. Socially, no matter your race, rank, or sex, you belong with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, fellow sons and daughters. Historically, you're connected, you're Abraham's offspring, your history is rich, you belong in this massive family tree.

Don't ever say that you don't belong. You have a relationship with God, you have a sense of belonging that nobody else has. You have this extraordinary relationship with the living God that's full of promise, sonship, and belonging.

Conclusion

Isn't it encouraging that even though these Galatians had really blown it, Paul calls the Galatians "sons" of God? Isn't it encouraging to know that even though you've really blown it, God calls you "son," "daughter"? Do you understand who you are? Do you understand your identity? Do you understand this relationship that's at the center of your life? You are a child of God and he is your Father.

The secret of the Christian life is your sonship. This is my prayer for you—that you'd be enabled to live as somebody who knows it is all utterly and completely true. Reinforce your sonship as often as you possibly can and in as many ways as you possibly can. "I am a son of God. God is my Father." Say that to yourself over and over again every day, no matter what you're doing. Talk to God, pray to him, like a son, like a daughter. The Father loves to listen to and act upon the voice of his children.

Behave like a son, live like a daughter. God isn't interested in impressive, self-sufficient adults. God's very job description is to be a loving Father to needy sons and daughters. Don't live life based on your feelings, live life based on your Father. Believe that God is your Father, act accordingly, and the feelings of sonship will eventually follow.

We glorify God, we give him great honor, not when we live like orphans, but when we live like secure sons and daughters who know we have a Father who loves us. You can lean back into his arms and trust him completely. He gave up his Son on the cross for you. If he did that for you, you can believe that he'll take care of you. Any sting that he allows in your life will be for your good. What a Father we have!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.