

## **Galatians 3:23—4:7**

### **“True Children of God”**

**1. Begin with prayer and read Galatians 3:23—4:7 [5 minutes].**

**2. Review briefly the previous lesson on Galatians 3:1-22 [5 minutes].**

**3. Discuss how Paul describes the law’s function for those who believe in Christ in Galatians 3:23-25 [10 minutes].**

- A. The law has an important function setting the table for coming to Christ in faith
- B. Paul expresses function through two images: first one is that of “protective custody” (v. 23 NLT) until the pathway of faith revealed to us by Scripture and the Spirit; Greek words refer to being protected by military guards
- C. Second image: our “guardian” (NLT), “disciplinarian” (NRSV), or “tutor” (NKJV) to keep us on track and in line until Christ; Greek word “paidagogos” term for slave who supervised children on parents’ behalf (root words “paideia” and “paideuo” where we get English word “pedagogy” for method and practice of teaching)
- D. Truth: with faith in Jesus Christ, we no longer need this type of guardianship; through the Spirit and Scripture, able to follow Christ and grow in discipleship
  - *Think back to the most memorable and helpful teacher you had in your school days. What made her or him that way?*
  - *Christians of Presbyterian and Reformed heritage often talk about three uses of the Law: 1) to convict us of our need for Jesus; 2) to restrain evil in civil society; and 3) to show us what kind of life pleases God. How do these three uses either connect with or contradict what Paul is saying in 3:23-25?*

**4. Discuss how Paul expresses the new reality for those who believe in Christ in Galatians 3:26-29 [15 minutes].**

- A. Most important passage in Galatians so far: all thus far leading to this point
- B. Those who trust in Jesus are “children of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 26 NLT), with no boundaries or borders separating them with shared baptism (v. 27)
- C. Three “no longer” categories (v. 28), covering major areas of culture, class, and gender: not Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, but instead one in Christ
- D. “The gospel has radical social implications. It means I am a Christian before I am anyone or anything else. It means that all the barriers that separate people in the world into warring factions come down in Christ.” (Tim Keller, *Galatians for You*, 92)
- E. Significant implications for our faith and practice at MDPC, among them being:

- 1) Culture, race and nationality: Iranian Christians and American Christians are spiritual brothers and sisters, regardless of current Iran/USA relations, as are US immigrant/refugee Christians and US-born Christians, regardless of politics;
  - 2) Money and material goods: our affluence is not indicative of God's favor for us over other Christians, but we instead are to use our blessings to bless others;
  - 3) Leadership: MDPC and ECO ordain women and men as pastors and officers; we are "egalitarian" (equal roles and functions, with male/female leadership), not "complementarian" (complementary roles and functions, with male leadership)
- F. Overarching result: since together we in Christ are heirs of the promise made to Abraham, we are saved and put in right relationship with God by faith and not by law
- *Discuss Tim Keller from Galatians for You: "The gospel has radical social implications. It means I am a Christian before I am anyone or anything else." What does this mean to you? Over what relationships, commitments, and obligations in your life does the gospel rise above?*
  - *MDPC practices egalitarian leadership in pastor, elder, and deacon roles. Many churches in our community do not. How should we respond when someone expresses surprise, concern, or dismay, at what MDPC practices?*

**5. Discuss how Paul illustrates and explains the new reality for those who believe in Christ in Galatians 4:1-7 [10 minutes].**

- A. Paul seeks to illustrate: if father dies, children don't possess inheritance in practical terms "even though they actually own everything their father had" (v. 1 NLT)
- B. Instead, children must obey those over them until they come of age (usually age 25 in Greco-Roman world when child could begin to exercise independent control)
- C. Paul makes analogy with Christian life: before Christ, like children, "slaves to the basic spiritual principles of the world" (v. 3 NLT), chief among them self-salvation
- D. Then Paul recapitulates gospel story in vv. 4-7, noting our 1) rescue through God the Son, 2) receiving the Spirit, and 3) relationship with God as "Abba" and heirs of God
- E. "Abba" equivalent to "Dad" or "Daddy"; dimension of spiritual, familial, and relational connection with God unheard of in most religious contexts both then and now; confirms the heirship of those in Christ to the promises made to Abraham
- *Self-salvation continues to be a guiding spiritual principle for many. How does the gospel as shared in Galatians 4:1-7 respond? How would you paraphrase it for someone with little or no Christian background?*
- *How does the Christian understanding of God as "Abba, Father" differ from what other religions or traditions believe today? Have you experienced this connection with God as "Dad" in a particularly meaningful way? When?*

**6. Close in prayer.**