

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: I've told you before about the day Jacqueline Becker was adopted. Recently I showed you a picture of Jackie reading her story in my new book, *Feels Like Home*. I wrote, "Our friends, Doug and Jamie, have four little girls, three of them adopted. Recently, Jacqueline, age 10, and who is deaf, celebrated her long awaited day. Jamie made a sash for her to wear that read, "Today is my Adoption Day!" As the family prepared to leave for the courthouse, Jackie signed, "It's going to be the best day of my life." Jamie said, "I think most of us started weeping at the part where the judge asked her if she understood what adoption was. She signed 'I know they love me forever, and I will get a new name, and they will adopt me as their daughter always.'" She kept clicking the heels of her fancy shoes and signing, "There's no place like home. There's no place like home."
- B. I love that story because **every Christian here has also been adopted but we don't realize nearly so clearly as Jackie did what a wonderful gift that is.** "*I am chosen, loved, adopted forever.*"
- C. The Jewish believers in the early church most certainly did not think they needed to be adopted in order to be saved but they *did* think that Gentiles needed to be adopted into the Jewish nation. They knew that God had adopted the Israelites 2000 years before when he simply *chose* Abraham to be the father of their nation. They saw their salvation through their Messiah Jesus as part of their birthright. Thus they saw Gentile Christians who didn't become Jews through circumcision as inferior; Christians maybe, but **step-children of God.**

D. **Turn to Gal. 3.** Last week Jamie took us through vv.23-29. My text, beginning ch.4, is part of that same thought so I'm going to back up a little so you see the flow of thought. It is helpful to know that, while Paul is speaking to the Gentile Galatians, he is speaking *of himself and his Jewish countrymen* when he uses the word *we*. **Gal.3:23-24a:**
“Before the coming of this faith, we [i.e. Jews] were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian...”

I. BEFORE CHRIST, JEWS WERE LIKE UNDERAGE HEIRS TO GOD'S GREAT ESTATE

- A. God had promised their forefather Abraham, *“All nations will be blessed through you.”* The Jews were God's chosen people. God called Israel *“my son.”* **God treated them with extraordinary favor.** Paul says in **Rom 9:4-5,**
“Theirs is the adoption to sonship [i.e., God had adopted their nation as his son]; theirs the divine glory [God's appearance to them on Mt Sinai, as well as the presence of his glory in the tabernacle and temple], the covenants [with Abraham, Moses and David], the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!” That is a privileged background and education! Those folks are bluebloods!
- B. But when a child is born into a wealthy and privileged family good parents know that their children will have to learn to bear their name and privileges responsibly. And God is very good parent! **So God's schoolmaster, his guardian, over his son Israel, was the Scriptures.** Within those pages were all the wisdom Israel would need to grow up as the wise and responsible people of God, ready and

able to draw all nations of the world to the blessing God had promised Abraham.

In the curriculum of Scripture were instructions and laws, stories of Israel's history, heroes and sins. There were proverbs, prayers, poems, and all kinds of prophecies. They learned about the customs, sacrifices and festivals that would shape their national character, memory, and faith. All these things would teach them who their God, Yahweh, is; what sets them apart from all other peoples; what it means to be holy and why that matters; how they were to treat one another and those beyond their borders.

And in these pages they were expected to see that God's Messiah would come and usher them into their age of maturity, when they would no longer be spiritual children under the tutelage of Scripture but a nation of royal priests in the kingdom of God. No other people in the world got such a privileged education.

- C. **The thing is, most of Israel was like a teenager, thinking they were really more adult than they were.** They *thought* that just *being observant Jews* meant that they were already spiritual adults. **It never occurred to them that their Torah was their schoolmaster or guardian. They thought it was their driver's license, their diploma.**
Illus.: I rode through Skokie recently and saw some of the orthodox Jewish men there. They've studied the Torah diligently. They stand apart from all others by their clothes and customs. Now imagine I have the nerve to tell them they're really still just children as far as God is concerned.
- D. **Jews may have thought they were adults with full rights to God's estate but they were still spiritually underage; they remained spiritual minors.** Thus, they had no wealth or status of their own at all.

E. Listen to **Gal 4:1-3**: *“What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.”* What does that last line mean? *“We [Jews] were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.”* **The Jews, like all other people on earth, had a rebellious streak even though they were God’s people.** After God led Israel out of captivity and death in Egypt they stubbornly resisted him and complained every step of the way. *“I have seen these people,” the Lord said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people.”* God called Israel *stiff-necked* 17 times in the OT. (Maybe some of you were a stiff-necked teenager!)

So the picture Paul is painting is that the Jews were already subject to the guardianship of God’s Torah, his Teachings, which most didn’t observe, or which they liked to twist to their own purposes. **Into that rebellion stepped “the elemental spiritual forces of the world.”** Later, in **v.8**, Paul speaks of *“those who by nature are not gods”* (he means evil spirits), and in **v.9**, *“those weak and miserable forces.”* Both Jews and Gentiles, by rebelling against God’s Word, were suckered by their rebellion into the power of Satanic forces. Imagine the silky temptation, *“Did God really say...”* *“God helps them who help themselves.”* *“How about a little wine and singing?”*

The devil goes to work when he can get his hand on people too stubborn—too stiff-necked—to obey God. He assigns his powerful spiritual servants to tempt, deceive, and nurture spiritual rebels in order to alienate God’s people from his love.

- F. So Israel was like one or the other of the two sons in Jesus' famous story. Either they were like the son who took all they could from God and left him far behind to squander their inheritance, or they were like the sour, self-righteous son who only wanted from God what they could get from him, and took no delight in God's grace. **So what is a Father to do?**
- G. And we haven't even mentioned the condition of Gentiles. Gentiles were like street urchins who had no family at all. Ignorant, godless, undisciplined, obedient only to their own desires, worshipers of stone or wooden gods, or worshipers of themselves. They were simply "not a people." Paul says in **v.8**, speaking now to the Gentiles, "*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.*"

*"Look down, look down
Don't look 'em in the eye
Look down, look down,
You're here until you die."* [from *Les Miserables*]

So now let's go back and read **Gal 3:24-29**... In a sense, the Jews would have stayed "forever young"—*too* young—if it hadn't been for Christ. Kind of the way Prince Charles has waited all his 70 years to become King of England. He is still just the heir but not the king. Who knows if he will ever wear that crown! The picture here is that **by putting our faith in Christ and being baptized into Christ, we are clothed as Christ**, and thus *in him* regarded by God as fully mature heirs of God's kingdom immediately. Our earthly distinctions—Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female— in that moment of our salvation all become irrelevant to our status as God's sons and thus his heirs.

There's a problem here with language. Jesus Christ is God's Son. In him, therefore, we gain his status and wealth as God's Son. My translation—the NIV—wants to make clear that women aren't excluded by saying in **v.26**, "*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.*" But the word *children* obscures our **adult** status and eliminates the sense of being 'of age,' and that muddies the water. We don't become God's little children at Jesus' knee. We become his adult heirs, like Jesus. That comes up again.

Gal 4:4-5, "*But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*"

II. THE HEAVENLY FATHER ADOPTS ALL AND ONLY THOSE WHO ARE REDEEMED BY HIS SON

- A. "*When the time had fully come.*" Jesus' birth came like intricate clockwork. All manner of gears turned—fulfilled prophecy, cultural forces, spiritual preparation of nations, even the vast movement of the stars in the heavens spelling out the event in coded astrology to the magi. As the song says, "*The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*" "*When the time had fully come.*"
- B. "*God sent his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law.*" Do you see how that fits in this context? Paul is talking about Jews who thought they were the full-grown national son of God, but here he says it was at Jesus' birth that "*God sent his Son.*" His *one and only Son, his only begotten Son*. There wasn't any other Son in all of Israel that night. And this God-sent Son of God was fully human and fully Jewish and thus obligated by covenant to keep the law completely. Which he did. **Heb. 5:8-9** says, "*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*"

As God's perfect Son according to the Law—the one Jew who actually came of age, he took the place of all others. He **redeemed** those under law—the Jews who clothed themselves in him. **John Stott** writes, [p.106]

So the divinity of Christ, the humanity of Christ and the righteousness of Christ uniquely qualified Him to be man's redeemer. If He had not been man, He could not have redeemed men. If He had not been a righteous man, he could not have redeemed unrighteous men. And if he Had not been God's Son, He could not have redeemed men for God or made them the sons of God."

C. **He didn't come to release those under the guardianship of the law.** Jesus was born to **redeem** them.

D. **And why?** *"To redeem those under the law [i.e., Jews], that we [i.e. Jews] might receive adoption to sonship."* And when he adopted the Jews (who thought they didn't need that) he also adopted Gentiles (who were nothing but urchins and orphans). That is the only way Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female, become the grow-up sons and daughters of God. God adopts us by wrapping us in Jesus his Son. And when he does that, we become God's heirs just as Jesus himself is.

E. **But if God had adopted us through Christ and done nothing else we would have fallen right back into our old patterns.** So God did this in v.6, *"Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"* Stott also wrote this:

*"He sent His Son that we might have the **status** of sonship, and He sent his Spirit that we might have an **experience** of it."*

Illus.: I don't know if there is a sweeter sound on earth than when my son throws his arms around me and says, "Hey,

Dad!” If I had some kind of clone son, some newly created son, I’d want to put *that* in him. If I adopted a son or daughter from some prison or back alley, everything would be well if only I could put that within him, that intimacy and love. *“Hey, Dad!”*

Well that’s what God did for us. He puts within every new believer the Spirit of his Son, Jesus, who knows, loves and speaks to God as *“My beloved Father.”* And that is why we are no longer treated by God like little children but rather as grown and beloved sons and daughters. Do you know that your Father welcomes you with far greater love than any of us can welcome and love our own children?

Conclusion

Gal. 4:7, *“So you are no longer a slave, but God’s ~~child~~son; and since you are his ~~child~~son, God has made you also an heir.”* You are not simply God’s little child. That’s the wrong picture. You are God’s adult son or daughter, as surely as Jesus himself was God’s Son, and you are his heir having *now* full access to the treasures of our Father’s kingdom.

Lesson one from this passage: There’s no status among us. We are all adopted.

Lesson two: When you feel God is far from you, or that you have worn out your welcome with him; or if you feel that you are not worthy of his attention or that you’d be met by his stern reprimand and disapproving glare, remember that you are clothed in Christ and God *invites* you to come boldly to his throne of grace to receive mercy in your time of need. What’s more, there is within in you the Christ-given yearning to whisper, *“Father! Dear Father!”* and that call will never—*never!*—be ignored nor unwelcome.

If your feelings tell you God will not welcome you, your feelings are lying, and that lie is from the devil. If you try to seek God only to be reminded of the hard and cold heart of a different failed father, ask the Spirit of Jesus within you to speak for you. If you think you are too small or disappointing, you don't know how great the Father's love for you is.

Illus.: Over 40 years ago when I was working with young adults at North Suburban Church in Deerfield Kathy showed up at our group. It turned out she was very needy and frail. She was a nurse and found a way to finagle too many prescription pills from doctors. She believed in Christ and always came to our Bible study, but she wasn't healthy. She attempted suicide. Then a few months later, she did it again. Finally, she was committed to the state mental hospital in Elgin.

I remember reaching her there by phone—a hall phone so I could hear people yelling and swearing in the background. It was a terrible place. She cried when we talked. She said almost all her stuff had been stolen. The professionals there mocked her faith.

One night, she lay awake in the dark with a little radio under her pillow, listening to a radio show from WMBI called *Night Sounds* with host Bill Pearce. He spoke that night about God's Father-love for us, and then he played that hymn we sang earlier, the one with the last verse found on the wall of an asylum, "The Love of God." There in her dark hour, God spoke to Kathy and she grasped God's love, and ran into his embrace. Three days later she left that hospital and never returned.

She struggled with health issues all her life. Our ways parted but every year I'd get a letter from her and always news about her church and her love for the Lord. She died seven years ago. At her funeral they sang,

*Oh the deep, deep love of Jesus
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free*

*Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me.
Underneath me, all around me
Is the current of your love
Leading onward, leading homeward
To your glorious rest above.*