

# THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S GRACE EMBRACES ALL WITHOUT DISTINCTION

## Galatians 3:26-29

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

### INTRODUCTION

When have you felt most included or accepted by a group? What sorts of things contribute to the feeling of being a "part" of a group? What are some possible reasons it is so important to us to be accepted or included in certain groups?

The letter that Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia is a description of who it is that belongs to the family of God. One way to state the central question that Paul is addressing is this, How do humans become part of God's family and remain a part of God's family? What are the entrance requirements to belong to God's family? Verses 26-29 are the climax to the argument that Paul began back in 2:16. In these verses God declares that he is completely disinterested in what interests humans. The things that make us different from one another and therefore acceptable or unacceptable to one another have no interest to God. The good news of God's grace is offered to all equally, without distinction and embraces all without distinction. Your economic standing, your moral performance, your religiosity, your gender, your social standing, your beauty, your intelligence, your race and a myriad of other things that matter to us have absolutely no influence upon whether or not God loves you or will accept you. Belonging to God's family and remaining a part of God's family is not based upon any of the things that include or exclude humans from human societies.

### STUDY

1. Verse 26 begins with a "for" which the NIV has again left out. That means that v. 26 is giving a reason for why v. 25 is

true. Why is it true that "now that faith has come we are no longer under the supervision of the law?"

*We are no longer under the supervision or direction of the law now that we are trusting in Christ because all of us who are trusting in Christ are sons of God. The law, the 10 commandments, religious rituals cannot make you a son of God. All the OT law can do is condemn you as a lawbreaker and show you the Son of God who is able to make sons of God by his death, resurrection and ascension. Everyone who is in Christ, the Son of God, by faith is a son of God, therefore we no longer need the supervision of the law to direct us.*

2. What might be some reasons that Paul calls all Christians, male and female, "sons of God" rather than "children of God"? (See Lev. 27:1-8, Numbers 30:1-15, 36:2-9, Deut 25:5-6 for an indication of the cultural situation of daughters/women as opposed to sons/men.)

*Paul uses this language for two reasons. First, he is communicating with people who live in his culture, which is a highly patriarchal society. In Jewish culture, women, daughters had few rights. All property rights were given through men, fathers to sons. They did not receive any portion of the family estate unless there were no sons in the family. Even if they did receive the inheritance they had to marry within their tribe so the property would remain part of her father's tribe. As is true in many cultures of the world yet today, sons were highly preferred over daughters for economic and social standing reasons. Therefore, Paul, in this context intentionally uses the term "sons of God" because he wants everyone who trusts in Christ to understand we are all in the position of being favored sons in the family of our Father with all the rights and privileges of that position. We cannot, from Paul's use of this term determine if he approves of the social arrangements within which he lives. He is using language that will be meaningful to the people to whom he writes. The point he is making is that there are no second-class children among us, he is not engaging in social critique. The second reason he says that we are all sons of God through our faith in Jesus Christ is so that we will understand that God feels about us the way he feels about his only begotten Son, Jesus. We are sons of God through our faith in the Son*

of God and therefore, God loves us the way he loves his own son. He treats us as his beloved sons because we are in His Son by faith.

3. What difference should it make in our lives to know that all of us equally are sons of God in Christ Jesus by faith?

*If you have faith in Christ you are in the position of a favored son. It doesn't matter whether you have strong faith or weak faith. It doesn't matter if you have been a Christian for 10 years or 10 minutes. It doesn't matter if you are a pastor or a disabled person who cannot leave your home. There are no daughters of God who have no rights to the family property and no access to the Father's wealth. God doesn't have any favorites in his family. He doesn't love some of his children more than others. He does not withhold himself or his resources from any of his children. This is so important for us to understand. It is so easy when we look around at other Christians and the conditions in which they are living to not believe what I just said. When you observe that other Christians are healthier than you or have more money than you or are more respected than you or appear to have some benefit in this life that you don't have it is easy to think that God loves them more than you. That is never the reason behind why our lives are different from one another. What you can always know is that God loves you as much as he loves his own Son. Therefore, whatever circumstances the wisdom of God ordains for our lives, we can always know that the motive behind the circumstances is God's love for us as his beloved sons.*

**The gospel of God's grace embraces all without distinction because through faith in Christ alone we are all equally sons of God.**

4. Based on the last clause of v. 26 and the first clause of v. 27, what does Paul assume is true of everyone who has faith in Christ?

*All who have faith in Christ have been baptized into Christ and all who have been baptized into Christ have faith in Christ.*

5. How do we know that Paul is not teaching that the physical act of baptism, by itself, produces spiritual effects in people's

lives, i.e., "clothed themselves with Christ?" (See Galatians 3:2, 5, 6-9, 11, 14, 22-25. Also, compare 1 Corinthians 1:17 with Romans 1:16)

*Paul is not saying that the external act of baptism is the cause of spiritual effects. Baptism, as a physical act does not save anyone. The word "faith" or the verb, "to believe" is used 26 times in the letter to the Galatians. Baptism is mentioned once. Throughout chapter 3 faith is the human response to Christ's work, God's promise and what connects us to what Christ has done. In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul says to the Corinthian church, "I did not come to baptize but to preach the gospel." In Romans 1 he says that it is the gospel that is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Therefore, it is very clear that faith is what unites us to Christ and gains for us all the benefits of what Christ has done. Baptism is an external act that all who trust in Christ submit to. It is quite clear that Paul cannot imagine an unbaptized Christian, yet he would not say that the act of baptism is what saves us. Rather our faith unites us to Christ and we are baptized as an expression of that faith. Because all who trust Christ are baptized Paul can use baptism as a summary description of a Christian.*

6. All who trust Christ and are thus baptized in water have "put on Christ." Why is it necessary for us to be clothed in Christ? See Matthew 22:8-14 and Exodus 28:1-4, 39-43 with Heb. 10:19-22.

*We are fit to come to the wedding feast that the Father has prepared for his Son's marriage to his bride, the church because we have been clothed with Christ. Christ is our wedding garment. He is the garment of salvation. He is the robe of righteousness. Additionally, the OT was full of regulations about the kinds of garments that had to be worn by the priests when they entered into the temple, into God's presence. We are dressed in Christ so that we can enter into God's very presence, into the most Holy Place. All of us who are trusting in Christ and have thus been baptized into Christ are dressed in God's best suit of clothes, the Lord Jesus Christ himself and are thus ready to participate in all the functions and ceremonies of God's kingdom. We are dressed for success in the kingdom of God. We are fit to show up in God's kingdom because we are dressed in Christ.*

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7. What is significant about the three pairs of categories of people in v. 28? Why these six groups paired in this way?

*The six categories include every human being. Each of the sets is a pair of opposites or an expression of a deep division in humanity. They reflect the deep racial/religious divides within humanity, the economic/social divisions of human societies and the most profound of all divisions, that between male and female.*

8. In what sense have the distinctions between Jew and Gentile, slave and free and male and female been eliminated for all of us who are in Christ? Is Paul saying that the church is a classless, genderless community? Why or why not?

*He cannot mean that there is no such thing in the world or in the church as Jew/Gentile, slave/free and male/female. He is not teaching that we are to ignore and treat as completely irrelevant and unimportant one another's sex or race or vocation or education or marital status or age or whatever other distinction you can think of. Paul's letters are full of specific instructions to men, women, married, single, slave, master, citizen, Jew, Gentile, children, parents, the old, the young, husbands, wives, kings, governors, etc. He is not promoting some sort of utopian vision of a classless, unsegregated society. This verse is not primarily about the sociology of the church or of the broader culture. I think it has profound implications for how we relate to one another but it is not primarily about the social interaction of Christians. Rather, the point is that when it comes to being justified, declared not guilty before God, being sons of God, being clothed with Christ, being an heir of God's promises, then your race, economic position, legal standing, gender do not matter. There are no human distinctions that prevent anyone from being sons of God nor are there any human characteristics that make it more likely for someone to be a son of God.*

9. In what sense are we "one in Christ?" How is this "oneness" the grounds for saying there is "neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male and female?"

*This does not mean we all have the same roles or functions in the church. It does not mean that we are to treat children as if they are adults or adults as though they are children. It does not mean we are to pay no attention to gifts and abilities when we organize the church or society. It does not mean we are to treat men like women or women like men or both as if they are some kind of sexless, genderless being. We are one in the equality of our access to God and to all the benefits Christ has won for us. God does not prefer the prayers of Jewish Christians to the prayers of non-Jewish Christians or of white Christians to the prayers of black Christians. God does not delight in the worship of the wealthy more than he delights in the worship of the poor. He does not give more spiritual insight to men than he does to women. Race or class or sex or education or physical beauty will not divide Heaven. God takes no notice of these things that matter so much to human beings when he determines whom he will save or when he distributes his gifts to his church. There are no second class Christians. Everyone who is in Christ is baptized by the Holy Spirit, given full access to God by Christ's death, destined for eternal life, loved by God, endowed with spiritual gifts.*

10. Jesus says in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." In what way is the "oneness" of the Trinity the model of our "oneness" in Christ?

*The simplest way to understand this is to consider the nature of God, himself. God is a trinity. That is, there is only one God who has eternally existed as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each member of the Trinity is fully God and yet there is only one God. Jesus in John 10:30 uses very similar language to that of Paul here when he says, "The Father and I are one." What does that mean? It means that both the Father and the Son are fully God. They both possess the fullness of deity. They both possess all the attributes and glory of the divine being. They both are worthy of worship. They both can be prayed to. They share equally in all that it means to be God. However, the Father is always the Father and the Son is always the Son. The Son always submits to the Father and the Father always*

*loves the Son and tells the Son what to do. The Son becomes man and fulfills the law and dies on the cross and rises from the dead. The Father does not do or perform any of these functions. The Father is not the atoning sacrifice for our sins, the Son is. While the Father and the Son are fully God, yet they have different roles, functions and relationships that make them distinct from one another forever. It is the same with us. All who are in Christ are one in their spiritual standing, yet we are distinct in our roles and functions in that spiritual unity.*

**11.** What are some of the social and relational implications of this verse to our life together as God's people?

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**12.** According to v. 29 what is true of all who belong to Christ?

*All the promises God made to Abraham and his descendants in the OT are made to Christ and to all those who belong to Christ. That's what Paul means by saying all who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed because Christ is the Seed of Abraham (vv. 16-18) and so all who belong to him or are in him are therefore also, the seed of Abraham.*

**13.** What is the inheritance promised to Abraham and his Seed according to Romans 4:13?

*The entire universe belongs to Christ and when he comes again he is going to take full possession of all that is his. At that time, all who trust him, who were baptized into him, who are one in him, who belong to him will also possess the world. Right now, in this life, the world is divided into the "haves" and the "have-nots". Those who possess the earth do so because of gender, race, legal status, political connections, wealth, access to educational resources, beauty, etc. There is a day coming when Jesus Christ will come and will raise all the dead. Those who belong to him will inherit the earth and those who do not belong to him will suffer eternal destruction in hell. Whether you inherit the earth or not will have nothing to do with your social standing, your looks, your education, your wealth, your*

*profession, your gender, it will have everything to do with whether or not you belong to Christ.*

**14.** What difference should it make in our lives now to know that we are going to inherit the world with Christ?

*The Bible is firmly opposed to racism, sexism, the oppression of the poor by the rich, discrimination, bigotry and prejudice of all kinds. The church is to be an agent in the fight against these evils on earth. However, while we are opposed to these evils here we also know that the fullness of our inheritance is not here but in the future. This world will always be divided by race, economics, sex, beauty, education, etc. However, if we belong to Jesus Christ, we know there is a day coming when access to all the glories and pleasures of God's creation will be fully enjoyed by all God's people equally. We may be poor here but one day we will be rich. We may be sick and physically weak now, but one day we will be whole. We may be despised now because of our race or gender but one day we will be free of oppression. We may not be part of the "in crowd" here but the day is coming when we will fully experience what it means to be part of the most "in" crowd forever. We may not be cool now, but one day we will be part of the coolest thing and the coolest people in the universe. We are not a bitter, resentful, violent people because we know that the Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, to whom all the promises are made and who will fulfill all the promises is coming again to take us to be with him forever. When we don't get invited to parties we don't get mad because we know we are heirs of the promise. Therefore while we work for justice for the oppressed, we are patient and content with our lot here because this is not our home. Our inheritance is on the way. One day we will inherit the earth and so we will not fear or chafe under the injustices and deprivations we experience here.*

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