

BIBLICAL MANHOOD & WOMANHOOD

RESTORED IN CHRIST

Galatians 3: 21-29

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt left out or excluded from a group of people? Jane and I moved to Champaign, IL in 1988. I became the Director of the Campus Crusade for Christ staff team at the Univ. of IL. The man I replaced was promoted to the job of Area Director for the state of IL. In other words, he became my boss. Jeff continued to live in Champaign. He was the director of the campus team for 5 years. He and his wife Mary were well liked by the members of the team I now led. After we had been in Champaign for several months, we heard that many of our staff were spending Friday nights with Jeff and his wife Mary hanging out together at their home. We had not been invited to these social gatherings. We felt excluded, left out and alone when we heard of these gatherings. We didn't feel like we belonged in Champaign, nor that we were wanted there. Nobody, not Jeff and Mary, nor any of our staff intended for us to be hurt. They were friends and enjoyed each other's company. There was nothing wrong with what they were doing. Nevertheless we felt excluded, unappreciated, left out. My guess is that everyone in this room has felt that way at some point in their life. If you haven't, you probably will at some point in the future.

There is one group that every human being ought to passionately desire to belong to. It is a group that no human being naturally belongs to. Being excluded from this group ought to make us feel really bad. That group is the family of God. Last week we looked at Genesis three, the story of the human race's fall into sin. At the end of that story, Adam and Eve, along with all their descendants are driven from the Garden of Eden, the place where God dwells with his people. Therefore, the Scriptures tell us that all human beings, by nature, are excluded from the people of God. In our natural state, we are alienated from God, enemies of God, living without God, dead as far as God is concerned. Not only is this true but none of us naturally wants to be included in God's family. It's not just that we are not interested in being a part of his family but we find the idea of being a part of God's family as offensive as if we were invited to join the Klu Klux Klan or the local coven of witches.

God, because of sin, drove us from his presence and we, because of sin, do not want to go back. If all of you could speak your mind right now, most of you would be saying, "What are you talking about? Of course I want to be a part of God's family. I've never not wanted to be a part of God's family. What do you think I'm doing in church?" I have no doubt that most of you have wanted to belong to the family of the god you have created in your own mind. But none of us naturally wants to belong to the family of the God who actually exists. We don't, by nature, like the rules he has for living in his family. To live in his family requires that I openly confess and repent of my sins. Living in his family requires that I stop trying to find my happiness in this world and aim to be happy only in Christ. Living in his family requires that I trust in no one and nothing except for Jesus Christ. I must love with a true and sincere love every other person who belongs to his family. In fact, I must put their needs and desires on equal footing with my own needs. These are but a few of the requirements that living in his family entails. All of us, by nature, find such requirements loathsome.

You may have noticed that I have repeatedly used the phrase, "by nature" or "naturally". What the Scriptures mean by the use of this word is that all of us, apart from the grace of God, hate the God who exists and want nothing to do with being a part of his family. However, there are, sitting in this room, many, I pray, who can think of nothing happier than to be a child of God, to be able to call God, Father. Living as an obedient and trusting child of the great God is your highest joy. How can this be? How is it that people who naturally abhor God and his family come to delight in being a part of his family? If your highest pleasure is calling God your Father, it is only because God has graciously, for no reason other than his own good pleasure, decided to give you a new heart that desires to know and love him. The way that God gives new hearts to his people is through his word. So, I have two goals this morning as I explain God's word. First, I aim to convince you of what a horrible thing it is to not belong to God's family. Second, I aim to convince you that belonging to his family is the happiest thing that could ever happen to you.

I can imagine that many of you, if not all of you, are saying to yourselves, “John, I thought you were doing a series on manhood and womanhood. What does this have to do with manhood and womanhood?” I want you to look with me at Galatians 3:28. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This verse is the main verse in the whole Bible that is used by those who call themselves “Biblical Feminists” or “Biblical Egalitarians” to prove that there should be no distinctions between men and women in the home, the church or society at large. Richard Hove in his book, “Equality in Christ?”, summarizes this position. “The phrase, ‘there is no male or female’ means ‘there are no distinctions between men and women—both have the same standing and roles.’ The arrival of the new age has shattered old patterns of racial, sexual, and class discrimination and has brought about a new existence in Christ, where everyone is one in Christ and has equal opportunity, regardless of race, class, or sex.” In other words, egalitarians claim that this verse says that there can be no distinctions in roles or functions in the church or the home because to be “one in Christ” means that men and women are equal in every way.

As I have said many times, our goal when we read the Bible is to seek to determine what the original author meant and the original audience understood. So, as I have studied this passage in Galatians I am persuaded that it is not primarily talking about social relationships in the home and church. Rather, this passage is part of an extended argument of the apostle Paul regarding what it is that Christ has done for us and what the benefits are for us. So, I will comment on the egalitarian’s view when I come to v. 28 but the main point of this passage is...

MAIN POINT

To belong to the family of God is the best thing that could happen to you because...

I. All who do not belong to God’s family are prisoners (vv. 21-25)

One of the things that I am confronted with almost daily as I read the Bible is how often the Bible seems to be interested in things that have no interest to me. Look at v. 21 for example. “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?” That’s just not a question that is very high on my priority list to figure out. I’m more interested in practical questions like, “How can I get my children to be more responsible?” “How can I find the time and money to fix my roof?” “How can I talk my wife into letting me go hunting?” If the Bible seems irrelevant to my life, does the Bible have a problem or do I have a problem? I think you know what I am going to say. The problem is mine, not the Bible’s. I must adjust my perspective. I live in God’s world, therefore I must stop trying to make the Bible care about what I care about and I must seek to care about what the Bible cares about. What v. 21 tells me is that I need to understand the relationship between God’s promises and God’s law.

Paul has made the point that God made promises to Abraham to be his God and to bless him and to bless all the nations of the world through him. God did not make these promises because Abraham did anything. He didn’t obey any law but simply believed the promises. Look at v. 18, “For if the inheritance (the blessing God promised to Abraham and his seed) depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.” The problem Paul is confronting is this. If being the recipient of God’s favor depends upon his unconditioned promise, then why did he give the law through Moses 430 years after making the promise to Abraham? Does the law, which is conditional because it says that if you obey, you will be blessed, contradict the promise that guarantees God’s blessing to Abraham and his seed? Notice the end of v. 21. Paul emphatically denies that there is any contradiction. Then he says why. It is because the law cannot make you righteous. In other words you cannot earn God’s favor by keeping the 10 Commandments. Why not? In v. 22 he says that the reason the law cannot make you righteous is because the whole world is a prisoner of sin. What is he saying?

To be a prisoner of sin means to be under the authority and dominion of sin. Just as a prisoner can only do what the warden says he can do, so every human being must obey sin. If you were to walk up to any person on the street and ask them if they were a prisoner of sin, what would they say? They would say, “Well, I know that sometimes I do things that are wrong. After all, nobody is perfect. But I’m not under the control of sin. I often do good things for others. I often keep myself from doing bad things. I’m not a prisoner, I’m free to do as I want.” This is how

the vast majority of people think about sin. Either Paul is wrong or this response is wrong. We need to ask, what is sin? I love the definition in our catechism as it accurately summarizes what the Bible teaches. “Sin is transgression of the law of God which teaches that we are to act in perfect holiness, from a heart of faith, to the glory of God.” Every moment of every day my actions are to express love for God and love for people. Every moment of every day I am to trust in God and his promises, never in myself, other people or created things. Every moment of every day I am to act, think and feel so that the greatness of God is seen in me and by me.

My problem is exactly what my imaginary friend said. “I am free to do what I want.” The trouble is that I always want to depend upon myself or another part of creation, never on God. I want to live so that I am the center of attention, not God. My behavior is determined by what I think will make me happy, not what God says. I am a prisoner of sin because I only want to do what I want to do and what I want to do is sin.

Then in v. 23 he says that we are prisoners of the law. How are we under the dominion and control of the law? The law is my judge and my jailer. The law cannot change me. All it can do is condemn me and sentence me to the just anger of God. This is what the law is given for. God gave the 10 commandments so that we will feel the prison of our sin and want to be free of it. The law serves only to show us our sin, God’s anger against us because of sin and our inability to escape from the domination of sin on our own. See in v. 24 that the purpose of the law is to drive us to Christ. The law is designed to show us that we need a Savior. It is the universal feeling of human beings that we are good enough for God. No one truly believes they deserve to go to hell. Everyone naturally feels that while there may be some really bad people who deserve hell, they are not one of them. However, the law’s purpose is to humble us and to frighten us, to show us our desperate condition.

Many have commented to me over the past several years that my preaching is too harsh. I talk about sin and threaten you with hell too much. These verses are the reason I talk about sin and judgment as much as I do. Look at v. 22. Why does the Scripture insist that we are under the dominion of sin? Why is it important that I as your pastor talk much about your failure to keep God’s laws? So that the promises of God might be given to all those who are in Christ by their faith. If you have cancer and it is treatable and I am your doctor and I know it but I refuse to tell you that you have cancer, what kind of a doctor am I? If, when I tell you that you have cancer, you deny it and tell me I’m crazy, what will I do? If I love you and care about you I will gather all the facts and seek, with all my might to convince you that you have cancer and that I have the treatment that can save your life. I will seek to scare you to death so that you will make use of the treatment and live. If you reject my treatment and decide to treat yourself by changing your diet, what will I do? I will keep seeking to show you that your only hope is to submit to the chemotherapy. This is exactly what the Scriptures do through the law. It is what I’m doing when I tell you about your sin and the certainty of hell for all who will not repent and cry out for deliverance.

Look at v. 24, the law is put in charge of us to lead us to Christ, in order that we may be declared not guilty of sin and perfectly righteous, through faith in him. You are under the dominion and control of sin and law and death and there is no escape except through faith in him. There is never a time when you outgrow your need to hear the threatening of God’s law. We need to hear and feel the weight of our condemnation for sin so that we will continually look to Christ as our Savior from sin and never depend upon ourselves. I’m not just trying to make you feel bad for no good reason. I want you to feel bad so that you will look to Christ only and continually for salvation.

To belong to the family of God is the best thing that could happen to you because...

- *All who do not belong to God’s family are prisoners*
- *And because...*

II. It is the only place where true unity is experienced (vv. 26-28)

Verse 26 is the best news you could ever hear as a human being. If you think there is better news than this, then the law has not yet done its work in your life. You are not thinking straight. If you think that winning the lottery is better news than v. 26 you are not thinking straight. If you think that getting married is better news than v. 26 than you are not thinking straight. If you think that being healthy is better news than v. 26 than you are not thinking

straight. If you are now in Christ by your faith, if you are now identified with Christ by your baptism, if you are now wearing Christ, then because you belong to the Son of God you are a son of God. You are part of the family of God because you are identified with the Son of the Father.

This is the picture that Paul is painting for us here. God the Father is the king. We are rebels in his kingdom. We despise him and his laws and delight in our disobedience. He has thrown us into prison and placed us under the condemning and confining power of his law. Each day we get up and scheme and plot as to how we are going to overthrow this king. We seek to thwart him and show our contempt for him in our scorn for his laws. We plan for how we are going to escape this prison and the death that awaits us. Yet, blaring over the loudspeakers in our prison we hear his commands and his sentence of death against our disobedience to his commands. We ignore these warnings and commands until one day the Son of the King comes to our cellblock. He tells us that he has paid the penalty for sin and has obeyed all of his Father's laws, perfectly. He tells us that that his Father has promised to give him his kingdom because of his obedience. He is willing to include us in the blessings of his Father, to make us one of his Father's own sons if we will repent of our sins and trust in him completely to deliver us from the prison of our sin. As he speaks, we are sullen, indifferent, and hostile to him. Then he blows on us and says, "Receive my Spirit." Suddenly the commands that are blaring over the loudspeaker and God's sentence of death seem deafening in our ears. We are shocked at how we love to sin against this great God. We are afraid and fall trembling at his feet acknowledging our sins and crying out to him for forgiveness. He lifts us to our feet, takes us out of the prison and clothes us with his own righteousness. He pours his blood upon us to signify that we died in his death, that the penalty of our sin has been paid. He takes us to his Father's home and the Father treats us in the same way that he treats his own Son. We discover that we belong to a family who share in common this saving work of Christ. We are part of a family of former prisoners who have all been made sons of the great King. We are very different from one another. Some are Jews, some Greeks. Some of us are wealthy, some are poor, some are criminals, some are middle class housewives. Some are black, some are white. Some of us are men and some of us are women. But what we are matters no more because we have been made into one family by being in Christ. All of us were prisoners and excluded from the family of God, now because of Christ we are one in Christ.

Verse 28 is not saying that Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, men and women are no longer different from one another in any sense. Paul is saying that the differences between people cannot keep anyone from experiencing the benefits of being in Christ. "You are all one" does not mean, "you are all equal in every way without distinction". Let me read you a portion of what Richard Hove says, "...if someone today made the statement, 'The Republicans and the Democrats are one', the hearers would doubtless be confused: In what sense are Republicans and Democrats one? A more likely statement would be, 'Republicans and Democrats are one in their resolve to win the war on drugs.' The expression, then, highlights what the diverse groups have in common; it says little or nothing about how they differ."

What is it that these diverse groups of people share in common? It seems clear to me, based on the context of this passage, that they share a unity as the people of God in spite of their profound differences. This oneness is not the oneness of function and role in the home, church and society. If you were going to pick three pairs of opposites to reflect the diversity in humanity, you would find it hard to pick more opposites than these three. The entire emphasis is then to show the powerful grace of God in Christ. He makes one in Christ people who are vastly different from one another. He takes sinners of all varieties and types and unites them together in his Son so that they each one fully experience all the benefits of his Son's obedience. No one has greater access or greater standing in his family based upon any of the distinctions that exist among human beings.

This reality is supposed to fill us with such joy that we delight to love and care for one another because we are one in Christ, not because we share a similar life experience or gender or race or family background. I am going to be blunt right here and maybe make some of you angry. Churches that divide people up based on age and gender and marital status and addictions are organizing their church in direct contradiction to what this verse says. Christians who only want to hang out with other Christians who are like them in "life experience" are living contrary to what this verse says. Let me ask you this. What displays the greatness of God's mercy in your life more, when you only hang out with people who are like you or when you develop relationships with those who are unlike you? Here is what I am afraid of for us: our lack of initiating relationships with those unlike ourselves merely reveals

that we do not find verse 26 to be good news at all. I fear that our unwillingness to befriend those unlike us shows that the “oneness” that comes from fellowshiping with those like me means more to me than the “oneness” of sharing in Christ’s salvation with someone different than me. We are to think of ourselves first and foremost as sinners saved by grace, not by our marital status or our race or our vocation or our age or our psychological state.

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- *All who do not belong to God’s family are prisoners*
- *It is the only place where true unity is experienced*
- *And because...*

III. It is the only family with a future (v. 29)

Every promise that God made to Abraham and to his descendants is now true for everyone who is in Christ. If you are not in Christ, then you are not an heir of God but an outcast. You do not have a relationship with God and you will be cast into the outer darkness on that great Day of Judgment that is coming upon the whole world. This verse tells us that the fullness of the salvation that Christ has won for his people is still to come. We are now experiencing a taste of that salvation by the work of the Holy Spirit but we will only eat the fullness of it when Christ comes in his glory and we are resurrected and go to live with him in the new heavens and the new earth.

This helps me to deal with the disappointments and troubles of this life. This is not heaven. I have not received my full inheritance yet. I have only received a down payment. The full inheritance is still in front of me and so I need to be patient but hopeful. The experience of oneness here is only partial; in heaven it will be complete. The experience of freedom from the prison of sin and the law here will only be partial; in heaven it will be complete. But I have this absolute certainty that if I am in Christ, then I am an heir of God and will receive the fullness of all God’s promises in heaven with Christ forever.

We all know how this works. All of us have gotten through a tough period by looking forward to a happy time that was coming. I have a vivid memory of this when I was in college. I had several tests and a large research paper due the Friday before the opening day of deer hunting. My dad and brothers were going to come to Stevens Point where I was in school on that Friday to pick me up so we could go hunting. I hardly slept that week in order to get all my work done by Friday. I often thought about my dad and brothers picking me up and leaving school to go hunt. The knowledge that when Friday night was here, I would be camping and hunting and not working kept me going during that week. In fact, I remember doing my work with happiness because of what I knew waited for me at the end of the week. This is exactly how the knowledge of my inheritance in Christ is to affect me now. I press on because I’m looking forward to my reward, not because I’m experiencing the fullness of it now.

Every human being, by nature of being human is excluded from the family of God. Every human being is by nature a member of the family of the devil. We are by nature children subject to the wrath of God. Christ has come, lived, died, and risen again to make all who believe in him members of God’s own family. He has come to set us free from the prison of sin and law, to make us into one new family in Christ with a glorious future awaiting us. I beg you now, on behalf of Christ, repent of your hostility and indifference to this great God and be reconciled to Him by the death of his Son. Join this family by faith in Christ. Look to him and keep looking to him alone.

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MOMENT OF SILENCE

BENEDICTION

Hebrews 13: 20-21