

## *Therefore . . . be God's*

### WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

4<sup>th</sup> in a six-part series

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*Exodus 4:10–13 (NIV)*

<sup>10</sup> Moses said to the LORD, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

<sup>11</sup> The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup> Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

<sup>13</sup> But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

*Galatians 3:26–4:7 (CEB)*

<sup>26</sup> You are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise. <sup>41</sup> I'm saying that as long as the heirs are minors, they are no different from slaves, though they really are the owners of everything. <sup>2</sup> However, they are placed under trustees and guardians until the date set by the parents. <sup>3</sup> In the same way, when we were minors, we were also enslaved by this world's system. <sup>4</sup> But when the fulfillment of the time came, God sent his Son, born through a woman, and born under the Law. <sup>5</sup> This was so he could redeem those under the Law so that we could be adopted. <sup>6</sup> Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” <sup>7</sup> **Therefore**, you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter, and if you are his child, then you are also an heir through God.

*1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (NIV)*

<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. **Therefore** honor God with your bodies.

*Whose are we? To whom does our life belong?*

There are certain Scripture passages that always hit me hard. Today's from 1 Corinthians is one: “You are not your own; you were bought with a price.” The Corinthian Christians had a lot of problems that their pastor, Paul, tackles in this long letter. Some of the problems are sexual. Men from the house churches are visiting temple prostitutes. One man is having an affair with his stepmother. Really. Granted they lived in a sex-drenched culture, but Paul is trying to lead them to a new way of living, God's way.

Sensibly, Paul doesn't try to reach these believers by laying down a set of rules. Instead, he reminds them of their true identity, hoping, I suppose, that as they gain a deeper understanding of who they have become in Christ, they will strive to live the better way.

So he tells them that, yes, they are free in Christ, free to do anything – but not everything is beneficial (6:12). Now that they have put their faith and trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells in each of them. Just as God's presence/Spirit once dwelt in the temple in Jerusalem, now each Corinthian believer is God's temple. Their bodies, their lives are no longer their own. Each of them has been bought and paid for -- at such an incalculable and horrific price, the death of God's own son. This is who they are; in a word, they are God's . . . as are we.

Across his letters, Paul spends a lot of time helping the new believers to understand their new identity in Christ – that they are God's and that the Holy Spirit, God's

empowering presence, dwells within each of them. Today's passage from Galatians is another example.

### *Heirs of the inheritance*

Like the Corinthians, these new Christians (after all, Christianity was new to all at the time) don't really grasp the work that God has done in them. Paul urges them to remember the gifts that God bestowed on them, beginning with the Holy Spirit. Paul's message to them is straight-forward, "You are new creations; now act like it!"

In Galatians 3-4, Paul uses the analogy of minors, heirs, and inheritance to make his point. *We are* in direct relationship with God. *We are* dressed in the adult wardrobe of faith. *We are* in Christ's family. *We are* the descendants of Abraham. *We are* the adult heirs of God and the inheritance due God's heirs is ours. In his commentary on Galatians, N. T. Wright brings out the connections between the Jewish story and the story Paul is telling these believers:

In the Exodus, the God of Abraham revealed himself in a new way as the covenant-keeping God, the God who heard the cry of his people and came down to rescue them. The book of Exodus itself sees this as the revealing of God's personal name, YHWH (Exodus 3:14; 6:2-8). Now, in a move as bold as it is original, Paul declares that, through his action in Jesus and the spirit, the one God of Abraham has now made himself known, not just by name and action, but in personal presence as a human among humans, a Jew among Jews. God's son Jesus, and the spirit of God's son, are both sent out from God, not as beings remote or detached from himself, but as his own self-revelation, his own personal presence. Though theologians did not use the word 'trinity', and the technical terms associated with it, until some time later than Paul, the roots of the three-in-one Christian understanding of God are already present in this, one of the earliest, if not *the* earliest, document we possess from the young church.

In the last verse of this paragraph Paul suddenly shifts from the second person plural to the second person singular. '*You*,' he says, pointing a finger at the reader: you, not the person sitting next to you; you are no longer a slave, but a true child and heir. Until each reader has heard that word addressed to him- or herself, the message has not got through. Paul the writer remained a preacher, and Paul the preacher knew how to ram the point home.<sup>1</sup>

So . . . it is not that we are going to be heirs, we are heirs now. We may not act like God's heirs much of the time, but that is who we are. If I had to act like an heir to be an heir . . . well, let's just say that the inheritance would forever elude my grasp.

Paul's point in this passage is larger than just the true identity of the Galatian Christians, though he begins this chapter of the letter by reminding them of their own experience of God's Spirit, which is the evidence and guarantee of their new life in Christ. Nonetheless, many of them still look to the keeping of the Jewish law as the mark of their salvation. They don't fully realize that the arrival of Jesus Christ freed them from the curse of needing to keep a law that they could not keep. Because God gave them the Law, they know sin in a way that other peoples do not.

Paul desperately wants the Galatians to grasp that the Law was only their temporary custodian. In Christ, who was himself born under this temporary custodian so that he could free us from the custodian's care, we, in Peterson's graceful paraphrase, "experience our rightful heritage." And our heritage is that we are new creations, made alive in Christ, God's own children.

The "therefore" is to live like the reborn children of God we are. This life is not to be marked by timidity and fear, but by boldness, for we work knowing our labor in Christ is never in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, T. (2004). *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (pp. 46-47). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

### *Finding courage*

You've heard them all. All the reasons why we can't do what we ought to do or even want to do. We embrace the language of limitation. We close down possibilities. We avoid risks. Instead of asking God, "What's next?" we inform God, "That's it."

But often, these are merely lies that we tell ourselves.

Now, I'm not foolish. I know that we can't be or do anything we can dream. We all have differing gifts and talents that make us more suitable for some endeavors than for others. As a boy, no matter how much I might have wanted a career in professional baseball, I soon learned that hitting Nolan Ryan's fastball was not in my future. I couldn't even handle the fifth-grade phenom!

Further, we're not talking about the power of positive thinking or any of its ever-popular imitations. Yes, positive thinking matters, a lot. But God has something else to say to us. Indeed, it isn't even something we could ever figure out on our own; instead, God has revealed to us that we are his children, brothers and sisters of Jesus, and heirs of the promise. Still, responding boldly to God isn't always easy. Even Moses, the towering figure of the Exodus, found it hard to say yes.

*Who me? . . . I can't!*

After killing an abusive Egyptian overseer, Moses escaped into the Sinai wilderness where he began to build a new life, a pastoral life far different from the palace life of his youth. One day, as Moses was shepherding his animals, he saw a bush that burned but was not consumed. When he went over to check it out, he met the LORD God. And there the LORD proceeded to lay out the mission he had for Moses. He is to go to Pharaoh and bring God's people out of Egypt (Exodus 3:1-12).

Moses' response to the Lord is understandable, but at least a bit surprising. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh," Moses says. "Suppose they do not believe me? . . . I don't even speak well!" We sympathize with Moses. Who wouldn't be intimidated by such an assignment? Yet, who better than Moses? Didn't Moses realize that he was really the right man for the job. He was an Israelite, yes. But he had been raised in Pharaoh's household. If any Israelite could get an audience with Pharaoh it would be Moses. If anyone knew the ins and outs of palace politics, it was Moses. Who better?

But instead of trusting God's choice of him for this job, Moses listened instead to his own fears and doubts. He said, "I can't, send someone else!" when he should have said, "This is a surprise, but tell me, God, how do we proceed?" God said that he would be Moses' mouth. God would teach Moses what he needs to say. God even promises to send Aaron to speak for Moses. It is as if Moses doesn't really grasp the enormity of God's simple promise: "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). But, of course, Moses goes and God's people are brought from slavery to freedom.

*There is no one else*

As God's Spirit-filled heirs, we are empowered by God to work the works of the kingdom. We can accomplish far more for God than we imagine. And we are to accomplish it together. We are God's children bound together by God into a union that transcends all social divisions, whether of gender, race, education, or denomination. Together, our only response to God ought to be, "Yes, of course, . . . what's next?"

So, as we contemplate the next thirty years at St. Andrew and the bold plans being laid, we need to remember whose we are and admit that if not we won't go forward with courage and commitment, then who will? What church is better equipped to lead than our own? Moses might have first said, "send someone else," but let that not be our response. We were bought at a price and empowered by the very Spirit of Christ, so let's pray that we remain bold in the Lord.

## Big Problems in Galatia

In the mid-50's AD, some of the churches that Paul founded in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) were under attack from false teachers and he pulled no punches in responding. One of the biggest issues that faced the early church was the struggle between Jewish Christians and Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians. Because Christianity began as a movement within first-century Judaism, many Jewish-Christians believed that in order to become a Christian, a Gentile must live under the law of Israel. For male converts, this would mean circumcision. For all converts, this would mean keeping the Sabbath, obeying the Jewish dietary laws, and so on.

But in all his writings, Paul is clear that Christians are marked out *only* by their faith in Jesus Christ (see Romans 4). Paul taught that even the Old Testament heroes, such as Abraham, were reconciled to God by their faith – not by the works of the law. Further, Paul taught that this faith is received by God's grace alone and that it eliminates all traditional distinctions before God – “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:26-29, NRSV). In the early church, Paul's teachings carried the day, and were endorsed in about 50AD by an important council of Christian leaders in Jerusalem. Christians could keep the Jewish law if they wished, but it was not to be required.

Evidently, false teachers had come to Galatia preaching that both faith in Jesus Christ *and* adherence to the Law of Moses are needed to be reconciled with God. Paul is profoundly disappointed that these churches have succumbed to false teaching (yes, heresy!) and he is very combative in this letter. In contrast to Paul's letters to other churches, there is no general word of thanksgiving for the churches in Galatia. Instead, Paul quickly sets the stage for the rest of the letter – “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” (Gal 1:6-7, NRSV)

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

It can be very hard for us to grasp the enormity of God's work in us. In his commentary on Galatians in the *New Interpreters Bible*, Richard Hays writes:

“Our identity is given to us fundamentally through our union with Christ. Paul saw this union as figured forth and enacted in baptism. In baptism we “put on” Christ; we enter into union with him in such a way that all other markers of status and identity fall away into insignificance (Galatians 3:27-29). Centuries of the practice of infant baptism in the culture of Christendom have obscured the dramatic symbolism that the early Christians saw in baptismal initiation. In baptism, the person being baptized confessed the lordship of Jesus Christ over all creation, disrobed to signify the putting off of an entire way of life, was immersed below the water as if undergoing burial (Rom 6:3-5), was raised to a new life, and was clothed in new garments symbolizing the transformation that had occurred. Baptism was a symbolic participation in Christ's death and resurrection, and no one could undergo it without realizing that one life had ended and a new one had begun.”

We will and should continue to baptize infants, but how might we better grasp God's work of new creation? Are there any rituals or practices that would help? How would you help a newly-Christian friend to grasp the significance of her rebirth?

How does embracing our true identities, as God's Spirit-empowered new creations, his children, help us to say “yes” to God, to take risks knowing that our work is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58)? How do we even know what God might be asking of us? Have you ever felt like God was asking something of you? Something pretty specific? How would you go about knowing it was God's voice, not your own? What do you think God is asking of you right now, at this time in your life? Try to be specific.

# Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Monday, Galatians 1</b> This is the only one of Paul's letters in the New Testament that does not open with a word of thanks for the letter's recipients. Paul's Greek is not as polite as it comes across in the English translations. Why is he so angry with these Christians? Why do you think Paul feels that he must defend his own apostleship? Why does he recount so much of his own story? What surprises you the most about the details of his story?</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, Galatians 2</b> Read Acts 15 for more on this council meeting in Jerusalem, assuming Paul is describing the same meeting. It isn't hard to imagine multiple meetings over such a contentious issue. What is the nature of the dispute? Why is it so important that the leaders of the movement must meet to resolve it? Why does Paul get angry with Peter (Cephas)?</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, Galatians 3</b> Paul now mounts his counter-arguments to the false teachers? How does Paul view the Law? What was its purpose? Do you think Paul means that with Christ, anything goes? How is it that you are one of Abraham's descendents? How would you explain this to another person?</p>	<p><b>Thursday, Galatians 4</b> How does the story of Sarah and Hagar help us to understand Paul's point? How is it that Sarah's son is born "through the promise?" This passage illustrates that Scripture can sometimes be pretty hard to understand. How do you typically deal with a confusing passage?</p>
<p><b>Friday, Galatians 5</b> We are new creations, free in Christ. But free for what? What is the nature of Christian freedom? What does this have to do with circumcision? Why do you think Paul contrasts the works of the "flesh" (our old self) with the works of the Spirit?</p>	<p><b>The weekend, Galatians 6</b> What does Paul say here about how we are to live out the unity given us in Christ? Notice that in v. 11, Paul takes up the pen himself. Notice esp. v. 15. What does Paul mean?</p>

