

Part 8: Don't Forget Your Adoption

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December 14, 2025

Many of you know Kenzie who's on staff with our college ministry. But you may not have known that she and her family lived for a few years in Ethiopia while she was growing up. While they were there, one of her brothers became friends with an orphan named DJ who had lived on the streets for most of his life. DJ became fast friends with the family and they eventually even looked into adopting him. But DJ was 21 years old – too old to be legally adopted. But to this day, the family has considered him to be the 8th Weiland kid. He lives in the US now and they see him all the time. He's on their family's group chat. He's even in Kenzie's parents' will. DJ is a Weiland heir.

Now in light of how the family has essentially adopted him and made him an heir, wouldn't it be strange if DJ started to feel anxious that he needed to earn his belonging? What if he started comparing himself with the other Weiland kids and trying to meet the perceived standards for what it looks like to be a Weiland? What if he was constantly burdened by how much he wasn't worthy of being an heir? What if he was constantly wondering if today was the day he would be written out of their will?

Well as unlikely as that might be, that paranoia and shame actually characterizes many of us in the church. When a brother or sister shares with you that they're doubting their assurance because they're wrestling with sin, or they're depressed because they feel rejected and unwanted, or even that they're wrestling with thoughts of self-harm because they are so frustrated with themselves for not fitting in or being worthy of being loved – these all share the same sentiment that DJ would have if he forgot his place in his family.

And in our passage today, the Galatian Christians are having a similar dilemma. They had been listening to teachers who came in and started distorting the Christian message. Where the gospel is about salvation through faith in Jesus alone, these false teachers started adding barriers and standards that the people had to meet in order to *really* belong. They are imposing on the Galatians the same reliance on performance that we naturally find ourselves trapped in. And so to help the Galatians and us, Paul is going explain what it means to be an heir of God.

And our main point today is this: **Don't forget your adoption.**

Don't forget your adoption.

If you are a Christian, then the reality of your identity is that you are accepted by God through adoption as a gracious gift. And when you compare that reality to the substitutes that you could trust in to tell you that you're accepted, you'll find that adoption makes the alternatives senseless.

And so we'll see three ways to view belonging in this passage:

1. **Adoption**
2. **Performance**

3. People Pleasing

And for the kids in the room. As you're listening today, I want you to try to follow along and see if by the end you can answer this question for your parents or the person who brought you today. Are you ready? What does it mean to be adopted by God? What does it mean to be adopted by God. Try to listen closely and you can share your answer with your folks after service.

So we're going to start with our 1st point today: Adoption

1) Adoption (3:29-4:7)

Let's read **Galatians 3:29-4:7**

Adoption is in Christ

Paul is helping us understand what it means to be an heir of God. And he gives an illustration. In that culture, when a child was an heir, even though all of the estate was technically his, he was still under authority and didn't have rights to what he owned any more than a slave did until he came of age.

And so now he draws a parallel. He says we were once like children enslaved under the "elementary principles of the world." That phrase seems to refer to the gods that the Galatians would have worshipped. Remember that unlike Paul, they weren't Jews who were under the authority and standards of the Jewish Law. Instead, they were polytheists who were under the authority and standards of numerous false gods. But interestingly, Paul lumps himself and the Jews in the same boat as pagan idolaters. Whether it was to false gods or to the Law, they were all imprisoned and held captive by something that couldn't give life.

But at the appointed time set by God, the Son arrived.

We all know the coming of age stories where there's a moment when the young person has matured enough or accomplished some feat and they're told that the time has come and they're given some precious heirloom that was left for them by their parents or they assume some rightful position or status that belonged to their family. Luke is old enough to receive his father's lightsaber. It is time for Simba to take his rightful place as king.

But here, notice who the Son is that arrives.

It's not us. It wasn't that we were children who matured over time until we had arrived and got the inheritance for ourselves. Instead, at the right time, God sent *his* Son.

So whether you were a Jew with the law or not, it was always about the promised offspring that was going to come. Whether a Jew or a Gentile, the only way to become an heir is by being adopted by God as sons in Christ - the offspring, *the* Son, the rightful heir. So adoption is in Christ.

And now we'll see that adoption includes rights.

Adoption Includes Rights

Remember **v.4-5 said,**

So God sent his Son. This is what we're celebrating at Christmas. The Son had always existed with the Father, but he was sent at a moment in time to enter our experience and be born as a man. So he's fully God and fully man. So kids, when baby Jesus was born, he really was a baby, but he was also the Son of God who had always existed.

And he was born "under the law" so he could redeem those who were under the law. Jesus' redeeming work involved both his obedience to the law in our place and his death for our sins (*our* law-breaking) in our place. So Jesus doesn't just remove something from us – our condemnation – but he also adds something to us – our adoption.

Becoming a Christian is not about getting a clean slate or a second chance. If you only receive a clean slate, then you are going to make the slate dirty again. If you only get a second chance then you'll inevitably ruin it again.

Kids, have you ever disobeyed and got caught and then promised, "I will never do that again"? Does that ever end up being a promise that's harder to keep than we thought it would be? I've learned that's not a good place to put your hope.

In those moments with my kids, I've tried to explain that the good news isn't that you'll never do it again but that Jesus has already obeyed perfectly in your place.

Jesus both paid for your sins and perfectly obeyed in your place so that everything you need to be accepted by God has already been done. And for this to count for you, all you need to do is receive the gift by renouncing trust in yourself and instead trusting in Jesus' finished work.

And notice that this doesn't just make God *okay* with us. Jesus' redemption has a destination. It's redemption unto adoption. Adoption as sons.

Now calling all adopted believers "sons" can seem devaluing of women. I know a Christian sister who struggled for years to feel like she could come to God and be welcomed because of her gender. Her dad had always prioritized his relationship with his sons over her and so she felt kind of like a second-class citizen. But that's why this was so revolutionary in a male-dominant society, because all believers – both male and female – share together in all the rights of *the* Son of God. You might be a daughter of God, but as one who is united to Christ, everything that belongs to the Son is yours so that the phrase "adopted as sons" isn't forgetting about you, but is rightly referring to you.

But also, for all believers, it's really common to wrestle to feel loved by God. We know and affirm biblical things about God forgiving us and loving us. But we're also aware that we are sinners and that we aren't worthy. And so some of us try to rationalize how to fit the truths we affirm with our shortcomings, and it sometimes sounds like this: "I know God loves me, but I don't think he likes me. He *has* to forgive me but he's probably not happy about it. God's not proud of me the way he's proud of other Christians at church. He's too disappointed in me. I'm too tainted, too dirty. I'm not worth his time. The things I'm going through right now make it hard not to believe that God is angry with me. I must not be getting something he's trying to teach me. If I could just figure it out and do it right, then maybe he would go easier on me. Oh, I'm confident I'll make it to heaven – like I said, God loves me – but I'll probably be on the outskirts of heaven with the other people who barely made it in."

When we think this way, we don't realize that what we're saying is actually inconsistent with what we believe. These thoughts actually contradict redemption unto adoption. There aren't different levels of adoption. Being adopted by God means that you receive all of the rights of being a son.

Adoption is Intimate

And we see this **in v.6-7**:

Adoption is intimate. There's no room here for the category of a neglected step-child. The Father sent his Son to redeem you unto adoption and he sent his Spirit so that you might *experience* adoption. Did you notice how the whole Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) is involved in your adoption? To be redeemed by Jesus is to have adoption, and to be adopted is to have the Spirit of the Father's Son in your heart. This is what it means to be united to Christ. All that is true of Christ is intimately true of you. His obedience counts for you. His death counts for you. But also, his relationship to his Father counts for you.

Now many of us have had painful experiences with our biological or adopted fathers. And often it can be hard to relate to God as Father in light of our experiences. Sometimes people hear the word "father" and something tightens up inside their chest. It's a word that can evoke fear or grief. Your father might have been an angry man that you didn't want anything to do with. He might have been an absent father that you could never please. You may have never even known your father. We import those experiences and project them on God, and it can feel like an impossible hurdle to overcome.

But I want to encourage you that no matter where your starting place is with your experience of an earthly father, all of us have to learn what it is to relate to our heavenly Father. Jesus says elsewhere that all fathers (even good ones) are essentially evil compared to God.

He says in **Luke 11:13**:

Your reference point might be further ahead or behind of someone else's but all fathers fall infinitely short of this kind of love. There is no human father in all of time of which we could fully say:

- **Your Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48)**
- **Your Father sees (Matthew 6:4)**
- **Your Father knows (Matthew 6:8)**
- **Your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)**
- **it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32)**
- **the Father himself loves you (John 16:27)**

Your suffering in relation to your earthly father is not determinative of your relationship with your heavenly one. The very place to go with the pain of your relationship with your dad is to the Father who will receive you and will never let you down.

And so the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts cries "Abba! Father!" Now the word "Abba" is an Aramaic term. It was a tender and intimate way of addressing your father – maybe like the word "daddy" today. But the people that Paul is writing to probably didn't speak Aramaic. So why would Paul

suddenly include an Aramaic word in a letter to people to whom that language wouldn't have been natural?

Well it's been observed that Jesus would have spoken Aramaic and that "Abba" would have been how he addressed *his* Father in heaven. And so it would make sense for the Spirit of the Son in you to address the Father through you in the same way Jesus would. You have the same intimate access to God that Jesus had. And you're being invited to call out to him as confidently as though you were as deserving as Jesus.

But also, let's look at the only time recorded in Scripture where Jesus specifically addresses God the Father as "Abba! Father!"? In **Mark 14:36** we read this:

At the most intimate and vulnerable moment in Jesus' life – at the moment he was "greatly distressed and troubled" – at the moment he said "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" – he cried out "Abba, Father."

And the very reason the Father didn't remove the cup of his wrath – the very reason it was the Father's will that Christ would suffer and die on the cross and be raised from the dead, was so that in Christ, you who were once far off could have the right to call him "Abba! Father!"

What more could the Father give you? He didn't spare his own Son for you. What has been withheld? What more could be done to convince you that in Christ you are a son.

Don't forget your adoption.

So for kids in the room, we just saw that adoption is all about Jesus, if you believe in Jesus you're a son, and the Father loves you. Remember some of those phrases for later.

Paul tells Christians that you are no longer a slave, but a son. And now he's going to help them to see the implications of that. The alternative to resting in your adoption is putting your hope for acceptance in your performance. And this is our second point: **Performance**

2. Performance

Let's read **v.8-11**:

So remember that Paul is talking to Gentiles. They weren't Jews and weren't given the Jewish Law. Instead they had worshipped gods that weren't gods at all. The word "paganism" has historically referred to all religions outside of Judaism and Christianity. And so that word captures what Paul is referring to here in Galatia. He uses that phrase "elementary principles" again and calls their former religion "weak and worthless." He calls it "slavery." And the root issue was that they did not know God.

If you are here today and are not a Christian, then this passage calls you to consider what you are enslaved to. Maybe you identify with the Latter Day Saints or Native American spirituality, or another form of religion. Every system promises life if you can meet its standards. But Paul says that none of them can deliver and calls all of them slavery.

Maybe you're not a Christian, and it's for this very reason. Maybe you think that all religion including Christianity is just a system designed to enslave people. Perhaps you feel free because you're not under any system. But that doesn't mean you don't have creeds that you live by, standards you measure yourself by, guilt that you remedy by doing whatever you determine is the "right" thing to do to meet your idea of what it means to be a "good person." Can you see how that has all the elements of a religion. It just happens to be self-made. You might feel very content that you don't need Jesus – that you have what you need and will be just fine. But Paul says you're actually enslaved because you don't know God.

And so it sounds like Paul is saying that the Galatians want to go back to their pagan idolatry and become its slaves once more. But that's not actually the issue that the book or this chapter is addressing, is it? They don't want to go back to their old religion, they just think that they need to obey Jewish Laws in order to be truly accepted by God. And so this is what's shocking about the language Paul is using here. He's equating obeying things found in the OT scriptures while thinking that it's necessary in order to really be accepted by God with paganism. When he says "You observe days and months and seasons and years!" – he's equating their observance of Jewish holy days with going back to their pagan holidays. This is scandalous. How can he equate OT laws with paganism?

Well the Law served a good purpose, but now, to treat it as a way to perform and measure yourself and make yourself acceptable to God is no different than trying to go back to idol worship. It's going back to slavery to performance as the means of acceptance with God.

Now some Christians have literally struggled in their conscience with whether God will accept them if they don't follow certain aspects of Old Testament Law. Earnest Christians can wrestle with guilt and feeling unacceptable to God in relation to things like: keeping the Sabbath, circumcision, or the requirement to give an exact tithe – These are things that are found in the Old Testament – at one time God did command these things to his covenant people. But now Paul calls trusting in them in order to be right with God, idolatry.

Now most of us probably aren't looking to Jewish law the way the Galatians were. But most of us probably wrestle with the heart of the issue.

In my own experience and in meeting with people in the church, feeling condemned by God for our performance is a consistent issue. We want to obey God – we want him to be pleased with us. But when we fail, we imagine that God doesn't want anything to do with us.

Maybe you gave into sexual sin this week. Maybe you lost your temper with your kids again. Maybe you feel stuck in a situation and feel shame because you can't seem to fix it. How many of us imagine God like the dad that the prodigal son thought he had rather than the dad that was actually waiting for him to come back home.

Welcoming us home is how the Father responds to real sin when we turn to him. But notice that the things that the Galatians are putting themselves under aren't even things that God wanted from them. Circumcision wasn't inherently moral or immoral. Eating pork wasn't moral or immoral. Taking Saturday as a day of rest wasn't moral or immoral. Some things might be more or less wise in different circumstances, but you can choose. It's not something God requires of you.

For us too, often the laws that we aren't measuring up to aren't even something God commands.

We look for security in meeting standards. If we've met the highest standard we're aware of, then we feel acceptable. Think of the places in your life where you are inflexible with good things because you've created a standard with them. What are you afraid of happening if you were flexible in that area? For instance, there have been times where I've been inflexible with how much money we gave away even though my wife would have been cared for better with some more money going to the food budget. What was I afraid of? Well if I didn't hit that new standard of giving that I heard in a podcast somewhere then God would be disappointed in me. If I didn't perform, I'd be a failure.

I've panicked when I've discovered that another family does more consistent family worship than we do. Well we can't compromise on Scripture. It does command parents to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. But there's a lot of freedom in how you can do that. Family worship is a good thing. It's not the only way but it is one of the ways that you could seek to obey Eph. 6:4. But to make that the standard that you have to hit in order to be acceptable to God is enslaving. It's taking a principle in Scripture, creating your own law off of that principle, and then making obedience to your own law the standard of whether God is pleased with you or not.

Whatever you look to to tell you you're okay, that is what captures your meditation – that's what you are in awe of – that is what you're worshipping. It's called an idol. And idols always enslave.

When the Galatians had worshipped other gods, the way it would work is that the people would want something like a good harvest and so they would sacrifice to the goddess of agriculture in hopes that that would unlock for them the thing they desired. Or if you wanted love you'd sacrifice to Venus or if you wanted protection you'd sacrifice to Apollo. The idol itself is just a means to an end of what was really desired.

We can do the same thing. We want to feel accepted – to know we're okay - and so we look to our own performance to deliver that. But what sacrifice does our idol of performance require of us before it can unlock that acceptance we want. Oh not much. You just have to make sure no one has higher standards than yours and you must perfectly meet those standards in your opinion and everyone else's opinion all the time. So essentially all you have to do is be omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. That is a crushing, enslaving weight. Performance is a bad god.

Acceptance by performance is paganism. And here's the thing. If you're someone who wrestles with your performance, then your response to hearing that right now is "tell me what the new standard is that I have to reach in order to fix that!" There's reliance on our performance again.

But it's relationship with God that eliminates slavery to performance.

Paul says, "but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God..." Knowing God actually starts with him knowing you first. Now it's impossible for God to not know you in the sense that he knows everything. But this word can also be used to refer to a more relational knowing. God chooses to set his love on you and know you in an intimately relational way before you even came to know him.

So what frees you from slavery is your relationship with him by grace. Timothy Keller says, "it is our insecurity regarding our acceptance with God which is the reason we make idols."

Where are you insecure in your relationship with God? Where are you trying to be biblical but in a way that Paul is actually calling pagan? When you fail to reach your self-made standard of looking spiritually mature enough, or your past being clean enough, or your family looking put together enough, where will you find your security? You are already known by God. Don't forget your adoption.

Paul says, "I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain." Once you've been adopted by God, you can't go back to acceptance by performance.

You might feel nothing but condemnation in what Paul is saying right now because it's one more thing you've gotten wrong. But Paul's intent is not to make the Galatians question their salvation. Instead, he's reminding them of these things as believers so that they will embrace what's already theirs. He says "because you are sons," he says "you are no longer a slave, but a son," he says "but now that you have come to know God." All of these realities are theirs. Just don't turn back. Don't let your Christianity function like paganism. Don't remake yourself a slave. Remember your status in Christ. Don't forget your adoption.

And along the way, security in our adoption will have implications for how we relate to others. And we'll see this in our last point. The other alternative to acceptance by adoption is putting our hope for acceptance in **People Pleasing**.

3. People Pleasing

Let's read **v.12-17**:

Paul calls them to become as he is as he has become as they are.

Remember, this is Paul. In **Phil. 3:4-6** he says this:

Nobody could do the law better than Paul. He had been the poster-boy for law-keeping. So if he had achieved what the Galatians were aspiring to, why did he abandon hope in it? **In v.7-9 he says:**

The very thing that the Galatians are hoping in is the very thing Paul came to recognize as rubbish. That's a word that means "dung," "refuse," or "garbage." Paul gave up hope in being under the law and keeping Jewish traditions. He became like the Galatians. But now the Galatians are trying to make themselves like who Paul was.

Why the change? Somehow they have gone from a state of happiness to a state of seeing Paul as an enemy for telling them the truth.

Maybe like the Galatians you received the gospel with joy, but then in your Christian walk, you started to listen to pastors or influencers online who started defining specifically what the standard is that your life needs to look like and warning that otherwise you're a carnal Christian, and you don't belong.

Well that's what happened with the Galatians. He says "They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them."

So he's talking about their relationship to the false teachers. Apparently, these false teachers had come in and said that the Galatian Christians were missing something and that in order to be truly accepted by God and be able to participate in table fellowship, you had to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. So why are the Galatians listening to them?

Well the false teachers "made much of them but for no good purpose." They flattered them and puffed them up. But all the while, they were grooming them to make much of the false teachers. By excluding believers from table fellowship, the people became dependent on the false teachers to let them in. And becoming the gatekeepers caused the Galatians to make much of them.

Do you see the insecurity of the false teachers? Because they don't believe in adoption, they are left with relying on their own standards and performance. And they need others to validate their performance. And so even though they present very confidently that they know the right way to do things, it actually comes from a deep insecurity. They must build a large enough fan-base to make a defense that they are in the right – they are justified.

So it's like this people pleasing pyramid scheme. They are dependent on others to prop them up, so first they shut them out and extend the hand of fellowship only if the Galatians become like them. They become the gatekeepers, and so the people are dependent on them to know that they are okay. But they're just manipulating one another to get validation.

So why did the Galatians listen to them? Well, we're hard-wired for a message of works. We want something doable and verifiable so we can trust in man to tell us we're okay. At times, I've been drawn to teachers who present with firm convictions and clear standards. They're actually overly prescriptive. They draw lines in the sand where the Bible doesn't make those lines. But I was drawn to that because there's security in knowing exactly what you're supposed to do and having someone who can assure you you've done it. Without adoption, you need someone to verify you.

Now maybe you're someone who actually sees *yourself* as an influencer. Are there areas where you are loud about your preferences? Where you pressure other Christian's consciences to align with yours and meet your approval and join your side? Functionally you can draw lines in the sand over your view of alcohol, or what the church service should look like, or what the music should be like, or what community should look like, or the correct vocabulary to use. Behind these lines are insecurities clinging to standards and demanding validation.

Or maybe you're someone who is constantly consumed with what other people think and juggling trying to not disappoint anyone's expectations. Maybe you're constantly dropping hints to illicit sympathy and validation. Maybe you present yourself as very agreeable and appreciative but behind closed doors you are bitter over how unfair everyone's expectations are. But do you need to recruit fans to know who you are? Your status is not dependent on your stats. Don't forget your adoption.

And this manipulative ministry of the false teachers is contrasted with Paul's ministry. **Let's read v.18-20:**

So Paul isn't against appreciating ministers. He had just affirmed that they had received him like Jesus himself and had been willing to give him their own eyes if that could have helped him. But this wasn't manipulative. It was in response to Paul's ministry.

And how did Paul's ministry contrast with the false teachers'? Well he calls them "my little children." He says that he is in the anguish of childbirth because he longs for Christ to be formed in them. You see, it's almost like the Galatians are trying to unborn-again themselves (which isn't possible) but that's why Paul is perplexed. It's like having to go through childbirth all over again after the baby has already been born. It doesn't make sense. He's in anguish for them. The false teachers are only concerned for themselves, but Paul shares the concerns of Christ for the Galatians.

And yet, the Galatians don't like Paul's tone. They're seeing him as the enemy, but unlike the false teachers, he's not flattering them in order to manipulate them into affirming him. He doesn't want to use this tone but he's willing to challenge this false gospel they're believing and be thought ill of out of love for them.

Do you have Paul's security in ministering to people? His status as an adopted son frees him up to actually be thought ill of for the sake of love. And this isn't an excuse to be harsh with people. Look at the love and assurance he's trying to give the Galatians. But he's not a people pleaser. He's not needing to manipulate them. He's willing to suffer their displeasure from love.

Paul isn't just an example for ministering to other people in the church, but for parents, he's an example of how to minister to your kids. Sometimes parents can be very insecure in relation to their children. Especially if you've had experiences where your parents never affirmed you or communicated love and acceptance to you. Some people grow up fearing that their children will end up rejecting them and so like the false teachers they try to cater to their children, only telling them what they want to hear to try to recruit them as fans.

But are you willing to be seen as your child's enemy in order to share the truth they need? Is your desire in parenting that they would make much of you or that Christ would be formed in them? Your adoption can give you the security you need to share the bad news of their separation from God and the good news of adoption available through faith in Christ.

So adoption, performance, people pleasing...where will you put your hope? If you're not a believer then I want to invite you to abandon your reliance on performance or people pleasing and instead trust Jesus and receive the gift of adoption.

Kids, remember our question from earlier? Be sure to share your answer after service with your parents. But even if you can't remember, why don't you go ahead and ask them: "What does it mean to be adopted by God?"

You know its humbling how much I resonate with all of the ways that we've talked about that you can forget your adoption. Paul Tripp calls it "Identity Amnesia." Even just earlier this year back in the Spring I took a class where there was a growth project that required you to think of a struggle in your life and journal about it over the course of several weeks considering what you're feeling and believing and doing in relation to the struggle. I recommend you try that sometime with something

that you're struggling with. I chose the issue of anxiety at work. And in the process of journaling and thinking about Scripture in relation to it, God helped me to see that I was really afraid of failing and putting a lot of hope in my performance and believing that I was condemned if there was any evidence in me of need for growth and comparing myself with others and trying to meet self-imposed standards. And even though it's something I continually need to remind myself of, there is such relief in connecting those issues to the reality of our identity in Christ.

I don't know what you're going through right now. You might feel like you're failing as a husband, failing as a parent, failing in your career, forgotten in growing older, an outcast, too guilty, too ugly, too angry at yourself or the people who did this to you, maybe you're even contemplating ending your life. And if that's you, then please don't leave without talking with someone here today. We want you to see the hope in adoption.

For everyone in Christ, you don't have to fear failing because Jesus has already bore our shame and it can't keep you from your heavenly Father. You're already adopted.

You don't have to fear being condemned because of your performance. You're already adopted.

You don't have to compare yourselves with others and bemoan how unimpressive you are by comparison. You don't have to be enslaved to trying to figure out all the standards and constantly performing desperately hoping someone will tell you you're okay. You're already adopted.

Brothers and sisters in Christ...don't forget your adoption.