

From Prison to Adoption
Galatians 3:23-29; 4:1-7
September 23

Let me begin this lesson with two stories – the story of a family in my church and then my personal story. In my church, I have an incredible young family that adopted two sisters. Adoption into a caring, loving family has changed the lives of these two precious preschool-age girls. Adoption has given these sisters a new status, new privileges, a new future, and a beautiful inheritance.

I grew up in a wonderful family. Yet, my life before Christ meant that I was separated from the family of God. Because of my spiritual separation from God's family, I belonged to a broken family that enslaved me. Spiritual forces ruled my life (Gal. 4.3,9). When I received spiritual adoption, God placed me within a new family – the family of God.

In the focal passage for this lesson, used the first-century practice of adoption to illustrate the radical change in the spiritual family that occurs in an individual's life. In contrast to our culture, first century adoption involved the adoption of adults into the family. What happens when God brings an individual into His family?

First, through faith, we are brought into a relationship as sons of God (Gal. 3.23-26). Paul contrasted the situation of humans "before faith came (v. 23) with our condition "since faith came" (v. 25). Before adoption, the Mosaic law had two functions and two purposes. First, the law imprisoned people (v. 23) for judgment and punishment. As a prison-house, the law does not allow escape. The law imprisons to drive us to salvation. Second, Paul used the analogy of a guardian or custodian of a young boy between the ages of six and sixteen. The role of the guardian was to serve as the disciplinarian of the child. The purpose of the disciplinarian nature of the law was to help people understand their true spiritual condition and bring about justification by faith (v. 24).

The words "but since faith has come" (v. 25), we are no longer imprisoned. Since faith has come, we are "sons of God" through the Son Christ Jesus.

Second, through baptism, we declare our status as children of God (Gal. 3.27-28). Baptism does not create the family, but baptism testifies to the status and nature of the family. In baptism, a new believer attests to a personal faith commitment and the reality of a new family. Some families have photographers take a picture in which family members wear the same clothing. Through faith in Christ, believers put on a new wardrobe – "we are clothed with Christ." British translator captured the meaning of Paul's thought, "All you were baptized 'into' Christ have put on the family likeness of Christ." The family of God is not divided by ethnicity (no Jew or Greek), economic status (slave or free), or gender (male or female).

Third, through faith, we receive an inheritance (Gal. 3.29-4.7). This section of Scripture begins and ends with the concept of "heir." In the ancient world, a child had a status similar to a slave

because a child had no rights. Apart from Christ, "elements of this world" – a code phrase in Paul's letters for demonic forces. At the appropriate time historically, culturally, religiously, and politically, God sent His Son on a rescue mission of redemption with the purpose of making possible God's adoption of individuals. The gift of the Spirit is evidential proof of a believer's adoption as an heir of God.