

My family is so confusing. When I go to an event where all my family is there, it is mind-boggling who goes where. When people ask about my ethnicity, I say, I really don't know. My family is the most fun family you have ever been around. When we're together, someone will always bring out an instrument, and we all sing. We laugh. We genuinely enjoy each other. But growing up, I really didn't know where my family came from, and to be honest, I still have a hard time identifying people at family reunions.

In the last ten years or so, I've had the privilege of getting to know my grandpa better. He's always been a poet and a great singer, and so he and I started writing songs together about a decade ago. When writing songs, stories come out. And one day, driving around, I heard the story of his childhood that made things make a little more sense.

He was born the oldest of three children in the central valley of California. We know that his mom was Native American, but we really don't know anything about his dad. When he was six or seven, his mom decided, for reasons my grandpa never found out, that she couldn't take care of three boys. At the end of the day, when they were all playing at a friend's farm, my grandpa's mom said goodbye to him, took his two brothers, and left.

My grandpa never saw her again.

Even though 18 years late he was able to reconnect with his brothers (I remember him saying how weird it was seeing his flesh and blood brothers for the first time since childhood), that's about the extent of the legacy he received. There was no inheritance. No culture or family memories. In those days, it was a challenge to prove he was even blood-related.

I think it was early on in those days that my grandpa decided that his family would be different. The reason my family was confusing was that despite multiple marriages and two Native American uncles and their kids—everyone was in. And they were never getting out. And honestly, I wouldn't have it any other way

We will never know why my grandpa wasn't chosen to go with his mom that day almost 80 years ago. But I tell you that story because Paul is about to remind us what it means to be chosen. To be thought of. To be wanted. And I think, at our core, that is truly our greatest desire.

I'm going to break the text into two sections.

In Galatians 4:1-7, Paul will talk about the usefulness of the law and the depth of what it means to be an heir of the one true king. In Galatians 4:8-11, Paul will warn against going back to things we've been freed of, including, and especially, the law. Ultimately, I believe this passage leads

us to a greater understanding of our longing. And even though we go to a lot of places to satisfy this longing, there's only one place that will satisfy.

In the previous chapter, as in the rest of this letter, Paul was cautioning them on going back to the law, and in doing so, was using strong language about the law. Now when you and I think about what it would be like to go back to practice the law, most of us couldn't even imagine doing so. Animal sacrifices, a blood atonement economy, 600+ laws to abide by. So it makes sense to us, of course, not to go back to the law.

But what you must understand is that for Paul's Jewish audience, what Paul was saying in chapter 3 would have been incredibly shocking and probably offensive. If you remember, last week, he compared their time under mosaic law to "being held in custody and locked up" and being "controlled by a strict disciplinarian." That makes sense to us, but when you look at the history of Israel, specifically when they were in slavery in Egypt, God redeemed the Jews from slavery. In fact, when God set the Jewish people free, he had called them his child. And when God gave them the law (Torah), it began with the announcement of freedom for God's people.

Paul talking so negatively about something they considered to give them life would have been a hard pill to swallow. And while there was an original purpose for the law, that purpose had been fulfilled.

I like how Kevin said it last week. Was the law meant to bring life? No. Was it meant to be a teacher? No. Was it meant to transform or save? No. Its purpose was to restrain evil. And it was always meant to be temporary until the time the Father decided we were ready for Jesus. Paul reminds us here that the law had served its purpose, but in Jesus, its purpose was fulfilled

So in Chapter 4, he uses another illustration, maybe one that everyone could easily get on board with to get his point across—the concept of an heir.

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. Galatians 4:1-3

So he's talking about what it means to be an heir. And he's basically saying, when you're underage, you're no different from a slave. You don't own it. This immediately makes me think of basketball player Shaquille O'Neil. I saw in an article a few weeks ago Shaq said, "I want my kids to know that we are not rich. I am rich." The point is well taken,

and I think we can all understand that even though someone is an heir, it doesn't mean their heir-ness has taken root yet. Shaq's kids will likely end up as heirs of the Shaq kingdom. But right now, they're limited. There are guardians and trustees. They don't have the responsibility of running the estate yet, nor do they have the benefits

Paul is saying this is what it's like being under the supervision of the law. It's like a son or daughter heir that is deemed not ready by the father to manage the estate. Until you're ready, you're subject to guardians and trustees. You're supervised, disciplined, and controlled. Specific orders regulate and restrain your behavior. You stay under that authority until a time set by the father. Paul is trying to get this church plant to see they were reverting back to a point in time where they had no freedom.

Being under the law was like being a kid. It was an important phase. Your childhood was important just as the law was important, but that phase is over now! We all understand that there are phases in our lives that we must outgrow. If we choose not to outgrow these phases, we hinder not only our own freedom but the freedom of others

In verse 3, he likens this to slavery to "elemental spiritual forces." This word comes up twice in this passage. Once here, and another in verse 9 when he says, "*how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces?*" You could also say principles.

The Greek word he's using here is *stoicheion*. It literally means an elementary or rudimentary principle of any intellectual or religious system. When he uses it, he's referring to the elementary nature of the law. It's elementary. When you were a spiritual child, under the law, you were in slavery!

"*But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law,*" (vv. 4-5a). This caught my eye. I kept wondering why Paul wouldn't just say, "God sent his Son to redeem those under the law?" I wish I had time to go into this, but let me at least say this. Jesus understood the law. He was born by a human woman who also was under the law. He was no stranger to it. But let that thought blow your mind for a second. Not only did the living God, who created everything, come to earth as a helpless, vulnerable child; he also submitted himself to the law. The law that wasn't created for Him. He didn't need it. And still, in an act of true love, He entered our mess, grew up as a good Jew, memorized the Torah, and practiced the law. He's not a faraway God. He's a God who gets in the middle of where we are now.

"*that we might receive adoption to sonship*" (v. 5b). This idea of adoption is crucial to Paul's message. He mentions it over five times in letters to other churches. When he talks about adoption, he's especially talking about Roman adoption, which is actually pretty fascinating in context what it meant to be a child in ancient Rome.

In ancient Rome, the oldest living male in the family, the *paterfamilias* took care of and decided everything for the family. In those days, women had very little influence. When a biological baby was born, it was not automatically part of the family. In fact, the midwife would take the baby right after being born and set it down on the floor. If the

paterfamilias picked up the baby, it was part of the family. If he did not, the baby was considered disowned. This process of leaving the baby was known as exposure because babies were deliberately exposed to the elements or taken by families in need of slaves.

Side note: This is one of the ways the early church distinguished itself from the Roman guard. It was their ethic of the value and sanctity of human life. As Christianity began to grow, more and more Christians were finding exposed infants and giving them homes. Talk about living the kingdom of God

But even if you made it past being a baby, you weren't safe. Your safety was in the hands of the *paterfamilias*. If his children angered him, he had a legal right to disown his children, sell them into slavery, or even end their life. You can imagine the insecurity. How vulnerable and fragile you'd feel like as a child in Rome.

Adoption was entirely different. There were laws that protected adopted kids. In Rome, adopting a child meant: The child was freely chosen by the parents, desired by the parents. That child would be a permanent part of the family. The parents couldn't disown a child they adopted.

As an adopted child in Rome, legally, you would receive a new identity. Any prior debts or assignments were erased. New rights and responsibilities were taken on. Being adopted made someone an heir to their father, joint-sharers in all his possessions.

Now think for a minute about the audience that would have been reading this—specifically, the Gentile audience. As they've been newly following this movement that Jesus started, they would have felt like total outsiders! They don't have the history with God the ways the Jewish people did. This idea that they're adopted and chosen by God would be a powerful, powerful message.

God chose you. Some of us need to hear that again. God chose you. And look at this, because he chose you: "*Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father'*" (v. 6). Paul says that God put the Spirit of his Son into your hearts and that Spirit calls out and longs for your true Father. That means that all of us have a longing in our hearts that has been placed there by God. And let me tell you something about this longing.

I think, at the core of all of our brokenness, at the center of everything we've done wrong, there is a misdirected longing. A longing that can only be found in the Father. Think about some bad choices you've made. Some of the missteps that you've taken. Why did you do it? What led you there? Could it be that you brought your longing to something or someone else to satisfy other than God

When I was little, I was painfully shy. There are home videos of my family trying to get me to sing, and I just wouldn't. My more outgoing twin brother was always glad to assume the spotlight. For me, it wasn't even a negotiation. And I didn't sing publicly most of my childhood. But in 6th grade, I was reintegrating back into a public school from being homeschooled. My outgoing brother instantly made friends, but for me, it was a different story. I was so shy and so shocked by stuff I saw

in public school, I started attracting bullies. It became instantly a really painful time for me. It's safe to say, no one in school was "choosing" me. Then I went to choir. I still had no intention of singing, but something interesting happened. They were doing auditions for a Christmas solo. And all the kids were whispering about this kid Daniel and how good he was. People were saying to each other, "I'm not even going to audition because he's so good. We all know he's going to get it." When we heard his audition, I remember thinking, "I can own this dude, and I don't even sing." So I got up all my courage, and this scared, skinny little sixth grader that nobody knew auditioned. I got the part, and immediately the kids started whispering about me. It was like water in a desert. People finally saw me. They finally made friends with me.

I tell you that sad, sad story to tell you this. Music became the source I went to when I needed to satisfy my longing. It took me 20 years of chasing that before I realized the end of that road would still leave me still longing. No matter how many songs I write, how many people tell me they love my music, or how many amazing concerts. It's never enough.

There is only one place to go with that longing of ours. And it's to the Father. It's as if Paul is screaming at the Galatians; HE CHOSE YOU. Not at random. Not because He had to. God sent his son to redeem everyone enslaved by the law so that you could be part of his family. And because you are chosen, you have a new legacy. Your slavehood is no more. Because you were chosen to be his son or daughter, you have a new identity. You have a new family. You have a new purpose. Paul is saying, "Don't ignore this voice. Don't ignore this longing." God said you're his child! Please don't ignore who God says you are.

If you're running from God or looking for hope, happiness, or joy in something other than God, you know there is a longing that never goes away. You feel it. There's an ache that is never satisfied deep in your bones. On the other hand, when we connect with Him, there's a fullness and satisfaction that is unlike any other thing the world has to offer.

Paul knows this story better than anyone. He was chosen by God as dramatically as any person in the history of mankind. So in verse 8, Paul reminds them of their own slavery. He reminds them that there was a time they didn't have a choice to be free

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? vv. 8-9

This who are by nature are not gods were the objects that pagan Gentiles worshiped as gods. They could have been stone or wooden idols, mythical beings, or even demonic spirits that enslaved those who worshiped these idols. Whatever they were, Paul says, they're not the divine. They do not have the attributes of God. They are finite, created things, not the infinite creator. Paul is saying that when we turn back to the idols, we are enslaved by them. He says it another way in his letter to the Romans. "*Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone*

as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16).

He says both ways are slavery! One leads death, and one leads to life. Another way to say it is, "Who are you offering yourself to?" Paul is speaking to both Jew and Gentile here. And he's speaking to all of us. If you are like the former Gentiles, who worshipped idols, you are worshipping something that is not God and in slavery to sin. If you are going back to the law and obeying a law that God declared is no longer necessary, you are not worshipping God; you are worshipping the law! You're trying to satisfy your longing for something that was never created for that

So he says to them, "Are you really going to go back to that elementary stuff? The stuff you don't need to do anymore? The stuff that will leave you empty? Are you really going to go backward?" This has got to be one of the most frustrating parts of being God. It certainly was hard for Paul.

Paul goes on to say, "*You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!*" (v. 10). At first glance, it looks like Paul is simply referring to Jewish holiday observances, but the Jewish calendar didn't actually look at the seasons. Jewish timekeeping referred to festivals, not seasons. Seasons came from a pagan Celtic religion. Paul is again referring to them returning back to their "*stoicheion*," or elementary spiritual laws, again the with mosaic law, but also this time referring to pagan traditions and religious rituals of the Gentiles before they knew Jesus. Remember the purpose of this letter. Returning to the law is not just negatively impacting the Jews in Galatia. It's having a profound impact on the Gentiles in Galatia. And that's what he's addressing. Even though we saw in earlier chapters that the majority of the believers in Galatia are not yet circumcised, they are giving Paul every indication that many are about to take this irreversible step of circumcision.

Is Paul frustrated that they're going backward? Yes. He's frustrated that the Jews are living enslaved to a law that is no longer necessary. But he's also frustrated because the Jews going back to the law isn't just reverting Jews back to slavery to the law; they're also risking putting new believers back in bondage as well.

I've been here before. When I've had people that are open to the idea of God, open to the idea of Jesus, and then they're exposed to something that wasn't from God at all. I can't tell you how many times I've had to say that hatred is not my God. That exclusion is not my faith. That legalism is what my Jesus came to get rid of. I find myself wanting to protect those new in the faith sometimes, like the Gentile Galatians, from well-meaning Christians who have added extra things to the freeing gospel of Christ. So I get his frustration when he says, "*I fear that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you*" (v.11)

Let's summarize this briefly. Paul compares Christian Jews returning to the law as to an adult heir, who for some reason returns back to being a child, with no power, authority, or freedom. He reminds us of the power of what it means to be chosen by God. He reminds us of the grace and privilege of being God's children. He tells that God installed a longing

inside each of us. He warns us that returning back to the law will not only enslave us but enslave others who are attempting to follow Jesus.

So what does all this mean for you? Does this still affect us today? What does it look like for us to be enslaved by the law? In what ways are we, as a society, or us as individuals going backward into our former slavery? Who are we actually obeying? Who are we offering ourselves to

I was talking to a friend of mine last week about this message, and this friend comes from a very legalistic upbringing. In her tradition, there were very specific ways to earn favor with God. And as we talked, even though she's left that tradition of earning God's love and salvation, she admitted to me that there was a comfort in the old way for her. There was a comfort in knowing there's a certain, right way to live. And if you mess up, you can just make up for it in some tangible way and be done with the guilt.

This is just my opinion, but I think the law appeals most to our need for control. There's something comforting to our flesh to be able to control things. You may not want mosaic law. You probably don't want to sacrifice an animal when you sin, but perhaps there are other ways in which you try to earn favor with God. You may not have wooden sculptures, but perhaps there are ways in which you serve and worship things that are created instead of the creator

We all have our idols. We have false narratives that put us on paths to nowhere. The thing about idols is they always overpromise and under-deliver. If we can just make/save enough money, we'll feel secure and stress-free. If I can perform well enough at my job, I'll finally find the respect and value I need. If I could just lose enough weight, I know I'd be happier, and people would like me more

And the brokenness doesn't stop with us. If only our brokenness stayed inside of us and didn't affect others. But there are always ripple effects of our sin. Maybe we put it on our children. If my children can get good enough grades, I can put them in the right college, and they can make enough money so that they'll be happy. If only I could...If only she could. If only he could. And we're locked into something that was never meant to bring life in the first place. No idol will ever satisfy your longing.

Here's the real tragedy of returning to the law: Using Paul's heir analogy, it's not just that we miss out on the benefits of being an heir of God. It's really easy to focus on that. There are definitely massive benefits to being in the kingdom of God. It's that we're so busy following the wrong path, we lose sight of the responsibility of what it means to be heirs of the king

See, God's design, when He gave us the keys to the kingdom, is that we become the image-bearers of the King. That wherever we go, we point to the true desire of our hearts. We show people the Father.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

The real tragedy of my musical pursuits is that God actually did create me for music! I can see that now. Hopefully, you all can see that too. When I look at the years trying to white-knuckle a music career apart from God, I don't see shame., but I do see years of wasted opportunity. In the last year, as I've attempted to submit this gift he gave me back to him, I've seen movement as I've never seen before. I've written and published my first worship song. I've seen a worship ministry thrive. I've walked side by side with broken musicians. I've reoriented my calendar to reflect his priorities, and while I'm doing fewer shows, the ones I am doing have a purpose beyond just bringing glory to my name. This is the grace we experience apart from the law. What God wanted was the musician He created submitted to Him.

Can you imagine what the Bay would look like if we all started submitting ourselves to being image-bearers of God? That was his design. Software engineers going to work writing code and software in Jesus' name. Event planners that work with clients in a way that glorifies God. People will start to notice. Teachers who are deeply rooted in Jesus will care about their students the way Jesus cares about us. CEOs, CFOs, COOs in the Bay who love Jesus, who are submitted to His kingdom, running the most influential companies in the world. Can you imagine what that would look like?

The farm that my grandpa was left at was owned by a sweet Filipino man named Benny Pasion. He was a loose acquaintance of my grandpa's mom and didn't know much about my grandpa's mom other than she struggled to put food on the table. Benny liked Vince, my grandpa, and thought he was a good boy, so he let him stay. Benny eventually married and had two more kids, but Vince was part of the family now. A few years later, Benny and Angie made Vincent Abella legally Vincent Pasion. Benny died the week I was born, so I never got to meet him. But when my grandpa talks about him, there's a glimmer in his eye. In all of the questions, in all the hurt, abandonment, and pain, there was someone who chose him. Someone who gave him a legacy. Gave him a name. When we get together, a sort of rite of passage is this bracelet I'm wearing now. It's not the trendiest jewelry, but we all wear it with pride.

Dale, our retiring elder, said this as he left last week. "You need to remember who you are. And that starts with remembering whose you are." I hope you'll hear this. You were chosen by God before the foundations of the world. The psalmist says that he knit you together in your mother's womb. And He chose you for a purpose: To bring his light into every single place you go.

© 2021 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1462-6FC