

The Good News Changes Us

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[0:00] So, again, if you have your Bibles, you can open them, first of all, to Galatians chapter 4. As we conclude this little series in the book of Galatians, looking at some of its big themes, we're thinking about the reality that the good news of the gospel, it's a message that changes us.

Now, before we get to thinking about how the gospel changes us, just to think about the importance of finding love and acceptance.

So, this week, lots of our teens and kids in primary school have been applying for camp. And for those of us who perhaps have been to camps, or you've watched people go away to camp, for many people it becomes a moment when perhaps being kind of isolated in a small church perhaps, they go to a camp and here's the moment where they find their people.

Do you know that moment that I'm talking about? When a person perhaps feels kind of anxious, they kind of feel like they're all alone in the world, and nobody else really understands them or perhaps their faith.

And then all of a sudden you find some other people, and they think the same, and they accept you. And now, your life is different. Maybe I've seen that in the teenagers in your own life.

[1:27] You can think about it. There's a happiness, there's a confidence that comes from finding your crew, or when a guy or a girl finds the one. The same thing happens.

Something changes, and everybody else can see it. To find love and acceptance in this world is huge. I was thinking about all those studies that tell us that, you know, kids from stable homes are much more likely to flourish, and much more likely to be resilient, and so on and so forth.

And thinking about the fact, if that's true in our human experiences with another person, how much more true is it when that comes to our God?

And this is where Paul kind of takes us in the book of Galatians, that knowing the love and acceptance of God, that changes us profoundly.

And that's the good news that Paul closes his letter with. And in a sense, it takes us to the question of what is the greatest privilege in the Christian life?

[2:35] What is the greatest thing that God could give us? Now, if you've been around for the last couple of weeks, we've been in the book of Galatians, we might instinctively think, well, the answer must be justification.

And of course, that is a wonderful truth. The forgiveness of sin, acceptance from God, that's massive, and it's fundamental. But actually, that's just a gospel foundation that we must build on. But it must be our foundation, because if we don't know what it is to be justified, to be declared right with God, then we can never find true peace. There'll always be a sense in which our hearts are restless and will wrestle with guilt.

And so justification is wonderful, but it's only the foundation. To think about an analogy from house building, you know, you lay a good foundation, a builder is never going to stop there.

Well, unless resources run out. A homeowner is not going to celebrate the stage at which the foundation is laid.

[3:47] Because obviously, there is much more to be built. There is a home to live in. That's the point where the champagne gets opened. And as Paul takes us towards the end of his letter, he wants to show us that there are still greater privileges.

There is still this gospel house that we need to live in, where justification is just the foundation. And he's going to take us especially to the wonderful truth that God adopts us into his family.

So we come to live in God's house as God's children, as members together of God's family. And that's the good news that changes us. Because it changes our relationships in an essential way with God and with one another in the Christian church.

So let's think first of all about how the good news that we find in the gospel, how does that change our relationship with God? It's here in chapter 4, first 7 verses.

The story of God's redemption is the story of a spiritual adoption. That God takes people who are strangers and enemies, and he makes them not just friends, he makes us his family.

[5:03] He changes lives for all eternity. And Paul, in the course of just these few verses, he takes the Galatians and he takes us on something of that journey.

So he takes them, first of all, to their past. What was it like before Jesus came? And look with me, chapter 4, first three verses, he uses the imagery of being like a slave or being an underage child. As long as an heir is underage, he's no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. So Paul is picturing a son in a wealthy Roman family.

Big house, lots of land, lots of property, but as yet they're under 16. So they're in minority. So they've got the promise of a great inheritance, there's great wealth to come, but not yet.

And so this child, though he is the heir, he still has to live under a tutor and a guardian. He is not yet ready to enjoy all the privileges that are coming, the freedom that will be his one day.

[6:17] And Paul says, well, that's really like life under the law before Jesus came. It was a time of waiting and longing for the Messiah through whom all these promises would come and the freedom of the gospel would come.

And in the context of the book of Galatians, remember he's been saying to them, why would you ever choose law-keeping as a way to be right with God?

It's as if he's saying it'd be like going back from being a son to being a slave. So there's this period in the past of slavery, but then in verse four, in God's story of adoption, what happens?

The set time fully comes. 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.

What a wonderful phrase, at the set time. At just the right time, God's timing is perfect. And in God's perfect timing, he sent his son, Jesus, so that you and I might become sons of God.

[7:36] It's the right time in the sense, when you look at what's happening in history when Jesus arrives, it's a time of spiritual longing. I think we see that whenever we read the gospels, there's that great longing for the Messiah.

They're looking for anyone. John the Baptist, are you the Messiah? When excitement about Jesus builds, they want to make him king by force. It's a time of spiritual longing for the Jews, but it's also a time of spiritual longing for the Romans.

The Romans were becoming increasingly uneasy about their gods and immorality within their culture. And a lot of people within Roman society were beginning to look for a new form of truth. We could also say it's the right time, because we think about the time when Jesus came. It was a moment where culture was being shared.

So, Greco-Roman culture was the thing. And that was so helpful, because then everybody had a shared language, the Greek language, so that when the good news of Jesus was announced, that message could very quickly spread through the world.

[8:47] A missionary wouldn't have to go to language school for years to learn a new language to tell people about Jesus. They could simply go and speak the Greek that everybody else in the Roman world understood.

And this timing of God sending Jesus at just the set time when he arrived, it was a great political moment for a Messiah to come, because while you had the wealth of Rome and the power of Rome, they also had that desire to maintain security and authority, which meant that they were building lots of roads.

So, if there was trouble in a far corner of the empire, they could quickly send an army to quell a rebellion. But that meant that people could go from Jerusalem and spread to the far corners with

this good news of the Lord Jesus.

And nothing happens by accident. This is God's good timing. And so, at the set time, Jesus comes. So, the timing is perfect, but also, Jesus is perfect.

His qualifications are perfect to be our Savior. What does he say of Jesus? He is the Son of God. He is completely divine.

[10:02] He is totally God. But he's also born of a woman, so he's totally man. And this is what makes Jesus uniquely qualified to be our perfect mediator.

The one who can represent God to man and man to God. He is the one and the only one who can stand in the place of unrighteous sinners like us. Remember, we can't by ourselves be good enough for God.

But Jesus is perfectly righteous, and he stands in our place. And more than that, he is the only one, because he is fully God, is able to absorb God's holy anger and secure deliverance and be vindicated at the end of the day.

And we see that at his resurrection. He came born under the law, and he would perfectly keep the law. He would be totally righteous at every point in his life so that he could redeem those who are under the law.

And here we see Jesus' total commitment to God's plan of salvation. Jesus knew all through his life that he would redeem by his sacrificial death.

[11:12] And so nothing is held back in God's plan of salvation. And that matters so much when we think about what comes next in this storyline of God's adoption story.

Look at verses five to seven. Jesus came to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship. So there's a movement from slavery to sonship.

Because you are his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out, Abba, Father. So you're no longer a slave, but God's child.

And since you are his child, God has made you also an heir. This is the great privilege of the gospel. Adoption.

This is moving from the wonderful reality of God the judge declaring of us in Christ Jesus, you are not condemned. That's wonderful. This is God the Father now saying to us, come home with me.

[12:18] That's a greater privilege. There is a new level of relationship we are being invited into. So J.I. Packer says, adoption is the greatest privilege the gospel offers, even higher than justification.

Now just to pause for a moment, perhaps we recognize in verse five that Paul uses the language of sonship. Now why does he deliberately choose sonship?

Why doesn't he call us sons and daughters there? Why doesn't he talk about children there? It's because this is a very particular, specific legal idea. Because only sons, only males could inherit.

But what Paul is at pains to point out is that any and all Christians are given the right to inherit. That whoever we are, Jew, Greek, male, female, slave, or free, all of us in Christ have the right to be called children of God, to be sons of God in the sense of inheriting all his wonderful promises.

The right to have God as our eternal father, that belongs to all of us. The prospect of an eternal home, that belongs to any who have faith in Jesus.

[13:39] The reality of belonging to an eternal family, that's for all who are united to Christ Jesus by faith. And this wonderful privilege of adoption, notice in verse six, brings with it the gift of the Spirit.

God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. We remember Jesus being baptized in the Spirit, the Spirit-filled man, that same Spirit that filled Jesus now fills us.

God comes to dwell in our hearts. We have this unique privilege since the coming of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit of God drawing near in a whole new way.

In the Old Testament, Jewish worshippers, Gentile worshippers, had various levels of being removed from God.

If God dwelt in the Holy of Holies and we're Gentiles, well, we could get to the outer courts. If you're a Jewish woman, you could get a little bit further. A Jewish man could get a little bit further.

[14:42] The high priest, well, they could enter into the holy place, but nobody could enter the holy of holies except the high priest and only one

time a year and then a very real worry that he might lose his life by making some mistake in the presence of the holy God.

But now in Christ Jesus, we're brought right into the holy of holies. Whenever we pray, immediately we are in the presence of our God and our Father.

We have wonderful privilege because of our sonship to pray our Father in heaven. As I was reading this week, I was reading an author and a preacher by the name of David Platt.

Some of you may be familiar with him. He also started a movement called the Radical Movement. It's a really interesting website. Encourages mission to the unreached. There's lots of interesting videos about, for example, gospel work in Japan.

There's a whole series on that. But David Platt was so helpful to read because over the course of his life, he and his wife have adopted two children, one from China and one from Kazakhstan.

[15:50] And he tells the story of this little adopted boy from Kazakhstan being in that stage which all children go through of asking multiple why questions.

So we remember those. If we're parents, we remember the why stage. And so he tells this wonderful little conversation. So David Platt begins talking to his little son.

Simply wanted to say to him, I love you. Why? Because you're my son. Why? And he thought about that for a few seconds.

And his answer was wonderful. Because we wanted you. And we came to get you. And that's why you're my son. And it's a wonderful message because that comes from a pastor who knows the gospel.

He knows the logic of the gospel, that God loves us, that God wanted us, God in Christ came to get us, to die for us and rise again, to make us beloved children adopted by our Father.

[16:58] the greatest privilege that we can have in our lives. And J.I. Packer, in one of his books, can't remember which book, he said, if you want to know how well somebody understands Christianity, ask this question.

Ask yourself this question. How much do you make of being God's child? How much do you make of being God's child? Paul tells us that God has sent the Spirit so that we can enjoy the privilege of sonship.

God sent his Son to make us sons of God. The reality that we can worship is only because God has sent his Son to make us his children.

Our free access to a throne of grace. the reality of God's steadfast fatherly love. The fact that we can confess our sin to our Father and know that he won't turn his back on us because he loves us in Christ.

The security that we have of knowing a Father who is steadfast to his promises and that work of salvation that he begins in Jesus, he will complete, he will take us home to be with himself.

[18:22] The freedom that we have because we're not slaves to a taskmaster, we're sons and daughters of a Father who loves us deeply.

When we understand the privilege of the knowing God as Father, then we're beginning to get to the heart of Christianity. Christianity. And that's the good news that Paul brings to these Galatian Christians who are beginning to think, well, maybe I should turn back to the law.

Maybe that's going to be the better way to be right with God. And he says, no, no, remember the gospel in Christ Jesus adopted to sonship. So the good news changes our relationship with God, but he doesn't finish with that relationship.

Paul also wants them and us to know that the good news changes our relationship with each other. And so we heard from Galatians 5 and Galatians 6.

So perhaps we can turn there together as we think about the fact that the truths of the gospel, the wonderful truths that we've been thinking about in the book of Galatians, they should change us.

[19:34] Now that we know that God is our Father, now that we live experiencing His love, that should transform us, that should show itself in life in His family, in the church.

So we heard Paul talk about freedom this morning. In chapter 5 and verse 13, he's still talking about a particular kind of freedom the Christian enjoys. You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.

But we need to understand what kind of freedom. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh. So this Christian freedom is not freedom to live as I please.

And it's not freedom to simply live for myself. It's not, well, now I've got Jesus, now I've got a free pass, so I can just do whatever I want. Rather, our freedom has a particular form.

Serve one another humbly in love. That's the freedom we have as Christians, the freedom to be humble. The freedom to serve from hearts that have been transformed by Jesus serving us.

[20:44] The freedom to love one another because God has freely loved us. It's a similar point that he makes at the beginning of chapter 5.

So we read this morning, chapter 5, verse 1, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. The end of that little section is verse 6. And look at how he ends verse 6.

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Our faith in Christ should show itself in lives of love and service.

I love the story of the Apostle John. It's told by some of his followers when he was really old, so in his 90s.

Too old really to say much, too old to travel by his own strength. The story is told that he would be carried on the Lord's Day on a kind of, I guess, a stretcher is probably the easiest way for us to imagine it.

[21:49] And he'd be taken to a house church and he'd be placed in front of the congregation, very little ability to speak, but he would say to them, dear children, love one another.

That's the one truth. That Apostle wanted the church, those young churches, to know that as you've been loved by God in Jesus, love one another. And the great gospel truths that we've been thinking about, being justified by faith in Jesus, being adopted into God's family, they're not just for our heads, not just doctrines to admire, rather they are to reach our hearts and change our lives in a particular way that it should lead us into lives of love.

And so just to notice a couple of different ways that we see this. First of all, thinking about how the Spirit wants to work in us, the character of Christ.

So look at chapter 5, verse 22 and 23, that sort of famous, perhaps familiar section for many of us, the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So in this section, verse 16, Paul calls believers to live by the Spirit. Then in verse 18, he calls us to be led by the Spirit.

[23:23] And when we're living by the Spirit and we're led by the Spirit, that's going to produce a certain kind of life. Life is going to take on a certain shape and form, and that shape and form is the fruit of the Spirit, is more of the character of the Lord Jesus.

He chooses this image from the garden to say that what the Spirit wants to grow in us is more and more likeness to the Lord Jesus.

Because as we think about these qualities, as we think about Jesus in the gospel, we recognize that He is the one and the only one who perfectly shows us all of these character qualities.

He is the one of perfect, sacrificial love towards others, driven by compassion and care to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to restore fallen disciples, and ultimately to die on the cross for us.

He is the one of perfect kindness and goodness, never sending anyone away, welcoming the children, those despised, those rejected, those full of shame are welcomed, they're honored, they're shown kindness and care.

[24:48] Jesus is the one who practices perfect patience when His disciples fail to understand, when they want to exercise pride and be full of themselves rather than serving, when they abandon Him at the moment of His trial, and as He is arrested, He patiently restores.

And so we see these qualities perfectly in Jesus, but the Spirit wants to grow them in us. And in a particular way to transform how we relate to one another, because this is part of a contrast.

So in verse 19, there is a description of the acts of the flesh. And as you scan that list, you'll see that those acts are profoundly selfish acts.

Sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, selfish acts. That's what the flesh produces.

That's what we naturally would produce. But when the Spirit works in us, the Spirit of Christ works in us, then He's producing in us a character that shows and expresses love towards others.

[26:15] And it's important to recognize that all of these qualities, they need a someone to show them to. we can only grow in patience as we rub up against other people.

And so this is a picture of the kind of life that Paul wants to see these Galatian Christians have and share together.

That God wants these qualities to grow in us in the context of our church family life together. Now it's important to recognize that we are all works in progress that nobody can say I've reached perfection.

These processes that the Spirit begins in us, they won't be complete until we are with the Lord Jesus or the Lord Jesus comes back and then we are completely free from sin.

Then we will have that perfect character. But nevertheless it is true that when we are walking with the Spirit He will bring change in us and He'll give us that desire to want to change and to become more holy.

[27:31] And so there is something of the character of Christ that is being formed in church members that shapes and changes our relationship with one another. But the second way in which our relationship with one another changes that we find at the beginning of chapter 6 in that we are invited to carry each other's burdens.

Look at verse 2, carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. This is one of those New Testament one another sections, you know, forgive one another, you know, show hospitality to one another.

There are a whole raft of them and again in common each of them needs a church fellowship to practice them in. We cannot carry each other's burdens if we are not connected enough to know what burdens somebody else.

And so even as we're thinking about carrying each other's burdens it's a reminder that we need to love the local church and to love our brothers and sisters within the church so that we can keep these commands.

what do we help carry? Well perhaps first of all we can think about carrying that burden of sin and temptation because that's where he begins in verse 1 brothers and sisters if someone is caught in a sin you who live by the spirit should restore that person gently but watch yourselves or you also may be tempted.

[29:08] That's one way where we can carry each other's burdens when we can practice gentle restoration. When a family member falls into temptation Paul is saying to the whole church we have a duty of care to one another.

That we are all to function like shepherds who are attentive to see are there any sheep wandering who I know whom God would want me to gently restore.

That all of us in Christ have a responsibility to speak the truth in love. This isn't restricted to a minister or to a group of elders though we do have a duty of care in that absolutely.

This is addressed to brothers and sisters within the church that part of our everyday pastoral care for one another is to help each other to fight temptation and to walk in obedience.

And that requires a certain level of commitment. It requires us to get close enough to know one another to know what our struggles might be.

[30:16] It commits us to stand together as brothers in arms in the fight of faith. It requires us to be willing to share honest struggles not with everyone but with at least someone.

it involves praying for help for someone because we know them and we know that they are struggling.

It involves being accountable to others not isolating ourselves and not allowing sin to isolate us further. Remember we read about Eve and Adam what do they do when they fall into sin they try and hide they feel a sense of shame.

whereas we're invited rather to confess to bring our sin into the light of the gospel. And so we have a responsibility to help to carry that burden of sin and temptation that we all have ongoing in our

lives.

But secondly we are to help carry the burden of life's challenges together. to be the person who says to someone else I will be there for you through thick and through thin.

[31:39] To fulfill the law of Christ is to love one another. And to help us to think about what that involves again we can go to no better place than to go to the gospel and to think about what did it look like for Jesus to love others to carry the burdens of others.

What do we see in Jesus that we can learn from? Well love shows up and comes near. It's the incarnation. Love is willing to walk the road of pain and suffering with and for others. love is the whole pattern of Jesus life. Love weeps for grieving friends. Love restores the friend who fails.

Love brings hope and help. Love sacrifices for the sake of others. And we know that because we see Jesus doing it.

And he is our saviour and he is our great example. So what does God want for us as a church? As we think about how Paul closes off his letter.

[32:58] He wants us to grow nearer to him as father. To appreciate his fatherly love and care. He wants us to love one another as children of God as part of the family of faith.

He wants us to love God by loving one another and in so doing to show that the gospel is real and that the gospel is powerful.

God