

Unit 2: Letter to the Galatians

Lesson 7 | July 19, 2026 Children of God Through Faith

Study Text

Galatians 3:26 through 4:31

Central Truth

Through Jesus, we can become God's beloved children.

Key Verse: Galatians 3:26–27

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ(KJV).

You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will explore how the story of Abraham relates to justification by faith.
- Students will reflect on their identities as God's children by faith.
- Students will choose to live free from obligations to the Law.

Introducing the Lesson

Today's lesson explores the process of becoming children of God. Our adoption into God's family does not happen because we earn it or deserve it. Instead, becoming God's son or daughter is by faith alone.

Famous Adoptions

As Christians, we've all been adopted into God's family. I'm going to tell you some details about a few famous people who were adopted. Try to guess who the stories are about.

- Born in 1997, she was in and out of foster care, and was eventually adopted by her grandparents. They helped her fulfill her dream of competing at the Olympics. (*Simone Biles, gymnast*)
- Leslie Lynch King Jr.'s parents divorced sixteen days after he was born in 1913. A few years later his mother remarried and changed his name to honor his adoptive father. (*Gerald Ford, Jr., 38th U.S. President*)
- In 1902, he was sent to an orphanage at the age of seven because his father, a bar owner, could not control his delinquent behavior. The school's disciplinarian, Brother Boutlier, became his lifelong mentor and taught him the sport of baseball. (*Babe Ruth, baseball player*)

Many famous people have been adopted or chose to adopt children of their own. But the greatest adoption story is the one every Christian experiences when he or she is set free from sin and

becomes part of God's family. The Galatian false teachers thought this could happen through human effort, but Paul argued that only faith in Jesus could bring about this transformation.

Earlier in Galatians 3, Paul compared those under the Law to children with an especially harsh teacher (Galatians 3:24–25). But now that justification by faith has arrived through Jesus' work on the cross, believers have become true children of God. The status was not earned through the Law, but given through faith in Jesus.

Part 1—God's Children Through Faith

United in Christ

Galatians 3:26–29

What causes unity? Is it required that we speak the same language or have the same cultural background? Does it matter if we're all in roughly the same economic bracket? Do we all need to agree theologically? Since our justification is by faith rather than works, our faith becomes the basis for our unity. In a world filled with bitter divisions, the Church has the opportunity to be an example of what true unity looks like.

Paul reminds the Galatians that all believers are God's children through faith in Jesus (Galatians 3:26). He then explains that the outward sign of inclusion in the Church is baptism in water. In the earliest days of Christianity, believers were baptized as soon as possible after salvation (Acts 2:41; 8:12–13, 36–38; 9:17–18; 10:47–48; 16:14–15, 31–33; 18:8). Years later, during the era of Christian persecution, baptism was delayed until believers had proven their sincerity, thereby protecting the congregation from false converts. While water baptism is not required for salvation (Luke 23:40–43), the first-century Church viewed baptism as the formal induction into the community of believers. Paul mentioned baptism in Galatians 3:27 because he was about to emphasize the unity of the Church, not because he believed baptism itself was required for justification.

Paul commonly used the metaphor of taking off and putting on clothes to describe the Christian's new way of life (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14; Ephesians 4:21–24; Colossians 3:9–12). Putting on Christ requires taking off the old clothes of sin and the old way of approaching God through the Law. A believer cannot wear both sets of clothes, as the Galatians were trying to do.

One of the results of justification through faith is that the people of God are unified. Social, economic, and cultural distinctions fade away as believers become "one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). Of course, this does not mean that such differences no longer exist. Men are not the same as women, and Jews are not the same as Gentiles. However, our primary identity should be derived from our position "in Christ." If you identify more with someone because you share the same race, gender, political alignment, or social status than you do with another believer, you are allowing your identity as "in Christ" to fall from its primary status. Unity among the body of Christ comes from putting our identity as "in Christ" before any other identity.

Paul's choice of categories in Galatians 3:28 is not accidental. A common daily prayer among Jewish men of the first century was to thank God they were not created as Gentiles, slaves, or women—implying that these were shameful things to be. Paul intentionally subverts this view by claiming these divisions are now united in Jesus. One Christian has no reason to view himself or

herself as greater than any other Christian. None of us earned our salvation. None of our accomplishments are due to our own strength. None of us deserves to be elevated above any other member of God's family.

Paul earlier identified Jesus as the seed (child) who fulfilled God's promise to Abraham (verse 16). Now Paul uses the term again as a collective noun to declare all Christians to be the true children of Abraham (verse 29). As Abraham's children, Christians are the legitimate heirs to everything God promised Abraham. Every believer—whether Jew or Gentile—becomes an heir of Abraham through faith in Jesus, not through obedience to the Law.

A Biblical Vision of Community

? Why is baptism an important step for a believer to take?

? What kinds of divisions exist in the Church today? How would Paul respond?

Adopted into God's Family

Galatians 4:1–7

At what point are children old enough to manage their own affairs? In the United States, children can drive at sixteen and vote at eighteen. But scientists say the brain's prefrontal cortex—where we process moment-to-moment input—doesn't fully develop until age twenty-five or so.¹ In Paul's time, fathers decided at what age their children would be free to inherit their land or possessions. Paul argues that Jesus' death on the cross was the moment when God's children were liberated from the supervision of the Law and made official heirs of God's promises.

Paul uses the illustration of a will to explain the transition from Law to grace (Galatians 4:1–3). In the first century, even if a father died, his children would not receive control of his estate until they came of age. In the meantime, the estate would be managed by guardians appointed on their behalf. The children would have had no more control of the inheritance than a servant.

Paul explains that, before Jesus came, people were like children who were no better off than slaves (verse 3). The Jews were subject to the Law that could not be perfectly followed. The Gentiles were subject to worldly religious philosophies that brought them under the spiritual bondage of demonic forces (verses 8–9; 1 Corinthians 10:19–20). But the Father had established a time for the oversight of the Law to end (Galatians 4:4). Jesus was born to a woman, and He was fully human and could represent humanity as the sacrifice for sin. Jesus was born under the conditions of the Law, and He could fulfill the Law and end its time of guardianship.

No longer slaves to sin and the Law, those who follow Jesus are adopted as God's own children (verse 5). In the ancient world, adoptions required a witness. In this case, the witness to a Christian's adoption is the Holy Spirit, who inhabits the believer as a witness of his or her new status with God (verse 6; Romans 8:15–17). The Spirit allows us to relate to God directly as children, not through the restrictions of the Law. We can call God our Father. In Galatians 4:6, Paul uses both the Aramaic and Greek words for Father, emphasizing how the Holy Spirit within

¹William R. Hathaway and Bruce W. Newton, "Neuroanatomy, Prefrontal Cortex," National Library of Medicine, May 29, 2023, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK499919/>.

us allows us to approach our Heavenly Father freely (Matthew 6:9). Now Christians have received freedom from the Law and a new relationship with God. As His children, we are heirs of His promises (Galatians 4:7).

- ? Why does it matter that believers are adopted by God?
- ? How does the Holy Spirit confirm that we belong to God?

Part 2—Do Not Abandon Faith Don't Return to Slavery

Galatians 4:8–11

It's possible to work very hard to achieve a goal but still fall short. Failure can sometimes make us feel like all our hard work was for nothing. Paul understood this. He had invested a great deal in bringing the gospel to the Galatians, but if they fell for the lies being spread by false teachers, he feared all his efforts would have been in vain.

When Paul first met the Galatians in Lystra, they had tried to make sacrifices to him and Barnabas as Hermes and Zeus (Acts 14:12–13). According to Paul, this meant they were “slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist” (Galatians 4:8). He contrasts these false gods with the one true God—a theme in Paul's writings and throughout Jewish literature (1 Corinthians 8:4–5).

For reasons Paul could not fathom, the Galatians were turning away from the gospel that saved them and once again embracing slavery “to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world” (Galatians 4:9). The master they chose this time was the Jewish legal system. Paul rebukes them harshly, implying he is uncertain he can even declare they really know God. The most he can say is that God knows them.

In verse 10, Paul mentions the many feasts and holidays that were observed by Jews. Each week, they observed the Sabbath. Each month, they observed the new moon. They kept annual feasts like Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles, Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Atonement, Hanukkah, and Purim. They were also instructed to celebrate every seventh year as a Sabbath year and every fiftieth year as a Jubilee year. These festivals were in addition to regular traditions like circumcision, the dedication of the firstborn, rituals for washing and eating, and various marriage and death ceremonies. While modern Christians may recognize some of these events for their symbolism and beauty, they are not requirements. Paul argues that followers of Jesus are no longer bound to these rituals. They do not earn God's favor.

Paul's emotion throughout his letter to the Galatians apparently comes from his fear for their salvation (verse 11). If they continue being slaves to the Law, Paul's efforts would have been for nothing. The territory claimed for God's kingdom would be lost again. Paul's concern is not selfish. He is less concerned about his personal standing and more concerned for the Galatians' souls.

- ? What are some “so-called gods” (Galatians 4:8) that people worship today?

Live in Freedom

Galatians 4:12–20

Maybe you know what it feels like when a close friend gradually becomes more distant from you. This can be a painful experience. Paul sensed this was happening with the Galatians. Although they had once been close friends, they were turning against him because of the influence of false teachers. Paul implored them to return to right relationship with him and with God.

In Galatians 4:12, Paul pressed the believers in Galatia to “become like me, for I became like you” (4:12, NIV). Paul’s approach to evangelism rooted itself in empathy with his audience. In 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Paul developed his evangelism process in more detail. Among the Jews, he followed the Law out of respect for those he intended to reach, not to imply it was a requirement for salvation. Among the Gentiles, Paul lived free of the Law so he could effectively preach to Gentiles. So among the Galatians—who were likely Gentiles for the most part—Paul would not have observed the Law or Jewish rituals. This is why he reminded them that he had become like them, and he encourages them to imitate his way of life.

Paul next reminded the Galatians that he had experienced physical infirmity when he had first visited them (Galatians 4:13). Scholars have long debated what type of illness Paul suffered, but it is impossible to know. Based on verse 15, some speculate Paul’s condition may have been related to his vision. Whatever the issue, it was serious enough that the Galatians might have used it as a reason to reject Paul and his gospel (verse 14). But instead, they treated him with kindness. Paul says they received him as God’s messenger and showed him the same honor they would have showed Jesus.

Paul feared the situation had changed. Because he exposed the false teachers, he wondered whether the Galatians may have turned away from him (verse 16). Now, the false teachers were attempting to win the Galatians’ favor. Were these deceivers enjoying the same welcoming hospitality that the Galatians had once extended to Paul?

The false teachers’ true motive was to separate the Galatians from Paul (verse 17). The apostle was not jealous; he wanted the Galatians to be treated well, but only for the right reasons and in the right way (verse 18). In verse 19, he showed his care for the Galatians by using a personal term: “dear children.” He even compared his work among them to a mother’s pains in childbirth. Paul wanted to visit the Galatians in person so he would not need to write a harsh letter (verse 20). If he had a face-to-face conversation with them, he would be able to strike a different tone, persuading them with tenderness. But because he was so far away, Paul was forced to use the means of communication available to him. “I don’t know how else to help you,” he admitted.

We can learn a great deal from Paul’s example of dealing with wavering Christians. He was acting out of love and concern for them, not out of pride or personal hurt. The goal of his intervention was spiritual restoration so that they would grow stronger in their walk with Jesus. May we follow his example when we are dealing with people who are being drawn away from the true faith.

A Personal Appeal

Students will compose their own personal appeal to a loved one who needs Jesus.

? Describe how Paul's relationship with the Galatians evolved over time.

Part 3—Children of Law or Faith

Abraham's Two Sons

Galatians 4:21–27

People have always used stories to illustrate important points. Paul uses this tactic at the end of Galatians 4, retelling the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar to show the value of justification by faith.

In Galatians 4:21, Paul began directly addressing the false teachers and their followers. Most people define the Law as the regulations in Exodus and Leviticus. But the Law, or Torah, includes the first five books of the Bible, even Genesis. Rather than using the legal code to make a case for justification by faith, Paul once again argued from the section of the Law that centers on Abraham.

The account of Hagar begins in Genesis 16. Thinking she was unable to bear children herself, Sarah sent her slave Hagar to Abraham so that she could produce an heir for him. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, and years later, Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the child God had promised. Paul used allegory to apply this story to the situation in Galatia. "These two women serve as an illustration of God's two covenants," he explains (Galatians 4:24). Hagar is Mount Sinai, the place where the Jews had first received the Law. The Jewish people were physical descendants of Isaac, but Paul called them spiritual descendants of Ishmael because of their desire for justification through works (verse 25). Sarah is "the heavenly Jerusalem" (verse 26). As the free woman whose child came through faith rather than works, she represents believers who are justified by faith.

Paul then quoted Isaiah 54:1, a prophecy concerning the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon (Galatians 4:27). According to Isaiah's prophecy, the Jews who returned from exile would be more prosperous than those who had gone into exile. Christians—justified by faith—belong to the heavenly Jerusalem, the new covenant. This new way of justification by faith would produce more descendants than the Law ever could. Paul's argument may seem strange to modern readers, but it would have been well understood by his audience in the Galatian churches—false teachers and true believers alike.

? Does justification by faith seem too good to be true? In what ways have you been tempted to add human effort to Jesus' completed work?

Children of the Promise

Galatians 4:28–31

The best persuasive arguments begin with logic and end with an answer to the question: So what? Paul understood this, so after setting forth his illustration of Hagar and Sarah, he explained how it applied to the Galatians.

Paul explained that Christians, like Isaac, are “children of the promise” (Galatians 4:28). The false teachers claimed obedience to the Law, including circumcision, was required for someone to be Isaac’s spiritual descendant. But God’s promise and Abraham’s faith predated the introduction of circumcision. Spiritual birth only happens through faith (Galatians 4:29).

Paul finds a clear call to action in Genesis 21:10, where Sarah demands that the slave woman and her son be cast out because they have no share in the inheritance of the freeborn. Paul suggests in Galatians 4:30 that the Galatians must permanently free themselves from slavery to the Law by casting out the false teachers and destroying their legalistic influence. Since Christians receive justification by faith, they belong to the free woman’s lineage (verse 31).

? What kind of persecution might legalistic Christians impose on others today (Galatians 4:29)?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Through our faith in Jesus, God has united Christians into one family. Regardless of background, culture, language, gender, or economic status, a believer’s new identity is child of God. This status enables believers to receive God’s promises, including eternal life, as His rightful heirs.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Evaluate any weak spots in your church’s unity. How can you help strengthen those areas?
- Start a conversation with someone from a different background. Look for opportunities to share the gospel.
- Spend some time in prayer, thanking God for the spiritual freedom that comes through faith in Jesus.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

God’s Fatherly Compassion.

Psalms 103:8–18

Tuesday:

God’s Rebellious Children.

Isaiah 1:2–9

Wednesday:

Father to Israel.

Jeremiah 31:1–9

Thursday:

Live as Children of God.

Matthew 5:43–48

Friday:

Becoming God’s Children.

John 1:6–13

Saturday:
God's Great Love for Us.
1 John 3:1–3