

## Enjoying Sonship

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We're studying Galatians to be grounded in the gospel, to sink ourselves deep into what *God* says about us. This passage insists we soak up the soil of *sonship*, the idea that Jesus frees us from being slaves to the law (legalism), slaves to the principles of the world (secularism), to enjoy being his sons. How do we do it? *Renounce* competing identities, *remember* our true identity, *reach out* to the Father in the Spirit.

### Renounce Competing Identities

Paul says something radical in our times and their, [There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus](#) (28). He's not saying race, gender, and social status don't matter. This isn't color, gender, or status blindness. He's been standing up for the racially marginalized, Gentiles, all along. As for status, he says he's *eager* to remember the poor. We'll come back to gender. So what is he saying? [There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, FOR you are all one in Christ Jesus.](#) He's saying there's something that unifies us more than divides us. He's saying these distinctions don't compare to the ultimate distinction of being in Christ Jesus. They are subordinate; being in Christ is ultimate. Now, that's difficult in a secular age, which says gender, race, or status takes ultimate place in forming our identity. The right and the left, black and white, rural and urban: pick a category run it up to the top of the flagpole, even insist people salute it: the rainbow flag, confederate flag, male power. But when we do, when we run up an identity other than Christ corruption is inevitable. Men in places of influence will use their power to belittle or abuse. Women bitterly fear or chaff under leadership simply because it's male. Companies require attendance to Gay Pride not heterosexual pride rallies. Interestingly, more and more secular academics are taking exception to these identity politics. Robert Boyers is a liberal professor with a Jewish background. In his recent book he describes how he was expected by his family to take certain position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Why should I be expected to adopt that perspective? I'm not only of Jewish background but also a college professor, intellectual, a person with a range of experiences? He says, I am many things. "Obviously, all identities are plural." What's he saying? That no single thing is

enough for our identity; we require a plurality of sources to form who we are. He contrasts this with what he describes as an intolerant impulse in liberalism that demands we reduce our identity down to one, “African-American, White, male, female.” *This* he says is misleading and oppressive. Why? Because, while some, especially those who have experienced injustice, may want to focus on one source for identity, *most* have many sources. To force a person to look to one source is demeaning and shallow. But what does that say about Christianity, which also boils identity down to one? Jesus at the top. Isn't it that limiting and oppressive? Not if that identity has something none of the others possess. Verse 26, “**for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God.**” Quite a claim. You could imagine being a son of God would leave you lacking in nothing. Why does he use the category *son*? Is he being dismissive of women? Notice 27 he does not say, Put on maleness, masculinity. He says quite plainly, Put on Christ, the exceedingly beautiful, righteousness of Christ. Also, he has quite a high view of women, higher than most women have of themselves. How so? In chapter 4, he identifies Sarah as a type, a woman as a symbol of city of God, the shimmering New Jerusalem (22, 26). The female gender isn't dismissed; it's dignified through glowing association with the city of God, the Bride of Christ. So why is being God's son better identity? In the ancient world it was sons, not daughters, who received the family inheritance: land, cattle, wealth. But now, because of faith in Jesus, *all are sons, all inherit.* Men and *women* are adopted equally into God's family to enjoy his love and receive his inheritance. He uses the word “sonship” in verse 5, which the NIV translates as “**that we might receive the full rights of sons.**” Faith in Jesus doesn't just grant equal worth; it gives us more than we're worth: full rights to God's love and city for women and men. Sonship is God reclaiming us as his own, pouring out his perfect love, and pulling us into his kingdom. It changes everything. This week Jimmy Kimmel asked Kanye West, Are you a Christian artist? Kanye paused and said: No, I am a Christian everything. That's it. Christ is not part of our identity; he is all of our identity.

### **Remember True Identity**

But how is that better than other sources? Three brief reasons. First, *justification*, God accepts his children *more* than any gender, racial, vocational, or religious group can accept us. Over the years, friends have confided in me that have been snubbed for not being black

enough, gay enough, feminist enough. In Christ, you don't have to be enough. That's the whole point of justification by faith: you are accepted, period. Second, *adoption*, in Christ you belong like no family, no movement, no cause can ever make you belong. A secular, gay friend of mine was dying so I visited him in hospice. I walked in and he was a bag of bones, laboring to breathe. I thought what would I want someone to ask me? What were some of your best times, Scott? He told me about how he snuck into the White House, slipped into the Green Room of the Today show and hung out with famous actors, VIP rooms. We laughed. I asked, how did you get into all those places? He said, easy, I just acted like I belong. It's my life philosophy. If you act like you belong, you can get into just about anywhere. He'd been seeking to belong his whole life. I paused and said, you know that won't work with God? He knows we don't belong. That's why he sent his Son, to act perfectly and sacrificially on our behalf so we can belong forever fully to him. He closed his eyes and nodded in agreement. Better acceptance, better belonging. Third, *clothed with Christ* "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (27). To clothe yourself. This means when we put on Jesus we are more radiant, glorious, and beautiful than any workout, outfit, or diet could make us. I once counseled a woman who shared she couldn't keep from compulsively working out. 7 days a week. I asked her why she did it. She confided, I want people to notice me. When my body is chiseled people look. When you're clothed with Christ, you don't have to wear yourself out to get God to notice. When we are baptized into Christ, we are clothed with his very glory so that when God looks at us he sees the beauty of his Son. Do you wonder if God sees you? He doesn't just see you; he adores you. You have the loveliness of Christ about you. As sons of God we're offered something secular sources cannot: unwavering, unlimited, unmatched acceptance, belonging, and beauty. So how do we apply that? Notice he says they were *baptized* into Christ. Why? The Galatians had been drifting from Christ by trying to earn a place of distinction before God. Paul uses the word baptism to trigger a memory, to take them back, to remind them of their baptism. When you're tempted to put your faith in other identities remember who you are. 1. Justified: you are accepted. 2. Adopted: You belong. 3. Clothed: You are radiant. Not just part of you; all of you, every inch: redeemed, justified, adopted, clothed. So when you're tempted to run some other flag up the flagpole, patch worth from

various sources, *remember* your baptism, remember God sent his son into the world to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

### Reach Out in the Spirit

Now what do we do when remembering isn't enough? When we preach the gospel to ourselves but struggle to believe it? Look at verse 6. God sent Jesus into the *world* to change our *identity* (sons not slaves), but he sent the Spirit into our *hearts* to change our *experience*, *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* The Spirit closes the distance between a doctrinal belief and a lived reality. How does he do it? Couple things: *First, the Spirit cries out.* The Spirit doesn't talk to the Father; he doesn't even just pray to the Father; he *cries* to the Father. When do you cry? When you're desperate, weak, struggling. If you're struggling to believe the gospel, take heart—the Spirit knows your weakness and cries on your behalf. The Spirit is crying out to put you in touch with the lived reality of your adoption. *Second, the Spirit enflames the heart.* He doesn't just inform our intellect; he enflames the heart. The Spirit makes the truth desirable, believable, sweet. This happens when you hear someone praying out loud and your heart is moved, amen. Or Scripture is read and resonates deeply. That's the Spirit of Christ blowing on the embers of your heart. Don't hold him back; give into it! You say, I don't experience that. Well, do you pray? That's what the Spirit is doing here in us, crying out in prayer. Do you pray to the Father, not just for things, not just for forgiveness, but for *Him*? The Spirit is in your heart—reaching with childlike language, Abba Father. When the Spirit cries he's cries out not for stuff but for Father, just because. When my son was young, he'd ask me to play Xbox so he could play Xbox. But as he got older and we formed a relationship, he'd ask me to throw the football—not to play football—but to be with his Father. It's about being with your Father. The Spirit closes the distance between our doctrinal belief and our lived identity. Will you *renounce* competing identities; *remember* your true identity, and *reach out* to the Father in the Spirit and to enjoy your sonship?