

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Questions 05

Why Do Christians Say There Is Only One Way To God?

John 14: 6

Feb 5, 2017

Souper Bowl Sunday

Communion: Robert Domingos

Care Calling: Robert Domingos

Host: Carol Hill

Saturday 2/4 Clean Up: Carol Hill

- 1 🎵 **How Majestic 121** [DH 2238]
- 2 🎵 444 - I love to tell the story [ALL] 444
- 3 🎵 697 - The way of the cross leads [ALL] 697
- 4 🎵 **Doxology 815** [DH 1981]
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John 14:6 (NASB)

6 Jesus said ... I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

You see the **bumper stickers**:

God is too big to fit into one religion

If evolution is just a theory, religion is just an opinion

CoExist

Whatever Makes You Happy

In our pluralistic society, if you want to start a fight, just say "No

one comes to the Father but through Jesus!"

This statement rankles people, including some Christians. And, Christians who embrace this conviction about Jesus are called narrow minded, bigoted, snobbish, arrogant, or worse.

And, when we examine this claim by Jesus, He is with His Apostles in the Upper Room. He has shared with them the Last Meal. He has washed their feet. He has predicted that He would be betrayed. And, when the Apostles need to be comforted after He says He will leave them, He tells them they will be given the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

And, then just short hours later, Jesus is in the Garden of Gethemane praying.

Matthew 26:39 (NASB)

39 And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

Matthew 26:42 (NASB)

42 He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Jesus was not the first person crucified. Records indicate that there were probably around 500 crucifixions a day in Jerusalem at that time. And that is one reason why crucifixions were held on permanently placed poles, and the cross members kept the crucified person just a foot or so off the ground. It was an agonizing death, and our Lord knew that.

Before the foundations of the earth, it had been settled in the Godhead that Jesus would by His death be the sacrifice for all

mankind's sin, from Adam to the end of the ages.

By His prayers, we can see that Jesus is saying that ***IF*** it were possible to atone for our sins some other way, then "Please, Father, let it be. But ***IF*** not then Your will be done."

You see, Jesus Himself asked the question about another way, and God's response indicates that there was and still is no other way.

6 Jesus said ... no one comes to the Father but through Me.

Jessie Pounds wrote that old hymn we sometimes sing:

**I must needs go home by the way of the cross,
There's no other way but this;
I shall ne'er get sight of the Gates of Light,
If the way of the cross I miss.**

And, as harsh as it seems, as exclusive as it appears, there simply is no way to God except that which has been provided by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Use your imagination and remember the first Gospel sermon:

Acts 2:37 (NASB)

37 Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

And, Peter replied: "Brethren, just be diligent in your present religion. All roads lead to heaven!"

But...

I. All Religions Are Not The Same

The Hindu leader of the late 19th century, Ramakrishna Paramahansa said:

“One can ascend to the top of a house by means of a

ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope; so too, diverse are the ways of approaching God, and each religion in the world shows one of the ways.”

Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, law professor at DePaul University College of Law is one of the world’s leading authorities on international criminal law and human rights.

In 1999 he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in establishing the International Criminal Court.

Dr. Bassiouni says:

“All religions lead to God using different paths. Judgement is not by the choice we make, but by how we pursue the path of the choice we make. Different religions and cultures are equal in the eyes of God and should be seen as equal in the eyes of man.”

And, frankly, there are **SOME** commonalities when you **ONLY** examine their teaching on basic morality.

But at the same time, there **ARE** also drastic and irreconcilable differences between Christianity and other faith systems that cannot be papered over.

As C. S. Lewis pointed out, one major difference is that-unlike other religions, christianity proclaims a gospel of grace and not works.

You see, every other religion is based on people **DOING** something.

Adherents struggle to somehow **EARN** the favor of God.

Some faiths teach that people have to use a Tibetan prayer wheel, or they have to go on pilgrimages, or they have to give alms to the poor, or they have to avoid eating certain foods, or they have to perform a certain number of unspecified good deeds, or they have to pray at a certain time in a certain position each day, or they have to go through a cycle of reincarnations, **OR WHATEVER**.

You see other religious systems are essentially **DO-IT-YOURSELF** propositions.

Follow this way of life, they say, and you stand a good chance of

gaining favor with God and eventually achieving salvation.

Think of it like this: Other faiths are attempts by PEOPLE to reach out to GOD but Christianity teaches that in Jesus Christ GOD is reaching out to US.

Scripture tells us that God's gift of salvation through Jesus was GOD-given, GOD-driven, GOD-empowered, and GOD-originated.

The gift of salvation is not from man to God through our efforts. It is from God to man.

And Christianity ALONE teaches this fact, that in His great grace, God REACHED DOWN to us because we were incapable of REACHING UP to Him.

As it says in 1 John 4,

1 John 4:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

There are other fundamental differences:

For instance, Christianity says that there is one eternal God who created the universe.

But Hinduism says that everything is God; you are God, I am God, this podium is God.

Islam denies that Jesus was God and that Jesus died for our sins.

While other religious leaders can offer wise sayings and helpful advice and insights, only Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, is qualified to offer himself as sacrifice for our wrongdoing.

No other religious leader even pretended to be able to do that.

Moses could mediate the Law.

Mohammed could brandish a sword.

Buddha could give personal counsel.

Confucius could offer wise sayings.

But none of these men was qualified to offer an atonement for the

sins of the world.
Jesus alone was qualified.
All religions are not the same.

II. It Matters What You Believe

You've heard the objections.
"You have your truth. I have my truth."

They say even though Christianity might be different, it's just one philosophy among many, and it's only as valid as any other religion.

In other words, even if there are differences between religions, they all have equal claims on the truth.

This is appealing because it seems to reflect the pluralistic attitude of the United States.

On one level, that attitude is helpful.

It is important that we are tolerant of people who believe differently than we do.

Peter tells us

1 Peter 3:15 (NASB)

15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

The Bible tells us that those of us who are followers of Jesus need to be loving and respectful and accepting toward people of all faiths.

Under our Constitution, all religious viewpoints are equally protected; anybody can believe whatever they want.

But the problem is that some people jump to the erroneous conclusion that because different philosophies are equally protected, they must be equally valid.

That's just not the case.

Remember the old saying:

"If a million people believed a ridiculous thing to be true, it would still be a ridiculous thing!"

Of course, this gives anybody in the country freedom to make the claim, as Jesus did, that they are the way and the truth and the life; that they are the only way to God.

The question is, how do we know that Jesus was telling the truth?

Jesus backs up his claim with unique credentials.
Jesus authenticated his claim of being God
by living a perfect life,
by embodying the attributes of God, and
by fulfilling dozens of prophecies written hundreds of years before
Jesus came to this planet.

Unlike other religious leaders, Jesus also authenticated who he was
by performing great miracles in broad daylight, in front of skeptics.
He demonstrated his mastery over nature.
He demonstrated his mastery over sickness.
He demonstrated his mastery over death by bringing Lazarus back
to life after four days in a cold, damp tomb.

In the most spectacular demonstration of his deity, Jesus fulfilled
his own prediction by being resurrected from the dead, in an
historical event that was witnessed by more than 500 people and
that sparked a spiritual revolution that has been unparalleled in the
history of the world.

Christianity is not just a philosophy; it is a reality.
Jesus didn't just claim that he is the one and only Son of God.
He validated his claim with convincing evidence like nobody else
in history.

**III. It Is Not Narrow Minded to Believe Jesus Is
THE Only Way**

The critics say Christians are narrow-minded and snobbish when they say that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

If there were many roads to God and Christians were claiming, "Ours is the best," I would agree they were being narrow and arrogant.

But that's not what Christians are saying.

We are not saying "Ours is the Best!"

We are saying that somebody has got to pay the penalty for the obvious wrongdoings that keep us separated from God.

By virtue of his sinlessness and by virtue of his divinity, Jesus is the only one qualified to be our substitute.

That is the reality of the situation.

It is not narrow-minded to act in accordance with the evidence and to pursue truth.

In one of his many books, I think it was "Faith Under Fire," Lee Strobel, tells the story about a friend whose baby girl developed jaundice.

The doctor told them that jaundice is a potentially devastating disease, but it is easily cured by putting the baby under a special lamp.

The parents were concerned that the treatment would be ineffective, and wanted some other way.

The doctor said, "You're going to jeopardize the life of your child if you do something else. There is only one way to cure her. You're hesitant to pursue treatment because it sounds too easy. But look at the credentials on my wall. I've studied at medical school. I've used what I've learned to treat and to cure countless babies. Trust me."

Would anybody accuse those parents of being narrow-minded if they trusted a doctor with credentials and pursued the only course of treatment that was going to cure their little girl?

Of course not!

That is not being narrow-minded.
That is acting rationally and in accordance with the evidence.

Every person in this room has a terminal illness called "sin."

The reason those of us who follow Jesus cling to him so tightly is that he is the Great Physician who has the only cure.

We could try to scrub away our sins with good deeds, but it will not work.

We can sincerely think that there are other ways of dealing with it. But we would be sincerely wrong.

The truth is that only the Great Physician offers a treatment that will erase the stain of sin.

He has credentials and credibility to back him up.

So when we turn to him, we're not being narrow-minded.

We are acting rationally and in accordance with the evidence.

It is anything but snobbish for Christians to believe Jesus is the only way to heaven.

For a Christian to act holier than thou is snobbish, but to believe that Jesus is the only way is not.

Christian apologist, Greg Koukl, professor at BIOLA, says:

“If issues of religion have eternal consequences, then errors in thinking are infinitely tragic. To rephrase Karl Marx, FALSE religion is the opiate of the people. It soothes, but does not cure.”

Christianity is unique.

It cannot be reconciled with any other religion.

It backs up its truth claims with the credentials and credibility of Jesus Christ, which cannot be duplicated by any other spiritual leader.

That's why when Jesus said he was the way and the truth and the life, history does not laugh.

History has been revolutionalized by Jesus.

To illustrate this, let's pretend that there are two country clubs. The first country club only admits people who have EARNED their membership.

In order to get into this country club, you have to obtain superior wisdom.

You've got to fulfill a long list of demands.

You've got to advance spiritually in some way.

And despite their best efforts, lots of people just do not make the grade.

In the end, the door is going to be slammed in their faces.

They are not going to be good enough.

They are not going to make the qualifications to get into this country club.

This is what other religions are saying when they teach that people have to work their way to God.

But Christianity is different.

Christianity is like a another country club that says anybody who wants in is invited, because Jesus has already paid for their membership.

Rich or poor, red, yellow, black, or white, regardless of your ethnic heritage, regardless of where you live, the doors are wide open.

Entry is not based on your qualifications.

It is only based on your admitting your sin and following through on Jesus' invitation.

This is what Christianity is like.

Now let me ask you, which faith system is being snobbish?

Certainly not Christianity!

We know we are not better than anyone else.

Our own experience with God's grace has taught us that we have no right to be pious or holier than thou.

In the Sermon in the Mount, Jesus had this to say:

Matthew 7:13-14 (NASB)

13 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

All people are on one of two roads.

Most are on the wide road that leads to destruction, that is, eternal Hell.

Oddly, many people think that they must be right because the majority of people agree with them.

Wrong.

Most people are wrong and are on the wrong way.

Truth is not determined by a majority vote.

These words tell us something else.

Jesus rejected the view that says that all men will be saved from their sins and make it to Heaven with God, regardless of their religion.

If they do not turn to Jesus, they will certainly go to Hell, not to God.

By contrast, Jesus is "the way" to God.

He is the narrow way.

Are Christians narrow-minded to say that Jesus is the only way to God?

We sure are.

Because Jesus Himself was.

The one way to God is a narrow way.

The now deceased Swiss theologian, Dr. Emil Brunner, makes the case clear.

He says: "The original sin of man breaks out first of all, and mainly, in his religion, the essence of original sin is man's apostasy and his inveterate tendency to be absorbed in himself."

He says: "The God of the "other religions" is always an idol."

Mature Christians agree with the Apostle Paul, who sums it up for

us this way:

Philippians 3:8-11 (NASB)

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

The older philosophy of missionary work stressed the discontinuity between Christianity and other faiths, and saw the task as being, not to supplement ethnic faiths, but to displace them.

Surely this was right.

Does the Bible warrant the view that non-Christian faiths are a way of salvation?

It seems not.

Dr. J.I. Packer, in his lectures on this subject at Dallas Theological Seminary, concluded his two days of lecturing by saying:

"It thus appears that the case for other forms of faith beside Christianity being ways of salvation is forlorn indeed. Without Christ, we are without God and without hope. Non-Christian religions exhibit much that is noble and many insights that are true, but they do not exhibit saving grace. So far as the way of salvation is concerned, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" really is the last word."

When Paul was testifying before King Agrippa, he said God had sent him to the Gentiles

Acts 26:18-20 (NASB)

¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who

have been sanctified by faith in Me.' ¹⁹ "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

Romans 10:13-14 (NASB)

13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." **14** How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

And, that is where each of us here today come in.

D. T. Niles, who died in 1970, was the Methodist Bishop of Sri Lanka.

He understood the poverty of our situation.

He said:

"Christians are just like beggars trying to tell other beggars where they can find food."

Prayer and Invitation

Unit 3: The Birthing of a New Community

February 5 Lesson 10 **Re-Created to Live in Harmony**

Devotional Reading: [Colossians 3:12-17](#)

Background Scripture: [Galatians 3:26-4:7](#)

GALATIANS 3:26-29

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, **27** for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28** There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

GALATIANS 4:1-7

1 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. **2** The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. **3** So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. **4** But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. **6** Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." **7** So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Key Verse

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.—**Galatians 3:28***

Introduction

A. The Boundless Variety of Humanity

The next time you are out in a public place, take note of the variety of people. They are tall and short; thin and plump; female and male; with many shades of skin, hair, and eye color. When you get to know people, you find that they are quiet or talkative, funny or serious, trusting or wary—and often a fascinating mixture of several traits!

Each of us feels a closer connection to certain kinds of people. Often they are people who share our life experiences and outlook. Sometimes they may be people who differ from us in intriguing ways. We enjoy building friendships with such people. Our lives are richer because we build bonds with them.

But by the same token, sometimes we feel a barrier between us and

others. We find it hard to make a connection with some people. We may even experience fear when we come across people who are different from us in certain ways. With these, we find it hard to build relationships.

God clearly intended to create human beings with infinite variety. We bear God's image regardless of individual characteristics. The God who created each person loves us enough to send Christ to the cross to pay the price for our sins. That is the basis for our mutual fellowship. But if we view the variety of people as a threat, we may add to the gospel additional requirements for mutual acceptance. That was a problem Paul confronted in his letter to the Galatians, and it remains a problem (with different issues) yet today.

B. Lesson Background

We are not certain exactly when Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians. Research proposes dates as early as AD 48 or as late as AD 58. The arguments and the evidence are tedious to sort through, but a date of about AD 57 seems best.

Despite uncertainty regarding *when* the letter was written, the general contours of *why* are quite clear: some individuals in the churches were teaching that Christians of Gentile heritage needed to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. Such converts could not belong to God's people until they did so. (See discussion of Paul's opponents in next week's lesson.)

The reasoning for such a position was that Israel had always been distinct as the people of God. It was to Israel that God had revealed himself, given his law, and specified circumcision as the sign of his covenant ([Genesis 17:7-14](#)). So if God were making himself known through the gospel to the nations, then people from the nations who come to God in Christ should be circumcised.

To this reasoning Paul had already answered *no* in text preceding that of today's lesson ([Galatians 2:3, 11, 12](#)). The numerous verses between that reaction and today's text serve to ramp up the intensity of Paul's line of thought. The preaching and acceptance of the gospel repairs the sinbroken relationship between God and humans. As a happy side effect, the gospel also repairs human-to-human relationships. Both happen because of Christ and his work. Paul wrote to correct the wrong doctrine that the bond provided by Christ had to be accompanied by a certain kind of law-keeping.

I. Foundation of Equality

([Galatians 3:26-29](#))

A. Role of Faith ([v. 26](#))

26. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,

Paul writes this statement as a firm assertion of the equal standing of all Christians before God. Those who *through faith* are *in Christ Jesus* are in a family that has no class distinctions. In describing this status, Paul uses the Greek word for “sons”; this is translated *children* here and elsewhere (example: [Romans 8:14](#)). He uses the word for male offspring because inheritance generally goes from fathers to sons in the ancient world.

Paul has much more to say about faith as it relates to salvation. But right now the summary statement we see here is sufficient for the line of argument he is establishing.

B. Role of Baptism ([v. 27](#))

27. for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Paul now appeals to baptism as a common experience of all believers, whether their background is Jewish (circumcised) or Gentile (uncircumcised). For Paul to say that having been *baptized into Christ* is to be understood as being *clothed ... with Christ* may strike us as odd, so a bit of investigative work is in order.

Baptism is the ritual of being dipped in water, first practiced by John the Baptist. In the Jewish culture of the day, people purified themselves ceremonially by dipping themselves in water. John’s actions, however, were different in procedure and significance. Regarding procedure, the person receiving baptism did not dip herself or himself. Rather, another performed the dipping action on the recipient.

Regarding significance, John’s baptism was one “of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” ([Mark 1:4](#); [Acts 19:4](#)). Repentance remained as a key element of Christian baptism, which superseded John’s.

Furthermore, baptism was administered in the name of Jesus for receiving the Holy Spirit. We see all three elements in Peter’s exhortation on the Day of Pentecost that followed Jesus’ resurrection: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” ([Acts 2:38](#)).

This reorientation of baptism as being toward Jesus shows how new Christians understood that they were forgiven. Jesus—who died, rose,

and ascended to God's right hand—is the one who gives God's cleansing forgiveness and fulfills God's promises. To be *baptized into Christ* is to be baptized asking Christ that the forgiveness and fulfilled promises be applied to oneself by Christ's power.

Baptism thus is a powerful expression of the equality and unity of Christ's followers. None are able to cleanse themselves, even those who had grown up following God's law. All rely utterly on Christ's cleansing. None can look to previous Israelite identity as credentials for inheriting eternal life. Rather, all must look to Christ's death and resurrection.

Perhaps we are now better able to see what Paul means when he declares that those who *were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*. The expression speaks of Christ as being like the fresh garment a person dons after being baptized. Christians are not defined by ancestral heritage or former practices, but by Christ's gracious forgiveness and gift of new life. Though we may look and act differently from one another, we all wear the same spiritual clothing. It is the uniform of the gospel that speaks of Christ alone (compare [Isaiah 61:10](#); [Romans 13:14](#)).

C. Result of Oneness ([vv. 28, 29](#))

28a. There is neither Jew nor Gentile,

Having summarized the equalizing results of the good news of Jesus, Paul begins to note distinctives that serve to categorize and alienate people in his day. The first such is that of *Jew* and *Gentile*, the primary division troubling the churches of Galatia.

We should note that the people classified as Gentile(s) are the same as those classified Greek(s) elsewhere. We see that Paul uses the terms interchangeably as we examine his writings, although he prefers the word translated *Gentile(s)*—sometimes translated “pagans”—by a ratio of about four to one. The English word *ethnic* derives from the word translated *Gentile(s)*.

Paul's other letters reveal that he has more to say about the positions of Jews and Gentiles relative to each other (see [Romans 3:1-9](#); [11:11-24](#); etc.). But here the stark and succinct *there is neither Jew nor Gentile* suffices. Neither group should be saying that the other is lesser, for the gospel of Jesus indicts the sin of both groups as it freely offers forgiveness to all.

Paul, “a Hebrew of Hebrews ... a Pharisee” ([Philippians 3:5](#)), fights hard for this point in the letter to the Galatians. Gentiles do not need to

become Jews to belong to God's people, and Jews do not need to live as Gentiles either. Both have equal standing before the cross (compare [Romans 10:12](#); [Colossians 3:11](#)).

28b. neither slave nor free,

The enslavement of humans is a common practice in the Roman world. Slaves perform a variety of tasks, from manual labor to highly skilled, technical tasks such as those required in the fields of education and document production.

Most slaves of the first century AD do not suffer the extremes of physical abuse that we associate with slavery as practiced more recently. Even so, no slave is accorded full human dignity, and no slave can live as the slave chooses. People who are *free* are used to thinking of slaves as lesser beings.

But in Christ, there is no difference between the two in their standing before God. One who is enslaved may be accorded pastoral responsibilities in the church, and that slave's master may submit to the slave's instruction and care. A few years later, Paul will remind a slave master to treat as a brother a runaway slave who has become a Christian ([Philemon 16](#)). The entire institution of slavery is undermined as the radical equality of the gospel is brought to bear.

What Do You Think?

What responsibilities do Christians have to confront the injustices of inequality that exist outside the church? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Responsibilities of Christians as individuals

Responsibilities of the church as a body

28c. nor is there male and female,

The third distinction echoes the biblical account of human creation ([Genesis 1:27](#)). While we can easily exaggerate the inequality between the sexes in the ancient world, that inequality was nevertheless real. Indeed, in most cultures the vulnerability of women becomes a basis for men to take positions of privilege. Such inequality includes the customs of inheritance: women typically do not inherit property in the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD. Inheritance in terms of having access to salvation is in view in the text at hand (see [v. 29](#), below). The fact that *nor is there male and female* means no inequality exists in that regard in Christ.

Both male and female can inherit the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation in Christ. While male and female remain that way individually as God created them to be, neither has a superiority in inheritance status before God. There are not separate inheritance qualifiers for men and women.

28d. for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Divisions that result from living in a fallen world, including those that vex us yet today, are overcome by the gospel. Oneness in Christ means we treat each other with absolute love and respect as equal heirs of salvation.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can we put into visible action the six affirmations of [Galatians 3:26-28](#)?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the three positive affirmations of [verses 26, 27](#), and [28d](#)

Regarding the three negative affirmations of [verses 28a, 28b](#), and [28c](#)

29. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The promise to Abraham was that through his *seed* God would bless all nations. Abraham's descendants would be like the sand on the seashore ([Genesis 22:17, 18](#)).

Christ himself fulfills this promise, with the word *seed* stressed as singular in [Galatians 3:16](#). So those in Christ become part of Abraham's family, sharing in the inheritance of God's promise given to him. Jews are therefore heirs not because of circumcision, but because of Christ. Gentiles therefore do not need circumcision, for they are already members of God's people with full status as heirs, equal to Jewish Christians in every way.

INHERITANCE FIASCO

The Queen of Mean was the unflattering title for Leona Helmsley. Her infamous temper was the reason for the derogatory moniker. But she wasn't mean to her dog, Trouble. When Helmsley died in 2007, her will excluded several relatives, but Trouble was left \$12 million! A court later cut that to "only" \$2 million.

By one estimate, 70 percent of families experience inheritance problems, but most of them are not as strange as those surrounding

Leona Helmsley's estate. Sometimes the issue isn't monetary, but emotional. These may be seen in fights over possessions that have only sentimental value.

Judaizers of Paul's day taught that Gentiles couldn't be heirs of salvation through Christ unless they became "members of the family" as those Judaizers saw the admission requirements to be. Paul had to remind his flocks otherwise. Do we put requirements on people today that the gospel does not?—C. R. B.

II. Establishment of Equality

([Galatians 4:1-5](#))

A. That Was Then ([vv. 1-3](#))

1. 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.

To explain the sweep of God's plan in history, Paul extends the comparison with inheritance practices in ancient cultures. He does so by picturing a son who will inherit the father's property when the son comes of age. The son has already been designated as *heir*, who will control the property. The son therefore always *owns the whole estate*. But until the son is granted control of the property, he has no power at all! In that respect he is like *a slave* in the father's household.

2. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.

In Roman custom, the heir of the father's estate is under the supervision of someone who both teaches and protects the son until age 14. After that age, his life is under the control of another, who supervises him and restricts his decisions until age 25. Only after that age does the son receive full rights as heir.

3. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

Paul now makes the comparison: like those who are *underage*, the Galatian Christians had lived not as heirs, but *in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world*. What exactly Paul is referring to as he uses that phrase is difficult to determine (see also [Galatians 4:9](#); [Colossians 2:8, 20](#); compare [Hebrews 5:12](#); [2 Peter 3:10, 12](#)). It's fairly safe to conclude that the word *elemental* in this context means "something that is basic or elementary," such as learning one's ABCs. Some students think that the elementary thing in view here is the Law

of Moses. If so, Paul's point would be that the law functioned as teacher and protector to prepare the world for the fulfillment of God's promises. Now that Christ has come, the Galatians should look to him instead of that law.

What Do You Think?

Which Scriptures help you best resist the lure of returning to the life you led as an unbeliever?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Passages featuring direct commands

Indirect commands through parables, etc.

B. This Is Now ([vv. 4, 5](#))

4. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

As a father has a plan for his son to become his heir, so God has a plan for all people to become his people. *The set time* was the point at which God acted decisively to fulfill his promises. That decisive act was to send *his Son*.

Christ entered the world with the full status as God's Son, the one who truly was and is heir to the world ([Hebrews 1:2](#)). Although he possessed privilege as Lord, he took instead the lowly position of those who lived under the custodianship of God's law. In emptying himself of privilege, he identified completely with the servitude of humanity ([Philippians 2:6, 7](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can Christ's lowliness be a model in helping you overcome barriers to equality among Christians?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering one or more specific examples of something Jesus said or did

Considering one or more specific examples of something Jesus did not say or do

5. to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Becoming human yet living without sin, Jesus was able to take the curse of sin on himself ([Galatians 3:13, 14](#)). In so doing, he paid the price that bought for humanity freedom from bondage to sin, a bondage

illustrated by Israel's continual failure to keep *the law*.

To redeem is to pay a price that gives freedom, the very thing Christ did on the cross. Having been freed from the curse, people can join God's family as heirs. Unlike Christ's sonship, our status is not one that we have by nature. Rather, it is granted to us by God as a gift, like an *adoption* (also [Romans 8:15](#)).

ADOPTION TURBULENCE

Jesse was adopted at age 4 from a Bulgarian orphanage by an American family. It wasn't long, however, before his adoptive mother thought she had "ruined her family's life." She was overwhelmed by Jesse's behavior as he adapted to his new life. Whenever she tried to leave the house, he would throw tantrums, a behavior pattern exhibiting what is called separation anxiety disorder.

According to experts who work with such adoptees, other common problems are attention deficit/hyperactivity, oppositional defiance, and autism. Many problems are traceable to years of institutional neglect. But counseling, medication, and time may bring healing.

Jesse eventually became a straight-A student and a star player on his high school's basketball team. Even so, his mother says of the experience, "It's misleading to think it's a pathway covered with rose petals. ... It [was] hard and serious work."

Our adoption into God's family may also result in "separation anxiety" behavioral problems as we distance ourselves from past ways or beliefs. If you see someone in such a state this week, be sure to bring him or her the patient love of the Father as you act as his hands and feet.—C. R. B.

III. Outcome of Equality

([Galatians 4:6, 7](#))

A. No Longer Alone (v. 6)

6. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Paul again reminds his readers of their equality as he notes that they *are his sons*. In addition to their baptisms ([Galatians 3:27](#)), their common experience of having *the Spirit of his Son* in their hearts affirms their equality. They had received the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ ([3:26](#)), not by undergoing circumcision. In turn, the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to address God with confidence as *Father*. This is not a timid expression, but is the deep cry of the heart in dependence

and joy.

What Do You Think?

What can and should Christians do in order to experience more deeply the Spirit-filled joy of their adoption in Christ?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In times of corporate worship

In times of private worship

Other

Paul, writing in Greek, uses a word from the Aramaic language to express this heartfelt address to God: *Abba*. This is the warm, familiar word used in the household for a father. It is not equivalent to the word *Daddy*, as young children might use today. Rather, it is a warm term of endearment and closeness. Jesus distinctively addressed God with this word ([Mark 14:36](#)), a different expression than the one commonly used for God as Israel's Father. So, Paul says, we who have the Spirit can address God with the same confidence as did Jesus. All Christians share this relationship with God through Christ. None in Christ has a lesser or greater position.

B. No More a Servant ([v. 7](#))

7. So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

The Spirit's presence is proof of one's new status as *heir*. As full members of God's family, we all receive God's promises fulfilled in Christ. Thus Paul concludes the argument begun in [verse 1](#).

Conclusion

A. The Great Sameness of Status

Jewish Christians of the first century were accustomed to seeing themselves as insiders and Gentiles as outsiders. But the gospel teaches something different: neither group could claim the better status. Both had their deficiencies, deficiencies canceled by Christ. Everyone was to be welcomed into God's family not by markers of past identity, but by faith in Christ as they put on Christ in baptism ([Galatians 3:26, 27](#)).

None of this has changed. We dare not think of ourselves as insiders because of economic status, etc. As we understand one another in our differences, let us remember how we came to God's people: not by our own doing, but by Christ's.

B. Prayer

Father, forgive us when we think of ourselves as entitled. When we begin to dwell on differences among people, help us to see everyone's need of Jesus as Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

“The ground is level at the foot of the cross.”

—*Author unknown*

How to Say It

Abba *Ab*-buh.

Aramaic *Air*-uh-*may*-ik.

Judaizers *Joo*-duh-*ize*-ers.

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