

Series: Set Free to Live Free (Galatians)

#3. Freed to BE

Galatians 3:26 – 4:7

Today marks the half way point in this journey through Galatians. In this 6-chapter book, Paul has spent 3 of those chapters systematically exposing and dismissing counterfeit ways that the Galatians have been striving for freedom. It's the Jesus PLUS gospel that he exposes. Jesus PLUS Religious Performance. Jesus PLUS obeying the rules.

Three chapters of focussing on where NOT to find freedom. Half the book saying; "don't go there! That's a way of false freedom!" And it's no accident that Paul spends so much time focussing on and exposing these futile attempts to find freedom. Because that's people's default. It's our default. It's human nature to think that we can get right with God by what we do. Scratch below the surface of any of us, and you'll probably find evidence of it – that our good behaviour or morals or our going to church somehow makes us better than those who are immoral or a sponge on society. And that's why we need to hear again and again that freedom – true freedom – can never be found in what we do. It can only be found in what Jesus has done for us on the cross. That's why a key verse in Galatians – and for us - has been Gal 3:22; *"The Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing Jesus."*

You and I – set free? How? *"By believing in Jesus!* What incredible news! To be set free FROM sin by Jesus' saving work on the cross. But that's only half of the good news story. The Freedom FROM half. Freedom FROM religious performance. Freedom FROM obeying the rules. And it's a great half of the story. To be set free FROM those things is fantastic news. But there's more to this freedom story God offers us. There's also FREEDOM FOR.

Let me explain. In that key verse, Paul says that we are all *"prisoners"*. When prisoners are set free from prison, they are set free FROM all kinds of things. FROM the strict routine of prison life. FROM the stark restrictions that prison life brings. FROM the hierarchy of power and control that exists in all prisons. And when a prisoner walks free through the front gate of their prison, they walk away FROM all those things. But they are also walking forward FOR something. FOR a brand new start. FOR a new opportunity to walk down a different road. FOR a reconnection with loved ones they've been separated from. And if prisoners aren't clear about this new chapter, if they aren't clear about what they're being freed FOR, if they are only focussing on what they have been freed FROM, they are likely to end right back in the slammer!

So – as a Christian – are you clear about what you have been freed by Jesus FOR? If it's not to do the religious performance thing, and if it's not to obey the rules, what is your Christian life FOR? What's your purpose?

By way of moving towards an answer to this question, can I take you a conversation dad had with me 43 years ago. It was on the platform of Central railway station in Sydney, and dad and mum were saying their farewells as I was about to head off to Adelaide to begin my studies at the seminary. Now anyone who knew my dad knows he was a man of many words. But not that day. He was a man of few words. And – in those few words – what did he say? Did he talk about how I should respect the authorities – the lecturers down there - and obey the rules? No. Did he lecture me about standards and behaviours and morals? No. This is what he said. And even though it was 43 years ago – I'll never forget it. He said; "Rob, remember whose child you are." And that was it. No lecture. No "You better . . ." Just "Remember whose child you are". As if that was all that needed to be said!

And it was! It didn't matter what the circumstance was, or how complex the issue was I was dealing with down there in Adelaide – all I needed to remember was – "I'm God's child." Or "I'm a Paech child." And the rest – the appropriate behaviour, the appropriate response - would become clear. It would all flow my status as a child of God, or a child of the Paech family.

Now admittedly St Paul wasn't on a train platform when he spoke – or wrote - these words to you, but his words echo my dad's words on that Sydney central platform. He says; *"For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus."* 3:26

Who are you? *"You are children of God"*, Paul says! *"You are a child of God"*

Did you notice the tense of this verse? It says, *"You are all children of God."* That's present tense there. A present reality. Being a child of God is not something you are aiming at or a reward you are trying to earn. It is something you already have now in the present. Whatever your past, whatever you've done – or haven't done – God looks at you this morning and he says; "Right now – at this very moment - you . . . you are my child!"

"You are a child of God". And in a very real sense, that's all you need to know. That's all you need to remember. Because that fact will speak to and clarify and inform every situation you will find yourself in; every decision you have to make.

You know, we are so prone to complicate our lives as Christians. We can get so anxious about what we should do or how we should act. We can get so bound up in the religious performance thing or the obeying the rules thing - worried whether we are doing everything right - that life becomes an egg-shell walk. But that's not God's way. He frees us from all that and he simply says; "Just walk free! You're my child – my son, my daughter! That's who you are! That's your status. You're in the family! So just get out there and live life!" So if you find yourself in situations that are challenging or complex and you're not sure what you should do – just remind yourself "I'm God's child" – and the direction should come

clear. Or if you find yourself uncertain about how you should be acting in a particular situation, there's one thing that will give you plenty of clarity – and that's the reminder that you are God's child.

But what if you mess up? And you and I do. Sometimes in small ways. Other times in big ways. But all of us do mess up. And when we do, what happens to our status as a child of God? Does God get disappointed with us, disgusted with our behaviour? Does he run out of patience with us after repeated failures on our part and show us the door out of his family? Some people wonder about that. Maybe you do too.

Paul deals with that very issue. He says; *"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you have clothed yourselves with Christ."* 3:26, 27. And the key words here are "Clothed with Christ". That's baptismal language here. That's when your status changed from "sinner" to "child of God." In your baptism God joined you to his Son Jesus; he *"clothed"* you with Jesus. When God looks at you he sees you as his son – his daughter - because he sees his Son, Jesus.

How good is that! How freeing is that! Knowing that – in your baptism – you've been clothed in Jesus' perfect clothes! And that – no matter how often or how badly you might stuff up – when God looks at you he continues to see Jesus! That really does take the pressure off! It sets you free to live free!

Paul isn't finished, though. He gives 2 more reasons why being a *"child of God"* helps you to live free. I'll zip through these pretty quickly.

You no longer have to prove yourself to others

Paul says; *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* 3:29. In this verse Paul continues to throw revolutionary hand grenades into the cultural setting of his time. He's saying that all the barriers that separate people in this world into warring factions come down in Christ. Culture, class and gender barriers cease to exist when you become a child of God clothed in Jesus.

And that's good news because you don't have to try to float your boat, to list your credentials and accomplishments to others to gain their acceptance. You don't have to put on masks and try to be someone you're not. Because you're clothed in Christ! You are – not pretending to be - you are a child of God.

And you needn't be threatened by others either. Whether they seem more capable or popular or well off or whatever. I mean, why would you be jealous of anyone else when you are a child of God?

And here's the final reason why being a *"child of God"* helps you to live free.

You are free from fearing anyone or anything

When I was a kid growing up in country News South Wales, I remember visiting my best mate on his farm. His name was Chris. It was shearing time and I found him in the shearing shed with a bunch of shearers. They were a rugged looking mob. But Chris didn't seem concerned. As a 6 or 7 year old, he just confidently made his way around that shed. And they got out of his way, even if he was in the way! I was in awe of him then – how he wasn't afraid of anyone or anything.

I didn't understand what was going on then, but I do now. He was unafraid of those shearers because he was the son of the man who owned the shearing shed and the sheep. He was the son of the one who paid their wages. If they treated him harshly they would have to answer to his father. And that's what helped him feel safe and secure as a child working alongside of those tough and rough shearers in the shed.

God wants us to have the same confidence in life. We don't have to walk in fear of anyone or anything because our Father owns it all. Verse 6 says, *"Because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father."*

Do you hear that?!! The God who owns it all, controls it all - he's your "Abba." Your Daddy! Your loving, protective Father! And he's looking out for you! And he'll be there for you!

Set Free to Live Free! Set Free FROM everything that once held you as prisoner, and Set Free FOR a life of freedom as God's son, God's daughter!

Your status before God is certain!

You don't have to prove yourself to anyone. The clothes of Jesus you wear declare you to be someone very special!

And you don't need to be afraid of anyone or anything. Because your dad – your heavenly dad – he is the one who owns and controls all things.

So . . . LIVE FREE!!!!!!!