

THE STATUS OF BELIEVERS

Galatians 3:25-29

Have you ever been in a situation in which you felt inferior to others? It can be such a troubling experience. Sometimes you experience this because you are inferior, or at least your knowledge is inferior. While I was still a student in college, I was conducting a revival in a church in East Tennessee. The pastor of the church was a college friend of mine. We shared so many things in common in the Lord, but in other areas of life we were very different. He had grown up in the home of an outstanding attorney in another state. He was one of the most intelligent young men I have ever known --- he was always an effortless straight "A" student--or so it seemed to me. From his earliest days he had been trained in music, and had been trained to appreciate classical music. One evening after the revival service, he invited me and another friend over to the parsonage for a time of fellowship. During the evening they began to listen to some classical music, and it was beautiful music. They put on a record that had in it some unusual musical things. They would sit there and laugh and laugh at the record. In the music some type of humor had been included. I did not have the slightest idea what was going on. I suddenly began to have a painful experience of music inferiority. I began to look for a way to make a graceful escape from that situation. I can still feel the humiliation of being in a situation in which I felt inferior to every person present.

This was the kind of experience the Gentile Christians in Galatia had every time they got around the teachers from Judea. These Jewish teachers made them feel inferior because they were observing rules and regulations that were foreign to the Gentile believers, and they were claiming privileges that the Gentile Christians could not know. This paragraph is written to believers who have been bothered by such a feeling of inferiority. The theme of the paragraph is a declaration that the believer in Jesus Christ enjoys every privilege and blessing that God has ever offered to man. The believer stands on the highest status possible. It is a most encouraging word for those who have their trust in Christ for salvation --- and not in the works of the law. Three different aspects of our spiritual status as believers are presented by the Apostle.

I. THE BELIEVERS ENJOY THE STATUS OF SONSHIP.

In contrasting the position of those under the law with those who are the people of faith, Paul emphasizes this. Already he has pictured the law as being a "schoolmaster", or "trainer", and those who are under the law are like children who have not come to the place they enjoy the status of sonship yet. They are still under the care of this slave-trainer, the law. "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." Historically "faith" came in the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth in the fulfillment of the promise. Experientially faith comes when you come to the place that you trust Jesus Christ alone for salvation. From

that moment onward you are no longer under the care of the law. You are then a person of faith, one who belongs to Christ.

Then comes this great affirmation of the text! "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." "Ye are" affirms that this status is a present reality. It agrees with the testimony of John who wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." "All" is the emphatic word of the sentence. All of the believers, Jew and Gentile alike, share this status of sonship. As to status before God, there are no inferior believers. This sonship comes by faith --- in contrast to the works of the law. It is debatable whether "in Christ Jesus" should be understood as the object of the faith or the realm in which we are sons of God. We should not spend much time concerning ourselves with the question since both are true. The object of this faith that brings into the sonship is Jesus Christ. The realm in which this becomes a reality is "in union with Christ Jesus". This word translated "children" is the Greek word that calls attention to the dignity and status of the sons. Paul uses this word deliberately to emphasize that the highest dignity, and position of sonship is not gained through the keeping of any Jewish regulations, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Since this is true, there is no spiritual status to be gained by the keeping of the law.

In connection with this faith, Paul reminds us of our baptism. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." The "as many of you" of this statement is the same as the "all" in the prior statement. This verse has been abused by using it in support of baptism being the actual instrument through which one is placed into spiritual union with Christ. Such an understanding would contradict everything the Apostle has said in this letter. Rather the thing that misleads us is our overlooking the connection the New Testament Christians made between faith and baptism. We have made the public profession of faith in our day the walking down an aisle, filling out a card, and standing in front of the congregation. In the New Testament when a man wanted to publicly declare that He was placing his faith in Christ for salvation, he did it in the symbolic act of baptism. By being immersed into the water he symbolically declared that he was trusting the death of Christ upon the Cross, and by being raised from the water he was declaring that he was trusting the Christ who was raised from the dead. He was demonstrating in this public act his faith in Christ Jesus. This act demonstrated that he had no other hope. Since all of the believers in Galatia had been baptized in the same manner and for the same reason, it was obvious that they were all claiming Christ as the basis of their being placed as sons in the family of God. Why should they now seek some other basis? All true believers have the blessed privilege of being the full-grown sons of the living God.

II. THE BELIEVERS ENJOY THE STATUS OF EQUALITY WITH ALL

This question of status comes to the heart of the problem in Galatia. Did the Jewish members of the congregation enjoy some kind of special privilege

because they were Jewish? These visitors from Judea had made the Gentiles to feel that they did. They had even taught them that these privileges were available to them if they were willing to become Jewish in their life-style as we have already noticed. What is the truth?

In a bold, revolutionary statement Paul gives it to us. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Just how revolutionary this statement was can be understood if you will recall that most Jewish thanked God daily that they were not born a Gentile, slave, nor woman. Yet Paul is here declaring that these distinctions about which Jewish men have been so concerned are of no consequence before God. That before God all of those who trust in Christ enjoy complete equality.

"Jew nor Greek" speaks to those distinctions that are based on race or nationality. A man's national origin makes no difference in his spiritual status. Regardless of national origin all who are trusting in Christ for salvation are one in the Lord. They are equal.

"Bond nor free" speaks to social and political distinctions. In the church at Galatia some were free men and some were slaves. They lived on these different social plateaus out in the world, but when they came to church, they were one. As they stood before God, one did not rate higher than the other.

"Male nor female" refers to the difference God has made in the human family from the beginning sexually. God created this distinction. This distinction does make a difference in many different realms, but when they stand before God as believers they stand on equal ground. This verse is being used in the church today to deny that there should be any difference in the roles of women and men, but that is a taking of the verse out of its original context. This verse is speaking to the spiritual equality enjoyed by all believers in the Lord Jesus. Since each one is equally dependent upon God for the grace of salvation, not one can claim rank over the other. The result is to be a fellowship in which we experience a oneness.

The end result of the teaching of the Judaizers was to divide the fellowship. It made two classes of Christians. Those who observed the rules given by Moses stood on a higher plane than those who just trusted in Christ. This is false. Any teaching that places Christians on different levels, or ranks should be avoided. We need to be careful even talking about "spiritual" and "carnal" Christians lest we divide the church into ranks. You can never rise above the rank of son, or believer. You will never achieve some status that is not enjoyed by the humblest of believers in the Lord Jesus.

III. THE BELIEVERS ENJOY THE STATUS OF HEIRS WITH ABRAHAM

"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." This brings us back to the point we have discussed before. Already we have noted that the primary thing Abraham received from God was righteousness, which he received as a gift when he believed. Every believer receives this same inheritance with Abraham. Whether he is a physical descendent of Abraham or not, if he believes like Abraham, he inherits righteousness like Abraham.

In this sense, no Christian is better than another Christian. At least we are no better than another as to acceptance before God, or righteousness. You may know more than another, or do more than another, but the other person who trusts in Christ is as fully accepted as you.

CONCLUSION:

This paragraph assumes something about the Galatians, Can we assume the same thing about you? Paul assumed that they were trusting in Christ Jesus alone for salvation. Since he assumed this, he could affirm so confidently these glorious things about their status before God.

This is not a challenge then to be a status seeker, but rather to be a believer in Christ Jesus. You can never do anything greater than publicly declare your faith in Christ Jesus through baptism, and then live as a man of faith day by day. Everything God offers to man is available to the man who so trusts in Christ.