

Shorter Catechism 34
Exodus 3-4
Psalm 2
Galatians 2:23-4:7

“Adopted in Christ”

February 24, 2013

Introduction: the Story of Israel, the Son of God

In Exodus 4:22, God says to Pharaoh:

“Israel is my son, my firstborn.”

What does that mean?

A couple months ago, when we looked at the doctrine of creation,
we saw that God created Adam to be his son –
Adam was created in the image of God.
To be in the image of God is to reflect God –
and Adam was created in the likeness of God,
and was called to live as a son of God.

But Adam fell into sin.

And ever since then humanity has not resembled God very well!

How can the image and likeness of God be restored?

How can we once more call God “Father”?

That’s what the Exodus was all about.

God had adopted Abraham and promised him an inheritance.

God told Abraham to leave his father’s house –

in other words, abandon all hope of an inheritance from your father
in Ur of the Chaldeans.

And go to the land that I will show you.

Abraham was called to an inheritance that he would never possess!

After all, God told Abraham that his descendents would be held captive 400 years.

But Abraham believed God (as we saw last time) –

and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Now, in Exodus 3-4, we hear that the appointed time has come –

the time that God promised to Abraham –

when he would bring his children out of Egypt and into the Promised Land –
into the inheritance that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And so God sent Moses to Pharaoh to say,

“Israel is my son – my firstborn –

and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’”

Israel is my heir.

And God warns – you are messing with my son and heir.

If you refuse to let him go, then I will kill your son, your firstborn.

Psalm 2 portrays another stage in the history of God's son.

Yes, Israel is God's son –

but in the book of Samuel, we hear that Israel has failed to live like God's son.

During the time of the Judges Israel fell into the same patterns as the nations.

Israel was not acting like the son of God.

Indeed, God says that Israel has rejected his kingship –

and so God makes his covenant with David,

and says that he will adopt David's son as his own.

While there is still a sense in which all Israel is God's son,

there is now a special sense in which the Davidic king is the son of God.

Psalm 2 speaks of this in verse 7,

“I will tell of the decree: the LORD said to me,

‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’”

There are four “stanzas” in Psalm 2 –

the first sets up the problem: the nations are plotting against the LORD and his Anointed;

the second then speaks of God's declaration of the solution: I have set my King on Zion;

the third then takes up the voice of the King, as the King reports the LORD's decree –

God has given me the nations as an inheritance,

so I can smash them like a clay pot;

and the fourth then concludes with a warning to the nations to

“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you perish under his wrath.”

This Psalm is frequently quoted in the NT to speak of how Jesus now rules over the nations –
and therefore you need to repent!

Sing Psalm 2

Read Galatians 3:1-4:7

The Shorter Catechism has two parts.

The first part is “what man is to believe concerning God” –

and the second part is “what duty God requires of man.”

Or to put it another way:

what are the doctrines of the Christian faith,

and what practices embody them?

One of the reasons I really like the Shorter Catechism

is because it provides a succinct statement of Christian doctrine *and practice*.

While it was drawn up by Presbyterians,

there is not a single doctrine in the whole catechism that is *unique* to Presbyterians!

Many Congregationalists and Episcopalians could agree with the whole thing.

Lutherans, Baptists and Methodists would have slight disagreements –

but only in a couple of places.

Question 32 of the catechism structures the final part of what we are to believe concerning God.

Q. 32. What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

A. They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.

Today we come to the question “What is adoption?”

Our catechism puts it like this:

Q. 34. What is adoption?

A. Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God.

What does it mean to be a son of God?

Our Shorter Catechism has a good explanation of how we *become* sons of God:

But if we want to understand what it means to be God’s son,
then we need to know the *story* of the Son of God.

Now, right up front, I’ll bet some of you girls are wondering,
“what about me? I’m not a son – I’m a daughter!”

God calls all of you–boys and girls–his sons.

Why?

Because Jesus is the Son of God.

And because you are in him, you share in his sonship.

You share in his inheritance.

Therefore we are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

As Paul says in Galatians 3:26-28:

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Does it make a difference whether you are a boy or a girl?

No. Because Paul says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek,
there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

If you have been baptized into Christ, you are all sons of God.

You all share in the same inheritance with Jesus.

Now I also have something to say to the boys:

don’t start teasing the girls that they are sons,

because Paul goes on to say that we are all (boys and girls) the bride of Christ!

So girls share in Christ’s sonship – and boys share in the church’s motherhood.

But Paul portrays the whole history of redemption as the story of the son of God.
The history of the Old Testament is the story of the son of God in his minority.
Israel was the son of God—the true heir of God;
But so long as he was a child, he was no better than a slave.
The law was a paedagogue—a servant employed to discipline the children.
But then in the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son,
Born of a woman (the promise of the seed of the woman)
Born under the law so that he might redeem those under the law.
He is the faithful son—the true Firstborn Son of God,
who now has redeemed us that we might receive the adoption as sons.
He is the embodiment of Israel—the son of God *par excellence*
Jesus is all that Israel was supposed to be.
Therefore all those who are baptized into Christ are sons of God through faith in him.
You are Abraham’s seed—according to the promise.
You have been adopted among the true sons of God,
You have been grafted into the true vine.
If Israel was the son of God in his minority,
Jesus is the Son of God come of age.
And if you are in Christ,
then you are also come of age.
All that Israel was supposed to be has come to fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

1. Abraham’s Seed Is Christ (3:1-18)

In the first part of Galatians 3 Paul lays out the same doctrine of justification that we saw in Romans last week.

Paul even appeals to the same passage in Genesis 15 to remind us that even Abraham was justified by *faith* – and so, therefore, “those of faith” are “the sons of Abraham” (v7).

In verse 12 he appeals to the verse we’ll be looking at tonight (Habakkuk 2:4) “the righteous shall live by faith,” in order to show that no one can be justified by works of the law.

But who is the seed of Abraham?
Paul says in verse 16:

*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring.
It does not say ‘and to offsprings,’ referring to many,
but referring to one, ‘and to your offspring,’
who is Christ.*

This is a fascinating argument.
The Hebrew and the Greek words for seed were collective singular—like English.

When I say that the sower sowed his seed,
 you did not think that I meant that the sower planted one seed,
 but rather that the sower sowed many seeds.
Even so, when God promised to bless Abraham and his seed,
 no one imagined that the “seed” was only one person.
The Israelites prided themselves on being “Abraham’s seed,”
 and the rabbis had long talked about the “sons of Abraham”
 and frequently spoke of Abraham’s seeds in the plural.
No one in all of Israel’s history ever seems to have taken “seed” to be a true singular.
Until Paul.

And Paul only says this because of the undeniable fact that at this point in history,
 God’s promises to Abraham have come true for one—and only one—
 of Abraham’s descendants.

Who has inherited *everything* that God promised Abraham?

Joshua?

 No—Israel failed to take possession of the whole land.

David?

 No—David’s kingdom fell short.

What about all believers?

 Ah! That’s precisely the question that Paul wants to address!

 The Judaizers in Galatia wanted to say that Jesus is the one who restores Israel,
 and so *now* Israel will come into possession of the full inheritance.

 The Judaizers still think that “seed” can only be a collective singular.

Paul *will* agree that there is a place for the collective singular.

 Verse 29—at the end of his argument!—Paul will say

if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.

 (And, sure enough, Paul uses the *collective singular* for seed there!)

But, Paul says, you have to start with the true singular.

Paul takes a grammatical quirk—the collective singular—

 and says “this grammatical quirk has profound theological significance!”

God’s promises to the offspring referred to one.

 Because Jesus is the true Israel.

 All of the promises were made to *him*.

What is the point of this?

 Paul says in verses 17-18: *this* is my point

the law, which came 430 years afterward,

does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God,
 so as to make the promise void.

For if the inheritance comes by the law,

it no longer comes by promise;

but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

God promised an inheritance to Abraham and his offspring.

430 years later God gave Moses the law.

Was God changing the terms of the inheritance?

Was God saying, I know that I promised this inheritance to you,
but I'm just not sure that you're worthy of this,
so I'm going to add some new requirements!

If you want what I promised, now you need to do X, Y, and Z.

In other words, is the inheritance based on the promise, or on the law?

Implicit through Paul's whole argument is the obvious result of the law:

Israel failed.

Israel did not keep God's law—and wound up in Exile!

(He'll make this explicit at the end of chapter 4)

As he puts it in 3:21, the law has never produced righteousness.

But more important to Paul's argument here,

is his point that God's promise to Abraham did not include the law.

The inheritance that God promised Abraham

was not based on Abraham's obedience,

or the obedience of Abraham's children.

It was based on God's promise!

For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise;

but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

The Judaizers saw the law as a *supplement* to faith.

"Of course, you start with faith, and then you move on to the law—

just like you start with the promise to Abraham,

and then move on in Israel's history to Moses—to the law."

In other words, the Judaizers drew a straight line from the history of Israel to themselves.

They said that we have to recapitulate the history of Israel.

We start by faith, just like Abraham,

and then we move on to the law, just like Moses.

But Paul says—no!

The law is *not* a supplement to faith!

You cannot draw a straight line from the history of Israel to your own personal history.

After all, what happened to Israel?!

They failed!

They wound up in exile!

And if you insist on trying to imitate Israel, you will succeed,

and therefore you will fail!

Jesus is the one who recapitulates the history of Israel.
Jesus is the one who endured the exile—the curse of the law—for us.
Sure – the OT story has *lots* of relevance for us!
But it is all *in Christ* – only as we see that story in him.

Paul has been adamant that any “Christ PLUS” is in fact a different gospel.
Jesus plus Moses is bad news.
We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ—and not by works of the law.
The only way to begin the Christian life is by faith in Jesus.
And the only way to continue the Christian life is by faith in Jesus.
It is not as though you begin by faith and then are made perfect by works!
Rather the whole of the Christian life is by faith.

So, what was the purpose of the law?

2. The Law Was a Paedagogue (3:19-29)

*It was added because of transgressions,
until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made*

The first thing to note is that “it was added.”

--it was something tacked on later.

And it was tacked on “because of transgressions.”

Its purpose was not to make anyone righteous (legalism)

[Legalism is when you believe that your own works can make you right with God]
or to bring Israel to perfection (nomism),

[Nomism is when you start with faith, but then your own works bring you to perfection]
but rather the law was added because of transgression.

It was added because Israel sinned.

And it was added “until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.”

Once again Paul emphasizes the singular.

The promise to Abraham’s offspring was a promise to Jesus.

And Paul calls the law our “guardian” – or paedagogue.

The paedagogue was a servant in a Roman family
who had the charge of the discipline of the children.

He was not a teacher, but the one who enforced discipline.

The child is the master of the estate, but so long as he is under age,
he is under the authority of a servant—
he is no different than a slave.

The result is that a slave (the paedagogue) can not only order the young master around,
he can even beat him—
all because the son is a child.

But when the child grows up, the paedagogue is dismissed.

The paedagogue was a faithful servant during the child’s minority,
but once the son grows up,
it would be horrid for the paedagogue to still rule over the son.

The point of the law was to govern the son of God until he grew up.
“until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.”

*But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian [paedagogue]
for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.*

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (3:24-29)

3. And Jesus Is the Son Who Inherits the Nations (4:1-5)

a. We Were Infants – No Better than Slaves

Even the Gentiles are Abraham's seed—if they believe in Christ.

This is the fruition of Paul's distinction between the “seed” singular
and the “seed” plural –

that grammatical quirk that Paul drew attention to in 3:16.

Because Jesus is the Son of God who comes into his inheritance.

Paul explains the true purpose of the law by telling a story.

*I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave,
though he is the owner of everything,
but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.*

Even so Israel was the son of God—but Israel was the son of God in his minority.

Israel was a child.

(Remember Israel in the wilderness?

–how Israel continued to rebel against God, time after time?

That is otherwise known as the terrible twos!)

The law was given as a paedagogue—a guardian, a disciplinarian.

Israel was not yet ready for the inheritance.

Because Israel was a child.

Would you give control of your checkbook to your five year old?

Of course not!

But someday, when your five year old has grown up,
you will that same money to him (or her).

Israel was not old enough or mature enough to handle the inheritance.

The son of God had to grow up.

And so when the fullness of time had come—

in other words, when the appointed time came—

the time when the Son of God was to enter his inheritance—

God sent his Son.

God sent the only person who could bring humanity to maturity.

And Paul uses two descriptions of this sending:

1. born of woman

This is an echo of Genesis 3:15–
the promise that the seed of the woman
would crush the head of the seed of the serpent.
God had promised that the seed of the woman would triumph–
and so the Son of God must be born of woman.

But it is not enough that Jesus be born of woman.

Because Jesus is not only the seed of the woman, the eschatological Adam,
he is also the true Israel–therefore he must be

2. born under the law

God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.
Was the eternal Son of God in need of a paedagogue?
No.

But, if the eternal Son of God was to become the eschatological Son of God,
and bring us into his inheritance,
then the eternal Son would have to be born under the law.

The owner of everything had to be brought under the power of a slave.

This is what we confess in the Nicene Creed

“Who for us and for our salvation,
came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary,
and was made man.”

Jesus is the Son of God who has come to maturity.

b. But God Sent Forth His Son to Redeem Those under the Law

But why?

Why did the eternal Son of God need to be born of woman, born under the law?

*5 to redeem those who were under the law
so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

The only way for God to redeem those under the law
was for him to send his Son to be born under the law.

The law held all Israel under the curse.

Remember that the curse we are dealing with here is the curse of the law.

Paul is not yet dealing with the Gentiles directly.

Paul is saying that *Israel*–the son of God–is under the law, under the curse of the law.

In order for the blessing of Abraham to come to the Gentiles,
someone needs to deal with the curse of the law (3:13-14)

That is precise what Jesus did.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

He became a curse for us, by being hanged on a tree.

In that way, Jesus took the curse of the law upon himself.

And when Jesus redeems those under the law—when he redeems Israel,
then the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles.

In other words, “we” receive adoption as sons.
The “we” being all those who believe in Jesus.

Paul has just established that in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female.
There is no place for “we” and “you” in Christ.

The distinguishing marks of the Christian are faith and baptism.
For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.
For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

And the key to our identity as Christians is that we are sons.

This term “adoption” or “sonship” is a uniquely Pauline term.
Paul uses it to refer to Israel’s status in the OT (Romans 9:4),
the Christian’s present status (Romans 8:15),
as well as the future resurrection of the body (Romans 8:23).
In Ephesians 1:5 he uses the term to refer to our whole relationship to God in Christ.

But since Paul conceives of the whole of redemptive history in terms of the Father/Son relation,
it is not surprising that he uses the language of adoption.
God’s purpose in redemption is to bring his son into the promised inheritance.
And so in the fullness of time (which is the same as “the date set by his father”),
Jesus came as the son who enters into his inheritance.

4. So You Are Sons (4:6-7)

a. God Sent the Spirit of His Son into Our Hearts

So you are now sons of God, through faith in Jesus Christ.
And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,
crying ‘Abba! Father!’

At the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3,
the Father poured out his Spirit upon the Son,
declaring, “this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

At the resurrection of Jesus, as Paul tells us in Romans 1,
Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness.
And on the day of Pentecost, as Peter tells us in Acts 2,
Jesus poured out his Spirit upon his church.

We rightly talk about the death and resurrection of Jesus as being one package.
But we often forget that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is part of the same package.
Paul has already told us that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law
so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles,

so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (3:13-14)
Now we hear that not only did God send his Son to redeem us,
God has also sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.
And it is the Holy Spirit who prompts us to call God “Abba, Father.”

This is the same Spirit who was poured out upon Jesus in his baptism.
The Holy Spirit equipped and empowered Jesus as the Son of God—
and that same Spirit—the Spirit of the Son—now indwells us.
And because we have the same Spirit,
we too cry out “Abba, Father!”
And so if the Spirit of his Son dwells in you,
then you also are a son.
You are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

(You may have heard that “abba” is what a child calls his father?
That’s true, but it’s also what a grown adult calls his father!
It’s simply the Aramaic word for father!
If you need proof, just look at the Greek word that follows:
there is a more “tender” term for father in Greek: “pappas” –
but Paul does not use that!
Paul’s point is that God has adopted you as his child and heir.)

b. You Are No Longer a Slave, but a Son

So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

In other words if you are in Christ, you are not under the law.
What does this mean in terms of *our* relationship to the law?

The law was a good and faithful servant.
It deserves our respect and our love.
But the law is not our master.
In Christ, we have come to maturity.
In Christ, we love God’s law
because it was a faithful servant who prepared us for this day.

If (when you were a child) you had a faithful paedagogue,
a disciplinarian who had been pretty strict with you,
and now you had grown up,
would you allow that paedagogue to continue beating you?
Of course not!

What does all this mean?
Does this mean that we can sin against God law?

Of course not!

If you had a faithful old servant who had done right before God,
and prepared you for adulthood,
you wouldn't beat him up and throw him out!
Indeed, you might even find him a wise and faithful counselor!

Paul is not saying that the law is useless.

Paul is saying that the Christian's relationship to the law has changed.
We are not *under* the law.
Our status is not as children who are no better than slaves.
Rather in Christ we have grown up!

And that *in Christ* is the key.

Would you count yourself as more mature, personally, than Moses?
Do you think of yourself as wiser than Solomon?

I doubt it.

Paul's point is *not* that we are, in ourselves, better or more mature than the OT saints.

Paul's point is that *Jesus* is the Son of God who has come to maturity,
and so all who are *in him* are perfected *not by the law*, but by his Spirit.

Your maturity is found not in yourself, but in Christ.

Like justification, your adoption is God's act.

It is a definitive act.

Once you are justified, you can't get any more justified.

In the same way, once you are God's son, you cannot become more of a son
—because you are as much of a son as Jesus.

But Paul also speaks of adoption in a future tense, much the way he does with justification.

In Romans 8, Paul says that *we have* received the Spirit of adoption.

But then in v23 he says that we “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons,
the redemption of our bodies.”

What is Paul saying?

Since we have received the Spirit of adoption,
we may wait patiently for the redemption of our bodies
because we have received the down payment and guarantee of that inheritance
that awaits the Son of God.

These are not two different adoptions.

In our union with Christ, we have been adopted as sons

—God has promised us the full inheritance that he gave to Jesus.

But it is only in the resurrection of the body that we will receive that full inheritance.

We are justified in Christ,
–but we long for that open acquittal before the judgment seat of God and of the Lamb.
We are adopted in Christ,
–but we long for the fulfillment of that adoption in the redemption of our bodies.

It is as though you were in an orphanage and the king has adopted you as his son.
He has signed all the papers–the royal act of adoption has been declared–
but he has not yet brought you to his palace.

Instead he sent his most trusted servant with his royal coach to array you in the finest clothes,
and bring you to the grand party he is throwing in your honor.
The ceremony at the palace is in fact part of the same act of adoption
as the signing of the papers.

Though of course, our adoption is even better,
because in the Holy Spirit we have not merely a trusted servant
(we are not under a paedagogue!!),
but the eternal God himself–the presence of the resurrected Christ with us.

And the fact that we have the Spirit of adoption
ought to cause us to long more and more for the conclusion of our adoption–
the redemption of our bodies!

We ought to long eagerly for the resurrection,
where we will become fully what we already are–
sons of God–spotless and pure reflections of our heavenly Father.