

Pentecost 2
Galatians 3:26-4:7
June 6, 2010

“You are all sons (children) of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Everything else in this section connects to this basic truth.

I'm focusing on this sentence because today I am going to start a series of nine sermons, one each for different parts of the Lord's Prayer. The very first words, “Our Father who art in heaven” or just “Our Father in heaven” really are the foundation for all Christian prayer.

Our Lord Jesus taught us to pray this way. From the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, God teaches us that the Lord's Prayer was given us to pray and also as an example of how to pray – both. The first words of this prayer set the tone, put the heart into all our praying as Christians.

What tremendous confidence comfort, warmth **are** in the words “Our Father” or for that matter, in the words “we are God's children.” Finally, they boil down to the same thing, don't they?! But sadly, without context, the words “We are God's children” can be a false statement.

That's even more so with the actual words, “You are all sons (children) of God.” St. Paul does NOT stop the sentence there, does he? Yet that is where many people do stop the sentence. They talk about the “fatherhood” of God and the “brotherhood of man” as if it were sort of an automatic thing.

Well, if sin had confined itself to the devil and his other fallen angels, all human beings could have enjoyed God's fatherhood and would truly have practiced brotherhood with everyone. It would have been automatic. But sin ruins everything it gets into. And sadly it got into all human beings. There are a couple things that always go along with sin. One thing is separation. Sin separates. It separates the Maker from those He made. It separates people from people, too and in a most negative way. Sin caused people – Adam and Eve to start with, but every one of their children afterward – to jerk themselves away from their Father. We people ended, broke, the family relationship.

Since sin became a part of us, it not only turned us away from our Father, but also it prevents us from fixing it.

God, our Father, has fixed it. To do that our Father sent His eternal Son, born of a woman, born under law, in order to redeem (purchase freedom) for all the rest of us trapped under the just and rightful condemnation of the law so that God could restore to us again the full rights of being God's children. God reestablished His Fatherhood for us.

Jesus tackled our sin in two ways. He lived sinlessly and righteously in the name of all sinners (the world) and He suffered and dies under the guilt of and the punishment for all

the sin of all sinners. Again, Jesus' return to life, even glorious, eternal life assures us that Jesus actually succeeded at removing our sin from our accounts and at depositing into our accounts His flawless and perfect righteousness. Faith believes God put it there and uses it. Unbelief says, "It's not here!" and never benefits.

So, we are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. And the Apostle further assures us of that by pointing to our baptism. In Baptism – God-given, God-created Baptism, God baptized us into Christ and clothed us with Christ. Picture this – Jesus' flawless, perfect, holy, obedient life of love totally covering us and all of our disgusting sinfulness and its guilt and its punishment removed from us. That's what Paul says God baptized us into. Another way Paul says the same thing in Romans 6 is that we were baptized into Jesus' death and into His resurrection.

It was good for those called God's children in Old Testament times, but it is better for all of God's children in Christ Jesus in these times. Why?

Paul says that Israel of old were like children of God who had not yet reached the age of majority, as it is called. As minors, the estate was theirs, but they really had no control over it all. God used the Sinai covenant like trustees and tutors, guardians. The law really ran everything in their lives.

But when Jesus came, God announced that all the rights, privileges and authority of being "of age" had come. The law now serves us, assisting us as we find out how God's children proceed in this world.

It was Christ, through faith in Him, by God's Word about Him, through God's promises and descriptions and teaching in the prophets, from Moses to Malachi, who caused those Old Testament believers to believe and who made them God's children, heirs. They anticipated the Savior's coming to win the full benefits. It is Christ, through faith in Him, by God's Word, including the prophets and the Apostles, who caused believers, to the present day, to believe and made them God's children and heirs. And now, with Jesus having finished His work, we have the full benefits of being God's full-fledged children, heirs of all our Father's love, grace, mercy, complete forgiveness, life, eternity, glory, with the future entire new heavens and Earth as our home and free, total access to Him by prayer, made priests, prophets and kings, even God's holy temples, will all of God's holiness and power, and eternity and knowledge, and goodness dedicated to blessing us.

That's what it means to be able to pray "Our Father" to our God.

"Our Father in heaven" is a fearless, Jesus-inspired, Holy Spirit-empowered approach to God. Our Father is one of God's precious, dearly loved children coming to Him, maybe just to talk, maybe to seek His help, maybe to ask for someone else, maybe to bang on heaven's door with all urgency or maybe to say thanks. Our Father means natural. And, remember, it wasn't natural because of our sin. Our Father made it natural by His Son and through the Holy Spirit working with the Good News (the Gospel) of Jesus in Word and Sacrament.

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We're not slaves; we're children. Jesus taught us that when He said, "When you pray say, 'Our Father who art in heaven.'" Amen.