

Our Inheritance

Galatians 4:4-7

In early December my brother LaVaughn had a DNA test. This was very generous of him to share since it allows me and my siblings to know our ancestry. We had been told various stories of who we are and where we came from and our place in the world. Hopefully the DNA does not lie and we can figure out who we are in the world. This is what the report states:

24% - Cameroon/Congo	23% - Great Britain
12% - Nigeria	11% - Mali
6% - Benin/Togo	6% - Senegal
5% - Ivory Coast/Ghana	5% - Iberian Peninsula
3% - Africa Southeastern Bantu	2% - Europe East
1% - Finland/Northwest Russia	1% - Native American
1% - Asia Central (0.05%)	1% - Ireland/Scotland/Wales (0.05%)
= 100%	

If I am reading this correctly our mixture of African ancestry: 24% - Cameroon/Congo; 12% - Nigeria; 11% - Mali; 6% - Benin/Togo; 6% - Senegal; 5% - Ivory Coast/Ghana; 3% - Africa Southeastern Bantu: making us International Africans at 61%! And our 23%-Great Britain; 5% - Iberian Peninsula (Spain and/or Portugal); 2% - Europe East; 1% - Finland/Northwest Russia; and 0.05% - Ireland/Scotland/Wales; making us 31.5% European. I was surprised by the 1% - Native American and 0.05% - Asia Central. Our daddy thought his grandmother was Cherokee and one of his ancestors may have been Asian as he was called the "China Man." So what does this mean about our inheritance? We know our inheritance from our parents and grandparents, but what does this mean about our

place in the world? My suggestion is that my siblings and I visit all the ancestral countries identified: about 40 African nations; 5 European nations; maybe the 7 Native Tribes in Washington state; and go to Hong Kong or Mumbai for a flavor of Asia. This way we get to visit all our distant relatives and learn of our various cultures and discover our heritage, if not our inheritance.

Paul's passage was addressed to uncircumcised Gentile Christians who accepted, but then were reconsidering, the message that Paul had proclaimed about God's grace in redeeming and justifying Jews and Gentiles through faith in Jesus Christ without the works of the law. They received the "good news" that Gentiles could become heirs of God's promises and equal members of the people of God by abandoning their idols and trusting God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ, without observing the law. The acceptance of this message made possible the emergence of Christian Jewish groups in synagogues and churches that proclaimed and practiced full and equal membership of uncircumcised Christian Gentiles among God's people. Paul had not given this the Matthew or Luke version of the Christmas story, only that "in the fullness of time God sent Jesus." Although Paul had no written Gospel texts to guide him, and although he most assuredly wrote long before the Gospel of John, [Galatians 4:4-7](#) sounds remarkably Johannine. In the third chapter of that Gospel, in Jesus' exchange with Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees, we hear echoes of Paul. "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" ([John 3:4-5](#)). What John would call "water and Spirit," Paul foresaw as "adoption." Regardless of the mode of birth, whether by nature or by law, the end is the same. In both Paul's writing and John's, at the intersection of law and gospel, God did something miraculous. John called Nicodemus, Paul calls the Galatians, and God calls us—to a spiritual second birth.

Paul claimed in the epistle to the Galatians that the new reality of God's redemption of Gentiles without the works of the law (4:4-5) and their incorporation as uncircumcised believers into God's people was: something God intended from the beginning (3:6-9); a teaching in the law (4:21-30); a reality accepted by key church leaders in Jerusalem (2:1-6); and a missional agreement between those leaders and Paul (2:7-10). Therefore, uncircumcised Gentile believers in Christ were encouraged to claim their new status as equal children of God and descendants of Abraham (3:6-9), but free from the obligation to observe the law (3:10-29).

As exciting as this information was, the message and its practical communal implications were opposed by some Christian Jewish groups who affirmed and practiced something different. In their view, in order for Gentiles to be redeemed by God and enjoy equal membership among God's people, they needed to become proselytes—that is, circumcised and law-observant converts. Like Abraham, they needed to be circumcised in order to become children and heirs of Abraham (Gen. 17). God's covenant and true faith in Jesus Christ required the observance of the law. Their faith was incomplete and their membership unequal until they were circumcised. Most likely, confused about their spiritual identity and threatened on their group status, uncircumcised Gentile Christians began to accept this gospel, complied with the new requisite, and submitted to the authority of these leaders. Paul's letter was an attempt to reprimand this turn away from the gospel. He tried to convince them not to believe this "different" gospel, not to comply with this assimilation policy, and not to consent to the threats of exclusion and expectations of subordination of those leaders.

Paul argued to justify the law free "gospel of Christ" and the policy of incorporation and equality (3:28) for uncircumcised Gentiles believers in Jewish Christian groups. Paul focused on what God had done in Jesus Christ and the Spirit

in order for Jews and Gentiles to acquire the new status of free children of God. There are three convictions in this passage that are part of Paul's understanding of the "gospel of Christ" (1:7) that grounds spiritual freedom and equality among God's people, and our common inheritance.

First, God is the redeemer of all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, who always makes real the divine promises of redemption. God is the universal and inclusive redeemer seeking to bless all of the children of God. God is enacting the promise made to Abraham: "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you" (3:8). By God's grace and freedom and through the death and unity with Christ (3:28), uncircumcised Gentiles are now included as free and equal members in God's people.

Second, God's gracious and inclusive redemption is the work of God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Spirit. Through the death and resurrection of the Son, God has: "set us free from the present evil age" (1:4); justified those who believe in Christ Jesus (2:16); "redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (3:13); passed on the blessing of Abraham to Gentiles (3:14); made believers in Christ "children of God through faith" (3:26), Abraham's offspring (3:29), and adopted and free children of God (4:5; 5:1); and finally, made believers one and equal in Christ Jesus in spite of human differences in identity and status (3:28). God has given the promise of the Spirit (3:2-5, 14) in order for believers to be free children in communion with God and heirs of God's promises (4:6); "eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" (5:5); overcome the desires and works of the flesh (5:16-21); bear the fruit of the Spirit (5:22); experience "the only thing that counts... faith working through love" (5:6); and become agents of love and care for the common good in the life of the community (6:1-10). Finally, God is committed to redeem and transform the life and destiny of Jews and Gentiles alike, especially those who are excluded and marginalized by human hierarchies and divisions (3:28).

The Christian gospel invites people to become aware of and respond to God's grace and mercy, which seek, among other things, to make humans free in order to live reconciled and reconciling lives with God and others. The church has the continuous task of discerning and enacting new ways by which God extends a gracious invitation of acceptance and freedom to those who are considered and treated as "others, outsiders, subordinates, strangers, and impure" by church and society. God's love and righteousness defy all attempts by religious people to establish policies of separation, exclusion, subordination, and assimilation on human terms that run counter to the gracious terms of God's policy and practice of redemption, adoption, and hospitality. Old and new forms of all sorts of "slaveries" appear in different times and contexts. For this reason, churches are always challenged to live and proclaim our understanding and practice of the Christian gospel of peace, freedom, and justice in response to particular contexts where these "kin-dom" values and relationships are resisted and denied in society and church. The task of discerning the truth of the Christian gospel and the freedom of Christian life is not under our control and achieved once and for all, but it is sustained by the hope that the liberating work of God through the sending of the Son (4:4) and the sending of the Spirit (4:6) is still with us. **Luis R. Rivera**

On this First Sunday *after* Christmas, Paul calls the church and its culture to vivid, pentecostal transformation. *Our* hearts—are directly injected with the Spirit of God's Son. We are no longer slaves—to the law, to others, or to ourselves. We are no longer second-class strangers to our salvation. We are now children and heirs of God, just as Jesus himself is God's child and heir. Paul's words take hold of us and lift us above ourselves and beyond our culture. Paul calls us—the church—to be born again on the first Sunday *after* Christmas. We are directly led to hope and know that we have an inheritance in Christ. We are told anew of God's hope for all the world, and reminded that our hope rests in God. Wherever we

stand, we have standing because God is willing to adopt us. Wherever God is, God stands hopeful that we can develop beyond societal limits, casting off whatever chains of situation tie us down, to become conscious of our position as children and then also heirs of God. Not merely students, nor even friends, we are brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. This message of hope, this word of new birth must be proclaimed to all we meet. **James W. Mctyre**

I may not know my inheritance in the world because I will have to travel half the globe to understand what that means; but I do know is that we are sons and daughters of God because of our faith in Jesus Christ our Lord!

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