

First Sunday after Christmas – Epistle

UNDER AND OVER AND INTO OUR HEARTS

Galatians 4:4-7

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

Galatians 4:4-7 4But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Diagnosis: “This is my ranch and you’re trespassing on it.”

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *I am my own woman. I am my own man.*

Teenagers are still minors, though they will insist that they are their own persons. “I can make my own decisions!” A man might say, “A man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do.” Or a woman, “I’m just doing my job. It’s nothing personal.” However much we may strive to make independent decisions, the truth is we are still owned by some perspective. The teenager is owned by the idea that adults make independent decisions. Adults are owned by norms that shape how they should behave. They both feel that if they live according to these perspectives they will be their own

persons. Some even believe that if they live according to the rules, they will be proper dependents of God and included in God's will that gives eternal life. That's how it was for the Galatians who were beset by the claim that to be approved of by God they had to follow certain customs, such as circumcision and keeping certain holy days. Having Jesus approve of them was not good enough proof that they had God's approval. How could a cross-killed man accomplish that? They felt like adolescents—they meant to make their own decision. They wanted to be adults before God and do what had to be done.

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *“Give me the deed to your ranch or I’ll tie you to the railroad tracks.”*

When the Galatians and we desire to do what has to be done, we don't immediately realize that that is not only thing we have to do. Getting to make your own decision suddenly means responsibility for deciding everything. Getting circumcised in order to receive God's approval suddenly means doing everything that one is supposed to do in order to be approved. If you depend upon one law to make you right with God, you are depending upon the whole way of the law to make you right with God. Instead of making our own decisions, we become slaves to what the law tells us to do. We no longer own ourselves. The law is taking the deed to our lives.

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *We are tied to the tracks and the midnight express is coming.*

When the law owns the deed to our lives, it is because we trusted the law and gave the law our lives. But the law has betrayed us. The law does not save our life, but condemns it. We are tied to the railroad tracks of the law, tied to what we are supposed to do, tied to what we trust. But the very thing we trust is going to destroy us. To trust the law means we trust its verdict of our lives. And the law will always give a verdict of “Not good enough.” God has declared that when we trust the

law to receive God's approval, then one slip, one error, results in death. That is what the crucifixion shows us. We deny that our deaths are a result of our errors. Ironically, trusting the law to get us God's approval is the first error and the greatest error.

Prognosis: "Then along came Jesus, mercy talking, mercy giving Jesus."

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Jesus comes and switches places with us.*

Jesus, the Son of God, offers himself to the law by becoming human, born of a woman named Mary, in a stable in Bethlehem. As the Son of God, Jesus is worth much more as a hostage, so Jesus switches places with us. He becomes tied to the tracks of the law, and we are set free. Jesus, now owned by the law, is condemned by the law for our error of not trusting him for God's approval. He is now not good enough and is killed on a cross. He is cut off from inheriting anything from God because the dead do not inherit. That's the law. But the law has been double-crossed! God raised Jesus from the dead because God sent him to free us from the law. God declared that Jesus fulfilled the way of the law by dying. The law has made its demands, pronounced its verdict, and executed its judgment of death on Jesus. God raised Jesus and said the way of the law is now done, complete, ended. Jesus is truly the one of whom God approves.

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *"Oh, Jesus, you're my hero!"*

Jesus approves us. He does not approve of us because of what we do or accomplish or say or achieve. He did not approve of us being tied to the way of the law. Only by his love does he grant approval. He grants it, gives it, offers it, even lavishes it on us. He says, "I forgive you. I approve you. I have mercy on you. I justify you. I say you are good and right with God." And his

say-so makes it so. And God verifies that by raising Jesus from the dead. The very approval we could not get on our own we have been given freely. Wow! What a gift! “Jesus, you’re my hero! You’re the greatest!” All blessing and honor and glory and might be to God and unto his Christ. We look to Jesus as the one who can get us approval from God. We trust him as the one who is worthy of God’s approval; and we know that because of him we have God’s approval.

Step Six: Final Diagnosis (External Solution) – *“Here’s the deed to my ranch.”*

As a result of what Jesus has done, God approves of us. In fact, for Jesus’ sake God makes us God’s children. We are children of God as Jesus is the Son of God. As children of God, we are included in God’s will. We inherit what belongs to God. What is God’s is now also ours. We trust God and say, “Daddy, can I have, not the keys to the car, not twenty bucks, but can I have all that is yours?” And God approves for Jesus’ sake. God delivers. Grace is ours. Mercy is ours. Forgiveness is ours. Peace is ours. Comfort is ours. Jesus is ours. We no longer have to make deals with the law to get approval. Instead, we now see that the law was only there to protect us from harm. It was not meant to save us or get us properly certified for entrance into heaven. And since we have all that is God’s, we get to use it just like Jesus used it and so give it to one another. We get to give mercy and love and forgiveness. Knowing Jesus we get to help others see that God has switched them from a place of condemnation to Jesus’ place of approval. So it happens when the Lord’s Supper is given to the Hospice patient. “Here is Christ’s body and blood to take your place so that you may have his place of resurrection.” So it happens when the teenager says to her parent who was late to pick her up after school and feels terrible for neglecting her, “I forgive you,” as she draws a cross on his forehead. Christ is put in the place of the

condemned and the father inherits mercy.