

February 5
Lesson 10

RE-CREATED TO LIVE IN HARMONY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Colossians 3:12-17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3:26-4:7

GALATIANS 3:26-29

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

GALATIANS 4:1-7

¹ What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. ² The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. ³ So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. ⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

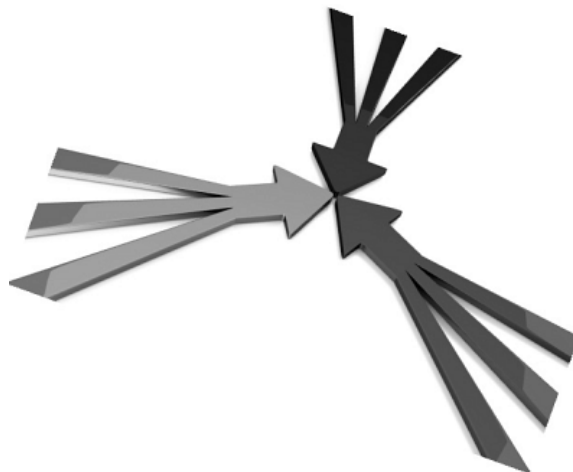


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KEY VERSE

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.—Galatians 3:28

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the means by which God's grace makes all his people to be of equal standing before him.

2. Explain the connection between faith in Christ and being of Abraham's seed.
3. Articulate one way his or her church can better demonstrate its commitment to the equal standing of all Christians before God.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. The Boundless Variety of Humanity
 - B. Lesson Background
 - I. Foundation of Equality ([Galatians 3:26-29](#))
 - A. Role of Faith ([v. 26](#))
 - B. Role of Baptism ([v. 27](#))
 - C. Result of Oneness ([vv. 28, 29](#))
 - Inheritance Fiasco*
 - II. Establishment of Equality ([Galatians 4:1-5](#))
 - A. That Was Then ([vv. 1-3](#))
 - B. This Is Now ([vv. 4, 5](#))
 - Adoption Turbulence*
 - III. Outcome of Equality ([Galatians 4:6, 7](#))
 - A. No Longer Alone ([v. 6](#))
 - B. No More a Servant ([v. 7](#))
- ### Conclusion
- A. The Great Sameness of Status
 - B. Prayer
 - C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Boundless Variety of Humanity

The next time you are out in a public place, take note of the variety of people. They are tall and short; thin and plump; female and male; with many shades of skin, hair, and eye color. When you get to know people, you find that they are quiet or talkative, funny or serious, trusting or wary—and often a fascinating mixture of several traits!

Each of us feels a closer connection to certain kinds of people. Often they are people who share our life experiences and outlook. Sometimes they may be people who differ from us in intriguing ways. We enjoy building friendships with such people. Our lives are richer because we build bonds with them.

But by the same token, sometimes we feel a barrier between us and others. We find it hard to make a connection with some people. We may even experience fear when we come across people who are different from us in certain ways. With these, we find it hard to build relationships.

God clearly intended to create human beings with infinite variety. We bear God's image regardless of individual characteristics. The God who created each person loves us enough to send Christ to the cross to pay the price for our sins. That is the basis for our mutual fellowship. But if we view the variety of people as a threat, we may add to the gospel additional requirements for mutual acceptance. That was a problem Paul confronted in his letter to the Galatians, and it remains a problem (with different issues) yet today.

B. Lesson Background

We are not certain exactly when Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians. Research proposes dates as early as AD 48 or as late as AD 58. The arguments and the evidence are tedious to sort through, but a date of about AD 57 seems best.

Despite uncertainty regarding *when* the letter was written, the general contours of *why* are quite clear: some individuals in the churches were teaching that Christians of Gentile heritage needed to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. Such converts could not belong to God's people until they did so. (See discussion of Paul's opponents in next week's lesson.)

The reasoning for such a position was that Israel had always been distinct as the people of God. It was to Israel that God had revealed himself, given his law, and specified circumcision as the sign of his covenant ([Genesis 17:7-14](#)). So if God were making himself known through the gospel to the nations, then people from the nations who come to God in Christ should be circumcised.

To this reasoning Paul had already answered *no* in text preceding that of today's lesson ([Galatians 2:3, 11, 12](#)). The numerous verses between that reaction and today's text serve to ramp up the intensity of Paul's line of thought. The preaching and acceptance of the gospel repairs the

sinbroken relationship between God and humans. As a happy side effect, the gospel also repairs human-to-human relationships. Both happen because of Christ and his work. Paul wrote to correct the wrong doctrine that the bond provided by Christ had to be accompanied by a certain kind of law-keeping.

I. Foundation of Equality

(GALATIANS 3:26-29)

A. Role of Faith (v. 26)

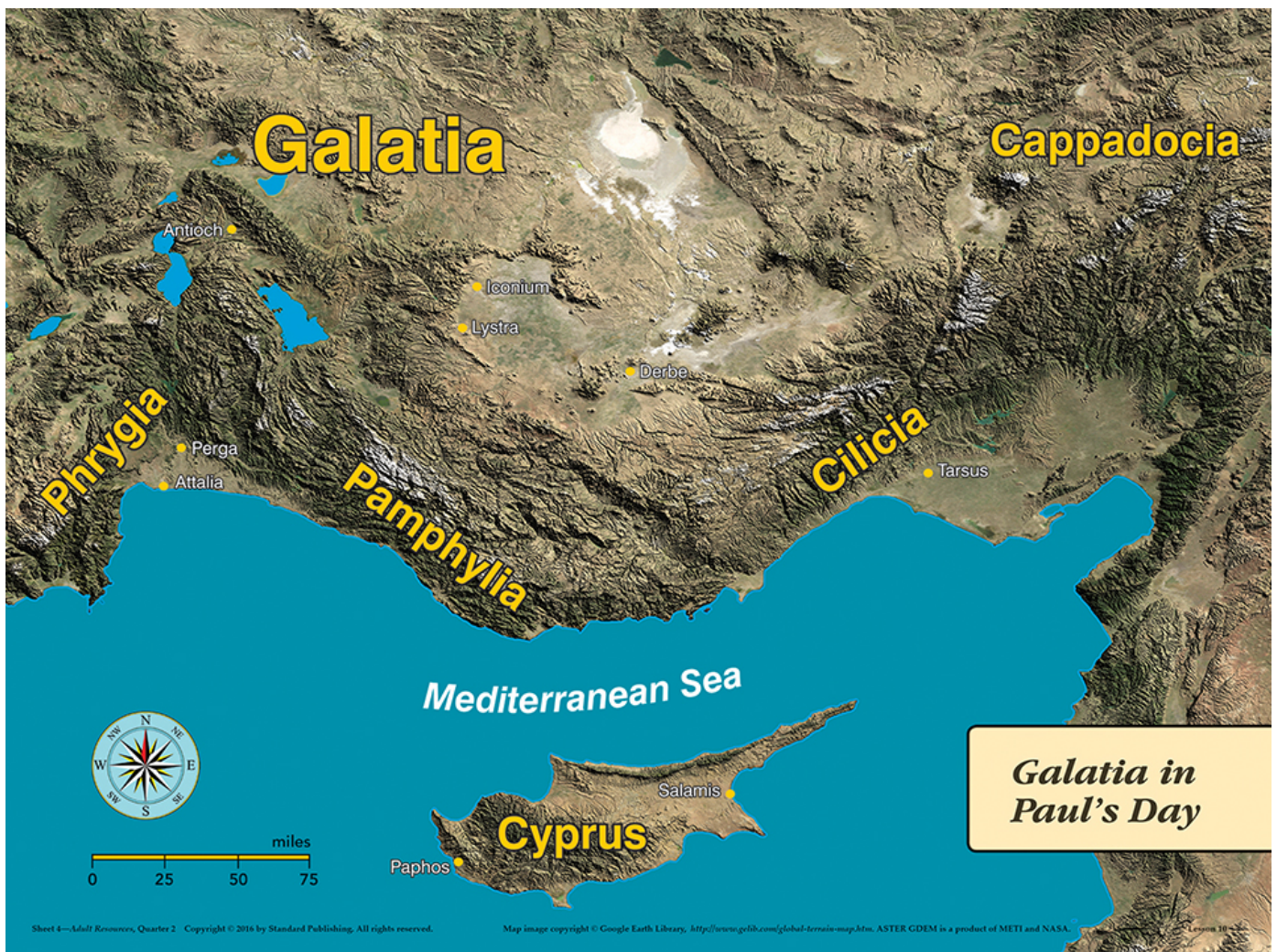
26. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,

Paul writes this statement as a firm assertion of the equal standing of all Christians before God. Those who *through faith* are *in Christ Jesus* are in a family that has no class distinctions. In describing this status, Paul uses the Greek word for “sons”; this is translated *children* here and elsewhere (example: [Romans 8:14](#)). He uses the word for male offspring because inheritance generally goes from fathers to sons in the ancient world.

Paul has much more to say about faith as it relates to salvation. But right now the summary statement we see here is sufficient for the line of argument he is establishing.

B. Role of Baptism (v. 27)

27. for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.



Visual for Lesson 10. Keep this visual posted throughout the final four lessons of the quarter to give your learners a geographical perspective.

Paul now appeals to baptism as a common experience of all believers, whether their background is Jewish (circumcised) or Gentile (uncircumcised). For Paul to say that having been *baptized into Christ* is to be understood as being *clothed ... with Christ* may strike us as odd, so a bit of investigative work is in order.

Baptism is the ritual of being dipped in water, first practiced by John the Baptist. In the Jewish culture of the day, people purified themselves ceremonially by dipping themselves in water. John's actions, however, were different in procedure and significance. Regarding procedure, the person receiving baptism did not dip herself or himself. Rather, another performed the dipping action on the recipient.

Regarding significance, John's baptism was one "of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" ([Mark 1:4](#); [Acts 19:4](#)). Repentance remained as a key element of Christian baptism, which superseded John's. Furthermore, baptism was administered in the name of Jesus for receiving the Holy Spirit. We see all three elements in Peter's exhortation on the Day of Pentecost that followed Jesus' resurrection: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" ([Acts 2:38](#)).

This reorientation of baptism as being toward Jesus shows how new Christians understood that they were forgiven. Jesus—who died, rose, and ascended to God's right hand—is the one who gives God's cleansing forgiveness and fulfills God's promises. To be *baptized into Christ* is to be baptized asking Christ that the forgiveness and fulfilled promises be applied to oneself by Christ's power.

Baptism thus is a powerful expression of the equality and unity of Christ's followers. None are able to cleanse themselves, even those who had grown up following God's law. All rely utterly on Christ's cleansing. None can look to previous Israelite identity as credentials for inheriting eternal life. Rather, all must look to Christ's death and resurrection.

Perhaps we are now better able to see what Paul means when he declares that those who *were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*. The expression speaks of Christ as being like the fresh garment a person dons after being baptized. Christians are not defined by ancestral heritage or former practices, but by Christ's gracious forgiveness and gift of new life. Though we may look and act differently from one another, we all wear the same spiritual clothing. It is the uniform of the gospel that speaks of Christ alone (compare [Isaiah 61:10](#); [Romans 13:14](#)).

C. Result of Oneness ([vv. 28, 29](#))

^{28a.} **There is neither Jew nor Gentile,**

Having summarized the equalizing results of the good news of Jesus, Paul begins to note distinctives that serve to categorize and alienate people in his day. The first such is that of *Jew* and *Gentile*, the primary division troubling the churches of Galatia.

We should note that the people classified as Gentile(s) are the same as those classified Greek(s) elsewhere. We see that Paul uses the terms interchangeably as we examine his writings, although he prefers the word translated *Gentile(s)*—sometimes translated "pagans"—by a ratio of about four to one. The English word *ethnic* derives from the word translated *Gentile(s)*.

Paul's other letters reveal that he has more to say about the positions of Jews and Gentiles relative to each other (see [Romans 3:1-9](#); [11:11-24](#); etc.). But here the stark and succinct *there is neither Jew nor Gentile* suffices. Neither group should be saying that the other is lesser, for the gospel of Jesus indicts the sin of both groups as it freely offers forgiveness to all.

Paul, "a Hebrew of Hebrews ... a Pharisee" ([Philippians 3:5](#)), fights hard for this point in the letter to the Galatians. Gentiles do not need to become Jews to belong to God's people, and Jews do not need to live as Gentiles either. Both have equal standing before the cross (compare [Romans 10:12](#); [Colossians 3:11](#)).

^{28b.} **neither slave nor free,**

The enslavement of humans is a common practice in the Roman world. Slaves perform a variety of tasks, from manual labor to highly skilled, technical tasks such as those required in the fields of education and document production.

Most slaves of the first century AD do not suffer the extremes of physical abuse that we associate with slavery as practiced more recently. Even so, no slave is accorded full human dignity, and no slave can live as the slave chooses. People who are *free* are used to thinking of slaves as lesser beings.

But in Christ, there is no difference between the two in their standing before God. One who is enslaved may be accorded pastoral responsibilities in the church, and that slave's master may submit to the slave's instruction and care. A few years later, Paul will remind a slave master to treat as a brother a runaway slave who has become a Christian ([Philemon 16](#)). The entire institution of slavery is undermined as the radical equality of the gospel is brought to bear.

What Do You Think?

What responsibilities do Christians have to confront the injustices of inequality that exist outside the church? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Responsibilities of Christians as individuals
- Responsibilities of the church as a body

^{28c.} nor is there male and female,

The third distinction echoes the biblical account of human creation ([Genesis 1:27](#)). While we can easily exaggerate the inequality between the sexes in the ancient world, that inequality was nevertheless real.

Indeed, in most cultures the vulnerability of women becomes a basis for men to take positions of privilege. Such inequality includes the customs of inheritance: women typically do not inherit property in the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD. Inheritance in terms of having access to salvation is in view in the text at hand (see [v. 29](#), below). The fact that *nor is there male and female* means no inequality exists in that regard in Christ.

Both male and female can inherit the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation in Christ. While male and female remain that way individually as God created them to be, neither has a superiority in inheritance status before God. There are not separate inheritance qualifiers for men and women.

^{28d.} for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Divisions that result from living in a fallen world, including those that vex us yet today, are overcome by the gospel. Oneness in Christ means we treat each other with absolute love and respect as equal heirs of salvation.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can we put into visible action the six affirmations of [Galatians 3:26-28](#)?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding the three positive affirmations of [verses 26, 27, and 28d](#)

Regarding the three negative affirmations of [verses 28a, 28b, and 28c](#)

^{29.} If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The promise to Abraham was that through his *seed* God would bless all nations. Abraham's descendants would be like the sand on the seashore ([Genesis 22:17, 18](#)).

Christ himself fulfills this promise, with the word *seed* stressed as singular in [Galatians 3:16](#). So those in Christ become part of Abraham's family, sharing in the inheritance of God's promise given to him. Jews are therefore heirs not because of circumcision, but because of Christ. Gentiles therefore do not need circumcision, for they are already members of God's people with full status as heirs, equal to Jewish Christians in every way.

INHERITANCE FIASCO

The Queen of Mean was the unflattering title for Leona Helmsley. Her infamous temper was the reason for the derogatory moniker. But she wasn't mean to her dog, Trouble. When Helmsley died in 2007, her will excluded several relatives, but Trouble was left \$12 million! A court later cut that to "only" \$2 million.

By one estimate, 70 percent of families experience inheritance problems, but most of them are not as strange as those surrounding Leona Helmsley's estate. Sometimes the issue isn't monetary, but emotional. These may be seen in fights over possessions that have only sentimental value.

Judaizers of Paul's day taught that Gentiles couldn't be heirs of salvation through Christ unless they became "members of the family" as those Judaizers saw the admission requirements to be. Paul had to remind his flocks otherwise. Do we put requirements on people today that the gospel does not?—C. R. B.

II. Establishment of Equality

([GALATIANS 4:1-5](#))

A. That Was Then ([vv. 1-3](#))**^{1.} What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.**

To explain the sweep of God's plan in history, Paul extends the comparison with inheritance practices in ancient cultures. He does so by picturing a son who will inherit the father's property when the son comes of age. The son has already been designated as *heir*, who will control the property. The son therefore always *owns the whole estate*.

But until the son is granted control of the property, he has no power at all! In that respect he is like *a slave* in the father's household.

^{2.} The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.

In Roman custom, the heir of the father's estate is under the supervision of someone who both teaches and protects the son until age 14. After that age, his life is under the control of another, who supervises him and restricts his decisions until age 25. Only after that age does the

son receive full rights as heir.

3- So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.

Paul now makes the comparison: like those who are *underage*, the Galatian Christians had lived not as heirs, but *in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world*. What exactly Paul is referring to as he uses that phrase is difficult to determine (see also [Galatians 4:9](#); [Colossians 2:8, 20](#); compare [Hebrews 5:12](#); [2 Peter 3:10, 12](#)). It's fairly safe to conclude that the word *elemental* in this context means "something that is basic or elementary," such as learning one's ABCs.

Some students think that the elementary thing in view here is the Law of Moses. If so, Paul's point would be that the law functioned as teacher and protector to prepare the world for the fulfillment of God's promises. Now that Christ has come, the Galatians should look to him instead of that law.

What Do You Think?

Which Scriptures help you best resist the lure of returning to the life you led as an unbeliever?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Passages featuring direct commands

Indirect commands through parables, etc.

B. This Is Now (vv. 4, 5)

4- But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

As a father has a plan for his son to become his heir, so God has a plan for all people to become his people. *The set time* was the point at which God acted decisively to fulfill his promises. That decisive act was to send *his Son*.

Christ entered the world with the full status as God's Son, the one who truly was and is heir to the world ([Hebrews 1:2](#)). Although he possessed privilege as Lord, he took instead the lowly position of those who lived under the custodianship of God's law. In emptying himself of privilege, he identified completely with the servitude of humanity ([Philippians 2:6, 7](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can Christ's lowliness be a model in helping you overcome barriers to equality among Christians?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering one or more specific examples of something Jesus said or did

Considering one or more specific examples of something Jesus did not say or do

5- to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

Becoming human yet living without sin, Jesus was able to take the curse of sin on himself ([Galatians 3:13, 14](#)). In so doing, he paid the price that bought for humanity freedom from bondage to sin, a bondage illustrated by Israel's continual failure to keep *the law*.

To redeem is to pay a price that gives freedom, the very thing Christ did on the cross. Having been freed from the curse, people can join God's family as heirs. Unlike Christ's sonship, our status is not one that we have by nature. Rather, it is granted to us by God as a gift, like an *adoption* (also [Romans 8:15](#)).

ADOPTION TURBULENCE

Jesse was adopted at age 4 from a Bulgarian orphanage by an American family. It wasn't long, however, before his adoptive mother thought she had "ruined her family's life." She was overwhelmed by Jesse's behavior as he adapted to his new life. Whenever she tried to leave the house, he would throw tantrums, a behavior pattern exhibiting what is called separation anxiety disorder.

According to experts who work with such adoptees, other common problems are attention deficit/hyperactivity, oppositional defiance, and autism. Many problems are traceable to years of institutional neglect. But counseling, medication, and time may bring healing.

Jesse eventually became a straight-A student and a star player on his high school's basketball team. Even so, his mother says of the experience, "It's misleading to think it's a pathway covered with rose petals. ... It [was] hard and serious work."

Our adoption into God's family may also result in "separation anxiety" behavioral problems as we distance ourselves from past ways or beliefs. If you see someone in such a state this week, be sure to bring him or her the patient love of the Father as you act as his hands and feet.—C. R. B.

III. Outcome of Equality

(GALATIANS 4:6, 7)

A. No Longer Alone (v. 6)

6. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”

Paul again reminds his readers of their equality as he notes that they *are his sons*. In addition to their baptisms (Galatians 3:27), their common experience of having *the Spirit of his Son* in their *hearts* affirms their equality. They had received the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ (3:26), not by undergoing circumcision. In turn, the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to address God with confidence as *Father*. This is not a timid expression, but is the deep cry of the heart in dependence and joy.

What Do You Think?

What can and should Christians do in order to experience more deeply the Spirit-filled joy of their adoption in Christ?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In times of corporate worship

In times of private worship

Other

Paul, writing in Greek, uses a word from the Aramaic language to express this heartfelt address to God: *Abba*. This is the warm, familiar word used in the household for a father. It is not equivalent to the word *Daddy*, as young children might use today. Rather, it is a warm term of endearment and closeness. Jesus distinctively addressed God with this word (Mark 14:36), a different expression than the one commonly used for God as Israel’s Father. So, Paul says, we who have the Spirit can address God with the same confidence as did Jesus. All Christians share this relationship with God through Christ. None in Christ has a lesser or greater position.

B. No More a Servant (v. 7)

7. So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

The Spirit’s presence is proof of one’s new status as *heir*. As full members of God’s family, we all receive God’s promises fulfilled in Christ. Thus Paul concludes the argument begun in [verse 1](#).

Conclusion

A. The Great Sameness of Status

Jewish Christians of the first century were accustomed to seeing themselves as insiders and Gentiles as outsiders. But the gospel teaches something different: neither group could claim the better status. Both had their deficiencies, deficiencies canceled by Christ. Everyone was to be welcomed into God’s family not by markers of past identity, but by faith in Christ as they put on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:26, 27).

None of this has changed. We dare not think of ourselves as insiders because of economic status, etc. As we understand one another in our differences, let us remember how we came to God’s people: not by our own doing, but by Christ’s.

B. Prayer

Father, forgive us when we think of ourselves as entitled. When we begin to dwell on differences among people, help us to see everyone’s need of Jesus as Savior. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

“The ground is level at the foot of the cross.”

—*Author unknown*

HOW TO SAY IT

Abba *Ab-buh*.

Aramaic *Air-uh-may-ik*.

Judaizers *Joo-duh-ize-ers*.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Display this statement prominently as learners assemble: “All people are created *UNequal*,” with a little extra space before the word *created*. Have the *U* and *N* of *UNequal* stuck on as separate squares. Have on the reverse of the *U* an *R*; on the reverse of the *N* an *E*. Ask, “In what ways are we as class members unequal?”

Allow the class to suggest 10 to 12 attributes of learner inequalities (examples: age, weight, size, vocation, education, financial status, length of service to Christ, and others may be offered). Now remove the *U* and the *N*, turn them over, and stick the *R* and *E* before the word *created*. The sentence will now read, “All people are re-created equal.”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Taking It Personally” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work in small groups.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study saying, “No, we are not all alike! But we *can* get along. All who are re-created in Christ have equal standing before God.”

Into the Word

To help your class study today’s text, you will create a graffiti wall. Attach a large sheet of newsprint to the wall and have a supply of washable markers nearby. Write, “It’s Time!” as a heading on the newsprint. Read [Galatians 4:4](#) aloud, pointing out that God’s plan for salvation took place at just the right time.

Divide the class into three groups. Give each group a section of the Bible text. Instruct the groups to read their text and create “It’s time” statements based on the content of their verses. When they discover one, a member of that group can write it on the graffiti wall.

The verse divisions and a few sample statements follow:

Group 1—Galatians 3:26-29.

It’s time to affirm that we are God’s children. It’s time to clothe ourselves with Christ. It’s time to be unified with others who are in Christ.

Group 2—Galatians 4:1-5.

It’s time to leave the slavery of sin behind. It’s time to be adopted as God’s children. It’s time to grow up.

Group 3—Galatians 4:6, 7.

It’s time to reach up our arms and cry for our Father. It’s time to prepare to receive an inheritance.

Close by saying, “This is the grand truth we celebrate: When the time was right, God sent his Son. His work allows people born in unequal circumstances to be one people before him.”

Into Life

Have a volunteer read [James 2:1-4](#), a text citing a possible sense of inequality because of unequal treatment by those assembled for worship and fellowship.

Ask, “What are some differences that separate people in a congregation? Are there any ways in which you see division in our own congregation or in the daily living we as individual Christians experience? What steps can be taken to move toward a genuine sense of equality?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Dovetailed Differences” activity and allow students to work on it individually.

After either activity, review lists of differences you have found. Ask students to select one set of differences and suggest something that can be done to promote unity. For example, the gap between young and old might be bridged with a Paul and Timothy club, a pairing of adults and teens so one may pray daily for the other.

If you wish, you may close the class by handing out snack-size packages of candy-coated chocolate. Note that while the pieces differ on the outside, they are all the same inside!