

The Joys of Growing Up

Galatians 4:1-20

Have you ever wished you could go back to being a child again—to be free from work, mortgage payments, bills and taxes; not having to be concerned about repairs or great responsibilities? The Galatians may have felt that way spiritually. They clung to the spiritual childhood of living under the law. But aren't we forgetting something? Just think of the things we were denied as children. In Galatians 4:1-20 Paul reminds us of the joys of growing up in God's household.

God's Children Through Faith

Read Galatians 4:1-7

1. What position or status does an heir have when they are still a child (or minor)? (vv. 1-2)

In legal terms today, we would call a child a minor. Even though a juvenile heir may own the whole estate, he is no different from a slave. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. Usually when he reaches a certain age.

In both Jewish and Greek cultures, there were definite "coming of age" ceremonies where a boy stopped being a **child** and started being a man, with legal rights as an **heir**.

When Paul used the phrase ***until the time appointed by his father***, he makes reference to the Roman "coming of age" custom rather than the Jewish custom (*bar mitzvah*).

A Roman child became an adult at the sacred family festival known as the *Liberalia*, held annually on the seventeenth of March. When a child had reached the age specified by his father, it was at the *Liberalia* that the child would be formally **adopted** by the father as his acknowledged son and heir and was clothed in the ***toga virilis*** which replaced the child's attire of a ***toga praetexta***.

This could also be a word picture for Galatians 3:27: ***"for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*** We are now clothed with Christ rather than the childish garments of the law.

Isn't it interesting to note that the term "adopted" applied to one's biological child as well as to any other person (such as a trusted slave) that a man wished to adopt and make his heir. The word "adopted" would have carried a strong meaning for the Gentile believers.

So then, the phrase, ***until the time appointed by his father***, can be compared to God who had chosen a certain time in history for Christ to bring redemption.

2. In what way were we in slavery prior to our coming to know Christ? (v. 3)

As children (that is, spiritually immature), we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. Whether born a Jew or a Gentile, all have lived under the threat of punishment.

3. What did Paul mean by “the basic principles of the world”? (v. 3)

The term in Greek for “basic principles” originally meant “things placed side by side in a row” which some scholars suggest it to mean like A-B-C or 1-2-3. Later, the word came to mean fundamental principles. The ABCs of the universe, if you will.

Most prominent among these basic principles is what we might call *cause and effect*. If you obey, you will be rewarded. If you do wrong or fail in some way, you will be punished. Eastern religions call it *karma*. You get what you deserve.

Paul told the Galatians to go beyond this “ABC of the universe” into an understanding of God’s grace. Grace contradicts this “ABC of the universe,” because **under grace God does not deal with us on the basis of what we deserve**. Under grace, our good deeds don’t justify us; our bad deeds don’t have to condemn us. God’s blessing and favor is given on a principle completely different from the “ABC of the universe.” His blessing and favor is given for reasons that are completely *in Him*, and have nothing to do with us.

We must understand, however, that the “ABC of the universe” is not bad in itself. We do and must use it in life, (especially with children) and God has a proper place for it. **But we must not base our relationship to God on this principle**. He does not deal with us on the principle of earning and deserving. Because this is such an elementary principle, it is so hard for us to shake this kind of thinking. But we must if we are to truly live by faith. When we live on the principle of earning and deserving before God, we live in bondage under the elements of the world.

During the first century, more and more new religions began to appear as people sought religions that promised fulfillment and hope. This is why there were so many false teachers. It was a perfect time for these opportunists to exploit those seeking the truth.

4. What happened when the time had fully come? (vv. 4-5)

When the time set by God for his children to become adults and heirs, he sent his Son who was born of a woman, indicating the humanity of the Messiah. He was born under the law – subject to the Jewish law. This happened that we might receive the *full* rights of sons.

Jesus was born of a woman—he was human. He was born as a Jew—he was subject to God’s law and fulfilled it perfectly. Thus, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because, although he was fully human, he never sinned. His death bought freedom for us who were enslaved to sin so that we could be adopted into God’s family.

5. What gifts and privileges have we received now that God has made us His sons (that is, adult children)? (vv. 6-7)

The Spirit of his Son who lives in our hearts. This is the Spirit who calls out **Abba**, Father. The Spirit of his Son is a new “guardian” identified as the Spirit of God in Romans 8:9. The Greek for the phrase, “calls out,” is a vivid verb expressing deep emotion, often used of an inarticulate cry. In Matthew 27:50 it is used of Jesus’ final cry on the cross. “**Abba**” is the Aramaic term used by children for their father much in the same sense as “Papa.”

Under Roman law, an adopted child was guaranteed all legal rights to his father’s property, even if he was formerly a slave. He was not a second-class son; he was equal to all other sons, biological or adopted, in his father’s family.

As adopted children of God, we share with Jesus all rights to the riches of God’s grace and wisdom. As God’s heirs, we can claim what he has provided for us—our full identity as his children. (See Romans 8:15-17).

In a Greek adoption, the ceremony involved the birth father coming to the public square before the magistrates with a scale and the adopting father with copper coins. The coins would be weighed on the scales to “sell” the son, but then the birth father would “buy” him back. This would happen three times except on the third time, the birth father did not buy him back.

This third time signified that he was certain about his decision and fully understood that he was giving up all rights as a father to the young man (often an adult). Then the new, adopting father would present his papers to the magistrates, proving his right to adopt the young man.

The adopted son now had a new father, a new family, and he was a new heir on equal standing with any other children in the family (although adoption of a son was frequently necessitated by a man needing a male heir). His former life was wiped from the record and all debts were canceled.

Paul’s Concern for the Galatians

Paul is concerned for the Galatian believers. He recalls their joy when they first received him and is confused (and maybe even hurt) that they are embracing the teachings of the Judaizers. It appeared that the Galatians had traded their new found freedom for a system of rules and regulations.

Read Galatians 4:8-20

6. What was the status of the Galatians before they knew God? (vv. 8-11)

They were *slaves* to those who by nature are not gods. When the Galatians were pagans, they thought that the deities they worshiped were real gods; but when they became Christians, they learned better.

They were enslaved by weak and miserable principles which existed in the belief system of the Greeks as well as of the Jews. But having become known by God, they were set free from them.

Now, he says, they are turning back to those oppressive principles. They are going backwards instead of forward. He asks, "Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"

As an example, he says they are observing special days and months and season and years! The Pharisees meticulously observed all these in order to gain merit before God. Paul expresses his grave concern that he has wasted his time and effort on them!

7. What was the reason for Paul preaching the gospel to them in the first place? (vv. 12-13)

Paul reminds them that it was because of an illness.

The wording suggests that Paul's original plan had been to go elsewhere and that his missionary journey to the region of Galatia was due to his illness and his need for recuperation.

Luke does not record anything about an illness in the book of Acts. Many have suggested various illnesses which one might get in that area such as malaria, but we cannot be certain.

Some have suggested it may have been epilepsy as this was a disease which many confused with evil spirits. The typical reaction in that day toward an epileptic was to spit toward him to keep him at a safe distance. In fact, the literal meaning of *despise* is "to spit at." That is what the Galatians could have done, but thankfully, they did not.

8. How does Paul describe the Galatians' attitude toward him when he was with them? (vv. 14-15)

Even though Paul's illness was a trial or burden to them, they did not treat him with contempt or scorn. Quite the opposite, they welcomed him as if he were an angel of God or Christ Jesus himself!

They were filled with joy and would have given their own eyes to Paul if that were possible. This suggests that Paul's illness caused him vision problems or he had some sort of eye infection (which would certainly be a burden to people who had to do things for him and lead him around).

The word used for *joy* (or *satisfaction* or *blessedness*) is the same word used in the beginning of each of the beatitudes of Jesus (see Matthew 5:1-12).

Apparently, Paul is recalling their former attitude toward him because the Judaizers had influenced them in such a way that their joy was gone and they no longer regarded Paul in the way they did at first. Paul felt that the Judaizers were turning the hearts of the believers away from him, and he wanted the Galatians to realize that, too.

9. In what ways do you think legalism takes away joy?

Legalism can take away joy because

- (1) it makes people feel guilty rather than loved;
- (2) it produces self-hatred rather than humility;
- (3) it stresses performance over relationship;
- (4) it points out how far short we fall rather than how far we've come because of what Christ did for us.

If you feel guilty and inadequate, check your focus. Are you living by faith in Christ or by trying to live up to the demands and expectations of others?

10. What does Paul say are the true motives of “those people”—(the Judaizers)? (v. 17)

They are zealous to win the Galatians over, but for NO GOOD. They want to alienate them from Paul and his associates. They want the Galatian believers to be zealous for *them*.

The false teachers claimed to be religious authorities and experts in Judaism and Christianity. Appealing to the believers' desire to do what was right, they drew quite a following.

Paul said, however, that they were wrong and that their motives were selfish. False teachers are often respectable and convincing. That is why all teachings should be checked against God's word.

11. What metaphor does Paul use to describe his anguish over the Galatians' change of heart toward the gospel of faith? (vv. 19-20)

He said he was again in the **pains of childbirth** until Christ is formed in them. Note also that this is the only time Paul uses the phrase, “*my dear children,*” as opposed to John who often uses it in his letters.

But Paul often uses the term “*son*” or “*son in the faith*” when he refers to Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus. Paul said that Onesimus (Philemon 10) became his son while he (Paul) was in chains. Paul regards his converts, especially converts turned helpers, as his sons.

Paul wishes he could have a face to face conversation with them rather than have a one-sided discussion through a written letter.

Paul led many people to Christ and helped them mature spiritually. Perhaps one reason for his success as a spiritual parent was the deep concern he felt for his spiritual children; he compared his pain over their faithlessness to the pain of childbirth.

We should have the same intense care for those to whom we are spiritual parents. When you lead people to Christ, remember to stand by them to help them grow.