

Living as Grown-up Children

Stidy #11 Galatians 4:1-11

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It takes hard work and guidance to get over our childhood habits and ways.

There are things we **get away with things** when we're younger, that **aren't appropriate** for us as adults. And it **takes time** to learn the ways of **living as a grown-up**, and of **responsibly taking our place** in the world.

Until then, parents responsible to **oversee** our spending, to get us to clean our rooms, to write thank-you notes, and to pick up our clothes.

They remind us to do our homework, to get to bed on time, and to be respectful to others.

It's **sad** when **adults** are **still childish** in these ways, and **never learn to be grownups** leaving childhood behind.

We all need to be growing from childhood into mature adults.

Paul begins the **fourth chapter** in his *Letter to the Galatians* by **comparing us with actual children**.

1. I mean that the **heir**, as long as he is a child, is **no different from a slave**, though he is the owner of everything,
2. but he is **under guardians and managers** until the date set by his father.

We all begin as children.

A child might be **heir** to the family home, bank account, investments, or a family business.

But if a child's **parents** are **taken away** suddenly,

a guardian is appointed until the child reaches **legal adulthood**.

By then he's supposed to be **mature enough** to manage the things that belong to him.

Before then, a child needs a parent or a guardian. He doesn't manage his own inheritance

In that sense, he's **similar to a slave**, though he's the master of all.

It's all his, but he **doesn't manage it yet** because he **isn't ready** to do that.

When he **reaches the age** appointed by law he **takes control of what's his**.

As children of God, we need to be growing up too.

Paul was dealing with **specific problems** in the churches of **Galatia**.

3. In the same way we also, when we were children, **were enslaved** to the elementary principles of the world.

There are **two kinds of immaturity** they had to overcome.

God's people had been under the Ceremonial Laws of Moses before the time of Christ.

It was like those **heirs** who **hadn't come of age yet**. The **Ceremonial Laws** were their **guardians**.

They **kept believers** from violating **moral and religious principles** they **didn't fully understand**.

For that time before Christ they were **obligated** to those **physical symbols of what was to come**.

But when the **Promised Messiah came**, those basic elemental practices **weren't needed any more**.

Jesus was the **sacrifice for sin** that the **temple sacrifices represented**.

All the special holidays, cleansing rituals, dietary laws and things like that,

were fulfilled by the **fact** of the **cleansing** by the shed blood of the **Savior**.

They were now a **Covenant People** that extended **beyond** the boundaries of **Israel**.

But Judaizers had come into the church. They **wanted to keep up** those **old ceremonies**.

That was a **denial** of the **fulfillment** of the ceremonies in Jesus Christ. They still clung to those **guardians**.

True believers needed to become spiritually mature in their Christian lives.

Before the birth of Jesus, the **Jews didn't fully understand God's plan**,

so the **law set boundaries** to keep their **personal lives in line** until clarity came in Christ.

Now that he'd come, they had to make **changes in their daily living**.

They had to be **mature**, and **understand the principles represented** by the law.

Those outside the Covenant Family, the **Gentiles**, **grew up without that important guardian**.

As new believers they needed to **mature** out of their old worldly ways.

They once lived by the **principles and values** of the **lost world**.

The Gentiles **didn't know** the **things God revealed** in his word.

Many of the Jews had taken on those **worldly cultural influences** too.

and many of them **still hung onto the old Mosaic ceremonies**.

They **weren't willing to let go** of them and begin living in the liberty of Christ's fulfillment.

The **Judaizers** were trying to keep the Christians **bound** to the **old ceremonies** of Israel.
It **confused and alienated those not born as Jews**, and **blinded the believing Jews** to God's truth.

We **all** need to **progress** out of spiritual childhood, **into being mature, grown-up Christians.**

In place of those guardians of our past, we need to **live by the liberty** we have **in Christ**.

It's **not** a liberty **to sin** without guilt, **but** a liberty **to be godly** without a feeling of pride.

In **Colossians 2:20-23** the Apostle Paul again explained this **basic principle**,

20. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world,

why, as if you were still alive in the world, **do you submit to regulations--**

21. "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"

22. (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings?

23. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

The principles of the **world around us** can **color** the way we **look at life**.

That **includes religious beliefs** and the **way we think about God**.

Immaturity needs guardians because it **isn't ready** to be on it's own.

But **false religion invents guardians** that **don't guard** them very well.

Like immature children they want their **guides** to **help them get their own way**.

They can **accept superficial rules** if they let them **excuse** the real **heart sins**.

They want to think they can actually **earn** a place in **heaven** by doing what they think is **good**.

They make a person **feel spiritual emotionally**, while still being **far from truly honoring God**.

In Galatia, God's **good laws** were being **abused** by the Judaizers resulting in a **denial** of what Jesus did.

While they insisted on circumcision and cleansing rituals,

they excused hypocrisy, arrogance, pride, rudeness, and innovative gimmicks in worship.

They turned the good tutor into an abusive master that held them in chains. Jesus came to set them free.

If the **rules you live by** make you **feel good** about yourself,

then you're **missing the whole point** of God's giving of the laws,

both **the perpetual moral ones** built into creation, and **the temporary ones** given to Israel before Christ came.

As **Martin Luther** said, "**the law forces us into the arms of Christ**"

This is why **Paul** could say in **Romans 7:12**,

"**So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.**"

God's law was to **show us our sin**, and **prove our need for God's grace** through Christ's life and death.

When the time was right, God sent the Messiah to fulfill his promises.

4. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

5. to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

6. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

The world was **ripe** for **God's plan**. It was time for his decrees to move forward in the **coming of Messiah**.

God had crafted the course of human events to create the **perfect setting** for Christ to come.

History is the record of God's plan emerging in time.

He made **Greek** to become the **common language**, which everyone in every province understood.

The New Testament writings could be understood by all those in the Empire at that time.

God led Rome to have built a good **system of roads** for the Apostles to use in their travels.

And he authored **civil peace** inside the boundaries of the Roman Empire that **enabled safe travel**.

Local **synagogues** were developed around the Empire as gathering places to teach God's people.

At that exactly right time - Christ was born to fulfill all the law demanded of us.

Jesus **kept the law** perfectly and personally in our place.

He **took on the penalty** for our sins against God's principles and laws.

Now **all who believe** are **engrafted** into him, both **Jews and Gentiles**.

All who come **repentantly with faith** in the work of the Savior **are God's family, his children**.

Unlike human adoption, this adoption implants God's Spirit in us.

The result is a **changed heart**.

As children, we **cry out to God** as we would come for **help** to our own fathers.

Jesus purchased us by his atonement, so we **can cry out to God in faith**.

We call out, "**Abba, Father!**"

The word "**Abba**" is the common **Aramaic** word for father, אבא - the term the **Jews** used.

The word "**Father**" is literally "**the father**", the common Greek words, ὁ πατήρ - a term the **Gentiles** used.

In their own **local dialect**, and in the **language all of Rome** understood,

we come as **children**, united as **brothers and sisters**, joint **heirs** with Christ.

So we're to stop clinging to the tutors, and come as full heirs of God's family.

7. So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a **son**, then an **heir** through God.

8. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.

9. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God,

how can you **turn back again** to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world,
whose **slaves** you want to be once more?

10. You observe days and months and seasons and years!

In his commentary on this passage in *Galatians*, the Reformer **Martin Luther** says,

"Those who seek to be justified by the Law grow weaker and more destitute right along. ...

Yet for salvation they **grasp at the straw of the Law**. The Law can only aggravate their weakness and poverty.

The Law makes them ten times weaker and poorer than they were before.

I and many others have experienced the truth of this.

I have known monks who zealously labored to please God for salvation,

but the more they labored the more impatient, miserable, uncertain, and fearful they became.

What else can you expect? You cannot grow strong through weakness and rich through poverty.

People who prefer the Law to the Gospel are **like Aesop's dog**

who let go of the meat to snatch at its shadow on the water. There is no satisfaction in the Law.

What satisfaction can there be in collecting laws with which to torment oneself and others?

One law breeds ten more until their number is legion."

God's law is there to guide us to the gospel.

It shows us our **sins**, our **deserved condemnation**, and our **need for a substitute** to die for us.

Christ is the substitute the law illustrated. He's that **real meat the sacrifices pointed to**.

Now that **Christ has come**, and **we've been drawn to Christ**,

the law of God is satisfied not by our feeble attempts to obey it,

but by **Christ who kept it perfectly** for us, and he **paid the penalty** in our place.

This **doesn't free us to live immorally or disobediently**.

It **frees us from the condemnation**, and from our own **deserved guilt**.

It **frees us to cling to the living Savior** who **makes us able** to live as **grown up children** for God's glory.

The time for tutors is over. It's time for the students to live their lessons.

Instead of bringing a lamb to the temple priests at appointed times,

you can any time **come repentantly to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God**, who paid for your sins.

Instead of the aroma of **incense** rising up from a table in the ancient Tabernacle,

you can **offer your prayers** to your Father with **confidence** that, through Christ, you **are heard**.

Instead of **ceremonial washings** and morally **restricted diets**,

you come with your soul **cleansed** by the **promise fulfilled** at the **cross** on Mount Calvary.

Instead of a **complex calendar** of religious days and months and years

you set aside **just that one day in seven, God's Creation Sabbath**, to gather to **worship** as a church.

Instead of the **rules set by religious councils** or the ways accepted by the **cultures** of our world,

you come directly to the **principles God reveals in his word**.

This is **your greater hope** - greater than the ancient believers ever experienced.

It's a **greater promise and certainty** than any made-up religion can offer.

Paul was deeply concerned for these believers in Galatia.

11. I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Had all Paul had done for them amounted to nothing?

Had they heard the Gospel but didn't think it would really work?

Did they forget that it had been **their comfort** in times of pain, hardship, and losses?
that it secured **their direct connection with God** in lonely times or when they're afraid?
that in Christ they can **come at any time for forgiveness and restoration?**

Paul was deeply concerned, but not for himself. It was for those he loved in Christ.

It troubled him to see them being **mislead back to the pre-school lessons.**

They **should be building upon the reality** for which the **Old Testament prepared them.**

The **liberating reality of the Risen Christ** was *there* for them, but they were **missing out on it.**

Today, not many are tempted to go back to the Old Testament rituals.

We **didn't grow up** with them, and we know they were for the **era of ancient Israel.**

But there are still those temptations that lure us away from maturity in Christ.

Some look for **mystical moments** to stir their emotions so they *feel spiritual.*

Some think that if they do some really **good deeds**, God will **forgive them.**

Some look to the **inventions of lost hearts** for help in dealing with their **stress and fears.**

We **don't need guardians over us** when we have **God's promises** fulfilled by our Savior.

We live in the era of the Risen Savior.

He's **alive and present with us** now and always.

The **greatest joy** our hearts can feel **isn't** created by

emotional settings, music, visits to psychologists, or even a resume of good deeds.

It's when we **humbly honor and worship God** for **all that he is:**

the **Great Creator** of everything in the entire universe,

the **Redeemer** who paid for our sins without us having to deserve it,

the **King** over all, **Head** of his true church, and **Good Shepherd** to his children.

He **deserves our trust**, and our **greatest devotion.**

He promises that when we **step out as mature children,**

he's there to strengthen us, to **encourage** and **comfort** us,

and to **make us an effective blessing** to others.

Note: Bible quotations are from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

ESV

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11. I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Greek

Galatians 4:1-11

1. Λέγω δέ, ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον ὁ κληρονόμος νήπιός ἐστιν, οὐδὲν διαφέρει δούλου, κύριος πάντων ὢν,
2. ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους ἐστὶ καὶ οἰκονόμους ἄχρι τῆς προθεσμίας τοῦ πατρός.
3. οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὅτε ἦμεν νήπιοι, ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἦμεν δεδουλωμένοι·
4. ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον,
5. ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν.
6. Ὅτι δέ ἐστε υἱοί, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν, κρᾶζον· ἀββᾶ ὁ πατήρ.
7. ὥστε οὐκέτι εἶ δούλος, ἀλλὰ υἱός· εἰ δὲ υἱός, καὶ κληρονόμος Θεοῦ διὰ Χριστοῦ.
8. Ἀλλὰ τότε μὲν οὐκ εἰδότες Θεὸν ἐδουλεύσατε τοῖς μὴ φύσει οὕσι θεοῖς·
9. νῦν δὲ γνόντες Θεόν, μᾶλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ Θεοῦ, πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα, οἷς πάλιν ἄνωθεν δουλεύειν θέλετε;
10. ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτούς.
11. φοβοῦμαι ὑμᾶς, μήπως εἰκῆ κεκοπίακα εἰς ὑμᾶς.