

“Adopted Sons, Heirs of Christ”

- Galatians 4:1-11 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Galatians 4:1-11 Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. 4 But when the fullness

of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. 8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.



4:1-3

It seems Paul was seriously impassioned and highly motivated concerning this issue before us. After all, this was not some ‘small talk’ email and chit chat about the weather. For Paul, this was *war*. It seems that he was bringing out all the ‘big guns’ he could muster. Clearly he was fighting for his own spiritual life as well as for all those who would follow after him.

Paul would now attempt to effectively draw a picture to explain as clearly as he could just what was ‘on the table.’ He was herein putting forth the concept that as born again Christians those in Galatia as well as us here in this fellowship, were ‘heirs of the kingdom,’ meaning they were the inheritors of what existed...what was created, and is yet to come. But in reality, these believers were still children, and in that fact they therefore ...*practically speaking*, were without real adult spiritual rights and blessings. Now this is an important concept because many do not understand it’s imperative and then therefore why life for them is not as they imagined it was going to be. Like chronological children, they would need those who were still over them and would tell them to come and go, and do and be. After all, children, before they are of age, have stewards to care for their property and guardians to care for their well-being.

Oh yes... as born again believers they were now adopted into the family! The inheritance indeed was theirs, but they would not realize its benefits and blessings until they grew up! No matter how wealthy a father may be, his infant son or toddling child cannot really enjoy that wealth. Again, this is a fact for many of us even today! We have been snatched from the mean streets of this world and have...because of the cross, been now adopted into the family of God...sons and daughters of Christ! But how many of us have not yet experienced many of the blessings of being such an heir because we are still immature spiritually? There is still a necessary dependance upon those who are more mature than they because of a lack of spiritual development on their part.

Some of this process is natural in every believer’s natural maturation ... his or her path through the redemption process: the “saved, *being* saved and the *will be* saved.” So if you are a new convert I would encourage you to relax and be patient...there is no substitute for time and experience! But often this is the result of our own personal spiritual “Peter Pan Syndrome.” We just refuse to grow up and start living like spiritual adults! You know...dealing with the hard stuff...the uncomfortable aspects...the sacrificial stuff...and doing it because

that's what big people do. We want to eat cookies before dinner and have all the blessings of a life of faith without the active priority of living Jesus first. It is the child that avoids such aspects of Christian living. It is the adult that learns to trust in Christ for his or her righteousness as well as his or her "marching orders" and no longer tries to stand on their own "good stuff" as the declaration of their position! We "do our chores" because we want our allowance, not because of a passion for the duty or for our Father.

The Galatian Christians, like most believers, wanted to grow up and move forward for Christ; but instead they were backtracking! They weren't growing up at all but were "stunted" in their maturity. Spiritually speaking they were still living in their parents' basement! Instead of growing up and maturing in their faith and spiritual practice they were essentially going backwards...back to needing a guardian ...a "steward" to take them by the hand and walk them through their day to day lives. They were slipping back to utilizing a "school master"...back to leaning upon their own good works and rules...what *they* were doing to declare their position...their level of maturity. Their experience is not too different from that of many Christians today who inexplicably look to their own acts of righteousness to speak as to their standing and maturity in Christ.

This is the point Paul was trying to get across to these believers in Galatia. The Judaizers had come in amongst them and convinced them that following the old Law...working to earn God's love, would make them better Christians. Their old nature...because of that very immaturity, felt an attraction to law-keeping because such a path allowed them to 'do things' themselves to add to their spiritual position and it all could be measured to declare their external results. As they measured themselves and their achievements, they felt a sense of accomplishment, and, no doubt, a little bit of pride. They thought they were going forward when actually they were regressing. Again, many of us are stuck living in our parents basement spiritually speaking for these same reasons and we have yet to wake up and see the disfunction in their lives!

As children, the Galatians were unfit in their immaturity to 'take the helm.' Judaism ...a.k.a "rules following" was physical, external, and temporal; Christianity in Christ is spiritual, internal, and permanent. The Jews without Christ were still under 'under bondage' to the law and the unredeemed were still 'under bondage' to the "elements of the world" ...both of which was in reality just simply *in bondage* to sin.

There is an innate danger in this journey because many folks will see maturity as then being a "free-lance" version of Christianity. If following the rules is somehow a sign of immaturity then I will chuck them all and then live a life of no discipline whatsoever. Of course this is counter productive because adulthood of any kind is certainly not without life disciplines. There is a big difference between attempting to *earn* God's blessings through my acts of contrition and service and doing those same things out of passion and love without any expectation of "quid-pro-quo" payments on behalf of God.

4:4-5

"*When the fullness of time had come*" refers to the time in which a child becomes a man, when he 'comes of age.' Corporately speaking, we have experienced hundreds of years of man trying it their way, to make it on their own, with only overt failure to show for it. And then individually many of us are still children, never growing up, never coming to a maturity in God. An heir in Christ? *Maybe*. A blessed spiritual adult enjoying all the fruits and blessings of the faith? *Not so much*.

For example I know some people who really would like to have a relationship with another of God's kids but the truth is they are effectively still children ...barely able to maintain their **own** lives... *spiritual and otherwise*... without someone taking them by the hand and helping them take care of their personal needs, their finances, their hygiene, their devotional life, their service, their personal health, etc. Why would God entrust you with the life of one of His children if you can barely take care of yourself? It's like little kids playing house. And that's just one instance and example! Multiply that by a multitude and you begin to get a picture of the greater church world...yes, even *our* church world! People kicking and crying "I want to be a big boy!" but at

the same time unwilling to step up and surrender their whole life to Christ...His destiny for them...and a world where He is everything...the priority over all, and the sieve in which all other issues are run.

Your reply maybe be in defense: Hey! I serve, and I tithe, and I read my bible! Ok...that may be...but *why*? Is it because of a guardian? A “steward” in the form of the church community and/or a pastor or leader coaching you along, maybe even guilting you into the righteous response? What’s your motivation? And what about all of the other aspects of adult living both spiritual and secular? Consistency...faithfulness...manager of time and priority...leadership by example...good financial management...good work habits...healthy diet and physical living...passionate service and other-centered living, etc, etc?

These Galatian believers...again, *like many of us*, had never had a love and passion for their God, but were merely children with all their self-centeredness and tantrums. They were there for the candy and the attention. They had to be continually spoon fed and disciplined, and they had to have their hand held as they crossed the street.

To make matters worse, attempting to live through law demanded a price be paid for our attempts and our failure to adhere to it. The price of course was death. So over and over, tens of thousands of times it played out. Men and women trying to live out their lives under their own strength, trying on various levels to be good and do good stuff, to weave in and out of the landmines and pitfalls that are embedded in the road of life. Trying desperately to find purpose and meaning, only to finally meet death no matter the level of success or failure of their journey.

This scenario had, by the time of Christ’s arrival, been clearly established. Ahhh...*the fruitlessness of it all!* The empty failure of man going at it all alone, while still actually standing in the midst of it all! Just children standing around watching the adults do all that cool adult stuff while we still needed those clippy things to keep us from losing our mittens.

And the saddest part for them and for us is that God had already sent His answer, His resolution, His ‘cure.’ All of it came in the person of Jesus Christ: **God embodied in human flesh.** It had to be this way. He had to be all God and all man at the same time. A man, the second Adam, had to come and pay for the sin of humanity for it was man who had sinned, not God. But He had to be God to be perfect. To be the ‘unspotted lamb’ destined for sacrifice. Then He sent “God is Spirit form” to literally dwell within us to empower us to clarity and adult living.

So, to go back into doing for yourself...surviving under your own acts and strengths is to undo the very work of Christ on the cross. Working for standing not only doesn’t accomplish what you want it to, but it makes you an equivalent to a slave. Christ did not purchase us to make us slaves, but sons! **IN** Christ and filled with the Spirit of God we continually move forward to experience the “fullness” of being a son of God with an adult standing in God’s family.

It took the perfect God to follow the law perfectly. Only God could do this. Only God could do what we never could do in a million years. God is just. Thus, justice had to come about. Sin had been committed. So very much sin! And sin brings death. God had said so all the way back in the garden! Someone had to pay. I couldn’t, but so many of us are essentially still trying. We knew we could not succeed so we repented and received Christ in salvation, but then over the following months and years so many of us abandoned the road to adulthood and just slowly slid back to trying again to do it ourselves. That’s what the Galatian believers were doing. That’s what many of *us* are doing!

4:6-7

So the result is that for hundreds of years man has been slaves. First as slaves to their sin, then slaves to their own attempts at righteousness and pleasing God, and finally many of us just became slaves to ourselves. Having drifted back to trying ...*and failing so miserably*, to make it through this life and faith under our own strength

and efforts. Welcome to life under the law. And you thought all of this law thing was just some old testament stuff that had nothing to do with you!

While we were ...while we *are*, still slaves to such a path, we never realize the benefits and the blessings of being filled with the Holy Spirit and impassioned ...*and yes, empowered*, to live out every aspect of our lives IN Christ. Not just our own efforts to do so *for* Christ, but to live out our life *IN* Him. The difference between these two paths is self-evident. Those who have not surrendered 'live out' day after day in frustrated self effort, and the other lives every day just saddling up closer to Dad. No matter what this world dishes out, we just keep calling out for Dad. Mankind in their self efforts have searched the depths of science, flown to other planets, delved into the depths of the mind, and embraced all the religions of time. Us? *We just keep calling out to Dad. Abba...Father...*

God sent forth His Spirit into our being, and it is *that Spirit* that drives us to seek out our Father, our God, our Creator. To seek out His oversight, His power and insight, His gifting and His calling upon our lives. As long as we are in bondage to this world, to rules and self works, and to ourselves, we will be slaves and can never know the blessings of being a real son or daughter. And in that, and we can never know ...*never experience*, our true and whole inheritance.

4:8-9

When we didn't know God, we worshipped idols of the world. Such was understandable when we were in that state! But now we know better. Just as those in the Galatian church knew better. *We are...as scripture puts it, "without excuse."*

Note that God found them, even though it seems always like we found Him. The question here is critical: why would you go back to false gods...to paths of failure, once you know the truth? Why, once you understood that you were saved by God's free grace and stand in blessedness because of His possession and grace, would you go back to trying to be right by earning your way? Why would we go back to trying to earn your position with God? And sadly, so many folks just never come to the stark realization that they have inexplicably done just that. Yet their living and maturation really says it all. Because it has now been years and they still have never really grown up.

4:10-11

The Galatians had gone back just as so many of us 'go back.' We received Christ with utter simplicity and we just rejoiced in being rescued. We called out "abba"...*daddy*. But then somewhere along the way we got scared...got lazy...or became again enamored by our own reflection and decided that we didn't really need Christ and the Holy Spirit...that we would just handle it ourselves...we would go to church and be moral and do good stuff and God would love us for it, even though we had absolutely nothing to do with getting here in the first place or staying here once we arrived.

Paul states that he was afraid for them. This was something that, for Paul, was serious business. If they were going to go back, then everything that he had done was for nothing. I understand that heart today. For I too am afraid for some of you. It seems your only motivation is community peer pressure of the pastor pressuring you. And yet there just is no drive...no passion...no *love*. Just duty and rules that you don't follow very well anyway.

But it doesn't have to be that way. You are not doomed to live out your life as a child. If you are indeed born again, you know innately that God loves you and His path for you is full of blessing. But you must be in love. It is the only true motivator in this matter. Being a child has its natural attractions...you get to play all day, live in an imaginary world, and have little if any real responsibility. But you know...adulthood has its benefits too. Yes, *we must acknowledge*...benefits *and burdens*. We are promised to "receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property — *along with persecution*...Mr 10:30. But

most of us have no desire to return to the proverbial “playground.” Being an adult has all the blessings of being a son, and so “grown up” is where we will stay.