

## Growing in Grace

Galatians 4:8-31

Last week we talked about *how God has made us his children by means of adoption*. God took us from slavery to sonship. This week, and the weeks to follow, we will talk about how as adopted children are to grow up in God's grace.

The Galatians were trying to go back to their old way of life, returning to their bondage ... their **"orphanage"** if you will. Instead of living as "sons" they were lapsing into "slavery."

**Rus Moore illustrates the folly of returning to our former life:**

When my wife Maria and I at long last received the call that the legal process was over, and we returned to Russia to pick up our new sons, we found that their transition from orphanage to family was more difficult than we had supposed. We dressed the boys in outfits our parents had bought for them. We nodded our thanks to the orphanage personnel and walked out into the sunlight, to the terror of the two boys.

**They'd never seen the sun, and they'd never felt the wind.** They had never heard the sound of a car door slamming or had the sensation of **being carried along at 100 miles an hour down a road. I noticed that they were shaking, and reaching back to the orphanage in the distance.** (Get that picture)

I whispered to Sergei, now Timothy, **"That place is a pit!**

**If only you knew what's waiting for you: a home with a Mommy and a Daddy who love you, grandparents and great-grandparents and cousins and playmates and McDonald's Happy Meals!"** But all they knew was the orphanage. It was filthy, but they had no other reference point. It was home.

We knew the boys had acclimated to our home, that they trusted us, when they stopped hiding food in their high-chairs. They knew there would be another meal coming, and they wouldn't have to fight for the scraps. This was the new normal.

They are now thoroughly Americanized, perhaps too much so, able to recognize the sound of a microwave ding from forty yards away. **I still remember, though, those little hands reaching for the orphanage. And I see myself there.**

I want to see that orphanage one more time. When the boys are a little older, maybe twelve or fourteen, I plan to make the trip again, with them. I want them to see, to feel, where they came from. It's hard to imagine now what they'll think of it.

They'll probably hate Russian food as much as I do-and look forward to slipping off with me to the McDonald's in Moscow when we can find it.

At the orphanage, I'm sure their eyes will widen as we walk up those cracking steps into that horror movie-looking front door. They'll probably go limp inside, just like I did, when they see all those abandoned toddlers peering out from the corners of the doors inside. Maybe they'll try to replay in their minds the circumstances of the nights they were born. I'm not sure what all they'll think of the orphanage.

**But I'm quite sure they won't call it home.**

**When we try to turn from God and his gospel, it is like returning to a *fifthly orphanage, the pit*. This passage is all about learning to live as God's children, in the freedom of grace and in the love of the Father.**

**In these verses, Paul opens up his heart to his spiritual children, the Galatians. He speaks as a shepherd, as father, and even using the language of a gentle mother. Even though Paul has rebuked them earlier, the language is of friendship and family here.**

- Brothers, I entreat you" (v. 12), "brothers" (28, 31)
- Mother: "My little children" "anguish of childbirth" (19)

Though Paul is brilliant (having the equivalent of two Ph.D's by the time he was 21!), he is **not** *all head-and no heart*.

#### **4 Prayers for Spiritual Growth**

I decided to outline this passage by putting it into four petitions. I decided to do this for the following reasons:

- **We should learn to pray the Bible.** You won't last ten minutes in prayer apart from the Bible if you are like me. We need Bible, prayer, Bible, prayer. So let's pray the Word.
- **This is a personal, pastoral nature of this section.** The spirit conveyed here is one of love and desperation.
- **What we have in many ways in 4:8-31 is *not* new material.** It's more of a recap of themes. So let's pray them.
- **We just talked about "Abba" (4:6), but didn't dwell a whole lot on it.** *Abba is the term for the Father that Jesus used when he prayed in the garden of Gethesmene. Abba cry is a longing, a groan; it is affectionate and intimate.*

#### **Four Prayers for Spiritual Growth...**

### **1. Abba, teach us to live as your children (4:8-12a)**

The first step of growth is to know your identity and learn to live in it. Paul reminds us of who we were, "formerly" (4:8) and who we now are, "but now" (4:9).

#### **A. Teach us that we are not slaves of religion (8-10)**

Paul uses the language in 4:8, "enslaved," that he used in **3:22-23, 4:3, 5, 7**. Do not go back to slavery! He specifies with three issues:

- **Don't go back to slavery to idols (8).** Before you were a Christian, you lived in bondage to false gods. **1 Thess. 1:9**,

**“turn from your idols to the living God.”**

- **The opposite of Christianity is not atheism; it’s idolatry.** At the root of sin is exchanging the glory of Creator with self-worship and with created things (**Rom. 1:25**).
  - Luther said there’s **only one commandment**; the rest follow the first one. Those who are not Christians, are worshiping something or someone.
  - Even though they are called “gods” they are not. “An idol has no real existence for there is no God but One” (1 Cor. 8:4).
  - We are prone to drift into idolatry, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 Jn. 5:21).
  - *An idol is something you look to give you that only God can give you: a person, sport, drink*
- **Don’t go back to weak principles (9).** Paul refers to the way of life that they left behind, either referring to “worldly way of life” or to “demonic activity,” which is likely what he means. Wrapped up in idolatry is demonic activity (1 Cor. 10:19-20). Paul thinks a return to this is irrational.
  - **Don’t go back to religious slavery (10).** What is amazing about this verse is that Paul equates living under the Mosaic law with pagan idolatry. He equates the false gods, to this religious system.
    - Keeping these rituals is no better than paganism.
    - Both pagan idolatry and keeping these laws are forms of slavery! **Both keep you from Jesus.**
    - Trying to earn God’s approval by external acts is slavery. Worshiping false gods is slavery. The **Parable to Two Lost Sons** sort of illustrates this. These are two ways to be lost.

**Application:** Let's bring this into the present.

If you go to church, sing songs, pray prayers, & study a holy book, and go through all of these things **to earn righteousness**

– by doing these things in and of themselves – you are no different from the other religions of this world...

- “I Pray”: So Do Moslems – 5 Times a day
- “I Worship”: Hindus worship all day long
- “I Study”: Jehovah's witnesses know it better than most
- “I do Missions”: So do Mormons

These acts by themselves do not merit acceptance before God; they can be forms of slavery.

- 2 Tim. 3:5: “form of godliness denying its power”
- Matt: 7:21: “cast out demons, prophesy...Mission trips”...  
“I never knew you”

**Matthew 23:** 1-7, 15, 23, 25-28 Pharisees did religious acts:

**“Deeds,” “Preached,” “Prayed,” “Synagogue,” “Missions,”**

**“Tithed.”** But they missed it because they missed Christ!

Christianity is not rule keeping rules & rituals to be right before God.

Let me give you one analogy of how religious people are in bondage to false religion: **John Wesley** (evangelist, founder of the Methodist church, historical hero of many).

**He was involved in a holy club at Oxford. He was the son of a minister, he was ordained as a minister. He was orthodox in beliefs, religious in practice, upright morally, and did good works. He visited prisons, and provided street kids with food and clothing. He observed Saturday and Sunday as Sabbath. He took communion, read, fasted and prayed. He went on a**

mission trip to Georgia (America)... But he was shackled to religion because he was trusting that he was earning his way to heaven by performing these religious acts, instead of trusting in Jesus Christ himself and Jesus Christ alone.

But he eventually woke up. After his trip to Georgia, Wesley said, **I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.** (When he returned he read Luther's preface to Romans) and said, **"I came to trust in Christ, in Christ only for salvation. And an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death" ... "[Previously] I had the faith of a slave, though not that of a son."**

Christianity is not about being a slave to religion; it is about being a son and daughter in a relationship with God.

## **B. Teach us that we are children in relationship with the Father (4:9, 12a)**

**This changes everything. It's not ritual. We are not earning righteousness. We are sons and daughters who are right with God because of Christ. We are already accepted.**

- Religion is external, a relationship is personal
- Religion is man-made, a relationship is supernatural
- **Relationship means that we "know" God (9)**
  - The word know isn't intellectual, it's personal.
  - Know, Grow, Go
  - John 17:3... Kimberly – wife material, long hair, musician – but I didn't know her.
- **Relationship means God knows us! (9)**
- This word for "know" harkens back to the OT when God "knew

**Abraham** by choosing him; he "knew" **Israel** and called them out; he "knew" **Jeremiah** before he was born.

- God knows us – he graciously chose us and loved us and adopted us.
- Wouldn't it be cool if this person knew me? **Athlete, Actor, Pastor [meeting Rick Warren first time - he knew me]**  
Ladies and Gentlemen: we are known by GOD.
- Oh, God knows everyone, but he knows his people in a particular way. Jesus said, "I KNOW my sheep ... I know my own, they know me.. As the Father knows me and I know the Father"
- **Example of Relationship with God: Paul (12a)**

"become as I am" - Paul used an imperative in 3:7, but this is **the first imperative** calling them to action. What does it mean? It free from bondage to the law.

**Philip. 3:2-10.** This is a contrast from religious bondage; to a real dynamic relationship with Christ, that is about knowing him *personally, passionately, powerfully, progressively.*

Perseverance in faith functions as evidenced that someone truly does know God.

## **2. Abba, help us treasure your truth (4:12-16)**

"preaching the Gospel," (14), "enemy by telling the truth" (16)

### **A. Help us preach it when it's difficult (4:12-14, 29)**

Paul's example is powerful. Learn ministry from him.

- i. Paul was a worker (12-19) Verses 12-19 shows his work ethic. It was noted in verse 11 also, "labor" (11). He notes "I would have gouged my eyes out" (15), "anguish" (19). Was it easy to be an apostle? No. **Was it a nice inside job that**

**didn't require heavy lifting?** No. [bull pen catcher]

- ii. Paul was a **missionary (12)**: “I became like you” He identifies with the culture. In our missions’ efforts we don’t seek to Americanize the world, we seek to Gospelize the world. “Become like me” **theologically**, free from the law, – but we adapt to them **culturally**.
- iii. Paul pressed on **in spite of sickness. (13-15)**. We don’t know what he was talking about. Speculations include an **infection, malaria from the swamps of Pamphylia, a fever from hiking in the Galatian mountains? Poor Eyesight, Epilepsy?**
- Whatever it was, it was a big problem **not a common cold**. It seems to **have been unsightly**. He was possibly **disfigured** in some way. **Verse 14**: “It was a trial to you.”
  - The congregation’s attitude toward a teacher is not to be determined by his physical appearance.
- iv. **He Experienced the Pain of Betrayal, (15-16)**
- **They turn their backs on Paul** – “What happened to the blessing I felt?” (15) “Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (16).
  - The attitude of the people is not to be determined by whether the teacher’s message makes them feel good.
  - **Why the enemy?** He told them they were turning from the Gospel by their legalism. Paul got **nothing for Pastors appreciation month but a stiff arm**.

He continued proclaiming the truth even when it wasn’t easy.



"Speak the truth in love" Paul says elsewhere.

**Application:**

- We should expect hardship too, especially the grief that comes from religious people.
- **READ 4:29** – Those of the flesh will persecute those of the Spirit. Who persecuted Jesus? The religious people, not atheist.
- Keep laboring (Gal. 6:9)
- Keep Relying on God's strength (2 Cor. 12:7-11)

**B. Help us receive it when it's not popular (4:15-16)**

Paul says I'm bringing you this truth because I love you. Why am I your enemy?

**Hearers:** be reminded: if preachers/teachers are doing their job, some truth is going to make you uncomfortable. It will confront you, challenge you. Don't attack the messenger.

**I don't yell at the mailman for bringing me the mail.**

**Teachers,** be reminded: People will love preachers/teachers as long as they tell the people what they want to hear. Don't be a sellout.

If the congregations attitude toward the teacher isn't based on appearance, and if they feel good, what is it to be based on? Faithfulness to the Word of God. Period.

Why? Because that's how God will judge his teachers and preachers. Faithfulness, not flashiness nor fame.

**Jonathan Edwards: Kicked out of his church because he said only Christians should take communion, according to the Bible. He had become the enemy by speaking truth. Was he a**

failure?

### 3. Abba, make us like your Son (4:17-20)

**17-18.** This phrase “made much of” is also translated “zeal” Zeal is good if it is accompanied by truth, when it is for “a good purpose.” (18)

**V. 17:** The false teachers were zealous but to “shut you out” he says; that is, to exclude you from God’s people. They want to circumcise you, and make you slaves to the law.

**V. 18:** Zeal is great if it is directed at the right object. What’s the good purpose for which we are to be zealous? Next verse:

**19:** –*Christ is formed in you*. That’s the purpose.

This is zeal! This metaphor is striking. Paul, as a man, is in labor! He is grasping in pain over the Galatians! What is more, we understand birth pains, **but can you imagine birth pains in the first century!?** Paul longs for Christ to be formed in them!

#### a. Zeal to be like Christ

- “formed in” – *mophoro* – to be changed from the inside out!
- “until you take the shape of Christ” (NEB)

Same picture in Galatians 2:20 “Christ lives in me”

- This is the freedom Paul is talking about. It is not external transformation; *it is internal transformation*.

Col. 3:5, 16 – Put to death, put on, “let the Word dwell in you

richly”

- This is why we study the Word like we do. We believe the Word has the power to shape us into the image of Christ. This is why we don't give “Tony's tips on how to have a Good Life in 2011-2012.” That's no good for you. You need the Word.
- Rules, law, behavior tips – cannot change the heart. It might change how someone dresses, or not dancing, or whatever, but you haven't changed anything.

There are no shortcuts. Growth is a slow process. **Just like the kids. You keep feeding and they keep growing. Sometimes it is hard to get them to eat!** (Ex: Our first time we tried to get Eyasu to eat salad).

The word, day by day, slowly, changing us. You've got to eat!

**“It is not great talents that God so much blesses as it is, great likeness to Jesus.”** That's what we want for ourselves, and others...

**b. Zeal to make others like Christ**

Paul's goal is our goal. “You is plural” **“You all”**

**“If ministers wish to do any good, let them labor to form Christ, not to form themselves in their hearers.”** (Calvin)

- False teachers desire to conform themselves in others – by manipulation. They seek personal glory and prestige.
- True teachers desire to conform Christ in others.

Notice **2 Cor. 11:28-29**

## What does that look like?

**Galatians 5:16-25** – character sketch of Christ.

- If this would be the prayer and service of every church member – to long for each other to be conformed into Christ-likeness – to bear the fruit of the Spirit

### **4. Abba, help to rejoice in your salvation (4:21-30)**

Paul uses this OT story to drive home the previous points about not living as a slave under the Mosaic Law. He urges them to understand God's salvation, as a miracle, to understand their spiritual freedom, and to rejoice in it.

#### **A. Before Salvation: We were slaves to the law (chs. 4:21-25)**

Abraham and Sarah couldn't produce a child. They worried. So Sarah says, "Take Hagar" who was a servant of Abraham. Abraham and Hagar have a child. That child's name was Ishmael.

You've got a **slave woman** (Hagar) and a **slave child** (Ishmael).

Genesis 17, God says, "No, I'm going to give you a child. The child of promise." That's Isaac. "Trust me. I know it's hard to believe. I know you are 100 years old and she is 90. But you are going to have a child. He will carry on your line. Kings will come from her." God fulfills it *miraculously*. Abraham goes on puts on the Cupid Shuffle and what do you now: Isaac.

- You have **two women**: Sarah and Hagar
- You have **two sons**: Ishmael and Isaac

- One is born by **natural means: man-made:** (represents slavery to religion, a lack of trust in God)
- One son is born **by a supernatural miracle**

## **B. The Means of Salvation: Born of the Spirit (4:28-31)**

We couldn't keep the law; but we were born by the Spirit.

**28-31: Isaac's birth is supernatural. There was no other explanation for this birth. WE ARE ISAACS!**

We don't have a *natural birth* – we have a *supernatural birth*...

We are children of the Father by virtue of the new birth!

The law was trying to be our own savior, like Abraham was trying to produce his own child on his own. **The Gospel is God saving us through a miracle...**

- Let us **Rejoice** in the miracle of salvation! (27) (for further homework read Isaiah 54:1)

**A Christian is a walking miracle.**

- This goes all the way back to **chapter 3:2.**
- You don't need more rules, you need a new heart!

## **C. Implications of Salvation**

### **i. Do not live for earthly possessions (4:25)**

- Present Jerusalem – this is not our goal, the city on earth. We have a inheritance. "The meek shall inherit the earth." Therefore don't covet - its all yours! Live for something else in your short life, namely, advancing the kingdom

### **ii. Live for your heavenly home (4:26)**

- We are living for that which is eternal.

- Hebrews 13:14 - "For we have no lasting city..."

**iii. Anticipate opposition (4:29)** We see the privilege of spiritual birth and the inevitability of persecution.

This birth reminds us of the ultimate miracle birth, Jesus Christ, and it is through him that we find spiritual freedom, saving grace, and everlasting joy.

**iv. Don't submit to slavery! (5:1).** We will look at this next week, but it is a transitional verse into the next section.

- Because we are free, don't go back to slavery! Don't go back to your idols; to your guilt.
- Because we are God's children, don't go back!
- Because we are free, rejoice and live it that grace!

Pray these things this week:

1. Abba, teach us to live as your children - not as slaves of religion.
2. Abba, help us treasure your truth - to proclaim it when it's difficult, and receive it when it's not popular.
3. Abba, make us like Christ - to be like Christ, and to make others like Christ.
4. Abba, help us to rejoice in your salvation - to see that we are children of promise, of the Spirit, of freedom.

**John Newton: After being in slave trade, was caught in a ferocious storm and cried out to God for mercy in 1748. He was truly converted and never forgot how God saved him. In order to imprint it on his memory, he had written in bold letters fasted across his wall over the mantle these words from Deut. 15:15,**

**"You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you."**

Now this is a picture of maturity, *of growing in amazing grace.*

Remind yourself of the awfulness of slavery, and the wonder of God's salvation. Don't go back to slavery. Don't go back to the orphanage.

Later Newton said, "**my memory is almost gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior.**" We prepare to remember our Savior now with the Lord's Supper...