

# GROWING UP!

GALATIANS 4:1-7

**GOD'S DESIRE FOR HIS CHILDREN IS THAT WE GROW AND MATURE TO THE POINT WHERE WE CAN UNDERSTAND AND ENJOY OUR INHERITANCE.**

## I. FATHER KNOWS BEST (VS 1-3)

**GOD EXPECTS HIS CHILDREN TO BECOME MATURE BELIEVERS. THE MORE WE GROW THE MORE BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE.**

- A. CHILDREN HAVE NO SAY (1)
- B. PARENT'S WISDOM (2)
- C. CHILDREN MUST CONFORM (3)

## II. BECOMING AN ADULT (VS 4-7)

**THE FACT THAT WE STAND TO INHERIT SO MUCH OUGHT TO ENCOURAGE US TO CONTINUE GROWING.**

- A. GOD'S PERFECT TIMING (4a)
- B. GOD'S IMPARTIALITY (VS 4b-6a)
- C. GOD'S INHERITANCE (6b-7)

# Growing Up!

Galatians 4:1-7

Paul appeals this morning to something we all understand, an inheritance. Paul says that inheritances are for adults. Even though children may receive an inheritance, they cannot receive it or enjoy it until they become adults.

If you think inheritances are not good motivators, listen to this. You all remember the church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?)

One day I saw one of my deacons moping around the church. He looked really sad. I said, "Deacon, what's the matter?"

He said, "Pastor, let me tell you. About three weeks ago, an uncle who I never met died and left me forty thousand dollars."

I said, "That doesn't seem to be so bad."

"Hold on, I'm just getting started. Two weeks ago, a cousin I never knew kicked the bucket and left me eighty-five thousand dollars free and clear."

"I'm still not getting why you're so sad. That doesn't sound all that bad to me."

"Last week my grandfather passed away. I inherited almost a million dollars."

"Then how come so glum?" I said.

He looked at me almost in tears and said, "This week – Nothing!"

This morning, Paul wants to motivate us by focusing on the fact that we have great inheritances but we must be mature enough to understand them and enjoy them.

There are six chapters in the book of Galatians. Paul spends about 5 ½ of them ranting and raving about how the Galatians should not live. In other words, he scolds them not to return to the Old Testament law or any other notions of how to get right with God. They gave their lives to Christ in faith. That's all they needed to do. As I started to preach thorough this book, I thought it was a bit overkill. However, since I have been studying through this a couple of verses at a time, I'm starting to understand why he was so adamant about this.

We are coming to the end of the Lenten season soon. This is what I have been learning this time around. Most of us give up something for Lent, or we try to form some new better habits, and we practice spiritual disciplines. The first thing I learned was that there is nothing that I can give up or add on for God that doesn't in the end benefit me. If we fast, give up smoking, give up sweets, etc.; we get healthier. If we pray more or read the Bible more, give up bad habits; we find more peace. Whatever we do for Lent doesn't add anything to or take away anything from God. So even though our idea as we enter Lent is to somehow please God, whatever we do really ends up benefiting us.

And secondly, more to Paul's arguments in Galatians, trying to follow religious rules really ends up showing us how sinful and weak we really are. First of all, when we enter Lent, we usually think through what vows we are making very carefully. We think about how practical our vow will be and how easy or difficult it will be to keep. Most people set realistic and doable goals. Even after all of this, if we were to honestly evaluate how we did over this 6 ½ - week period, we would have to admit that we failed actually, in spirit, or in both. And so we evaluate our journey as a failure.

On the other hand, there are those who either manage to keep all they have vowed, or at least are able to fool themselves into believing they have succeeded.

If those who succeed feel as if they have accomplished some lofty task of holiness, the reality is that these often have nothing to do with holiness, so the pride is doubly disastrous. First of all, we haven't accomplished any great spiritual goal. Mother Teresa or missionaries who give up everything to reach the lost for Christ have accomplished great spiritual goals. Although if you talk to them, they would deny what they had accomplished was lofty or even of their own doing. Secondly, even if we really did manage to accomplish these tasks, we can easily identify other areas of our lives that need a great deal of work.

Back to the majority of us who feel as if we have failed in our Lenten journeys. The goal of our journey was to draw nearer to our Lord Jesus. When we realize how impossible it is to keep rules that we ourselves make, it forces to admit that we could never become righteous by keeping any system of religious laws, let alone measure up to God's standard of holiness.

We are driven to our knees in confession and repentance, admitting that we cannot get close to God by being religious, doing good works, or being good. We are driven to thank God for sending His Son Jesus to die for our sins. We are driven to thank Jesus for saving our souls. We are driven to thank the Holy Spirit for enlightening us to our weakness and empowering us to rely on Jesus alone for our salvation. And that is exactly what Paul is trying to hammer home. Being religious, being good, or doing any amount of good works can never make us right with God. And that is the work of Lent, to drive us back to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone.

And that's where Paul picks up today. Paul says that going back to following religious rules in order to earn God's love is truly going backwards. It is like an adult wanting to go back to being a baby. The main idea of this morning's text is this.

**GOD'S DESIRE FOR HIS CHILDREN IS THAT WE GROW AND MATURE TO THE POINT WHERE WE CAN UNDERSTAND AND ENJOY OUR INHERITANCE.**

Being confused about God's love and acceptance causes us to be stunted in our growth. If we look at our failures and conclude from this that God doesn't love us, then we are not trusting in His love. God promised us His love through the death of His One and Only Son, Jesus. How much could God give to prove He loves us?

If we think that because we can obey some religious rules or do good works that God loves us more, then we misunderstand who we are and our true propensity for evil and self-deception.

Mature believers understand Who God is and who they are in Christ. Mature believers truly believe that Father knows best as described in verses 1-3. **GOD EXPECTS HIS CHILDREN TO BECOME MATURE BELIEVERS. THE MORE WE GROW THE MORE BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE.** God has so many exciting things for us, but we must grow up to receive them. For example, I have a friend who built a classic car for each of his children. The cars were finished by the time the children were ten-years-old. However, they couldn't drive the cars until they reached 16-years of age, took driver's education, passed their driving tests, got their licenses, and proved they were responsible and trustworthy enough to drive the cars safely. Loving parents know the proper timing and training.

Verse 1 illustrates that children have no say. He starts out verse 1 by saying, "What I am saying is ..." He is clearly continuing on with trying to convince non-Jewish Christians not to backwards in their faith by adding Jewish works of the Mosaic Law to their salvation. And he is trying to get the Jewish-Christians to understand that

they need to fully embrace the finished work of Christ on the cross. It's almost as if they have a superstitious view of the law. They believe Christ saved them, ... but they also feel this strange compulsion to keep the law.

It's hard for us to understand because Christianity is birthed out of Judaism. For example, if someone was converted from Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or any other religion to Christianity, and then wanted to practice both religions, we would say that Christianity expressly forbids that. The very fact they would want to continue practicing the other religions in addition to Christianity demonstrates they don't believe that Jesus is enough to be saved.

In our culture, my guess is that most people who are converted to Christianity come from no religious background. If they want to continue practicing worldly behavior and hold on to worldly ideas and desires, we would say that is not a wholehearted commitment to Christ.

So just as Paul expected the Gentile-Christians to leave their old beliefs behind to embrace salvation in Jesus Christ alone, he expected Jewish-Christians to leave behind any notion that obeying the religious rules of the Mosaic Law can add to their salvation.

I have kind of overlooked this next point all these years until my study in preparing for this sermon. In verses 1-5 Paul uses "we," I think probably referring to the Jewish-Christians of which he is part of. In verses 6-7 he uses "you," I think probably referring to the Gentile-Christians.

At this point, he makes a comparison between the nation of Israel and a child living in a wealthy home. The child's parents are wealthy and their intent is to pass on all their wealth to their child. So in theory, all the money, property, wealth, and possessions belong to the child. However, while he is a child, he is no different from the slaves that work on the estate. Like the slaves, the child has no say and no input as to how the money is spent or invested. He must simply do whatever his parents direct him to do. The management of the estate is left in the hands of the parents and they will decide how and when to incorporate this child into the decision making process.

In verse 2, Paul makes the point that loving parents are usually wise and the child can trust in his parents' wisdom. Not only is this rich child not allowed any say or input, he is actually put under the guidance of guardians trustees who were usually slaves themselves. They would guide and protect this child as he grew up. Further, they would educate him in practical matters of everyday life.

They would care for this child until the time set by his father. In other words, as the child grew up, as the guardian and trustee gave the father feedback as to how the child was maturing, the father would decide when to embrace the child as an adult and make him a partner in the decision making process. At this point the adult child would now have a say and gradually have more and more access to the money and other assets. The father must be wise because as he gives more access to this adult child, he is also placing his own well being at stake as well. If this adult child turns out to be evil and wastes all the money, the father will be left penniless as well. Parents had to exercise a great deal of caution and wisdom in making these decisions.

Children had no say in family matters, they were placed under the care of guardians and trustees. In addition to all this, in verse 3 Paul reminds us that children must conform. Now Paul makes the connection between his description of children from wealthy families and the Jewish nation under the Law of Moses before the time of

Jesus. Paul says we were under the basic principles of the world in the same way children were in the family.

First, let's discuss what "the basic principles of the world" means. Now we must remember that Paul is addressing primarily his fellow Jewish-Christians. However, the Gentile-Christians were listening in, just like we are listening in. The phrase means the basic fundamentals or teachings. In classical Greek it means basic knowledge like learning the ABC's, the basic addition and subtraction tables, etc. For the Hebrews, this would mean that the Law was to teach them how to survive in the world as God's children. They learned to live according to the 10 Commandments. They learned how to maintain sanitary conditions within camps and within cities. They learned how to deal fairly with one another. Even though there were all these laws, Paul is saying that living under these laws is like children living under the care and direction of a guardian. The Law was meant to preserve the nation, society, and religion until the Promised Messiah arrived. Once Jesus arrived, and presuming one really gave their life to Christ, there would be no need for the law. The Law taught "an eye for an eye" and also, "You shall not kill." However Jesus said, "Love your enemy and pray for them." Later on we will see that the commands of Jesus carry us far beyond and demand much more of us than simple rule keeping. The Jewish Christians felt comfortable in judging their salvation by how good they could conform to the Jewish Laws. However, Jesus made it clear the only way to be saved is to leave those laws behind and to place your faith in Him alone. Compared to life in Christ, keeping the Old Testament Laws was like basic math or first grade reading.

For Gentiles or for us, many of us come from ethnic backgrounds where cultural expectations kind of define life for us. We spend much of time evaluating our behaviors, thoughts, or decisions based on the assumptions we take with us from culture. And many of us, even though we are Christians, find ourselves still enslaved to these cultural demands. I see so many people struggle with life and situations, not because God puts these expectations on them, but their own cultural ideas have enslaved them and keep them enslaved. I think we can pray all we want, but if we choose to submit to cultural expectations, then God cannot deliver us from these problems because we are the cause of our problems.

Jews had to leave the notions of Old Testament Law behind. Gentiles had to leave their philosophical expectations and sexual immorality behind. That goes for us today. We are free not to follow Hollywood or what our friends say is cool or beautiful or worthwhile. We are free to choose Christ. If worldly standards and expectations once again confuse us, then we are going backwards. We are placing ourselves under the guardianship and trusteeship of the world, which is under the control of Satan.

If we remain children by letting our ethnic expectations, our culture, our friends, or society at large determine our values, then we have gone backwards, have remained children, and cannot enjoy the fullness of life in Christ. Jesus said He came to give us an abundant life. But we must grow up to take hold of it. **GOD EXPECTS HIS CHILDREN TO BECOME MATURE BELIEVERS. THE MORE WE GROW THE MORE BLESSINGS WE RECEIVE.**

In verses 4-7, Paul describes what becoming an adult is all about. Here he is attempting to encourage us to grow up in our faith. For Paul, there is a lot at stake. **THE FACT THAT WE STAND TO INHERIT SO MUCH OUGHT TO ENCOURAGE US TO CONTINUE GROWING.**

In the first phrase of verse 4, we are reminded that God's timing is perfect. The phrase reads, "when the time had fully come." Although Jesus entered our physical

world and entered space and time as we know it, the fullness of time in concert with eternity has to do with redemption time. The world was at peace. Rome ruled the world and for the most part, everyone spoke Greek. The Old Testament had already been translated into Greek and many Jews and Gentiles were familiar with it. Under Roman rule, the Jews were allowed to practice their religion. And from a spiritual point of view, Paul writes this in his letter to the church in Rome:

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8 / NIV).

Part of growing up in Christ is learning to trust in His timing. We in the United States want things instantly. But if we look carefully at the Bible, often God takes years, generations, hundreds of years, and even thousands of years to fulfill His promises. We must get away from our clock-time modes of existence and join into the redemption-time model. We are part of God's redemptive history. Living in faith, working for the kingdom in faith, and anticipating going home to our heavenly homes by faith is the timetable we are to be on. In other words, we are now on the eternal-timetable. God's timing and plan are perfect.

In the rest of verse 4 through the first half of verse 6, God's impartiality is on display. We need to really slow down and digest this as if we were in one of the Galatian churches hearing this letter read. I'm sure we would be saying, "What's that he just said? Is he kidding?"

Paul makes that point that Jesus, the God Son, came as a result of a God-initiated decision. Redemption is totally in the hands of God. Jesus entered human history. He was fully God and fully human. Ethnically, socially, and religiously, He was a Jew. He was circumcised, dedicated, attended the Jewish religious festivals, and was baptized. Now speaking particularly to the Jewish-Christians Paul makes it clear that Jesus was the Promised Messiah Whom they had been waiting for as a nation for over 1500 years. He came to buy them back from the spiritual bondage of sin, Satan, sin, and death. Jesus came to liberate them. Jewish-Christians believed all of that. For them, they were God's chosen people before Jesus came. Once they received Jesus in faith, they viewed themselves as doubly chosen. They came from the chosen people of God. And now they are one of the chosen remnant of Jews who now follow Messiah.

But look what Paul does here in the last phrase of verse 5. Paul says that through the redemption of Christ, the Jewish-Christians were given the full rights of sons. Actually, the word used for sons here in Greek is *huiiothesia*. It means "Adopted sons." You can hear the Jewish-Christians saying, "What is he talking about, adopted?" They had been thinking that they were born "children of God" because they were Jewish. But here, Paul makes it clear that no one is born a child of God. We only become God's children when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. So the Jewish-Christians received the full rights of salvation, right standing with God, the privilege to serve God, and the rewards in heaven, only when they gave their lives to Christ in faith. What a scandal! The Jews had to become Christians in exactly the same way Gentiles had to become Christians. They both had to place their faith and trust in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, the Christ.

Now look at this great subtle shift in the first phrase in verse 6. Paul says, "Because you are sons of God. Now he addresses the audience as "you" not "we." Perhaps now he is addressing the Gentile-Christians. And to further even the playing field, Paul addresses them as sons. Here he uses the normal word for sons, *huios*, which

means a natural son, not an adopted son. What did Paul just do? He just reinforced that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, free nor slave, male nor female in the body of Christ. No color, no culture, no ethnicity, no gender, and no social background mean anything in coming to Christ. All are equal. We all come to Christ the same way. That is why any sort of discrimination or feelings of prejudice are antithetical to the healthy functioning of God's church.

But the further news is this. All believers have become heirs to God's inheritance as described in the rest of verse 6 through verse 7. Let me just list some of things we inherit as children of God. We receive eternal life. In other words, we are in a sense journeying through this world, but we no longer belong to this world. Death is not the end for us. We are now granted citizenship into the eternal Kingdom of God. We receive a commission in fulfilling God's redemption plan in history. We receive a family. We call one another brother and sister. We call God Father.

First of all, Paul says that when we became believers, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. Jesus comes into our lives through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In other words, when we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives. Since the Holy Spirit is God, the fullness of the Godhead lives in us. The reason Jesus can make good on His promise to never leave us nor forsake us is because He lives in us. I think sometimes we feel as if God is far away or distant. The reality is that He is inside. The next time you feel lost or abandoned, the next time you are afraid or are having trouble gaining mastery over a sin, remember God is in you.

If that isn't amazing enough, the next promise is even more incredible. We are no longer slaves, or enemies, or just plain subjects of God. The Holy Spirit within us encourages and empowers us to address God the Father as "Papa or Daddy." In Aramaic, *Abba* is not the formal address for father. It is indeed a diminutive, however, it is still respectful. The issue is not what name we use, the fact is that we are in the official family of God. You are a prince. You are a princess. We are all royal children of the royal court.

In the news these days, Prince Harry of England is third in line for the throne. He is now an adult and participates in rights, privileges, and responsibilities of the royal family. He has completed his schooling and is now the equivalent of a second lieutenant in an elite branch of the British Army. He will probably go to serve in the Iraq war.

We have been given official duties and responsibilities as well. First of all, we have been given a mission to the world of unbelievers. We have been given the official title of ambassadors of the Good News. Our participation in redemption history is to not only be messengers of the Gospel message, we have been authorized to freely offer it to all who will accept it.

Further we have been given duties and responsibilities inside the royal household. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God has given us spiritual gifts. He has given us all sorts of natural talents and abilities. And he has given us financial resources. Our job is to care for one another in this royal family. Remember, our Father has given us everything we have. He wants us to share with our brothers and sisters.

And we must be always looking forward to the end of redemption history when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. God the Father loves us. He created us and sent Jesus to redeem us. God the Son loves us. Jesus came to die for our redemption and to make us part of the Royal Family. He has gone back to prepare a place for us and will come to take us someday to heaven to live with Him. God the

Holy Spirit loves us. He indwells us. He gifts us. He guides us. He encourages us. He prays for us and enables us to address God as "Father." We have tons of blessings to inherit but we must mature more and more to inherit more and more. **THE FACT THAT WE STAND TO INHERIT SO MUCH OUGHT TO ENCOURAGE US TO CONTINUE GROWING.**

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul expressed maturing in love like this:

"It's like this: When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child does. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now. There are three things that will endure—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love"

(I Corinthians 13:11-13/ NLT).

Make no mistake **GOD'S DESIRE FOR HIS CHILDREN IS THAT WE GROW AND MATURE TO THE POINT WHERE WE CAN UNDERSTAND AND ENJOY OUR INHERITANCE.**

Here's the thing. God never runs out of blessings. The more we grow, the more we find. Kent Hughes relates this story about finding new attitudes in growth:

"It is said that, before the discovery of America, Spanish coins that bore the imprint of the Pillars of Hercules had a motto, *Ne plus ultra*, 'Nothing else beyond'; but after the success of Columbus, the motto was changed to *Plus ultra*, 'More beyond.' So it is with the Christian life; whatever may be the heights to which the believer attains, 'Still there is more to follow.'"

Let's not turn back to our old ways of thinking; whether they are culture driven, society driven, ego driven, or religion driven. Let us keep our eyes fixed squarely on Jesus Christ: the author and finisher of our faith.