

WHAT LIVING WITH GOD LOOKS LIKE

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Let's Begin

One famous Christian author had this to say this about what life with God looks like, "The life of obedience to Jesus Christ means living moment by moment in the Spirit of God and it will be so different from your former life that you will often be considered strange. In fact, the life in the Spirit is such a different life that some of your former associates will probably discuss the question of whether or not you are mentally disturbed."

Does life with God look like we are mentally disturbed? Depending on the crowd with whom a person associated before conversion to Christ, perhaps it will to some! Whatever the case, life with God does have certain characteristics about it. Paul deals with what life with God looks like in Galatians 4.

As we study through this exciting chapter, let's observe the outline below:

- I. The Principle of Adoption: Beginning Life in God's Family (vv. 1-11)**
- II. The Process of Adapting: Developing Life in God's Family (vv. 12-20)**
- III. The Promise of Abiding: Retaining Life in God's Family (vv. 21-31)**

I. The Principle of Adoption: Beginning Life in God's Family (vv. 1-11)

While Paul unfolds Biblical redemption in this passage, he does so in a way that is uncommon among other writers. In speaking of entering new life, he does not speak of regeneration, but adoption. He writes, "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (vv. 1-5).

Know also that though regeneration and adoption speak of the same reality—the beginning of our life in Jesus Christ—each has its own contribution to understanding better what living with God looks like. For example, regeneration focuses on the *nature* of new life in Christ while adoption focuses on the *privileges* of new life in Christ. Being born again by the Spirit of God points to a firm *prerequisite* to enter God's Kingdom (John 3:3). Becoming a child of God through adoption zeros in on the believer's *position* in Jesus Christ. We *enter* God's family by regeneration, while we *enjoy* God's family through adoption. And, as adopted sons and daughters of God, we enjoy all the privileges of being in God's family (cp. Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:14-17).

Finally, to understand adoption, we must understand two fundamental truths concerning God's revelation to us. *First*, believers must understand the *dispensation of the law* (vv. 1-3). As Paul makes clear, life in the law was a sort of kindergarten, a special time when we were learning the "ABC's" of God's kingdom. Hence, we were under "tutors and governors." In other words, we lived under the guidance of guardians and managers who took care of our person and property. When Christ came, all changed.

Second, believers must understand the *incarnation of Christ* (vv. 4-7). The key to this section resides in the short phrase, "when the fullness of time had come." When Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, it was not a haphazard event of certain elements of history. Instead the "fullness of time" refers to a Divine moment, a moment planned from eternity. Religion was dead, philosophy was vacuous, but God was alive! All the while, He was planning to "bring forth His son." The eternal Christ—the Logos as second Person of the Trinity (John 1:1)—became human flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:14). Or, as one put it, God grew Himself some skin!

Reflection Connection

When you think of adoption, what comes to your mind?



Therefore, Paul describes Christ as both “made of a woman” as well as “made under the law.” Even though He was truly human, He nonetheless was subject to the law even if He was God. Yet Christ did not break the law, perfectly satisfying its demands. Jesus in His humanity kept the Law.

Consequently, every human being stands without excuse. We stand condemned by the law. The Gospel Paul preached, however, delivered us from the law (vv. 8-9). The shackles of paganism fell from our ankles, and we have become known by God, whereas before we knew not God. Paul asks the Galatians a pointed question, “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” (v. 9). Insisting on keeping the law, as the Judaizers taught, was a return to the law for redemption. However, as Paul reveals: a return to the law can only be a return to the one reality the law can offer—*condemnation*.

II. The Process of Adapting: Developing Life in God’s Family (vv. 12-20)

Paul has argued like a veteran trial lawyer, making an airtight case, confidently pleading with the jury, and waiting for the verdict. The second section naturally flows from the first section of chapter 4. When we look at life in God’s kingdom, it begins with *adoption*. But is adoption all we look for as we live with God? The answer is no. The second thing we see is *adapting*, and *adapting* focuses on *developing* life in God’s family.

First, let’s look at the *security* we have as we adapt to God’s life. Paul writes, “Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all. Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus” (vv. 12-14).

There are two factors involved in sustaining security. With the first factor, a *personal commitment* is involved (v. 12). Paul calls on the Galatians to “be like me.” While this exhortation could be viewed as egotistical, it is hardly Paul’s purpose. Instead, Paul’s thrust is to connect with the Galatians where they are. Elsewhere Paul reveals virtually an identical principle when he asserts he has “become all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:20-22). What was he suggesting? In short, he was saying if one wants to reach people where they are, one must go where they are. Of course, he did not mean to become entangled in another’s sin. Strangely, there are those today who insist, for example, if we want to reach people in the bars, we should start a barroom Bible study, fully open to folks consuming alcohol all the while studying the Bible. Paul hardly had this in mind as he went everywhere preaching the Gospel. The bottom line is, are we committed to care for others where they are?

The second factor involved in sustaining security is a *provincial enablement* (vv. 13-14). Paul reminds us of the circumstances which brought the Galatians to Christ in the first place. It was through “infirmity of the flesh” Paul preached the Gospel to them. Indeed, while others were healed by Divine miracles accompanying the apostolic witness, authenticating the Divine message, Paul’s suffering continued. Nevertheless, the Galatians received him, God enabling it all to bring them to faith in Christ.



Second, let's look at the *nurture* we have as we adapt to God's life (vv. 15-18). Just as the newly born baby needs care and provision, so does the one converted to Christ. The Christian life is a developing life. Hence, eternal life is about nurture; eternal life is about adapting to God's life. Paul writes, "They zealously affect you, *but* not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them. But *it is* good to be zealously affected always in a good *thing*, and not only when I am present with you" (vv. 17-18).

From Paul's standpoint, the Galatians had not lost their salvation. Indeed no one who is truly in Jesus Christ loses his or her adoption into God's family. Rather Paul's point is the loss of joy. The Galatians lost all sense of joy in first coming to faith in Jesus. How often Christians lose their joy in Christ is hard to tell. But any joy lost is tragic! The most miserable, pitiful person in the world is one who has truly given his or her heart to Christ but for whatever reason, joy is gone.

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Reflection Connection

Think for a moment about the reasons some offer as to why a person may lose his or her salvation. Name the most common reasons you hear. Is there a pattern between the various reasons?

In addition, we must note not only Paul's emphasis on the *right message* (vv. 15-16), but also Paul's focus on the *right motive* (vv. 17-18). If one is going to develop life in the Lord—adapting to His Kingdom—both the message and motive remain non-negotiables in the process.

Third, let's look at the *maturity* we have as we adapt to God's life (vv. 19-20). Developing in any discipline implies improving and maturing in the discipline. It is no less with developing in God's life. Maturity is a part of the development and therefore remains characteristic of what life with God looks like.

Paul opens his heart wide in these verses. His love and passion are plain. He first records the *price* of his maturity, "I travail in birth again" (v. 19). The term he uses is a strong term used of a woman bearing the birth of a child. The pain Paul revealed in "bearing" the birth of the Galatians is a vivid reminder to all those who win souls to Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, "birthing" the child is not enough. Therefore, Paul records the *prize* of maturity, Christ filling the lives of His people. Paul's burden is not complete until Christ is "formed" in them. The goal is for Christ, Who is in the believer's heart, to take such possession of him or her that his or her outward life conforms perfectly to Him.

III. The Promise of Abiding: Retaining Life in God's Family (vv. 21-31)

When the Lord taught Paul salvation by grace alone, it was the best news he had ever heard. Christ died on a cross to save the world from sin, death, hell, and the law! The law condemned but had no power to save anyone from the clutches of condemnation.

Paul went to Galatia with the burning message of the Gospel in his heart. And, as Paul expected, the same joy he had in receiving Christ was perpetuated through the hearts and lives of the Galatians. However, some teachers came



in behind Paul teaching a false doctrine which demanded the Galatians add circumcision to their simple faith in Jesus Christ. For Paul, this was a flat denial of the Gospel of grace! Hence, Paul wrote back to them in this letter that the way the Galatians were *adopted* into God's new life was grace; the only way the Galatians *adapted* to God's new life was grace; and the only way the Galatians could *abide* in God's new life would be grace.

For two chapters, Paul argued for salvation by grace alone. Beginning in chapter three, he started disassembling the critics' arguments, showing from the Old Testament the flaw they perpetuated. Paul now asks the Galatians if they really understood the implications of what embracing the law all over again would mean. He asks, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?" (v. 21).

While the Judaizers talked a good talk about the law, their walk was another story entirely. It remains far easier to speak about how one's life is changed on the one hand, than to demonstrate the change in one's life every day on the other. From where do you suppose the accusation, "the church full of hypocrites" originated? While it may be hard to say for sure, a reasonable assumption is, the accusation originated because some "professing" Christians talked about Jesus changing their lives, but their walk in sin appeared to show the exact opposite.

First, Paul gives an *illustration* of the Christian's promise to abide in God's family (vv. 22-23). Abraham's two sons are the centerpiece, one representing a promise (Isaac) and the other a result of the flesh (Ishmael). Hagar's son is merely ordinary, with hardly a promise he would be born. Being the son of the flesh, Ishmael serves as a model of human works. Consequently, God's deliverance would not come through human works. Instead, God's salvation would come through the son of promise, Isaac.

Isaac's birth was both a promise and supernaturally fulfilled. Abraham was 99 years old when his son was born; Sarah was 90! God's promise prevailed! No amount of human power can bring forth salvation anymore than human reproductive power can bring forth a son of promise. God stands alone! The power to abide is in God. The promise to abide is from God.

Second, Paul gives an *interpretation* of the Christian's promise to abide in God's family (vv. 24-29). He writes, "Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (vv. 24-26). Simply put, an allegory is a true story

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Reflection Connection

Do you think allegory is a valid interpretation of God's Word? If not, why do you suppose Paul employed it? On the other hand, are there dangers in using allegory in interpreting God's Word? Explain.

with a deeper meaning (cp. 1 Cor. 10:11). The actual facts in an allegory usually have symbolic meaning.

The meaning Paul puts to the allegory he mentions is two-fold. The first meaning is the difference between *legalism* and *liberty* (vv. 24-26). The triple duo is significant: 2 women, 2 covenants, 2 cities. Hagar is Sinai which represents the law and therefore works-oriented salvation. The city is Jerusalem, the center of legalistic religion. On the other hand, Sarah points to the "Jerusalem above" and therefore signifies freedom from God in the heavenlies. The city above is about grace; it is about Gospel (cp. John 8:36; Heb.11:10).

The second meaning we must understand is the difference between flesh and faith (vv. 27-29). Those in bondage to law are shackled from life in God (cp. Isa. 54:1). Hagar gave birth to a born slave. Hence, the law could deliver only slaves to its demands. On the other hand, faith is the crux of the child of promise. We are born by the miracle of the new birth and kept by the power of God through faith (cp. Rom. 10:9; 1 Pet. 1:23).

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul writes, "which things are an allegory" (v. 24). The Greek word for "allegory" is *allēgoreō*, comes from two other Greek words which mean "other" and "compare." The meaning is, when one thing is compared to another or more properly, when one thing represents another. Hence, Paul could "allegorize" the Law representing salvation by works and Jerusalem "above" representing salvation from God (i.e, salvation by grace).

Wrap Up

Law and grace are mutually exclusive. Hence, Paul's counsel is to reject the way of law and the way of legalism. Obeying a law never saved anyone. Jesus dying on the cross potentially saves everyone! In fact, He does save everyone who will humbly bow to Him, asking forgiveness for sin, turning from sin, and putting faith in Jesus Christ. Is there anything which hinders one reading these words or studying this passage of Scripture from trusting Christ right now?

