

Do you have any respect for a man who acts like a child or for a woman who throws a temper tantrum? Of course not. They're acting childish. They're acting immature. They need to grow up. They need to act like an adult, to think like an adult, fulfill their adult responsibilities, and so on. Why? Because they're no longer children. They have left those things behind and have become adults.

Christians, Paul shows us in our Epistle lesson for today that faith is the same way. There was a time when we were spiritual children. And there is a time when we become spiritual adults. And just as it is shameful for an adult to act like a child, so it is also shameful for us to act like spiritual children. So what does that look like, exactly? Paul gives us the answer today.

Because the Galatians in this letter were acting spiritually immature. Paul had come through that area and had preached to them the Gospel. He had brought them to know Christ, and they certainly believed at that time. But after Paul left, some false teachers came in. And these false teachers were telling them: "If you really want to be a Christian, what you need to do is follow all of the Old Testament ceremonies, all the Old Testament rules." "You need to be circumcised," they said. "You need to do all of these things and then--and only the--will you truly be a Christian." But the problem was that the Galatians believed them. They had fallen into this error and started to think that what they were doing, their own works, were the most important thing of all. So Paul writes this letter then to rebuke them, to show them the error of their ways. Because salvation is not by our works, he says. Salvation comes by faith in Christ and by no other way. And so for the Galatians to do what they were doing was to try to go back to a spiritual childhood. Even though they had become adults in Christ, they wanted to go back. And being a spiritual child, then, was leading them away from Jesus, just as it can also lead us away from Jesus. And that is the danger that Paul wants us to avoid.

So Paul begins, then, verses 1 and 2: "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, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father." That's very interesting image that Paul uses here. Kind of strong language, if you think about it. He's saying that being a child is like being a slave. That both have to listen to other people. Both have to abide by certain regulations and rules. Both are not free to do whatever. Both have to be told what to do, and so on. In that way, he says, a child is like a slave. Now, of course, he doesn't mean by this that what parents do are somehow bad or that it isn't actually meant for their good. Paul would be the last one to say that. What he's saying here is comparing the two. Just as a slave can't do as he pleases, but has to listen to somebody else, so a child is the same way. And in this way, a spiritual child is in a kind of slavery, a kind of bondage, waiting to be set free.

But the form that this slavery takes is different for different people. This is why Paul goes on to say, verse 3: "In the same way, we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world." Those elementary principles that he's talking about are different for different people. For the Jewish Christians, for the Galatians, those elementary principles were the Old Testament rules, the Old Testament laws. Everything that Moses had told them. Because Moses gave all of those things to Israel for a very specific purpose. They were supposed to set Israel apart and then look forward to when Jesus would finally come. And when Jesus had come, they came to an end. Their purpose had been fulfilled. This is why Jesus declares all foods clean.

All of those dietary laws of the Old Testament had their purpose, but once Jesus came, their purpose came to an end. Same way with circumcision. It had the purpose of looking forward to when Jesus would come. And now that he has come, its purpose has also come to an end. There's no need for these things any longer. They belonged to the childhood of Israel. But the Galatians wanted to go back to them. They wanted to go back to their childhood. They wanted to become spiritual children once more. And that was the whole problem. Why would you go back to being children now that you have come to be adults? Now that you have come into spiritual adulthood?

And Christians, for us those elementary principles are those things which once held us in sin. Those things which once led us away from God. And so long as we were under those, so long as we were enslaved to them, we walked in the way of sin, walking contrary to God.

But now things have changed. We have become spiritual adults. As Paul goes on to say, verses 4 and 5: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." The fullness of time is that time when we became spiritual adults, when we came of age. And that coming-of-age happened when Jesus Christ came into the world. Jesus came into the world, sent by the Father, to become one of us. Jesus was born of woman, just like us. As human as we are, except without sin. God became man in order to save us. Jesus was born under the law, humble and lowly. Born so that he could keep the law in the way that we had not. Jesus was born to redeem us, to buy us back, to purchase us with his own blood, so that we are no longer enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. We are no longer enslaved to sin. We have a new Master, and that is our Lord. And because of that, we have been adopted as sons. God is not just our Master. God is also our Father. And he has made us heirs of the kingdom, sons taking up their rightful inheritance in him. All of this means that we are no longer children, spiritually speaking. We are no longer enslaved to the world. We are sons, heirs of God and sons of the Father, because we have grown up in Jesus.

And the proof of this, if you want to know if you are truly a son, Paul gives us in 6 and 7: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, than an heir through God." So the proof that we are sons, then, comes from the giving of the Spirit. We call God Father because we are his sons. And that shows us that we have the Spirit working within us. Because if we call him Father, then we have to be sons. If we didn't call him Father, how could we be? So calling on God by faith, then, shows that we have entered into spiritual adulthood. We have become spiritually mature. We are no longer children.

So why, then, would we want to turn back to childhood? Paul goes on to say, verses 8 and 9: "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 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?" And the Galatians were doing this by trying to go back to the elementary principles of the law, trying to go back to the rules and the regulations of the Old Testament. They were trying to become spiritual children once more. But Christians, we do the same if we want to go back to the ways of sin. How can we call God Father and then not listen to what he has to say? How can we call God Father and then ignore the needs of our brother? How can we call God

Father and then live our lives only for pleasure or material things? Do we want to be slaves once more? Do we consider our sins more important than God? How can we go back to what we once were?

Christians, we have been set free from sin through Jesus Christ. Jesus has made us spiritually mature. He has called us out of spiritual childhood to himself by giving us himself so that we would be set free from sin. We can call on God as our Father, because Jesus has given us his Holy Spirit. So we should not turn back to spiritual childhood. There's nothing for us there now. Jesus has redeemed us and made us sons. And if we are sons, then we are heirs through God.

So Christians, let us turn towards God, calling on him as our Father. Let us walk as those who are mature in Jesus Christ. Let us not turn back to the old ways of sin, to our spiritual childhood. But let us follow after Christ, because he has redeemed us and set us free from sin. We are spiritually mature in Jesus, because he has given himself for us forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Spirit through your Son, so that we call on you as Father. Help us always to walk in Jesus, so that we may do what is pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.