

To God Alone Be The Glory

Maybe it's because adults keep asking them, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Or maybe it's that children see how adults don't have to go to bed till much later, and adults can have a beer or a glass of wine, and adults get to drive, and adults can get married if they want, and adults don't have to go to school or turn in homework—adults just don't seem to have any restrictions on them. Whatever the reason, lots of children seem in a hurry to grow up.

Then when these same children actually grow up and become adults, they often wish they could go back to being children again because ...life was happier then, and less complicated, and the assignments you had to turn in were limited to homework, and you got enough sleep, and there weren't so many choices to make, and the games people played weren't as nasty. Whatever the reason, lots of adults wish they could go back. Some of them even say, "Youth is wasted on the young."

But there are a lot of adults who would not go back, even if they actually could. Sure there are more responsibilities now, but there are also greater privileges and freedoms. When things aren't going well, you can usually do something about it as an adult. It's nice to be all grown up.

Turns out that it's nice to be ALL GROWN UP IN JESUS too. That's what

the apostle Paul has been talking about so far in his letter to the Galatian churches. The key to understanding *Galatians* is to remember the troubles those congregations faced. The apostle Paul had shared the good news about Jesus, gathered the new believers into congregations, appointed leaders to read the Scriptures to each assembly, and then moved on to start other churches. The majority of the members were Gentiles, and there were some Jews too. Most of the members were not yet well engrained in the teachings of Scripture. So when some false teachers came to the Galatian churches, reaffirming that Jesus is the Savior, the churches took them in and let them teach. Before long the false teachers were slipping in some false doctrine. They kept insisting that the Gentiles be circumcised in order to become true sons of God, true offspring of Abraham. Paul's response? "Come on, folks, you can't have it both ways. Either you are saved from sin entirely by grace, as a gift, something you don't buy—or else you have to buy your way in through certain behaviors. Your new false teachers want you to think the requirements are small: 'Just be circumcised.' But if you are going to try to get right with God by your behavior, you obligate yourself to keep the whole law. You can't be saved by grace **and** by works. It's one or the other." Why would you want to go back to the law anyway? It's like wanting to go back to childhood with all its restrictions: get up, get dressed, come eat breakfast, clean your room,

finish your homework, don't touch that, brush your teeth, wash your face, put your pajamas on, go to bed. Does this sound like fun? O but, friends, do you realize that all other religions and many Christian churches have not yet understood the point of *Galatians*? You can tell because they place burdens on the behaviors of their people that go beyond what the Lord teaches about loving God and loving your neighbor.

Paul wants everyone to see that things are forever different because of faith in Jesus: ²³*Before this faith came, we [God's people] were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.* Why would anyone want to go back to that? The laws given by God through Moses were just like guards who kept us locked up in prison. Paul was basically saying: "Don't you Jewish believers remember how the law, after it locked us in, stood right outside the door, guarding us, making sure that we remain imprisoned? Did you like being in prison?" The Lord intended this prison to hold his people in only for a time, until it became clear that people are saved by faith in Jesus, not by keeping those regulations.

Someone might ask, "If those Old Testament regulations were not the final solution, then why did the Lord lay them on his people for the better part of 1500 years?" Paul explains (in v. 19) that the law was added because the Israelites showed repeatedly during the time of the Exodus that they were stiff-necked and

stubborn. They needed training. The regulations God laid down through Moses would correct and train them well for a time.

²⁴*So the law was put in charge.* Some of you are old enough to remember the King James Version. It translated the Greek this way: "*the law was our schoolmaster.*" It would have been better to translate "the law was our pedagogue." A pedagogue was actually a slave with a lot of power. Greek and Roman families would assign a slave to supervise children between the ages of six and sixteen. This slave's main task was to enforce discipline and supervise the children's moral conduct. That's just like what the Old Testament law did to the Israelites. It strictly enforced God's rules and supervised the people watchfully. Many wise parents still raise children this way, laying on them all the rules they need until they mature enough to understand the excellent purpose of the rules: that it's really good to love God and to love our neighbor.

Next our translation says, ²⁴"*the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ.*" Well that can't be right. The law doesn't lead anyone to Christ. The law shows us our sins and threatens us with punishment for failure. It's a much better translation to write: *the law was put in charge until Christ*, until the time that Christ came, *that we might be justified by faith*, that we might be declared not-guilty by faith. The law did its work of

showing God's people their sin and condemning them in order to make it clear that people can be put right with God only by another means, by 'faith in Jesus.'

²⁵*Now that [this] faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.* We aren't children and teens anymore like the Israelites. We don't need to be told what to eat or not, what to touch or not, how to worship, and especially not that we must cut off the foreskin. By faith we have reached the age of maturity. Now we enjoy the privileges of being spiritually mature. It's not that we get to throw off all restraints. Adults who do that go to prison, the kind with real bars and gates. We still observe restraint, but our attitude toward those restraints is totally different. Now we delight to do what is right in God's sight. When we are mature in Christ, we rejoice to come to God's house, we willingly do our work well, we are great neighbors, we use our mouths for good. We ask, "How can I serve God with my time and abilities?" Life as a Christian is a joy, even on the bad days.

And we have privileges. Paul writes, ²⁶*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* Please understand: the apostle Paul is not talking to just the men here (see v. 28) as if to say, "All you Jewish men and Gentile men—you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." According to the original Greek Paul is actually saying: "All you men and

all you women—you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." This was a radical idea in those days, that men and women are equal. Today we're used to this kind of thinking, although I'm happy to say that I've heard quite a few people agree on national television that men and women are not equal in every way, that we are in fact different. But still the idea that we ought to be treated equally well—this idea, this doctrine, is probably more accepted in America than that Jesus is the Savior of all people. It's ironic when you think about it. Where did the idea come from that men and women ought to be treated equally well? From the way God himself treats men and women when it comes to salvation. He redeemed from hell all male sinners and all female sinners by the same Savior, on the same cross, through the same kind of simple, child-like faith. When Paul says that all of us men and all of us women who believe in Jesus are sons of God, he's tapping in to historical reality. In those days, only sons inherited the estate of their parents directly. Daughters weren't left out in the cold though. Everyone was expected to share in the family's wealth (and to contribute to the family's wealth). Their way of accomplishing this was that daughters inherited the estate through their husbands or through one of their brothers. But when Paul writes, ²⁸*"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,"* he wants us to understand that God has decided to make men and

women, slaves and free, Jews and Gentiles—all heirs who will inherit directly eternal life in Christ. He treats us all the same for salvation.

God does this through Holy Baptism, ²⁷*for all of you who were baptized into Christ*—which is the same as being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the Christian faith centers on Christ... *all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*. Clothing is good. None of you left home without it this morning. But when you were born, you slid out of your mother completely naked, clothed only in flesh. Along with your skin came the flesh of Adam, something you inherited from your parents whether you wanted it or not. Your sinful flesh is the part of you that gets angry at God when things don't go the way you want. It doesn't really understand God. It questions whether certain statements in the Bible could really be true. It'll come to church with us, but only if it can be unhappy about being here. It figures out rational reasons why we were probably taught wrong, why we should not trust our pastor, or anyone in authority. The older we get, the more sophisticated our flesh becomes at finding ways to slip in some evil.

But baptism deals a serious blow to our flesh! Getting baptized is like getting dressed in fresh, clean clothing. Paul wants us to picture ourselves having Jesus on like a brand new shirt.

There are two ways to “put on Christ.” One way is to be like Jesus, imitate him, follow his example. We could call this the law way. Do good. Avoid evil. Just like Jesus (see 1 Peter 2:21, John 13:15). I'm not suggesting that we all have someone nail us to a cross, but rather: what a wonderful world this would be if everyone was gentle like Jesus, strong, patient, loving, self-controlled, faithful, loyal, considerate. If you've been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ as your example.

But there's an even better way to put on Christ. Let's call it the gospel way: being clothed with Christ by being born again through Holy Baptism. With Christ on us like a garment, we are renewed. As soon as we are baptized, the Father in heaven looks at us and no longer sees the sinful flesh we were born with. He doesn't see anything we've ever done wrong. He doesn't even see the good we fail to do. All he sees is Jesus, on us and in us and through us. Since you are clothed in Christ, ...since you have your Jesus-suit on over your birthday suit, you are also clothed with forgiveness, righteousness, peace, salvation, life. This is how God sees all you baptized sons of his. This is how God wants all you sons to see yourselves. ²⁹*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*. You don't need the law to make you right with God. **YOU'RE ALL GROWN UP IN JESUS.**