

A Mature Relationship with God

Galatians 3:23-29

As most of you know, we have four children. Our oldest two are in college and then we have one in middle school and one who is a fifth grader. Even though there are moments in parenting that are hard and challenging, for the most part I have loved every stage of child-rearing. I remember holding each of our kids as babies. It was amazing. I remember when they got a little older and they began to talk and you could interact with them. That was great. Then they begin to make friends and go off to school and get involved in sports and on and on. Every stage in their development has had its own kind of enjoyment for me.

But you know what? As much as I've loved every stage of life with our kids, there is nothing like a mature relationship with a child. As we have sent our oldest two off to college, we've seen a transformation in our relationships with them. They are growing up. They are not kids anymore. They are young adults. They are still our sons, but now we are enjoying a mature relationship with them.

God's desire for all of us is that we would live in a mature relationship with Him. He doesn't want us to live in a kind of spiritual infancy under the law, but rather in a spiritually mature relationship in Christ. This is what Paul is trying to help the Galatians understand in the passage that we are looking at today.

Before we look at our passage, I want to take a moment to remind us of the flow of Paul's argument. Remember, there were Jewish Christians seeking to persuade the Galatians that now that they have come to faith in Christ that they needed to adopt Judaism as a system if they wanted to be good Christians. If they really want to have a right standing with God, they need to follow the Law. But Paul is arguing that now that faith in Christ has come, the need to conform to the law for one's standing with God is over. Our standing with God is based on faith.

In chapter 3, he has demonstrated that the promises of faith that were spoken to Abraham were in effect before the law came, and so when the law came years later it did not invalidate what had previously been given. This discussion then led him to ask a rhetorical questions, in verse 19, "Why the law then?"

In our passage today, Paul continues to lay out a Christian understanding of the role of the law and in doing so he helps us understand what a mature relationship with God looks like. The first thing he says is that:

I. A mature relationship with God is not lived under the Law (3:23-25)

Verse 23:

²³ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Paul is talking about the Jewish experience of the law when he says, *we were kept in custody under the law. Before faith came* (and by "faith" he means the faith in Jesus Christ that he talked about in verse 22), the law served a function of confining Jews. It kept them *in custody*. They were *shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed*.

In verse 24 he explains this confining role of the law:

²⁴ *Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.*

The Law was our *tutor*. The NIV says, "put in charge to lead." In the original Greek language the word is *paidagogos*. It literally means a "child-attendant." These were usually slaves that wealthy Greek and Roman families employed to conduct their boys to and from school and to give supervision to the child until the child came of age around age 16. They were not teachers, but supervisors.

This verse literally says that the "*Law has become our tutor . . . to Christ*." The words, "to lead us," is not in the original. Those words are added by the translators to try and give the meaning of the text. And so the NASB is emphasizing that the role of the Law was to guide the Jew to Christ, like a *paidagogos* taking a child to his teacher.

The other possibility of what this verse means is found in the ESV translation, which says that the "law was our guardian until Christ came." The ESV is emphasizing that the law had a role that lasted for a duration of time, but that time was over when Christ came. This translation is emphasizing that like the *paidagogos*, which supervised a child until he came of age, so too the law was only a guardian until Christ came.

I think this second meaning makes the most sense in the context. Verse 25 says:

²⁵ *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*

In other words, at this point in salvation history, *now that faith has come* there is no longer a need to be under the supervision of the Law. To be under the Law was like a child under the supervision of a *paidagogos*. The goal for that child was never to live his whole life under that kind of a guardian, but to come to maturity and not be in need of a *paidagogos*.

That's the role the law served. It was for a time. But when a new way of relating to God through faith in Christ came, living under the constraint of the law was no longer necessary. And to continue to live under the law is not desirable as the best way to live because it is not a mature approach to God.

Now, let me make one other comment from verse 24. Paul states that the purpose of the law was to serve as a guardian until the time of Christ that *we may be justified by faith*. To *be justified* means to be declared righteous before God. This justification is

based on faith in Christ alone, not the works of the law. The law was never given to justify one before God. And so, since this faith in Christ that justifies has come, *we are no longer under a tutor.*

Again, Paul is addressing the Jewish experience here. He is saying to the Jewish Christians that since faith in Christ has come, they are no longer under a tutor. And if the Jews are no longer under the law, why should Gentiles be compelled to follow it? Paul is not saying that it was wrong for Jews to continue to live out a Jewish lifestyle of observing dietary laws and other such Jewish practices, but they must not require them as spiritually necessary for the Gentiles.

And so here's the truth for us - we need to realize that if we want to live in a mature relationship with God it is not found by living under the law. If your spiritual life is primarily centered on the rules and on trying to perform to please God, you are living in a kind of spiritual infancy. You are under the law. That's not a mature relationship with God.

What is a mature approach to God? Paul goes on to say that:

II. A mature relationship with God is lived in Christ (3:26-29)

In verses 26-29, Paul lays out a theology of what is true of anyone who has come to faith in Christ. At the heart of what he is saying is that you are **IN** Christ. When you express faith in Christ, you've experienced a change in status from being a spiritual infant under the law to a mature son in Christ. Your life is now all about being **IN** Christ.

The first thing that Paul says in this section is that **in Christ, you are all sons of God.** Verse 26 begins with "*for*" indicating that Paul is giving reasons why we are no longer under a tutor. He says:

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Paul switches from speaking of "we" to "you" in this passage because he is describing what is true for both the Jew and the Gentile in Christ. And notice his use of, *all*. In Christ, *you are all sons of God.* Jew. Gentile. It doesn't matter. This status of being a son is not achieved by faithful observance of the law, but through *faith in Christ Jesus*. The Judiazers thought that it was those who followed the law of Moses who were the sons of God, but Paul says that it is faith in Christ.

In verse 27, Paul says:

²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Paul is speaking of water baptism here, which in the New Testament is an outward sign of inward reality. When New Testament writers speak of baptism, such as Paul does here, they are not separating it from the reality to which it points. And so to say *bap-*

tized into Christ would be the same as saying "you have believed in Christ" because that's what baptism represents. Paul says that all who have been baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ. They have put on the characteristics, the virtues of Christ.

This is part of Paul's theology of why the law is no longer necessary. For the believer in Christ, their life is now governed by Christ, who is in them, not by the external law. They *have clothed themselves with Christ*. That's a mature way to relate to God. And so why go back to the law?

And so, if you want to express a mature relationship with God focus on being "in Christ" more than the rules to be kept. Focus on the person of Christ within you, on being clothed with Christ, rather than trying to please God with your performance.

The second thing Paul says in this section is that in Christ there are not distinctions and division, but rather, **in Christ, you are all one.**

Many commentators believe that verse 28 comes from an earlier Christian confession that was possibly used in a baptismal services. Paul pulls in this confession because the first pairing speaks to what he is addressing in this letter - the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, but he includes the fuller confession, which says:

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The Jews that had come to the Galatians were suggesting by their teaching that Jews were superior because they followed the law. But Paul's point is that in Christ that division is gone as well as the other divisions and inequalities of slave and free; male and female. They are all done away with. They don't matter in terms of one's standing before God. Everyone's standing before God is based solely on faith in Christ.

And so for the Galatians there was now no advantage to become Jews. That distinction doesn't matter. Jewish Christians following their Jewish practices were not better before God than the Galatians who didn't. In Christ, they are all one.

The third thing Paul talks about in this section is that **in Christ, you are Abraham's offspring.** Paul says,

²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

The Jews believed that simply by their being Jews, they were sons of Abraham. They had been entrusted with the Law and so surely that shows they are Abraham's sons. But as Paul has argued earlier in the letter it is those who believe in Christ who are the true sons of Abraham (3:7).

Do you notice the "if . . . then" statement that Paul makes here? This particular conditional statement is called a 1st class conditional statement. This kind of statement assumes the truth of what is found in the "if" part of the statement. In other words, Paul assumes that the Galatians actually do belong to Christ and since that is true, then the result is that they *are Abraham's offspring*.

The Judiazers were calling the Gentile believers to follow the law thinking that is how one might be related to Abraham and become recipients of God's covenantal promises. But Paul's says that it is being "in Christ" that brings these results. And so, again for the Galatians, they do not need to adopt a Jewish lifestyle to be *Abraham's offspring*. That is found in Christ.

All three of these truths point to the truth of what Paul is saying, a mature relationship with God is lived in Christ. It is not lived by being under the law. It is found IN Christ.

I don't know if you noticed this or not, but Paul mentions Christ's name a lot in this passage. Six times in fact. Paul is driving home the point that it is being "in Christ" that makes all the difference. Those who have expressed faith in Christ receive all that is of value spiritually by virtue of their attachment to Christ not through their adherence to the law. A mature relationship with God is lived in Christ.

Let me offer an illustration that I think sort of captures what Paul is talking about in this whole passage. Last night hundreds of parents sent their kids off to Manhattan's prom. Some of you were those parents. It can be a scary night for a parent hoping their child makes good decisions and doesn't do anything he or she shouldn't, right? Now, whether you sent a child off to prom or not, imagine for a moment that you did. And imagine that right before your son walked out the door last night you had the choice of handing him one of two things to guide him through the night.

First, you can give them a card. On this card it plainly and clearly lists out the rules that you have for him on this night. It lists how he will treat his date. What he can and cannot drink. It lists with whom he can and cannot spend time. It lists how he should drive your car. It lists when he must be home. You can give him a card with the rules. And it's a nice card, plastic coated and everything. That's your first option.

Or second, you can give him a magic pill. This is just an illustration . . . hang with me. When your son takes this pill, it has the effect of putting deep within him a desire to please you more than anything in the world. It gives him a wise and discerning spirit. And, it gives him power to do the right thing even when he faces powerful temptation. He doesn't have a list of the rules, but he is going to head out into his prom night with a desire and a power to do what will please you and what is right.

What would you give him? The card? Or the pill? All of you who are parents are wondering where you can get such a magic pill right? You'd give him the pill, right?

I think this is exactly what Paul is getting at. There was a time, when the law played this function of being a tutor. It was the card with the rules. But once faith came, and we've become sons of God through faith in Christ, we have been clothed with Christ. We are "in Christ." And when we are "in Christ" and clothed with Christ, God has done something within us that orients us towards wanting to do what is right. And he has given us a power to do what is right. It is not a magic pill, it is Christ in us. Paul is going to flesh out what this means in the coming passages. We are just getting a glimpse of it here.

But there are two approaches to how we do life with God. One is that we focus on the card - the external rules. Or, in the other approach we focus on our relationship with Christ. We focus on the truth that we are "in Christ," we have clothed ourselves with Him. The first approach is living under the law. It is not a mature approach to God. The second is living in Christ. It's a mature approach to God.

If you want to express a mature relationship with God, let me encourage you to focus on Christ. Focus on the fact that you are IN Christ and that He is IN you. Seek Christ. Grow in your love relationship with him. Focus on Him more than the rules. Let that be your passion. Let that be the focus of your life. As you do that, your life will more and more align with God and His desires for you. You will grow to love and do the things that God desires in a way that a focus on the law never could.