

13. Learning Why Some Fail to Become “Adult Sons”

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to become “adult sons and daughters” and full partners in ministry. We want them to be equipped to Make Disciples. As Paul wrote to the new Christians in Galatia, he realized that some of them were being deceived by false teachers who were teaching these new Gentile Christians that they had to keep the Jewish law in order to grow and become mature Christians. As a result, Galatians 4:8-20 will help us to understand why some Christians fail to become “adult sons and daughters”. That will be the focus of our topic today.

In Galatians 4:8-11, we read, “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.” Before the Galatians had become Christians, they had served false gods that were not gods at all. When the Galatians had come to God by placing their faith in Christ, the Lord had set them free from the bondage of their false religions.

However, after Paul had left the region of Galatia, Jewish false teachers had come to that area and told these new Christians that they had to keep the Jewish law in order to be saved or grow. The Galatians had just been saved from the rules of their false religion. Now Paul saw that they were turning to a new set of rules. This often happens with new Christians. False teachers are looking for new and weak Christians that they can deceive. Even many churches that preach the Gospel have added many rules that they try to force new Christians to practice. Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” This verse shows us that it is easy for immature Christians to be deceived by those who teach rules and bring weak Christians back into bondage.

The Galatians had begun to observe the various Jewish feast days and the religious practices that went along with those days. These laws were for the Jews and had helped to keep the Jews a separate people but they were not for the purpose of either giving the Jews salvation or helping the Jews experience spiritual growth. Compare the following two verses. The leaders of the church at Jerusalem said in Acts 21:20, “And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law.’” Then, they said in Acts 21:25, “But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.” All four things mentioned in verse 25 go back to the first nine chapters of Genesis long before Abraham was ever called to be the Father of the Jews.

Paul was greatly concerned to see the Galatians turning to the Jewish law after they had just been delivered from the bondage of their own false religion. Paul went on to remind the Galatians how they had received him. Galatians 4:12-16 says, “Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I

became like you. You have not injured me at all. You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” Before Paul became a Christian, he had been a proud Pharisee that followed all of the rules of the Jewish religion. He had turned from his own efforts to Christ and he now encouraged the Galatians to follow his example and turn from those Jewish rules back to Christ.

Paul reminded the Galatians that they had not hurt him or committed any sins against him even though they were starting to follow the Jewish law. Instead, Paul was concerned about the choices that the Galatians were making because he knew that those choices would hurt their own spiritual growth. When Paul had first taken the Gospel to the Galatians, he was experiencing some kind of physical infirmity. Since he mentions his eyes in verse 15, it is possible that he had caught some kind of disease that caused him to have severe problems with his eyes. He said that in spite of his physical problems, the Galatians had received him as an angel of God. They had accepted his message and begun to experience the blessing of God. Now Paul was asking them what had happened to that blessing that they had experienced when they first placed their faith in Christ.

Here, we see the bondage of following a set of rules and depending on those rules for spiritual growth after a person has become a Christian. Those rules cause a person to lose the blessing that they were experiencing in their new life in Christ. Colossians 2:6-8 warns, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” When we are walking with the Lord by faith, we see that our lives will be filled with thanksgiving. When we turn to the human ideas and traditions of people, those philosophies and traditions cause us to lose that life of thanksgiving. We want to help our children fully understand this danger so that they can help new Christians avoid the danger of losing their thanksgiving. Paul even asked if he had become an enemy of the Galatians by warning them and telling them the truth.

Then, Paul went on to tell why people teach a series of rules instead of showing new and weak Christians how to learn to walk by faith and yield to the Holy Spirit. Galatians 4:17-18 says, “They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.” The Judaizers that were teaching the Jewish laws were pretending to have a real concern for the Galatians. However, they did not have a genuine concern for the Galatians. They wanted to turn these new Christians from following Christ to following them.

Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus about two kinds of false teachers that would come and try to deceive the Christians at Ephesus after he left the area. Acts 20:29-31 says, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples

after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Paul said that there would be false teachers who would come from the outside and try to destroy the Christians. Paul also warned that there would be people who arise and speak perverse things (things that turn Christians from the truth to bondage). Paul said this second group would teach what they taught to gain disciples for themselves instead of disciples for the Lord.

Because of what had happened earlier in Galatia, Paul warned new Christians everywhere about those who would try to gain followers for themselves with a series of rules. Paul realized that the Judaizers were actually trying to gain followers for themselves instead of the Lord. These false teachers seemed eager to help the new Christians. However, their real goal was to try and exclude these new Christians so that they would not grow in Christ and become mature Christians. These false teachers knew that it would be easier to get people to follow them if the people did not know and understand the truth of the Gospel of Christ. Paul explained the power of that Gospel when he said in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” The Gospel of Christ sets people free while the rules of people bring a new form of bondage.

Paul said that it was his concern for these new Christians in Galatia that caused him to speak the way that he was speaking. Galatians 4:19-20 says, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.” Paul viewed the Galatians as greatly loved spiritual children. He was willing to say or do whatever was necessary to try and help them grow and become like Christ. The desire of Paul was to see Christ formed in the lives of each of these new Christians. Here, we see that Paul had the concern of a spiritual parent.

In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children develop that same concern of a spiritual parent so that they will provide an example to help new Christians in their spiritual growth. This will also equip them to help struggling Christians so that they can grow and Christ can be formed in their lives. Paul said that he would like to be present with the Galatians to protect them from these false teachers. However, since he could not be with them at that time, he felt that he could write the letter of Galatians to help them realize that these false teachers were trying to bring them into the bondage of the Jewish law instead of helping them to experience the freedom that Christ has provided through His death and resurrection. As we equip our physical and spiritual children, we want to equip them to help others also. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children become equipped to protect new and weak Christians from legalism.