

Galatians 4



WHAT LIVING WITH GOD LOOKS LIKE

Student Guide

Daily Bible Reading

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One famous Christian author had this to say 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.

1. 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 (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.

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 “ABCs” 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. The eternal Christ — the Logos, as second Person of the Trinity, (John 1:1) — became human flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:14).

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 though He was God. Yet Christ did not break the law, but perfectly satisfied its demands. Jesus in His humanity kept the Law.

2. 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. 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 (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. Elsewhere Paul reveals virtually an identical principle when he asserts he has “become all things to all men” (1 Cor. 9:20-22). In short, he is saying if one wants to reach people where they are, one must go 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 (vv. 17-18).

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). Furthermore, “birthing” the child not enough. Paul records the *prize* of his 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.

3. 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. 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 law they perpetuated. Paul now asks the Galatians if they really understood the implications of what embracing the law all over again would mean (v. 21).

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). Isaac’s birth was both a promise and a supernatural fulfillment.

Second, Paul gives an *interpretation* of the Christian’s promise to abide in God’s family (vv. 24-29). Simply put, an allegory is a true story with a deeper meaning. 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 second meaning is the difference between *flesh* and *faith* (vv. 27-29).

Those in bondage to the law are shackled from life in God. On the other hand, faith is the crux of the child of promise. We are born by the miracles of the new birth and kept by the power of God through faith.

Wrap Up

Law and grace are mutually exclusive. 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, ask forgiveness for sin, turn from sin, and place faith in Jesus Christ.