

Christian Freedom: Grow Up and Be Free

by Warren Wiersbe

Growing up and being free means to mature spiritually and enjoy the freedom that comes with it, not being held back by the law or immaturity.

Duration: 29:36

Scripture: Psalm 37:4, Romans 6:14, Romans 8:14, Galatians 3:29 - 4:1, Galatians 4:7, Galatians 5:1

Topics: "Freedom"

Description

In this sermon on Galatians 4:1-18, the speaker emphasizes the importance of spiritual maturity in experiencing freedom in Christ. He distinguishes between age and maturity, stating that maturity is a quality of experience rather than simply a quantity of time. The speaker also highlights the need for believers to live in the freedom they have been redeemed into, rather than returning to bondage. He concludes by contrasting the motivation of fear under the law with the motivation of love under grace, emphasizing the intimate relationship believers have with God as their Father.

Transcript

We just sang about this matter of freedom, and we're going to turn to Galatians 4 and consider verses 1 through 18. Not in detail, but take from it the basic doctrine that is here and deal with it from three viewpoints. Historically, doctrinally, and then practically.

Now, the theme of Galatians 4, 1 through 18, in one simple sentence is this. Grow up, and you'll be free. Grow up, and you'll be free.

Grow up spiritually, and you can enjoy freedom in Christ. Because freedom and maturity go together. Now, never confuse maturity and age.

There are many people who have age, but not maturity. Age is a quality of time. Maturity is a quantity of time.

Age is a quantity of time. Maturity is a quality of experience. Not everybody who grows old grows up.

And Paul is discussing here this basic truth that maturity and liberty go together. Now, in verses 1 through 7, he deals with this truth historically. He takes the nation of Israel as his example.

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he, the heir, be lord of all, but is under tutors, that means guardians, and governors, until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. In verses 1 through 3, he tells us what Israel was.

Israel was God's heir. They were chosen to have an inheritance. Israel was called to be God's child.

And Israel, while they were under law, was God's servant. Those three nouns in verse 1, heir, child, servant. If this evening a baby were born into a wealthy family in Chicago, and if the father wrote that child's name into his will, that child would be an heir.

But he couldn't sign a single check. That child tonight could not walk, or talk, or even know who his father and mother are. If he were to wave a thousand dollar bill in front of his face, he wouldn't know what it was.

Now Israel, under the law, was in a state of childhood, spiritually, before God. The law was God's ABCs to teach Israel spiritual truth. He was teaching them the fundamentals of spiritual life.

That's what Israel was, a child and an heir. But because of immaturity, a servant. You see, when I was a little child, I had to be under law.

I didn't run the house. There were times I thought I could, and then my parents reminded me that I couldn't. I wasn't equipped for it.

There were times when I said, as you said, why can't I do that? You aren't ready for it yet. But my big brother is doing it. He's your big brother.

But I'm in this family. That's right, you are. Immaturity, childhood, rules and regulations go together.

As I mentioned to you the last time we were in Galatians, the law is not given to make people grow up. You can't pass a law that will make people grow up. You can't stand over the crib and say, kid, grow up, grow up.

It doesn't work that way. What does the law do for the child? The law protects the child so that he can grow up, and then he comes to the point where he doesn't need it. So in verses one through three, what Israel was, a child, an heir, but a servant.

Now in four and five, what God did, but when the fullness of the time was come, now that refers back to verse two, until the time appointed of the father. In Roman law, the father would state in his will how old the son would be before he could get the inheritance. And so God had a timetable.

And over the years, Israel matured. I hope when you read your Old Testament, you see how God little by little pulls things away from Israel to teach them deeper spiritual truths, and he prepares them for the coming of his son. So when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law to do what? To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Now there's a difference between child, back in verse one, it's the word infant and sons at the end of verse five. The word sons means mature sons. Oh, the Lord Jesus Christ came, fulfilled the law in his life and in his death, and therefore remove the law to enable us now to have the position of adult sons.

He came to Israel, paid the price, redeemed them from the law. Now this word redeem doesn't just mean to purchase. It means to purchase to set free.

You could purchase a slave and keep him a slave. This word means to purchase to set free. So Jesus, when he died on the cross, purchased us to set us free, purchased Israel to set Israel free.

What did God do? In the fullness of time, sent his son, his son paid the price, felt the curse of the law in his own body, became a curse for us that he might set us free. Now this leads to adoption. Verse five, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

I'm going to spend a little minute on that now because people confuse adoption and regeneration. My friend, you do not get into God's family by adoption. You can get into a human family by adoption.

It's a beautiful experience, I'm sure. I once had to counsel a child who discovered that he had been adopted and he was quite broken up over. I said, now look, there are many babies born into this world and born into families and they're not wanted.

They just keep them because they have to keep them. They went and chose you. They had the choice and they wanted you.

His eyes kind of lit up and so I never thought of it quite that way. But this is not how you get into God's family. You get into God's family by regeneration.

You're born again. That's how you get into the family. But when you enter the family, you are instantly adopted.

What does adoption mean? God places you on the level of maturity in adulthood. Now you aren't mature yet. You could be saved for five minutes, but God has still adopted you and given you the position of an adult son.

You know what that means? That means you can talk because he tells us here the spirit of God comes into our heart. Verse six, and because you are sons, that means adult sons. God has sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Imagine how surprised I would have been when my first born son was born. If I had taken him in my arms, he'd look up and said, Hi, Daddy. But that's what happens when you're saved.

You see, regeneration means you're just a baby, but adoption means you're an adult in the family, and therefore you can speak. You know your father. It means you can pray.

It means you can walk. Imagine if the baby walked out of the delivery room. Wouldn't that be interesting? Spiritual babies can immediately begin to walk.

They can immediately begin to feed themselves. You see, you never would grow in the Lord without the privilege of adoption. How many people say, well, I've only been saved for six months.

God can't expect much out of me. Wait a minute. He gave you the standing of an adult son.

Therefore, you can talk, you can walk, you can sign checks, you can start taking your inheritance, you can read your Bible, your bank book and say, what about that? He's given me this. I guess I'll take that. You

can see you can fellowship.

So what did God do? He adopted us. Now, what's the result? Verses six and seven. We are sons, not just children.

We have the spirit of God in our hearts, not just a law out here on stones. We know who our father is. Thou art no more a servant.

I noticed in this passage how often you find the word servant and bondage. Thou art no more a servant, but an adult son. And if a son, then an heir.

Now there you have verse seven contrasted with verse one. Back in verse one, Israel was an heir and Israel was a child, but Israel was a servant under the law. But by the time you get to verse seven, Israel is no longer a servant.

Israel is now a son and an heir through Jesus Christ. And we Gentiles who have been baptized by the spirit of God into the body of Christ are sharing in this spiritual blessing. Now there's the historical background of this, what Israel was, what God did, what Israel is.

And you and I as Christians are a part of this blessing. That's part of the argument of Galatians, the blessing that God promised to Israel. He has now made a part of his body, the church, and we share in that blessing of Abraham.

So we tonight are not just children of God. We're sons of God. We have an adult standing before God.

The law does not make us serve. The law is not our master. The law is our servant.

And we have been set free from this. We don't need it anymore because we have been given an adult standing before God. Now let's look at this truth doctrinally.

What does it mean to believers today? The easiest way to look at this I think is to contrast the two lives. Contrast law, contrast grace. Now here we go.

Under law, children. Under grace, sons. As children, immature.

As sons, treated with maturity. Now the son, as I've mentioned to you, knows his own father. The son can look into the father's face and say, you're my father and I'm your son.

The father looks at the son and says, I'm going to treat you like an adult son. Didn't you hate it when you were younger to have your parents treat you like children? You know, whenever the parents didn't like what you did, they'd say, oh you're acting like a kid. When they wanted you to do something very special for them, they'd say, oh look, you're grown up now.

Remember that? Now God doesn't do that. God says to us, look, I'm treating you like an adult son. I'm turning over my inheritance to you.

Here's my bank book. I'm putting my spirit in your heart. I'm going to treat you on the basis of maturity and I want you to live up to it because I've given you the Holy Spirit of God to help you live up to it.

And so there's the contrast between children and sons. As children you can enter the family, but as sons you can enjoy the family. Now here's a little baby who's just come into the family.

He doesn't know who he is. He doesn't know even who his father is, his mother, his address. He has a social security number, doesn't even know it, doesn't even know what's on TV.

The child doesn't enjoy the family. You start enjoying the family when you mature. The son enjoys the family.

He's able to draw up on all the blessings the father has for him. Now under law there were guardians. If you're going to live under law, then the law becomes a guardian.

Under law they were under tutors and governors until the time appointed. But under grace, we're not related to a guardian, we're related to a father. Abba, father.

Now get the difference. Here's a little Roman boy who's being taken to school by a slave. The slave was his schoolmaster, his custodian, until he grew up old enough to be able to take care of himself.

That's what the law was. The law kept children under control. Now the child did not have the same nature as the slave.

The slave may have been a Greek, the child a Roman. The slave may have been an African, the child a Greek. But as sons of God, we have the same nature as our father.

And so our relationship is not that of a little child to a guardian. Our relationship is that of a son to a father. Oh how I wish more Christians would enjoy the liberty of loving their father.

I was teaching my Sunday school class down in Sankey Auditorium several years ago when my class used to meet down there. And we were in the Lord's Prayer and we were talking about the fatherhood of God. And after the class, a student came up and said to me, if God is like my father, I'm not interested.

It's unfortunate that there are people who have had the wrong kind of bringing up. But here we're talking about the right kind of bringing up. Our relationship is that of a son to a father.

We share his nature. His spirit is within us and we're able to say Papa. That's what Abba means, Papa, Father.

There's a third contrast. Under law, you're motivated by fear. Here's the little child being led by the guardian.

And if he does one thing wrong, he's disciplined for it. But under grace, we're motivated by love. We look up to our father and we say, Papa, Abba, Father.

There's an intimacy of love that leads us in obedience. Now there is a proper fear of God. I don't deny that.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Every child ought to have proper respect for parents, but that respect is mingled with love. It's a loving respect, not a fearful respect.

It's not a slave cringing before a master. It's a son enjoying the fellowship of a father. Many Christians live a cringing life.

Many Christians have so put themselves under law, the fear of man trying to please people, that they've lost that joyful liberty that comes when you are under God's grace. And so we're motivated not by fear, but by love. That's a mark of maturity.

Little children obey because they're afraid. If you don't obey, we'll spank you. Teenagers obey because they get something out of it.

They know that if they do what they're supposed to do, they can get the car, they can have some money, they can do this, they can do that. Mature people obey because of love. You don't have to pass laws.

They love each other. I've used this illustration before, permit me to repeat it. In the city of Chicago, the law says that parents have to take care of their children.

If you don't, they'll arrest you. Every once in a while, you'll read in the newspaper about some mother or father who was arrested for abandoning his children, her children. Do you people ever think about that law? When the alarm clock goes off in the morning, wife, do you nudge your husband and say you better get up and go to work and take care of the kids or the police are going to be here and arrest us? You never think about that law.

You know why? Why do you take care of your children? You love them. Mature people are motivated by love. Immature people are motivated by a cringing fear.

Under law, there was poverty. This poor kid had an inheritance, but he couldn't use it. You put yourself under law, my friend, you get poor.

That's why he says in verse 9, you've gone back to the weak and beggarly elements. They're weak. There's no power.

They're beggarly. There's no wealth. When you put yourself under law, you get poor, poor, poor as you can be.

The law cannot make you rich. But when you're walking by grace with a father who loves you, then you can enjoy the riches that you have in Jesus Christ. Under law, there's bondage.

Under grace, there's freedom. Now, this freedom is controlled by the Holy Spirit within. We must never think that Christian freedom is liberty to do anything you want to do.

That's why he puts the Holy Spirit in our hearts. And he says, now you have the Spirit in your heart. You have my life within you.

You have my love within you. That's all you need. Wasn't it St. Augustine, and he was also quoted, I think, by Martin Luther in saying, quote, love God and do what you please.

Now, think that through. Love God and do what you please. And if you love God, you'll do what pleases him.

Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart. But if you have the delight, you'll have the right desires. And so these people who take grace to the point of license have never read their Bibles carefully.

Under law, there is bondage. Under grace, there is freedom. So as an adopted child of God, I have freedom and riches and love.

I can look to my Father and walk with him in the enjoyment of freedom and liberty. You know what this means? It means growing up. I will now get myself into trouble.

There are many Christians, there are Christian organizations, there are churches, there are denominations that take Christians and after they're saved, put them into a box. And they say, you can go this far and no farther. And that box becomes a coffin.

Something like some of the tribes, when a baby's born, they immediately wrap it up and fix it so it can't grow too fast. It grows stunted. Some saints are this way.

I have met saints who are emotionally, spiritually stunted, handicapped, crippled, because somewhere in their Christian life, somebody was afraid to let them grow up. Someone was afraid to trust the Holy Spirit. There comes, oh I want to say this carefully, there comes in every Christian's life that fullness of the times.

God appoints in your life a time of fullness. When you say to yourself, I understand what it means to be free. Now for some people, this comes earlier than others and they become a threat.

Sometimes in a church, a group of people will enter into their liberty in Christ, their joy in Christ, and they're a threat to the rest of the corpses that are sitting around. And so the rest of the corpses do all they can to tone them down. Dear friend, have you come to the fullness of the times in your life? Have you dared to get out of the crate, the box? Have you dared to say, I'm going to move in the liberty that is in Christ Jesus? Don't be afraid of that.

Can you remember when you began to move into maturity in your physical life? Where all of a sudden it dawned upon you that you were you. And there's no other you quite like you. And you had potential.

You didn't have to be like everybody else. And you were important. And you began to move into the liberty of maturity.

Now it's a dangerous thing. If you aren't careful, you'll run away with it. That's why you have to have the Holy Spirit down inside.

I can recall when my mother handed me the key to the house. I had arrived and she just simply said, now we trust you. What kept me from abusing the privilege of coming and going as late as I wanted to the spirit of my father down inside.

I knew what my father wanted. And I love my parents too much to abuse the privilege. The best way for me to test your maturity or you to test my maturity is not to give me responsibilities, privileges.

You aren't tested by responsibilities. You're tested by privileges. That's the test of maturity.

Now let's move into this in a practical way and then we'll go. In the remaining verses, verses 8 through 18, Paul issues three warnings. Actually, he asked three questions.

He said, why do you want to go back? Verse nine, after you've known God, you've turned again to these weak and beggarly elements. You go back to bondage. There are some saints of God, as they start to move ahead in liberty, they get afraid.

They say, oh, I can't make it. I can't make it. And they want to go back into bondage.

Paul said, don't do it. Don't do it. It'll keep you a baby.

Once again, I don't want to be misunderstood, nor do I want anyone to think that what I'm saying applies to anybody here. But have you ever heard of or met people who didn't have the courage to leave home? And to the end of their lives, they were under the matriarchal or patriarchal thumb or fist of a parent, afraid to step out. And for the rest of their lives, they remained emotionally immature.

Now, I'm not saying all who live with their parents have done this. No, I'm saying, have you ever heard of or seen this? I have. Paul is saying, you don't want to go back into a second childhood.

The law has been fulfilled. You have been put into a place of maturity. Now, grow up and be free.

Oh, are there some stumblings? Yes. Do you make mistakes? Certainly. As you and I were emerging into emotional and physical maturity, we stumbled and fell, but we kept on going.

Wouldn't it have been awful if after you'd had your first adolescent problems and difficulties, you'd put your thumb in your mouth and gotten your blanket and gone back into the playpen? And people would come to see you now that you're 20, 25, 30 years old, and you'd be peeking out the bars of the playpen. There are people doing this spiritually. They haven't got the courage and the faith and the love and the trust in their God just to move out and grow.

He says, don't go back. In verses 12 through 16, he talks about the way they've treated him. They don't love him like they used to.

Paul said, boy, when I first came to you and ministered, you loved me so much. Now your love is gone. You know, children are this way.

Children are very fickle in their love. Mature people are very steady in their love. But immature people are fickle in their love.

And legalistic Christians love this one and they hate that one. They hate this one and love that one. That's not maturity.

He said, why are you losing your love? Why are you going back to law? 17 and 18, he says, why are you living to please men? These Judaizers had gotten into the church. And you know, people who are legalistic like to be praised. They like to get disciples after them.

May I say this again? You will be tired of hearing me say this, but you will hear me say it many times. I am no man's disciple and I want no man to be my disciple. My ministry as a pastor is to get you so close to Jesus Christ.

You don't need me anymore. You'll be out helping other people do it. And if your Christian life is hooked to a box of tapes or a set of books, be careful.

You might have put yourself under law. These Judaizers came in and they said, oh, you follow us. You don't need Paul.

Watch out for that person who comes along and says, oh, I'm the one you need. Unless you have my magazine, my tapes, my book, you can't be anything. You've got the Holy Spirit.

We've got the word of God. What more do we need now? We thank God for teachers, for tapes, for books. But those are means to the end of maturing in the Lord.

So why go back to law? Second childhood. Why turn off your love? Why follow man and seek to please man? You have been adopted. You have an adult standing before God.

You've been redeemed. Now live that freedom in the Lord. My friends, this next week, as we walk with the Lord, let's dare to walk in freedom.

Let's dare to believe that we are free from the law and that Jesus Christ is fulfilling his purpose in our lives. One quick word and then we'll sing and be on our way. The law says you've got to take care of the children.

Love says I want to take care of the children. But love puts law around the children to allow the children to grow up. There's a stage in the spiritual life where we have to be restricted, restrained, that we might be able to grow up.

But oh, my friend, when you reach that fullness of the times, don't be afraid. God's appointed that. God opens your vision and God fills your heart and God quickens your steps and God says now you're stepping out into maturity.

Enjoy your liberty and use your liberty to serve other people to the glory of God. Gracious Father, we know so much more than we live. Oh, we would that our learning and our living would get together.

And here is this marvelous truth that we're not under a law relationship, but a grace relationship. You've adopted us. You've accepted us.

You've given us the Holy Spirit who himself is mature and who wants to mature us. And I pray you'll help us to have the faith and courage to step out and be free, not to be anarchists, but to be free. Oh, gracious Father, how we do need maturity in our homes, in our churches, in our own individual walk.

May we be childlike, but not childish. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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