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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study of the Bible-81
Galatians 4:3, Legalistic Babies in Bondage

Read Galatians 4:1-5. Note how Paul continues his theme of adult sonship in the grace dispensation in contrast to being children under the Mosaic dispensation.

Galatians 4:3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.

Verse three is an application of the first two verses. The mention of children, *νήπιος* (*nepios*) refers to a very young child, an infant, a baby. While it is true that we all start out as spiritual babies even in our grace church age, only capable of the milk of the Word (read Heb. 5:12-13), the grace age is a major shift in the way God treats all believers. In the Mosaic dispensation, believers were dominated by rules. This does not mean that they did not have fellowship with God. However, it does mean that the focus was on the “thou shalt” and thou “shalt not.” Because they did not have the completed canon of Scripture, or the fulness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, or the fulness of the revelation of God as per the incarnation (read John 14:8-9), their understanding of the True, Good, and Beautiful was rudimentary or infantile at best.

As far as the “bondage” in our passage and its connection with children, consider how *all* children must be treated. A child *must* be told what to do with just about everything. They must be told to wash their hands before eating, to brush their teeth regularly, and a thousand other things, because they do not understand the danger of germs and disease of the gums and teeth. Anyone who has to be commanded to do this or that functions as if they are in “bondage,” like slaves. The point here is that anyone who mindlessly lives under rules and regulations functions like a baby. No baby has the capacity for freedom. All must be controlled in a way similar to slaves.

“we . . . were held in bondage.” “Held” is the perfect passive participle pointing to the fact that the Law perfectly and completely enslaved those under it from Mt. Sinai to the coming of Christ with His fuller revelation of grace; read John 1:16-17.

“under the elements of the world.” The Greek term for “elements” (*τὰ στοιχεῖα*) refers to the basic principles. It was used in the ancient world for the letters of an alphabet, the building blocks for writing. The point is that the Mosaic Law is elementary compared to life under grace. The Mosaic Law tied believers to rules and regulations that kept them in slavery to the external rather than the freedom that comes from internal dynamics of life under grace *understanding*.

The grace that Christ brought was a system of mature truth about reality. It is a mistake, born out of infantile thinking, to think of grace in terms of licentiousness or in any sense which plays down the problem of sin and carnality. It is unfortunate that many Christians continue in legalism, and even with forms of legalism with grace language. To be sure, one can be very legalistic about Bible doctrine by simply going through the motions of listening to tapes and spouting doctrine vocabulary, much like children learning new words without ever attaining true wisdom on true nature of grace or God as such.

The common denominator in all forms of legalism, doctrinal or otherwise, is lack of growth in wisdom, prudence, and discernment, which are all necessary to live a successful spiritual life before God, which is impossible if one cannot even stay in fellowship very long. It is the baby who lives in the slavery of fear and anxiety and needs to be constantly told that everything is going to be OK. Not to grow up and live like adult Christian men and women is as shameful as it would be for a grown man or woman to go around acting like they are babies who need attention and someone else to take care of them. It is imperative for every believer to grow up in the wonderful adult grace age in which we live to truly glorify God as an adult, mature, and responsible member of the royal family of God.

We are very blessed at Faith Bible Church to have so many believers who really are interested in growing in the whole truth of God, rather than simply playing church and wanting to be entertained, have their boobos kissed, and simply told what to believe. All diapers and rattlers must be put away to grow up in the marvelous and matchless full truths of the adult church age.

Are you a legalistic baby?

Read Colossians 2:20-23. You are legalistic if you

- ✓ Think you are spiritual just because you listen to Bible doctrine and can parrot the terminology.
- ✓ Think you are better than others because of some human standard.
- ✓ Look down on others.
- ✓ Are absorbed with your own "righteousness/goodness/talents."
- ✓ Are satisfied with not growing in spiritual understanding.
- ✓ Have no brokenness of spirit before God (because of pride).

In *'Ehyeh*,

Pastor Don