**Sons of God by Faith**

Based on [Galatians 3:23-4:7](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Ga3.23-4.7)

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Pentecost 5

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

Our epistle lessons for the last several weeks have been taken from St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians. And in this epistle, like most of Paul’s epistles, are deal with a problem. And it’s good for us to remember that,as the book of Ecclesiastes says, there is nothing new under the sun. Satan is smart, but his bag of tricks is the same it’s always been. Today Paul clarifies two questions, even gives some illustrations appropriate for Father’s day, in order to address the following issues. 1) How do people become Sons of God, 2) what does that even mean?

The way that people become Sons (and daughter’s of God) is by faith in God’s word and by nothing else. The fact that the God of the universe, the almighty who set the stars in their place, raised up mountains and lowered valleys, who said to the sea this far you shall go and no farther. Who created breath and life and in whom everything has their being, this God is no mute. He has spoken, and still speaks to his children today. Not in the sunset or a rainbow, like some effeminate greeting card might say, but in words.

There is no greater respect a Father can receive that he is heard by his Son. That his Son takes his words to heart and cherishes them. Solomon writes to his own son in Proverbs 3, "**My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.**" It is the same with God our Father, he wants us to hear his words, not as take it or leave it advice, but as wisdom from one who knows and cares about us. Sometimes that word is hard to understand, but the obedience of faith is that we trust the words because we trust where they come from.

Now there are two kinds of words that come from a loving Father, commands and promises. So Solomon says to his son "keep my commandments"...that is a command, and a promise attached "and length of days and peace and life will be added to you." So too, the fourth commandment, "honour your father and your mother" is the first commandment given with a promise, "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." Commands and promises are the gifts of a loving father to his son, and by a loving son they are received as his bread and butter.

The way we become sons and daughters of God is by faith, that is by believing his commands and promises, and these commands and promises are not mysterious or open to interpretation. God has spoken clearly in the scriptures. 2 Timothy says, "**But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.**" It is the scriptures, the word of God that raises you in the wisdom and knowledge of his Son, and how by baptism, through faith, you are adopted as his own.

But someone might say, "I have read the bible, and God's commands there...and he commands that if I sin I should offer a goat for a sin offering and that I should circumcise the foreskin of my flesh. He says that pigs are unclean and so I shouldn't eat bacon. He says that every Saturday I must refrain from all work. He says that if a woman is caught in adultery, or if a child is disobedient, or if a man blasphemes the name of God, we should stone him to death. And He promises that if we obey these things, we will be a holy nation, set apart from the rest of the pagan world and gentile sinners. He promises if we keep these commands, we will be His people, and He will be our God." ...Looks like we better polish our stones and grow our phylacteries long.

These commands that I mention to you, they are commands from God in the holy scriptures, it's true. They are called the mosaic law, the law given to moses by God on mount sinai. Ten of these commandments carved in stone by the finger of the almighty himself (Exodus 34:28), but there were in total some 613 commandments and observances. And of this law of moses, St. Paul has this to say to the Galatians. "Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian*, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith."

When you were a minor, your parents told you where to go, what to wear, when to eat, who you could and couldn't be friends with. These were laws, but they were penultimate. I don't imagine you observe the same bedtime that your parents commanded in your youth. They were given to guard you until you reached the age of majority, when having acquired the wisdom of your Father, you no longer are in need of such arbitrary safeguards, but are able to walk in the precepts of your Father, not according to the letter but the Spirit of his teaching.

Sometimes children never grow up. And I'd say today this is more common than ever--because parent are taught by the culture today to let their children raise themselves. By that I mean the parent's job is simply to make the child comfortable and as happy as possible feed and clothe them and tell them they are special until they're out of the house -- that exhausts what it means to raise kids today. How is the child to learn right from wrong?...the child will learn from his own heart right from wrong, good from evil, wisdom from folly, by following his own heart he will self-actualize and self-identify.

The baby boomers have raised a generation of adult children, who jump on whatever occupational hamster wheel that will give them the most money for the least amount of effort, so that they can use their free time to self-actualize in whatever way they find satisfaction. A generation that figures, since marriage is a life-long commitment, I better test the waters, date for years and not commit until I've found someone I can stand to be with. Or, even worse, they do the most reasonable thing for the ethic of happiness at all costs. Those who are raised to care first about their own happiness the smartest of the bunch know to follow that logic to it's most logical conclusion. They find drugs that give an instant bliss that slowly melts their brain into a lifelong infancy and dependency on guardians... be it parents or literal prison guards. Selfish ambition and Perpetual guardianship, that's adulthood for those who are not raised in the fear and instruction of their heavenly Father.

Or, as happened in Galatia, the freedom found in Christ means that, instead of the law as a guardian, you are given His Spirit. **And by his Spirit, you are called to the insurmountable task of loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself.** Having been given the Spirit, you are sanctified in order to keep the perfect law, a life of utter self-sacrifice for your neighbor. That's why you get married before you test the waters, because marriage is supposed to be about sacrifice and change for the other. That's why you have children, because your life is to be an offering for your children. You, dear friends in Christ have not been given a legal code, but a new commandment, love one another as Christ has loved you, and you have been given the Spirit of God's son into your hearts, crying, Abba! Father!.

And having been given the perfect law of love, of self sacrifice for your neighbor, you will fail to keep it perfectly. And that's why you have been given the promise, not of perfection, but of forgiveness. So that, when you go forth, having received the Spirit in your baptism, sanctified and set apart for a life of perfect service, you know you will fall short, but you will not be condemned. You will not always love God with your whole heart, and you will not always love your neighbor as yourself. If Christ had not died for your sins, and been raised for your justification, your failure would be your doom. But because he had promised you forgiveness, you always have a way of escape. And so every day you should remember the Ten Commandments and where you have failed, you should pray and confess your sins to God, and be assured of his forgiveness. And every Lord's Day, you come to lay your sins before the altar of God, and receive his life Giving body and blood, a Spiritual food, for the forgiveness of your sins, and to strengthen you in the faith unto life everlasting.

But when you grow up, do you know what you realize sometimes: "Boy I wish I were still a kid. I wish that I had someone to dress me, and feed me, and raise my kids for me." I saw a meme on facebook last night that said, "(1) Going to be early, (2) Not leaving my house, (3) Not going to a party...my childhood punishments have become my adult goals. It is hard being an adult and trying to do it right. So rather than live according to the Spirit and trust in the forgiveness of sins, we seek another guardian. We find new laws to live because by them, we think we can control our failures and attain a perfection for ourselves apart from the perfection Christ has already won for you on the cross and attributed to you by faith.

So the Galatians, rather than live in the Spirit and the free forgiveness of sins, were persuaded to return to the mosaic code of sabbaths, and moons and circumcision. Why, because these things are doable. Loving your neighbor, sore for a while and in emergencies, but every moment of every day...that's like trying to hold a benchpress at mid-rep forever...sooner or later your arms are gonna fail. But if all you have to do is ten reps then drop it...well, that's doable. So too if all I have to do is a checklist of outward observances, even 613 of them, not eat pork and get circumcised. We can say we did them and find our righteousness in them.

And so a return to the law is a return to, as Paul says, "the elementary principles of the world." And though it's not too vogue to try and find your righteousness in the mosaic law today, there are plenty of other ways to leave Christ at the cross and seek your righteousness in other ways. For instance, self-improvement...that is self help books, fitness and dieting tips, etc...represents a $10 billion per year industry in the US alone. (Sorry I don't have figures for Canada, but I'm sure it's ratio is comporable). $10 billion a year. And self help is addicting...in that the most likely purchaser of a self-help book is the same person who purchased one already in the last 18 months. As Paul says of todays self-help groupies, they are always seeking and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:7), searching science, or statistics, or case studies to show which dietary or life habits will lead to the happiest life now...while the bible collects dust on their shelves. Anyone serious about righteousness is always tempted to find it in the law, in some way shape or form. Repent and remember this,

"In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

"**My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.**" Not through your own cleverly devised laws, but through the grace of God in Christ Jesus, your length of days will be eternal and peace is yours even now, for you are freely adopted sons and daughters of the father, and the inheritance is yours. Only do not use your freedom to return to slavery to the elementary principles of the world, for you have the promised Spirit poured out from Christ to you in your baptism. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.