

## “Growing Up in Christ”

Galatians 3

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Every once in awhile, I'll hear someone announce what he or she was raised on. “I was raised on country sunshine.” Or, “I was raised on hominy grits.” Or, I was raised on fried eggs and diet Pepsi.” Or, “I was raised on a mother's love.” As a boy, I was fascinated by the courage of Davy Crockett, king of the wild frontier, as played by Fess Parker. I learned all of the verses of the Davy Crockett ballad and still remember the verse that reveals what he was raised on:

“Raised in the woods so he knew every tree  
Killed him a bear when he was only three.”

This can be an interesting question, “What was I raised on?” When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, he had something like that in mind. He writes a few verses to them about what it means to grow up in Christ, what it means to be raised with a Christian identity.

First, he speaks about authority. To grow up in Christ is certainly to be aware of and respectful of the many authority figures in our lives: teachers, principals, headmasters, parents, to name a few; but primarily it is to nurture the authority that is within us. In our baptism, we are given the authority to love as Christ loves. Unlike the authority of a second lieutenant which can be taken away for behavior unbecoming an officer, our authority for loving can never be stripped away. To grow up in Christ is to develop that sixth sense for knowing what is the most loving response I can make in any given situation. When a student goes ballistic at Virginia Tech and guns down thirty people, then takes his own life, our inner authority asks, ‘what is the most loving response I can make?’

One member of our church showed up on the front lawn with lilies to plant, as a loving memorial. Another member asked the church to pray for and to work for a better delivery system of mental health services on college campuses. Personally, I started writing letters to Taran Hutchinson, a graduate of that school who still lives in Blacksburg, to tell him I love him. No one told me to do that. It's not in my job description. My inner authority that urges me to love as Christ loved, that inner authority showed me what to do. To grow up in Christ is to nurture that invisible authority.

Then, Paul speaks about being radically inclusive. He writes to the church in Galatia to encourage them to be as unabashedly inclusive as Christ was in his earthly ministry. At that time in history, the culture was defined by divisions. There were masters and slaves. There were Jews and gentiles. There were men and women. Each had different rights and privileges. Each had different assigned values. Some were first class citizens and some were second class citizens. Paul couldn't stand the thought that the church of Jesus Christ would merely reflect the double standards of the culture.

He writes his Letter to the Galatians to say that growing up in Christ means moving beyond those distinctions; means eliminating the double standards; means seeing in every single human being the very face of God. When I lived on a Sioux Indian reservation in South Dakota, this truth was brought home to me in an unforgettable way by a Lakota neighbor. He told me one time, "We Indians have no problem with Christianity. It's Christians we struggle with." I took that to mean that my neighbor was longing to meet some Christians who had grown up in Christ, that is, who had moved beyond the distinctions of race and ethnicity and wealth. I think he was waiting to see whether I had grown up in Christ or whether I had really grown up in some other name.

When we were kids, one of the everyday sarcastic taunts we'd hear on the playground was one student saying to another, "Grow up, will ya!? Grow up!" In a way, this is the essence of Paul's letter, minus the sarcasm. He desperately wants the church in Galatia, and in Glastonbury, too, to grow up in Christ, that is, to let go of all those artificial divisions so prevalent in the culture, and to embrace each human being as evidence of God's own handiwork.

Lastly, Paul thinks of growing up in Christ as living by faith. In a way, this is the most challenging part of the letter. To live by faith is to place great confidence in the promises of God. One way to think of the Bible is to think of it as a collection of stories of people who chose to place their trust in the promises of God and what difference that made as they lived out their days.

Abraham and Sarah trusted God's promise of offspring, as many descendents as there are stars in the heavens.

Moses trusted God's promise to liberate the Israelites from bondage.

Esther trusted God's promise to rescue her people from Haman's evil intent.

Mary and Joseph trusted God's promise to parent a child who would change the world by establishing love as the basic building block of every relationship.

Since those Biblical times, believers have been invited to place their confidence in God's promise to make all things new; to bring light to darkness, joy to sadness, healing to brokenness, hope to despair, liberation to oppression. And those who have placed their confidence in this fundamental promise of God have a story to tell, for they have found an abundance of life like no other.

To grow up in Christ is to live by faith, to live trusting the promise of God to make all things new. Taran Hutchinson stopped by the church office on Wednesday. He presented me with a t-shirt from his campus in Blacksburg, Virginia. It says simply, "We Are Virginia Tech." I take this to be a faith statement. I take this to mean that though they have been devastated, they will rise again; though they have been wounded, they will find strength again. Though they have seen the darkest hour, they have this confidence that the light will prevail, that God will deliver a new dawn for a new day. I'll be wearing my new t-shirt throughout the summer as a public declaration that I am choosing to live on a promise, a holy promise.

Sisters and brothers, let us bring Paul's words to the Galatians off the page, out of history, into the present moment. Let us grow up in Christ day by day. That is what I wanted to say to the church on this Confirmation Day, in the greatest of hope, Amen!