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Volume XVIII
Issue 449

Baby Stuff, or the Big Stuff

An Introduction to Galatians

by — James Flanders

I'd like you to imagine for a moment that you and I are the recipients of a letter from Paul, the Apostle.

We had gotten to know him a couple of years ago. In fact, he had come on a mission trip just to see us, to share with us the evangel of grace which Christ had given him to share with you and me, Gentiles.

We were so excited to learn about God; to learn about His work through Christ; to learn that we can approach God based on no merit of our own; to learn that our relationship and standing with God is based purely on grace.

Because of this great news, you and I were filled with joy and excitement and a desire to love God, because we truly believed that He was head over heels in love with us. Not only that, we were filled with a desire to love one another and other people, because we understood that all of us are absolutely precious to God regardless of who we are or how we happen to be performing on a particular day.

However, after Paul's departure, some perhaps well-meaning religious people came in and began to teach that, "Yes, Jesus is the Savior, *but* ..."

Uh oh! "But" always creates problems.

But, if you really want to please God and stay on his A-team list, if you want to stay off of God's naughty list, you need to regulate your relationship with God. Your standing with God is based

on a list of dos and don'ts. In fact, we've got a whole bunch of do's and don'ts for you, including the law of Moses.

If you get circumcised, that is going to make God a whole lot happier with you; you need to keep certain feasts and festivals; you need to follow some particular dietary laws – because if you really want to make God happy with you, it's not really grace, it's the things that you do.

It might start with grace, but that's the baby stuff. The real mark of maturity is these dos and don'ts – all of this religious stuff."

Hearing that, and wanting to make God happy, we began to walk down that path. Not too long afterwards, though, we began to find ourselves discouraged and worn out, trying with all of our might to do all of the dos and not do any of the don'ts. We were working as hard as we could. Some of us got our fore-skins cut off. We started observing dietary laws and special feasts, thinking that this is the key to holiness.

On days when we were doing well with that, we thought, "Man, God really is happy with us."

(see *STUFF*, page 3995)

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Bible Student's Notebook™

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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The Revelation of the Mystery

(Part 6 of 6)

by – Robert C. Brock

The Revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began (Romans 16:25).

The Importance of the Mystery

It is important because God has made it known.

(Colossians 2:2).

*Even **the mystery** ... now is made **manifest** to His saints; to whom God would **make known** what is the riches of the glory of **this mystery** among the Gentiles (Colossians 1:26-27).*

*He **made known** unto me **the mystery** ... now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:3, 5).*

*Having **made known** unto us **the Mystery of His will**, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself (Ephesians 1:9).*

It is important because we are to have a knowledge of its riches.

*To whom God would make known what is the **riches** of the glory of this Mystery among the Gentiles (Colossians 1:27).*

*That ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the **riches** of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:18).*

*That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all **riches** of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the Mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ*

It is important because believers are established by it.

*Now to Him that is of power to **establish** you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to **the revelation of the mystery** (Romans 16:25).*

It is important because for the obedience of faith.

*But **now** is made manifest ... to all nations for the obedience of faith (Romans 16:26).*

Boldness is needed to proclaim it.

*Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us **a door of utterance, to speak the Mystery of Christ**, for which I am also in bonds: that I may **make it manifest**, as I ought to speak (Colossians 4:3-4).*

*And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may **open my mouth boldly, to make known the Mystery of the gospel**, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may **speak boldly**, as I ought to speak (Ephesians 6:19-20).*

*And to **make all men see** what is **the dispensation of the mystery** (Ephesians 3:9). ■*

STUFF (continued from front page)

Yet, on days when we didn't do so well, we started to think, "God must not like us all that much."

Not only that, it began to affect our relationships with one another. After all, if our standing with God is based on how well we happen to be performing on a particular day, our standing with each other must now also be dependent on how well we are perform-

ing – it became a mess.

What had been a joyful relationship with God and with one another began to turn into religious duty and obligation where we began to police one another daily to make sure we were measuring up in an effort to make God happy, forgetting that, according to Paul, God was already happy with us.

(see STUFF, page 3997)

The Irony of Spiritual Maturity

by – Stephen Hill

When we hear the term “maturity,” we tend to equate it with good behavior and adulthood. To the world – and, in fact, most believers – maturity is best defined in terms of age and conduct. We may refer to a teenager as “mature,” because he is going through puberty. In this sense, maturity bears a physical definition. Then again, we may refer to a much younger child as “mature,” because she acts much older than her age. In this case, maturity is defined in terms of conduct rather than age or physical characteristics. To the world, maturity, in every sense, revolves around adulthood. To be mature in the world’s eyes, we must be an adult, act like an adult, or both.

Considering how opposite the world’s ways are to God’s, it will do us well to consult the Scriptures in search of God’s definition for what it means to be mature as a believer, and in particular, what it means to be spiritually mature. When we do, we find (not surprisingly) that the world’s definition of maturity leaves much to be desired.

The loftiest goal of every believer should be to come into a greater realization of God and His Son. God desires to be known, and the more we understand Who He is, the better we know Him. It stands to reason, then, that knowledge should be one of our primary endeavors. Paul continually confirms this in his epistles. To the Corinthians, Paul upheld knowledge as a spiritual gift (I Corinthians 12:8). To the Colossians, he shared his prayer that they would be,

... filled full with the realization of [God’s] will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ... growing in the realization of God (Colossians 1:9-10).

To the Ephesians, he stressed,

... the realization of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ, that we may by no means still be minors ... (Ephesians 4:13-14).

Yet, in spite of Paul’s emphasis on knowledge, we also witness him telling the Corinthians that,

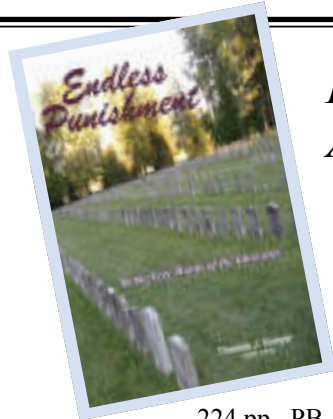
... knowledge puffs up, yet love builds up (I Corinthians 8:1).

Paul’s words here may be better understood with the phrasing, “knowledge inflates pride, but love edifies.” Growing in knowledge, therefore, requires a great deal of humility. We always must be careful to keep our ego at bay, as increasing in knowledge has the potential to give us a feeling of superiority.

Paul often preached a different message to the nations than Jesus preached to Israel, but in this case we find what it means to be mature spiritually in Jesus’ words as well as Paul’s. Contrary to the popular worldview that maturity revolves around adulthood, Jesus informed the Jews that,

Who, then, will be humbling himself as [a] little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens (Matthew 18:4; Luke 18:17).

What exactly does Jesus’ statement mean? If we are to endeavor to increase in our knowledge, how can we also be like little children who are greatly lacking in knowledge?



224 pp., PB

Endless Punishment: In the Very Words of Its Advocates

by — Thomas J. Sawyer (1804-1899)

A reprint of the 1880 edition. “I should be ashamed of myself, if, believing in God and in Christ, I still feared their ultimate failure in this great work of redemption. God never fails. And I beg those of the contrary part to reflect that the final issue of the divine government, whether it be in harmony with our theology.”

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This is the irony of spiritual maturity. To be mature, we must increase in knowledge while, at the same time, becoming more child-like. As adults, we have experienced the realities and hardships of life and tend to be more skeptical, cynical and pessimistic. We also tend to be more arrogant because of our increased knowledge. Children, on the other hand are, by their very nature, humble because they rely on their parents and other adults to care for them and to teach them everything. They believe all things, endure all things, and hope for all things. Because of their humility, children are much more apt to live out faith and love. They are more trusting, and that trust is a key to maturity.

To the world, being more “adult” means being independent and untrusting. Behaving like an adult means adhering to socially accepted norms. For the believer, rooted in true knowledge of God and strong faith, we strive for the exact opposite. As we grow in faith, we become increasingly more dependent on our Father, more trusting of Him, and more eager to follow His ways than the world’s. In doing so, we experience persecution from others who view us as ignorant and foolish (*i.e.*, more child-like).

It is important to note that, when He upheld children as a model, Jesus was not promoting a childish lack of knowledge or poor behavior. He was very specific in the child-like quality that He praised, which is humility. The Pharisees possessed knowledge coupled with a great deal of pride, and Jesus stressed their need for humility to be mature. In saying “we see,” their sin remained.

In I Corinthians 3, Paul refers to the Corinthians as “*minors in Christ*” (:1) to whom he gave milk to drink rather than solid food to eat (spiritually speaking, :2). The reason, according to Paul, is that they were “*still fleshly ... walking according to man*” (:3). The issue among the ecclesia at Corinth was not a lack of knowledge: it was their lack of humility which caused them to act inappropriately. They

knew the message that Paul had preached to them, but they reacted in a worldly (fleshly) way by letting their knowledge inflate their pride, whereas a humble response would have caused them to react in a godly (spiritual) way.

Thus, Paul’s use of the term “*minors*” is not a contradiction of Jesus’ words on children. The Corinthians whom Paul addressed were “*minors*” in the sense that they possessed knowledge of the truth but had fallen into the trap of putting their knowledge above love for one another. Like the Pharisees, they made the mistake of being too prideful because of their knowledge. Had they been mature, they would have put love above all. In this sense, they actually would have been more child-like.

From the examples of Jesus and Paul, we see that spiritual maturity requires grown-up knowledge coupled with child-like humility. If either is missing, we will remain minors in Christ. The good news is that, the more we come into a true knowledge and understanding of our Father, the more child-like we will become! The more we know of God’s goodness, the more we will trust Him as a child trusts his parents. The more we recognize His perfection, the more we will believe His promises as a child believes. The more we understand the wonders of grace, the more humble we will become.

In short, spiritual maturity is an ironic equation. Adult-like knowledge, plus child-like humility, equals spiritual maturity. To the world, an increase in knowledge leads to a decrease in faith; but to those who believe, the opposite is true. The more we know our Father, the more we trust Him and yearn to be His faithful children. ■

— *The Irony of Spiritual Maturity* was taken from Stephen Hill’s book *Word on the Word* (Volume 1). See order form.

STUFF (continued from page 3995)

So our friend Paul gets wind of what was going on and decides to write us a letter. That letter is what we now call *Galatians*. It’s a letter to the churches in the region of Galatia.

Now, I’m going to give you a homework assignment. Open your Bible to Galatians and start reading. Its six chapters, and you can probably get through the entire thing in about twenty minutes or so.

Read the entire thing, keeping in mind the background I just shared with you regarding the circumstances of Paul writing this letter. ■

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The Rites and Ceremonies of Idolatry

by — E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage (Galatians 4:9).

By this repetition of the word “again” we are pointed to the key to this whole passage, as well as to the explanation of an obscure word and a difficult expression. All turns on the meaning of the word which is rendered “elements” (στοιχεῖα, *stoicheia*):

the elements of the world (:3)

the weak and beggarly elements (:9)

The word “again,” twice used, connects these two together, and emphasizes them. Verse 3 reads,

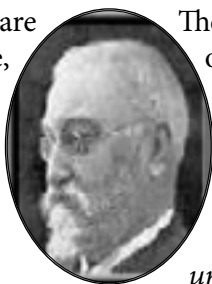
Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου [stoicheia tou kosmou: i.e., the stoicheia pertaining to the world].

It is clear what the *cosmos* is, for it is the world with reference to its creation and embraces the whole world. But what are the *stoicheia*? The answer is given in :8,

When ye knew not God ye did service [or “were in bondage,” the same word as in :3, 9] unto them which by nature are no gods.

The *stoicheia* were the rites and ceremonies of heathen idolatry.

In Greece today every mountain, tree, grove and fountain has its *stoicheion*, or god, who has to be appeased and propitiated. These Galatians had been such idolators (:8); but they had abandoned these rites and ceremonies, and yet wanted to bring in the *stoicheia*, or the rites and ceremonies of Judaism into the Church. The same term is thus applied both to Paganism and Judaism.



The Jewish rites of circumcision, purification and the observance of “days and months and times and years,” etc., are put on the same level as the worship and propitiation of spirits in trees and mountains, etc. The Holy Spirit asks, by the apostle,

When ye knew not God ye were in bondage unto them which by nature are no gods. But now having known God ... how turn ye again unto the weak and beggarly [stoicheia] whereto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days and months and times and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain (Galatians 4:8-11; cf. Col. 2:16-18).

Hence, “*stoicheiolatry*” consists of introducing that which belongs to the world (κόσμος, *cosmos*) into Christian worship and practice. Romanism has given the *stoicheia* of paganism and Judaism a very large place in its creeds and ritual; while the Protestant Churches show that they have not wholly purged themselves from them when they adopt worldly methods and adapt Jewish rites and ceremonies. ■

— *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*
Bible Student's Press
Repetitio, page 119



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