

## CHRISTOMORPHOSIS

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Paul was immersed in cross-cultural ministry. Establishing several Corps in Galatia, throughout parts of Turkey, Paul dealt with the realities of Greek culture, Roman rule, and Jewish heritage.

In his highly critical missive to his soldiers, known to us as “Galatians”, Paul chides them for starting off with the Holy Spirit and then reverting to the law. He compares them to heirs of the estate who, while minors, are treated like slaves, under the strict control of a *paidagogos*, tutor whose responsibility was to train up the child to become an adult.

Within this cross-cultural environment Paul alludes to the various rites of passage with which the people of Galatia would be familiar to press home his point.

A Greek boy was under his father’s control until he turned 18, at which time they held a festival called *apatouria*. He was declared an *ephebos* (cadet) and began to serve the clan or city state for a two year period. The key recognition is that this individual was now able to offer meaningful service.

The Romans celebrated a *toga virilis*. We get the word ‘virile’ from this, ‘pertaining to manhood, the ability to procreate’ or reproduce.

The Hebrews still practise the bar mitzvah. Among other things, the father prays a prayer abdicating responsibility for the child, and the child prays a prayer accepting responsibility for his actions (John MacArthur. GALATIANS. 1987. p104).

Paul rebukes the Galatian Christians for remaining adolescents, even though they should be spiritually mature. He compares them to children and to slaves.

In Psalm 2, Father God prophetically takes God the Son through His rite of passage: “You are My Son; today I have become Your Father” (2:7). This event probably happened physically at Jesus’ baptism, the first witnessed unity of the Trinity, at which point the Father spoke, “You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased “ (Luke 4:22). Up until that point, Jesus, although ‘truly and properly’ God from before birth, was ‘truly and properly’ a regular man, albeit a sinless one. Up until that point, although He was heir to the Kingdom, He offered no meaningful service, took no responsibility, and demonstrated no ability to reproduce Himself in others.

In this Psalm 2 prophetic passage, the first thing that the Father did upon accepting the Son’s maturity was to deal with the inheritance. “I will make the nations Your inheritance, the ends of the earth Your possession” (Psalm 2:8). This sounds like the ancient cultural practice: the first thing the father did was to give the son the keys to the family business - inheritance. For Jesus the inheritance is harvest!

Peter's rite of passage occurred in a question and answer time with Jesus when he recognised Jesus' divinity. He got a name change and keys to the family business. Remember? Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

It was at the baptism that Jesus began His public ministry. He took on responsibility, offered meaningful service, and began to effectively reproduce Himself.

Paul is dealing with Christians here. They have been saved and are going to heaven. But they are living like slaves to the law, without responsibility, without meaningful service, and unable to reproduce.

Those who are mothers can relate to Paul. He feels that after a long labour and delivery, he has to give birth to them again! He is committed to seeing them through the Christian rite of passage: Christomorphosis. You may not have heard of it. That's not as important as having experienced it. Paul is labouring until Christ is fully formed in them (Galatians 4:19). The term comes from 'Christos', meaning Christ, and 'Morphoo', meaning to form and has the idea of the 'faith that shapes us in the form of Christ' (Allister McGrath. SUFFERING AND GOD. 1995. p79).

And until they experience Christomorphosis, they are slaves, irresponsible, unable to meaningfully serve, and unable to reproduce. And until they experience Christomorphosis, they have no inheritance. They lack the harvest. At the *toga virilis* the boy took his toys and offered them to the gods as a symbol of putting childhood behind him (John MacArthur. GALATIANS. 1987. p104). Paul said, "When I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11). What is it that we need to offer up, what toys do we need to put away, what childish things do we need to put behind us so that Christ can be fully formed in us, so that we can inherit the harvest?