

## The Epistle to the Galatians: The Gospel of Grace

### Lesson 10: Under the law, or in Christ? (3:23-29)

Everywhere that the gospel of Christ has gone throughout the world, throughout the centuries even, there has been a theological issue within God's people regarding the purpose of the law of God recorded in scripture. Interpretation have been quite varied between theologians throughout church history as to the relevancy, and severity of keeping all the laws, or certain laws, or *any* laws at all. At the point of the Reformation of the church, and the time to follow, men had departed from the clear errors of the Catholic church regarding its dealings with the law and justification, yet they failed to all arrive at the same point. Leaving at one point, the church quickly spread wide and arrived at many different points, and so did its theology. On one end the spectrum were those who saw the law as absolutely necessary for salvation, not just a knowledge of the law, but a required obedience to it. On the other end of the spectrum were those who embraced the message of full and free salvation that is attained apart from works, apart from necessary obedience or knowledge of the law. The vast majority landed somewhere in the middle. This theological question of the purpose of God's law in regards to justification has sparked much debate, and is ongoing even today in the church. The Catholics still cling to obedience, the emerging church clings to just loving Jesus. The question we need to settle is, what does the Bible say regarding the purpose and place of the law of God in our lives? I think for most reading this, we already know from scripture that we are not saved by works, but the question then is, what do we do with the law?

Paul has been establishing the purpose and place of the law given to Moses from God, through angels. The purpose of the law has always been to reveal the totally depraved nature of the sinner. The law's purpose has always been to expose the sinner's complete inability to be right with God. The law has always pointed to the gospel, the coming of Jesus Christ who would pay the price of redemption for sinners as their substitute. The law has always served to point people to God's promise of life through Christ. Now Paul will conclude his argument with two illustrations: The first illustration that Paul uses is one from the prison system, and the second illustration comes from the idea of guardianship of a child by an adult. These illustrations will help us to see with even greater clarity the right place of both the promise and the law in our lives, both before and after placing our faith in Christ alone.

Galatians 3:23, **"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed."** It's easy to see that Paul's imagery here gives us a before-and-after picture of life in Christ. Before we placed our faith in Christ, we were held captive under the law. Paul gives us the illustration of the law as a prison. Maybe it's helpful is we consider that image for a moment. A prisoner cannot escape the prison. (Yes, I know. Sometimes they do. Stop ruining the moment.) Prisoners are locked up, they can't wander off, they eat only what's provided, they wear only what's provided. They are confined in every way. For some prisoners, they will never see the outside of prison walls again. This is what the law does to sinners. The law reveals that the sinner has broken the law, and it reveals the eternal penalty and punishment for doing so. The law gives no remedy, it points us to the only remedy for our sin, Jesus Christ.

Not only is the law like a prison for lost souls, but it also serves the purpose of being the guardian of souls. Verse 24, **"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith."** What Paul literally means is lost for us in translation. The word for 'guardian' is literally a "pedagogue"—a slave appointed to serve as a child's protector. In the Greek culture of that day, wealthy families hired pedagogue's to serve their children individually. They were like a babysitter,

or a chaperone for those children up until their late teen years. Perhaps the term babysitter is a little misleading. The pedagogue was the authority, in charge of disciplining the child and ensuring that it was raised in a proper way. While the pedagogue was not the educator of the child, it was the job of the pedagogue to ensure the safe arrival of the child to and from school. Often times a close bond was formed between the pedagogue and the child. The pedagogue did everything for the best interest of the child.

The law of God is our pedagogue, it was the pedagogue of the Jews also. The law is what raised the Jewish nation from its birth, through its awkward teen years and into its adulthood. But the law was not intended to be the teacher that would explain how to get right with God through obedience. The pedagogue, the law, was only intended to keep the Jews walking down the path towards godliness, disciplining them along the way. Just as a pedagogue is employed until the child is no longer a child but an adult who makes their own decisions, the law was only employed to do its job until the coming of Christ, when the Jews were then old enough, and ready to place their faith in Him. In one sense, it always was about faith. From Abraham onward it was always about faith, but when Christ came, the time for law had expired and the people had a name to believe in.

Prisons serve to keep others safe (including prisoners from other prisoners), prisons also confine those who have broken the law, and the pedagogue's purpose was to ensure the safety and well-being of the child until adulthood. Both of these teaching analogies tell us more of how the law was always to function. The law always had a proper function that was brought to completion at the coming of Christ. Romans 5:20-21, **"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."**

There are only two categories for people to fall into: Under the law, or In Christ. Paul uses the language of slavery for those who are under the law, and the language of freedom for those who are in Christ. Galatians 3:26-29, **"for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."** The result of faith in Christ is a new life, under a new master. We **"are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."** (Gal. 4:7) If you are a Christian, you are no longer enslaved in sin, you are now a child of the King, you are a child of the Almighty God! Contrary to what the Judaizers were saying, true sonship of God came not from bloodline, came not from circumcision, came not from obedience to the law. True sonship comes through an understanding of our sin through the law, and faith in Christ alone. This sonship is offered equally to Jews and Gentiles.

Not only is salvation offered full and free to Jews and Gentiles as a gift from God according to His mercy, but there is also the biblical language of adoption that we see in our text. Through our faith we become sons of God by adoption. It will be helpful for us to consider another portion of scripture concerning our adoption, but even from the world around us we can draw some helpful conclusions. When we consider two people who (for whatever reason) choose to adopt a child into their home, we see the beauty of grace and mercy towards that child. They don't choose the child based upon the child's value over and above another child. Nor does the child demand that they be adopted to specific people. The child is completely out of the equation as far as the adoption process goes. Based upon the will of their future

parents, they are brought into a new home, and given all of the rights and privileges as any blood children would receive from those two people.

The same principle is true of God's choice to adopt the believer into His own family. Note how clear this principle is shown in John 1:12-13, **"But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."** Could that principle get any clearer? Those who receive Christ, those who believe in Christ become the children of God. But how did we come to Christ? How were we born again in Christ? Not of blood. (It's not because you grew up in the church knowing the Lord. It's not because your grandfather was a Pastor, and your Dad is a Sunday School teacher.) It's not because of your will, or anyone else's will for your life! It's because of God's choice to adopt you!!!

The Jews thought that they were legitimate children of God, and they weren't. Legitimate sonship is gifted by God alone. Every Christian is a legitimate child of God. This means that every Christian now has a new relationship with God as their Father. This means that God the Father now relates to them as any Father would with their child, with tender affection, with wise counsel, and with necessary discipline as the time seems fit. A good father gives everything that he has for the well-being of his children. He pours his heart and soul into his children for their betterment. God, being perfectly good and holy, is therefore the best Father in every respect that we could think of a father to be. There is now a communication that exists (as any relationship must have communication) through prayer as the new son learns of His Father's ways, and seeks to please and honor Him in all that He does. This desire to obey is borne out of love for God in this new relationship, and can be learned through the reading of the law of God. Obedience therefore is the fruit of this adoption. It is the result of this relationship made possible through the redemption found in Christ. To be in Christ, to be a son of God, is the highest calling or status that anyone could ever have.

Verse 27, **"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."** In much the same way as physical circumcision means nothing, what is more important is the circumcision of the heart; water baptism has no saving grace. All believers are to be baptised as an outward profession, a public proclamation of their faith in Christ alone, and their commitment to follow Him for the rest of their life. But the inward reality of that believers' sonship is already in effect. Baptism is an outward sign to others of an already inward reality. There is nothing signification about water baptism in respect to salvation. If a believer came to know Christ and were killed in a car accident hours later without having the opportunity to be baptised, they are still saved.

Water baptism is not in Paul's mind here. The idea in mind here has to do with the inward reality of the spiritual cleansing, the spiritual transformation that has come upon the believer. It's the reality that says that the sinner has now been declared righteous based upon the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. They have been washed in the blood and they are as white as snow! Any who has been saved is in Christ!

There is something to be said here about "putting on" Christ in verse 27. It's the idea of putting on a piece of clothing. In other words, the end result of someone who has been changed by God will be someone who "puts on" Christ as a way of life. I heard a story once of a man who was to meet his friend somewhere, but his friend showed up late. When the two finally met, the friend was apologetic, *"I'm sorry buddy! I planned on being on time. I got stuck in traffic, and then once I got going I hit a pothole and blew out my tire! Then, when I was changing my tire, a transport truck came alongside and ran me over. It took me a lot longer to get the tire changed after that! But I'm here now!"* No one would

believe that story. If that man was run over by a transport truck, he would resemble that...dead or alive. And the same goes for the believer in Christ. To have your heart of stone surgically removed by the Creator God Himself, and replaced with a heart of flesh is infinitely more invasive than being struck by a large vehicle. No one encounters God and walks away unscathed. Anyone who claims Christ and lives like he's never met Christ before is a liar. This is why Paul says in Galatians 2:20, **"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."** For Paul, conversion wasn't something light and easy and common. Conversion for Paul (and every Christian) is a traumatic event where the sinner's heart is invaded and changed forever. For Paul, coming to Christ meant the death of himself. He lived for Christ. He now had the Holy Spirit of God living inside of him. Paul was radically changed. His life was clothed with Christ. The life of Christ was forever attached to Paul's. The presence of Christ was now with Paul forevermore. The righteous character of Jesus was now being worked out through Paul's life. Literally whatever Jesus is became Paul's. Because Christ has the love of the Father, so did Paul, in Christ. Because Christ has full access to the Father, so did Paul. Because Christ has all the resources of the Father, so did Paul. Coming to Christ is anything but a common and simple decision to follow Christ. Coming to Christ results in a marvelous change where the believer is clothed with Christ!

Galatians 3:28, **"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."**

Racism and sexism have always been an issue in this world. Even in that day, people looked down upon everyone who didn't look and think and sound like them. The Jews looked down upon everyone who wasn't Jewish. The Greeks considered themselves to be the only properly cultured people, all else were below them. The Romans despised everyone that they conquered. Women were regarded by all to be second-class citizens. Albrecht Oepke wrote of 'a saying current in different forms among the Persians, Greeks and Jews in which man gives thanks that he is not an unbeliever or uncivilised, that he is not a woman and that he is not a slave.'<sup>1</sup> This was the world then, this was the thinking that Paul was opposing when he penned verse 28. He begins the verse by affirming that, in Christ, it doesn't matter if came from a Jewish lineage, or a Greek lineage, in Christ, all are saved to an equal standing, and loved the same way. This is a truth that we know quite well, as people with much exposure to scripture. This portion of the verse might even be something that we skip over quickly, because we understand equality in Christ. But to the Jews and the Greeks of that day, national pride was great for both. For the Jews, there were only two classes of people, those who were Jewish, and everyone else. The Greeks weren't quite as cut-and-dry as the Jews were in their definition of 'us and them', but they did have quite an arrogance about them because of their richness in culture, education, and philosophy. Because of their diversity, they weren't as exclusive as the Jews, but they did look down to all of the uncultured people of the world. In both respects, when a Jew or a Greek came to Christ, they needed to check their national pride at the door.

Next Paul addresses the equality in Christ at the level of slave and free man. Once again, in 2019 it is quite difficult for us to understand the weight of Paul's words, especially the younger readers. To understand better, we need to understand the culture of Paul's day. In the Roman world, there was a massive divide between enslaved and free people. Even the most common, most uneducated, least gifted, least skilled, poorest free man, was infinitely more valued than the greatest of enslaved men.

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<sup>1</sup> Oepke, Albrecht, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 777

Slaves had absolutely no rights or privileges. Therefore, it would have been a revolutionary truth to learn that both a slave and a free man were completely equal in Christ.

Finally, Paul concludes verse 28 by noting the equality in Christ of both male and female. It is even within the lifetime of some of us, that we have seen women receive equal right within our own society. Women were not allowed to vote, or receive a proper education, and therefore work and earn the same wage as a man. I will resist the urge to take the rabbit trail down the path of the Feminist movement, and talk about how our culture has indeed corrected the problem of the inferiority of women, and created another problem in the superiority of women. For the purpose of this lesson, let's continue to focus on the culture of that day.

It wasn't unheard of for a woman to rise a position of importance in that day, but it was exceptionally rare. For the most part (nearly the whole part), women were considered to be lowly and given very minor roles in society. They weren't educated, in fact, it was seriously looked down upon for an educator to teach a woman. Because of this, the sphere of influence that a woman had was very limited. The role a woman was basically regulated to grow to become a submissive wife, bearing and raising many children, and keeping the house affair in order. Paul therefore once again smashes all cultural boundaries by announcing that, in Christ, men and women are saved and placed on equal footing.

Paul closes verse 28 with these words, **"for you are all one in Christ Jesus."** We should note first the word 'you', which teaches us that these Galatian readers were comprised of Jews, Greeks, slaves, free, men and women. It's also important to note the word 'all', to underscore the truths of this verse that every category of humanity is grouped together into this same standing in Christ. This was important that the Galatians remember their standing in Christ, as they faced the attack on the faith from the Judaizers who were attempting to add to necessity of circumcision for saving faith.

Verse 29, **"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."** It's important that we not misinterpret the opening words of this verse. The word "if" is a little misleading, because it is a conditional word. It is a necessary condition that a person be "in Christ" to receive promised eternal salvation. Perhaps an easier way to interpret verse 29 is to read it, "and because you are Christ's". All believers in Christ are His. And if we are His, a condition that He alone meets, then we become Abraham's spiritual (not physical offspring), and thus we become heir according to promise. This raises a few question as to defining first who is truly Abraham's offspring, and secondly, what specific promises which God gave to Abraham that are ours.

First, it is important to remember that not everyone who is descended from Abraham is considered his offspring, and becomes a recipient of the promise. We learn of this quite clearly in Romans 9:6-11. Abraham was justified by his faith, just as we likewise are justified by our faith in Christ alone. This is clearly taught in Romans 4:3-4. So, if we are in Christ, we are considered by God to be the spiritual offspring of Abraham, and therefore we become an heir according to the promise. But what promise? This certainly isn't a reference to the promise of God to Abraham concerning the land in Genesis 12, 13 and 17, but it is the covenant that God made with Abram in Genesis 15. Here God has made a promise to Abraham in his old age, that he will become the father of many, so many that the number will be innumerable. This promise was given to Abraham at a time in his life where it would be impossible to his efforts to have anything to do with the results. This promise was made and fulfilled to God. From his descendants would come the Christ who would save His people from their sins. Abraham believed God, and his faith in God was credited to him as righteousness. In the same way, God has placed a life in our

hearts, whereby we come to a realization of our need for Christ. This life, this faith that we now possess was just as impossible for us to muster up as it was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to bear children. And so God has shown a great mercy upon us by causing us to see our great need of Christ, and place our hope and trust in Christ. And so we believe God, just like Abraham did, and we are saved by God's grace, and not through a keeping of a law. The law cannot save us, our morality cannot save us, our accomplishments cannot save us, our generosity cannot save us. Only Christ can and has saved us. And because we are in Christ, we are *heirs* according to the promised eternal life that we hope in. Let's consider Romans 8:12-17 as we close this lesson.

If we are in Christ, than we are God's adopted children. And if we are God's children, then we are the one's who gain the inheritance. This inheritance is heavenly, it is incorruptible and eternal. It is my prayer that God give us the spiritual discernment to behold the magnitude and the beauty of everything that we have in Christ, and that our gaze be fixed upon it for the rest of our lives and for all of eternity. Certainly, how we conduct our lives today is a proper reflection of what we cherish the most in our hearts. May all the cares and pressures of the world fade into an ugly and distant place, so that we see Christ in His rightful, ruling place in our hearts.