

Galatians 3:19-29 – The Law Did Not Rule Out the Promise
Community Group Galatians Lesson 7

I. Review Galatians 1-3:18

- A. 1:1-10 – God sent me to speak to you because you are being deceived to add obedience to the law to your faith in Christ. In doing so, you are departing from the gospel.
- B. 1:11-24 – I got my gospel from Christ Himself and that message was verified by Him in personal interaction and again three years later by the apostles in Jerusalem.
- C. 2:1-10 – Fourteen years later, my gospel again was verified by those in Jerusalem.
- D. 2:11-21 – Even Peter and Barnabbas were tempted to follow the example of leaving the gospel in favor of obedience to Jewish rules and regulations and had to be corrected.
- E. 3:1-18 – Our gospel based on promise and not on our obedience is no different than when Abraham was justified by faith in the promise of God. For even the Abrahamic Promise was a gift and preceded the (Promissory) Mosaic Law by over 400 years.

II. Why the Law?

(3:19-22)

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Galatians 3:19-22 (NASB)

- A. **v. 19** – *Why the law then? It was added because of transgression, having been ordained through angels....* The law came in response to transgression: both to “regulate” that behavior and to “reveal” the sinful heart of Israel. The law was “ordained” *through angels* (angels were part of how God conveyed the law). It was mediated (by Moses). It was temporarily put in place “until the seed” (Jesus).

While awaiting the seed, God wanted Israel to become a beacon for the world so that Israel and the world would know that He alone is God (see Exodus 6:7 and 7:5). He could not make them a beacon if they lived godless lives deserving judgment which they would have lived without the law. They often did that even with the law; so imagine without it! He could not bless them as He offered to do in Genesis 17 unless they obeyed him. In order to give the nation the kind of “order and dignity” that could give glory to God and gain attention of the nations, they needed rules to order behavior. (See, for example, *Babylon’s Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4, the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10/2 Chron. 9, the Midianite army man in the hearing of Gideon in Judges 7:9-15, Rahab the harlot in Joshua 2:8-11, and various other examples.*) But they also needed rules so that they could see they needed God’s grace to supply their righteousness, since even with rules spelled out, they would fail.

- B. **v. 20** – *Now a mediator is for two parties, but God is only one.* Here Paul speaks of the mediator’s (Moses) role – he represented the people to God (like a priest until the priesthood was established) and God to the people (as a prophet). Moses could bring the petitions of the people to God and God could count on Moses to deliver to His people His expectations for their worship and behavior. It was by means of their obedience that He would receive glory – both from Israel and from other nations.

- C. **v. 21a** - *Is the law contrary to God's promises?* Here Paul imagines the complaint of the Judaizer. They might ask him, "Are you saying, God sending His law was in contradiction to His promise by faith?" He says, "by no means." The promise still existed as the only means by which anyone could be made right with God, and the law was given to accomplish two goals.
- D. **v. 21b** - *If a law had been given which could have produced life...* If it were possible that a law could be given that people could obey their way into righteousness, then righteousness (right standing with God) would have been based on the law. It would no longer have required a promise as the means of righteousness. But as J. Vernon McGee said, *trying to adhere to the law can no more produce spiritual life than rubbing your face against a mirror can remove the dirt that the mirror revealed.*
- E. **v. 22** – *But the scripture has shut everyone under sin so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.* (See **Romans 3:19** also)
 This is Paul's most complete argument yet on the gospel being purely by faith and not by obedience to the law. Later in the book, we will see this has GREAT SIGNIFICANCE when it comes to living the life of faith as believers – being sanctified in practice. Have you ever noticed that if you are far from the Lord, you don't want to be in the scriptures? The reason is that the scriptures make us aware of our shortcoming. Here Paul says, in effect, there never has been a law which could produce righteousness. That does not mean the law is not necessary. The law is very much necessary, but not to produce right standing before God.

III. The Law has tutored us to Christ (Galatians 3:23-27)

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Galatians 3:23-27 (NASB)

- A. **vv. 23-24** *Before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the law has become our tutor to Christ so that we may be justified by faith.* Here Paul explains more fully the law's purpose. We saw it was "added because of transgressions" (v. 19). Now we see it was also given to tutor the people of God towards Christ. Upon reading the law, they saw much of the character of God. As they attempted to live the law, they saw their own inability. It required the humble person (convicted by the Holy Spirit) to say to the Lord, "*we are unworthy men... we have violated your clear instruction... we deserve your judgment unless you are merciful, for we know that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin.*" In these two verses, we are reminded of Romans 3:20. It is "*through the law that the knowledge of sin comes.*" The law makes us aware of our great need.
- B. **v. 25** – *Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*
 Here Paul says we no longer need the "pedagogue." The pedagogue of this time was a servant who admonished the children and "controlled" their behavior until they were mature enough to be able to be instructed without having someone "sit on them."

Paul explains for the Christian that since righteousness is by a promise (*eternal life to those who believe on Christ*, John 5:24), we no longer need the law to discipline us.

He is talking about the fact that the Judaizers were saying, “*faith in Christ is ok, but what you really need to do is obey the Jewish rules that were given to Israel.*” His response? **The opposite.** If you want to follow rules to gain a hearing with someone, that is ok (see Acts 15:28-29, 16:13, 18:18). But the law was for a limited time to make us aware of our need for a Savior, and to bring us to the point of conviction that we could believe that the God who promised to send a redeemer, has done so. We are not under the tutor of the law. Like Chuck Swindoll says, “*We need the law no more than a high school graduate needs to ask his nanny if he can go to the bathroom.*”

- C. **vv. 26-27** – *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* (See 1 Cor. 12:13)

The reason you do not need the Law as a tutor to bring you righteousness is that you **are now children of God.** Here Paul reminds the Galatian Christians that they are accepted as sons through their faith in Christ. They have clothed themselves with Christ by virtue of their faith in Him.

His imagery here might have been taken from Roman Society. When a young man was of age, he was given a different kind of toga - one representing adulthood. Similarly, being clothed in Christ showed a new identity. When one “clothed himself with Christ” (by believing the gospel), he no longer needed the strict pedagogy of the law – he is a fully accepted son.

By the way, “were baptized into Christ Jesus” should be understood as referring to *being placed into Christ by faith.* Water baptism is the outward sign of spirit baptism that takes place when we believe the Gospel (See Acts 10:44-48). Churches that teach “baptismal regeneration” (no saving faith until someone is baptized) will argue that this verse supports their position. In reality, this verse just says, “you’ve been placed into Christ” (baptism=placed into), and Galatians 1-3 make it plain that occurs by faith alone.

- D. PS: One terrible consequence of the opposition to authority and judgment in our culture (and even in our churches) which results in lawlessness, is that people are not being pedagoed to Christ and they are without shame. They do not see how short they are coming before God, because standards are so offensive to modern ears. I think some will be so surprised when they meet the Lord at either of his judgments. Believers at the Bema will be shocked to see how seriously Jesus evaluates our lives; they may well say, “*No one ever told us it would be like this. We thought it was just about believing on Jesus and having sins forgiven and knowing Jesus loves us.*” Unbelievers at the Great White Throne may well say, “*We heard that hell was just a scare tactic and that God – if there is one – loves everyone.*” Through their ignorance of law, they will come so short.

IV. Heirs According to Promise

(Galatians 3:28-29)

- A. One in Christ Jesus

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Paul is drawing the conclusion for his listeners that whether they are Jewish believers in Christ or Gentile believers in Christ, they **are one body in Christ** (see verse 27), a body without distinction so far as acceptability in God’s sight. (See also Ephesians 2:11-22.)

The Judaizers were saying that those who conformed to Jewish rules and practices were accepted more highly and more assured of their place with God. Paul is contradicting that. In fact, he goes **further**. Not only does the acceptability before God not vary whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. The acceptability before God doesn't change if you are a slave or if you are a free man. It doesn't change if you are a man or a woman. **(See also 1 Cor. 12:13)**

Paul's point here is not that there are no distinctions between people, as some liberal commentators have said. It is addressing the theme that has been our theme since 1:1 – the acceptability of all mankind before God rests **ONLY** on faith in Christ, recipients of the promise. A “free, Jewish, male” has no more stature before God than an “enslaved, Gentile, woman.” (This is supposed to show itself in how we treat people who are different from us.)

B. You inherit with Abraham

²⁹*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.* (Cf., 3:7 “those who are of faith are sons of Abraham,” and 3:9, “those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer”.)

Here Paul teaches that all those in Christ are **of Abraham's seed**, descendants of his by faith in the promise, and **heirs with him of the promises of God**. What does that mean?

Romans 4:13 says that the *promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith*. In Romans 4:16, he adds, *the promise may be certain for all the descendants... to those who are of the faith of Abraham*. Abraham has descendants according to the flesh (Jews, **Rom. 9:6-7**) or to the spirit (believers, **Romans 9:8**). The meaning here is that just as Abraham receives certain inheritances as a result of his faith, so those with faith in Christ share in his inheritances.

V. Discussion

- A. The inheritance of Abraham was based on faith and not obedience to the law (3:18, 29). How is that similar for Christians?
- B. Genesis 15 spoke of an unconditional inheritance (promise) for Abraham. What was the inheritance for him, and what was the requirement?
Genesis 17 also spoke of an inheritance, but it was conditional. What was the inheritance (promise) and what was the requirement?
How were those similar to or different from Christians?
- C. Paul says in Galatians 3:21 something about the law and its power or lack thereof. What does he say and what does it mean? What is its significance? Compare to Col. 2:20-23.
- D. Be aware that in the last third of the book, we will see how this discussion of a clear promise received by faith as the basis for a relationship with God affects our obedience.

VI. Homework

- A. Re-read chapter 1, 2, 3 and 4 on four separate days.
- B. Re-read chapters 1-2 on day five and re-read chapter 3 on day six.
- C. One question. Please jot down your answer somewhere. When did you become 100% certain that you were going to heaven? Why? How did you know?