

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON FORTY-EIGHT)

“THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW”

(PART 4)

GALATIANS 3:23-26

(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

In verse **23**, Paul argues that before the particular faith in Jesus Christ, as exercised in the Age of the New Covenant, came into being after His death, resurrection and ascension, lost human beings were, *“held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.”* In character, that faith is fundamentally the same as the faith exercised by Abraham and all the other Old Testament believers, but it is different in that it looks **back** to an accomplished salvation at the Cross, whereas the faith of Abraham and the other Old Testament believers looked **forward** to the accomplishment of that salvation at Calvary.

The words, *“held captive”* are the translation of a Greek word which means, “To guard or protect by a military guard, either in order to

prevent hostile invasion, or to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight.” Figuratively, the word means, “to protect by guarding.” Paul is saying that the Law was a jailer who held those who were subjected to sin in custody, in order that they should not escape the consciousness of their sins and their liability to punishment. They were held captive “*until*” the particular faith in Jesus Christ, as exercised in the Age of the New Covenant, was revealed.

The Greek word translated “*until*” means, “With a view to.” Paul is explaining that during the approximately 1500 years in which the Law was in force, it was the means of convicting sinners of their sins, and of causing them to look ahead in faith to the atonement God would one day offer which would pay for their sins. During this period, believing sinners were saved by the blood of Christ just as surely, and just as eternally as they have been saved since the Cross. But when the faith in an **historic** Christ came, that is, a faith exercised in the Christ of **history** rather than in the Christ of **prophecy**, the Law was cancelled forever.

In verses **22** and **23**, the Law was personified by Paul as a jailor shutting persons in a prison cell under a death sentence. In verse **24**, the Law is personified as a guardian or custodian. The Greek word is **paidagógos**: (**pahee-dag-o-gos**’), which literally means, “a child leader.”

The **paidagógos** was usually a slave employed in Greek and Roman families, who had the general charge over a boy in the years from about 6-16. This slave was entrusted with the moral supervision of the child. He watched over his outward behaviour, and took charge over him whenever he went from home, as for instance, to school.

By describing the Law as a **paidagógos**, Paul emphasizes both the inferiority of the Law, and its temporary character. The role of the Law was that of a guardian to Israel, keeping watch over those committed to its care, accompanying them with its commands and prohibitions, keeping them in a condition of dependence and restraint, and continually revealing to them sin as a transgression of God’s expressed decrees. He

says that, *“the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.”*

The position of child guardian or custodian was a temporary one. When the son became an adult the responsibilities of the guardian were fulfilled. And so, by way of analogy, Paul is explaining that the Law kept watch over the Jews, showed them their sins, and finally escorted them to Christ. Even as the guardian was to ensure that the boy travelled safely to and from school, the Law supervised God’s people until the coming of Christ.

In verse **25**, Paul writes, *“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”* In this verse, he stresses the point that now that the particular faith in Jesus Christ has come, believers in the Age of the New Covenant, have come of age as God’s children and are therefore not under the guidance of the Law like a young child. The Law has fulfilled its role in leading them to Christ.

Warren Wiersbe explains that Paul, by using the illustration of a guardian or custodian, is saying at least two things about the Jews and the Law that was given to them by God. He says,

*“First, the Jews were not **born** through the Law, but rather were **brought up** by the Law. The slave was **not** the child’s father; he was the child’s guardian and disciplinarian. **So, the Law did not give life to Israel, it regulated life.** The Judaizers taught that the Law was necessary for life and righteousness, and Paul’s argument shows their error.*

But the second thing Paul says is even more important: the work of the guardian was Preparation for the child’s maturity. Once the child came of age, he no longer needed the guardian. So the Law was a preparation for the nation of Israel until the coming of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ...During the centuries of Jewish history, the Law was preparing

for the coming of Christ. The demands of the Law reminded the people that they needed a Saviour...

The Law has performed its purpose: the Saviour has come and the 'guardian' is no longer needed. It is tragic that the nation of Israel did not recognize their Messiah when He appeared. God finally had to destroy the temple and scatter the nation, so that today it is impossible for a devoted Jew to practice the faith of his fathers. He has no altar, no priesthood, no sacrifice, no temple, no king (**Hosea 3:4**). **All of these have been fulfilled in Christ so that any man-Jew or Gentile-who trusts Christ becomes a child of God."**

In **Romans 6:14**, Paul states emphatically, *"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."* Commenting on this verse, **William Newell**, writes the following:

"Note the two '**fors**.' The first '*for*' announces the Divine decree that sin's lordship over us shall be ended. The second reveals the happy condition of things in which such a release is possible: we are not under the **legal** principle,-which first demanded duty, and then offered blessing; but we are under the **grace** principle,-which confers blessing first, and, behold, fruits follow!

It is deeply significant here that even to us, new creatures in Christ, and recipients of the Holy Spirit, it is definitely announced to us that we are not under law,-else bondage and helplessness would still be our lot. Note, God does not say we are not under **the** Law,-the Mosaic Law: (Gentiles never were!) But, God says we are not under law,-under the **legal principle**...Only when we believe that our history in Adam, with all its responsibilities and demands to produce righteousness, ended at the cross, shall we find ourselves completely free to enjoy these words of heavenly comfort-'**UNDER GRACE!**'"

The reign of Law has ended because faith in Christ has delivered believers from the protective custody of the prison and the harsh discipline of the **paidagógos**. His work is finished. Now we who have believed in Jesus Christ have the law written in our hearts, **and what is written in our hearts corresponds with what is written in Scripture.**

In **Colossians 2:13-17**, Paul is incandescently clear:

13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

The Law of Moses with its sacrifices, rituals and feasts, was a shadow pointing to Christ. New Covenant believers who possess the “*substance*” or the reality as members of the Body of Christ, would be foolish to return to the shadow. The legalistic, ceremonial and mystical extremes of cultish religion, with its performance-driven philosophies and culture of triumphalism, are not the **essence** of true faith or the **basis** of true faith, but rather the **enemies** of true faith! The essence of true faith, the basis of true faith, the reality of true faith, is Jesus Christ, Who is in us the Hope of glory. Believers are, right now, spiritual and righteous before a holy God not because of what they do or do not do, but because they are complete in Christ, Who has become to their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, according to **1**

Corinthians 1:30. That is our **position** and in Christ it is an eternally perfect one. We work out that “positional” righteousness **practically**, by faith and obedience, motivated and empowered by His Holy Spirit.

The person who judges a believer because that believer is not ordering his or her life based on that person’s legalistic principles, is in a sense, judging Jesus Christ. He or she is saying that when Christ shouted, “*It is finished*” on the Cross, the work was not actually finished, and that believers must add something to it. He is also saying that Jesus Christ is not sufficient for all the spiritual needs of the Christian. The false teachers in Colossae were claiming a “deeper spiritual life” for all who would keep the Law. Things have not changed much in 2000 years!

In verse **26**, Paul explains why believers in the Age of the New Covenant, who have exercised faith in the historic Christ (the Christ who has already come), are no longer under the guardian of the Law. He says, “*For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*”

In this verse, Paul changes from using the **first** person “**we**,” which is a reference to the Jews, to using the second person “**you**,” which refers to both the Jews and the Gentiles in the Galatian church. By so doing, Paul shows that the wall of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles had been broken down at the Cross, and that both races have become the sons of God in Christ Jesus.

The Greek word translated “*sons*” is **huios**: (**hwee-os**’), which properly means, “a son (by birth or adoption).” Figuratively, the word refers to anyone sharing the same nature as their Father. **Huios** signifies someone who is of full age. Paul is saying here that under law, the individual was a minor and was therefore under a guardian. Now, under grace, the individual has attained to the status of an adult son, and has therefore outgrown the surveillance of his former guardian.

In **Romans 8:14-17**, Paul writes the following to the believers in Rome:

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Newell, makes the following remarks in respect of this passage:

“Let us look first at the words ‘sons of God’; and second at what is meant by being ‘led by the Spirit’; third, let us see that our being thus in the Spirit’s sphere and control is the proof of the reality of our sonship.

1. ‘Sons’ means ‘adult-sons,’ sons come of age...The term, when referring to saints, is applied in Paul’s epistles both to Christ...and to those associated with Him since His resurrection...therefore to His own saints, sealed by the Spirit...

2. Being ‘led by the Spirit’ does not refer here to service, nor to ‘guidance’ in particular paths. **It refers to that general control by the blessed Spirit of those born of the Spirit, living by the Spirit, in the Spirit.** He is the sphere and mode of their being, and is their seal unto the day of redemption.

3. That our being thus in the Spirit’s sphere and control is the proof of the reality of our sonship, is evident from what has been said; **but let us avoid the thought that assurance of our sonship is based on our perfect obedience to the Spirit. Nothing is based upon us.** If one of God’s true saints disobeys, it is the office of that same Spirit to

convict him of his sin, interceding in Him 'according to God' (**Romans 8:27**), while Christ intercedes for him above (**1 John 2:1**)."

Every individual who is truly a son of God, has the Holy Spirit indwelling him or her, and will prove the genuineness of his or her profession of faith by yielding to the guiding and enabling of the Spirit of God. His or her obedience will certainly not be perfect, but the general direction of his or her life, will be increasingly God-ward. From the time of his or her conversion, the **position** of a believer is entirely secure. But **full** conformity to the image of Jesus Christ will be attained only when the Lord returns and believers are glorified.

While one might say that God is the Father of all people in a **general** sense because, according to **Acts 17:24**, He, "*made the world and everything in it,*" and in verse **28**, "*we are indeed his offspring,*" not every created being can rightly refer to God as their Father. In fact in **1 John 3:8**, the apostle explains that, "*Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.*" It is only those who have put their faith in Christ Jesus who can rightly say that they are spiritual children of God the Father.

John emphasizes this point in chapter **1** and verses **10-13** of his Gospel:

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

From the perspective of the Bible, which of course reflects God's perspective, there are only two "families" on the earth-the "family" comprised of those who believe in Christ Jesus and the "family"

comprised of those who do not. There are only two “races” on the earth, for every human being is either a Jew or a Gentile. However every individual in these two “races” belongs either to the family of God or the family of the devil. In other words, every person who has ever lived is either a child of God and an heir to the kingdom of God, by virtue of placing their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, or they are a child of the devil based on the fallen, unregenerate nature they inherited from their Federal head and representative Adam, and the sins which they themselves have committed.

When the “sons” of Israel were placed under the Law, they received a spirit of bondage and fear. But according to **Romans 8:15**, believers, *“did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba!”* And yet a great many genuine believers live in fear and bondage, and not in the liberty of the sons of God because they have placed themselves under the Mosaic Law, or some other legalistic principle. In this regard, these believers are like the people of the world, who fear Christ and consider Him to be a hard taskmaster. How sad!

It is important for us to understand that the freedom that is in Christ means deliverance from “trying to be good” in order to be accepted by Him. Believing sinners are accepted freely by God on account of Christ’s sacrifice and they are placed in Him Risen. He or she already has an eternally secure standing in grace. It is a standing that is his or hers by a sovereign act of God, which has not only reckoned to him or her the atoning work of Christ, but has placed him or her in the place of Christ’s present acceptance with God! The believer today lives after the Cross, and in the full right and power of all that Jesus Christ accomplished for him or her there. Not only are our sins put away forever by His blood, but because we are reckoned as being crucified with Christ, our sinful history in Adam over and all our future is in Christ!

Neither the Mosaic Law, nor any other system of rule-keeping has anything to say to a son of God! The way to God is **believing**, not **behaving**!

How are we to live in light of this glorious reality? **Newell**, provides the following insightful answer:

"If you had been in heaven fifty years, and were then sent down by God to earth to live and witness for fifty years, then to be taken back to Heaven:-how would you live? Would you fall under daily doubt as to whether you should count yourself as belonging to Heaven? Would you not, rather, be a constant witness, both in walk and word, that you really belonged in and to Heaven?"

Now God says He has 'made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him **in the heavenlies** in Christ Jesus' (**Ephesians 2:5-6**). Are you going to try to add to that glorious heavenly calling the Law,-that was given to Israel down here on earth to make them know their sin? A Law under which God says you are NOT? May God forbid such folly in any of us! For we all tend toward it."

Philip Graham Ryken, makes the following comments with which we will conclude our Lesson this evening:

"When it comes to personal identity, the first thing to know is who the father is. So the apostle Paul establishes the Christian's paternity: 'for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith' (**Galatians 3:26**). **If you know Jesus Christ, then you know who you are, because you know to whom you belong.** A Christian is a child of God. Back in verse 7 Paul said that every believer is a child of Abraham. Now he takes it one step further: every believer is a son or a daughter of the Most High God.

This is the climax of Paul's argument. He has just finished explaining how the law is a pedagogue for underage children. But eventually children outgrow their need for a guardian, so the law lasts only until the coming of Christ. Now we have the full rights of sons and daughters. We are no longer 'minors,' under the restraint of a tutor, but sons of God and heirs of His glorious kingdom, enjoying the status and privileges of grown-up sons."