

The Law or Christ?

Galatians 3: 23-29

Our text today continues the theme Paul has discussed throughout the letter. He continues to argue against the doctrine of the Judaizers. Granted, some who embrace this doctrine would argue that faith in Christ was essential for acceptance to God and forgiveness of sin, but they also believed that human effort was necessary as well. Along with faith in Christ, the Judaizers argued that one must meet the standards revealed in the law to be found pleasing to God. Such doctrine was, and remains dangerous because it adds human effort as a requirement for salvation in addition to faith in the finished work of Christ.

Now, I will argue that God desires His people to live uprightly before Him. We are expected to seek the ways of God, fleeing the lusts of the flesh, and resisting the temptations of the enemy. However, our salvation is not dependent upon our ability to do these things. We strive to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord because of our salvation, not in an effort to secure or maintain our salvation.

Paul makes a practical application for our lives regarding the two covenants within the text. One will either trust wholly in Christ by faith, or one will seek to keep the commandments of the law. As we discuss the [contrasts](#) between the covenants, I want to consider the question: [The Law or Christ?](#)

I. A Description of the Law (23-24) – Here Paul offers a simple and yet thorough description of the law and its application for the believer. Notice:

A. The Restriction (23) – [But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.](#) This reveals the restrictive nature of the law. Prior to coming to faith in Christ, we were kept under the law, being shut up unto the faith. The law has no ability to liberate those who are in bondage to sin. In fact, the law keeps one in bondage. The law cannot save. It serves two primary purposes – to reveal the holy righteousness of God, and to reveal the utter depravity of mankind. The law shows us who God is and who we are. It reveals the great divide between fallen humanity and the righteous God. *Every human being either continuously lives as a captive slave chained under the judgment of God's immutable, universal law, the demands of which he must pay by eternal death and hell, or he lives by faith as utterly free from judgment (Rom. 8:1) as a redeemed child of God under His sovereign and eternal grace.*¹

➤ Every believer endured in this condemned state, revealed by the very law that kept them bound, until faith was revealed. Faith would liberate once revealed and received.

B. The Discipline (24) – [Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.](#) Paul revealed the way in which the law revealed faith to those bound under its demands. Again, this proves the law was never intended to save. The law was used to serve as a schoolmaster, a *tutor*, whose focus was to bring us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith. Such tutors were common in Paul's day. These were often trusted slaves who were entrusted with supervising children on behalf of their parents. *They took their young charges to and from school, made sure they studied their lessons, and trained them in obedience. They were strict disciplinarians, scolding and whipping as they felt it necessary.*ⁱⁱ

➤ It was never intended for the tutor to serve continually with the child. The goal was for the child to learn wisdom and discipline through the guidance of the tutor and be set free from his care. So, it is with the law of God. The law was given to guide and discipline one in the faith. It was never given for one to remain in indefinitely. The outside demands are replaced with the indwelling Spirit. Once conversion happens by faith in Christ, the believer is set free from the bondage of the law. The law serves its purpose; but what it could never accomplish, Christ fulfilled on our behalf. I am thankful to be delivered from the bondage of the law and set free in Christ! [Heb.7:19 – For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.](#)

II. The Liberation in Christ (25-29) – Having revealed the bondage associated with the law, Paul then revealed the liberation secured in Christ. Consider:

A. Our Adoption (25-26) – [But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.](#) ²⁶ [For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.](#) Having been liberated from bondage in Christ, we have been set free from the schoolmaster of the law, and the law itself. We no longer are bound under the strict and harsh care of one defending the law; we have been brought in under grace. The law cried out for justice, and by faith we have received grace, which offers mercy.

➤ We are no longer separated by sin and condemned by the law; we have become the children of God by faith in Christ. We have been adopted into the family, never to be disinherited or removed. Our care has switched from one approved by the Father to the Father Himself. We no longer have to see the Father through types, pictures, illustrations, and law – we have the privilege of a personal relationship with the Father as His dear children. [Rom.8:14-15 – For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.](#) ¹⁵ [For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.](#)

B. Our Justification (27) – [For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.](#)

Paul speaks of the believer being baptized into Christ. He is not referring to water baptism, but the baptism that occurs at the moment of salvation. The old self, filled with sin and condemnation dies, and the believer is resurrected unto eternal life in Christ. We are transformed in an instant.

➤ Paul further describes this transformation with the believer “putting on Christ.” This speaks of our being clothed in His righteousness. Isn’t that a beautiful thought? One unworthy of God’s grace, being bound and condemned by the law, is transformed in an instant, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We are viewed according to His righteousness. We have been justified in the eyes of God – literally declared righteous. Such a transformation was not brought about through adherence to the law or works of the flesh. This transformation was obtained through faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. [Rom.6:14 – For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.](#)

C. Our Identification (28) – [There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.](#) Our salvation results in a complete and total transformation – we are made one in Christ. We are no longer identified by our past, our social or racial status, nor our gender. We have been made the children of God, united together in Christ. We now are identified as being in Christ, the children of God, the redeemed and saved by grace through faith in Him!

➤ This doesn’t imply that one loses his/her personal identity, but that all former prejudices and tendencies are erased. There is no place for these identities within the body of Christ. We are no longer separated by the boundaries and divisions that exist in this world, but we are united in Christ, eternally belonging to the family of God. [Eph.4:3-7 – Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.](#) ⁴ [There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;](#) ⁵ [One Lord, one faith, one baptism,](#) ⁶ [One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.](#) ⁷ [But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.](#)

D. Our Validation (28) – [And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.](#) Here Paul made a profound point regarding the debate of the Judaizers. They claimed the promise and blessing of Abraham, and yet they refused to receive salvation by faith in Christ alone. This promise rested in the blessing of the coming Christ, the one who provided salvation for all races of people. Being the seed of Abraham did not rest in being in the physical bloodline of Abraham, but having received the spiritual promise made to him regarding Christ. Those in Christ are the true descendants of Abraham.

➤ By virtue of being in Christ, and thus Abraham's seed, we are heirs of the promise. As we have discussed, Christ fulfilled the promise made to Abraham. So, that begs the question – what is the promise we have received through our inheritance? It is the salvation obtained by faith in Christ and eternal life that accompanies our salvation. We have been resurrected from the deadness of sin, to life in Christ, with the promise of eternal life with Him. His great sacrifice secured our salvation and reconciliation to God. We are heirs of the promise, granted eternal life in the presence of Christ and the Father. Eph.1:13-14 *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,*¹⁴ *Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.* Titus 3:5-7 – *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*⁶ *Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;*⁷ *That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

Conclusion: Each of us have been or continue to be under the bondage of the law. It was never intended to save, but to reveal our need for a Savior. Coming to Christ by faith in His finished work on the cross to secure our salvation is the only way to be liberated from the law of sin and death. He has secured salvation and righteousness for all who will come to Him by faith. Have you responded by faith unto salvation? *“We cannot come to Christ to be justified until we have first been to Moses to be condemned. But once we have gone to Moses, and acknowledged our sin, guilt and condemnation, we must not stay there. We must let Moses send us to Christ,”* John Stott.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 94.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 96.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Stott, (*The Message of Galatians* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1968), p. 102.