



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 3: 23-29

Spring 2021

"Why The Law"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are in the Book of Galatians this morning, as we have been for the past few weeks. We are in chapter 3, and we're going to look at the rest of the chapter, verses 23 through 29. Paul is explaining the function of the Law. We begin in verse 23 with "But before faith came" [and when he speaks of that, that may be a little confusing, because faith came from the very beginning. But this is a reference to faith in Christ. So really, before the incarnation, before Christ came, before we came to know the Gospel specifically as related to Him. "Before faith came" (in Christ)...],

²³ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.

Galatians 3:23-29

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word.

(Message) Important discussions and debates always raise important questions; such as, 'If God is sovereign, why pray?' Well in Galatians, Paul is teaching on justification by faith, apart from the works of the Law, and that raised the question— 'Then why the Law?' Paul has been answering that question in the second half of Galatians, chapter 3. He has stated that the Law adds nothing to a person's salvation— and proved that from Scripture, and also from the Galatians' own experience. 'Look back on your life', he said, 'How did you receive the Holy Spirit?' They had received the message of the Gospel and received the Spirit of God through faith—and faith alone. And this was well before they heard this new message from the Judaizers.

But if that is so, (and this is the question I think that the Judaizers were raising), 'Why the Law, then? If it doesn't save, why did God give it?' And Paul answered that by explaining that it was given to expose sin and show the need of salvation. In verse 22 he said, 'It was like a judge that has "shut up" all men "under sin." ' The Law is not a liberator—it is an incarcerator. It condemns and confines, and it gives no escape to the guilty.

To emphasize this work of the Law Paul changes the picture slightly in verse 23. Instead of describing the Law as our judge, he describes it as our jailer; "But before faith came", he writes, meaning before faith specifically in Jesus Christ came, "we were kept in custody under the law..."

Men of course, have always been saved through faith. Abraham is the great example of that. Paul is not speaking here of faith in general but the particular faith in Christ that followed upon the Incarnation. Before He came, before faith was centered in Christ, before Christian faith and during the Old Testament era, the age of the Law, we were kept "in custody under the law". The Law surrounded men with obligations that they cannot keep, like guards that surround a prisoner's cell. The result was, the Law gave men a sense of hopeless imprisonment.

In fact, this expression "kept in custody" was used by Paul of his own experience early in his ministry when he was hunted down in the city of Damascus. He speaks of it in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 32. He wrote that Aretas, the king, was guarding the city. He posted guards all around the city to prevent escape. Paul escaped only by being lowered "in a basket through a window in the wall." But the Law has no windows or doors for escape from the condemnation. It confines everyone within the walls of its rules and regulations. It exposes our failure and guilt—and there's no way out.

There's an illustration of that from a story by Edgar Allan Poe, *The Pit and the Pendulum*. Some of you probably read that when you were young, as I did. It's a story of a condemned man, a victim of the Spanish Inquisition who wakes up after his trial in a dark dungeon. In fact there's no light, he can't see anything. So to get his bearings he stretches out his hands and he begins to find the wall and feel his way around it. And as he does that he realizes there's no opening, there's no way out—just this hard, damp wall that he feels. And as he realizes the hopelessness of his situation, that there is no escape, that he's doomed, terror overtakes him.

Now that's the function of the Law. It closes off all doors of escape and gives a sense of hopelessness by showing people their guilt—but not giving them the solution—which leads to despair. But it is that despair that leads to hope, that alerts people to their desperate condition, their need of salvation, and causes a desire within them for deliverance.

That's how Paul explains it. Men were being 'shut up' under the Law to the faith which was later to be revealed. In other words, the function of the Law was to prepare people; specifically to prepare Israel because the Law was given to Israel. It was their constitution to prepare them for the coming of Christ by giving them a longing for the Savior. And the prophets spoke of the Savior to come. The Old Testament gave that hope, but the Law itself, in its rules and regulations, did not. So while the Law was like a stern jailer, it was really a good friend after all. It shut men up to faith by keeping them from escaping to a false freedom of self-righteousness.

That was the function of the Law and, historically, how it worked in Israel. But the function of the Law can also be seen in the personal experience of the believer who abandons all attempts to establish a righteous standing of his or her own, and instead looks to the Savior, looks to Christ.

John Bunyan illustrated that at the beginning of *Pilgrim's Progress*. (I know most of you are familiar with this famous scene), Christian is in his home in the city of destruction and he's in despair and he's weeping because of a heavy burden of sin that he feels on his back. And he knows that destruction is coming and he has no way of escape—and he is guilty. And that's when he meets a man named Evangelist, who points him to a small gate in the distance where he would be delivered of his burden. And Christian flees the city and he heads toward the gate.

But as so often happens in the story, he gets sidetracked. And he gets sidetracked to Mount Sinai where the burden doesn't get easier. The burden, in fact, gets heavier upon him. Evangelist finds him, again, gets him back on the path to the gate where he came to the cross. And you know the great scene: He sees the cross—the burden falls off his back. Down it tumbles into a sepulcher and is never seen again. Gone forever is the burden of sin through the cross.

The Law threatens death and strikes fear. It doesn't give relief from guilt. But in that way, the Law acts as a friend, because it turns us away from the works of it, the idea of a works salvation, and turns us to Christ.

Now Paul develops that idea further in verse 24 where he changes the picture again, from the Law as a jailer and a jail, to that of a tutor—a teacher. He writes, "Therefore, the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith." The word 'tutor' is a translation of the Greek word *paidagogos*. We get our word pedagogue from it and, for us, a pedagogue is a teacher. And this idea is reflected in the translation, 'tutor', and is in the translation that the King James version gives, 'schoolmaster'. But for the Romans, a pedagogue was less a teacher than a

guardian or disciplinarian; and who was often a slave. So, the word often meant 'slave guardian'.

In many wealthy Roman and Greek homes, a slave would be appointed to watch over a child in the family. And from the time the child left the care of the nurse until he reached maturity ... and these ages were usually something like 6 to 16 ... the slave would accompany the boy wherever he went and teach him good manners. He would take him to school and wait there in a special room for the tutors; or even wait for him in the classroom itself. Then he would take the child home and test his memory, making him recite the lesson that he had just learned. He would make sure that he ate his dinner, that he went to bed on time, got up earlier than he wanted to.

Wherever the child went, the pedagogue went—to protect the child and to discipline the child—to keep him in line. In fact, some ancient drawings depict the pedagogue with a rod or a cane in his hand that he would use. So he was like a babysitter who governed and restricted the conduct of the child with scoldings and whippings. It was not an easy relationship. And sometimes children would rebel. And there are cases cited where the children would beat up the pedagogue.

But it wasn't a permanent relationship. When the boy became a man he gained his freedom. And his relationship to the pedagogue changed completely. The pedagogue might have disciplined the boy the day before—but the day he became a man, the day he 'came of age', it all changed. Then the boy was the master and the pedagogue just a slave with no authority over him at all.

Well Paul found in that institution an illustration of the Law. God gave it to Israel as a temporary system, like a slave—a pedagogue or tutor—to supervise his life—to supervise the life of the nation; His children. Its rules and regulations directed and controlled behavior. It didn't give life. The Law doesn't give life. It restricted life. By its punishments it reminded people of their condition. It reminded people of their sin and guilt. It was hard. And Paul tells us that—Peter tells us that. They both called it 'a yoke'. It was like a heavy burden that people carry on their shoulders and caused them to be dissatisfied with their condition and with their lives.

I think an example of that is seen in the rich young ruler that we see in the Gospels. He misunderstood the Law's function. He thought he could gain acceptance with God, gain acceptable righteousness by observing the Law, and even thought that he'd kept the Law. But still, even with that misunderstanding, the Law had done a work in his life because he wasn't satisfied. That's the reason he came to Jesus. He knew that there was something missing and so he asked for that one thing else that he needed to do that was missing. But that's what the Law did. It left a person unsatisfied, sensing something was missing and longing for it; for freedom.

But there was no escape from it, not in the Law. Not until Christ came. Historically, 1500 years after the reign of the Law began that system ended governing the people of God. And personally, for the believer, its condemnation ends at the moment of faith in Christ. That Law has served its purpose when that happens. The Law served its purpose; as Paul puts it, "*...to lead us to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith.*" (vs24). As Luther said, "With its whippings, the Law draws us to Christ."

But then the whippings stop, the yoke is removed, the Law's control ends—that's what Paul says in verse 25, "...we are no longer under a tutor." Now Paul is saying more than 'Everyone who believes in Christ is delivered from the condemnation of the Law.' That's important, that is true, but that's not really Paul's meaning here. He's explaining the function of the Law of Moses in history, and is stressing that since Christ has come, the reign of the Law has ended for those who believe.

The Law was given as a temporary measure. Just as the pedagogue was appointed for a limited period of time in a child's life, so too the Law was appointed for a limited period of time in history. The age of the Law of Moses was a parenthetical age that lasted, as I said, about 1500 years, from Moses to Christ. It was for the purpose of preparing Israel for the LORD's coming. Now that He has come, the Law has served its purpose and its rules are no longer binding on the people of God.

It still has authority as God's Word. We still learn from it. We profit from reading and studying the Law. But it's not the rule of life for the Church as it was for Israel. It was their constitution. It's not our constitution, because believers have 'come of age'. As Paul

explains in verse 26, 'with the coming of faith' in Christ, meaning this new age of Christian faith, believers become "sons".

And that new status marks a significant change. It's like the change that occurred in the life of a Roman boy when he came of age and became a man. He was not just a child in the house—he was a son with all of the privileges of the household, all of the family privileges. It was a great day in the life of a young man. The change brought with it new responsibilities—but also with those responsibilities, new freedoms. It was a moment that the child longed for as he lived his life under the guidance and the discipline of the slave, the pedagogue. That's what happens spiritually to the believer in Christ. We become sons in God's household, with new privileges and new responsibilities. We're free in Christ.

So, to go back to the problem that the Galatians were having in their situation, and that Paul is addressing here: To put oneself under the Law is not an advance. It's not spiritual progression—it's spiritual regression. It's like an adult putting himself back under the care of his childhood babysitter. It's like a man who has been freed from prison returning there to live in his old cell.

I'm reading a biography of George Herman Ruth—'Babe Ruth'. He died, I think about four months before I was born, but he has been the iconic figure of baseball. He had a rough beginning. He was an incorrigible child, so his father put him in a school, St. Mary's, an orphanage. His biographer called it "an incarceration". He lived a lot of his childhood behind the walls of that institution and under the strict rules of it from his childhood and through almost all of his teens. They wore uniforms, were in bed by eight o'clock, up by six in the morning, in class by 7:30. They had one hour of recreation. But it was there that he really learned to play baseball. And then when he signed a contract to play ... I think he was 19 when he did ... things changed. His biographer wrote, "He was free." After all those years he was finally out of the cage and nobody was ever going to get him into one again.

That was the Law's purpose. That's the function of the Law. Now imagine if he had walked out of Yankee Stadium, the house that Ruth built, and went back to St. Mary's to live behind its walls and play on its small field. Fans would have thought him crazy.

Well that was the Galatians. Paul called them "foolish Galatians" for wanting to do that very thing; in fact, he couldn't understand it. Or he expressed his bemusement; he calls them 'bewitched', "Who hath bewitched you?" (vs1). They were like adults who wanted to be children again, who wanted to give up their privileges and return to the nursery.

The people of God today are sons. All of us are sons. It's what Paul says, "For you are all sons..." (vs26). Jews, Gentiles, all are who believe. Daughters are too. Male, female, we are "sons". We have sonship, and all the privileges of that. We don't obtain that privilege through circumcision or law-keeping. It is, "...through faith in Christ Jesus.", (vs26), Paul says, because faith joins us to Christ, who is the eternal Son of God.

That union with Christ is the basis of our sonship because when we believe in Him we were justified—at that moment of faith. We are incorporated into Christ; we are united with Him at that very moment—instantaneously and completely.

Paul explains this union with Christ further in verse 27 where he describes it as baptism, "For...you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Now this is not water baptism that he's referring to. Faith, not water, is the means of being joined to Christ. Baptism was a way of describing the believer's identification with Christ and union with Christ.

There is an example of this idea of baptism in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verse 1-2, where Paul describes Israel's exodus from Egypt with the same wording used here. He writes, "...our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." That doesn't mean they all got wet together with Moses in the sea. They didn't. They walked over on dry ground. Being "baptized into Moses" means being joined to him, being identified with him. Before the exodus the Israelites were under the tyranny of Pharaoh. They had to obey him. They

had to make bricks. It was cruel. At the exodus, Moses became their leader and they were permanently under his authority.

Here in Galatians 3 Paul is saying, 'all who have believed in Christ have been united with Him,' ... baptized into Christ...' (vs26). We are under His authority. And Paul adds, they have been 'clothed with Christ'. It's a statement or description that may have been taken from a Hebrew tradition of changing clothes to represent an inward, spiritual change. It's very similar to what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 61, verse 10. "...He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness..." Later, in chapter 64, Isaiah describes "all our righteous deeds", meaning all our attempts at goodness and obedience, he describes them as being "like a filthy garment." (vs6).

We cannot produce righteousness that is acceptable to God. We don't have that ability within ourselves. It's like wearing a grimy robe. It doesn't satisfy. It's got to be put off. And we need to change; we need a change of spiritual clothing, so to speak—and everyone does as they enter into this world. We need to be clothed in righteousness, but it's not a righteousness of our own, because we can't produce it. We need a righteousness that is not our own, a righteousness of another.

And that's what Paul is describing here, the righteousness of Christ that we receive through faith in Him—and through faith alone in Him. That's justification—being declared righteous.

Paul may have been thinking in his mind of the Roman custom describing this change, (which the Galatians would have been very familiar with), a custom that fits well this teaching on the pedagogue. When a Roman youth reached adulthood and officially became a man and no longer was under the authority of his pedagogue, he went through a ceremony, somewhat like a Jewish boy's bar mitzvah. He would remove the little toga that came just over his knees and had a crimson border on the hem. That was the garment of childhood. He put that off and put on the long, white toga of manhood, signifying that he had come of age.

It marked a great change, as we saw earlier. The child was now a young man. He was no longer under the authority of the slave guardian. He was free from his

restrictions. He was accepted into the family as a son, with all of the rights and the privileges and responsibilities of the family.

That's what happens to every believer in Jesus Christ; we are clothed with Christ, and God accepts us into His family as sons, with all the rights and privileges of sons. When God looks at His Son, when He looks at Jesus Christ, He sees His elect people in Him, gathered together in Him. We are all in Christ Jesus. When He sees us He sees Christ. When He sees us He sees Christ's righteousness. That's the result of faith. And it is the position of every believer in Jesus Christ—without exception, without distinction. And there is no 'second class citizen' in the church. We are all equal in Christ.

That's the point that Paul makes in verse 28 where he deals with three fundamental distinctions or divisions in ancient society. "There is neither Jew nor Greek," he writes, "there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

All believers are equally united to Christ and in Christ regardless of race, society, or sex. As one Asian commentator put it, "These distinctions are covered up by the garment of Christ." Well that's good news—and that was good news for the Galatians. The Law made distinctions and divisions between individuals and nations, between slave and freemen, between men and women, Jews and Gentiles. Society made those divisions.

The world was full of slaves who were considered to be nothing more than property. Women were not treated much better. Gentiles hated Jews and looked down on them as unsophisticated and anti-social. Jews looked down on Gentiles as religious pariahs. They called them "dogs". But in Christ, those attitudes are changed, and these distinctions are removed.

That doesn't mean there are no distinctions—that they cease to exist upon conversion. The Jew who believed in Christ was still a Jew by race and so were the Gentiles. Men and women, obviously, continued to be male and female. Social distinctions continue. Neither was Paul eliminating the distinctions in authority—that

husbands and wives in the family, or male leadership in the church, it still exists. He teaches that very thing in other books. In 1 Corinthians 14, and in 1 Timothy chapter 2. Men and women are equal in essence, but different in function. That's the point.

In fact, we have a good illustration of that from 1 Corinthians 11 in verse 3 where Paul speaks of the Trinity. And he writes there, "...Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head Christ." Well that's significant. The Father is the head of the Son. Well, both are equal in essence; the Son isn't less divine than the Father. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all equally of the same essence. But there is a hierarchy in function. And that's true between the husband and the wife in marriage. That's true between men and women in the church, at least in terms of office.

Paul's not speaking about function here, but about standing before God—our relationship with God. Race and gender don't change in Christ. Status may not change either, but those things are of no value or handicap to us in our relationship with God. Regardless of our differences, Christians are spiritually equal with the same status before God, equal access to God, and are heirs equally of the promises given to Abraham. And that is true for all in the same way—through faith alone in Christ, 'apart from the Law.' (Rom 3:28).

Believers are "one in Christ Jesus" (vs 28), Paul says. And being in Him we participate in His life. We have a new, spiritual, supernatural ability to live the life that's before us. The Law didn't give that; God's promise and grace gave that. It's what Christ spoke of in His analogy of the vine and the branches in John chapter 15. Just as a branch draws life from the vine that it is in and produces fruit, so too we draw life from Christ by being in Him, by being joined to Him, and His life transforms us. We become like Him with His mind and attitude.

That's where healing is. It is what enables people to overcome the natural barriers that we have, the prejudice that is endemic in human nature, so that the Jew

and the Gentile accept each other as brothers. That was a radical transformation that occurred in society, within the church, within Christ.

Well, Paul concludes in verse 29 with a final result of that relationship with Christ, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." Christ is the heir to the promise made to Abraham. He is Abraham's seed, as Paul stated earlier in verse 16. Therefore, if we are united with Him, then we are united with His promises and we are his descendants. We are Abraham's descendants. We are in Christ and His brothers and sisters—and sons of God.

In Romans 11, verse 17, Paul spoke of believing Gentiles as being "grafted in" to Israel's olive tree, where we partake of its rich root. We partake, we participate in all of the great promises that were given to Abraham. They're ours as well. So every believer in Jesus Christ, "...from every tribe and people and tongue and nation..." (Rev 5:9), is fully accepted by God now and makes all of us equal heirs to the kingdom to come.

And we have immeasurable blessings now. We have a glorious future. That's certainly stated there. We have a glorious future, all of us together. But we also have immeasurable blessings right now in this life. We have spiritual life. We have eternal life, and it's due to the full acceptance that we have with God—now. An equal heir of the kingdom. We are sons, we are heirs. We have the privilege now of sonship in God's family. We have the love of the LORD and protection and guidance in this world.

That's something the world doesn't have. This is a dangerous place to live. Every moment is full of dangers that we can't even see. But He protects us, and we have freedom. And it is for that freedom that the Law was given—to incarcerate us, as it were, in order to lead us to Christ. It was a heavy yoke on men's necks but Christ is the end of that. He invites the weary and heavy laden to come to Him, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me...for My yoke is easy and My load is light." (Mat 11:29-30).

Well, have you done that? Have you come to Christ? Have you believed in Him? He alone is the way. And freedom and the kingdom to come is in Him and Him alone. If not, we invite you to turn to Him.

And we who have, we who have believed in Christ as our Savior, by God's grace, may we never turn back, (like those Galatians contemplated doing), but go forward with Christ as sons and daughters of God. He has given us a glorious future. He's given us a blessed present. So, may we live that life by faith and obedience to Him. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for this text of Scripture. We thank You for the simple truth that it sets before us. The Law had a function.

Why the Law? Well, it was to convict us of sin. It was to show us our condition, our need of the Savior. It couldn't give us the Savior. It didn't show us the way of salvation in and of itself. But the Scriptures do predict the One who would, from the very beginning. From before the Law was given we had the promise of the Redeemer to come. And from the beginning, as we see in Abraham, the reception of that Savior and the life that is in Him was through faith and faith alone.

And we thank You for the free gift of life in Christ. Thank You for Him, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

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