

LIVING BY LAW VS. LIVING BY FAITH
GALATIANS 3:23-29

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

In 63 BC Pompey brought Asia Minor, including Galatia (PROJECTOR ON--- GALATIA), into the Roman Empire. But it was Caesar Augustus who really established Roman control and government over what we call today Turkey. Augustus is regarded by some historians as the greatest of the Roman emperors. It was Augustus who is credited with establishing the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace. It was Caesar Augustus who was ruling over Rome when a baby boy was born in the little town of Bethlehem.

In Galatia and other provinces in Asia Minor towns built statues and even temples to honor Augustus. He was the first of the emperors to call himself a god and to be treated as such. In that polytheistic culture it was no big deal for most people to add another god to their list of gods to be worshiped.

So it was at Priene (PRIENE MAP) in Asia Minor where residents sought to honor Caesar Augustus. Archaeologists in this place discovered an inscription chiseled in to rock honoring the emperor. (PRIENE INSCRIPTION) Written in Greek capital letters the inscription reads like this: **“Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (excelled even our anticipations), surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of *euangelion*--- gospel--- good news--- for the world that came by reason of him...”**

Historian Tom Holland, in a recent book entitled *Dominion* (p. 82), (PROJECTOR OFF) writes, **“Only the Jews, with their stiff-necked insistence that there existed just a single god, refused as a matter of principle to join in acknowledging the divinity of Augustus; and so perhaps it was no surprise, in the decades that followed the building to him of temples across Galatia, that the visitor there most subversive of his cult should have been a Jew.”** It was this Jew, the Apostle Paul, who brought a different *euangelion*, a different gospel, about a different god, about the God above all gods to the province of Galatia. It was he who proclaimed that God had sent His Son to become a human being to die on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of the world that whoever would believe in Him might have eternal life.

We face a similar challenge in our culture today as did the Galatians in the first century. The temptation is to treat government as a god. For we look to government to care for us in our old age and in our situations of joblessness. We look to government to protect

us. We look to government to teach our kids. We look to government to provide for our medical care and to protect us from disease. We look to government to give us peace. But there is only One who can meet our deepest needs.

We have seen in our study of the New Testament Book of Galatians that the Apostle Paul has been addressing Christians, mostly Gentiles, who lived in the Roman province of Galatia. There were Jews who claimed to be Christians who were trying to tell these Gentile Christians that in order to be right with God they not only had to believe in Jesus but also to become Jewish and to follow the law of Moses. In #3 of this book Paul has been talking about limitations of the law. Beginning in v. 23 we pick up on his argument.

I.

In vv. 23 & 24 of #3 Paul says that LIVING BY LAW PRODUCES RESTRICTIONS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. LIVING BY LAW PRODUCES RESTRICTIONS) In these two verses the apostle pictures the law, in particular the Old Testament law of Moses, as being like two kinds of people.

A.

First, in v. 23, he pictures the LAW AS A JAILER. (I. LIVING BY LAW... A. LAW AS A JAILER) He writes, **“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.”** Literally, the author says “before the faith came...” He is talking about the Christian faith. The “we” is the people of God, especially the Jews.

Before the coming of Jesus the situation is compared to confinement, and the law is pictured as a kind of jailer. The verb for “held captive” is used elsewhere in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians #11 v. 32. Paul is talking about the time earlier in his life when he was a new Christian and the king of Nabatea tried to capture him. (2 CORINTHIANS 11:32) The text says, **“At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me...”** The king had Paul guarded, or confined.

So for the Jewish people the law of Moses was a kind of jailer. It confined the Jews in terms of their behavior. (PROJECTOR OFF) They had a lot of do’s and don’ts. They had dietary restrictions. They had Sabbath day restrictions. They had limits on their behavior. All of these restrictions were off-putting to the Gentiles. In order to get close to the true God, they had to become Jewish.

Paul was writing to Christians who were mostly Gentiles. He quoted the Book of Genesis and cited Abraham who believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. So salvation has always been by grace through faith. But if Gentiles wanted to cultivate an ongoing relationship with the true God, they had to submit to the law of Moses. That meant that men had to be circumcised. Gentile believers had to observe the Jewish feasts and follow what the rabbis said were the 365 commandments in the Old Testament.

The law was like a jailer. But Gentile Christians in the Roman Empire would have realized that there was something different about jails and prisons in the first century. Unlike in the US, prisons in the Roman Empire were always places of temporary confinement. Convicted criminals were never sentenced to long terms in prison. Prisons were for holding people before their trials. Once a judge ruled on the case, prisoners were either freed, or executed, or whipped, or fined, or sent into exile. So perhaps there is a hint in this jailer terminology that the law of Moses was never intended to be a permanent arrangement.

B.

Then in v. 24 Paul pictures LAW AS A GUARDIAN. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. A. B. LAW AS A GUARDIAN) He writes, **“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.”**

The word that Paul uses for “guardian” is the equivalent of our English word “pedagogue.” We don’t use that word very much. But it basically means “teacher” in English. You might find a class in college where “pedagogy” appears in the title of the course. It means “the study of teaching.”

In the first century Roman world a pedagogue was not a teacher. Originally it was a term and a position used by the Greeks. Then the Romans adopted it, and even the Jews did. It referred to a person in a wealthy household who was often a slave, but sometimes a hired individual. Usually this person was a man who was entrusted with the care of one or two sons in the family. Occasionally there was a female charged with similar responsibility with a daughter in the family.

Typically this pedagogue was assigned to a son when he got to be about seven years old. The pedagogue would stay with him through adolescence. His responsibility was to watch over this son for most of his waking hours. He would make sure that the son was ready for school. He would escort him to school and carry any books or items that needed carrying. He would wait for him outside of the school. He would take him to athletic practices. He would protect him from bullies. He was supposed to keep the kid out of trouble. He would go home with him. He would make sure that he did his homework. He would supervise his social schedule.

Generally the head of the family would want the pedagogue to encourage virtuous behavior in the son. So he would function as a disciplinarian. Some of them could be harsh. Some were gentle. There are stories of some pedagogues who laid down their lives for their charges. Often they functioned as surrogate dads. Some were loved by the kids in their charge. Sometimes they were not very well liked. Sometimes the pedagogues who were slaves would be freed when the sons reached the age of maturity.

But the whole point and reason for existence of these pedagogues was to prepare the sons for adulthood. Then they were done with their responsibility.

So Paul is saying that the Mosaic law was like this pedagogue. It was designed to prepare the people of God for adulthood. One of the key parts of the Mosaic law was animal sacrifices. The first part of the Old Testament Book of Leviticus describes all of these animal sacrifices that people are supposed to make. You touch a dead body, and you have to go through this procedure which includes an animal sacrifice. The point of all of these detailed laws was to teach the people of God about the seriousness of sin and about the need for a final sacrifice.

In the New Testament the Book of Hebrews makes reference to how priests were involved in this animal sacrifice deal. (HEBREWS 10:11) In Hebrews #10 v. 11 we are told, **“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.”** This is the pedagogy, the guardianship, of the Old Testament law. Then v. 14 in Hebrews #10 (HEBREWS 10:14) describes how Jesus releases the people of God from this guardianship: **“For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”** Jesus becomes the final sacrifice for sin. No more need for animal sacrifices. That restrictive guardianship of the law is done away with by Jesus.

Some of us may have come from a religious background which had a lot of rules. There were certain things which you could and couldn't do on Sunday. There were certain rituals that you had to follow in church. There were certain activities that were regarded as wrong. There were certain words that you could and couldn't use. Some of this may have served a certain purpose. It may have taught right and wrong, and it may have promoted good values and good behavior. But some of us may have found it to be very restrictive. We may not have found that it really connected us with a God to whom we wanted to be connected with.

Pilgrim's Progress is a classic allegory written in the 1600s by John Bunyan. It tells the story about Christian who sets out to get to the Heavenly City. Along the way he encounters various temptations that get him off of the right path. He also carries a heavy burden on his back. At one stop Christian encounters a man named Worldly Wisdom. Worldly Wisdom tells Christian that he needs to visit Mr. Legality in the city of Morality. Worldly Wisdom promises Christian that Mr. Legality will relieve Christian of the burden on his back.

On the way to the city of Morality Christian approaches Mt. Sinai. There are flashes of lightning and claps of thunder that come from above the mountain. As he gets closer to Mt. Sinai, the burden on his back seems to get heavier and heavier. The mountain threatens to crush those who pass by. Fortunately Mr. Evangelist comes along and convinces Christian to turn away from Mt. Sinai and get back on the path to the Heavenly City. A bit further along the way Christian passes Mt. Calvary. There the straps on the burden on his back are suddenly broken, and Christian is freed from his burden. Such is what happens when our bondage to the law is broken.

II.A.

(PROJECTOR ON--- II. LIVING BY FAITH PRODUCES BLESSINGS) In vv. 25-29 of our passage we learn that LIVING BY FAITH PRODUCES BLESSINGS. In vv. 25 & 26 we find that the first blessing is NEW FREEDOM. (II. LIVING BY... A. NEW FREEDOM)

The apostle writes in vv. 25 & 26, **“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”**

When the Roman son in a wealthy family reached the age of maturity, he was freed from his pedagogue. There was a coming of age ceremony. As a child he wore a toga praetexta. (TOGA PRAETEXTA). This robe was marked by a crimson border on it. At this ceremony the toga praetexta was exchanged for an all-white toga, the toga virilis. (TOGA VIRILIS) This was the toga worn by adult men. The young man could now enter the counsels of the adult men in the family.

This release from the law of Moses as a pedagogue had special relevance to the Jews. But some Gentiles then and now came from a rules background. (PROJECTOR OFF) This stress upon faith and a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ was designed to produce a certain freedom. Acceptance now comes not from living by a strict code but rather on the basis of faith in Jesus. That produces a new freedom.

In v. 26 Paul speaks of “you all.” He is including Jews and Gentiles. The promise of sonship is given to those who are in Christ Jesus, to those who have put their faith in Him. I explained last week that Paul describes sonship as obtained by adoption. In the Roman legal system a father had almost absolute power over his family. He could kick out any of his kids if he wanted to. But an adopted son could never be kicked out. He was there eternally. Paul is including women as well as men in this promise of sonship.

Earlier in this chapter we saw that Paul argued that the faith connection with Jesus makes us sons of Abraham. Now he says that it makes us sons of God Himself. So this involves the most important decision that we can make in life. In John #8 Jesus is speaking to the religious leaders of His day. He says that people have only two options. In v. 42 He says that if we have God as our father we will love Him. In v. 44 He tells the religious leaders that if they don’t respond to Him, it is evident that their father is the devil. Thus we are either sons of God, or we are sons of the devil. By faith in Jesus we can make sure that we are sons of God.

B.

In vv. 27 & 28 Paul speaks of a NEW IDENTITY. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. A. B. NEW IDENTITY) In v. 27 he writes, **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”** This is the first time in Galatians that Paul speaks of baptism. The term is used in two ways in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to the physical act of water baptism. Sometimes it refers to the spiritual connection with Jesus which physical baptism symbolizes.

Paul has been arguing in this book that it is faith alone in Jesus which saves. He has not mentioned baptism to this point. It was expected, and it was the normal practice in the early times of the church that people would be physically baptized when they became followers of Jesus. It was a public demonstration of faith as we have witnessed it happen this morning.

But the primary thing which baptism symbolizes is unity with Jesus. Thus it is in 1 Corinthians #12 v. 13 (1 CORINTHIANS 12:13) that the Bible says, **“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”**

In much of the early church a tradition developed whereby new Christians at baptism would get rid of an old set of clothes and put on a new set of clothes after they were baptized. This symbolized their new identity in Jesus.

The deeper symbolism is that in becoming Christians we take on the virtues and characteristics of Jesus. (COLOSSIANS 3:12) In Colossians #3 v. 12 Paul urges Christians, **“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...”**

Our identity as Christians should be the most important thing about us. It should be more important than our job, our race, our ethnic background, our family connections, and our gender, all of which may have importance. What gives us eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and a meaningful life is our identity as Christians. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Then in v. 28 we read, **“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.”** These were the three biggest social distinctions in this early Roman culture. They were certainly of great relevance to the early church. The Jewish-Gentile divide was the central issue being addressed in the Galatian letter. The question was: Do Gentiles have to become Jews in order to be right with God?

Part of the cycle of morning prayers for Jewish men, probably going back to the time of the first century, included this: **“Blessed be He that He did not make me a Gentile; blessed be He that He did not make me a boor [i.e. And ignorant peasant or slave]; blessed be He that did not make me a woman.”** (*The Authorized Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Conference of the British Commonwealth of Nations*, 1967, pp. 6-7) So here we have these three social divides.

The context here has to do with our status before God. How are people justified? How do we become sons of Abraham and sons of God? Paul says that we all have the same access. By faith in Jesus we become children of God. We become part of the family of God. We are spiritual brothers and sisters. We are one family.

This does not mean that all distinctions are to be erased. In the New Testament Book of Romans Paul says that God still has special promises that apply to the Jews. Israel still has a part in the future plan of God. In Colossians and Ephesians Paul says that slaves and masters have certain responsibilities. Then in Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, and Titus Paul says that men and women have certain responsibilities and roles in the church and in the family.

In 1987 a group was formed which calls itself Christians for Biblical Equality. These Christians claim that there should be no distinction in the roles that men and women have in Christianity. Men and women should have the same roles in the home and in the church. Women should have just as much authority as men in the home and in the church. Women should be able to be preachers and elders in the church.

It seems to me that they have to explain away a lot of Biblical passages in order to come to this conclusion. One passage which they push is this verse before us. They claim that this is a defining passage. Paul is saying that there should be no distinction between men and women in the family and in the church. The argument is made that Paul was not fully developed in his own theology in these statements which he made in other passages. One problem with that argument is that Galatians is recognized as the first letter which he wrote. The other letters were written later. Paul was well aware that he had written this verse when he later spoke of certain roles being reserved for men in the church and in the home.

Perhaps the central argument made for this equality of roles is that to have the husband and father be the leader in marriage and the family, and to have men holding a certain leadership position in the church is to indicate that women are inferior to men.

Paul King Jewett was a theology professor at Fuller Seminary. He wrote a book entitled *Man as Male and Female*. In her introduction to the book Professor Virginia Ramey Mollenkott wrote, “...if woman must of necessity be subordinate, she must of necessity be inferior.” (p. 8)

Initially that might sound like a good argument. But then consider this passage from the New Testament. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 CORINTHIANS 11:3) In 1 Corinthians #11 v. 3 the Bible says, “**But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.**” If subordination necessarily means inferiority, then this means that Jesus is inferior to God the Father. How does that square with the theology of the Trinity? The traditional theology of the entire Christian church is that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are equal in being. One God exists in three persons. They have different roles, but they share the same deity.

Consider this statement in the Gospel according to Luke about Jesus as a child in relationship to His parents. (LUKE 2:51) Chapter 2 v. 51 of Luke says, “**And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.**” Jesus was God incarnate. Yet He

was in submission to two human beings. Certainly submission does not necessarily mean inferiority.

The two positions on this issue are described as egalitarianism--- the idea that men and women should have equal roles, and complementarianism--- the idea that there are to be distinctions in the roles between men and women in the family and in the church. The further argument of egalitarians is that having men always in charge in the home just naturally leads to greater abuse of women and children. A study was done just a couple of years ago of the Scandinavian countries where egalitarianism is just an ingrained part of the culture. Yet the researchers found that the abuse rate in those countries was much higher than in the US. (*Christianity Today*, 7/6/2020)

The main argument which Paul is making in this passage is that the advent of Jesus marks a major change in God's program with us human beings. What marked out the people of God in earlier times was their adherence to a law code, or their lack of adherence to it. What marks people out now as the people of God is their relationship with Jesus Christ. We have a new identity. What marks us out now is not how well we follow rules but rather how closely we reflect the character of Jesus.

C.

Then finally in v. 23 we find that living by faith produces a NEW INHERITANCE. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. A. B. C. NEW INHERITANCE) The Apostle Paul says, **"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."**

The Judaizers were trying to convince the Galatian Christians, who were mostly Gentiles, that to be fully right with God, to become sons of Abraham, they had to become Jewish. Paul says that by virtue of their faith in Christ, the Galatian Christians already are descendants of Abraham. Like Abraham they believed in God, specifically Jesus, and therefore have inherited spiritual blessings. They are justified. They have been declared righteous. As we saw last week, that means that they have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, as we saw has been promised in Ephesians #1. Living by faith produces blessings.

A survey conducted by the Lifeway Research group several years ago found that 71% of US adults agreed with the statement that people must contribute some effort toward their own salvation. The gospel of the Bible says that if we believe in Jesus Christ, we will be saved. Paul also wrote, **"For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

At the Dachau concentration camp built by the Nazis in Bavaria, there was a sign hung over the entrance which translated into English read, "Work Makes You Free." Most victims who passed through the gate were led to believe the lie. What stands out to some of the visitors to that camp today is an official document distributed to the Nazi guards which says, **"The camp's law is that those going to their death should be deceived until the end."** Deceived until the end.

I hope that none of you will be deceived about the true gospel. Jesus said, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should have eternal li fe.”** (John 3:16)