

FREEDOM AND THE LAW

Lesson Scripture: Galatians 3

Focus Scripture: Galatians 3:18-29

Key Verse: If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. Galatians 3:29 (NRSV)

GALATIANS 3:18-29 (NRSV)

18 For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator.

20 Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

21 Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law.

22 But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.

24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian,

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

27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

GALATIANS 3:18-29 (KJV)

18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

19 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made: and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 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.

27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

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.

29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

KEY TERMS

- **Heir** – A person inheriting and continuing the legacy of a predecessor.
- **Mediator** – An ambassador; an intermediary with a view to reconcile.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Galatians gives both the legal and the spiritual argument for salvation through faith in Jesus the Christ.

Paul addresses the church of Galatia in a similar manner in which he wrote the church in Rome. He questions their understanding, as people who are easily misinformed and unknowingly led into a frivolous concept of the power of their faith. Paul proceeds to conduct a parallel analysis of how God's promises to Abraham align with God's introduction of the law to his people. Through faith, Abraham was considered righteous long before the chosen people of

Israel were commanded to follow the law. Instead, the law aligns with their role as a chosen people whose nation, culture, and religious beliefs are grounded on the principle that God's chosen people

are determined through the lineage of Abraham.

Paul continues his analysis of their concerns by concentrating on the church's internal struggle with how the law fits their new faith in Jesus Christ. It is apparent in this letter that there is extensive debate by the Jews that salvation is in some way earned through specific actions and works of the law. The law becomes the standard for all of God's heirs to

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follow. God's children have notoriously fallen short and require an intercessor, a perfect sacrifice to cover the sins of the people. The intercessor is Jesus, who is our mediator, our legal representative and advocate, who prevents those guilty of sin from facing the consequential fate of death. Paul acknowledges through this letter and others, this pardon of offenses is not limited to the Jews. There is a spiritual "adoption process" by which

anyone who believes by faith in Jesus Christ as God's son, risen from the dead, is entitled to the same privileges and benefits as God's chosen people. Just as God chose Abraham as the father of

the chosen people of Israel, God also enables all who become followers with steadfast faith in Jesus to be adopted into this family and receive the gift of grace. Abraham's offspring extends beyond ethnic Jewish heritage into the larger body, the countless number of believers who each can be pardoned and freed from sin. Becoming a member of this new family is a privilege and an honor that the law was unable to fulfil.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The Apostle Peter references the Galatian Christians in 1 Peter chapter 1, and the Apostle Luke referenced them with the church in Phrygia (Luke 16:6). These churches in Galatia, comprised of multiple communities in the region, were founded by Paul during his missionary work

(Acts 16:6). After Paul's departure, a group of Jewish Christians, sometimes referred to as Judaizers, entered these fellowships and attempted to promote an alternative theological perspective of salvation that required strict adherence to Jewish traditions and the law. As Paul writes this letter, he continues the relentless discussion and argument that the law cannot save. He interjects legal terminology of people as *heirs* (v. 18). The

book of Galatians continues this precept that the occurrence of salvation is justified by faith. Paul's concern also ensures that the Jewish Christians understand the mediator is Jesus, not the traditional Jewish priest. But Jesus is more than that. In a similar ideology, Jesus advocates for those who seek reconciliation with God. Rather than face the harsh punishment of death and being trapped in the bondage of sin, Jesus assumes punishment for

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humanity. The diverging argument presented by these unknowing members of the Galatian church were likely attempts to justify their higher status as Jews. On the contrary, Paul explains, there is no difference between Jew or Gentile, slave or free, man or woman. Through Christ, all have been adopted into this new family. What Paul made clear

is that the law still has purpose. The law set a standard, a goal for humanity, but also a measure of humanity's transgressions. Humanity's inability to follow God's laws may appear to be a useless effort. However, Jesus explained that he came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). All believers in Christ are saved from the law, and become Abraham's children, inheriting the promises of God (v. 29).

SANKOFA

*"A tree cannot stand without roots." –
Congolesse Proverb*

Family relations are fundamental in every culture, as this African proverb points toward. The principle surrounding this phrase is not simply understanding one's ancestry, although this holds great value. The roots of a tree are dependent on the original seeds. The roots grow strong if the seed is planted in good soil. The roots grow far or deep based on the typography and the weather. The seed itself cannot grow if it has been infected by disease. We observe roots of a tree even from above the ground. As the roots spread, they can dominate the landscape, with strong vines that not only support the tree, but provide an intertwining network of food and shelter for living creatures below. All this occurs with the tree still standing. However, what is more apparent to the viewer is what is above ground, not recognizing that every tree depends on its roots below.

The principle of this proverb is relevant to all families. The roots help strengthen the tree, the branches, and the new seeds that will sprout and eventually

grow. Families are like trees; elders hold great wisdom and offer support for future generations. In some cases, the family trees are grafted into new arbor species. Many blended families have utilized the expanded root systems to enhance the support for younger generations. This is especially important when members of the family system have been chopped down much too soon. Over the years, many family units are forced to adjust their family system due to the early

departure of loved ones and the disappointing termination of family units. But if the roots are strong, the tree can still stand. Finally, and most importantly, those roots must be grounded in faith. The faith of the ancestors and their trust in God led the African diaspora through ocean passages, underground railroads, and great migrations.

The community of faith known as the church became the haven and place of refuge for families to find solace and support. The church fed the roots of each family tree, encouraging believers to have faith, trust God, and turn to Jesus. Through the miraculous story of the resurrection, even those who have fallen will rise again.

CASE STUDY

Historically, there have been countless

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discussions and debates surrounding church doctrine, particularly the issues surrounding conversion to the faith and the leadership roles that may follow. Debating religious practices and determining a person's position in the church still exists. This commonly occurred with women, who were traditionally blocked from their call in various vocations, including their call to preach.

One example of this was Amanda Berry Smith, a black woman born into slavery in Long Green, Maryland, in the early 1830's. Unlike most slaves during that time, her father was able to purchase her entire family's freedom. Amanda was self-educated. She found her way to Christ at a Methodist service. What followed her conversion was a challenge to the existing religious society. Amanda described receiving a heavenly experience, where a voice told her, "Go preach." She became a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church after the Civil War. She overcame the resistance by many pastors and used her excellent oratorical skills to evangelize, leading her to become a popular speaker in the region and abroad. She became internationally known, preaching in

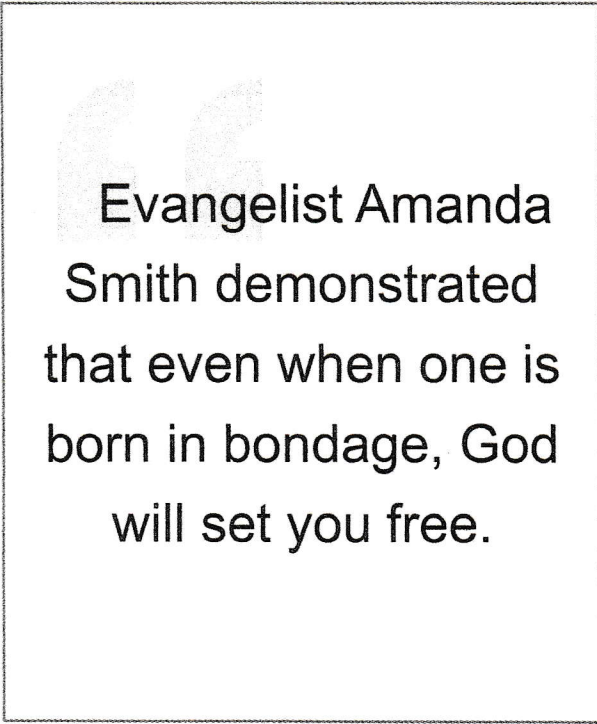
North America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. After spending fourteen years abroad, Amanda Berry returned to the United States in 1899. She established a home for orphaned black children called the Amanda Smith Industrial Home for Girls. Evangelist Amanda Smith demonstrated that even when one is born in bondage, God will set you free. She spread the gospel message to all nations, ethnicities, and nationalities. In her final

years, she established an institution that cared for orphaned children. Evangelist Smith recognized that everyone needs an earthly family, and most importantly, to belong to the family of God.

LIFE APPLICATION

When a child comes into the world, they should not be burdened by being born into a system of bondage.

Slavery was banished in the U.S. over a century ago, but there is a spiritual law of slavery to sin that cannot be overcome without a relationship with Jesus Christ. Anyone who confesses their sins, believes in faith that Jesus is God's son, and accepts Jesus in their hearts is born again and set free. No one can revoke this freedom. Therefore, if you have not accepted Jesus Christ, do it today. Break the chains of sin that have you bound



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and be welcomed into God's family. The promises of liberation and the blessings of Abraham are waiting for you.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe it is important for your local church to teach about sin? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe there may be a direct correlation between the decline in church participation and growth and increase in crime, as well as indifference to human suffering? Why or why not?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:

"Yes, Lord" – *African American Heritage Hymnal* #551

Closing Prayer: Give us grace, O God, to dare to do the deed which we well know cries to be done. Let us not hesitate because of ease, or the words of men's mouths, or our own lives. Mighty causes are calling us – the freeing of women, the training of children, the putting down of hate and murder and poverty – all these and more. But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifice and death. Mercifully grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the king and if I perish, I perish – Amen.

Give Us Grace by William Edward Burghardt DuBois

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 16-May 22

Monday	Galatians 4:1-7 (Children and Heirs Through God)
Tuesday	Philippians 3:1-8a (Authentic Circumcision)
Wednesday	Philippians 3:8b-14 (Press Toward the Goal)
Thursday	1 John 4:7-13 (Let Us Love One Another)
Friday	Matthew 5:43-48 (Love and Pray for Your Enemies)
Saturday	Proverbs 17:13-17 (Avoid Strife; Love Always)
Sunday	Galatians 5:1-15 (Faith Working Through Love)