

April 6, 2014  
Community Baptist Church  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Galatians  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to study Galatians 3:21-29.

1. Explain how the law is not in conflict with the promise of salvation by faith in Christ.
2. How are we as sinners kept imprisoned by the law?
3. Explain the picture of the law being like a guardian.
4. Describe what a life might look like if the person has “put on Christ.”

### **FREE IN CHRIST Galatians 3:21-29**

I sometimes have a strange picture in my mind. I see sinners, normal people of the world, laughing and partying and having a great time. But we are separated by a fence with razor wire strung along the top. They keep chiding me and saying, “Get with it Whitcomb!” “Why don’t you come out here and enjoy the freedom we enjoy?” “Why do you want to stay cooped up inside the fence when you can live it up out here in the free world like us?”

In my mind, I refuse their invitations and sometimes I am a bit confused. So I walk away. But as I keep walking and getting further and further away from the fence, I turn back and realize that I am not the one who is inside the fence. They are! How utterly ironic that they who crow about freedom are in prison! They are all condemned by

the law to perish. The law is their prison because it condemns them—and they don’t get it!

That picture makes me sad for the foolish people but mighty glad for my own condition. I kind of like it out here where I am free to serve the Lord who purchased me with His own blood. That is the picture Paul drew for the people in Galatia, who claimed to be free by faith in Christ, but for some reason wanted to go back to prison.

### **Until Faith, We Were Captive to the Law (vv.21-24).**

Because of the nature of things, we all have a problem about which few people are aware. The Scripture imprisons everything under sin. That is a rather broad and sweeping statement! Broad indeed but true nonetheless. The fact is that the law cannot give life. Paul argued, *Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law (v.21)*. According to our study last week (vv.15-20), we know that God gave the promise of Christ to Abraham and He gave the law to Moses. Since God gave both, how can they be contradictory? Paul anticipating the Galatians’ response asked the rhetorical question, “Is the law opposed to the promises of God?”

It is impossible that two of God’s gifts can be against each other or cancel each other out. The problem is that no law can give spiritual life. If there was such a law, then righteousness would have been attainable by keeping it. That is impossible because such a law would have been *against* the promises of God. If we could gain righteousness by keeping a law, there would have been no need for the promised Seed of the woman. There would have been no need for the promise of the world being blessed through Abraham’s Seed. There would have been no need for Christ’s perfect life and sacrifice. There would have been no need for God’s grace and mercy. And there would have been no need for us to have faith in God’s promises.

But there is no such law—never has been—never will be! Therefore, everyone needs the promise of faith in Christ. That need is highlighted when we consider our natural condition. Paul described our plight when he wrote, *But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin (v.22a)*. Scripture in this case is synonymous with the law.

The law is a major part of Scripture. It has been in effect since God gave it thousands of years ago, and it isn't going to change anytime soon. Scripture is forever settled—isn't going to change. David concluded, *Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever (Psalm 119:152)*. That is why Jesus said of the law, *“For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18)*.

That enduring law has tightly shut up everything under sin. As bad as that may sound, that is the purpose of the law. As Paul said in verse nineteen, *it was added because of transgression*. Human nature recoils against such an idea. But in reality, the best thing that can happen to a sinner is for him to run into the electric fence called the law over and over until he finally figures out that he is not free at all. Paul taught, *I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died (Romans 7:9)*. Like all sinners, Paul was running free and happy—or so he thought. Then one day he ran smack into the law. The law demands, *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)*. Paul knew those words well. He thought he understood them, but he didn't understand how they applied to him until God the Son confronted him on the road to Damascus. According to Luke's account, *And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4)*.

The most wonderful day of the sinner's life is when he realizes that he has no wiggle room at all under God's law. It is a good day when he comes to realize that he is guilty of offending God all the time.

Okay, but that is awfully negative sounding. It sounds a lot like no hope! Indeed that is the case. We must fully embrace our hopelessness or we will not see and understand God's grace. God's grace is always most brilliant against the backdrop of our deep, dark sinfulness. The best day of our lives is when we realize that we are crushed by God's law and have no escape from the crushing. Only then is there hope!

Really? How so? Consider God's provision. We must realize that the law crushes us, *so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ*

*might be given to those who believe (v.22)*. The little phrase, *so that* is a purpose clause answering, “Why did God hatch a plan in which Scripture imprisons everyone in sin? We have to come to grips with sin before we can enjoy the promise of faith. This is why preachers who dance around sin, who always preach a positive message of hope, who never want to make the sinner feel bad by accusing him of sinning, or who just deny the reality of sin are the most wicked, dangerous people on earth. Hitler and his atrocities posed less eternal threat than Robert Schuller did. The promise of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is only realized through knowing the guilt brought by the law. Only people who believe what the law says about them can be given salvation by faith.

So what is the law's effect on sinners? The law holds everyone captive. *Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed (v.23)*. There is no reason for or desire for forgiveness if I do not believe I am guilty of wrong. The purpose of the law is to hold us captive in conviction of sin. Contrary to popular opinion, no sinner is free to do whatever he chooses because the law holds him captive. The Scripture and even God's law written on the conscience keeps declaring the sinner's true condition. That idea was well illustrated when Paul confessed that he would not even have been aware of sin except that the law kept telling him he was a sinner (Romans 7:7).

It is as though the law is your prison and each time you break the law, time is added to your prison sentence. You are never going to get out! Never, that is, until the promise of faith came to be realized. This is the greatest of news. The promise of faith was fulfilled when Christ died and rose again. The promise of faith is salvation. But most important the faith came to the individual sinner when he trusts the finished work of Christ in his behalf. Until that day, we are held in the prison of the law. At that moment, the prison bars are burst asunder and we cry aloud, “Free from the law, O blessed condition; Jesus has died and there is remission!”

Paul gave us a second picture of the law when he wrote that the law serves as our guardian. *So then, the law was our guardian (v.24a)*. He taught that the law served as our *paidagogos*, which Greek word obviously gives us the English *pedagogy*, the profession or theory of teaching. In Paul's day, this person was a male servant responsible to see that the children of the family got their chores

done, got to and from school safely, and generally kept them out of trouble. Being responsible for the children's training in obedience, these men were notoriously harsh and strict. In 4:2, Paul used the word to describe them as guardians and trustees. In that sense, the "guardian" was always a temporary figure who the children would outgrow.

That is a fair description of the sinner's relationship to the law. The law chastens and restricts us. It constantly tells us that we are in error and need to do better. We chaff under its strict harshness and long for liberty. That is, until we meet Christ. Paul said that we were subject to that harsh guardian, *until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith (v.24b)*. Once we have come to Christ and embraced Him by faith, we no longer need the harsh discipline of the law. When we come to Christ, confess our sins to Him, and put our trust in Him alone, God instantly declares that we are justified—we are as righteous as Christ Himself. Jesus Christ does not need the chastening and badgering of the law. The law serves the very important function of making us sinners want Christ, making us see our despicable condition, and making us desire to find freedom in a genuine, mature relationship with our Savior.

### **Faith in Christ Grants Us Freedom (vv.25-29).**

When faith in Christ comes, everything changes. Moving from the pictures of prison and guardians, we learn that now we are sons of God (vv.25-27). Faith has removed us from the guardian. *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian (v.25)*. The phrase, *now that faith has come* refers to genuine Christians alone. Every time a legalistic Jew engaged in ceremonial washing he was declaring that he was not clean, not justified. He was demonstrating that he was still under the guardian. That is what the law does to us.

True Christians have been overrun by faith which puts us in a righteous standing before God forever. The faith came for all when Jesus Christ was born, lived, died, and rose again to pay the penalty for sin. That was the fulfillment of the promises God made to Adam and Abraham. All the Old Testament saints were justified by believing that God would fulfill what He promised. They looked forward with faith, longing for the promised Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We realize the fulfillment of God's

promise because, as Paul put it: *It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified (Galatians 3:1b)*.

More than Christ coming to fulfill the promise is the reality that the gift of faith has come to us individually. Let us never assume that we are just smarter than the average bear because we have faith in Jesus. Let us always remember that the gift of faith is the evidence of God's grace to us. Once we have faith, we don't need the guardian any longer. It is not that the law has lost its power to convict of sin. We do not forget the lessons the guardian taught us along the way. Rather, we don't need the law to serve in that capacity any longer.

Last week our son Mark was able to visit for a day as he was passing through on business. In one of our conversations, he said something that revealed spiritual maturity to me. He said that at this point in life, he and Jen live pretty much according to the same standards they had imposed on them while they were growing up. He said that the big difference now is that they live by these standards because they want to, not because they have to. He said their relationship with Christ governs what they do instead of their fear to please another person.

That conversation reminded me of the story of the woman who was married to a tyrant. The first week of marriage the man made up a to-do list and demanded that the woman do all of those chores around the house every week. Her's was a miserable life. But God was gracious to the humble wife, and one day He killed her tyrannical husband. In time, the woman remarried a wonderful and kind man. She loved caring for him. One day while she was cleaning, she stumbled across the old list from the former tyrant. To her surprise, she was regularly doing all the demands of the list, except now she did those things out of a heart of love because she wanted to please her new husband. That is a good picture of those who are free from the law in order to serve Christ freely.

Furthermore, putting on Christ makes us sons (vv.26-27). Paul said, *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith (v.26)*. Everyone who is in Christ is a son of God. The little word *for* is Paul's way of saying, "Let me explain what this idea of faith removing the need for the guardian means." Our relationship to God as sons supercedes any need for a guardian. We are now mature, children of God, independent of the guardian of the law. We are no

longer *paidea* living under the eye of the guardian, but we are *uios*, grown into adult sons because of our relationship in Christ.

We get “in Christ” through faith. Being children of God is the result of our union with Christ. Our union with Christ is the result of faith in Him. To believe facts about Christ is not the same as being wholly dependent on Christ. Faith in Christ means that we are holding on to Him and Him alone for our eternal security.

Faith is co-active with being baptized into Christ. *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (v.27)*. Being baptized with water is a public declaration that we are identified with Christ. That is an important step of faith, but it is not the doctrine taught here. This is the picture of the person who exercises faith in Christ being spiritually immersed in Him. It is the same figure we find when Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, *I want you to know, brothers, that 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, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)*.

That picture teaches that faith in Christ identifies us completely with Christ, as Christ’s possession, which leaves us with no choice but to put on Christ. We all can see what clothes you put on before you came to the meeting tonight. But can anyone see that you have put on Christ’s character? If we have been baptized into Him, it will be obvious in the way we live. Hear Paul say, *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Romans 6:3-5)*.

Because we are identified with Christ, now we are one in Christ (v.28). That means that there are no distinctions in Christ. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female (v.28a)*. When we enter into the family of God through faith in Christ, distinctions cease to matter. That is not to try to argue that all distinctions cease. That is impossible and the idea is silly. Paul did not propose that in the Church there were no Jews or Greeks, slaves or freemen, men or women. What he meant is that

those distinctions don’t matter. We are too familiar with people who make distinctions in culture. This group is better than that, or there are the intelligent and the not so intelligent. There are Baptists and then the other people. There are people of my particular theological bent and then those other people. That is all gone in Christ.

How ironic that the goal that sinful world leaders claim they want to achieve is only achievable through salvation in Christ. Satan and his world rulers desire to force us into uniformity where there are no distinctions. They want to remove distinctions in the genders. They want to remove distinctions in religion. They want to make everyone except themselves equally poor. This is the desire and plan because it is difficult to control independent thinking people. So in Antichrist’s day, everyone will have to be just alike, all bearing the mark of the beast.

In contrast to Satan’s way, God delights to put distinctions together in unity. A thumb is not at all like an eye, but God puts both to work together in the Body of Christ. So too women are not the same as men, but God puts us together in His family to work together for His glory. Not one person can ever claim that they became part of the family of God through unique circumstances.

We are one because we are all justified the same way. Paul argued, *for you are all one in Christ Jesus (v.28b)*. We all share the same spiritual blessing of salvation, we all share the same grace, we all share the same eternal life. Therefore, we are all coming to the same understanding of and demonstration of Christ. God’s plan is for us to learn and be edified, *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesian 4:13-15)*. Even with all our individual preferences we are one, we are unified in Christ Jesus.

That must also imply that now we are heirs of the promise (v.29). That is the case because Christians are Abraham’s seed. *And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring (v.29a)*. If you are a Christian, you are in the family of Abraham. That means that you receive the promise God gave to Abraham. We do not receive the promise of a great nation because that is reserved only for the Jews. Nor do we receive the promise of inheriting a particular piece of property because that is also reserved only for the Jews. We receive

the promise of justification through faith in the promised Seed, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it can be said that Christians are heirs with Christ because of the promise (v.29b). The promise is ultimately that we will inherit God Himself. As David concluded, *The LORD is my inheritance and my cup. You are the one who determines my destiny (Psalm 16:5 GWV)*. We inherit the eternal life which **is** Christ.

In light of such wonderful promises, why would anyone who truly has faith in Jesus Christ desire to go back under the tyranny of the law? That question makes us realize that the person who desires to gain salvation by trying to keep the law knows nothing of the freedom that comes from faith in Christ alone. Likewise, we realize that person who claims to have faith in Christ alone and is therefore united with Christ but does not demonstrate the character of Christ in his life must not really be united with Christ. To be free from the tyranny of the law is to be free to live like Christ.