

FROM SLAVERY TO SONSHIP

Galatians 3:19-4:7

Introduction:

The problem that was facing the churches in Galatia was that there were Jewish leaders from Jerusalem who were trying to impose the Old Testament Law on the new Gentile converts, insisting that it was necessary in order to gain God's favor and to complete or accomplish their full salvation. Paul was very concerned at how quickly these believers were being led away from the truth that salvation is only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul spent a significant amount of time and space in the first part of his letter to defend his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ and the authenticity of his message of grace against the accusations of these Judaizers. He made it clear that his message came from Christ himself but also that it was endorsed and confirmed by the other apostles.

Then he began his attack on the Judaistic notion that the Law and the keeping of the Law was necessary in order to gain God's favor and to achieve a right standing before God. In chapter 2, verse 16 he makes the assertion which is really the core of his entire thesis.

"...we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified." (Galatians 2:16 ESV)

There you have his proposition, his personal testimony, and his summary statement all wrapped up in one sentence. He is very clear about the truth regarding the OT Law with its rules and regulations. It can never bring about righteousness. It cannot justify anyone, because no one is able to keep the Law perfectly. That is what he says in 3:10:

"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.'" (Galatians 3:10 ESV)

Fortunately for us, the curse of the Law has been dealt with by Jesus Christ, who took that curse on himself,

"...by becoming a curse for us...so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." (Galatians 3:13-14 ESV)

Last week we looked at the contrast of the Law and the Promise—God's covenant with Abraham, which was based on his promises apart from any keeping of the Law. He again summarizes his argument in v. 18 (*read it*).

So then that leads to the question: If the Law cannot save, if living according to the Law cannot bring anyone into right standing with God, then why was the Law given? That is precisely the question Paul addresses in the next part of his letter.

As we look through this next passage of Scripture we find that the purpose of the Law is two-fold. There are two distinct purposes for the Law that Paul expounds in these verses. We looked at the first reason briefly last week.

The Law was intended to imprison the whole world under sin...

This intent is repeated in different ways several times by Paul in these verses. Read vv. 19, 22, and 23.

To repeat some of what I said last week: The Law was given because of sin. It was given to give people a standard by which we could see the depth our sin and our need of a Savior. The Law could never make a person righteous. Rather what it could do was show God's people how much they needed the promise. It was intended to point people's eyes toward the fulfillment of the promise, which was the "offspring" (seed) of Abraham, Jesus Christ.

In Romans 3:19, Paul said, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God." (Romans 3:19 ESV)

The Law was God's way of getting people to see their own unrighteousness and their need of someone to save them from sin. Its purpose was to bring the whole world to a position of guilt before God, imprisoning everyone under sin, "...until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come." (v. 19)

So the Law was a prison warden, keeping people under bondage to sin, making us guilty before God, "...so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." (v. 22)

There is a very important word that shows up a couple of times in this description of the Law and its purpose—the word "until." Note vv. 19, 23. "...until the offspring (Seed) should come..." "...until the coming faith would be revealed." That Seed and the accompanying faith is Christ. The Law had a temporary purpose and it was completely fulfilled in Christ.

Before we continue on to the heart of our text today, I want to briefly mention one other thing. I know you may be wondering what Paul means in the latter part of v. 19 and verse 20 – read it. I wish I knew what he meant. What he says is relatively clear, but why he said it, or what the relevance is to his argument concerning the purpose of the Law, I really have no idea. So we are going to leave it alone and move on to what we can understand.

The Law was intended to lead us to a position of maturity as sons of God...

In vv. 23ff Paul looks at another purpose for the Law. It is closely related to the previous point, but yet it goes further. Yes, the Law imprisons us under sin. It is a prison warden, keeping us enslaved to sin. But it is more than that. Look at v. 24

"So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24 NIV)

"So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24 ESV)

The AV uses the word "schoolmaster." There was a custom among the people of Paul's day, especially the wealthy Roman citizens, which

helps us to understand what Paul is getting at here. When a son was born, who would be the heir to his father's inheritance, he would first of all be under the care of a nurse. By the age of 4 or 5 he would be put under the charge of a guardian or tutor. This would be one of the most trusted slaves in the household.

This guardian would have complete control and direction over the boy for several years. He would be responsible for the child's upbringing—his safety, his education, his development in all areas of training. The child, who is really the heir would be under the guardianship of this servant until he reached a certain level of maturity. At that time, on a date set by the father, there would be a special ceremony, at which the father would declare that this is now my son, and the heir of all that I have. From that point on, the child, now the rightful heir would enjoy all the blessings and benefits of a son and heir.

With that background information in mind, listen again to what Paul says in these verses – *read 3:24 – 4:7 again.*

Do you see what Paul is really saying? The Law was given to be a guardian, to keep us under bondage, until faith comes. Under the law we are, in essence, slaves. Just like the child who is to be the heir of a great inheritance from his father. Yet during those years under a guardian, is no better than a slave. In fact, he is under the control and guardianship of a slave. But when the time is right, he receives the mantle of sonship and is given all of the blessings and benefits of an heir.

That is what Paul is saying about our lives as believers. For centuries, God's people were under the Law as a guardian, enslaved to sin. 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." (3:25-26)

When the time was right, God took those who believed and accepted his offer by faith, and transferred them from slavery to sonship. *Read 4:4-5.* Now, by faith in Jesus Christ we are sons of God, and heirs of the inheritance. *Read 4:7.* Paul says in Rom. 8:16-17.

"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ..."

Conclusion:

What a magnificent truth! The Law was not without reason or purpose. The Law fulfilled its purpose, by imprisoning everything under sin, in order to prepare us for a life of faith when the promise was fulfilled. When the time was right, God sent the promised One, Jesus Christ, in order that we might receive adoption as sons.

The Law was completely and utterly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, so we are no longer under bondage to the Law. We are no longer under a guardian, but we have received the inheritance. We are heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

So need to wrap this up by revisiting the reason Paul was writing this to the Galatians. Remember the problem in the Galatian churches—false teachers were telling these Gentile believers that they needed to observe the Law in order to be complete Christians.

What Paul is really saying is that we are now free from the Law, and that to go back and place yourself under the Law, is to abandon your freedom and the benefits of sonship, to again place yourself under slavery. Why would anyone want to do that? Later on Paul restates this exhortation in 5:1 – For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.