

# Freedom and the Law

Printed Text • Galatians 3:18-29

Devotional Reading • 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE the difference between living according to God's law and living by faith in Christ Jesus, CELEBRATE the freedom God's promise gives to all who believe in Christ, and PRACTICE ways they can embrace this liberation and oneness in Christ.

## In Focus

Hilton wanted to be a teacher as long as he could remember. He always admired and respected the teachers he had over the years, and believed that teaching would be a way to give back to the community. He had spent the past year in a special program designed to recruit teachers to urban and rural schools. The program paired Hilton and other student teachers with a more experienced master teacher, who observed them in the classroom and helped out when necessary. It also provided Hilton with professional development training that teachers needed to advance in their profession.

Hilton tried his best over the months to be the best teacher he could be. However, the students were aware that Hilton was not the "real" teacher, and caused disciplinary problems for him. The master teachers' treatment of their protégés also sometimes contributed to a feeling of inferiority, but that was about to change.

Hilton was completing the program in one month and had already received a job offer. Once Hilton was hired, he would earn a salary commensurate with other teachers with his experience; but more importantly, Hilton would be accorded equal status with the other teachers. He would no longer be a student teacher, but would receive the same benefits and privileges as the other teachers. Hilton could not wait to sign the contract.

*How did Hilton's time as a student teacher train him to be a better teacher? How do similar in-between times train us in our own lives?*

## Keep In Mind

"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29, KJV)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Transgressions** (Galatians 3:19) *parabasis* (Gk.) – A breach of an existing law

**B. Mediator** (vv. 19-20) *mesites* (Gk.) – One who links two parties

## Say It Correctly

**Pedagogue.** PEH-dah-gog

**Mediatorial.** Mee-dee-ah-TOR-ee-al

## KJV

**Galatians 3:18** 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.

## NLT

**Galatians 3:18** For if the inheritance could be received by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God's promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham as a promise.

19 Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised. God gave his law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people.

20 Now a mediator is helpful if more than one party must reach an agreement. But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when he gave his promise to Abraham.

21 Is there a conflict, then, between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it.

22 But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

### God's Children through Faith

23 Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.

24 Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith.

25 And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

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

27 And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes.

28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Promise.** The Bible contains many promises from God to His people. Significant among God's promises is His promise to bless Abraham with a son, who would become a great nation, and that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in Abraham. God also promised Abraham that his descendants would be too many to count. God's promise to Abraham was in the background as God delivered the Children of Israel from Egyptian slavery and made a covenant with them. Israel descended from Abraham through Isaac. God's presence was continually with the Israelites, who trusted in God's future salvation because of His promise to Abraham.

**Slavery.** Slavery was an integral part of Greco-Roman civilization. Slaves accounted for one-fifth of the population. People became slaves through various circumstances, including wars, piracy, debt, and birth to a slave mother. Slaves were the property of their owners and had no legal rights, but could be freed and suffer few legal limitations as a freedman. Slaves functioned broadly within the society from civil service to hard labor. Household slaves were entrusted with the care of the home and child rearing. School-age children were under the moral guidance of "pedagogues," or custodians, who were slaves who looked after the children's general well-being, but were not the children's teachers. A benevolent master might grant a slave freedom in his will, freeing the slave upon the death of the master. A friend, relative, or other benefactor might also purchase a slave's freedom. "Redemption" means "to buy back," as in to purchase from slavery.

## Background

At this time in his letter to the Galatians, Paul had introduced God's promise to Abraham and his "seed" (descendants) into his defense of his Gospel to the Gentiles. For Paul, God's promised blessing extended to all Abraham's heirs, both Jews as well as the Gentiles who shared Abraham's faith. Some Jews did not accept this teaching, believing that new believers must become Jewish in order to follow Jesus. Paul countered that anyone who lives by faith in Jesus Christ, the "Seed" of Abraham, are the sons of Abraham and recipients of the promise.

*How do modern Christians add unnecessary requirements to following God?*

### At-A-Glance

1. Purpose of the Law (Galatians 3:18–22)
2. The Coming of Faith (vv. 23–29)

## In Depth

### 1. Purpose of the Law (Galatians 3:18–22)

Paul argues throughout his letter to the Galatians that observance of the Jewish law was not a requirement for them to be accepted into the Christian community. Paul shifts to legal language to provide further evidence of why they were justified by faith, not by the works of the law. First off, he establishes that one does not come into the promised inheritance by keeping the law. The reason behind this is simple: the inheritance is part of the Abrahamic covenant, not the Mosaic Law.

He explains that God gave the law to Israel as a supplement to the promise to help them see that sin is contrary to His will. The law, Paul insisted, was a temporary system until the arrival of the promised offspring (“Seed”). Furthermore, the law was compromised because Moses received it through a mediator, a go-between, in the form of an angel. Abraham, on the other hand, received the promise directly from God. (The notion that God gave the law through angels is most clearly seen in the Greek language version of the Old Testament translated by Jewish scholars for the Greek-speaking Jewish community.)

Paul maintained that the law did not oppose God’s promise. Rather, the law could not save the people from death because it could not prevent people from sinning. The Scripture, according to Paul, concluded that the law had imprisoned the people under the power of sin. The only way to be released from under the power of sin is through faith in Jesus Christ.

*Why did God choose to give His people the Law instead of immediately providing the Savior?*

## **2. The Coming of Faith (vv. 23–29)**

Paul contended that before faith came, the law was like a “pedagogue” (custodian or guardian) over the Jewish people, who were as children in need of moral supervision and discipline. Now that faith had come, the people were no longer charges of the law, but had matured to the point when they were no longer in need of a custodian. They were now children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and full heirs of the promise, not by birth, but by faith expressed through baptism. Baptism into Christ clothed the Gentile with Christ, and afforded him or her the status of Abraham’s offspring (3:27). Baptism, unlike circumcision, was a sign of inclusion into God’s covenant family for women, as well as men. Social, economic, racial, and gender discrimination was erased as a part of acceptance into God’s family. Native born versus non-native born was no longer an issue. They were all one in Christ Jesus, and if they were in Christ, they were Abraham’s offspring and heirs to the promise.

*In what ways are our social, economic, racial, and gender differences significant to the Church? In what ways are they not?*

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Paul says the law was added for what purpose (Galatians 3:19)?
2. Who does Paul say is the seed of Abraham and heirs of the promise (v. 29)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. The pedagogue functioned as a custodian of minor children until they came of age. What does it mean to no longer be under a “schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:24–25)?
2. What does Paul mean when he said, “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” (v. 28)?
3. Compare and contrast what it means to be naturally born or adopted into the family of God.

### **Liberating Lesson**

As families blend, some people will distinguish between their half-brothers, or step-sisters, or adopted cousins, and their “real” relatives. These demarcations are based on someone not being biologically related, but instead being related by marriage or adoption. Learning these nuances of relation should not change our relationships, or how much love is shared among family members. Some, however, are guilty of treating their half-siblings or step-cousins as some of the

Jewish Christians treated the Gentiles. The Gentiles were treated as inferior because they were not natural-born Jews, and therefore were not considered the seed of Abraham. However, Paul assures us that in Christ Jesus, we are all children of God, through baptism, and that God does not make distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free persons, or men and women.

### **Application for Activation**

How does it make you feel to know that no matter what the circumstances were surrounding your birth, that through Christ Jesus, you have been adopted into God's family, and made one with Christ by baptism? All your debts are paid, and you now have all the rights of a natural-born child. You share an equal inheritance with all God's children. That is good news! Create a "certificate of adoption" for yourself as an adoptive child of God.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

---

---

---

---

### **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

---

---

---

---

## **More Light on the Text**

### **Galatians 3:18–29**

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

The Galatian church was plagued by false teachers confusing the nascent believers about what God required. Did they still have to abide by the Mosaic Law? Did they have to become Jews in order to become Christians? Paul argues that God gave Abraham a promise 430 years before giving the Law. That is the promise to which the Gentiles cling as they follow God. In order to inherit Abraham's promise of blessing, Paul argues, one must simply follow Abraham's method of attaining righteousness: belief. If a person believes and is faithful to God, they will be made righteous. If they expect to inherit righteousness by obeying the Law, then they have forgotten that God's family of faith began not at Sinai with the Law, but in Haran with a 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 the angels in the hand of a mediator.**

The thrust of Paul's argument is to show how the law functions to reveal sin in human nature for what it is. As they infringed on the law, they were reminded of their sinfulness despite their covenant relationship to God. Violating the law did not make the Israelite a sinner; instead, the Israelite violated the law because he or she was a sinner. The Greek word translated as "transgressions" is *parabasis* (pah-RAH-bah-seese) and denotes a breach of an existing law. Before the law, it was easy for the Israelite to gloss over sin as a subjective thing; but the law shows sin to be an objective reality, a violation of God's standards (cf. Romans 7:13).

The law also stimulates faith in the promised Seed, whose coming was to fulfill the law. This phrase refers back to an earlier part of Paul's reasoning that showed Jesus is the true heir of Abraham (v. 16). Paul reads the Abrahamic covenant as being made to Abraham "and his seed." Since it says "seed" instead of "seeds," Paul interprets Jesus as the true heir to Abraham's promise. As the Israelites come to terms with the reality of sin through the law, they were pointed to the coming Messiah who will deal decisively with it. The law was interim, pending the coming of the Seed who fulfilled the promise.

The law was inferior because it was given through angels and the mediatorial role of Moses. "Mediator" (Gk. *mesites*, meh-SEE-tace) suggests one who liaises between two parties. It has been rightly observed that the involvement of a mediator points to the contractual nature of the Law and implies obligations for both parties. In a land contract, for example, a mediator may be needed to facilitate the deal between the buyer and the seller and both parties assuming certain responsibilities. With their final agreement witnessed by the mediator, the Israelites were contractually obligated to follow the Law.

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

In contrast to the two-party contract of the Law, God's promise to Abraham is only one-sided. Here, Paul contrasts the promise with the Law by showing that the promise was solely a divine affair. God told Abraham to set up the sacrifices to formalize their covenant. The sacrificed animals were cut in two and laid out with a path between. The two parties of the covenant were supposed to walk together between the carcasses and vow that such a brutal fate would await them if they violated the agreement. But God caused Abraham to fall asleep and as Abraham slept, God Himself moved between the sacrifices alone, validating the promise Himself (Genesis 15). Abraham was not obligated to do anything to validate the promise. Therefore, no mediator was needed. This again shows that the promise was superior to the Law because its fulfillment does not depend on Israel.

How comforting to know that the believer's status as an heir of salvation does not depend on the believer's efforts but rests solely on God's grace through Christ. It is like our relationship with our loving parents. You did absolutely nothing to merit being your mother's child, but in deciding to be your mother, she bound herself to certain promises of love and protection that do not depend in any way on what you do or fail to do.

**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.**

A Jewish Christian might think the law negates the promises of God. Paul very strongly rejects this notion. The expression translated as "God forbid" in the Greek literally means "May it not be" (Gk. *me genoito*, MAY GEH-noy-toe). The purpose of the promise was to impart life. In order for the law to

replace the promise, it would have to be able to impart life too. God did not reveal His law to us so that we would be confused, fail at His regulations, and lose hope for salvation. God certainly would have provided a set of laws that could give life and righteousness if such a set of laws could have been devised. The Law, then, must have had a different purpose than actually working out the salvation of those who followed it.

**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.**

Paul does not completely discount the Law, but respectfully calls it "scripture," (Gk. graphe, grah-FEY) literally "the writing." Instead of imparting life, the law of Moses condemns all humanity under sin. The word the KJV translates as "concluded" is the Greek word sugkleio (soong-KLEE-oh), meaning to shut or enclose. Paul is personifying Scripture (the law) as a jailer who keeps the condemned secure in prison. Interestingly, this Greek word is also used of enclosing a catch of fish in a net (Luke 5:6). The law wraps around, ensnares, and limits those that follow it. Before long, it convicts all humanity as being guilty of sin. Therefore, those under the Law will appreciate the fact that eternal life is dependent on faith in Christ and is therefore open to all who believe.

Paul continues his personification, but this time he changes from "scripture" (v. 22) to the "law," suggesting that both terms are used interchangeably. The verb "kept" (Gk. phroureo, froo-REH-oh) is a military term meaning to guard a place in order to prevent an escape from inside or an invasion from outside. The law functioned like a siege, keeping those under it from escaping from the reality of their sin until Christ comes. Someone has compared the law in this connection to the natural law of gravity which pulls down anyone who tries to defy it without depending on a device.

These images of the Law could make someone think God is harsh and cruel. In truth, however, God's Law encloses His people to keep them safe. If they were free from the restrictions of the Law, they would be lost wandering about in the wide world without any direction from God. The Law reminds them of the guilt of their sin, but it also keeps them close to God so that when faith comes and is revealed, they can partake of it. God ensnared His people in the Law so that they could all be gathered together to receive the gift of Jesus all at once.

**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.**

Again Paul personifies the Law; this time as a "schoolmaster" (Gk. paidagogos, pie-dah- go-GOCE). This servant would escort the family's children as they journey to and from school. They were to serve as a guide, mentor, and protector. Even though a trusted and wise servant would be chosen for this role in bringing up the children, it is no substitute for the teacher who has trained and practiced in providing higher education. Just as a modern school bus driver takes the children to school to be taught by the teacher, so the law served to guide those under it to Christ for their justification by faith. The Law is wise and useful, but it is not the end goal. It was always designed to lead followers to Christ.

Since Christ had come and fulfilled the promise, the law was no longer needed. Just as the child does not need the school bus driver any longer once they have arrived at school, God's followers are no longer under the law now that Christ is here to teach us.

**26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.**

Special emphasis is placed on the word "all," which here includes both Jews and Gentiles. Through faith in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles have equal privileges before God as His children. Faith in Christ, and not obedience to the law, confers the privileges of a child of God. Christians are not called children of Moses because they follow the Law. They are not called Children of Israel because they have the right bloodlines. They are not even called children of Abraham, hoping for a promise of land and blessing. Christians are children of God Himself, because we identify ourselves with Christ Himself, God's only Son. By faith, we trust that Christ is the fulfillment of all God's promises to save His people. By faith, we see Him as the one true Seed of Abraham, the true and faithful Israel, and the Prophet greater than Moses. By faith then, we follow Christ's example and identify ourselves with Him, becoming God's child just as much as Christ is Himself.

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

Just as circumcision was the sign of entering into the covenant of Abraham, baptism is the sign of entering the covenant of Christ. This is the spiritual baptism by which new believers are incorporated into the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). Only faith in Christ is required to be joined to Him. The Law is not needed, nor any part of the Law. Even baptism itself is an outward sign of an inward change.

This unity with Christ is tantamount to putting Christ on figuratively as a garment. The Greek verb *enduo* (en-DOO-oh) is normally used with reference to putting on a garment. Paul uses this same metaphor with the Corinthian church, speaking of Christians putting on our eternal, heavenly bodies and no longer suffering here on earth (1 Corinthians 15:54; 2 Corinthians 5:3). Here, however, Paul is not looking to the end times, but to the moment of salvation. He highlights the need to make visible our spiritual union with Christ here and now. In Paul's society, clothes really did "make the man," so once the new Christian has "put on Christ," that Christian becomes Christ. Everyone who sees someone who has put on Christ will only see the Savior. This is why God can accept us even though we are sinful. When we put on Christ, God looks at us and sees His sinless Son, who completely covers and pays for our sin.

**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.**

Paul is not denying that differences between nationalities or sexes exist after one becomes a believer. Paul's point is that the merits of these distinctions do not give one an edge over others as God's child. For the purpose of pursuing salvation, it does not matter who you are. Jews are no closer to reaching Jesus than Greeks are. Slaves do not have to settle their earthly affairs and become free before they can pursue God. Men do not gain any preferential treatment over women in the process of salvation. All are equally sinners in need of a Savior. In Christ, we are all one, i.e., we are the same.

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

Paul has already set up that Christ is Abraham's only real seed (v. 17). Therefore, if the believer puts on Christ, in essence becoming Christ, that person also becomes the real seed of Abraham and the true heir of God's promise to Abraham. The contrast is clear, faith in Christ rather than obedience to

the law is the way to inherit God's promise. Abraham's promise was inherited by his Seed; not seeds plural as in his descendants, but Christ who perfected Abraham's example of faith which would be credited as righteousness. Christ fulfilled the promise of Abraham by His complete faith in God (making Him righteous), plus He also fulfilled the Law (keeping Him pure), which no one else had ever or would ever be able to do. He completed the Law and shows us the example of faith. When we hide ourselves in Him, we too enjoy the fruit of God's promise to Abraham of blessing, protection, and prosperity.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

Receiving the Spirit through Faith  
(Galatians 3:1-5)

## **TUESDAY**

Abraham's Blessing Comes through Christ  
(Galatians 3:6-17)

## **WEDNESDAY**

God's Power Grants Life and Godliness  
(2 Peter 1:2-4)

## **THURSDAY**

A Faithful and Just People  
(Hosea 2:16-23)

## **FRIDAY**

A Wise and Faithful Builder  
(Luke 6:45-49)

## **SATURDAY**

Walk Blameless before God  
(Genesis 17:1-8)

## **SUNDAY**

No Longer Subject to the Law  
(Galatians 3:18-29)