

GROWING UP IN FAITH

GALATIANS 3:23-29

**CHRISTIANS ARE EXPECTED TO LIVE FAR BETTER THAN
OLD TESTAMENT LAW.**

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***EVEN THOUGH OLD TESTAMENT LAW CANNOT BRING US SALVATION, IT
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Growing Up In Faith

Galatians 3:23-29

Last time we were together, we talked about Paul's thoughts on the purpose of the law. Let's keep in mind that he is talking in particular about the Mosaic Law. If you remember, we said that the law was given to the nation of Israel to preserve them as a nation and to preserve the promise of a Messiah.

Today, I would like to expand on the purpose of Old Testament law, and perhaps give some suggestions on how we can use it today.

There can be no doubt as we look back through history that God kept the nation of Israel alive until the birth of Jesus and the nation was scattered throughout the world just about 40 short years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Israel did not become a nation again until 1948 when they became a Jewish nation once again settled in the Promised Land. Without getting into eschatological schemes or timetables, we should make some sort of a mental note. The Jews existed as a nation from about 2,000 years until the appearance of Jesus and it has been about 2,000 years that the Jews have not had a nation, again until 1948. I'm not making any end times prediction or anything like that. All I'm saying is that as we study about how God used Israel under the Mosaic Law, it kind of makes us wonder how God is using the Church in our day and age.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament Law was meant to protect and preserve Israel as a nation. Laws are often meant to protect us, especially God's laws.

One day I decided to take a walk to one of my deacon's house. I was about a block a way when I noticed his 5-year-old little boy on his bike, pulling his wagon behind him loaded with a lot of stuff. I watched him for a while as he circled the block twice.

Finally I approached him and said, "What are you doing Tommy?"

"I'm running away from home," he said.

I asked him, "Why do you just circling the block Tommy?"

He said, "Because my mother won't let me cross the street."

So no matter how angry Tommy was and no matter how hard he tried to run away from home, ... as long as he obeyed some fundamental rules, he would be safe and not do too much harm to himself. God's laws are the same. They are meant to prevent us from harming ourselves too badly.

Sometimes I don't think we understand what Paul is saying when he says that we are dead to the law. Some of us take that as permission to do anything that we want. However, as we will see later in his letter to these Galatian churches, we are instructed to live by the Spirit of Christ. That brings us to the main idea of this morning's text. **CHRISTIANS ARE EXPECTED TO LIVE FAR BETTER THAN OLD TESTAMENT LAW.** When Paul declares us free from the law, he is not giving us permission to choose between good and evil. He is giving us permission to choose what is consistently better and better. It does matter what we do and say. The point Paul is making is that no one has ever been made right with God nor will there ever be someone who is made right with God by keeping religious rules, doing good works, or being good. We can only be made right with God by placing our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

It sounded to the Jewish-Christians like Paul was saying the Old Testament Scriptures were useless. And so that is why Paul raised the question last time, "So

why then did God give the Law to the Jews?" We answered that to a degree last time but I will expand on it this morning.

In giving the Law to the newly born nation of Israel when God freed them from the Egyptians, it almost seems as if He is approaching them as children in verses 23-25.

In other words, for us, **EVEN THOUGH OLD TESTAMENT LAW CANNOT BRING US SALVATION, IT CAN HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THE HEART OF GOD.**

Whenever Paul talks about the death of the law, we must also quote what he says about the Old and New Testaments. Let me quote this again from Paul's second letter to Timothy:

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the (men and women) of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17 / NIV).

If that is correct then we have to understand in what sense the Old Testament Law is dead and in which ways it can be used to teach, rebuke, correct, train in righteousness, and equip us. They almost seem contradictory. Hopefully, before we finish this section, I can somehow resolve this to some satisfaction.

First of all, verse 23 describes what the nation of Israel was like under the law. This section nicely summarizes what we talked about last time. The primary function of the law was to protect and preserve Israel as a viable nation who would ultimately produce the Messiah. I'm not sure that Paul is referring to individuals here but rather the nation of Israel. Secondly, I don't think it is meant to sound as negative as it does in English. Look at verse 23. Paul says, "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed." Let's try to make a timeline out of this verse. Paul has already stated that Abraham started out in faith. This lasted for about 500 years. Towards the end of that 500 years, Israel found themselves enslaved to the nation of Egypt. The Israelites were a group of tribes and families, but they were not a nation. However, within this group of slave tribes, the seed of the yet unborn Messiah also lived. At the end of this period of time, God miraculously delivered the Israelites from their Egyptian Slavery. He then made them into a nation who He proposed to settle in the Promised Land. In order to make sure this nation survived and prospered, God gave them the law through Moses. These laws were meant to protect them physically, socially, and spiritually. Let's look at the phrase, "held prisoners." This word means to confine or to hem in. It could be used of a jailor. However, let me quote to you from King David:

¹ O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.

² You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³ You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴ Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.

⁵ You hem me in—behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain. (Psalm 139:1-6 / NIV)

⁵ LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.

⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance" (Psalm 16:5-6 / NIV).

So it seems as if David feels safe in the hands of and under the protection of God. Let's now take a look at the second phrase, "Locked up." The word means to be guarded or protected under the protection of soldiers. In talking about the peace of God, Paul wrote to the Philippians:

⁷ "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7 / NIV).

There is definitely a time limit for the law to function. The law was meant to protect the civil, ceremonial, political, and religious Israel. The ultimate goal of Israel was to produce the Messiah Who would take care of sin, Satan, evil, and death. God preserved the nation and religion of Israel so that Jesus could be born and enter human history. Once Jesus appeared on the scene, He would build the new community known as the church. This community would comprise people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. He would fulfill the promise made to Abraham that all nations on the earth would be blessed through his seed.

This must never be confused. People have always been saved by grace through faith. Old Testament believers gave their lives to God in faith and anticipated the day of Messiah. All post-Jesus people are saved by grace through faith in trusting the finished work of Jesus on the cross. However, to preserve this new community the church, Jesus gave us commands that will enable us to survive until His second coming. It seems pretty interesting to me. God keeps the promise of Messiah alive through the nation of Israel. He now keeps the promise of Messiah's second coming alive through the church. God seems to use community and He gives them laws to preserve them and protect them.

Verse 24 describes what it was like living in the law. Again, I think that we have misunderstood this verse because of how it translates into English. If you look at the words, "put in charge" in verse 24, the word in Greek is *paidagoges*. We get our English word pedagogy from it. In English pedagogy has to do with teaching and teachers. Many preachers and teachers say that Paul was saying that the law taught them about the need for Christ. In other words, when people were introduced to the law, they would see how sinful they were and recognize the need to place their faith in Christ. That is good theology, however, it is the wrong text.

In Roman and Greek societies, wealthy families took slaves who were of good character and put them in charge of their children. The pedagogue was assigned to a boy when he was about 6 until he reached the age of about 20. This man was responsible to walk the child to school and pick him up. He was a combination of bodyguard/nanny/chaperone. He would guard the morals of the child. The pedagogue was to walk the child to school, to protect him, and ultimately walk him to adulthood.

The law was meant to protect Israel and to walk them towards adulthood, when Messiah would come and they would give themselves in faith to Christ. The law was given to protect the nation of Israel and the promise God gave to all of humanity.

In verse 25, Paul hints at the fact that we now have to live above the law. When Jesus came to earth and offered Himself up as the ultimate sacrifice, there was no

longer any need for the nation of Israel to exist as a nation and to occupy the land of Israel. They produced the Messiah, and it was now time for Messiah to lead His people. And as we have said before, the nation was destroyed and scattered around 70 AD by the Romans.

However, having said that, I want to make sure that we do not slip into the errors of different Christian churches throughout the centuries of becoming or even sounding anti-Jewish. Paul makes it clear in his letter to the Romans that God is not finished with the nation of Israel and as we look at how miraculously Israel was gathered back to the land in 1948, became a nation once again, and has miraculously been able to defend themselves and survive is evidence of God's hand and blessing on the nation and people of Israel.

So keeping in mind that we now live by the law of the Spirit of God, how then are we to approach the Old Testament law? For us believers who now find ourselves 2,000 years removed from the time of Paul and over 3,500 years removed from the time of Moses, how should we approach Bible study?

Let me address the early Jewish Christians first. They had to recognize that they were saved by the finished work of Christ, and that alone. But Paul also told them that if they came to Christ as a Jew, they should remain a Jew. Socially and politically, they should remain Jewish. Even though they continued to practice circumcision, eat kosher, and practice other religious ceremonies, they now had to connect them with Jesus. For example, when they celebrated Passover or the Day of Atonement, they would have to identify Christ as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. So Christ would have to be the culmination of all the practices and ceremonies.

Let's now address how we are to approach Scripture today and further, how should we approach the Old Testament Law? Let's start by our approach of Scripture in general. The first warning is this. Just as some of the Jewish community came to worship the law, many Christians today have come to worship the Bible. That is not the proper place of the Bible. Like the Old Testament law, it is to protect us as a community identified as the chosen of God. It will guide us to godly behavior and guide us through life. However, we must never forget that just getting more and more knowledge from the Bible won't save us and neither will forming some sort of regiment of obedience and then obeying save us. We are saved; justified, sanctified, and glorified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Christianity is all about our relationship with God. In any good relationship, intimacy depends on knowing the other and honestly revealing myself to the other. God has revealed Himself through creation, through His incarnate Son Jesus Christ, and the Bible. To help us further understand His revelation, He has given us His Holy Spirit. Since the Bible is God's written word, we should approach it as His love letter to us. In other words, He reveals Himself to us through the pages of Scripture.

When reading the Bible, we must not try to take a statement from Scripture and try to apply it directly to today. For example, in the New Testament, Paul told the women to cover their heads when they pray. So many women in many different churches wear hats to church every Sunday, but it doesn't mean a thing. I don't want us to get too hung up on this so I want to give you a quick explanation of what I think should happen. In those days, and in those churches, women wearing hats was a symbol of humility, modesty, and submission.

Now in the churches I have been in where women wore hats, they were anything but humble, modest, and submissive. In fact many were loud, arrogant, proud, and domineering. If they wanted to really please God by understanding what He wants,

they would have been much better off leaving their hats at home and bringing a humble, modest, submissive spirit to church.

So here is where we start. The first assumption I am making is this. In the Scriptures, God is revealing to us Who He is, what He likes, and what He doesn't like. Secondly, since God is so much bigger than we are, He has to communicate His message to us in language we can understand. Therefore, He has to take His message and put it in language that the people He is communicating it to can understand. That brings us to my second assumption. God speaks to people in the context of their cultural, historical, and linguistic understanding. In other words, He would not speak to Abraham who lived around 2,000 B.C. with 21st century American scientific words, concepts, or even the English language. Abraham would not understand a thing. God had to make Himself known to Abraham in Abraham's cultural, social, historical, and linguistic understanding.

Therefore, when we read the Bible, we must try and understand what the world was like in their day. If studying about Abraham, we must study and understand what the context of his life was. What was society like? What were their assumptions about the world in which they lived? What were their individual situations like? Then we must try and understand what God was telling them about Himself. That brings us to my third assumption. I believe that God wants us to know the same things about Himself that He revealed to the authors of Scripture. So when we study through a particular passage, we must draw out the "eternal principal," that idea that applies to all people throughout all history. What is God revealing about Himself that we all need to know to develop intimacy? For example, Paul has been arguing that God approached Abraham in love, in grace, and in person. God wanted to bless Abraham. The eternal principal Paul drew from that was that God approaches us all personally, in love, and in grace. God wants to repair the broken relationship with all human beings. He wants to be in a relationship with Him and the only way we can do this is by grace.

And that brings me to my fourth assumption. God wants us to apply these eternal principals to our lives and to know Him more intimately. Watch how Paul has been applying this eternal principal to the churches in Galatia. He had to take these truths about God and apply them to the people of his day. He explained to them what God revealed about Himself to Abraham, explained it, and then made it applicable to his churches. He said to them, the way to God's heart is not by being religious or obeying religious laws to earn His love. That would be insulting God. God took the initiative in the relationship. To try and earn God's grace and love and mercy would be an insult to Him. The only proper response to God's approach is to receive Him in faith, in trust and in love. The way we do that is by putting our faith in Jesus Christ to make all the promises apply to us.

To apply that to our lives, we must admit that we would be eternally lost because of our sin and our rebellion against God. None of us are good; not one of us. The only way we can receive eternal life and a right relationship with God is to receive the gifts of eternal life and a restored relationship with Him by simply placing our faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross for us.

I don't think that seems so hard. I think that is the way we are also to approach the Old Testament: even the laws. For example, the New Testament talks about sexual purity. There are tons of laws pertaining to sexual purity in the Old Testament. The Old Testament laws lay out an orderly society and talks a lot about social justice. If we want to know what relationships within the church ought to look like, the Old Testament laws can help us a lot.

Let me just give one quick example. In the law regulations are laid out for celebrating Passover and The Day of Atonement. In Passover, we saw that God saved Israel. He made it clear that He didn't save them because they were strong, noble, wise, or moral. God intended to kill the firstborn in every household. If the Hebrews would respond to Him in faith by killing a lamb and putting the blood over the doorposts of their houses, the angel of death would pass over that house and spare the firstborn. In understanding what Jesus did for us on the cross, we must understand that we too were unworthy. We deserve death, but when God passes over and sees the blood of Jesus covering us, He passes over without judgment. There is also a lot to understand about the eating of unleavened bread and the readiness to leave Egypt and our celebration of communion and our attitudes towards the world.

Think about The Day of Atonement. It is very involved. However, the priest laid his hands on the goat, symbolizing the transference of his sins, and the people's sins on to the goat. When the goat was abandoned to the wilderness, Israel was forgiven of her sins. When Jesus died on the cross, all of our sins were transferred on to Him and Jesus bears all of our sins.

I don't have time to go in depth here, but I think you get the idea. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17 / NIV). **EVEN THOUGH OLD TESTAMENT LAW CANNOT BRING US SALVATION, IT CAN HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THE HEART OF GOD.**

In verses 26-29, Paul describes God as now approaching us as adults. In other words **SINCE WE BELONG TO THE ROYAL FAMILY, WE ARE EXPECTED TO ACT ACCORDINGLY.** When we start chasing after the things of this world and acting like the world, we should be hearing the Holy Spirit telling us, "You belong to the Royal Family. Grow up and start acting like it!"

In verse 26 we are reminded that we share one faith. Many Bible scholars that I respect a lot criticize the NLT for translating this verse, "So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Even though I really respect these scholars, I cautiously and respectfully disagree with them. Their point is this. To address women as "sons of God" would be shocking in Paul's day. Women had no rights in Jewish, Roman, or Greek culture. Only men inherited estates. I agree with their assessment of the message in Paul's day. In fact, many misguided women think Paul is a misogynist. However, if we read Paul carefully, he turns the whole world upside down and gives women and children the dignity that God has always meant for them to have. Think about what Paul is saying here. Women, children, educated, uneducated, rich or poor can all become sons of God. They all become heirs to the kingdom and all the promises. Women in Paul's day would be ecstatic, while men would stand dumbfounded. Calling women sons in Paul's day would be an incredible compliment.

However, in our society, at least in theory though not always in reality, women are considered as equals. They have the same inheritance rights, etc. Therefore, I think in our society, it would be better to translate this as children of God rather than sons of God. I know that because my wife comes from a patriarchal society and many of you come from male dominated societies, perhaps knowing that you have all been given the status of the oldest son in God's Kingdom is meaningful. The point is this. There is only one way to receive this status as oldest and most valued son. That is to place your faith in Jesus Christ. There is only one way and one faith to join the family of God.

Verse 27 reminds us that there is only one baptism as well. Let me just say this about baptism. This is a rite that all Christians shared. I think baptism is not all that high churches mean it to be. For example, I don't think there is anything magical about baptism. If we baptize a baby or an adult, that does not make them a Christian. But it is certainly more than many other churches mean it to be. It is not just some sort of outward expression. I think baptism is symbolic in the same way communion is symbolic. By symbolic I don't mean that it just represents something or points to something. I believe it is symbolic in the sense of the word symbolic in Greek. It is a compound word. Sym means together. Balo means to throw. Symbol is throwing two worlds together. It is a simultaneous throwing together of the natural and supernatural worlds, and the temporal and eternal worlds. When we celebrate communion, somehow we are connected to the original celebration with Christ and the disciples and we are somehow connected with the body and blood of Jesus. It transcends time and space. It transcends the natural and physical worlds.

In baptism, we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus identified with us in baptism. We identify with His death and resurrection through baptism. Although baptism is not a requirement for salvation (for we know the thief on the cross was saved and went to heaven with Jesus without being baptized) there is never an instance in the New Testament of an unbaptized believer. Everybody who believes seeks baptism.

In going under the water, the believer is saying, "I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live." In coming up out of the water alive, the believer is saying, "But Christ lives in me."

Here Paul talks about clothing ourselves in Christ. It is as if we left all our dirty clothes and our old life behind in the water. That's why churches normally use white gowns to symbolize the new life we are committing ourselves to. We are clothing ourselves with purity, holiness, and love. It really participates with the reality of God's Holy Spirit taking up residence in us and giving us new life. So in baptism we participate with the death of Christ on the cross, His resurrection, and new Holy Spirit empowered life in Christ. All Christians should be baptized.

Verse 28 reminds us that there is only one church. Again, this is an exclamation point to end the conventional religious thinking of the time. Jewish men used to get up in the morning and pray this prayer, "Thank you God that you did not create me a Gentile. Thank you God that you did not create me slave. Thank you God that you did not create me a woman."

Paul blows up that whole way of thinking. In God's family, all these human distinctions and causes of prejudices and divisions are broken down. We are all one in Christ. There are no human divisions or human hierarchies in the church. In the family of God, Paul has already said that we are all considered sons of God. And here to hammer the point home, he makes sure that there are no legitimate human distinctions in classifying people. If you want to talk about laws that protect the survival and health of a community think about this. Any type of prejudice; whether it is racial, social, cultural, ethnic, or gender related, will not be tolerated by God. If we hold on to prejudices then we are a threat to the survival of the Christian community. And since Christ is the Head of this community, people who are prejudiced will find themselves directly opposing Christ. There is one church that is known as the Body of Christ. Jesus is the Head of this Body. There is only one church.

There is only one church because as verse 29 reminds us, there is only One Lord. We belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. When He redeems us and makes us His fellow

heirs, we not only receive all the promises made to Abraham, we receive the inheritance of Jesus Christ Himself. We receive eternal life. We receive an eternal home in heaven. We receive an abundant life lived constantly in the presence of God. We inherit the beauty of heaven forever. And here is the crazy thing. We will receive rewards from things that God did through us. God did them and we will be rewarded. That is what you call an extravagant Father. There is One Lord. He rules over one church. There is only one baptism because there is only one Lord, one church and one community we enter. And we all enter this community the same way; through one faith. The result of this knowledge is to keep in our minds that we are God's children. **SINCE WE BELONG TO THE ROYAL FAMILY, WE ARE EXPECTED TO ACT ACCORDINGLY.**

I know there are people who like us to believe the Bible is an ancient book and is no longer valuable or applicable to our lives. Somehow we forget that the God we worship is an eternal God. He is always approaching us in love, ... always. His word to us is always valuable and applicable. **CHRISTIANS ARE EXPECTED TO LIVE FAR BETTER THAN OLD TESTAMENT LAW.** In addition, we are to live far better than the world around us. We can live far above the Old Testament law, but keep in mind, the Old Testament law still reveals to us Who God is.

In one of the "Our Daily Bread" issues that we hand out in church, they described perfectly what our attitude towards Scripture ought to be:

"It is said of Charles Haddon Spurgeon that one Sunday when the time for reading Scripture came, he left the Bible closed. 'Some have found fault with me,' he said 'contending that I'm too old-fashioned. I am always quoting the Bible and do not say enough about science. Well, there's a poor widow here who has lost her only son. She wants to know if she will ever see him again. Let's turn to science for the answer: Will she see him? Where is he? Does death end all?' There was a long pause. 'We are waiting for an answer,' he said. 'This woman is anxious.' Another long pause. 'Nothing to say?' Then we'll turn to the book!' Spurgeon clinched his point by reading the wonderful promises concerning Heaven and eternal life."

The Bible is God's love letter to His children. Christianity is all about God's love for us and our love response to Him. To become more intimate with God requires us to know more about Him ... and more of Him.