

Galatians 3:23-25 “Christ’s Royal Law of Love”

GAL 3:23-25 “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

Last week we saw how Paul was demonstrating that the law, though not a means to attaining righteousness, was certainly not opposed to the will of God as it relates to grace and salvation.

And this is seen in the way Paul describes how the law is meant to be used. It is meant to show the sinfulness of sin, which then leads us to the one who can forgive us of our sin. The law cannot forgive, it only brings death. But praise God, Jesus Christ can and does forgive.

GAL 3:21-22 “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.”

And so, as Paul continues in our text this morning he clarifies this position as he further explains the function of the law.

GAL 3:23 “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.”

Now we can look at a verse like this and conclude that faith wasn’t in existence until it was finally revealed, presumably when Christ came. But that’s not what Paul is teaching. Obviously faith existed before Jesus came into the world. We see it in Adam, Abraham, Moses and so on.

So when he says, before this faith came, he is speaking about the culmination of the promise given to Abraham which was to be received by faith. In other words, this faith came to be realized at a time in history when it no longer looked forward to the promise in Christ, but it actually realized its fulfillment when He came.

But there's another sense in which this faith came while we were being held prisoners by the law and that's found in our personal lives.

All of us are under the curse of the law outside of Christ. But when faith came, that is the faith that was a gift to God's people, we were released from the law which held us prisoners. Only God can reveal and give us this faith as He takes us from the dungeon of death through the law and brings us into the light of His life in Christ.

It is this faith that has come to us as a gift from God as Paul points out to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

And so, this faith is the embodiment of the truths and promises given to us in Scripture which were now staring us in the face in the person of Jesus Christ.

And so, until He came, the law was playing a role in pointing away from itself to the only One who could give life. But in what sense did the law keep Israel as a prisoner, according to the NIV? Or as the NASB puts it, in what sense were they kept in custody until Christ came?

Well, the idea of being in custody, or held a prisoner by the law is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact the word in Greek for custody "has the idea of guarding in a good sense as much as that of confining in a bad sense. [and so, the idea of being] in protective custody would give the better sense." (R. Alan Cole)

It's similar to the President of the United States traveling the country or world and having the Secret Service surround him as he moves through the crowds.

Every place he goes has been planned out for him as the Secret Service essentially dictates when and where he goes. It's very restrictive, but it's meant to keep him very safe until he finally arrives home.

The latter part of verse 23 shows us how long someone was to be under the protective custody of the law; "until faith should be revealed."

And so, what this shows us is that the law was to have a time limit on it. It was never meant to be used forever by the nation of Israel. There was to be a time in Israel's history where the law would give way to the one who fulfilled the law. This is what Paul points out a little later in this letter.

GAL 4:4-5 "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

The writer of Hebrews also shows us that the law was only meant to be used for a particular time. After the Messiah came there would be no need for the law in Israel, since Christ had come into this world, thus fulfilling the Scriptures, as we see in Hebrews.

HEB 9:9-10 "This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings -external regulations applying; until the time of the "new order."

The "new order", according to the above verse, is the new covenant in the blood of Christ. And so, when Jesus Christ came, our faith in Him, and not a dependence on the law, was to take precedence. The law was to lead us to Him by faith.

But to be under the law "in practice is to be under sin -- not because law and sin are identical, but because law, while forbidding sin, stimulates the very thing it forbids." (F.F. Bruce)

And so, once you place your faith in Christ you not only come out from under the grips of the effects of sin, (its penalty and power), you also come out from under the grip of the law which condemns you. You've moved from death to life. So, why hold to the death agent, which is the law?

Again, however, it's important to understand what Paul has in mind here. In those days it was customary to use your slave as you put him in custody over your child.

It was kind of like a nanny who took the place of the parent to ensure that the child got to school, did the homework and learned the lesson.

But it went beyond the slave accompanying the child to school. The slave-attendant was with the child from morning to evening

wherever he went, in an instructive role, a protective role as well as a companion role.

The child didn't have the choice to ditch the slave-attendant because the parent placed that slave over the child and the slave had the obligation, as he was given authority over the child, to enforce the instructions given him from the parent.

Where the child went, the slave-attendant went, all the while giving the child all of the benefits of an adult who cared and had the wisdom to lead that child as he grew.

But there was a time when that child no longer needed the attendant to follow him and protect him, because at some point that child became a man. And the function of the slave-attendant was no longer needed.

In the same way the law was given as a slave-attendant to be wherever we are and to serve the will of God who placed that attendant over His children, the Israel of God. And that Israel of God includes every spiritual child of Abraham from Adam to every believing Jew and Gentile today and onward.

Galatians 6:14-16 ¹⁴ But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. ¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

The nation of Israel was always meant to be a shadow of God's chosen people in every generation. They were to be seen as those who belonged to God and were His special possession. And now the fulfillment of that shadow is seen in what Paul calls the Israel of God, the spiritual Israel found in those who are spiritual children of Abraham, the father, if you will, of this Israel of God.

But the question needs to be raised as to how the law leads us to Christ. Well, in one sense the law is put in effect to show the futility of the law to bring us righteousness and forgiveness. When one looks at the law it should lead us to the conclusion that the law is powerless to give us life.

Well, if that's the case where do we look? We look outside the law as we look to the one the law speaks of who can give us life. In this way, the law is a very good tutor as it shows us the

deficiencies of the law and leads us to the one who came to give us life.

And once we come to the One the law points us to we finally find that life and justification Paul speaks of at the end of verse 24, “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

You see, this is the difference between the law and Christ. One is simply acknowledged as God’s perfect standard as you obey the rules, while the other is received by faith as you receive justification. One brings death, the other justifies in the legal sense where all of God’s requirements have been met according to the law in Christ, who kept the law perfectly.

And once we place our faith in His redemptive work on our behalf we receive all the benefits of His life, death and resurrection, just as though we kept the law perfectly and fulfilled every requirement of God.

In Christ the law has been satisfied and that’s the reason we are justified and given a righteousness outside of ourselves and yet that righteousness has been placed to our account as our faith is placed in a person, not in the law.

If we’ve received Christ by faith, then it stands to reason that we would no longer need to carry the tutor around with us. His function has come to an end and we are now free to act without the tutor always looking over our shoulder.

GAL 3:25 “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

Again, this doesn’t mean that the law is bad or that it serves no purpose, but when we’re talking about eternal life the law simply cannot help in and of itself. It must point to someone who can.

Now, what this is telling the Judaizers of Paul’s day is that they are misusing the law as they try to reintroduce the tutor who has been fired since his services are no longer needed.

If you’re taking Calculus in college, why in the world would you go back and sit in the class of your second grade teacher who is only teaching basic mathematics?

Not only would it be a waste of time and effort, and not only would it be useless for your pursuit of higher math, but you’d look pretty silly sitting among 8 year olds.

There's a point at which we put aside the things of a child.

1CO 13:11 "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me."

It is childish for these Judaizers, or even us today, to try and rule our spiritual lives with a set of laws. Now, obviously what distinguishes the Judaizers from true believers who want to use the law is that the Judaizers were making the claim that unless the law is added to faith in Christ one cannot be saved. True believers who want to use the law usually use it as a means to sanctification.

The Judaizers created a false gospel. True believers who use the law as "the" guide for life use it in a similar way as one might slavishly follow their horoscopes. This creates a false means to growing in Christ. Paul would condemn both approaches.

For a group of people today who claim to know Christ and yet coerce others to use the law as a means of salvation are just as wrong and lost as the Judaizers of Paul's day.

We've cited a number of groups during this study who would fall into this category of forcing their followers to add the works of the law to ensure their salvation.

Why do you think the Jehovah's Witnesses spend so much time canvassing the neighborhoods? It's not simply as a way to get more converts. In doing this they add to their chances of getting to heaven. It's similar with the Mormons. The more good works you do the better are your chances of getting to heaven.

Growing up a Roman Catholic I knew that I wasn't going to heaven in the first round. But, I also knew that my chances were increased as I went to Mass on a regular basis along with confession and praying to the saints. I reasoned that the more good works I did, the better I looked to God.

Paul is saying that there are not enough good works in the universe that we can do to earn our way to heaven. And as believers that's not why we do good works, because good works are important, but only as we do them in response to what Christ has already done for us. We don't earn heaven with good works, Christ has earned heaven for us.

And so, good works follow salvation, they don't earn salvation.

But how can we Christians fall into this trap of reinstating the law in our lives? Well, as I said earlier we can use the law as a way to make us appear more holy. And after all, what's wrong with being holy before God?

Well, nothing is wrong with holiness. We've been told by Jesus to be holy even as our heavenly Father is holy. But it's not our holiness, as seen in acts of good works, which reconcile us to the Father. And yet, you might not know that looking at how some Christians treat holiness.

When Christians begin to use the law as a way to force us to be holy then they have usurped the ministry of the Holy Spirit and they assume His role. How does this happen? Well, how many churches lay down a set of rules to become a member of their church? And by rules I means rules they've created, not rules or commands God has clearly given us in His word.

I'm sure that you're aware of such rules. To be a member you ladies cannot wear makeup, you can't wear pants, your skirts must come to at least your knees and you need to wear a hat to cover your head.

You men cannot have a beard, you cannot have hair that comes below your collar, and to be acceptable in this church it is advisable to come to church in a coat and tie.

Now for both men and women, you are not allowed to go to the movies, you can't go to dances, and you can only watch certain television programs. If you'd like a complete list of our do's and don't's you can visit our website at PhariseesRus.com

Now, we might find this silly and extreme, but you can be assured that there are churches out there who subscribe to such lists. As I've mentioned before it is not uncommon with some churches that if you want to be a member of that church in good standing you have to sign a promise card that you will give one tenth of your income.

Now, we might ask what's wrong with any of this? Isn't it prudent to wear clothes that honor God? Isn't it wise not to go to some of the filth we find in movies and on T.V.? Isn't it a good thing to give to God's work with our income? Absolutely.

But it is not the job of the church or the leadership of the church to force people to act in a certain way when the Scriptures allow liberty in some of these areas. We are not the Holy Spirit police. It

is the job of the Holy Spirit to either convict or confirm the appropriateness of our behavior according to the word of God.

But when the Scriptures do not mandate a certain behavior then we cannot create a law which does. Now on the other hand, it is quite appropriate to expect certain behavior when the Scriptures are clear.

Adultery, murder, divisiveness in the body of Christ are all things the Scriptures prohibit and the leadership of the church can deal with such problems.

But to create a list of do's and don't's, as you twist the Scriptures to arrive at those rules, creates the same sort of environment with our sanctification as it did with the Judaizers using the law to determine who is saved.

No longer are we being Spirit led, we are being man-pleasers as we're led by fear of what someone may think of us instead of being motivated by wanting to please Christ out of gratitude for the salvation He purchased for us.

One approach is fleshly while the other is God-centered. But even when Christians use the law as a moral standard for right and wrong they can go beyond what it means to be led by the Spirit who gave us the law.

This is the difference between using the law as our motivation as opposed to using the love of Christ as our motivation. And so, we can take a good thing and make it bad. I used an example of this Thursday evening in our study on Exodus when we were talking about the law.

No one who is normal will approach their marriage by going down a list of do's and don't's and at the end of the day as they come together and go over that list to determine if they were a good husband or wife that day: "Did I tell my wife I loved her today? Did I cook a good dinner for my husband when he came home from work? Did I compliment my wife on her clothes and hair?"

"Okay honey, how did we do today?" "Well, you told me you loved me, but you could have put more excitement into the way you complimented my hair." "All right, fair enough. But you know the dinner was put on the table 15 minutes later than normal. You really need to work on that."

This is not the way a marriage grows. We don't deal with relationships in this way. Then why in the world would we deal with our God and Savior in this way?

This is the ultimate in relationships and yet there is a tendency to measure that relationship based on a particular rule we kept, even if that rule happens to be one of the 10.

“Oh, God can't be pleased with me today because I only read one chapter in the bible instead of the three chapters I promised Him. Oh, God can't love me this week because I was only at church four times instead of every day as my Pastor said I should do.”

“Oh, Lord how can you love me since I went to a movie? I know it was only Snow White but we all know that movie theaters are dens of demons.” The rules we create become more important than the relationship we are to pursue.

How does a relationship work? We love our mates and therefore would not do anything that would hurt them and do everything to help them and please them, precisely because we love them, not because a set of rules has been put in place.

In a love relationship we forgive. In a love relationship we desire to be close to one another. Why? Because someone said we have to? No, because of the love we have for one another.

It's the same with Christ. Why do we go to church? Because there's a law that says we have to? I hope not. In a love relationship with our Savior we desire to be with other believers to come before God's throne to worship Him and hear from Him in His word.

Why do we give to the work of the Lord? Because of a law that says you have to give a certain amount? No. Rather we give because it pleases the Lord as we worship Him with our increase. And as we take that attitude we can then give cheerfully as unto the Lord, not under compulsion.

If we give because of a law that compels us to give, we've left the love relationship and have relegated that relationship to the keeping of the law.

That doesn't please God any more than when you come to your wife and say I bought you an anniversary gift because your mother said you'd be upset if I didn't. Oh, that will earn you a lot of Brownie points.

There is a use for the law, but it's not in the context of a relationship. When you get pulled over for speeding you don't confuse that with a relationship with the police officer. You understand that as a necessary response for keeping accidents down.

The law defines bad behavior and then gives authority to punish that behavior, whether it's the law of God or the traffic laws of our city. But it doesn't create a relationship with the mayor or God, and it doesn't keep a relationship with either.

And so, to use the law as a means of trying to please God in a relationship we have in Christ is not to understand the law. Does this mean we are given a license to violate the law now that we have a relationship with Christ? Of course not. But it's our love for Christ, our relationship with Christ, which compels us to love and obey Him, not the other way around.

This is the law of love whereby our love for Christ motivates us to obey Him. We no longer have to go down a list which says you cannot steal. Our new heart in Christ says this will not please my Lord, let alone please my neighbor.

The apostle John put it in a very concise way.

1JO 3:21-24 "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."

What John is saying here is that God desires that we obey Him. But John makes the distinction of obeying God not because we have to, or because the law demands it, but because we want to as we want to please Him as we love Him.

This is why John says in 1JO 3:21... "... we obey his commands and do what pleases him."

But then in the very next verse he qualifies that by saying, "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.' In other words, it's a command of faith. It's a command unto life.

It's a command which results in a relationship. And after that relationship has been established, as we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are given another command. But, it's not a command to keep a particular law. It's a command which sums up the law. John puts it this way.

1JO 3:23 "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."

We can only truly love one another as we first love God above all. But love begets love. The law begets performance, not love. And so, this command John speaks of is really not a law as much as it is a reality of what happens when we have life in Christ. It's not the command from God which compels us to love, it's the Spirit of God who dwells in us.

And that's why John sums up the way he does regarding these commands from God.

1JO 3:24 "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."

He doesn't say that we know that He lives in us and we in Him simply through our obedience as if obeying a command verifies that we have life. Rather John says, we know that we live in Him as we keep His commands because of His Spirit He gave us.

The law doesn't bear witness to life, it bears witness to death and condemnation. But the Spirit bears witness to the life Christ has given us and then changes our hearts to be followers of Christ as we obey Him out of love, not because some law says to.

HEB 10:15-17 "The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

When you and I consider and meditate upon the fact that our heavenly Father does not count against us our lawless acts and sins, once we've placed our faith in Christ, we can begin to move and act in the Spirit who has placed His law of grace and mercy upon our hearts.

2 Corinthians 3:2-3 ² You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ being manifested that you are a

letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

May His law of love permeate us and motivate us to love Him above all and obey Him because it pleases Him to no end. We're in a dynamic relationship with the living God by faith, not a game with rules and regulations designed to change our behavior. Our behavior is changed because of a changed heart. It's Christ's heart which is to beat in us to His glory.