

THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

GALATIANS 3:23-29, AFFIRMATION OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH: POSITIONS UNDER LAW AND FAITH

- A. The position of people under Law (23-25)
1. Before faith in Christ, people were imprisoned by law (23), *Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.*
 - a. Paul likens law to a prison which holds people captive.
 - 1) *held captive* means *to guard, keep under watch, to watch over.*
 - a) *imprisoned* strengthens the meaning *watch over, guarded.*
 - b) Note 1 Peter 1:5, *who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*
 - c) Law guards everyone under sin so that the promise is received by faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 2) The purpose of law not only condemns but protects as noted by Donald Campbell, . . . *Israel was under the protective custody of the Law, God thus shielding His people from the evil heathen rites surrounding them.*
 - 3) Paul's use of *we* shows that he is speaking of Jews and Gentiles, all who are being guarded by law (no article in Greek), God's general principles.
 - b. Imprisonment by the Law continued until the revealing of faith.
 - 1) Paul is speaking of faith in Jesus Christ as noted in verse 22. He is the true object of faith.
 - 2) Donald Campbell, *Justifying faith was operative in the Old Testament but faith in the person and work of Christ did not come until He was revealed.*
 - 3) Grant Osborne, *Why would anyone want to remain in imprisonment when their freedom from captivity and emancipation from slavery has arrived? When the prison doors have been opened, no one in their right mind would want to continue stagnating in a cell!*
 2. The Law was the guardian of future believers who would place faith in Christ (24-25), *So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,*
 - a. *so then*
 - 1) It is a marker of purpose with what preceded as a means (*held captive*).
 - 2) The purpose of the Law was to be a guardian until Christ came.
 - b. *guardian*
 - 1) It means *custodian, supervisor.*
 - 2) The English word *pedagogue* is derived from this word and it is defined as a *strict teacher.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *In Paul's day it was common for children between age six and puberty to be under the care of a pedagogue (tutor). The pedagogue protected them from evil influences and demanded their obedience.*
 - 4) Donald Campbell, *These slaves were severe disciplinarians and were charged with guarding the children from the evils of society and giving them moral training. This was like the Law's function until Christ came and people could be justified by faith in Him.*
 - c. Christians are no longer children under a guardian.
 - 1) They have been justified by faith in Christ and are no longer children in need of a guardian.
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *Now all who trust in Christ are adult sons, no longer children. It is faith in Christ Jesus that makes one a son of God.*
 - 3) John Stott, *Only Christ can deliver us from the law's harsh discipline, because He makes us sons who obey from love for their Father and are no longer naughty children needing tutors to punish them.*
 - 4) Obviously, Paul is impressing on the Galatians, why would they want to go back to prison and be disciplined by a strict tutor when they are now children of God by faith in Christ?

B. The position of people under grace (26-29)

1. Those who place faith in Christ alone become sons of God (26-27), *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*
 - a. Paul declares that the new position of those who place faith in Christ alone are sons of God.
 - 1) *for*, there is no longer the need for a stern tutor for those who are in Christ through faith alone because they are now sons and daughters of God.
 - a) John 1:12, *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,*
 - b) Romans 8:14, *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*
 - 2) Paul makes it personal for the Galatians by saying *you are all sons of God.*
 - a) Why would they want to go back to a tutor when you now have the status of sons of God.
 - b) They were children but now they are adults.
 - c) They were under law but now they live by faith in Christ.
 - b. Those who are *baptized into Christ* have put on Christ.
 - 1) Paul is speaking of spiritual baptism.
 - 2) It is the time a person dies to self and rises to newness of life in Christ. Often, water baptism which is a public declaration of faith in Christ takes place soon after spiritual baptism.
 - a) 1 Corinthians 12:13, *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*
 - b) Ephesians 1:13, *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,*
 - 3) Being a son of God means one is in living union with Christ.
 - a) Christians are led by Christ not by a tutor.
 - b) Thomas Constable, *When Roman children reached son status their fathers gave them a special toga that identified their status. Paul compared that toga to Christ.*
 - c) John Stott, *God is no longer our Judge, who through the law has condemned and imprisoned us. God is no longer our Tutor, who through the law restrains and chastises us. God is now our Father, who in Christ has accepted and forgiven us.*
 - c. Warren Wiersbe, *The Law has performed its purpose: the Saviour has come and the “guardian” is no longer needed. It is tragic that the nation of Israel did not recognize their Messiah when He appeared. God finally had to destroy the temple and scatter the nation, so that today it is impossible for a devoted Jew to practice the faith of his fathers. He has no altar, no priesthood, no sacrifice, no temple, no king (Hosea 3:4). All of these have been fulfilled in Christ, so that any man—Jew or Gentile—who trusts Christ becomes a child of God.*
2. Believers are all one in Christ Jesus (28), *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
 - a. For those in Christ there are no distinctions that determine value.
 - 1) There is no distinction of race.
 - 2) There is no distinction of rank.
 - 3) There is no distinction of sex.
 - b. All have the same relationship to God and are of equal value.
 - c. Paul is emphasizing believers’ unity in Christ.
 - d. Donald Campbell, *None is spiritually superior over another, that is, a believing Jew is not more privileged before God than a believing Gentile; a believing slave does not rank higher than a believing free person; a believing man is not superior to a believing woman.*
 - e. It should be noted that there are different functions (not of superiority) ordained by God.
 - 1) 1 Corinthians 11:3, *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*
 - 2) 1 Timothy 2:12, *I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.*

3. Believers are Abraham's offspring (29), *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*
 - a. Those in Christ are Abraham's spiritual offspring.
 - 1) Jesus Christ is the singular seed promised.
 - 2) All of Abraham's spiritual descendants are heirs related through personal relationship to Jesus Christ.
 - 3) John Stott, *We are the spiritual seed of our father Abraham, who lived and died 4,000 years ago, for in Christ we have become heirs of the promise which God made to him. . .The unattached become attached. They find their place in eternity (related first and foremost to God as His sons and daughters), in society (related to each other as brothers and sisters in the same family) and in history (related also to the succession of God's people down the ages).*
 - b. Relationship to Abraham is based on promise.
 - 1) Galatians 3:18, *For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.*
 - 2) John Stott, So every sinner who trusts in Christ crucified for salvation, quite apart from any merit or good works, receives the blessing of eternal life and thus inherits the promise of God made to Abraham.
 - 3) Max Anders, *As the offspring of Abraham, we are heirs of the promise of righteousness through faith. Thus, grace is superior to the law because it unites us with God and one another in a way that the law could not.*
 - c. Abraham has natural seed, as well.
 - 1) Those are the descendants of Jacob in the twelve tribes.
 - 2) A believing remnant of Jews will one day inherit the Abrahamic promises directed specifically to them.
 - a) These Jews will accept Jesus as Messiah with land promises directed to this remnant.
 - b) Spiritual descendants do not supplant Israel by inheriting national promises.

CONCLUSION

- A. The Law is a guardian that holds sinners captive.
- B. Faith in Christ makes people sons of God who are free of the enslavement of the Law.
- C. All believers are one in Christ.
- D. Christians are the spiritual offspring of Abraham.
- E. National promises will be fulfilled by the nation of Israel.