

Our Schoolmaster

Galatians 3:23-27

“Why, then, the law?” That really is a very useful question. If it is all of grace, why then the law? If salvation comes to God’s people as the gift of his grace, then why did God give his people the law? What is the purpose of the law?

If you do much study of Scripture, you will often come across what are identified as three uses of the law. John Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, articulates these three uses in a way that continues to be extremely helpful for Christians to this day. One of those uses of the law of God is to restrain sin, and in particular, in the realm of civil government. The law serves to define sin, it threatens violators with punishment, and in general, it is necessary for the proper order of society. Our streets are safer because the law forbids careless drivers from going 100 miles per hour down Franklin Road in front of the church. And our lives are generally more safe because those who might break into our houses to steal what we own live under the threat of arrest and imprisonment. I am very thankful for that particularly useful work of God’s law. We identified some applications of that this morning.

Another use of the law, which I am focusing upon in our study of the Ten Commandments, is for us as Christians to know and understand the will of God for our lives. It is the rule of God for our lives as his children, and it defines the love of God which should characterize our lives.

1 John 5:3 “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith.”

So the law is the definition of your love for God. You love him by keeping his commandments. You honor him by living in way that pleases him. And the law restrains sins. Those are two of the proper uses of the law. The third and final way in which the law is used is what is defined by our text this afternoon. It is the use of the law as a tutor to lead us to Christ. A schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, as it was so familiarly translated in the original King James Version. A guardian.

And that is our specific focus today. The law as our schoolmaster. All three of these uses of the law are consistent and complementary, not at all contradictory. They are not at all in conflict with one another, they not mutually exclusive. That really is why I chose the book of Galatians to preach in the afternoon while we are studying Deuteronomy in the morning, with it’s focus upon the law—so we could see those different ways in which the law is used. So today, again the question, “Why then the law?” Specifically, here in Galatians 3, what does it mean for the law to be our tutor or schoolmaster? How does that work? The answer to those questions is at the very heart of this whole book.

Let me start with the thought in your mind of a before and after picture. Probably a weight loss advertisement. Perhaps a hair replacement ad. There is one picture before the treatment, before the program was instituted. And then a second one after, obviously much more attractive and appealing. That’s the outline of the sermon today. Before and after. The focal point is salvation, so I begin with,

I. BEFORE CHRIST.

The question becomes, how is the law used in the life of an unbeliever, in the life of a non-Christian as a non-Christian. Paul describes that in verse 23 as, “before faith came.” As we looked at verse 22 last week, the law was used to define our

condemnation.

v.21-22

Note well that the purpose of the law was never to be used as the means by which we would obtain life. The law was never the ground of justification. It was never the foundation upon which you could become a Christian or become part of the household of God's people. If the law could have given life, it would have, and Jesus wouldn't have had to die. Salvation by law was never the situation.

But before Christ, in your life, before you were a Christian, before a person becomes a Christian,

A. The law is a prison.

The application is personal, with reference to your own life. It is also broad and general, speaking of the time before Christ's incarnation as the time before the coming of "the faith", and the article is used in the Greek. "The faith" would then have reference to Jesus in the flesh, and it was of course Jesus who brought to the forefront this work of God's salvation. So before Christ, either with reference to the past age of the Old Testament, or with reference to your own life, before Christ, before the revelation of Christ, the law is a prison.

v.23

Strong language. Held captive. The Greek word doesn't actually apply to a prison but to the prison guards. The garrison. Before faith came, we were in custody. Imprisoned. Enslaved. Condemned. Held for judgment. As Paul puts it in,

Rom. 3:19 "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. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified

in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

That's why the law is so frustrating, isn't it? The law condemns. And it cannot impart life. The law convicts you of your sin, then enslaves you to that sin. It has no power to transform you. No power to enable you to obey. No power to change your heart. The law is a prison. That was Paul's testimony in,

Rom. 7:5 "For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death."

You see, while the law tells you what you must and must not do, it carries no power to enable you to fulfill it's demands. In fact, just the opposite. Exactly the opposite. The law actually stimulates your sin. That's what it means to live in the flesh, as Paul put it, "our sinful passions [are] aroused by the law."

In fact, Paul would say, the law killed me. As soon as he became aware of the law, his sin was defined and as he puts it, "I died."

Rom. 7:8 "But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me."

And even further,

Rom. 7:13 "Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."

That's what the Bible means, "the law is a prison." The law exposes your sin. It defines your sin. It condemns your sin. And then it actually stimulates you to keep on sinning. It produces death in you. That's true of every man and every woman since the fall of Adam and Eve.

Before they gained the knowledge of evil, before they rebelled against God, the law that was written on their heart was sufficient for life. They had the ability to obey it, and they were created without sin. The law, for them, was a test. A probation. They failed. And a failed probation means only one thing. Prison. Before Christ, without Christ, the law is a prison.

The law imprisons us. It tracks us down. No way out. Let me illustrate a little bit further how that works. Take an average two year old child. Now take the law. Take a commandment, a duty imposed by mom or dad. A command. The law actually stimulates the sin, doesn't it?

Take an adult, with even a little bit of that childish rebellion still left in the heart. Tell that person that there is something they are forbidden to do. Give them a prohibition. And what does that prohibition do in your heart? If you tell me I can't do it, it provokes me to do it all the more. If you tell me I can't do it, I am going to do it, just because you told me not to. It is called rebellion.

Be honest. Most of you probably have something of that left in your heart as well. For a non-Christian, that is their heart. God might restrain some of it, by his common grace, but without Christ, the law is a prison. And only when you understand that can you really understand the next image.

B. The law is a schoolmaster.

You see, God has a purpose for this imprisonment. The

slavery of the law is designed by God to cause you to cry out for something better, to cry out for freedom from sin. The slavery of the law that imprisons you is intended to teach you that you cannot save yourself. The more you try, the harder the effort to use the law for your own salvation, the more hopeless it becomes. And the more hopeless it becomes, the more you are ready to hear an alternative. A solution. The law is a schoolmaster.

Our English translations differ. Some have tutor, or guardian. The Greek word comes into English as "pedagogue." In the Greek and Roman world, the pedagogue was a male slave, a trusted and respected slave who was given the responsibility to take care of the boy children. He would have a very broad and comprehensive task that would include oversight of all the boys outward activities and behavior. The pedagogue would go with his charge wherever he went, he would attend to all his needs. That included taking him to school. He would be a teacher and instructor, and he would be the disciplinarian keeping him out of mischief and danger.

I should point out that the pedagogue had responsibilities only for children, so the one who needed the tutor, the schoolmaster, was a child. Not yet mature. Not yet grown up. And that would define the purpose of this tutor, to lead a young boy to become a young man.

That image of ordinary human development is made even clearer in verse 25. We are no longer under a guardian. That is to say, no longer a child. So the whole of the period before Christ is the period illustrated by the life of a child. That would also have reference to the people of God in the Old Covenant, in the time before the coming of Christ. They would be as children, able to become grown up in faith only when Jesus would come in the

flesh.

So how? How does the law function as this pedagogue or schoolmaster?

First of all, and for some people, this first step is never accomplished. The law shows you your sin. The law tells you, the law teaches you, you are a sinner. For me, at age 13, that was how the message of the gospel came. I realized that I was a sinner, that my superficial, imperfect, external, and self-righteous efforts to be good were inadequate. That's what the law did. It led me to Christ, by teaching me I needed Christ. I was a sinner. I was lost. In fact, I was dead in my sins. Alienated, separated from God. By nature a child of his wrath, because of my sin-an enemy. The law is a school master to lead us to Christ. The law is a guardian, our tutor to bring us to Christ.

And it still is. If you think that you are OK in the sight of God on the basis of your own works of righteousness, then you need the law to condemn you. You need the law to show you your sin. You need the law to expose your own heart as it is in the sight of God.

Second, the law shows you the inadequacy of your own outward performance. That was especially true for Paul's Jewish audience, who trusted in their religious rituals. For us, that might mean going to church, going to Sunday School, reading your Bible, a time of prayer and devotion, even witnessing to others. The law shows you that your outward performances are inadequate, because you would have to be perfect. And the law shows you your imperfections, so that it can show you Jesus.

The law shows you your sin so that you will flee to Jesus. The law shows you the standard you must achieve and it shows you how you fall short, so that you will trust in the only man who ever

met that standard perfectly. The law is a tutor to lead you to Jesus.

In order that you might be justified by faith, verse 24. That's the whole description of this purpose of the law, to teach you that you cannot be justified by the law.

And, therefore, the law teaches you that there is only one way. It is another way, the way of Jesus.

That's the "before" picture. The overweight person before the miracle diet program is started, the balding young man before his hair loss treatment takes effect. The woman before her makeover. Use whatever image you like. The point is in the contrast, and that contrast is stated in verse 25, "now that faith has come."

Now, instead of living before Christ, now we are,

II. IN CHRIST.

United to Christ. Saved by Christ. Justified. Adopted. Redeemed. Accepted as righteous in his sight, by faith not by works. Forgiven of sin, because Jesus satisfied the penalty. And in that case, under all those conditions, in Christ, "we are no longer under a guardian."

All the law had to do to lead us to Christ was done. We are no longer under a system of law, no longer a child under the tutelage of a schoolmaster. So what happens? How about this contrast, instead of being imprisoned, we are granted,

A. True freedom.

And just look at how that freedom is described.

v.26

Romans 8 begins with a great promise,

Rom. 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Paul continues to describe the freedom that we have in Christ, freedom from condemnation.

Rom. 8:2 “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

You are free from the law of sin and death. You are free from the condemnation of the law. Free from slavery, and free to be the sons of God, children of God.

Rom. 8:14 “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father! 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

That’s obviously where Paul is going in Galatians, too.
Gal. 4:1-7

True freedom. That’s now our theme in this section of Galatians. The freedom of sons, the freedom of being able to cry out, “Abba, Father.” The freedom of children.

When my girls were little, they would often come down to my basement office at home. Though sometimes I might have

seemed distracted and maybe even a little irritated at the interruption, I also realized what a privilege it was to have my children want my attention. So I gave it to them. They would sit on my lap. And now as young adults, whenever they come, or whenever I am able to visit them, I enjoy that same distraction. Because it is really no distraction at all! They have the freedom that comes from being my children, the freedom to call me their father.

Beloved, that’s freedom. Freedom to be children. Freedom to be loved. And I don’t need to tell you how destructive it is when children grow up without that freedom, without the sense of being loved and adored, without the freedom of access to a father and a mother who give them every expression and assurance of unconditional and unchangeable love.

That’s your freedom, in Christ. After the law has completed its task as tutor, as legal guardian during the years of your children, that’s the goal, the glorious freedom of the children of God. Which then also gives you,

B. A new identity. v.27

That means you are united to Christ. You live with Jesus and he lives with you. You are united with him in his death. You are united with him in the power of his resurrection. That unity is so well represented by baptism, a sign and seal of God’s promise to be our God and to have us to be his people, a sign of our identity.

I don’t think there is any better description of this new identity we have in Christ than what Paul defines in,

Rom. 6:3 “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We

were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Or more succinctly,

2 Cor. 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

There is so much in this new identity that ought to be emphasized. You have put on Christ. Your old self is crucified. You have been raised from the dead with Christ. You are dead to sin, no longer enslaved to sin. No longer enslaved in the prison of the law. You have put on Christ. Faith has come.

So let me ask you, have you put on Christ? Have you believed in Christ, and trusted in Christ for your eternal salvation? Or are you still relying upon the law to save you?

Beloved, if anything is clear in these verses of Galatians, it is this, that it is impossible to make your way to God through the law, for that law enslaves and condemns you. You must be saved by grace through faith. And that, not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, so that no one can boast.

You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. You must confess with you mouth that Jesus is Lord. And only then can you cry out to God as your father, and know that he loves you as his child. If you have not done so, then cry out today. So cry out right now, that God might free you from the bondage and slavery of your sin. And if you feel guilty because of your sin, let that law which condemns lead you to Jesus, that you might be justified by faith, that your guilt might be removed.

And one final word of encouragement to you who are in Christ, who have been baptized into Christ. Let me encourage you to dwell richly on the true freedom of your new identity. If you are in Christ, if you are united to Christ by faith, then you, too, can cry out to God as beloved children.

You have put on Christ, so that when God sees you, he sees Jesus. When God hears you, he hears Jesus. When you stand in the presence of God, the very clothes that you wear are the clothes of Jesus. You have put on Jesus.

It’s a pretty good “after” picture, isn’t it? It’s a very attractive description.

Do you have that freedom? Have you put on Jesus? If you are a Christian, you have. And if you have put on Jesus, you have the freedom of the glory of the children of God. So exercise that freedom. Enjoy that freedom. As you have put on Christ, live in Christ. For you are no longer an under-age minor supervised by a legal guardian. The inheritance is yours. All the blessings of the gospel are yours in Christ Jesus. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”