

GALATIANS 3:26-29

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PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 4:1-18

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“The law in the hands of one set free by grace becomes for him his guide and his light, what some theologians call ‘the third use of the law,’ a use reserved for those set free from its constraints, compelled by faith to its fulfillment.”

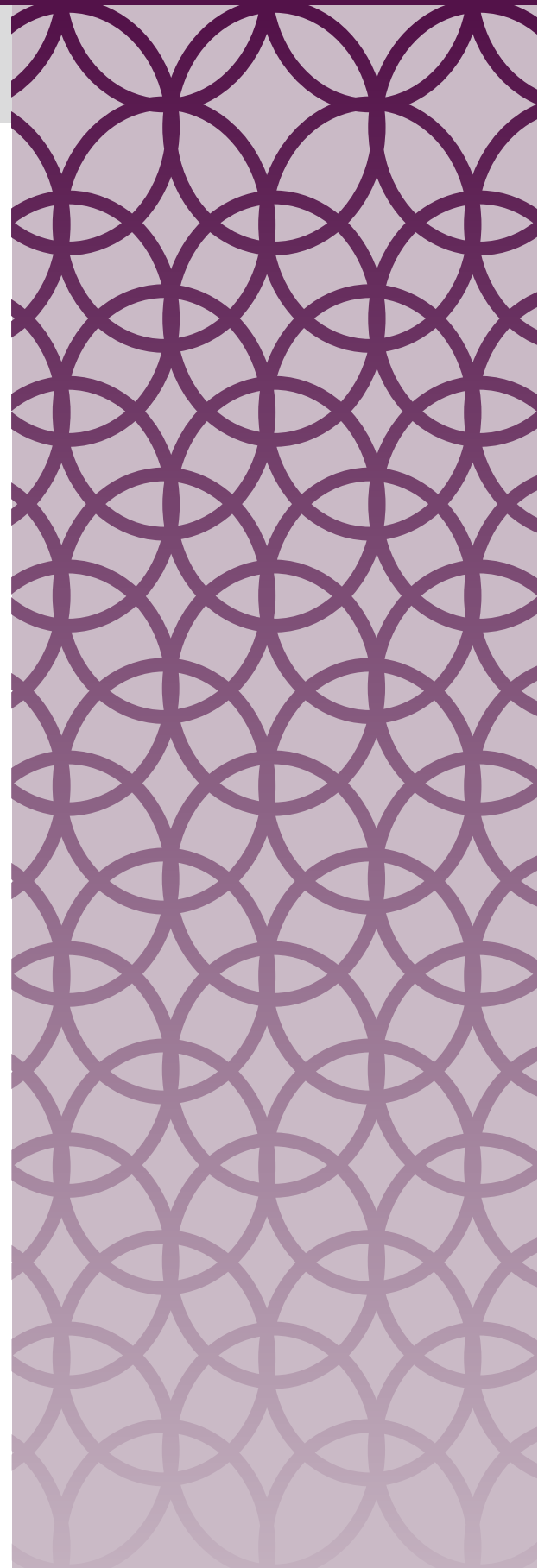


GALATIANS 3:19-25

“For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.” Theology, to say nothing of Scripture, has claimed that only the most precise perfection can satisfy the meticulous demands of God’s sense of righteousness. Paul here seems to be claiming that even perfection couldn’t get the job done, that God wants more than piety, and that righteousness doesn’t fulfill His hopes and His dreams for His children. There isn’t a law written the fulfillment of which would cause you to say, “This is the life.”

What is it about goodness and propriety and respectability, even perfection, which falls short and leaves us wanting something more, something else? Several things, probably. One of them has to do with the word “compulsion.” With the law one is forever under some constraint: You have to; you should. There’s always that impulse to glance over your shoulder to see if someone’s looking — or if someone isn’t. There’s always that tendency to stew and fret and worry. And when you’re not doing that you’re terribly afraid nobody’s been noticing how remarkably good you’ve been. That’s not living.

With grace, however, there is a constant shove from the inside, a compulsion, not constraint, a momentum sort of, which keeps you going in spite of yourself, almost a giddiness, and impulse to “do good and love mercy and walk humbly with your God.” That’s living. Not long, maybe, but well.



Note: In 2 Corinthians 5:14 (KJV), Paul uses the word constraint to describe what we are calling compulsion. Our arbitrary distinction should not confuse you. Paul, better than anyone, knows that our Christian lives are the upwelling of an inner force and that force is Christ who lives in us. In an effort to distinguish between the pressure from within and the pressure from without, we have chosen to use constraint to talk about that outside duress which leaves us feeling forced rather than free.

What's the law for, then? Schwann, in his explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, talks about three uses of the law. Two of them have to do with constraint. He calls the law a curb to check the coarse outbursts of sin and to contribute some measure of decency to the life in this world. When you ponder the excesses of our present century, the endless blatant effort to "deregulate" pornography, self-indulgence and deviation, you could wish the law success in its role to hold back the permissiveness and extremes of people.

And Schwann calls the law a mirror. Paul, here in Galatians, and most other places where he lives, moves and writes, is very comfortable with that analogy. You look at the law and what do you see? You see how totally imperfect you are and how immensely desperate your need for help is, for rescue. The law says, "Love God" and serve Him in righteousness, innocence and blessedness. But our love goes off on a different tangent as we settle ourselves at the top of our interest list, as we devote the labor of our hands and the best hours of our days to the fulfillment of our needs and the satisfaction of our desires.

The law says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The briefest moment spent in self recollection sends back a self-image to rival the worst villains in literature or history. You begin to see

yourself as you really are. You look into the law and death stares back.

It's in this latter role that the law serves, not as a rival to or an alternative for, but as an assistant to the Gospel of grace. The law as mirror makes it amply clear we cannot climb hand over hand upon the accumulated pile of our own efforts into the presence of God. We need help. More than help. We need Someone else to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We need Jesus, His life and His death crowned by His resurrection. Paul, who has been lambasting the law proponents, delivers the ultimate blow. He wrests out of their hands their own device and appropriates it for his cause and to serve his point. The law, he triumphantly declares, far from being a viable alternative to grace, drives thinking people into its arms. It becomes the servant of grace.

In the final section of Paul's letter, as we shall see, he talks about a life free from the constraints of the law, a life, rather, illuminated by the law. The law in the hands of one set free by grace becomes for him his guide and his light, what some theologians call "the third use of the law," a use reserved for those set free from its constraints, compelled by faith to its fulfillment.

GALATIANS 3:26-29

There is a great deal of stress laid, these days, upon what we (the church and its members) do by way of the Sacraments: Baptism and The Lord's Supper. In the Sacrament of the Altar, it is claimed we express our unity and profess our common membership in the family of Christ. Some want to express themselves about unity and commonality by not celebrating the Sacrament. The term "celebration," too, bespeaks what we do with the Sacrament of the Altar. In Baptism, we say, we institute a

covenant with God and with one another and we talk about renewing the covenant which we made at our Baptism. All of which tends, sometimes, to obscure the fact that in the Sacraments we really aren't doing anything at all. God is. The Sacraments are God's means: His Means of Grace and His means by which He works grace.

A major segment of Christendom still regards baptism as merely symbolic, and it has trouble with Paul's manner of speaking. Paul talks about the rite of baptism as if it actually performed the function of clothing us in the righteousness which belongs to Christ, as if it actually produced the faith which makes us part of the Kingdom, as if it actually made you a leg or a foot in the body of Christ, or a son or daughter in the family of God. And, of course, it does. Baptism is not some mysterious reminder that the "blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." It is, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

That's why Paul brings it in here. Our Baptism has made us something that we weren't before. Once you were a woman, man, slave. Now you are a child of God. Jesus, God's Son, is your brother. You even look like Him, a little. You've got the same family trait of righteousness, to say nothing of the rebirth marks of love and gentleness and patience. But we must not race ahead of Paul here. He'll come to all that in chapter 5.

The point Paul is groping for and which he just caught sight of again out of the corner of his eye is this: Baptism has made you God's adopted sons and daughters. You are now heirs. Ah yes, that was it. Heirs. We were talking about law and promise. You are children of promise, heirs of salvation, in the direct line of Abraham. And Abraham spells faith, not law. So Paul is back on track again.

The emphasis has moved in on sonship now. And the contrast is with slaves or servants. There is a considerable difference between living as a son and living as a slave. One lives free, the other under bond. One does what he does because he decides to and wants to; the other because somebody decided he should and he has to. The law, Paul is saying, makes slaves out of us. It's an interesting contrast. On the one side is the law path and on the other, the Gospel. On the law side you find circumcision. On the Gospel side, Baptism. On the law side you do (or don't). On the Gospel side, God does. On the law side, you become a slave. On the Gospel side, you are a child of God and an heir.

The last verse (3:29) is really very strong. There's that spasm of anger again which Paul feels for the Judaizers. "If you are Christ's," there is no question on which side you will come down.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 4:1-18

Fill my heart, dear Spirit of God, with peace and joy and the conviction that all my guilt has found its way to Calvary with Christ — forever. Amen.

Galatians 4:1-18

1. Galatians 4:1-3. List two restrictions placed upon the young before they attain to the age of maturity.

2. What equips a parent so that they are presumed to be able to make decisions for their children?

3. What are some privileges which go with adulthood?

4. List some responsibilities which go with adulthood.

5. Why are juveniles brought to trial in a different court than adults?

6. Galatians 4:4-5.
 - a. Who appointed the “time” for Christ’s coming? (Romans 8:3)

 - b. Who sent the twelve apostles on their mission? (Luke 6:13; Matthew 10:5)

 - c. Read Acts 9:1-16. Who sent the apostle Paul on his mission?

 - d. Who sent Christ on His mission? (John 5:37)

7. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 and 1 Peter 2:24. List two things which Jesus did to affect our adoption as children of God.

8. Whose work is it that provides us with the assurance that we are the children of God?

9. According to Ephesians 3:16-17, whose work is it by which Christ is brought into our hearts?

10. Using Ezekiel 36:27, state whose work it is when we do the works of the law.

11. Why is resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit so detrimental? (Mark 3:29; John 15:26)
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12. Galatians 4:8.
- Paraphrase, "when you did not know God."

 - Paraphrase, "you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods."

 - Read 1 Kings 16:32; Judges 16:23; Acts 7:43. Name some pagan "not-gods."

 - List other objects of man's idolatry from Exodus 32:4; Jeremiah 8:2; 1 Corinthians 10:20.

 - Of what kind of modern "idolatry" is Acts 14:11 reminiscent?

 - List other instances of "modern idolatry."

13. Galatians 4:13
- How did Moses seek to use his infirmity? (Exodus 4:10)

 - In Job 1:13-22, to what end did Job's affliction prompt him?

 - According to Isaiah 53:4 and John 19:17-18, what is the highest use God has made of affliction?

14. In verse 4:14, what are we told enabled the Galatians to overlook Paul's "infirmity in the flesh"?
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15. Galatians 4:16
- To what does Paul ascribe the Galatians change in heart?

 - Why is lack of candor not true friendship?

16. Do you think Paul's appeal to his personal friendship with the Galatians is appropriate? Explain your answer.
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17. Do you think it is appropriate for a pastor to appeal to his personal relationship with those he serves in the interest of his message? Explain your answer.
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