

**Galatians:
Commentary
Galatians 3:23-29**

note: This selection of commentary begins with a continuation of three functions of the law. To read the preceding material for a more thorough context, visit [the previous commentary](#).

23

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

Verse 23 offers further explanation to the assertion that the second function of the law in salvation history is to condemn the world with it to bring forth salvation. The manner by which everyone is imprisoned by the law is through the enslavement of the flesh. The coming of the law was provocative - it enflamed carnality because now carnality had the objective standard of God's holiness against which to rebel. The function of the law, then, was to imprison humans until "faith came" (another metonymy, this time for Jesus).

24

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

If the second function of the law is to imprison for a time, then the third function of the law is to discipline, and in so doing, set the person free. To extend the analogy further, law is not only the prison that oppresses all people, but the law is also the guard that relentlessly polices each person continually. The law is the watchdog that barks at every transgression, every violation, every imperfection. Interestingly, the analogy Paul uses here of the law being a guardian is best understood in the original language of a [pedagogue](#). These trainer/guardians not only gave detailed instruction about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of virtually every detail of a young child's life, but also served as a violent protector of the child, using severe discipline and the induction of fear to accomplish his purposes.

This imagery of a guardian pedagogue is particularly grim, given the context of the preceding verse that the law keeps the world captive. Every person, imprisoned by the law, is subsequently policed in the most micro-managerial manner, also by the law.

This "babysitting" is the third function of the law until the arrival of Jesus. When Jesus came, the realization of justification is universally understood and available to all people. The failing, imprisoning, policing law could not, cannot, and will not justify. Faith alone justifies. Awareness of that justification is made possible in the starkest of means by these relentless, merciless, and ineffective functions of the law.

25

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

"Faith" (again, a metonymy for Jesus) has come. Jesus has arrived. His work has been completed on the cross, and he succeeded where the law failed. He has freed man from the prison of the law. And because man is free from the prison of the law, he is free indeed, and because he is free he is no longer under that micro-managing guardian, that pedagogue, that relentlessly barking watch dog, the law. No longer being "under" the law means that a person is not condemned by it, nor the object of its relentless oversight.

26

for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

Even though the verse starts mid-sentence in Paul's construction, verse 26 functions as a fulcrum in Paul's theological exposition. In verses 6-14, he addressed the promise of God given to Abraham on the basis of faith. In verses 15-22, Paul explained the presentation of the law given by angels to the intermediary Moses. In verses 23-25, he explained how "faith came" in Jesus, fulfilling the promise given by faith, and bringing to an end the function of the law that had, in its appointed time, accomplished its God-ordained purpose. Here, Paul makes an intentional shift from instructional (or as some commentaries classify his writing to this point, "forensic") to intensely personal hereto forward. The teaching (or correction of wrong teaching, as the case may be) until now had universal application. Here, though, Paul wants individual Galatians to embrace the personal implications.

The original language of the text for this word "for" is *gar*, which is causal (meaning "because") and is therefore linked to the earlier thought. Paul is saying you are no longer under the relentless barking of the pedagogue law because now, through faith in Jesus, you are a child of God. Paul is deliberately using the inclusive language of family and telling the Galatians that they all are included in God's family. Where the law in its inefficaciousness used artificial standards such as circumcision and adherence to traditions to distinguish between "approved Jews" and "acceptable Gentiles, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile in the family of faith. And in the context of this passage, while the law of God has an appropriate part to play in the life of the believer, it no longer serves the functions of imprisonment, condemnation, or debilitation.

This new relationship was received by faith alone in Jesus alone (cf. [John 1:12](#))

27

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

It is so interesting and important that Paul chose to include a statement on baptism here in Galatians. It might be tempting and even understandable to use this verse as a justification for the necessity of baptism in the process of salvation. In a cursory reading, Paul seems to link baptism as the means by which a person "puts on" Christ. However, the danger in this interpretation is only the entire of justification by faith. If baptism becomes necessary for salvation, man has been reduced back to a doctrine of works, and the law is not at all dead nor ineffective, and the barking guardian has returned, louder than ever.

For Paul, baptism is no more a required work for the Galatians than was circumcision. Baptism was (and remains) a willful action of expressed identification. It possesses no salvific power. Baptism is the public testimony of having "put on" Christ by faith. Paul was talking to a congregation of people who had been baptized as an expression of their faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. He was reminding those dear children the significance of what their baptism symbolized.

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.

While this verse has been misused and abused to satisfy many different agendas (social, political, theological, and otherwise), the best understanding is attained when held in the context of the overall passage, which is to embrace the transformational effect of being "in Jesus" (or as stated in the previous verse, "having put on Christ.") First, this verse addresses the negative and superficial divisions that previously had divided people...cultural/racial, social, and sex/gender. In Jesus, all

these divisions are overcome. Notice, it is not a matter that these distinctions are eradicated. Rather, (and perhaps more significantly), these distinctions remain, but their proclivities to be matters of division have been rendered insignificant in the person of Jesus. Jews will continue to be Jews, and Gentiles Gentiles. Slave and free would continue to be class distinctions, and men would still be different than women. Yet, in Jesus, they are all one. One is not better than the other. One is not more important, the other not to be less considered. Even while gender roles will continue to exist and are not invalidated by this verse, it is understood that those different roles are not valued differently in Christ. Simply stated, those distinctions that used to matter, no longer matter when it comes to matters of salvation. In this regard, baptism is a great signifier of that "one-ness," that unity, and inclusion. One baptism in the one faith in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

29

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

This is the summation of faith theology. "If you are Christ's" is yet another way for Paul to articulate faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Being "in Christ," "Putting on" Christ, and "Being Christ's" are all expressive of a totality of faith that illustrates an abiding relationship in Jesus where identity is found solely and wholly in Him. Expressed publicly in the picture of baptism, belonging to Jesus is indicative of the ransom paid for the person by the Savior. Total identification in any and all of these ways is illustrative of your identification as a faith descendant of Abraham. The promise of God was issued to Abraham on the condition of faith. It is by this same faith that you are his descendant, and accordingly an equally regarded heir (in every way) to the fulfillment of that promise.

Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life

Galatians 3:26-29 - Never the Same Again

Small Group Learner Guide

Start the conversation

How was your high school, college, or other graduation a significant event to you? How did this experience signify a monumental point of change in your life? How was life afterward completely different than before the experience?

A New Paradigm (Galatians 3:25-26)

What does it mean to you that "faith has come?"

What is the significant change that has occurred because faith has come? How has this change been expressed in your own life?

"Putting on Christ" (Galatians 3:27)

What does it mean to you to be "baptized in Christ?"

If you have been baptized in Christ, what does it look like for you on a day-by-day basis, to "put on Christ?"

United (Read Galatians 3:28)

What does this verse mean to you?

Take a moment to write down (or think through) how you might reword this statement to apply to your life today, to help you see with Christ's eyes the availability of the Gospel to the people in your world. Share how you have "updated" this passage.

Heirs (Read Galatians 3:29)

Why do you think Paul wrote "if you are Christ's," rather than "if Christ is yours?"

What are some ways we tend to either forget this, or behave as though "Christ is yours" rather than "you are Christ's?"

If you are Christ's, you are Abraham's offspring. What does this mean to you?

What are some identifiable ways you have seen or experienced being an "heir according to promise?" What are some expressions of inheritance you can identify?

Continue in Grace - Living Galatians 3:25-29 in the Week ahead

Day 1

Take time in your prayers today to recall that you personally were on God's mind before He inaugurated creation. Prior to his declaration "Let there be..." He determined to create this all for you, so that you might be in community with Him. Despite the sin, despite the rebellion (which He knew all beforehand), He still proceeded. In His wisdom, He gave the law, so you might know your need for a Savior. Then, at the right time, in the right way, for the right purpose, He did the right thing, even though it defied human logic. He became flesh and died for you. In His resurrection, He remembered you and rescued you. Praise God for the fulfillment of your faith that is embodied in Jesus.

Day 2

Consider the ways today you live under the guardianship of the law: What do you do because "it's what you are supposed to do?" Do you behave like God is a cosmic score-keeper, attendance-tracker, or tithe-recorder? Do you choose things based on the "good Christian" relativity standard. Today, be free from the "barking dog" of the law and choose well because God loves you and because of Jesus, you know what love is. Live freely in excellence because of the saving grace of Jesus who has empowered you to live above sin!

Day 3

Have you been baptized? If not, consider being baptized at our next baptism opportunity (November 10 & 11), not to satisfy a law that doesn't exist, but to publicly demonstrate your life of freedom in Christ. If you have already been baptized, share your story with others and encourage friends and family to express their own faith in Jesus through this powerful witness of salvation. (Register for baptism [here](#))

Day 4

Today, you chose what to wear before you went and faced the world. Each day, you have the opportunity to live in the reality that because of your God-given faith in Jesus, you "put on" Christ. Ask God's Spirit to guide you as you face today's circumstances and challenges, that you would approach each moment by faith and not according to the old way when you were "naked" in your own resources.

Day 5

You are Christ's. You are free in Jesus to be used as God sees fit. Today, see your life as a God-ordained assignment that will put you in front of people who need grace, co-workers who God intends to bless through you, children or a spouse who God intends to influence through you.

Day 6

Remember today to pray for and look for ways to support our missionaries and global missionary efforts, as we endeavor to take the Gospel to Jew and to Gentile, to the slave and to the free, to men and to women, so that more people will become heir to God's promise to Abraham, through faith in Jesus.

Family Talk

Prior to the family talk, encourage everyone to get dressed in their favorite clothes. The outfit doesn't have to match. Choose your favorite shirt, shorts or pants, socks, shoes, and anything else. Then gather for the family talk.

Have each person explain why their chosen clothes is their favorite. What makes each their top choice? Do they care if other people like it? Would it be their favorite if someone else thought it looked silly or out of style?

Read Galatians 3:26-29, emphasizing verse 27.

Discuss what it means to "put on Jesus," or to live in the spiritual reality of belonging to Jesus. Explain how a Christian's identity is defined by the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit in life, how He guides and directs, encourages, supports, convicts, exhorts, and ministers. Talk about how sometimes, other people might think you look odd or behave "uncool" because you are a Christian, but that God is pleased when you are unashamed to live for Him and share your faith in Him with others.

Close your time by encouraging one another by how you see each other "dressed in Jesus" (or expressing God's fruit of the Spirit) day by day. Pray for one another to continue to grow in faith, hope, and love, and praise God for His unmatched gift of salvation in Jesus!

The following pages
are for small group leaders.

Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life

Galatians 3:26-29 - Never the Same Again

Small Group Leader Guide

NOTE: Pastor Jamie's message last week extended through verse 25, and this week's message resumes there. Consequently, verses 23-24 were not included in curriculum. [Commentary on those verses is included](#), though this week's curriculum begins with verse 25, corresponding with the message.

Prepare: Things to do before your small group convenes

- **Read** this [one person's story of being adopted](#). Note her awareness of what she's experienced since being chosen for adoption. See what her adoptive parents undertook to bring her into their family. Attend the details of how she describes awareness of how life would have been without adoption. **Praise** God for adopting you into his family through faith in Jesus.
- **Review** Galatians 3:26-29 to review the content of the biblical focus. **Invite** God to speak to you with a fresh application of His timeless truth. **Ask** God to open your eyes to see opportunity to share His love and truth with others, that you might also live by faith. **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Read** the provided [commentary on Galatians](#) 3: 26-29. **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to reveal a meaningful appreciation for their part in the family of God. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

To The Point - What to impart to your small group

Key Verse: 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. (Galatians 3:28, ESV)

Objectives: Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

Discuss how life is different from the past once a person becomes an adopted child of God.

Explore what it means "to be one" in Christ.

Apply the realities of spiritual adoption to daily living.

Leader Guide Key:

Blue - hyperlinks to other resources

Red - Reading prompts

Green - Leader headers and *sample responses to questions*

Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

Start the conversation

How was your high school, college, or other graduation a significant event to you? How did this experience signify a monumental point of change in your life? How was life afterward completely different than before the experience?

Graduation is a significant event because it meant the end of formal training for that particular stage of life, it meant you had been found "qualified" or ready for the real

world. It signaled the end of training and entry into adulthood or advanced learning or even more, specific specialized training.

Say

Each of us can point to different moments in life that are life-changing experiences; times where things afterward would not ever return to the way they were prior. There is no greater life-changing experience than when a person comes to faith in Jesus. In our time together, we will look at this passage at Galatians and see how life is never the same and how God wants us to experience true life in this new reality.

Open in prayer for your time together.

A New Paradigm (Galatians 3:25-26)

Ask

What does it mean to you that "faith has come?"

Paul is making reference God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham in the incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

What is the significant change that has occurred because faith has come? How has this change been expressed in your own life?

Because Jesus has come, people who have come to faith in him have moved from from being under the guardian of the law to now being identified as a child of God.

Answers to the second question will vary. Take the opportunity to challenge people to remember the sense of liberty in coming to Christ, express the change that comes from moving from being aware of one's enmity with God (as indicated by the "siren call" of the law), versus becoming aware of being totally accepted by God through his grace demonstrated in Jesus.

"Putting on Christ" (Galatians 3:27)

Ask

What does it mean to you to be "baptized in Christ?"

This term means to totally identify with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. It is important to emphasize that this term does not teach the requirement of being baptized to be saved, for if such a requirement were necessary, it come at the expense of Paul's (and the Bible's) doctrine of grace. Baptism is an expression of the finished work of Jesus and not a required work of a person to be qualified as an accepted child of God.

If you have been baptized in Christ, what does it look like for you on a day-by-day basis, to "put on Christ?"

"Putting on Christ" means to live in the reality of your spiritual identity, rather than according to the "old way" when we were still under the "barking dog" guardianship of the law. It means to choose to believe what God has said about you, rather than defining yourself by how you feel about yourself, or by what the world or others say about you. It means to live as though you have been accepted by holy God and are now living in a resurrection reality through the grace of Jesus.

United (Read Galatians 3:28)

Ask

What does this verse mean to you?

Answers may include:

- *Jesus doesn't "play favorites."*
- *Jesus doesn't discriminate. His salvation is available to everyone.*
- *Because of Jesus' impartial love, the distinctions in life that divide us in life are inconsequential in matters of salvation.*

Say

This is a great verse for us. Take a moment to write down (or think through) how you might reword this statement to apply to your life today, to help you see with Christ's eyes the availability of the Gospel to the people in your world. Share how you have "updated" this passage.

For example, a person might write:

There is neither native nor transplant...

There is neither Scottsdale nor Phoenix, nor Chandler nor Cave Creek....

There is no employer nor employee...

There is no wealthy nor poor...

There is no jock nor nerd...

There is no scholar nor laborer...

Help your group personalize the reality that they are missionaries of the Gospel. Just as Paul took Jesus to people who were like him, and also to people who were completely unlike him, so too must we be willing to share Jesus with others who are both similar to and different than us. Fortunately, God has immersed us in a world where both these types of people are readily found every day.

Heirs (Read Galatians 3:29)

Ask

Why do you think Paul wrote "if you are Christ's," rather than "if Christ is yours?"

Answers may include:

- *Because it is more theologically accurate.*
- *Even though Christ is your Savior, he saved you.*
- *You are the redeemed. He bought you.*
- *You belong to Him. You are in his hands.*

What are some ways we tend to either forget this, or behave as though "Christ is yours" rather than "you are Christ's?"

Answers may include:

- *We treat Jesus like "Aladdin's Genie," and only go to him when we need something.*
- *We trusted him in salvation, but we rarely live in grace, and instead live lives hindered by the law.*
- *We use Jesus, church, religion, and the Bible, as a spiritual billy club to bully others or justify ourselves.*
- *We interpret our worldly success as an affirmation of God's approval, and settle for a hollow form of cultural Christianity as an acceptable alternative to genuine biblical relationship with God expressed in community, service, obedience, worship, and mission in the world.*

If you are Christ's, you are Abraham's offspring. What does this mean to you?

Answers may include:

- *It means you are identified with God's chosen people.*
- *It means you are not alienated from God any longer.*
- *It means you were spiritually identified "in Abraham" the way the Jews were physically identified "in Abraham" when God made his promise to the Patriarch.*
- *It means he is your spiritual ancestral forebear.*

What are some identifiable ways you have seen or experienced being an "heir according to promise?" What are some expressions of inheritance you can identify?

Answers may include:

- *I have experienced being at peace with God.*
- *I have experienced the presence of God's Holy Spirit in my life.*
- *I have been blessed by expressing spiritual giftedness in serving others in Christ's name.*
- *I have been used by God to bless others.*
- *I have been given God's wisdom (the right knowledge, used in the right way, at the right time, for the right purpose).*

Say

As we close chapter 3 and move into a comprehensive understanding of what it means to live as children of God, let's strive this week to daily choose to exist in this basic spiritual reality: that in Christ Jesus, we are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. May that unfold in our lives in markedly different ways than when we have in the past lived under the guardianship of the law, in the prison that apart from Jesus, promised only death.

Let's close in prayer:

Invite the group to pray for one another. Pray over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important.

Encourage your group to use the "Continue in grace" resources (below and on the Group Members Page) on their own or with their family, to extend the small group experience into the week. Confirm your plans for your next gathering!

Continue in Grace - Living Galatians 3:25-29 in the Week ahead

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