

Freedom and the Law

Rodney listened, his mind not on his booth of novelty Memorial Day wreaths. The man at the next craft table, a jewelry booth, was talking to a festival-goer about plans to start a Christian youth activity center. When Rodney's wife, Kala, returned from the restroom, he told her he was going to visit with the man in the next booth.

Rodney introduced himself and learned that the jewelry maker was Pastor Leonard. The two exchanged cards, and Pastor Leonard was pleasantly surprised that Rodney was also a pastor. Their churches were in neighboring cities.

"It's nice to meet you, but excuse me for asking," said Pastor Leonard, "but why would you want to help us? You could just pursue the idea with your church members and your community."

"Well, why be separated when we can work together?" Rodney said. "We're all part of the same body, and we want to see the same thing—more souls in the kingdom of God."

"I'm sorry," said Pastor Leonard, "but I've had some bad experiences with churches trying to outdo each other."

"The Lord wants us working and fellowshiping together," said Rodney. "We're all one in Him."

"Amen!" smiled Pastor Leonard.

"Honey," Rodney beckoned to his wife, "come meet our brother in Christ."

1. *When have you experienced the reality of being part of the Body of Christ?*

2. *Why is it sometimes difficult to connect with other believers who are different from us in some way?*

3. *What can we do to develop unity with fellow believers?*

The Purpose of the Law of Moses

Galatians 3:18-22, KJV

18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

19 Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Galatians 3:18-22, NIV

¹⁸For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

¹⁹Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

²¹Is 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. ²²But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

In Galatians 3:17, Paul stated that the law God gave to Moses, even though it came 430 years after the covenant God ratified with Abraham, did not invalidate the earlier “promise.” Despite the addition of the law of Moses, the “inheritance” (vs. 18), or blessing, of Abraham’s descendants continued to be based on God’s pledge.

Paul next asked and answered two questions that might

naturally have arisen in his readers' minds. The first question asked why the law was given. Paul explained that it was temporary to prepare people for the Messiah's advent.

To be more specific, God established the "law" alongside the "promise" to reveal to people their "transgressions." Accordingly, when the Son (referred to as the "Seed," Gal. 3:19) came as the fulfillment of Father's promise, the chosen people should have been ready to seek the forgiveness of their sins by trusting in the Messiah.

Unlike God's promise to Abraham, which was permanent, the law was temporary to get people ready for Jesus. Even though the law came from God, it was administered through "angels" by a "mediator"—Moses (vs. 19).

Normally, binding agreements that require an intermediary are those in which both parties are active. The covenant of Moses fits this description: God gave the law, but His people were responsible to obey it. God's covenant with Abraham had only one active "party" (vs. 20), the Lord, who unilaterally gave His promise to Abraham and unconditionally pledged He would fulfill it.

In verse 21, Paul posed his second question. Do the distinctions between the law of Moses and the covenant with Abraham mean there is a conflict between these two? The short answer is not at all. The longer explanation is that the "law" and the divine "promises" are not contrary to one another, for they merely worked on different levels.

The law could not bring new "life" (vs. 21) to its adherents. It not only brought about a knowledge of sin, but also placed all humanity under its curse until the Messiah, who fulfilled God's promise to Abraham. Those who trust in Jesus for salvation receive God's promise of freedom.

4. *What is the basis for believers receiving God's promises?*

5. *What was the purpose of the law of Moses?*

6. *How is it that the law does not stand in opposition to God's promises?*

The Children of God through Faith

Galatians 3:23-29, KJV

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

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

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:23-29, NIV

²³Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.

²⁴So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

²⁶So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

In the Roman world, wealthy families often had a servant who supervised the conduct of the family's sons. Paul compared the law of Moses to this servant. In a manner of speaking, the law held us in its protective "custody" (vs. 23). The legal code was also like a guard who kept us "locked up" as prisoners until the time when we would believe in the Redeemer.

The Greek noun rendered "guardian" (Gal. 3:24) refers to a guide or custodian for younger children, often a slave who trained and instructed his master's children. In a

figurative sense, the law code operated as a disciplinarian by revealing sin and condemning it.

The law continued in this function until the Messiah came. Now that the Father has established “faith” (vs. 25) in His Son as the way to be declared righteous (or “justified,” vs. 24), we no longer need the law as our custodian.

Jewish Christians had grown up (in terms of their relationship to the law) and reached spiritual adulthood (in terms of their relationship to the Messiah). The Gentile believers in Galatia had not been raised according to the law. Nonetheless, they had also become spiritual adults when they trusted in the Messiah for salvation.

Paul described salvation not only as becoming adults in God’s spiritual family, but also as being “baptized into Christ” and “clothed . . . with Christ.” Through faith, they are “baptized” into and “clothed” with the Messiah (vs. 27). Put another way, they took on His righteousness by faith. They became God’s adult “children” (vs. 26)

Jesus broke down worldly divisions by coming. Race, social status, and gender have no bearing on who can become a follower of the Savior. It also means that all people in society should be seen as persons of equal worth.

Prejudice existed between Jews and non-Jews over religious, political, and cultural issues. Hundreds of thousands of people in the Roman Empire were enslaved. Women had limited legal rights and were often looked down upon by men. Thankfully, through the influence of Christian principles, many of these social divisions have been abolished. As verse 29 says, all who have trusted in the Redeemer are Abraham’s spiritual descendants and heirs.

7. *In what sense were God’s people once imprisoned by the law?*

8. *How is it possible for anyone to become a member of God’s spiritual family?*

9. *What is the implication of being joined to Christ by faith?*

Freedom in Christ

Paul's words are as relevant today as they were when he wrote. Anyone who seeks the blessing of God's promised inheritance may receive it. God's promise is based on His grace in sending Jesus, not on obeying the law of Moses. Although the law may not be readily apparent in current society, its tenets still provide a moral compass. Paul said, "we were held in custody under the law" (Gal. 3:23), which was given to show how people violate God's standard. The law points us to our need for salvation. For those who claim they have kept all the commandments, Jesus reminded His followers to consider sins of the heart and mind as well as deed.

The Good News of the Gospel is even though the law does not give spiritual life, it leads us to Christ, the source of true life and our eternal inheritance. Our risen Savior lives today to break down the same worldly divisions of race, politics, social status, gender, and culture. Just as all are held captive to the bondage of sin, anyone may experience freedom from the law through faith in Jesus. When we trust in Christ's redemptive work, when we live clothed with His righteousness, there are no distinctions between us as believers.

Jesus dwells in all believers and unites them into one body despite our differences. We are all children of God, but all children are different. We can unite under the freedom we have in Him.

10. *What does it mean to trust in Christ's redemptive work?*

11. *What divisions between believers have you noticed?*

12. *What are some ways we can unite together in the Body of Christ in spite of our differences?*

13. *What might it mean in practical terms to live clothed with Christ's righteousness?*

Living in Unity

We see the word unity within the larger word community. The Body of Christ functions as a community of believers, who then reach out to others to invite them also to become part of God's family through trust and faith in Jesus.

► *How can we overcome differences with fellow Christians to show unity to our community? How can we then show and extend God's grace to invite others to receive the fulfillment of God's promise?*

KEY VERSE

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. —Galatians 3:29, KJV

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. —Galatians 3:29, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 16 through May 22

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Galatians 4:1-7—Children and Heirs through God.
- Tue.** Philippians 3:1-8a (end with "my Lord")—Losing All for Christ.
- Wed.** Philippians 3:8b-14 (begin with "For his sake")—Press toward the Goal.
- Thu.** 1 John 4:7-13—Let Us Love One Another.
- Fri.** Matthew 5:43-48—Love and Pray for Your Enemies.
- Sat.** Proverbs 17:13-17—Avoid Strife; Love Always.
- Sun.** Galatians 5:1-15—Faith Working through Love.