

## FREEDOM AND THE LAW

DEVOTIONAL READING: Galatians 3:18-29

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3

### GALATIANS 3:18-29

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.

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.

### KEY TEXT

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

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 3: Liberating Letters

LESSONS 9-13

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize what makes a person a child of God through faith in Christ.
2. Compare and contrast life under the law with a life of faith in Christ.
3. Write out the promises God has made to him or her as an heir.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. All Skate
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Inheritance (Galatians 3:18-19a)
  - A. Given by Promise (v. 18)  
*The Audacity of Faith*
  - B. Questions of the Law (v. 19a)
- II. Law (Galatians 3:19b-21)
  - A. Added for Transgressions (vv. 19b-20)
  - B. Limitations of the Law (v. 21)
- III. Faith (Galatians 3:22-25)
  - A. Promised in Christ (vv. 22-23)
  - B. Deficiencies of the Law (vv. 24-25)  
*Advanced Coaching*
- IV. Unity (Galatians 3:26-29)
  - A. Resulting by Faith (vv. 26-27)
  - B. Regardless of the Law (vv. 28-29)

#### Conclusion

- A. Time to Grow Up
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### HOW TO SAY IT

GalatiaGuh-*lay*-shuh.

GalileansGal-uh-*lee*-unz.

Judaizers*Joo*-duh-*ize*-ers.

### Introduction

#### A. All Skate

By putting on roller skates, a person's movement is transformed as he or she glides across the pavement. One of the best settings for roller skating is at a roller-skating rink. In addition to being an easy place to skate, rinks often include colorful lights and engaging music.

Rinks might have times set apart for particular groups of skaters—times designated specifically for boys, girls, parents, grandparents, and so on. There may even be times for singles or couples to skate. After a few minutes of the special skate, the announcer proclaims over the loudspeaker, "It's all-skate time! Everyone, come skate!" No longer does anyone feel left out. All skaters are welcome to participate!

In this week's lesson, the apostle Paul made a sweeping declaration. This declaration invited all people to hear and experience the promises of God's transforming good news.

## **B. Lesson Context**

The Galatian Christians were a community of believers in the region of Galatia, located in modern-day Turkey. Paul's missionary journeys took him through this region and its cities. Depending on whether "Galatia" is understood in a political sense or a demographic sense, it was during either Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) or his second (16:1-18:22) that he first taught the gospel message to the Galatians (see 4:12-13).

The year Paul wrote the Galatian epistle is unknown. Some research has proposed that it was written as early as AD 48 or as late as AD 57/58. The latter would imply that Paul wrote this epistle after the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. If this were the case, part of Galatians includes Paul's retelling of the council's key concerns: circumcision as part of adherence to the Law of Moses (Galatians 2:1-10; see Acts 15:5). These same concerns were of importance among the Galatian churches.

The Galatians had received the gospel message from Paul (Acts 16:6; 18:23; Galatians 1:11-12), but there were some among them who tried to add to the message. These individuals taught that circumcision as part of adherence to the Law of Moses was a requirement for salvation; Paul declared that to be "another gospel" (1:6; see 2:14). Advocates for this approach were known as Judaizers because they called for Gentile believers to adhere to the distinctions of Jewish law. The Judaizers' beliefs were understandable. From their point of view, Israel was and continued to be the distinct people of God. It was to Israel that God had revealed himself, given His law, and prescribed circumcision as a mark of His covenant (Genesis 17:7-14).

Paul urged the Galatian churches to reject the Judaizers' addition to the gospel message (Galatians 1:7-9). Paul reflected on his own "exceedingly zealous" experience in Judaism (1:14) as he highlighted his inability to follow the law to the point of justification (2:15-21). Through Christ, the promise of salvation was to be revealed to the whole world (3:6-9). Paul went on to show the unifying nature of that salvation for all who would believe in Christ.

## I. Inheritance (GALATIANS 3:18-19a)

### A. Given by Promise (v. 18)

#### 18a. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise.

That Paul began with *for* indicates a continuation of his preceding discussion on *the inheritance* from God (Galatians 3:15-17). This inheritance implies eternal life and being counted righteous by God—for those having faith in Jesus (see Acts 20:32; Hebrews 9:15). Paul’s concern was the means by which the inheritance was received.

If the promised life and righteousness came via *the law*, then God’s promises—especially His promises to Abraham—would be of little value (see commentary on Galatians 3:18b, below). The law’s role was not to provide entrance into God’s *promise*. The law, given to Moses, was introduced long after God’s promise (see 3:17). This fact provided a distinction for God’s relationship with His people; He desires relationship, not regulation. If God’s inheritance was received by following the law, then His promises would be of no value and faith would be irrelevant (see Romans 4:13-16).

#### 18b. But God gave it to Abraham by promise.

God’s *promise*, made *to Abraham* centuries prior, designated a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3), a reward and heir (15:1-6), and a guarantee of descendants (17:1-8). In contrast to the demands of the law, God’s gracious act was in giving the promise. Ultimately, God’s promises would be fulfilled in Christ (Galatians 3:16). This observation led to Paul’s essential question, next.

*What Do You Think?*

How do God’s people live differently in light of God’s promises?

*Digging Deeper*

How do 2 Corinthians 6:16b-7:1 and 2 Peter 1:3-11 inform your answer in this regard?

### THE AUDACITY OF FAITH

Unbeknownst to the girl, her father was quite busy. Little did she know the weight of her request when she asked him, “Do you promise you’ll come to my game?” Her father hated breaking promises, so he paused before answering. The demands of his day weighed heavily in his mind, but those demands paled in comparison to supporting his daughter. He didn’t make promises lightly. He could not and would not break his word!

The Old Testament tells how the Lord made promises to Abraham, an obscure herdsman in the ancient Middle East. Abraham was promised land, numerous descendants, and the presence of the Lord. The audacity of these promises required Abraham to accept them by faith—an equally audacious act. God’s word would come true so long as Abraham faithfully followed God in all circumstances.

Unlike earthly fathers, God never fails on His promises. Have you claimed God’s promise of new life? If so, how will you now live? Will the audacity of faith now guide your life?

—M. S. K.

## B. Questions of the Law (v. 19a)

### 19a. Wherefore then serveth the law?

By asking this question, Paul anticipated the Galatians' response regarding the promise. If God's inheritance came through His promise, then why should people of God continue to rely on *the law* for salvation? The practice of anticipating the readers' questions is common in Paul's writings (examples: Romans 3:1, 3, 5, 7; 6:15; 7:7). It was his way of addressing their (assumed) concerns since he couldn't be with them in person.

## II. Law

(GALATIANS 3:19b-21)

### A. Added for Transgressions (vv. 19b-20)

**19b. It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made.**

The word *transgressions* indicates a violation of a boundary. In this instance, the boundary transgressed is the law (see Romans 2:23). The law was *added* to reveal the nature and extent of human transgression (4:15; 5:13, 20). As a result, people became conscious of their violations (3:20; 7:12-13). Through the Law of Moses, the Israelites had common language for understanding their transgressions and enforcing discipline. However, the law's application was limited as it served to reveal, rather than heal, transgressions.

The law would apply till a specific time ordained by God. Galatian Judaizers required obedience to the Law of Moses to become an heir of Abraham's promise (see Lesson Context). However, Paul nullified their argument by noting a temporal aspect: the law was fulfilled by the coming of Abraham's *seed*, Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:16).

### 19c. And it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

The law's inferiority was due, in part, to its mediated nature. While Scripture never calls Moses a *mediator*, God gave him the law and placed it under his care, as if in his *hand* (see Exodus 20:19-22; 21:1; 34:29; Leviticus 26:46). Other Scriptures indicate a belief that *angels* served a role in revealing the law (see Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2). However, God's promise is without angelic mediation. Therefore it is more enduring.

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

That the law was given through *a mediator* did not strengthen its influence. In fact, the opposite occurred. The mediated nature of the law differed from God's direct interaction with Abraham (Genesis 12:1). For believers, Christ Jesus serves as the mediator between God and humans (1 Timothy 2:5). As a result, there exists a new relationship between God and humanity, mediated through the "better promises" of Christ Jesus (Hebrews 8:6; see 9:15; 12:24). The law differentiated Jew from Gentile. *But God is one* and His people are one through faith in Christ (Romans 3:29-30; see commentary on Galatians 3:28, below).

## B. Limitations of the Law (v. 21)

**21a. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid.**

Paul again anticipated a rebuttal, so he cited a possible concern for the Galatians. *The law* and *the promises* are not against each other. Both are *of God* and both are holy (see Romans 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8). However, each serves a different purpose.

The Greek phrase behind *God forbid* is a favorite expression of Paul's (see Romans 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Corinthians 6:15; Galatians 2:17; 6:14). It is an expression of emphatic rejection.

**21b. For if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.**

The *law* was never intended to give eternal *life*. This is why Paul emphasized that the giving of the law came years after God's covenant and Abraham's faith (Galatians 3:17). If *righteousness* could come *by the law*, then the work of Christ, particularly His death, would be "in vain" (2:21). As the law shows humans their sinful ways, it follows God's holy intention (see Romans 7:7-10).

*What Do You Think?*

In what ways do Christians use good behavior to earn favor with God and with others?

*Digging Deeper*

What should be the role of good behavior and good works in the lives of believers?

### III. Faith (GALATIANS 3:22-25)

#### A. Promised in Christ (vv. 22-23)

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

It is unclear which *scripture* Paul has in mind. Perhaps he recalled the Law of Moses that called "cursed" those people who did not conform to "all the words" of the law (Deuteronomy 27:26). The law *concluded* that both Jews and Gentiles were "*all under sin*" (Romans 3:9), and all people were thereby guilty (3:10-18).

Because Paul declared that all were guilty under the law, all were unfit to receive life on the basis of the law. The imagery serves to contrast the law's condemnation with the life provided by *the promise*. Only those who believe will be counted righteous. The righteous person will be considered a recipient of the promise (Romans 4:3, 13, 16), conveyed by the "seed" of Abraham, Jesus (Galatians 3:16, 19).

God's plan never depended on the law. Through the *faith of Jesus Christ*—His faithfulness to follow the call of His Father—Jew and Gentile can experience the blessed promise of redemption. Those *that believe* become God's children, regardless of their ethnic identity (see John 1:12-13).

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

For Paul, *faith* was more than a person's mental trust or a deep-seated hope. Instead, he attributed faith to God's way of dealing with humanity. Jesus' faithfulness in following His Father was the way God revealed His righteousness to the world (see Romans 1:17; 4:16; Ephesians 3:12).

Before Christ's arrival, the law *kept* humans *shut up*. This might imply that the law served as a restraint, showing the extent of sin through Scripture (see commentary on Galatians 3:22, above).

Paul envisioned a new era of God's working among humanity. This era was one in which God's promise was *revealed* through faith. Paul drew demarcations between

the era of law and the era of faith, with Christ's faithfulness in His work being the moment of transition.

## B. Deficiencies of the Law (vv. 24-25)

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

Paul's next metaphor softened the description as he described *the law* as *our schoolmaster*. The illustration referred to the duties of certain servants in ancient Greco-Roman culture. These servants supervised the education of the household heir, keeping a close eye on the heir's behavior, character formation, and discipline. Eventually the heir would mature and no longer need this overseer.

Similarly, the law was only needed for a time. It served its purpose until *Christ* came and brought an end to the law's power for justification (Romans 10:4). The law could only do so much for humanity in regard to the promises of God. Humans could never be *justified* by the law (see Acts 13:39).

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

Paul's Galatian audience held that justification was a "both-and" construct. Their understanding of justification required both following the law and expressing faith in Christ. To that end, Paul highlighted the superiority and finality of *faith* in bringing justification. Now that faith has *come*, the law—serving as a guide—is no longer needed.

This fact is because the law has been fulfilled in Christ (see Matthew 5:17). Because the law could do only so much, God sent His Son to fulfill the requirements of the law (see Romans 8:1-4). What the law could not accomplish, God accomplished through Jesus.

### ADVANCED COACHING

If a visitor came to the Feller family farm in Iowa during the 1920s and '30s, the visitor was likely to see young Bob Feller (1918-2010) throwing a baseball with his father, Bill. While other boys were learning the family farm, Bob was under the focused tutelage of his father. As they played catch, Bob learned to be a skilled pitcher, undoubtedly set for the major leagues.

As a high schooler, Bob's fastball pitch impressed numerous scouts. Before he turned 19, Bob signed a contract to pitch for the Cleveland Indians. As a result, he left his family's farm and his father's unofficial coaching to play in the major leagues. Had he decided to stay home, would Bob have experienced baseball success? Likely not. But because of his decision, Bob found great career success as a pitcher for the Cleveland Indians.

Whether they were fully aware or not, the Galatians had outgrown following every stipulation of the law. Paul taught that the law, while holy, could not bring spiritual life. Are you seeking life by your law abidance—trying to be "good enough" by your own efforts—or are you finding life in the one who fulfills the law (see Matthew 5:17)?

## IV. Unity (GALATIANS 3:26-29)

### A. Resulting by Faith (vv. 26-27)

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

Previously, Paul had been speaking to an audience that would identify with his Jewish background, a collective “we” (see Galatians 3:23-25). Regarding knowledge and observance of the law, Paul was an expert (see Philippians 3:3-7).

Paul’s *ye ... all* included every believer in his Galatian audience, Jew or Gentile. The Judaizers’ insistence on adherence to the Law of Moses was of great concern for Paul. Regardless of whether a person followed the law, all people could be considered the *children of God*. This was a phrase first used to describe the biological descendants of Abraham, those who were given the Law of Moses (see Deuteronomy 14:1-2). However, a new era had arrived, one in which God’s children were no longer marked by their observance of the law. Instead, they were marked by their expression of *faith in Christ Jesus* (see Romans 8:14-16).

#### *What Do You Think?*

How do children of God act in ways that make their status obvious to nonbelievers?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How can children of God support each other and bring about love and good works?

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

So the Galatian Christians might demonstrate their faith in Christ, Paul reminded them that they had *been baptized into Christ*. Paul often stressed the importance of baptism for the believer. Baptism unites the believer with the death of Christ and the glory of His resurrection (Romans 6:3-7). Further, baptism brought unity and a transformation “into one body, whether ... Jews or Gentiles, ... into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The result of faith, demonstrated by baptism, was that Jewish and Gentile believers would become unified. To *put on Christ* implied putting to death the sinful nature and being renewed with a new nature, transformed by Christ (Romans 13:13-14; Colossians 3:5-14). The prophet Isaiah rejoiced when God “clothed me with the garments of salvation” (Isaiah 61:10). For Paul the garments of salvation were the work of Christ and the expression of faith in Him.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How do people identify with a sports team or a community organization when they wear those parties’ logo?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What steps can believers take to ensure that they identify with Christ?

### B. Regardless of the Law (vv. 28-29)

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.



The result of baptism into Christ is the formation of a new self in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). This resulted in unity with others also in Christ. To reinforce this reality, Paul upended notable social structures of a first-century audience.

First, Paul addressed concerns of ethnic divisions centered on the Law of Moses. Of main concern for a *Jew* was adherence to the law, most notably the law's prescriptions for circumcision. However, the law would not have been binding for a *Greek Gentile*. As a result of God's new economy of salvation, though, circumcision was no longer applicable for God's people. The identity of God's people expanded to include Gentiles (see 1 Corinthians 7:19; Colossians 3:11).

Second, the structure of the Roman Empire required an economy of slavery. In the structure of God's economy of salvation, though, the servant in *bond* and the *free* person are equal; both find eternal life in Christ Jesus. Under Christ, a servant was counted as "a brother beloved" (Philemon 16).

Third, Paul's statement that there be *neither male nor female* is not meant to disregard gender distinction or address fully the varied beliefs on the roles of men and women. Given his audience, Paul was likely addressing the limitations of circumcision. Both men and women, created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), are baptized into the unified fellowship of believers.

Regardless of any differences, through faith all can become God's children (Galatians 3:26). The children of God are *one* through the peace of *Christ Jesus* (see Ephesians 2:14-18).

*What Do You Think?*

How can Christians reconcile disputes that may arise due to differences in economic status, gender, or ethnicity?

*Digging Deeper*

How do 1 Corinthians 12:4-27; Ephesians 2:11-22; and Colossians 3:1-17 inform your answer in this regard?

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

Having confirmed the diverse yet unified nature of God's people, Paul explored the implications of this diversity. All people who express faith can *be* a part of *Christ's* body.

As a result, the promises made to Christ are applicable to all people who have faith (see Galatians 3:16). The promises made to *Abraham's seed* are fulfilled through those people in Christ as they become heirs with Him (Romans 8:17).

*Heirs according to the promise* will attain more than an earthly heir might attain (see Galatians 4:7). Being in Christ implies having full access to the promise of His blessing. Further, it means His Spirit would be present in the lives of believers (see 2 Corinthians 1:20-22).

## Conclusion

### A. Time to Grow Up

It was time for the Galatian church to mature. First, they needed to acknowledge that they were no longer under the law as the way to attain God's righteousness. They were heirs of God with full familial rights to God's promises.

Second, they needed to realize that following the Law of Moses no longer marked the children of God. Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female—all could inherit God's blessing.

Is there something in which we place our faith that is other than the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Embrace Christ and live confidently as sons and daughters of God! When it comes down to it, do we stand with Paul on the bedrock that all believers are one in Christ Jesus?

## **B. Prayer**

Our Father, thank You that we are Your children through faith in Christ Jesus. Help us to live in the freedom we have as heirs according to the promise of Your Son. Show us how to live in unity with all of Your children. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## **C. Thought to Remember**

Through Christ we are offered a life that the law could never provide.