

Ever since the enlightenment, there has been a shift in the source of authority in our world. You see, up until the rise of modernity and the enlightenment, there was a generally agreed-upon understanding that a culture couldn't survive without a shared set of assumptions about how the world worked and operated, about what was wrong and what was right. You could make a case that the only shared assumption is that all is okay as long as you don't harm anyone. The problem is the idea of harm necessitates an agreed upon understanding of what is good.

What began to take root culturally was a shift from an understanding of law as "divine law" or "natural law" to "rational law." You can trace this through the history of philosophy. From Aristotle to Aquinas, who viewed ethical and moral inquiry through the lens of objective divine or natural law. And then ultimately to the Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Rene Descartes, who sought to find a philosophical basis for morality within human reason. This shift gave root to what ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre would call "Emotivism" and what Philosopher Dallas Willard would call the "disappearance of moral knowledge."

The idea is that the locus of authority had moved away from an agreed upon set of moral understanding to the center of authority being what feels true to the individual. This is the undergirding for phrases like the above to emerge. This happens not out of a flippant dismissal but because rationality has drained the world of any overarching agreed upon narrative of the world. Without an agreed upon set of assumptions about the world, we cannot have objective truth.

The reigning idea in a modern pluralist secular society is that we cannot have a cohesive society if we believe in God because all gods are considered equal, and therefore religion must result in conflict. So God is viewed as a hindrance to social progress, the Bible a roadblock to faith, and traditional religion as a net negative to our world. So it must be avoided and removed from the public eye.

The assumption is that the only way to have peace is if everyone gets to decide what is right or wrong for them. Everyone should be accepted, embraced, and loved no matter what. I think what we are starting to see is that culturally, this doesn't work. So we cancel, we shame, we obliterate people based on extreme moral standards with no room for the transformative work of grace.

In our efforts to try and eliminate religion, we have actually created more deadly religions based not on the grace of God but on ideological and political commitments. And this is resulting in the fraying of social cohesion and great polarization. We are no longer able to maintain coherent dialogue around morality because there are no objective shared assumptions. In this way, we societally attempt to build a society on pure grace with no truth: "You do you, it doesn't matter" over any

conception of truth. And so we descend into camps that are either pure grace, "Anything goes, you do you." Or into camps that are pure truth, "Law and order."

What is uniquely Christian is the manner in which our faith holds together grace and truth. Without truth, we have no ability to reconcile with the brokenness of our own lives and the world around us. Without grace, we are enslaved to the law with no ability to break free from its grip. The hope of the Christian faith is that we recognize and embrace the need for both grace and truth. We accept the reality that there is an objective right and wrong rooted in God's law and that we also need the grace of God to deal with our failure and offer an invitation to a transformed life.

As we turn back to Paul's letter to the Galatians, we will see is that he is addressing the importance of the law to help us guard against pure relativism or pure truth. For Paul, the law was a good and temporary thing.

Much of our human life is determining how we manage our disordered desires, be it for greed, freedom, power, influence, or whatever your particular vice may be. And in a world that views any restraint as obtuse to the very manner of our own humanity, the concept of law struggles to find a footing. But what Paul is going to do in Galatians 3:15-29 is ask those very questions. What is the purpose of the law? What function does the law have in the life of the believer?

Paul has just finished up a detailed description and explanation as to how Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law. And now Paul is going to extrapolate the argument he made further, talking about three things: The Relationship Between the Law and the Promise, The Purpose of the Law, and The Redefinition of the Family of God

The Relationship between the Law and the Promise
Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. Galatians 3:15-16

Remember this entire time Paul is trying to answer the question that after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who is now included in the family of God? Is it those justified by works of the law or those justified by faith in Christ? At the heart of this question is how is the Christian, and consequently the Christian church, to understand the relationship between the promise God had given to Abraham in Genesis 12 and the Mosaic law given later? His first point is clear. "Just as no

one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.”

The covenant promise of God was established long before the Mosaic Law came about. Nothing can alter that promise. So when the law comes about 430 years later, it does not alter the promise. If it is implausible for a covenant that has been established to change, then the promise of God that through the lineage of Abraham, all nations would be blessed cannot change.

This is certainly digging into the weeds of Paul’s argument, but it can shed some light on the issue at hand in Galatia. Paul’s definition of seed contradicts the Jewish nationalistic interpretation of this term. Jews were convinced the term seed was plural and referred to the descendants of Abraham, the Jewish people. This is the basis for why they believed you had to belong to the Jewish nation in order to receive the blessings promised to Abraham.

But here, Paul is re-interpreting, or rather, exegesis the old teachings to ensure that it was not the plural seed, but it is a singular seed, and that seed is Christ. This is the messianic interpretation over and against the Jewish nationalistic interpretation. God now, after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, has no chosen people, no singular nation, no nation-state, no political party, no dividing line other than that of those who are “in Christ.” And to place, any other dividing line on the family of God is actually anti-gospel.

This is key. We can see this pop up time and again throughout church history and even today. But there is no favored nation-state—not America, not Britain, not Canada, nothing. The movement of God is a global movement of followers of Jesus who have placed their faith (or allegiance) in Christ alone. This Kingdom is made up of people across the globe. And by its essence defies nationalistic identity.

The effects of viewing this through nationalistic lenses results in the very ethnocentrism that Paul spoke about earlier, as well as marries poor theology with politics in an unhealthy and potentially damaging way. I am incredibly grateful to live in this country, it has afforded all sorts of freedoms and opportunities, but my allegiance to the Kingdom of God rises far higher. And it is to the Kingdom of God that I give my allegiance alone.

If Christ is the singular seed, then Christ is the singular one who is to receive the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant. Therefore, as we are all invited into union “in Christ,” then we, by incorporation into Christ, become heirs to the promise given to Abraham! “It is no longer I who live but Christ in me!” says Paul, and because Christ is in us and we are in him, we received that which belongs to Christ. This is a stunning, radically charged invitation to embrace a new life and enter the promise of Abraham. The people of God are no longer identified by ethnic origins but by union with Christ.

What I mean is this: the law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For 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.
vv. 17-18**

Paul brings up a topic I would imagine over the past few weeks you may have been thinking about as well. What role does the law play, and does it affect the promises of the Covenant? I think it is worth looking again at the Abrahamic Covenant/Promise that Paul is referencing as given in Genesis 12 before we move on.

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Genesis 12:1-3

The promise was that through the line of Abraham will come a blessing to all nations. Abraham’s family would be blessed to be a blessing. It is in this promise that God’s redemptive project is launched and will ultimately find its fulfillment in Jesus. We will see this at the end of our time together, but when Jesus arrives, he fulfills the promises of that which came before and launched the “new covenant” that does away with this promise and broadens its scope to all those who have faith in Jesus.

In the same manner in which legal documents are binding based on the dates they were ratified, so too, Paul is saying that the Abrahamic covenant preceded the giving of the Mosaic Law. Therefore, the Mosaic Law does not invalidate or augment the demands of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Law didn’t come around for 430 years after God’s promise to Abraham. This is an important note to remember. God chose Israel to be the line from which Jesus would come far before any law was given to them.

The basis for God’s love for his people is not rooted in adherence to the law; the very narrative of the people of God speaks to this. God loved them, saved them out of Egypt based on nothing of their own doing, and then gave the law. The law was given after God established his love and rescued them from slavery.

After having established that the promise remains, Paul says this sort of cryptic phrase, “*For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise...*” This inheritance of the created order is brought about by nothing other than the grace of God. It is a unilateral covenant, based solely on the work of God, and it was given through Abraham by the promise of the Covenant and not by adherence to the Mosaic Law.

To summarize these first four verses, the promise/covenant to Abraham predates the giving of the Mosaic law by nearly half a century. This ensures that the promise was attained by the gracious gift of God prior to the law, and so, therefore, the law does not bring about the promise. The question I have here is, what then was the purpose of the law? Why did God give the law to the Israelites in the first place?

The Purpose of the Law

Why, 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. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. Is 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." Galatians 3:19-21

Paul's answer to this question is it was given "because of transgressions" and "until the seed...had come." It can be easy for us to abstract the concept of "the law" outside of the context that Paul is speaking, but I want to resist that for now. The Law (The Torah) was given to Israel—God's chosen people before Jesus—in order to create a distinction about the people of God being different than the world around them. Within the law were ways and manners of living that Israel was to adhere to, and then in the law was also the means by which they would reconcile with God when they failed to live up to those other laws. These were the sacrificial laws. So the law is given as a temporary means to remain distinct as a people and encounter God.

You see, when God chose to rescue the world through one family, he had to deal with the reality, which was that every family would be enmeshed and infected with the effects of sin, the same disease the entire world is reeling from. Israel, as the carriers of the Abrahamic promise, would be prone to sin and wander from God's work. So God established the law in order to temporarily restrain Israel from descending into utter brokenness. This is why, built into the law that exposed sin, was a means to reconcile. The law, therefore, enabled Israel to stay in connection with God and to the purposes of God—protecting God's ultimate plan of bringing about the Messiah to deliver his people through Abraham's lineage.

The law provided an objective basis for understanding sin and naming sin and its effects. Without an objective basis for sin, we have no manner of dealing effectively with sin. If we are not able to name sin, we cannot deal with sin. If all morality is subjective, there is no means to call a spade a spade and actually deal with it. This is the problem we see playing out in our culture today. We have a nearly impossible time naming a wrong because we don't have an agreed upon objective reality of wrong.

But 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. Before 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. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. vv. 22-25

At the end of verse 21 and here in 22, we see that the law had a negative purpose. It was not a life-giving mechanism in that it exposed and restrained evil, but it could not transform. Consider the easy example of

the speed limit. The reason you generally don't drive 30 mph over the speed limit is that you recognize the potential for damage to yourself and others. The law is there to restrain this brokenness from wreaking havoc throughout the world. It won't transform you, but it can restrain you. This is an important and good function of the law, both the speed limit and the Mosaic Law. The purpose of the Mosaic Law was to serve a temporary function, which enabled Israel to restrain itself from falling into utter disaster. But its purpose was limited.

Paul uses an even better analogy as to the law being temporary, "*Before 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.*" The law held us captive and forced us to look for something greater. We were unable to transform ourselves by this law, and so we were driven to seek out something that could transform us. This is the promised seed, Christ, who would create a way to transform us from the inside out.

"So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" (v. 24). You see, while the Israelites were in "this present evil age," prior to the arrival of Jesus, they were given the law as a guardian. God understood the Israelites needed something external to govern them for the time being, but when the promise was realized—when Christ came and gave the Holy Spirit, we are now being transformed by Christ, so the law is no longer needed to be our guardian.

Paul's argument over the last few chapters has been that we are incorporated into Christ through union with him by faith alone. The law was, therefore, a temporary concession to deal with the problem of sin, pointing to the eventual fulfillment of the promise in Jesus. And this became the basis for a new family of God that transcends categories, which is how he finishes this section.

Now that the promise of Abraham has been realized in the arrival of the Messiah Jesus, we no longer live enslaved to the babysitter, the law. We are liberated and invited into a new manner of life now so that we can step into our identity as a new community, which is about the new creation. Paul closes this section with an explosive move, defining this new community built on the ethic of the "age to come" in beautiful terms.

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

Verse 26 starts with the word "So..." in Greek; it is *gar* or for. It is a transitional summary type of word. It is Paul's way of transitioning the entire argument toward its conclusion. "In light of everything I have just said for about three chapters, here is what it results in..." There is a sharp contrast now to what he has been talking about. The contrast is between enslavement to the Mosaic Law and Union with Christ. And it is union with Christ that reorients everything about the Galatian church.

So as to not leave any doubt in the Galatian church's mind, Paul emphatically closes this section with five references to being "in Christ" as the defining mark of the people of God. v. 26 - "So in Christ Jesus..." v. 27 - "baptized into Christ..." and "clothed yourselves with Christ..." v. 28 - "all are one in Christ Jesus..." v. 29 - "belong to Christ." It is an explosive declaration of our new identity as individuals and collectively as a church. We are not marked by the law but by our union with Christ.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was the in-breaking of the new reality right now. It is a past, present, and future event—an event that altered the way in which the world operates, enabling a new way to be human.

Christ is Lord of all creation. It is not dependent on one's acceptance of that reality. It is a matter of fact that we then reorient our lives around. We find our lives in Christ so that we go with the grain of the universe because it is a God-saturated world ruled by King Jesus, the Christ/Messiah. And anything less, either for the Galatian Church or for us today, is to reject the reality of the world and live enslaved to a past age. This is the meaning of verse 28. The Christ-Event breaks down any other hierarchical structure that is used to divide and keep others out. All of this is swallowed up by the broader category of those who are "in Christ."

The Redefinition of the Family of God

Jew nor Gentile - Ethnic Difference: This is what Paul has been talking about ad nauseam for the last few chapters. He then maps this same logic onto other hierarchical structures outside the bounds of religion and ethnicity.

Slave nor free - Social Differences: This is a culturally laden discussion that deals with Paul's trajectory of breaking down the structure of slavery. He does this in Philemon and here, making a strong case that the distinction of slave and free should never be a defining distinction in the people of God.

Male and Female - Cultural Differences: This is not a diminishing of our gender identity, any more than it was for Jew and Gentile. The invitation was not to lay aside those things but to see those lesser identities in light of the very work of Jesus. It is "in Christ" that we find the fullness of what it means to take up our maleness or our femaleness.

The main point of this beautiful section is that "being in Christ does not do away with Jew or Greek, male and female, even slave or free, but it makes these differences before God irrelevant. In God's new creation, his people, the new humanity, are able to bring the fullness of who they are as core to themselves, but not as a defining identity that has been absorbed into our identity as being "in Christ." Paul is insisting that when it comes to membership into the family of Christ, none of these either/or categories have any meaning.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

Here is the bottom line, our union with Christ sets us free to embrace a new identity as individuals and as his people. When we retreat away from this union with Christ, we are refusing the invitation to a new life that begins now. This is the story that animates us, Church. It is how we operate; it is how we think of ourselves as the Ekklesia, the community of God.

In the crescendo of the first section of this letter, Paul uses two images to define the way the gospel has broken into this old world and shook free a new humanity—those who have been baptized into Christ, and those who have clothed themselves in Christ. These are beautiful images that often have been used to talk about the manner in which we embrace the gospel in our lives. They are immersive images.

To be baptized into Christ is to be immersed in the water and raised to new life. It is a totalizing picture. When you are baptized, every part of you is participating in the story of God. The same is true of the second image of clothing ourselves in Christ. It, too, is immersive; every part of us is incorporated into the person of Christ. And as Paul has so beautifully taught us in this passage, to be in Christ is to be included in the Abrahamic promise of the people of God for all time. It becomes our story.

I think for us, we have to consider what are we immersed in? What have we been in union with that hasn't been Christ? For the Galatians Christians, it was the law and the nationalistic posture that excluded anyone not adhering to the law. Maybe that is for you too? Maybe you are caught trying to earn your way into the family of God by some sort of rote legalism. Maybe you find yourself using religion as a means to achieve some status, earning your salvation.

For many of us, it could be that we are immersed in some sort of identity that is other than Christ. Maybe you are immersed in some sort of ideological camp that demands your allegiance higher than that of God. Maybe you are immersed in a worldview that elevates the individual above all other things. Whatever it is, the invitation is to return to union with Christ.

So much of our journey toward union with Christ is built around the need to simply lay ourselves before God. To allow both the law and the promise to fill our souls so that we can see clearly the ways we have been malformed before God and then enter into repentance before him.

One of the ways we can do this is through silent prayer, sitting before God, and allowing our minds to rest in God. As we do this, distractions will come, and often these can expose the trappings of sin or the ways we have been immersed/baptized into things other than God. I encourage you to take five minutes every day this week and do just that. Sit quietly before God, bringing your mind to him, and surrendering every thought that comes to mind.

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