

“Freed from the Law, for the Law” // Gal 3:19–4:9 //

Freedom in the In-Between #5

Baptism

Summit Church! Let’s put our hands together for Tulse and **114 others like her who** were baptized here last weekend!

These are always my favorite weekends, and I usually like to stick around to the very end because sometimes the best stories occur at the end. (We were turning the lights off and starting to cover the pool when a girl who came up at the very end, eyes puffy...)

- Last weekend I saw people who have been fighting this for a long time finally cross this line of faith.
- Husbands whose wives have been faithfully bringing them, praying for them, and pestering them in Jesus’s name finally take that step of faith.
- That number doesn’t include **23 professions of faith** at the women’s prison campus

Can we celebrate our brothers and sisters in Christ in Wake Correctional?

I hope this never gets old to you—it never gets old to God, or to the angels, so let it never get old to his church.

Works Consulted:

Galatians for You, “Galatians 3:26-4:31,” Tim Keller

“Sons and Slaves (Galatians 4:21-31),” Matt Chandler

“Adoption: Pondering the Privileges (Galatians 4:4-7),” Tony Merida

“The Good News of the Incarnation (Galatians 4:4-5),” HB Charles

- **Today, we will give you one more chance to act on this.** This is for or those who got in the car last weekend, drove away, and immediately regretted it. Or, maybe you weren’t here last week and you know you need to take that step, we’ll offer a chance at the end of the message today just like last week.
- **As always, we’ll have everything you’ll need**—changes of clothes, a baptism t-shirt which is yours to keep. Deodorant, stuff for your hair...

Introduction

Galatians 3, if you have your Bible. (We left off last week right in the middle of Galatians 3, and that’s where we’ll pick up today.)

When you’re reading through Galatians, you can’t help but ask yourself, “Where does Paul get this hatred of the Law?” I was talking with a pastor friend the other day who told me that he’s noticed that sometimes when people grow up in one culture and get exposed to another, and they start to recognize certain deficiencies or shortcomings in the cultures they grew up in, they can develop an unhealthy critical spirit—almost a kind of self-loathing—back toward their home culture, **as if everything they had previously learned was wrong.**

Is that what is going on with Paul? Paul had grown up on the Law, but in Galatians, he attacks it mercilessly. He says things like,

- ¹⁰ For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse...
- ¹² The law is not based on faith; instead, (it is based on self-effort,

and teaches things like) **the one who does these things will live by them. (3:10–12)**

- In **chapter 5 he is going to completely take the gloves off** and say this about those who teach adherence to the law as a means of getting close to God: ¹² **I wish those who are (still preach circumcision) might also let themselves be mutilated!** (some translations say ‘emasculated’) **(5:11–12)** This is one of the most jarring statements in the Bible.
- **He’s saying**, “I’d like to see those who insist on circumcision let the knife drift up a little farther so they can’t reproduce their heresy anymore.” **At least**, that’s how Martin Luther translated it.¹
- (And some of you thought I was a little blunt. When people tell me I’m too blunt or harsh, I want to say, “Well, I’ve never said anything like that.” Paul wrote that **under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit**)

Paul has made the case in the 1st half of chapter 3, pretty convincingly, that the law plays no part in getting us declared righteous in God’s sight, nor can it produce the first tremor of true spiritual life in our hearts.

- His **biblical proof for this is Abraham**, who in his old age believed God’s promise that he’d have a child, even though for nearly a century he and his wife had tried to have kids but couldn’t.
- **When he believed God’s promise, however**, Genesis 15 tells us 2 things happened: (1) He was judicially counted righteous before God; and (2) new life flooded into his physically dead body.
- **Was this owing to any inner strength in Abraham?** Was it a new technique or mental mindset that released this power?
- **No.** The righteousness and power were gifts from God; Abraham obtained them simply by believing the promise.

In the same way, Paul says, **we are declared judicially righteous when we believe God’s promise that Jesus died for our sin and rose again**, and we receive spiritual power, through the Holy Spirit, as we continue to believe that.

*(It’s **amazing, btw, by how unified the Bible is**—from cover to cover it teaches one way of salvation—faith in God’s promise.)*

So then, here’s the natural question: **Is there no purpose then for the Law?** (Or, here’s how Paul says it: ²¹ **Is the law therefore contrary to God’s promises?**)

After all, didn’t the Law originally come from God?

And don’t we still use laws in our society to good effect?

Don’t we Christian parents use laws with our children? With my children, I say things like: *“You will tell the truth; you will do your homework; you will not play in the highway; you will eat your broccoli; you will not spread the entire stick of butter on your bread. And you will do these things whether you feel like them or not.”*

Isn’t that the law? Is Paul telling us not to use that?

And don’t we even use laws sometimes in church? Think about how often we say things like:

- “You should read the Bible and pray and come to church... even when you don’t feel like it.”
- “You should tithe... even when you don’t feel like it.”
- “You should flee temptation... even when you feel like indulging in it.”
- **Those are all statements of “law.”** Is Paul telling us to reject all of this kind of talk?

¹ Luther translated this verse as, “Tell those who are disturbing you I would like to see the knife slip.”

Or think about this...

- Say some **married man comes up to me** and says, “Pastor, I was walking through the mall the other day, and I saw this really beautiful woman in front of me in very skimpy clothing.

And I knew what I was supposed to think, what a truly righteous heart would think. A truly righteous heart would say, “This woman, while beautiful, is not God’s will for me, she is not just some object for my sexual pleasure and honoring her, my wife and the God who saved me are far more satisfying to me than indulgence in lust would be.” But, **Pastor, that’s not what I felt in the moment.** My thoughts toward her were entirely immoral. And isn’t forcing myself to do what’s right—i.e. turning the other direction and going home to my wife—isn’t that relying on the law?

Well, I didn’t want to be a Galatian heretic, so I acted on my heart’s desires and got the girl’s number, then went home and believed the gospel to get God’s forgiveness.”

- **Do you think I’ll say, “Great work!** That’s exactly how I was hoping you’d understand and apply Galatians”?
- **No, but think about it:** Isn’t telling this guy to force himself to choose one thing even though his heart wants something else using the Law in his life?
- Is **Paul saying that is bad?**

Well, obviously, no. (I will say, however, the fact that you have that question is a good one, and **shows that you are starting to understand** what Paul is teaching. Paul frequently, **in his teaching about the gospel, had to stop and answer this question (cf. Romans 6).**

- One of the signs you are starting to feel the radical implications of the gospel is that you ask this question of whether or not Paul is telling you to do whatever you want.
- Now, **Paul has a really good answer for it**, but my point is that if you don’t ever find yourself asking this question, you’ve probably yet to grasp with the truly radical things the gospel is teaching.

So, Paul gives his answer, **vs. 19:** ¹⁹ Why then was the law given? It was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come... ²¹ Is the law therefore contrary to God’s promises? Absolutely not! ²² ...the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin’s power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe... ²⁴ The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. ²⁵ But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,* ²⁶ for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

The key word there is **guardian**; some translations say tutor. Paul is referring to a schoolteacher, or a nanny, who oversees a child, training them up in the ways of adulthood, and **making sure** they don’t kill themselves accidentally before they become adults.

3 Ways the Law is Our “Guardian”

...and these are the **3 ongoing uses for the Law in our lives.** (God’s commands about what we ought to do)

First, the Law is a...

1. **Curb** - Through **threats of punishment or consequences**, the Law keeps our sinful natures in check.
 - We obey **simple because we are scared** of the consequences
 - **Forcing ourselves to obey** the law does not erase the presence of sin in our hearts, since sin consists primarily of corrupt desires, and those are present whether **we act on**

those desires or not, but they keep us from the further damage caused by acting on sin.

- **To go back to our illustration of the man in the mall...** It is true that the root this man's sin is in his heart,
- But **obeying God's law not to engage in adultery**, even when he doesn't feel like it, keeps him from the further damage that sin would bring: like destroying his wife and family, dishonoring this girl, corrupting his own heart, and displeasing God.
- The law says, "**You may feel like committing adultery**, but this is what it will do to your marriage, your family, your heart, and the glory of God..."
- And so, **if this man obeys the law even when he doesn't feel like it**, it curbs the sinful effects his sin.

2. **Mirror** - The **Law reveals to us how sinful** we are. The law reveals to us what a truly righteous heart would look like. It shows us the way our heart should be.

- So, by looking into the mirror of the Law and comparing the actual state of our hearts to it, we realize how **sinful and twisted** our hearts are and **how desperate** we are for a Savior.
- Commandment 9, for example, "**thou shalt not lie**," shows **me that I am supposed to love honesty so much** that I'm never tempted to lie, even when twisting the truth would gain me an advantage or get me out of a bad situation
- Commandment 7, "Do not commit adultery," shows me that **I'm supposed to love purity** so much that any sexual desire I have for someone else besides my spouse is outweighed by my love of purity and doing things God's way.
- Commandment 6, "Thou shalt not kill," shows me that **I'm supposed to be so aware of God's kindness to me** that I wouldn't dare think hateful thoughts to others.

- Commandment 10 shows me that I'm supposed to be so satisfied with God and **so trusting** of his plan for me that I don't get jealous when someone else has something I want.
- But **when I look into the mirror of those Laws I say**, "*I'm in trouble! Because these are the opposite of what my heart usually feels.*"
- And merely **forcing my heart to do the right thing won't change it!**
 - I've heard the **Law compared, in this regard**, to a thermometer, not a thermostat. That can tell temp, not change.
 - The law is the thermometer: the gospel is the thermostat.
- **When I force myself to obey the law**, obedience will only be short-lived.
 - **We've described it like bending metal**.
 - **Luther**: the law made me hate God. The more the Law showed me what I should be, the more I realized how much I wasn't.²
 - He talked about the dilemma of the Great Commandment...
 - He's commanding something that cannot be commanded. If you don't love something, no command can change that (mayonnaise).
 - If you do love it, then you need no command. (eat a steak)
 - That's the dilemma...
 - **"What the law requires is freedom from the law!" Martin Luther**
- **What the law does therefore, as the mirror**, is drive us to see our need for Christ. **This is what Paul says**:
 - Again,¹⁹ **Why then was the law given?...** It ²⁴ **The law, then, was our guardian until Christ** (it taught us our need of

² Charles Fry, <https://cruciformpress.com/luther-and-the-gospel-peace-with-god/>

Christ), so that we (would come to him and confess our sin-sick hearts) could be justified by faith.

So, it is a curb, keeping us from further damage of sin; **a mirror**, showing us our need of a Savior. **Thirdly, it is our...**

3. **Guide** (compass, map)— **After being saved, the Law shows us the best way** we can please the God that we love. **The Law perfectly reveals** God's character to us, and **shows us what a life pleasing to God** looks like.

- This is the illustration I used last week: **The law is like railroad tracks**: it can point us in the right direction to go, but it is powerless to move us along the tracks. The gospel is the locomotive. But after we've been given the engine power to obey, the Law can still help us know the direction that we should go.
- You could say, in that sense, that **the Law drives us to grace, but grace drives us back to the Law**. The law drives us in desperation to grace, but an experience of grace drives us in devotion back the Law. **Having been justified by grace**, we now desire to please the God who saved us.³
- And **we learn to do that** from the Law.

So, let's go back to our married guy in the mall and try to pull all this together. **What this guy should say**, when he feels tempted for this woman, is: *"God, I know that I should love faithfulness and purity more than I desire this woman. But I don't right now. And that desire reveals how sin-sick my heart is. I'm not going to act on this impulse, as I know it would harm my marriage and this woman, it would further entrench sin's power in my own heart, and it would dishonor you.*

But I realize that my forced obedience here is not going to heal the distorted desires of my heart. Only you can do that, and that power flows only from the finished work of Christ. Therefore, while I force

myself to do the thing that I don't want to do right now, I am looking to you, trusting in the power of the Spirit on the basis of the finished work of Christ, to change my heart so that I love purity more than I desire lust."

(You say, I can't remember all that. IOW, *"God, I am going to choose to do the right thing, but I really want to do the wrong thing. Please, because of Jesus, fix my broken want."*)

These are the 3 ongoing uses of the Law for the Christian. You see? **It's a curb** (keeping us from the damage of sin); it's a **mirror** (showing us how messed up we are and how desperate we are for a Savior), and a **guide** (showing us how to act in order to please God and bless others).

But the power to actually change the heart, to produce actual righteous desires in the heart, is only found in **the finished work of Christ—only he can do that by the power of resurrection**, released **only by faith** in God's promise.

In chapter 4, Paul continues his thought: **4:1 Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything.** ² **Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.** ³ **In the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements of the world.**

- **IOW, before we come to maturity in Christ**—before righteous desires are fully formed in our hearts—we need the law.
- We **have to be told what to do**, and we need to force ourselves to do the right thing sometimes.
 - That included **Israel before Jesus** came (they were under the Mosaic law).

³ See R.C. Sproul, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/sproul/threefold_law.html

- It also includes us as **immature Christians when we desire things we know we shouldn't desire** (like the guy in my story), and me every day.

But the Law was **totally insufficient** to change our hearts. So, ⁴When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- God wanted to make us into **sons who wanted to obey**. He didn't want us to remain as slaves who were forced to obey.
- **So, he redeemed us**—Jesus was born under the law, so he **could** live the life we were supposed to live, and die the death we were condemned to die.

And in so doing, he bought us **out of the orphanage of sin** (where sin was our **mother** and **Satan our father**), and put us into the **household of God**.⁶ And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "*Abba, Father!*"

- **After God cleared our sin-debt through Christ, he put Christ's Spirit into us** so that we would start to love and trust God like Jesus did.
- **Every child who loves his daddy wants to be like him** ('Abba' means daddy).
 - **Illus. Adon with me.** *What do you want to be when you grow up? Pastor or spy.* Not sure where he gets spy. Veronica says there are people who can subtly blend in to other cultures, and that is the opposite of me. I'm the easiest recognized American in any context. But preacher—he loves me and wants to be like me. I'm not sure if that's what God has called him to, but it honors me because he loves me and looks up to me.
 - **Sometimes when I look into the mirror** now I'll see Lynn Greear, my dad, looking back at me. And that's ok, because I love my dad and have always wanted to become the man he is.

- **That happens to us** with God our Father.

⁷So you are no longer a slave but a son... and that makes you free.

- **No longer do we live under a Law that forces us to do what we don't want to do.** Christ's Spirit comes into us and changes our desires so that obeying the Law is what we *desire* to do.
 - **Here's an illustration** I have used for the Law—some of you hate it; some of you love it, but it gets the point across. **Dogs and vomit.** *God doesn't want spiritual dogs in heaven.*
- The **gospel changes your heart** so that you desire to do what God's Law tells you that you should do.
- The **gospel frees us to obey God**.

Now, when I say "frees you to obey God," to many in our culture, that sounds strange, because our **culture celebrates freedom** as the **ability to** define your own existence, to make your own rules.

- That is how the **Supreme Court** of the U.S. even defines freedom—They issued a pretty famous ruling in a **1992** on sexual ethics in which they said: "*The heart of liberty is to define one's own concept of existence and the meaning of the universe.*" **Anthony Kennedy**
- **On a more popular level: in 2004 Will Smith starred in a movie called *iRobot*...** the basic gist of the movie is there's this robot, Sonny, whose purpose is to stave off a plot to destroy the human race by the other robots. After Sonny succeeds (*you're ruining the movie! We all know he'll succeed because the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air always succeeds*) he tells Will Smith that he's depressed because now he doesn't know what to do with himself now that his purpose in being created has been fulfilled. Will Smith, ever the insightful philosopher, tells him, "Well, I guess now you're like the rest of us, free to make your own way."
- **That's how our culture views freedom**—you are free to find your own purpose.

The Bible would say that's not freedom at all. Imagine a fish that develops a psychological disorder, and he wants to hop up out of the water onto dry land. The fish does it, starts flopping around, and thinks, "I'm free! I'm no longer constrained by that restrictive ocean!" He won't be free for very long. He'll be dead. He is designed to be in water, and he'll thrive only when he's in water.

You and I are created for God, and we'll thrive only when we are in right relationship to God.

- And **those who have walked with God faithfully for many years** can tell you from personal experience that that is true. ***I will tell you***, and I tell this to my kids, having walked with God for only about 20 years, if I had 10,000 lives to live, I'd live every single one... because of the joy that comes from knowing him. Life is hard, but God is good... and I know that when we've been there 10,000 years...

⁸ But in the past, since you didn't know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods.

- **IOW, Paul is saying, total freedom is a myth**, because we are not God.
 - **We know we need security**. Deep down, we know how fragile we are: powerless to stop a meteor; if our sun heats up or cools down by 5%, we're all dead, and we'd be powerless to stop that; NYT this week: super-volcanoes that can activate in a decade and change life on earth). We want some kind of security.
 - **Don't be alarmed...** Prob won't happen. But this might be a good moment for the baptism call.
 - We know **we need something beyond ourselves** to be happy. And so, we identify **some THING** that we need to be happy: money, romance, a certain standard of living, popularity, good health.
- **God is supposed to be that thing**. And when he is, **we experience freedom**, because we were created for God.

- But whenever we choose something besides God **to be our primary source of security** and happiness, not only are we not fulfilled, we become enslaved to it.
 - Question is not if we are a worshipper, but **what** we are worshipping
- **For example**,
 - If we depend on **money**: obsessive; stingy; workaholics
 - **If you think romance** is what will make you happy, you depend on it:
 - **You become really fearful** about being alone, or really co-dependent in relationships. Most people approach romance like a drowning man approaches a life preserver.
 - **Matt Dillon** said he realized he was a relationship junkie. He needed the hit of a new romantic relationship every few months to feel alive.
 - **If you need family** to be secure and fulfilled, you become controlling and possessive of your family. You need your kids to turn out well as a validation of you and you become very controlling of them because you need them close by and you resent them for doing things that take them away.
 - **If you look to the approval of others to be happy**, you become a slave to other people's opinions: One of my favorite old movie scenes is from Rocky I... They are in the ice skating rink and Adrian asks Rocky why he's going to fight the world champ... and Rocky says, "I have to go 15 rounds with the guy. Because if I go 15 rounds then I'll know I'm not a bum."
 - **Everyone has something that is like those 15 rounds**. Something whereby you escape "bumness..."
 - Something that will **give us life and security and meaning** and fulfillment. Something that clothes your nakedness. And whatever it is, we become a slave to it. It drives us.
 - As **Bob Dylan** says, ***"You might be a rock 'n' roll addict prancing on the stage, You might have drugs at your command, women in a cage; You may be a business man or some high degree thief, They may call you Doctor or they may call you Chief, but***

you're going to have to serve somebody. It might be the devil or it might be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody.” Friends, when the Apostle Paul and Bob Dylan both say it, it has to be settled in heaven. Everybody serves something.

The **same thing is true when you turn to obedience to the Law** to try and save yourself. Rather than being clothed by the righteousness of Christ according to the promise of God, you try to clothe yourself through obedience to the Law. And that's going to make you a slave to the Law.

- You get really technical and legalistic
- Paranoid—**like Luther**. Did I obey it enough? Confess enough? Go to church enough?

⁹ But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elements?

- **We were created by God, for God.**
- And in the gospel, we found what we were looking for. We were reunited to him. We are clothed in his righteousness and filled with his power.
- **Do we really want to turn back again to ourselves for clothing and acceptance?**

⁹ ...Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again?

God wants to make us into sons or daughters. He does that only by the power of the Spirit, and the power of the Spirit is released only through faith in the gospel.

The first time we believed “it is finished” we were released from the penalty of sin. As we continue to believe it we are released from the power of sin.

In the 4th grade, my mom commenced several years of rather cruel and unusual, **rigorous piano lessons**, because she thought it would add a lot of richness to my life. It was a desire that I did not share. I **dreaded** the moment in the afternoon when I'd be out in the yard playing football with the neighbors and my mom would say, “J.D., time to come in to practice your piano.” She required 30 mins: so I'd start at 4:04 and count that as 4:00; end at 4:26 and count that as 4:30... lots of bathroom breaks, need a drink. Probably actually got in about 9 minutes of actual piano practice.

The worst was **the recital**. Never really got those... by the time that the recital came around my parents had heard “Fur Elise” at least 3000 times. **The only difference in them hearing it this time was I was expected to play it perfectly**, wearing uncomfortable clothing in front of an audience of total strangers. The **only bright spot** in the whole evening was the hope that if it did it well enough I might get a **snow-cone** afterward.

Finally, in about the **6th grade my mother** released me from that tyranny. **But the strangest thing happened in college**. I started to really admire people with musical talent. I loved to hear them play, especially those who could play and lead in worship. And I sat down and tried to pick out some tunes. I **actually got pretty decent at playing a few songs...** like 5 of them.

Me and my friend had a deal worked out that whenever girls were around I'd play a song and they'd say “you play the piano?” I do... what do you want me to play? Ask me anything.” My friend would jump in and say, “Yeah, he does... like play “Faithfully” by Journey (which was one of the 5 songs I actually knew). And I'd be like... Uhh... let's see. That's in the key of F.” **Impressed**. Or maybe they weren't like that, I just thought they were. I just really got into it for a while. I started to learn chord charts. I started to understand why we do the finger exercises... It all made sense. All

the things that had been such bondage to me (finger rolls) became liberating... **as a way to excel at what I now loved.**

Sadly, I never really went on... the reason being that for all my desire, I really, truth be told, have no musical skill at all. My fingers are like meat sausages and I have no rhythm... when I dance I look like someone on roller skates getting attacked by a swarm of yellow jackets...

Paul is saying that many of us view the commandments of God and fellowship with him like I used to view the piano: Bondage. And that's because **we don't love him**; we have the heart of a slave... **God wants to give us the heart of a son.**

That change happens only through the gospel.

- Many of you **can't love God because you are trying to do so in the power of your flesh**, which is bent in opposition to God—and you can't change that no matter how many resolutions you are going to make that you are going to be different.
- Also, **deep down, you only think of God as the Judge who is going to punish you** for doing what you really want to do.
 - **So, like Martin Luther, you hate him.** And the more you are commanded to love him, the more you resist and resent him.

When my kids think I'm mad at them, they avoid me. When they know that I **love them and cherish them**, they love to be around me.

What if you saw that even in your sin, God wasn't angry at you, he was calling out to you, saying:

- *"I see your messed-up heart.*
- *I see that you don't really desire me, and you hate my law.*
- *And I am not telling you that you have to change that in order for me to accept you—to try to pretend you are someone you aren't.*
- **Because you can't do that.**

- *What I'm telling you is **that if you come to me, I'll change your heart into that.** **All you have to do is submit to me and believe I'll do it, and then I'll go to work on your heart.**"*

The gospel is not "change and I'll accept you." The gospel is, "Admit that you need to be changed; submit to God and trust him to do it, and he'll change you. He can give you the heart of a son who desires to be around and be like their daddy."

That's what God is calling out to many of you today. He is saying, "I want to be your daddy. You don't have the heart of a son yet. I know that.

But I still want to be your daddy. And I can give you the heart of a son.

Come to me and trust me for it, and I'll give it to you. You don't have to do anything to earn my approval or do anything in your own power to change your heart.

- **My approval is a gift purchased by Christ** and given to you when you simply receive it;
- **and I will change your heart into one that desires the right things** when you trust in the power of my Spirit to do that work in you."

Invitation / Heads Bowed

- Have you received him?
 - *Prayer for salvation*
 - *Prayer for ongoing sanctification*
 - *(Free from religiosity)*
- Have you shown that through baptism?
- Baptism is...
 - Symbol/Declaration
 - Command
 - As a kid? Ratify what was done when you were young. It is supposed to be a public declaration of your faith—where

you publicly identify yourself with Jesus of your own choice.

- Time to stop putting it off. Respond today.
- Stand and step!

(Not a good time for bathroom!)

