

## ***After law: a surpassing status in Christ*** (Galatians 3:23–29)

The law is not a satisfactory definer of life's purpose or an individual's identity. It points out our failures and pronounces condemnation. Keeping the law cannot make righteous or bring life. The Jews had been under law, but in Christ believing Jews and Gentiles have a far better status.

### **I. *The Jews' status under the law*** (3:23–25)

1. The subject "we" in these verses is most likely Jews, and in particular Jews like Paul who had turned to Christ.
2. Multiple expressions limit the time frame of the status of these Jews under law, i.e., "before *the* faith came", "until the coming faith would be revealed," "until Christ", and "now that *the* faith has come". Salvation was always by faith, not by works, but *the* faith is now faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Multiple expressions reveal the character of the status of Jews under the law: "held captive", "imprisoned", "under a guardian". The terms for "held captive" and "imprisoned" can be penal or protective, as in "protective custody." The "guardian" was a disciplinarian or custodian (not a teacher) of minor-aged children, who was to guard, guide, and discipline them. The law revealed the nature of sin (cf. vv. 19–22) but also restrained sin. Ultimately, it pointed to justification by faith since the law itself obviously could not justify.

The restraint of law is not needed by those who have the law written on their hearts (cf. Romans 7:15–22). Therefore, examine your heart by your response to the "restraints" God's truth puts on you.

### **II. *The Christian's status in Christ*** (3:26–29)

1. *You are all sons of God* (3:26–27).
  - a. The recipients, Jews and primarily Gentiles, all were "sons" of God, not in the sense of gender but as heirs (cf v. 29) and character.
  - b. All true believers have been baptized into one Body, the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). Those now so joined to Christ (and to one another) are "clothed" with Christ and should increasingly reveal His character (Colossians 3:10ff).
  - c. This transformation comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of the law.
2. *You are all one in Christ* (3:28).
  - a. The common distinctions of race, social status, and gender do not affect a person's standing before God nor the extent to which a person is united to others in the Body of Christ. Believing Jew and believing Gentile belong without distinction to the Body. Believing slaves are as freedmen in Christ, and freedmen are slaves of Christ (1 Cor 7:22). Both male and female were created in the image of God, and both as believers have the status of sons of God and are joined to the Body of Christ.
  - b. True believers are all one in Christ without regard for race, social status, or gender. Nevertheless the Bible does not eliminate physical and functional differences as seen in instructions for slaves and masters (Titus 2:9–10; Colossians 3:22–4:1; Ephesians 6:5–9), husband and wives (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:25–33; 1 Peter 3:1–7). However, spiritual unity operating in diversity should shine as a light in a world darkened with prejudices.
3. *You are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise* (3:29).
  - a. "Being Christ's" brings together the foregoing expressions: "in Christ", "baptized into Christ", "having put on Christ." The relationship with Jesus Christ defines the believer's identity.
  - b. Those of Christ are also the seed of Abraham by being in Christ and they join in His blessing. Neither physical descent or keeping the law are necessary.
  - c. They also become heirs with Christ, as promised to Abraham.

It was senseless for the Galatian believers to turn to an inferior status when they had everything in Jesus Christ. Like them, believers today should value highly all that we have in Christ and not be tempted to trust in the worthless self-effort of law-keeping.

#### ***Questions for further thought and discussion:***

- Evaluate your own heart response to the commands of Scripture. Does it show the law written on your heart?
- Why might professing Christian young people struggle with their identity? What might help?
- How should unity in Christ look when real functional and/or differences exist, e.g. between masters and slaves, or male and female?