

**Introduction**

For the last two weeks we've been reading and reflecting on Paul's letter to the Galatians. You may recall that Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in the region of what is now Asia Minor (Turkey) in response to some issues they had. Many of these new Christians were Gentiles and so did not follow all the laws of Judaism; and that was okay, as they had found their salvation in Christ. But along came some other preachers who told these folks that they had to follow the Law in order to be Christians (almost like becoming a Jew first in order to be accepted into the family of God). Paul rightly opposed this, knowing that it was simply wrong, for God, through Jesus, had opened the way for all people to enter God's family, and that following the Jewish law by some, and not by others, would only make for a divided church.

His letter defends his stance and further explains how Jesus has superceded the Law of Moses in terms of one's relationship with God.

**Role of Law**

James Madison (one of the writers of the U.S. constitution) once wrote that "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."<sup>1</sup> Good governments provide and administer laws so as to protect its citizens from harm. If men and women, here and in other nations, would always do good and never act from selfishness, then I suppose laws wouldn't be necessary.

Although laws and the judicial system cannot create a genuine, humane community, it still has important functions in faith and society. Paul says the law can serve as a preliminary measure, a stopgap.<sup>2</sup> The Law of Moses did not lead to faith in Christ; the Law was not a teacher to prepare us for Christ. The Law served to make humans aware of their sin and restrain their behavior *until* Christ came. The Law still serves to make people aware of their sins, but it is only union in Christ that makes them children of God.

[In the Bible God's first dealings with humanity wasn't through the law. As parents who first love their child and then, as it grows, give rules to protect it, so God dealt with our human race. The people of the Old Testament knew God's instruction was for their well-being, as a child snatched from beside a hot stove soon understands that his progress was stopped because of love. People today might find it insane to read the Old Testament and hear someone say, "I love your law." "Law" in the Old Testament means "instruction." The Hebrews understood it as gracious and helpful. When Paul writes of "law" in the New Testament, its sense has deteriorated. People (not everyone) have missed its gracious purpose and begun interpreting it legalistically, obeying it only as a duty. At times these people with a law-and-order mentality (like Paul's Pharisees) can be unloving as well as obnoxious.]

[Paul speaks about his understanding of the law in his letter to the churches in Galatia (3:24-25). Here he refers to a childrearing/childcare practice in the ancient world. Concerning the route to personal salvation he writes of the law as a παιδαγωγός (paidagogos). In upper-class Greek society the παιδαγωγός was an older man -- often a slave -- having charge of the boy from when he left his mother's care at six or seven until the boy entered his father's care at age seventeen. The παιδαγωγός carried the boy's books and lyre to school and supervised his activity. His job has been described as a "mixture of nurse, footman, chaperone, and tutor." Depending on the context, the word translates "child-attendant, disciplinarian, supervisor, guardian, leader, guide."]

[Paul describes the law as an aid in our maturity, which comes after we know we're loved. The paidagagwß protected and guarded us (v. 23) and, even though it seemed to enslave us, that purpose of the law was temporary. Now that role of the law is obsolete and we are God's children (v. 26). Christ's Spirit brings us to the loving person behind the law and to God's love as a renewed motivation for obeying.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Federalist No. 51," *Independent Journal*, February 6, 1788.

<sup>2</sup>David O. Bales, *In The Original, Insights from Greek and Hebrew for the Lectionary Passages*.

Certainly evil had perverted the law and even made the law work against us, but from the beginning God's law was a gift. The law could help us but not free us. Its central purpose is to bring us to the maturity of Christ.]

### **Christ Fulfills the Law**

Paul says, "For Christ is the goal of the law" (Romans 10:4). The law can take us by the hand and lead us to Christ. Christ, however, is the one, true way to God.

A group of young children, allowed to play in an unfenced field, will play close together. That same group allowed to play in a large fenced field will use the whole area to play. They demonstrate how rules and limitations protect us. In order to become mature, however, we must be guided by more than the law's limitations. If we stay only within a fenced area, it becomes a prison (v. 23). It is when they have internalized discipline, so to speak, that they may play outside the fence. To mature in Christ we need to step out and trust that Christ gives us the needed restraint within us (v. 27).

"Before faith came," that is, before the appearance of Jesus, we were guided by the Law. But now Jesus' faith saves us. He trusted God, even to death on a cross for our sakes. [Abraham is the forerunner of faith, as he trusted God for his future, setting out on his journey trusting in God's promise that he would be the father of many nations. "Faith is not a matter of mustering a heroic capacity to believe the odd or the miraculous; it is simply a matter of receiving gratefully a gift that God has chosen to give us, completely without regard to our deserving."<sup>3</sup>] Through Christ's faithfulness we become true children of God. "Children of God" was the term reserved for the Jews, born to the Covenant with God, according to the Law. But Paul deliberately uses this term for Gentile believers. It is union with Christ whose faith has saved us, not the Law, which makes us children of God, and heirs of the promises made to Abraham. [In that manner Abraham did become the father of many nations.]

When we receive this gift – truly take it into our lives, truly know that Christ "died for me, even me" - then all that Christ wrought *for* me on the Cross is wrought *in* me. The free commitment of myself to God gives the Holy Spirit the chance to impart to me the holiness of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> At that point the law's fence is no longer needed. The ritual law (dietary laws, circumcision) is no longer relevant because our identity is in Christ, not in outward signs of belonging to a holy group, but inwardly through the witness of the Holy Spirit. [Our Identity is given to us through our union with Christ, enacted in our baptism. All other markers of identity are no longer relevant; neither ethnicity, race, male or female, social or economic status. "Identity politics" really have no place in the church. Identity derived from union with Christ is different from all others if, and only if, the death and resurrection of Jesus are real and the singular event through which God has chosen to redeem the world. Otherwise, the gospel is just one more religious system which can be used to serve human pride and ambition.<sup>5</sup>]

The moral law (Ten Commandments and sexual practices) still stand, but now one who is "in Christ" will *want* to live in this manner, rather than being coerced by outside forces to conform. The law is no longer an outward constraint upon behavior, because the Person to whom the law has always been pointing (Jesus) leads us from the inside.

### **A Christian Father's Role**

Father's Day is an appropriate occasion to comment on the a father's role in imparting this crucial understanding of Christ's power to guide us into godly living. To teach the meaning of "faith" is the father's job.

Whether you are a biological father or not, you have a role as a father figure in this church. "Men need a sacred role, one only they can fulfill. Fortunately, God gave men such a role. God calls every man to become

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<sup>3</sup>Richard B. Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians," *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. XI*, Leander Keck, Ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 269-279.

<sup>4</sup>Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, "Interest or Identification, March 21<sup>st</sup>," (Oswald Chambers Publications Assoc., 1963).

<sup>5</sup>Richard B. Hays, "The Letter to the Galatians," *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. XI*, Leander Keck, Ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2000), 269-279.

a spiritual father. . . . It's a role that's not well understood because, like the Trinity, it's more implied than spelled out in Scripture. But the example of Jesus and the apostle Paul are clear; spiritual fathering is the only way to bring believers to maturity in Christ."<sup>6</sup> Part of Jesus' call was to be a spiritual father to the Twelve Disciples. Paul was called to do likewise with Timothy and Titus, whom he called his sons. The spiritual father is a living example for others to emulate. Jesus imitated his Father, and provides us a model to imitate, and men need other men to model themselves after. The spiritual father, more than a teacher, is one who is willing to walk alongside other men and help them grow to maturity in Christ; while also being courageous and bold where necessary. Men, we are to grow people in Jesus' likeness. (Jesus is the Lion of Judah – let's not de-claw him!)

Many churches suffer when men do not understand this or live by it. Men are absent in greater numbers from church, or a walk with God, than are women. Yet men, as well as women, have the responsibility to pass on to succeeding generations the truth about God our Creator, who revealed himself to us in Jesus. We are to help others build a firm foundation for life, not just so they can succeed in worldly terms, but so that they can also succeed on God's terms. In each encounter with our children we are planting seeds, and growing people. The results are eternal.

In short, if a father does not go to church, no matter how faithful his wife's devotions, only one child in 50 will become a regular worshipper. If a father does go regularly, regardless of the practice of the mother, between two-thirds and three-quarters of their children will become churchgoers (regular and irregular).

[If a father goes but irregularly to church, regardless of his wife's devotion, between a half and two-thirds of their offspring will find themselves coming to church regularly or occasionally. A non-practicing mother with a regular father will see a minimum of two-thirds of her children ending up at church. In contrast, a non-practicing father with a regular mother will see two-thirds of his children never darken the church door. If his wife is similarly negligent that figure rises to 80 percent!<sup>7</sup>]

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Christian fathers should instruct their sons, primarily by example. Fathers should lead family prayers, read the Bible, and take the lead in getting the family to church. Much of the Old Testament contains instructions on how to be a father, and the father is of key importance in the Christian household in the New Testament. Christian faith is a matter of infinite seriousness, far more serious than economics, politics, or sports. Christianity can give the true initiation into the mysteries of life and death, of heaven and hell, of spiritual warfare and the destiny of the human race. Men need training in spiritual discipline, and will think it worthwhile if they see the importance of Christianity.

Remember, the purpose of the church is not to be a clinging mother. The father's job is to separate his children from juvenile dependence and send them out prepared for the battle of life. The laity's role is out in the world, Christianizing our culture. Anyone who has tried to do this knows that it is a battle and that the Church needs more than just a few good men.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>David Murrow, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005), 215.

<sup>7</sup>Taken from a 1994 Swiss study, "The demographic characteristics of the linguistic and religious groups in Switzerland" by Werner Haug and Phillipe Warner of the Federal Statistical Office, Neuchatel. It appears in Volume 2 of Population Studies No. 31, a book titled *The Demographic Characteristics of National Minorities in Certain European States*, edited by Werner Haug and others, published by the Council of Europe Directorate General III, Social Cohesion, Strasbourg, January 2000.

<sup>8</sup>Leon J. Podles, "Missing Fathers of the Church, The Feminization of the Church & the Need for Christian Fatherhood," *Touchstone*, January/February 2001, 26-32.