



# THE RESULTS OF FREEDOM

*SERIES: IN SEARCH OF FREEDOM*

Catalog No. 977  
Galatians 3:24-29  
Tenth Message  
John Hanneman  
November 27th, 1994

In elementary school I played the clarinet, and on one occasion had to play a solo in competition. I was nervous, and afraid I would fail. When it was my turn to perform, my worst nightmare came true. My pianist and I got completely out of sync. I stopped playing, and asked the judges if I could begin again. The second time through I played flawlessly. But the damage had been done. I could not erase the mistake I had made. All I wanted was a chance at a fresh start, but it was not to be.

That is what the law does: it exposes our failures and makes us want to start over. Even Dennis the Menace seems to understand the function of law. Just this week I saw that he said this to his friend, "Remember, Joey, we're innocent till mom catches us doing something!" The law always catches us when we do something wrong.

At one time or another, we all wish we could start over. When we do something wrong, like hurt someone we love, have an argument, drink too much, or commit a sexual sin, we wish we could push a reset button, erase what we had done and try again. This pattern continues as long as we seek to live under the law. But the Bible promises something far better than starting over. It says that we can become new people not by trying to be perfect, but by identifying ourselves with Someone who is perfect. That someone is Jesus. If we understand this essential truth about identifying ourselves with him, then we will be liberated from living under the law.

Today we continue our study on freedom, from chapter 3 of the book of Galatians. Last summer, in a message entitled "The Key to Freedom," I touched briefly on verses 24-29, but we will study them in more detail this morning. This text brings us to the very heart of Galatians. Everything we have learned thus far climaxes at this point; everything we will study from now on proceeds from it. These verses, therefore, are critical to understanding the gospel and the freedom that is ours in Christ. Chapter 3, verses 24-29:

**Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are**

**all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.** (Gal 3:24-29, NASB)

There are two ways that we can relate to God. We can relate to him on the basis of his promises, God's word, given by his initiative, or on the basis of law, a code of behavioral expectations that qualifies us for approval. The promise, as we have seen, has priority over the law. Compared to the promise, the law is a temporary, secondary provision. The law has a threefold purpose: to make sin visible, to make us aware that we are imprisoned under its power, and to lead us to Christ. Paul says that the law acts like a custodian, a tutor, which leads to the promise.

We have already seen that in first century times, a custodian was a slave who functioned as guide and disciplinarian for a child. He was not a teacher, but rather one who led the child to the teacher. This was a temporary arrangement. At some point the child would enter maturity and the custodian would no longer be needed. (One would not expect to see a mature adult being led to school by a tutor.) The tutor, therefore, was not the end of the process, but the means to the end. According to Paul, the law is the tutor that leads us to Christ. Once we come to Christ and are justified by faith in him, no longer are we under the control of the tutor, no longer are we under law. The work of the law is finished; it has fulfilled its purpose.

What changed to make this so? In these verses, Paul explains the fundamental changes that occur when Christ enters a life. Christians are no longer under law not because they don't want to be or because they are tired of laboring under law, but because of the work of Christ and the bearing that this has on their entire person. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, and as a result we have a whole new identity that results in complete and permanent freedom.

Our task this morning is to understand three fundamental changes that result from our being set free from the law of sin and death. If we can see these three things in all their glory, then we will live life on a very different level than formerly. The law will simply fade away, overwhelmed by the glorious reality of the promise that is ours in Christ.

Here is the first result of that freedom: we become sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. No longer are we children in need of the guidance and discipline of a custodian; we are sons and daughters of God. The em-

phasis here is on adult sonship. A son or daughter who reaches maturity enters into a free relationship with his or her parents. The relationship is not defined by rules and regulations, control and manipulation, or approval based on performance. That is law. Sonship is a relationship of respect, mutual acceptance, trust and freedom. In a healthy family, both parents and children desire and work toward this kind of relationship. Paul is saying that as Christians we are sons of God, and we have this kind of free relationship with our Father.

According to the apostle, two things happened to bring this about. First, we were “baptized into Christ.” In other words, when we came to faith we were placed into Christ and united with him. The book of Romans says that we were baptized into Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Ephesians declares that we have been raised with Christ and are seated with him at the right hand of God. Baptism is the physical symbol of this union, this cataclysmic spiritual event.

The second thing that occurred in order to bring about our sonship is that we were clothed with Christ. Paul says, “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” This is a reference to the *toga virilis*, the robe that was given by a father to his son during the sonship ceremony, part of the Roman culture, as a sign that he had entered manhood, into adult sonship. We find the same symbol in the story of the prodigal son. When the wayward son returned home, the father dressed him in his best robe, his own garment. In the same way, sonship is granted to the Christian and he is clothed with the garments of Christ. When we are united in baptism with Christ, the Son of God, then we have clothed ourselves with him and we become as he is to his Father.

When I was a child I liked to play dress-up with my cousins, especially at Thanksgiving time. We would go into our grandfather’s closet, pick through his clothes, and parade around for the adults, dressed in grownup clothes. This activity was great fun, but looking back now, it is clear that what we were actually doing was wanting to be seen as adults.

In these beautiful stanzas, the prophet Isaiah describes how we have been clothed with Christ:

I will rejoice greatly in the Lord,  
My soul will exult in my God;  
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,  
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,  
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,  
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels  
(Isa. 61:10).

Sonship, then, is the first result of our freedom in Christ. As sons, we have an entirely new way of relating to our heavenly Father. We have a new identity, and a new sense of worth. And, despite how we may feel, these will never change. God promised Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son, even though they were long past childbearing age. Isaac, the child of

promise who was born to them, was a miracle child. Jesus, too, was a miracle child. He was born to Mary, a virgin. In the same way, we who were dead in sin by faith become alive in Christ. We were miraculously re-born, becoming part of the promise. We were baptized into the Son, thereby becoming sons of God.

The reason we live under law, as we have already seen, is our need for identity and worth. This is why we try to perform and achieve—to earn our identity. We try to earn it by being a “good” Christian, through our athletic ability, our job title, the kind of home we live in, etc. We are always performing in different areas, living under law, in order to maintain identity. We feed on our children’s success, so we put them under law. But Paul says that in Christ we have an entirely new identity. We are freed from living under law—and the change is permanent.

This truth is the key to freedom, yet it is a difficult spiritual concept to lay hold of. I used to have a hard time believing that I am a son of God. The reason for this, as I shared with you last summer, is that I had difficulty relating as a son in my own family. But when I grasped this truth it made a significant change in my life. This is the one thing that I hold onto more than anything else.

For many years I would wake up in the middle of the night with a deep ache in my heart. I could never quite determine its origin, and law could never remove it. No matter what I did it was still there. At last certain circumstances caused the perfectionist scaffolding which I had constructed around my life to collapse. It was a painful time. Losing my parents was a major part of it. But as the dust settled, one thing became clear, and that was that I am a son of God. This one truth has given me more freedom than anything else in my Christian walk. For several months now I have not felt the intensity of that pain I once experienced, that sense of loneliness at three o’clock in the morning. Instead I have a tremendous feeling of freedom. No magic formula led to this. It was nothing I did. God simply allowed me, by his grace, to begin to believe, not in my head but in my heart, that I am his son. I still have a long way to go; I still have my ups and downs. But even that is okay, because I do not expect to be perfect. By faith I believe that I am a son of God.

The law will never grant us sonship. Sonship comes by the promise of God. This is the first result of our freedom in Christ.

The second result is that Christians are all one in Christ Jesus. There is no longer a distinction of race (Jew or Greek), a distinction of rank (slave or free), or a distinction of sex (male or female).

Not only do we become sons of God, we become one in Christ. Not only do we gain a new identity, we gain a new family. “In Christ we belong not only to God (as His sons) but to each other (as brothers and sisters)” (John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* [IVP, 1968] 99). Paul

says that this is a radically new family: it has no racial, sexual, or social distinctions. In the cross, Jesus demolished the dividing wall, the barrier that stood between Jew and Greek. He abolished the law and created a whole new humanity, a new society, one new man. Here we have a redefinition of everything the Israelite held dear. Not only does one lose one's identification with Judaism, if a Jew, one also loses one's identification with humanity as we have known it, for the Christian has been placed "...in a new environment. And that environment was Christ himself, the ultimate Adam" (C.F.D. Moule).

The reason Paul wrote this letter in the first place was that in Galatia, agitators and troublemakers were trying to rebuild the wall and once again create division between Jews and Gentiles. The law is divisive, but the work of Christ is universal; it unifies all believers into one. God promised Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Abraham would be the father of a large family, and his descendants would outnumber the stars of the heavens. When we come to faith in Christ, then we too become part of this promise, for by faith we enter into the family of Abraham. The result is that we have equality of relationships. We are free from the control of others, because we are no better or no worse than anyone else in this new family.

Legalism is divisive, because law insists on making distinctions marked by comparison and competition. This is how the world lives, isn't it? That is why we have the battle of the sexes, barriers between rich and poor, prejudice between black and white, and tension between Republicans and the Democrats. We congregate in our group and throw stones at other groups. Once more, identity is a key factor here. Our need for an elitist identity drives us to separate ourselves, to prove ourselves superior, and in the process seek to control our relationships. But it is not to be so in this family of God. In this family we are one; we belong to one another. In the cross, all distinctions based on class, ethnic background, sex, appearance and intelligence are eliminated. If you view yourself as either superior or inferior to anyone in this family, this is a manifestation of law, not promise.

Let us apply this truth on a couple of different levels. First, the oneness of this family of God should change the way we view the world. When David Bruce was here a few weeks ago he told us about the hatred and prejudice between Protestants and Catholics that was part of growing up in Northern Ireland. The communities there are so segregated, he said, that he did not meet a Catholic until he was 18 years old. After he became a Christian, he found that his hatred and bigotry only increased. Finally he had to deal with this truth that Paul is referring to here, that we are one in Christ Jesus. David had to repent and rethink his view of Catholics. When at last he shared a teaching platform with Catholics, he was chastised publicly in the press. Yet he

knew that he was merely being obedient to this truth. What might this say to us about things like our world view, our view of minorities, our view of women?

Second, we can apply this truth right here in this church, among our own community. Look around you. Do you see brothers and sisters to love, or people to compare yourself with? It is amazing whom God has chosen to make up this family. We are far from perfect, aren't we? Most of us mess up a lot of the time. Yet here we are, the church, the body of Christ, the temple of God. It's astonishing, isn't it? Leon Morris describes the church in these words: "Jesus takes people who sing out of tune or have boots that squeak and all the rest of it, and he makes such commonplace people into the saints of God. Church membership does not mean being a person who qualifies for a place in stained glass windows. It means trusting Christ to save us despite our manifold handicaps" (*Expository Reflections on the Letter to the Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994] 37). When we look around do we see people with faults or do we see the saints of God?

Certainly we are still male and female; some get better grades than others; and we don't all make the same amount of money. Still we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, spiritual children of Abraham. God has put us together, a special family, united in Christ. There must be no spiritual distinctions based on physical criteria, no acceptance or rejection of one another based on obedience to law. We are not to exert control or try to manipulate one another. We are brothers and sisters in a special family and we can relate freely without sibling rivalry or competition.

Law cannot create unity and oneness in the church, in marriage, or in families. Unity can only come as a result of promise, and freedom in Christ.

Finally, Paul says the third result of our freedom is that we are seeds of Abraham and heirs according to promise. "...in Christ we belong to God and to each other. In Christ we also belong to Abraham" (Stott, *Galatians*, 101). Again we are taken back to the promise to Abraham that he would have a seed who would be an heir, not Ishmael, but "one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir" (Gen. 15:4). The seed was Christ, and Christ was the heir to the kingdom of his Father. When we are baptized into Christ we not only become the seed of Abraham, we not only become sons, we not only have equal relationships, we not only become part of a whole new family, but we become heirs to the kingdom.

This is what Paul declares in Romans, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:16-17). And in Ephesians, he wrote, "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus

through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). This means that we are the sons or daughters of royalty, heirs of a mighty king who has an everlasting kingdom, and we share the full inheritance that he passed down to his offspring. In Jesus we are part of a history and a heritage that is bigger and more glorious than anything we can possibly imagine.

My wife and I visited the East Coast last month to celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. One of the places we toured was Newport, Rhode Island. We didn't know that Newport was the home to some of the wealthiest families in the country. We saw places like the summer home of the Kennedys, for instance. On mansion row we saw one elaborate estate after another, where people like the Vanderbilts established the thrones to their kingdoms. I had never seen such homes. I wondered what it would be like to live in that kind of a family and be an heir to that kind of heritage.

But Paul says that when we come to Christ, we become part of something much grander and more glorious. Even the royal family of England pales by comparison. In Christ we become part of the heritage and history of the greatest kingdom ever established. And it is not a temporal, material kingdom, but an everlasting one. The law can never grant us to be an heir, no matter how good we are or how much money we have. This comes only by the promise of God.

This was what drove the Jews in Galatia to distraction, and why the gospel was such an offense to them. The thought that Gentiles could become Abraham's offspring, that they could become sons of God and heirs of the kingdom, apart from the Torah and its approval, made their blood boil. That was the reason they delivered up Jesus to be crucified. He ate with tax gatherers and sinners and told them they could be part of the promises of God through faith. He welcomed and accepted them. The Jews were like the older brother of the prodigal who was angry at his father for accepting and embracing his wayward brother. Let it not be so with us. If we live under law and make distinctions between

people, dividing and controlling them, then we become just like those who crucified our Lord, and we deny the cross of Jesus.

These then are the glorious results of freedom: we are sons of God; we are one in Christ; and we are heirs according to promise. Notice the centrality of Christ in these verses:

Verse 26: “in Christ Jesus you are all sons”

Verse 27: “were baptized in Christ”

Verse 27: “clothed yourself with Christ”

Verse 28: “you are all one in Christ Jesus”

Verse 29: “you are of Christ,” i.e. we belong to Christ.

“These, then, are the results of being ‘in Christ,’...in Christ we find ourselves. The unattached become attached. They find their place in eternity (related first and foremost to God as His sons and daughters), in society (related to each other as brothers and sisters in the same family), and in history (related also to the succession of God's people down the ages). This is a three-dimensional attachment which we gain when we are in Christ—in height, breadth and length” (Stott, *Galatians*, 101).

So much for starting over. Starting over is law mentality. Trying to be better people, trying to be better Christians, or batting .750 in law observance won't cut it. That is nothing more than trying to minimize failure. The promise, on the other hand, involves risking, trusting, enjoying. In Christ we become new people. We have a new identity, and we become part of a new humanity. Jesus is the seed and the promise, and in him we too inherit the promise. There are issues of sin that we need to deal with, of course, and we will come to these later in the letter. But first things first. As Christians, we are no longer under law. We are sons of God, one in Christ, heirs of the kingdom. This is where we must begin.

The only issue remaining is faith. Do we believe this? And do we live like we believe it? The law tells us that we are destined to fail, but the promise tells us that we are destined to live.

© 1994 Peninsula Bible Church/Cupertino