

Untitled (44)

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Date: 27 December 2015

[0:00] Amen. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have a confession to make. Now, I'm wondering if you're starting to love these pulpit confessionals and are thinking of them as perfectly scandalous.

Anyway, here it is. So, your priest as a little boy could be absolutely mean, mischievous, and rotten. Would you believe that?

Now, when I was about three or four years old, about the same age as my sweet little angel Mia, one of the chief recipients of my acts of mischief was Coco, my grandmother's nervous little chihuahua.

Now, a nervous little dog and a mischievous kid, what could go wrong with that arrangement, right? So, I discovered to my amusement that the little dog ran whenever I chased her.

[1:14] The little dog and I had quite the game going. She would run, and I would chase. For some reason, though, my grandmother didn't quite see the fun in our little game.

Not really sure why. She would lay down the law about that. I wasn't allowed to chase the dog, and I would be punished if I chased the dog. While that was all clear enough, even to a little guy, it didn't work.

If anything, being told not to chase the dog made me want to chase the dog even more. I'd be punished for chasing the dog, and still I'd do it again.

My grandmother's commandment, thou shalt not chase the chihuahua, had the effect of telling me that I shouldn't chase the chihuahua, right? It provided me with punishment when I chased the chihuahua, but it couldn't cause me to want to stop chasing the chihuahua.

Because of my wicked little heart. So, in our reading from Galatians for this morning, we see a contrast, right, between the law of God given through Moses, the commandments of the Old Testament, the law, and the faith that is revealed in Jesus Christ.

[2:31] We see in Galatians the limitations of the law, as we see it elsewhere in Scripture, that the law can show us what is right, and show us that we have fallen short of what God expects.

But like my grandmother's decree that I not chase the chihuahua, it only shows what is right, and provides punishment for wrongdoing. It doesn't change hearts.

That contrast, right, between the law of Moses and faith in Christ, is there in our Gospel passage as well. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Now these words, if we're looking at them at first glance, can seem a little puzzling to us. Why the contrast there? Now isn't there truth in the law that God gave to Moses?

Didn't that come from God? If it came from God, wasn't it good and true? I think that we'd have to say, yes, the law given by God through Moses must have been good, because it ultimately came from God.

[3:34] But I think we'd also have to say that the law that came through Moses, which rightly revealed the righteous standards and righteous character of God, pales in comparison to the grace and the truth revealed in our Lord and Savior, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Now our epistle reading from Galatians through this morning takes up these very questions. Look, they're with me in Galatians 3. Now to really get the sense of what's going on, I think we have to look back a couple of verses before our appointed passage starts in verse 21.

Now up to this point, Paul has been describing the contrast between the law of Moses and faith in Christ. Talking about the insufficiency, the inability of the law to save us.

Let's look at where he picks it up in verse 21. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not.

For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. So the problem isn't with the law, the commandments of God given through Moses.

[4:48] The law is good. The law came from God. The law reveals the behavior that God considers righteous.

The problem is with us. Those who haven't kept the law of God perfectly. And who is in that boat? All of us, right? If the law of God could give life, could give us the ability to keep the law as it demands, then we would be righteous by our obedience to the law.

But in our fallen and sinful state, we can't keep it. And we aren't righteous. But why would God give us a law that we couldn't keep?

Now, Paul starts to answer that question in verse 22. The scriptures imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

[5:51] Now, at first glance, this verse probably sounds more than a little weird. The scripture imprisoned everything under sin. What does that mean? We don't usually think of the scriptures as imprisoning us under sin.

Related question. Why would God give us scriptures that imprison us under sin, if he, as we know that he does, loves us and desires our salvation?

Now, the answer that Paul gives is that the scriptures imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

And we see that idea rephrased in verse 23.

Now, before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. We were held captive under the law.

[7:03] We were imprisoned by the law. And how could the law of God, which is good, imprison us? Well, let's stop and think. The law, by its very nature, is concerned with justice.

It's concerned with what's right and what's wrong. The law rewards those who do good and punishes and condemns those who do evil. Now, if we had kept the law perfectly, we would have been rewarded for our perfect keeping of the law.

But as the scriptures tell us, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And that is the trouble. So that being the case, we are imprisoned by the law.

The law imprisoned us, held us captive. It shows us the standard that we have failed to keep. Now, if God had just left us to our devices at that point, had kept us captive, kept us imprisoned for failing to keep the law indefinitely, he would have been just and right to do that.

But the same God who is righteous, just, and holy is also loving and merciful. And thank God that he is. We see that reality reflected in verse 24.

[8:24] So then the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. Now, the law, verse 24, is reminding us points beyond itself.

If we know the standards of God, if we know our scriptures, we do know them. We know that we haven't kept them, which we know if we're being honest with ourselves.

We have to realize that if we're going to have any hope at all, it can't be in the law. It's too late for that, because we've already sinned.

That train has left the station. The law of God as our guardian then shows us two things, basically. It shows us what God expects, what pleases him, but it also shows us that we are sinners in need of mercy.

Because we're lawbreakers. The law in acting as our guardian in this way points beyond itself to Christ Jesus, to justification by faith in Christ.

[9:36] And justification by faith in Christ changes everything. Paul tells us in verses 25 and 26, But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. Through faith in Christ, we have been released from our imprisonment to the law, and we have become not servants, not slaves, but children of God.

Because as Paul writes in verse 27, For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. And we remember our redemption, our adoption, especially this time of year, brothers and sisters, because we remember as the next chapter in Galatians, chapter 4, started in verse 4, tells us, When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be born of a woman, to live in perfect obedience to the law that had held us imprisoned, to the law that we couldn't keep, to set us free by His obedience, even unto death on a cross.

And not only that, but God sent His Son to be born of a woman, to become human, so that human beings, you and I, might become God's beloved children by adoption through faith in Jesus.

[11:23] Isn't it what we also see in John 1, our Gospel reading appointed for today? He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him, but to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

He gave the right to become children of God to all who received Him, to all who believed in His name. And isn't that amazing?

We, who under the law were imprisoned, were disobedient servants, were even rebels, were lawbreakers. But through God's grace in Jesus Christ, and through faith in Jesus Christ, we have gone from being prisoners, from being disobedient servants, to being sons and daughters.

And all of the privileges of being sons and daughters are ours. Because we are in Christ through faith. So Paul in Galatians 4, speaking to us, when he says, because you were sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, So you are no longer a slave, and if a son, then an heir through God.

What a privilege is ours, brothers and sisters. The Spirit dwells within us, declaring that we are God's children, crying out, Abba, Father.

[13:13] We are not slaves anymore. We're not disobedient servants. We have put on Christ, and when God looks at us, He sees His Son. We're no longer captives to the law, and that doesn't mean that we're disobedient.

It means that we have been given hearts that are being transformed by the Spirit of God's Son. Hearts that have the cry of Abba, Father, echoing within them.

Hearts that are being transformed from the inside out. Hearts that are being formed into the likeness of the perfect heart of Jesus. Because we have put on Christ.

Because we have been given power to be sons of God through faith. How's that for a Christmas gift? Now, if your faith is in Jesus, if you have been justified by faith, you have forgiveness of sins, because He was born under the law to redeem those under the law.

Us, we who were condemned because of the law. We are God's treasured, beloved children. Because we are in Christ.

[14:36] Christmas isn't over. Now, in the church, we have 12 days of Christmas. And what a perfect time over these next few days for us to think about the great salvation that we have in our Lord.

Let's set aside this time to meditate what it means to have been given the power to become sons of God through Jesus. The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Let's celebrate together. Let's think and talk together about what God has for us in the coming year as a community of those who have put on Christ.

Now, going back to my opening confession, I'm reminded that my beloved grandmother couldn't get me to stop chasing her little dog because she couldn't change my heart.

But God has changed my heart by sending the Spirit of His Son into my heart because by God's grace in Christ, I have been adopted as His beloved child.

[15:40] Has He done that for you? If so, then we can truly say together that from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

Thank God. Merry Christmas again. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.