

From Slave to Child

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of September 2003. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled From Slave to Child and is based on Galatians chapter 3 verse 19 through to chapter 4 verse 7.

As a child I had many rules that my parents imposed upon me. One of the rules that I had in my house was that if we wanted to get our pocket money we had to make our bed and do our washing and wiping up according to what night that we were rostered on to.

But of course our pocket money depended on what age we were. I had four younger sisters. So if you were ten that means you got ten cents for every year. So if I was ten I'd get a dollar.

If I was twelve I'd get a dollar twenty. That was the rule that we had in our house. Do you want the dollar twenty? Then I need to make sure my bed is made every week, every day of the week and that I also have done my washing up during the week.

[1 : 13] We also had the rule that you weren't allowed to have the television on while eating dinner. Now this caused many problems for me. Well I almost had to be rushed to hospital many many times while choking on chicken.

You see the problem was the goodies happened to be on every time that dinner was on. And so my theory was if I wolfed this food down as quickly as I possibly could then I could get to the television and watch the goodies.

Because I love the goodies. We had rules on bedtime. At what time you had to go to bed. We had rules about the stove. You weren't allowed to play with the stove.

And for that matter you weren't allowed to play with the chainsaw either. There were many, many rules that I had as a child. As an adult to go back to a lot of these rules would be silly.

Those rules that my parents put in place are not intended for me now. They were there for my own protection and my own learning and for their own sanity at points but that was for then.

[2 : 18] For now they don't apply to me anymore. It is foolish for me to go back to those rules and try and apply them to my life. Well, that's far when we've been going through the book of Galatians and we've been looking at this great battle that Paul has been putting between faith and law.

That of trusting in God's promises and that of those who are trying to tell that you needed to come and sit under the law of God. Paul's been vigorously defending his gospel of grace from the attack of these false teachers.

They're coming in telling you need to go back to the rules. You need to go back to the rules in the Old Testament. You need to be obeying them. Last week we saw Paul funded in no uncertain terms.

No one is justified with their relationship with God by keeping the law. We saw the law and we saw God's promises. You want to have a relationship with God?

It's in God's promises. The law will not give you that relationship with God. The big question we had from last week is, what is the purpose then of the law?

[3 : 23] Why did the law turn up? Why do we have all these obscure rules and regulations in the Old Testament? What are they there for? Paul's gone to great lengths to say, well, they're certainly not the means by which we have a relationship with God.

Well, then what is their role? If the spirit is not poured out by keeping the law, but by the gospel, then why does God give it in the first place? What role does it play in our life? These are the questions we're going to be looking at tonight.

What is the role of the law? Before we look at that, it'd be good for us to pray, because this is a great passage, but at times can be quite difficult. So let me pray for you and myself, that as we

come to this passage, that we have a clarity, an understanding of what Paul is trying to say, that we may apply it to our lives, and live lives that give honour and glory to God.

Let me pray. Father, as we come to this passage tonight, we do pray that you will help us to understand it, that your spirit will be working in our lives, helping us to understand the great points that Paul is making here, that we will indeed live lives that are Christ-centred, and not law-centred. And we pray this in your son's name. Amen. Well, like any good orator or any good speaker, he anticipates the questions. So after last week's sermon, Paul anticipates the questions that they have.

[4 : 41] It'd be good for you to open up your Bibles to page 947. 947, Galatians chapter 3, verse 19. Paul starts with this question, Why then the law?

What's its purpose? Many think that Paul at this point is getting sidetracked. Many think that Paul is sort of just going all over the place here, his argument's been going along, and he gets sidetracked a little bit, but it's not.

It's not a sidetrack for Paul. This is actually trying to help to understand what the law's purpose was, to again emphasise that we shouldn't sit under it, that we've been set free from it.

But in this passage, Paul doesn't explain everything there is about the law and how we are to understand it. He's relating it to the question of how these false teachers are trying to use the law. So in verses 19 through to 25, which is the first chunk we're going to look at, Paul gives two reasons why the law was put in place. The first is the law is put in place to teach us the reality of sin.

[5 : 43] That is, it teaches the ugliness of sin. That's the purpose of the law, Paul writes there. And the second thing which comes out of that first point is, is that this then drives us to the gospel, the gospel of grace.

It drives us to the promises of God, to live a life of faith. So let's have a look at that. Have a look there in verse 19. Why then the law? It was added because of transgression.

Now, transgression is actually a violation of a known law. What Paul is trying to make here is a point. The point is that sin, Paul describes as a transgression.

That is, he's turning sin into a transgression. That's what law does. Law is doing the things that are wrong. But the law points out what these things are that are wrong.

And then if we then go and break it, knowing that they are wrong, it then becomes a transgression. Let me explain it a little bit like this. At my dad's house, my dad has these lounges around the room and in the centre of the room is a lovely coffee table.

[6 : 54] In our family, there is an unwritten rule, although spoken about quite regularly, that you are not allowed to put your feet on the coffee table. Do not put your feet on the coffee table.

That's the law that we have in our family. It is wrong. My dad has made it very clear. He has written this unwritten rule. Don't put your feet on my coffee table.

So, if you happen to turn up there and you don't, now that you know this law, someone else who turns up, they might turn up and put their feet on the coffee table, not knowing this unwritten law. And so, they've committed a sin in my father's eyes.

They've done something wrong. But if I or you now were to go to my father's house and we sat there on the lounge, got our feet and put it up onto the coffee table, knowing that it was wrong, it goes from being something that is wrong, i.e. sin, to put it in terms of what Paul is saying, to that of a transgression.

We've broken this unwritten rule. And, as I'm about to tell you, you also have to face the consequences of a very long lecture about why you should not put your feet on the table.

[8 : 12] Well, so too with God's laws. God's laws turn sin into a transgression. That is, it turns something into a violation of a known law. That is, it identifies sin.

It tells you what a sin is and it tells you who it is against. It's against God. That's what the law tells us. You do these things wrong, it tells you who you're doing it wrong against.

It's doing it against God. It makes us aware of how far we fall short of God's glory. Not only that, it points out the things that we didn't know that we were doing wrong, thereby increasing transgression.

Many think that this is a negative effect. This is a negative thing of the law. But on the contrary, I want to say, and Paul wants to say, this is actually a good thing to know. It's a good thing to know how far we have fallen from God's laws.

It's a good thing. It also, I guess in many ways, if we then start breaking God's laws, we transgress God's laws, it also puts a far greater responsibility on us, therefore increasing transgression again. [9 : 24] Well, having known these things, the effect of these things, is that it actually drives us then to the promises of God. It actually drives us to see that we cannot trust in ourselves, but trust in God.

So, in that first little bit there, where he says, it was added because of transgression, we are to understand what Paul is saying there is, it's helping us to understand what sin is. Sin is a transgression against God.

It's not necessarily a negative thing, it can be a positive thing. It can make us aware of what the things we are doing wrong. It can hem us in. It can teach us where to obey God.

Well, notice in the rest of verse 19 and in 20, Paul actually points out though that although it does have this effect, it is actually an inferior of importance to the promises of God.

Notice there, after transgressions, until the offspring would come. The law is only temporary. It's only got a limited use. It's like disposable razors or disposable things.

[10 : 30] It only has a limited life. It's not something that is intended to keep on going. Paul is saying the law is temporary. Therefore, it's inferior to the promise because the promise goes right through.

We need to be trusting in the promises. Not only that, we see there at the end, after that it says, until the offspring would come to whom the promises had been made and it was ordained through angels by a mediator.

Paul makes a second point here of why it's inferior is because it's actually mediated. That is, the law came through different hands. It's gone from God, Paul notes here, through angels.

It's sort of an understanding in the Old Testament that the law was given to Moses by angels. So, it goes from angels to Moses and then Moses then goes and declares the law to the people. But the promise is different.

That's an inferior way of mediating things. It goes through lots of different hands and, you know, that type of thing. But Paul makes a point in verse 20, but the media involves more than one party, but God is one.

[11 : 34] You see, the promises are made to the offspring we saw last week. The promises came until the offspring, until Christ came.

The promises were made to Christ. Who makes the promises? God. God. God mediates directly to Jesus. God is one. See how there's no mediation there.

There's no going in between parties like Moses or anything like that. God gives the promise to Jesus and says, you're going to be the fulfilment of these promises. I guess it's all a little bit complex at this moment.

But let me just step back a little bit. The point that Paul is trying to make in verses 19 and 20 is that the law is inferior to that of the promises. It's only temporary and it's only an inferior means of mediating.

Well, some have said in light of that because it's inferior and it actually increases our transgressions, it's got to be evil. It's wrong. The law is wrong. As some have even said that the angels that Paul's talking about here are evil angels.

[12 : 37] That evil angels turned up and said to Moses, hey Moses, get hold of these. These will be good for you. But no. Paul actually anticipates this question as well.

Look there in verse 21. Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? That is, if the law comes along after the promises, is the law opposed to the promises?

Is it evil? Is it trying to detract from the promises of God? Is it making harder the promises of God? And Paul says no in the rest of verse 21. Certainly not.

For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. Paul's point here is that's not the purpose of the law. The law is a different category to the promises of God.

Do you want to have a relationship with God? That's obtained through the promises of God. If you try to obtain a relationship with God through the law, that won't make you alive.

[13 : 39] That is not the way. And so for those who try to live a life of God's law, trying to win God's favour, trying to be in a relationship with him through the law, they're misusing the law.

That's not the purpose of the law to bring us into a relationship with God. Paul then goes on in verses 22 through to 25 to unpack further what he's actually talking about here.

What then is this purpose of the law? And he unpacks it by using two images. That of a prison warden and that of a slave attendant. So the law is a prison warden and the law is a slave attendant.

I lived on a farm, as I've told you many times before, and our farm was right beside a prison camp. I used to go down there occasionally. You could see the big walls that were around the prison camp and this detention centre was there and occasionally we'd get a phone call from the detention centre and they'd say, oh look, one of them has escaped again and I'd just lock up your cars, your house, you know, just be careful, that's all.

They always say, look, these guys aren't all that dangerous until we found out one day that one went into the local city and actually shot someone. But anyhow, when we see a prison warden, a prison warden is there to actually keep the people restrained.

[15:01] Those who have broken the law, they're to restrain them, in some ways to train them, to educate them as well, to hold them captive. Well, when we look there in verse 22, we see this, but the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

There it says, scripture has imprisoned, that is, God, speaking through scripture, through the law, has imprisoned all things under the power of sin. What's happening here is Paul is saying that the law becomes, for those who are living under it, like this prison warden, holding them captive, stopping them from breaking out into areas and doing more damage.

That was the purpose of the law. It was there as a prison warden to hold them captive. But notice how he describes that, keeps them in prison under the power of sin.

You see, law points out our utter bankruptcy before God. It points out that we are absolutely under this huge power of sin.

That's what the law does. It keeps on pointing out all the areas that we fail God in. The power of the law is that of sin. Well, again, Paul points out that it's only a temporary thing.

[16:27] It's only until Jesus Christ has arrived. Verse 23, again, talks about this idea of being prison, the prison warden. Now, before faith came, we're in prison and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.

But in verse 24, he then changes the image for us. We've seen law as the prison warden. Now, we see law as the slave attendant. Now, a slave attendant back in the time of Paul was one, was normally a slave himself.

And what he would do is he'd be employed by the family to look after a minor, a child. And they had a guardianship responsibility for this free boy. They would provide necessary restraint and at times would even hold a whip to whip the boy into shape if he was doing something wrong.

He accompanied the free born everywhere he went. He taught him good manners. He would take him to school. That was the role of the slave attendant. So, when we look in verse 24, therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came so that we might be justified by faith.

What Paul is saying is a law for those who sat in that period of time, those who sat under that period of time, it was a disciplinarian. It was a slave attendant. It restrained them.

[17:49] It kept them in. But not only did it keep them in, it led them in the right path. When I was little, I had a tendency to run around a lot and it probably would be outlawed now but my parents had a little restraining harness that would be, you know, tied around with a long leash and, you know, that would be the way that my parents would keep me on the leash so that I wouldn't get into too much trouble being a hyperactive child that I was.

Paul is saying that the law functioned that way. It restrained people but not only that, it had a purpose of training people and leading them in the right direction.

The law was to lead people towards Christ, to lead people towards the promises as we saw earlier as the second part of Paul's purposes of the law.

Well, notice in verse 25, notice here that there is no need.

The time has come. Since Christ has come, we have no need of a disciplinarian. Something new has happened. There's something new that has happened is found in Christ. You see, when Christ arrived, we entered into a relationship with God.

[19:10] He has brought about the promises of God. And Paul reflects from verse 26 on to 29 about this new relationship. He starts reflecting on it, taking a bit of a pause, a bit of a sidetrack in

terms of trying to understand the law.

He then goes to talk about, well, what is it like being in a relationship with Christ? And he starts by talking about clothing. Now, clothing, I think one of the functions of clothing or one of the ways that clothing works is it actually defines your social status.

It's a little difficult looking at here trying to work out the social status of the different people here. But back then, it was particularly clear about social status. So, it would distinguish, your clothing would distinguish whether you were male or female.

It would distinguish whether you were a Roman boy or a Roman adult. The Roman boy would have a striped tunic. The adult would have a plain white one. It would also perhaps describe your rank that you had.

A purple bordered toga meant that you were an important Roman man. But slaves would have unrefined clothing. So, your clothing that you wore actually defined your status.

[20 : 28] It defined a lot about you. Whether you were male or female, it defined even your race of origin. So, different racial groups would have different clothing. I don't know if you remember when we had from Nigeria, oh, I've forgotten his name, Jacob and his wife and they would have their fantastic clothing.

It was just brilliant. So bright and it was from Nigeria. Well, Paul is starting here with this idea of using clothing. Look there in verse 26.

But, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you were baptised in the Christ, you have clothed yourself with Christ.

In verse 27 there we see that those who are in Christ are those who have clothed themselves in Christ. That is, they've put on this new garment. This new garment of being in a relationship with God.

of being in Christ. By being in Christ this one clothing it brings a levelling out within Christianity.

[21 : 37] We are all clothed in the same garment. That of Christ. All the old divisions of social status and ethnic origin are all gone.

Paul describes it there in verse 26. When you clothe yourself in Christ you are a child of God. Well, this is a, Paul then goes on after this to reflect further on this and he gives one of the statements that has been called the Magna Carta of humanity.

The great document of humanity. these verses in verse 28. There is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no longer slave or free.

There is no longer male and female. For you are, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Paul here probably has in mind a Hebrew prayer and he's using this Hebrew prayer to reflect on the fact that when we are clothed in Christ all these distinctions are broken down.

The Hebrew prayer would say something like this. It was a morning prayer and the Hebrew man would get up and he would say, thank you God that I am not a Gentile, a woman or a slave.

[23 : 01] Paul uses these three things to show that these things have been broken down. For within the Hebrew law there was great distinction and honour.

there were more laws as a part of being a male so therefore that meant they were more important because laws, more laws, more important. That was the way through to God. They had all these things and so for the Jewish person this Hebrew prayer I guess emphasised the great distinctions that there were and Paul says, no, this inequality that there is under the law, it's gone.

We are all on an equal footing. This is a great statement by Paul. An absolutely fantastic statement. We are all equal in God's eyes. Not only are we all equal in God's eyes, well the reason why we are all equal in God's eyes is because we are all accepted on the same basis and that basis is through Christ.

by clothing ourselves through Christ. Paul hammers this point here I guess in many ways to make the point that here are these Jewish teachers trying to say you want to have a special relationship with God then you need to become a Jew.

[24 : 24] Yeah, you're right, understand that Christ is part of that, you need to accept his grace and forgiveness but then if you want to accept, you want to get the full blessings of God then become a Jew.

Sit under these laws and that's where you're going to get the true blessing. Paul's hammering this point, no there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. You don't gain any special blessing.

Our blessing comes by being in Christ. I want to take a moment here just to stop a moment and reflect on this passage. I guess it's helpful actually to say what this passage is not saying. this passage is not saying that all distinctives are gone. It does not obliterate all cultural distinctives. It does not obliterate all distinctives between male and female.

Paul is not saying that we are now one pristine homogenous state. We're all the same blob. Paul's not saying that. We still hold our distinctiveness of being male and female, of those who come from perhaps a Jewish background to a Gentile background.

[25 : 35] Paul is saying he is not obliterating all these distinctives but what he is saying is these distinctives that we all have don't bring us any special blessing.

We are equal in God's eyes. The women's debate is a big issue and has been raging for many years.

It's going to be raging again in the next little while when we start talking about having women bishops. Many use this passage as their justification for saying this is the reason why we can have female bishops.

Here it is, we're all equal. We're all able to do the same thing. But the passage is not saying that. it does not give us that license to say that.

If you want to go and try and justify having women bishops you need to go elsewhere. You cannot justify it from this passage. Paul is trying to make the point that we are equal. We still have our distinctives, we still have our differences, I am still male, there are people that are still female.

[26 : 46] The point that Paul is trying to make is our acceptance before God is on equal footing. We cannot use this to try and say that there is no distinctives whatsoever.

But on the same footing we need to be very careful about those who want to abuse, use this on the other way and abuse their power and privilege thinking that it's great to be a male and therefore they abuse that privilege or they abuse it in any other way.

God has created a new group, a group that is clothed in Christ, they belong to Christ and in verse 29 we see that and if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

See the greatness of what Paul is saying here. We can be a part of God's family on an equal footing, part of Abraham's offspring.

Note here just for a moment how he has opened up. He's opened up from saying that Christ was Abraham's offspring to saying that we are now Abraham's offspring.

[28 : 00] The reason why it opens up is because we are in Christ. The promises that pointed towards Abraham now point to us because we are heirs according to that promise. Well, let's move on to chapter 4 verses 1 through to 7.

Here Paul tries to bring a lot of these things together. He tries to actually talk about the relationships that are used as an illustration of relationships to try and help us bring these things together. together. So, we've had the picture of law being the prison warden. We've seen the picture of law being that of a slave attendant. We now have the picture of the law being a guardian and a trustee. people. What Paul is talking about here is this process of someone growing up from being a child to being an adult and going through that process of having guardians and trustees.

keys. I had my 21st birthday quite some time. It was a great event. But my mum and dad, much to my embarrassment, had a key.

[29 : 05] I don't know if you've seen those keys. You know, they open them up and everyone gets to sign this wooden key. It's a very antiquated thing. But my parents thought it was the right thing to do. It was very important for them when you hit your 21st birthday.

The reason being is that when my mum and dad hit their 21st birthday, it was a big event in their life. You see, it was a time when they, in the eyes of the law, they became full citizens.

It's when they could vote. It's when they could marry without parental consent. They could serve on a jury. It was when they became an adult. And so the idea was you were given the key to the house and everyone got to sign it.

It's a nice thing. I've got all these signatures. I tried to find it tonight. I couldn't find it. But, you know, it's sitting there in the house somewhere. There's a little memento. Paul is using that picture of getting to an age of consent.

Until that age of consent, back in the Roman time, which was the age of 14, there were trustees and guardians who looked after not only you but also your property. So, you might be the one who's

going to inherit all this great property but you weren't allowed to touch it until you got to the age of 14.

[30 : 10] At the age of 14, then the guardians would give you the full rights to do with whatever you wanted. But until that point, they brought about compulsory discipline and they brought about, I guess, a maturing of that person until that point.

Well, Paul uses the same idea here in chapter 4. My point is this. Look there in verse 1. Heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property, but they remain under the guardians and trustees until the date set by the Father.

So, with us, while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. Paul says that those who are enslaved, those who are minors, are held under by the law, which is a guardian and trustee.

The idea here of the elemental spirits is that of the idea of someone being under bondage of a particular element. So, for example, here Paul is using the example of law being that of the elementary spirits.

Things of the world that hold you in, things that hold you under bondage. Later on in chapter 4, Paul talks about the elementary spirits being those things for the Gentiles being of idols and things like that.

[31 : 28] Paul was trying to make the point here is that when we are minor, when they were children, when they were under that period of law, they were under this guardian of the law.

But now that the law has been done away with Christ, we see there in verse 4 something has happened. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as children.

Because you are children of God, because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Jesus came to this world of spiritual bondage.

He came into enemy's lines so that he might redeem us, that he might pay the ransom for us, a costly business for him as he dies on a cross.

But he does this, as verse 5 notes, in order that we might be adopted as God's children, children of freedom. But not only do we have this freedom of being adopted as God's family, we are also given God's power to use it.

[32 : 35] We see there in verse 6 we are given God's Spirit that we may cry, Abba, Father. And so in verse 7 Paul brings the conclusion to this very dense chapter. So you are no longer a slave but a child.

And if you are a child then also an heir through God. I've left the quote but that's okay.

Martin Luther King had a great speech, a speech that he had a dream that he would abolish, that slavery would be abolished. I was actually going to read it out to you. It's a very emotional speech, a very emotional speech where he talks about this time of slavery for blacks in America.

And it's a terrible thing. I cannot imagine what it would be like to be under slavery. But the thrust of this passage points out that if you keep on going back to the law, you're going back under slavery. You're going under the slave of the law. You're going back to being a spiritual minor. For us as Christians, we've been set free.

[33 : 50] We've been given the freedom of mature sonship, not of slavery to the legal code. We are people to be Christ-centered, not law-centered.

Imagine Nelson Mandela after being freed from imprisonment after 25 years, becoming the president of South Africa, then going back to the jail and asking to be locked up again.

What a foolish thing. Imagine you're a student who has finally graduated from university. And after graduating, you then go back and re-enroll in primary school.

A foolish thing. Imagine being a street kid, picked up from the gutter, adopted into a warm, accepting family, but then choosing to go back into homelessness. Imagine choosing to go back and live under your childhood rules that your parents set up for you.

Galatians tells us again and again that the gospel of God's grace is a gospel of freedom that sets us free from the slavery of law, freed from being religious people, trying to please God through doing things, whether it even be doing the things that God has set up himself.

[35 : 03] The Old Testament does have an important function, but Christ has come. The supervisory role has ended of the law. We are no longer children of slavery, but heirs, children of

God.

Christianity wasn't meant, if your Christianity in your own life means that you don't feel free, then can I suggest you need to think that perhaps something is wrong. We need to be aware of the bondage that pressure groups put us under, of trying to turn our Christian lives into clones of other people.

We need to be aware of turning Christianity into bondage of slavery. Martin Luther and John Wesley were people who were very religious people, but then they came to realise the great freedom of the gospel, the great life that Christ led for them.

We must be determined to guard our freedom. We must be careful not to abuse it though. It doesn't mean that we can do anything that we want, being free. We've been set free to be adopted into God's family.

Therefore, act like you're a part of God's family. Show the likeness of his family. Be people that reflect the character of God.

[36 : 23] Well, after wading through all that, what's our response to this? I think it's actually a helpful thing that at this point we actually come and confess our sins before God.

Up on the overhead now is a prayer of confession. Perhaps you're someone who recognises the fact that in your life you've been trapped to live a life of bondage, a life of trying to please God, not because of what he's done for you, but trying to earn his favour.

We need to come before God and recognise our sin. Perhaps you're someone that recognises that you are a sinful person, that there are many areas of your life that don't please God.

There's a right and proper response that we come together now and confess our sins. Let us confess our sins before Almighty God. Let us say this together.

Heavenly Father, you have loved us with an everlasting love, but we have broken your holy laws and left undone what we ought to have done. We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them.

[37 : 36] For the sake of your Son who died for us, forgive us, cleanse us and change us. By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.