

UNDER ARREST NO. 2402

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“But before faith came, we were kept under the law,
shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.”
Galatians 3:23*

THIS is a condensed history of the Jews before the Gospel was fully preached to them. Before the clear and plain revelation of the way of salvation—that is to say, before Jesus Christ Himself actually appeared among the sons of men—the Hebrew nation was put under the tutorship and governance of the Mosaic law.

So far as salvation was to be obtained by it, that law was a total failure. It did not make the Jews a holy people—whenever they reached any point of excellence, they soon went back from it, for they were bent on backsliding. Whatever the influence of that blessed law might be supposed to be, the actual net result was very poor indeed, for when Christ came to the chosen people, they were in a most miserable condition, and there was no hope for them at all apart from the promised Messiah. They were shut up to the alternative of receiving Him, or else being put away as a nation for a long time of banishment and exile. This indeed they have actually endured through their rejection of the one and only Savior.

I am not going to preach at this time about the Jews, but I want to show you that the history of every soul chosen of God is very like the history of the chosen nation. I have heard of masses of crystal which assume certain forms, but if they are split up again and again, however small the particles may be, the same crystalline shape remains—the crystals are still of one form.

So, if you take a nation as a mass, its spiritual history will be found in each individual, and often every experience of that individual will still bear the same shape and outline. I take this text, therefore, as being, I am sure, a picture of myself. Before faith came, I was “kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.”

And my impression is that this is the history of all the people of God, more or less. We are not all alike in every respect. We differ greatly in certain particulars, yet the main features of all the children of God will be found to be the same, and their Christian experience will resemble that of the other members of the Lord's family.

So I shall quit leave the text as a matter of history of the Jews and use it as the life-story of many here present. Perhaps while I am explaining the experience of the child of God, there may be some here, who are passing through the darker stages of that experience, who may gather hope from that fact and say, “I see that my spot is the spot of the Lord's children. Possibly, my soul-trouble, being like theirs, may be producing in me the same result as it produced in them.” And thus, I trust, while I am speaking, some may be led into a clearer light and may even come into the full light of God's reconciled countenance.

There are three things that I am going to talk about as the Holy Spirit shall guide me. The first is, *the unhappy period*—it was long ago with some of us—the unhappy period “before faith came.” Secondly, I shall describe *the custody we were in at that time*—“we were kept under the law, shut up.” That is where we were when the spirit of bondage was holding us in captivity “before faith came.” Then, thirdly, I

shall have a little to say upon *the revelation which set us free*—“the faith which should afterwards be revealed.”

I. First, then, I have to say something about THE UNHAPPY PERIOD.

“Before faith came.” As I said just now, this period was long ago with some of us, but it was not so far back with others of you, “before faith came.”

We remember, some of us, when we *had no idea of faith*. We were in a measure religiously inclined, and in a certain way sincere and devout. As a matter of duty, we went to church, or we went to the meeting house, and we felt easy in our mind because we had been there. As a matter of duty, we read our Bibles and sometimes, we felt a pleasure in getting through the chapter—perhaps we had all the more pleasure if the chapter was not a long one. We did not object to family prayer—it may be that we had been used to it from our childhood. The less we had of it, the better we liked it, still, we kept to it, although it was always only a matter of duty.

As to *saving* faith, we had not an intelligent idea of it. Our notion was that good people would get to heaven and that we must do our best to make ourselves fit to be in that holy place. We had a great many shortcomings and failures, no doubt, but in some mysterious way we fancied that all would get rectified and we should be all right if we were only sincere.

Many still seem to imagine that it does not matter what persons believe as long as they are sincere, nor what they do so long as they are conscientious in doing it. That was our notion, but as to any idea of there being a faith peculiar to God’s elect, a faith which saves the soul by linking us to the Savior—if anyone had talked to us in that fashion, we should have said, “Yes, that is, no doubt, orthodox teaching—we have heard that Martin Luther taught that doctrine at the time of the Reformation, but what he meant by it, we have not the slightest conception!” We did not know, we had not formed any idea of that which, had we known it, would have been the chief joy of our minds and hearts—but in that unhappy period we had no idea of faith.

Some of us used to hear the Gospel, some of us did not. But, whether we heard the Gospel or not, “*before faith came*,” we *did not know what it was*. I have no doubt that I heard, hundreds of times, such texts as these—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” yet I had no intelligent idea of what faith meant.

When I first discovered what faith really was, and exercised it, for with me these two things came together, I believed as soon as ever I knew what believing meant, then I thought I had never heard that truth preached. But on looking back, I am persuaded that the light often shone in my eyes, but I was blind and therefore I thought that the light had never come there. The light was shining all the while, but there was no power to receive it—the eyeball of the soul was not sensitive to the divine beams.

Peradventure, some of you did *not* hear the Gospel, for it is by no means a difficult thing to attend a place of worship year after year, and yet not hear the Gospel. I am sorry that it should be so, but I know that it is so—there is a great deal of preaching that may be edifying to Christians, a great deal that is morally excellent—but the way of salvation by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is often regarded by the preacher as a truth too elementary to be introduced to the notice of a congregation so intelligent and so experienced as the one he is privileged to address.

This is a great mistake for any minister to make. The Lord’s command to Moses was, “With all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt,” and His injunction to all His servants now is, “With all thy teaching, preach the simple doctrine of faith in Christ crucified.” I delight to cry, with the apostle Paul, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and it is my constant joy to preach that simple doctrine of “Believe, and live.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

But whether people heard the Gospel or did not hear it, I know that it has often been the case that “before faith came” no idea of what faith is had penetrated the soul. Much was heard about it, but

nothing was understood. Much in some respects was understood about the doctrine, but faith itself was still unknown.

And, brethren beloved, as it is that, before faith comes, we have no idea of it, and we do not understand it, so *we have been puzzled to think of what it could be when we have seen it in others*. We have heard of others, we have read of others, and the most of us have seen others who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And we have wished that we could do the same.

We have looked upon their experience as some extraordinary secret, some marvelous mystery, some special manifestation—and we have said to ourselves, “We can never reach that height on which those people stand.” So we have continued our chapel going, our Bible reading, and so forth, under the notion that faith was something quite impossible for us.

We have thought of it as if it were some precious diamond that kings and queens might buy, but it was not for poor people like us. Though we have been told over and over again, that—

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One,”

we have said, “Yes, ‘life for a look,’ ah, yes! No doubt that is true, but I cannot look.” And so we have still turned away from the one hope of salvation. Perhaps we have been still further pressed by some earnest spirit and the truth has been made as plain as a pikestaff, yet still we could not think that the speaker really meant what he said—there must be some strange mystery at the back of it all.

We asked ourselves—“How do people obtain faith? Of course, it is simple enough to those who understand it, but as for us poor souls who do not comprehend it, how can we get to know what it means and how can we obtain it for ourselves?” That was the puzzled condition in which we were “before faith came.” We were just in that kind of state, so that, even when we wished to believe, it seemed to us as if it was something altogether beyond our reach.

There was also a time with us, dear friends, when “before faith came” in its healing and comforting power, *a measure of faith came to wound, and cut, and kill*. We saw our sin, we felt our need of a Savior, and we believed so far as this—that Christ was a Savior, that He was the Savior, and that He could save us. But our difficulty was like that of the woman in the crowd who tried to touch the hem of Christ’s garment—how could we get in contact with Him? What could we do to be saved?

Oh, the many times that I have wished the preacher would tell me something to do that I might be saved! Gladly would I have done it, if it had been possible. If he had said, “Take off your shoes and stockings, and run to John O’Groat’s,” I would not even have gone home first, but would have started off that very night, that I might win salvation. How often have I thought that if they had said, “Bare your back to the scourge and take fifty lashes!” I would have said, “Here I am! Come along with your whip and beat as hard as you please, so long as I can but obtain peace and rest, and get rid of my sin.”

Yet that simplest of all matters—believing in Christ crucified, accepting His finished salvation, being nothing, and letting Him be everything, doing nothing but trusting to what He has done—I could not get a hold of it at all. I might truthfully say that I have known many who, after years of what I think was very sincere and earnest hearing, still remain just the same, apparently willing, but really unwilling to believe.

They wish to know the way of salvation—and the road is open right straight before them—yet not experientially knowing the way of life, the only way by which a man can be eternally saved. I am speaking, at this time, I do not doubt, to many who are still in that fog, still bewildered, and knowing not which way to turn, albeit that from this platform there sounds forth that clarion note and nothing else, “Look to Jesus and live. Believe in Him. Trust in Him and you shall be saved at once, yea, saved eternally, from the moment that you have done with self and by faith, have laid hold on Christ.”

Why is it that people do not believe? I suppose it is, partly, because they are so proud. You, my friend, have a proud notion in your head that there is, after all, something due from God to you. In truth,

there is nothing due from God to you but that He should let you perish in your sin—that is all He owes you.

You have so sinned against Him that if He should at this moment cast you into the lowest hell, it is all that you have any right to expect. And He will have you know this and make you feel it before He will speak a word of blessing to your soul. You are too high and mighty to be saved as you are—you must come down from that lofty position. This, then, is one reason why men do not “believe and live,” because they are too proud to be saved by simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Besides, salvation by believing seems so strange, so singular, so contrary to the usual run of human opinion, and in addition, it is so spiritual that the natural man rebels against it. If it were but a carnal thing, something to be done with the hand, or performed with the foot, we could do that—but the spiritual action of believing, the action which honors God by taking salvation as the free gift of His grace and mercy—we cannot bend our backs and stoop so low as that.

The fact is that it is hard because it is easy. It is difficult because there is no difficulty in it and it seems obscure simply because it is so clear. There is nothing for you to do, O lost sinner, but to yield yourself up to your God and accept His sovereign mercy which He freely gives you in the person of His dear Son! Still, though I have said all this so plainly, you do not believe me—you do not yet understand what I mean, unless you have been taught of the Spirit.

That, then, is how we were in the unhappy period “before faith came.”

II. Now I want to show you, in a few words, THE CUSTODY WE WERE IN.

“Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up.” The word for “kept” means that we were arrested and given in charge, or that we were taken under the care of a garrison. The ten commandments of God, like ten armed legionaries, took us into custody and held us fast. “Before faith came, we were kept under the law.” How was that?

When the Spirit of God began to deal with us, we found that *we were always within the sphere of law*—we could not get out of it. We woke in the morning—there was the law right in front of us. All during the day—there was the law right before our eyes. If we went to sleep at night—there was the law—we were everywhere under the law. We said, with David, “Where shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” When once we recognized God, and realized the fact that we were His creatures, there came into our startled conscience the remembrance of the universality of law.

I recollect that experience and how I thought of what was said of the old Roman empire that, under the rule of Caesar, if a man once broke the law of Rome, he was in prison everywhere. The whole world was one vast prison to him, for he could not get out of the reach of the imperial power—and so did it come to be in my aroused conscience.

Wherever I went, the law of God had a demand upon my thoughts, upon my words, upon my rising, upon my resting. What I did and what I did not do, all came under the cognizance of the law—and then I found that this law so surrounded me that I was always running against it, I was always breaking it. I seemed as if I were a sinner and nothing else but a sinner.

If I opened my mouth, I spoke amiss. If I sat still, there was sin in my silence. I remember that when the Spirit of God was thus dealing with me, I used to feel myself to be a sinner even when I was in the house of God. I thought that when I sang, I was mocking the Lord with a solemn sound upon a false tongue. And if I prayed, I feared that I was sinning in my prayers, insulting Him by uttering confessions which I did not feel and asking for mercies with a faith that was not at all true, but only another form of unbelief. Oh, yes, some of us know what it is to be given into custody to the law! Perhaps some here are now in this condition without quite understanding it.

At that time, when I was in the custody of the law, *I did not take any pleasure in sin!* Alas, I did sin, but my sense of the law of God kept me back from a great many sins. I could not, as others did, plunge into profligacy, or indulge in any of the grosser vices, for that law had me well in hand. I sinned enough without acting like that. Oh, I used to tremble to put one foot before another, for fear I should do wrong!

I felt that my old sins seemed to be so many that it were well to die rather than commit any more. The law of God, when it gets a man into its charge, makes him feel just like that.

Then, *I could not find any rest* while under the custody of the law. If I wanted to sleep a while, or to be a little indifferent and careless, then some one or other of those ten commandments roughly aroused me, and looking on me with a frowning face, said, “You have broken me.”

I thought that I would do some good works, but somehow, the law always broke my good works in the making. I fancied that if my tears flowed freely, I might make some recompense for my wrongdoing, but the law held up the mirror and I soon saw my face all smeared and made more unhandsome by my tears. So that law shut me up in all directions and would not let me rest anywhere when I was under its custody.

Then also *the law seemed to blight all my hopes*. I hoped this and I hoped that—but then the law said, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” And I knew I had not continued in all those things, so I saw myself accursed, turn which way I might. I had offended against the justice of God. I was impure and polluted. And I used to say, “If God does not send me to hell, He ought to.”

I sat in judgment upon myself and pronounced the sentence that I felt would be just. I could not have gone to heaven with my sin unpardoned, even if I had had the offer to do it, for I knew that it would not be right that I should do so—and I justified God in my own conscience while I condemned myself.

One thing I found concerning the law, that *it would not even let me despair*. If I thought I would give up all desire to do right, and just go and drown my conscience in sin, the law said, “No, you cannot do that, there is no rest for you in sinning. You know the law too well to be able to sin in the blindness of a seared conscience.” So the law worried and troubled me at all points—it shut me up as in an iron cage—every way of escape was effectually blocked up.

I am talking now, not only of my own experience, but also of the experience of many another child of God. I will tell you one or two of the things that shut me up dreadfully. And one was when I knew the spirituality of the law. If the law said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” I said to myself, “Well, I have never committed adultery.”

Then the law, as interpreted by Christ, said, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” The law said, “Thou shalt not steal,” and I said, “Well, I never stole anything.” But then I found that even the desire to possess what was not my own was guilt. The spirituality of the law astounded me. What hope could I have of escaping from such a law as this which every way surrounded me with an atmosphere from which I could not possibly escape?

Then, as I have already reminded you, the law informed me that I was cursed unless I continued in all things that were written in the book of the law, so that, if I had not committed one sin, that made no difference if I had committed another sin, for I was under the curse. What if I had never blasphemed God with my tongue? Yet, if I had coveted, I had broken the law. He who breaks a chain might say, “I did not break that link and the other link.” No, but if you break one link, you have broken the chain. Ah, me, how I seemed shut up then!

Then I remembered that, even if I kept the law perfectly, and kept it for ten, twenty, or thirty years without a fault, yet if, at the end of that time, I should then break it, I must suffer its dread penalty. Those words spoken by the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel came to my mind—“If he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.”

So I saw that I was, as the text says, “shut up.” I had hoped to escape this way, or that way, or some other way. Was I not “christened” when I was a child? Had I not been taken to a place of worship? Had I not been brought up to say my prayers regularly? Had I not been an honest, upright, moral youth? Was all this nothing?

“Nothing,” said the law, as it drew its sword of fire. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” So there was no rest for my spirit, nay, not even for a moment.

What was I to do? I was in the custody of one that showed no mercy whatever, for Moses never said, “Mercy.” The law has nothing to do with mercy. That comes from another mouth and under another dispensation. But before I turn to that other point, I would like to say that if any of you are passing through all that I have been describing, do not be at all discouraged.

I rejoice that it is so with you, for this breaking down of the idols is the way to set up the true God in your heart. This cleaning out of your refuges of lies is a blessed work of God who loves you, though He seems now to be dealing out to you the blows of a cruel one. This is the way in which He is severing you from your deceptions, freeing you from your delusions, so that He may bring you to His truth and to Himself. That is my last point.

III. THE REVELATION WHICH SET US FREE—“We were shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.”

Now let me tell the story. It was on a day, never to be forgotten, when I first understood that *salvation was in and through Another*—that my salvation could not be of myself—but must be through One better and stronger than I. And I heard—and oh, what music it was!—that the Son of God had taken upon Himself our human nature and had, by His life and death, worked out a perfect salvation, finished from top to bottom, which He was ready to give to every soul that was willing to have it—and that salvation was all of grace from first to last, the free gift of God through His blessed Son, Jesus Christ.

Oh, the melody of that doctrine! “But I have heard that lots of times,” says one. Have you ever heard it at all? “Why, I heard you say it just now!” Again I put the question—Have you *heard* it? It has passed your ears, but have you ever heard it? Have you ever caught the meaning of it?

Then I had this vision—not a vision to my eyes, but to my heart. *I saw what a Savior Christ was*—divine as well as human. I saw what sufferings His were, what a righteousness His was. I saw the fullness of Christ, the glory of Christ, the love of Christ, the power of Christ to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

Now I can never tell you how it was, but I no sooner saw whom I was to believe than *I also understood what it was to believe* and I did believe in one moment. As much as if it had never been revealed to any mortal man, or written in this blessed Book, it was revealed to me by the Spirit of God that I, guilty wretch as I was, was there and then to fall at those dear feet that once were nailed to the cross, and to take Jesus Christ to be my Lord and Savior—and that the moment I did so, I should be saved.

I did take Him as my Savior and I am saved. And I come to tell you, again tonight, *the reason why I took Him for my Savior*. To my own humiliation, I must confess that I did it because I could not help it—I was shut up to it. That law-work, of which I told you, had hammered me into such a condition that if there had been fifty other saviors, I could not have thought of them, I was driven to this One.

I wanted a divine Savior—I wanted One who was made a curse for me to expiate my guilt. I wanted One who had died, for I deserved to die. I wanted One who had risen again, who was able by His life to make me live. I wanted the exact Savior that stood before me in the Word, revealed to my heart—and I could not help having Him.

And what is more, I cannot help still having Him as my Savior—I am shut up to it. I think I have told you of an American brother who sat in one of the pews behind me, one Sunday night. When I went out, I said to him, “What! You here again?” He said, “Yes, it is twenty years since I sat in this pew. I wonder that you remember me.” I said, “Oh, yes, I do remember your face right well!” He said, “You are hitched in the old place still, I see.” “Yes,” I replied, “and if God spares you to come in another twenty years’ time, and I have not gone to heaven meanwhile, you will find that I am hitched in the same old place then.”

I have nothing to tell of but Christ crucified, nothing to say to the sinner but, “Away, away, away from all other confidences to Him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation for sin!” I want the law to shut you right up to this one course. If a man were to ask, “Why do you go out of the Tabernacle by the right hand door?” it would be a very good answer if you had to say, “Because all the rest are bricked up.”

That would be a valid reason, would it not? You had no choice in the matter—and that is the reason why we come to Christ—because we have tried, and proved, and known that other salvation there is none, for “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” The law has shut us up to this one road, stopped up every other opening and gangway, and we are driven to stand here, and say—

*“Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find.”*

Now, if there are any one of you that has got into that cleft stick, I am right glad of it. This proves that you are God’s man, He has chosen you, He loves you, He has given His Son to save you. Take the Lord Jesus Christ to be everything to you and go on your way rejoicing. “Before faith came,” you were shut up, but you were shut up to faith in Christ. And now you have that faith, you are shut up no longer, you have received the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free. Go home and enjoy it—and if you meet any other poor soul shut up as you were, tell how you came out to liberty.

Do not be satisfied to go tonight to your bed without having told somebody of how the Lord Jesus came, dressed in garments dipped in blood, and with His pierced hands broke the bars of brass, and cut the doors of iron in sunder, and set your soul at liberty, and said, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.”

God bless you, for His dear Son’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

GALATIANS 3

Paul, writing, to those changeable Galatians, who had so soon deserted the faith, says to them in this chapter—

Verse 1. *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you.*

Paul does not compliment them on being a very “thoughtful,” “educated,” “cultured” people. He does not care an atom about that matter, but because they had forsaken the simple truth of the gospel, he says, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?” Those are hard words, Paul! Why did he not say, “Who has led you forward into more advanced views?”

Not he; he calls it witchery, the work of the devil, and it is nothing better, and the wisdom of it is no better than the trickery of some old witch. If you take your eyes off Christ, it must be witchcraft that makes you do it. There is such glory, such beauty, such perfection, such wisdom, such divinity in Christ crucified that, if you turn from that sight to anything else, no matter how scientific and learned it may be, you are foolish, indeed, and somebody has “bewitched you.”

2. *This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*

They had gone off into legality. They were trying to be saved by ceremonies, and by works of their own. “Well,” asks Paul, “how did you receive the Spirit, the Spirit by which miracles were wrought among you, the Spirit by which you spoke with unknown tongues, the Spirit which changed and

renewed your hearts? If you did indeed receive Him, did you receive Him by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" There was only one reply to the question—the Spirit came to them as the result of faith.

3. *Are ye so foolish having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*

If the very beginning of your religion was spiritual, a work of the Spirit received by faith, are you now going to be perfected by the flesh, by outward rites and ceremonies, or by efforts of your own?

4. *Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.*

You had to struggle and endure much contention within your own spirit to get upon the ground of faith at all, are you going to throw all that away? Is all the experience of your past life to go for nothing, and are you now going to begin on a lower and baser platform?

5. *He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*

He knew that they must reply that it was faith, and not the works of the law, that gave those miraculous powers.

6. *Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*

That is the old way, the way of faith. It is not here recorded that Abraham did anything, though he did much, but the one thing that was “accounted to him for righteousness” was this, that he “believed God.”

7. *Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*

Not this nation or that, as Anglo-Israelites might say, but those that are of faith, these are the children of Abraham. Abraham is the father of the faithful, the believers, and believers are all the children of Abraham. Race has nothing to do with this matter—an end has been put to all that. God is not the God of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.

And here is a new race whose distinction is not that they were born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but by the will of God, and this is the token by which they are known, they believe God, and it is accounted to them for righteousness, even as it was accounted to Abraham.

8. *And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed.*

That is the Gospel, and we are blessed by it, because we believe in Christ, and so become the children of believing Abraham.

9-10. *So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse:*

All the people in the world, who think themselves good, all the mere moralists, all those who, however amiable they may be, however excellent and religious they may be, are trusting to be saved by good works, are all under the curse, as surely as the drunkard, or the liar, or the swearer, is under the curse.

10. *For it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law to do them.*

That is all that Moses can say to you and all that the Old Testament can reveal to you. Apart from faith in Christ, all its rites and ceremonies, all its laws and precepts, if you are resting in them, can only land you under the curse, because you cannot continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. You have not so continued thus far, you will not so continue, and nothing but an absolutely perfect obedience to the law could save a man by the way of works, and as that obedience is not possible, we come under the curse if we come under the law.

11. *But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.*

Here Paul quotes again from the Old Testament Scriptures, “The just shall live by faith.” Even the just man lives by faith. Then, how can you who are not just expect to live in any other way?

12. *And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.*

The very spirit of law is the spirit of works, and as life only comes by faith, it cannot come by the works of the law, for they are not of faith. Now comes the Gospel, clear and bright, like the sun rising out of a thick fog.

13. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*

Here is substitution—what else can the words mean? Christ hung on a tree for us, bearing our curse, in our room, and place, and stead.

14. *That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Christ was made a curse for us that the blessing might come upon us. He took our curse that we might take the blessing from His own dear hands and might possess it evermore.

15. *Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.*

A covenant is a covenant—whatever happens, it cannot be altered, it stands, though it was only made by men.

16. *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

Quoting from the Old Testament, we may believe in the absolute plenary inspiration of that Sacred Book, because the apostle founds an argument upon the singular of a noun having been used rather than the plural.

17. *And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.*

Is not that splendid argument? The covenant was made with Abraham that God would bless him and his seed. Well now, four hundred and thirty years after, the law was given on Sinai, but that could not affect a covenant made four hundred and thirty years before. The argument goes to prove that the covenant of grace is not affected by any law of rites and ceremonies. Nay, not even by the moral law itself. The covenant made with Abraham and his seed must stand. The seed signifies those who believe, therefore, the covenant stands fast with Abraham and all other believers.

18. *For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

All through the Book of Genesis, it is promise, promise, and promise. Isaac was an heir of the promise and Jacob was an heir of the promise. In fact, Isaac was born by promise, and Ishmael the elder brother did not inherit the blessing, because he was born after the flesh. They who believe in Christ are heirs according to the promise. Now, a promise takes us out of the region of law.

19. *Wherefore then serveth the law?*

What is the use of it?

19-20. *It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.*

The law had its uses, blessed uses. The law should be used for its own purposes, and then it is admirable, it is divine. Take it out of its own proper use, make it a master instead of being a servant, and it is something like fire, which, in your grate, will comfort you, but if it masters you, it burns your house and destroys you.

21-22. *Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.*

It shuts you all up as in a dungeon, that by the one and only door of faith in Christ you might come out into a glorious liberty.

23-24. *But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster—*

This is an unfortunate translation. It should be, “The law was our pedagogue.” That was a slave, who was employed by the father of a family, to take his boy to school, and bring him home again. He often also was permitted to whip the boy if he did not learn his lessons well. “The law was our pedagogue”

24-25. *To bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*

We have outgrown him. God has given us power now to go to Christ’s school ourselves, joyfully and cheerfully. I remember, and I daresay you also do, when that pedagogue whipped us very sorely. I am glad that I am no longer under his power.

26-27. *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

You set forth that truth in your baptism. You then confessed that you were dead to sin, and declared that you were risen again in Christ to newness of life. Whatever you had to do with the law before, you were dead and buried to it, and to everything but Christ,

28-29. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

That settles the question. If you belong to Christ, you are the children of Abraham. Come then, and without the least hesitation, claim all the privileges that belong to Abraham’s seed. If you have come under the promise, enjoy its blessings, and do not go back to trusting in rites and ceremonies, or in works of your own performing, but live a life of joyous faith in Jesus Christ your Lord.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—867, 560, 533

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