

Gospel Guardianship

Galatians 2:19-29

“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”” (Galatians 3:11 [ESV](#)).

Every day, every way . . . the follower of Jesus lives by faith. Faith is the first, middle and end of our story. We begin the path of following Jesus by faith. And we continue on the path of following Jesus by faith. Faith is not merely to begin the journey, **FAITH IS THE JOURNEY.**

We need to be reminded over and over and over that the righteous live by faith because we are so very prone to unbelief. We move from faith to fixing our own problem . . . from truth to trying harder . . . from reliance on God to running faster . . . from dependence to designing our solutions.

Few hazards successfully entrap the church of Jesus more often with greater damage than the danger of living by the Law. Galatians 3:12 states the danger most simply, **“The Law is not of faith!”** So this temptation to live by works of the Law is one that guts our soul of the Holy Spirit.

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”
(Galatians 3:2-3 [ESV](#))

The efforts to live by works of the Law always move us away from the power of God’s Spirit and into the impotency of our flesh. No wonder why our spiritual life is so joyless, so grumpy, so despairing, so boring!

The righteous **SHALL LIVE BY FAITH!** There is no other way to truly live. **But what does it mean to live by faith?**

Rather than offering a definition, let me share a snapshot of faith from the heart of a little child. Last week, God gave me and Kimberly the joy of vacationing with our children and grandchildren. Lots of laughter, lots of noise, lots of drama, lots of messes and lots of fun as we stayed together in the same house.

One morning in our devotions together, we read and acted out the story of Jesus feeding the 5000. One of the grandchildren played the part of Jesus, another the little boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish, a couple of others were the

disciples and the rest were the crowds receiving the food. We talked about Jesus praying to His Father before he tore the bread and fish into pieces that filled up the tummys of the vast crowd of people. **At the end of the story, we talked about God's ability and willingness to care for our every need. What a great God we have!**

Many hours after the lesson of the morning devotion had faded from my memory, I was talking with my sons about ice cream. We talked about the supply in the freezer had been eaten up and how we did not have any more. We did not know that way across the room, a little 2.5 year old had been listening in to our conversation. I think she had been coloring some pictures at the dining room table and suddenly she stood up and raised her hands open to the sky and her face lifted up to heaven. She cried out with a combination of desperation and confidence, "Jesus! Send us some ice cream!" And when I looked at Raelynn's face, she had such joy glowing from her. There was an expectancy of Jesus hearing her plea. I thought for a moment that scoops of ice cream would start falling from the ceiling. Haha.

As I reflected, I realized how little I live by faith. Raelynn's passionate prayer teaches me what living by faith really means.

Little Raelynn knows that Jesus is the spring from which God's blessings flow to us.

She knows that Jesus is all-powerful and loving . . . that He is able and willing to attend to our need.

She knows that Jesus calls us to cast every care and desire upon Him.

Raelynn did not pray after human efforts failed, but BEFORE human efforts were tried.

Raelynn's first heart response was prayer and pleading.

She actually believes that God works miracles for her good.

What more is there to living by faith than that?

While I was planning my trip to Walmart, Raelynn was praying. Now faith does not keep us from planning. Faith is not passive in human processes. Faith does not refuse to go to the doctor or drive to the grocery store or work diligently in one's garden. However . . .

Truth: Living by faith consciously places God at the center of every problem, every yearning, every hope, every decision, every action. Living by faith means that we look to Jesus as our first resort and not our last resort.

I lose my keys quite often. I know . . . I know. I should always place them in the same place and that would not happen. Haha. But I do lose them. After my first quick attempt to find them, I call upon my beloved bride, Kimberly, “Kimberly, have you seen my keys?” Do you know what she always says, **“Have you prayed about it?”**

Living by faith means that faith governs our lives . . . governs the little things like ice cream shortages and lost keys.

And faith governs BIG things like messy marriages, rebellious children, loss of loved ones, painful diseases, loss of jobs, and crushing debts.

AND faith governs the BIGGEST THINGS OF ALL . . . our worship of God, our eternal future, our spiritual hope, our victory over sin, our labor for His kingdom.

MAIN IDEA: The righteous shall live by faith. Let us reject the Law as our hope for God’s blessing. Let us cling to Jesus in faith and rejoice in the blessings that flow only from Him.

Here is the question I urge you to ask yourself as we look at God’s Word together: “Am I really living by faith?” Please do not answer too fast. Demand some evidence. Demand more than a past prayer or a doctrinal statement or a church membership. What evidence do I have that I am living by faith?

Last week, our youth minister Kyler Bell shared a nourishing message from Galatians 3: -18. He noted in his message that God’s promise of blessing comes to us through faith. And that the promise CANNOT be nullified or changed by a Law that comes after the promise. God gave Abraham the promise of eternal life through faith in Him. AND THEN 400 years later, God gave the Law to Moses. So whatever we may think about the LAW, we must NOT think that the Law helps us to receive an eternal inheritance from the LORD.

“For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.” (Galatians 3:18 [ESV](#))

So the natural question that follows is, “Why did God give us the Law at all? If the promise was sufficient, why follow up the Promise with the Law?”

“Why then the law?” (Galatians 3:19 [ESV](#))

For all of our rejection of the Law as a means to receive spiritual life, we must not think that we are demeaning God's Law. We reject that the Law is a dirty word . . . something to be tossed aside by followers of Jesus. No, the Law of God is good and perfect. What is the good purpose of God's Law?

God answers that question for us in two parts: 1. The Law imprisons us. 2. The Law painfully tutors us.

The Good Purpose of God's Law

1. The Law imprisons us.

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one." (Galatians 3:19-20 [ESV](#))

The Law was given to show God's people the problem of sin. A transgression is **When the Messiah comes, He will not only show God's people the problem of sin, but also SOLVE the problem of sin.**

Yet the Law had an important purpose to make us aware that we do not live up to God's standards. We are NOT OK! God is NOT pleased with us. Everyone is NOT going to make it in to God's heaven. In fact, NO ONE deserves to enter in to God's heaven.

But even in this, keep in mind that the Law is NOT AS IMPORTANT AS THE PROMISE! God gave the promise directly to Abraham. But when God gave the Law he gave it through two mediators: angels and Moses. Which message is more important? A message delivered by God Himself OR a message God sent through created servants?

*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. **But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin**, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." (Galatians 3:21-22 [ESV](#))*

The Law does not contradict the promises of God; the Law COMPLEMENTS the promises of God. The Law makes us desperate for rescue . . . for escape . . . for freedom. The promise provides that rescue . . . that freedom.

The word "imprison" means to "shut up on all sides". Imagine being locked in a prison cell with no door, no window, only walls that are 4 feet thick.

The Law traps us in God's judgment so that we have no way to escape from its condemnation. If I were to ask you, "Are you a good person?" You might say, "Yes, I am a good person." But if I were to say, "A good person is one who keeps the Law perfectly and completely." Then I show you God's law and I ask you, "Have you ever lusted after a person in your heart? Have you ever gotten angry with someone and called them a name? Have you ever told a tiny little lie? Have you ever failed to forgive someone who hurt you? Have you ever desired something that someone else owned? Have you ever forgotten to thank God for something He has given you?"

You shuffle your feet and you feel the walls closing in around you. You say, "Well, yes. I have done those things." The Law says, "Then you are NOT a good person." Ouch. "I do not like that." I know. I do not either. But the Law shows us that this is the truth about our hearts.

*Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, **since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**" (Romans 3:19-20 ESV)*

Truth: The Law is given to condemn us, not to rescue us. Let us not try to use the Law as part of the solution to our problems.

Luke uses this term "imprison" in Luke 5:6 to describe fish captured in a net.

Illustration: Fishing. Big fish on the line. As you bring it closer to the boat, someone says, "Get the net!" The big fish so easily can wiggle off the hook or break the line when it is only captured by the fishing pole. We have lost many many fish that way. BUT once the fish is in the net. Game over.

So to the Law. When we are netted by the Law. Game over. No hope of escape. Only certain death.

We needed the Law because the Law made us desperate for God's Messiah! Our world still soft-pedals sin. We make sin seem so innocent and innocuous. But sin is a deadly poison that will take us to hell! Only when the Law says, "Guilty and condemned", will anyone look to Jesus and say, "Amazing Grace!"

“But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” (Galatians 3:22 [ESV](#))

Famous 60s song “I fought the law and the Law won.” True for every person UNTIL . . . Only Jesus can say, “I fought the Law and the Law LOST!” The promise of freedom comes only through Him!

2. The Law painfully tutors us.

*Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, **the law was our guardian** until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:23-24 [ESV](#))*

The word “guardian” is difficult because it comes from a culture that is different from ours. In the Romans world, a guardian was usually a slave who was given the task to train up a child through rough discipline. The guardian did not really LOVE the child. The guardian was simply there to teach the child what is right, what is wrong and to inflict painful discipline when the child did what was wrong.

To get the idea, think of the strictest teacher or coach you ever had. They were stern, strict, sometimes mean, seldom encouraging, harsh and persistent. Never letting up. If you take that person and multiply their stern characteristics by 100 times, you have the idea of a “guardian”. 😊

That is the Law. God’s Law never loves us. God’s Law never smiles at us. God’s Law serves to teach us what the Father says is right and what is wrong. God’s Law serves to inflict pain upon those who break it.

Note that the father who hires the “guardian” never intends for the guardian to be a permanent presence in the child’s life. Only for a time UNTIL the child is grown. The guardian PREPARES the child for a future day. When the future day arrives, the guardian is dismissed. At that point, the guardian has NO AUTHORITY over the child.

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.” (Galatians 3:25-26 [ESV](#))

Friends, if you are Jesus, you are under the authority of Jesus and not under the authority of the Law. Jesus is perfect in righteousness. So no one needs to be concerned that the authority of Jesus will make a path for sin.

Truth: Legalism teaches that Jesus needs the Law to grow righteousness in our souls. Legalism teaches that setting the Law aside and focusing only on Jesus will lead to us into sin.

We must be clear on the good purpose of the Law or our lives will slip away from Jesus. **Good things become harmful if we use them improperly.**

Charles Spurgeon, "A handsaw is a good thing, but not to shave with."

What the Law can do and what the Law cannot do

The Law is able to . . .

- 1. Convict us but not relieve us.**
- 2. Condemn us but not justify us.**
- 3. Brings us to despair, but not to hope.**
- 4. Brings us to sorrow, but not to joy.**
- 5. Enslave us, but not free us.**
- 6. Create fear, but not love.**
- 7. Stimulate a critical spirit, but not voice of encouragement.**
- 8. Help us to see our dirt, but not to cleanse us.**
- 9. Give us cause to shrink from God, but not draw near to Him.**
- 10. Obligate us, but not lead us.**
- 11. Make us Martha's, but not Mary's.**
- 12. Urge us try harder, but not move us to pray.**
- 13. Bring us to God as our Judge, but not make Him our Father.**
- 14. Guide us with truth, but not empower us with the Holy Spirit.**
- 15. Demonstrates God's righteousness, but not God's love.**
- 16. Grumble about our wages, but not rejoice in the gift.**
- 17. Trains us toward performance-based relationships, but not love-abounding relationships.**

The Law is a good thing. It is not the Law's fault that we do not keep it. But the Law is not given to help us live. Only Jesus can do that.

Which leads us to . . .

The Greater Benefit of Faith in Jesus.

1. Faith in Jesus justifies us.

“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:24 [ESV](#))

We have learned that to be justified means that God legally declares us sinners to be righteous.

On that future day when we give an account . . . imagine you are seated at the table of judgment. The Law takes the stand and gives witness against you. Every thought. Every word. Every action is reviewed. You feel the shame, the guilt, the lack of righteousness. You have nothing to say. The Law is a PERFECT witness to condemn you. Everything has been laid bare. You feel share and dread. A despair begins to wash over you. You have nothing to say in your own defense.

Then Jesus takes the stand . . . He shows the Judge His pierced feet and hands . . . He testifies that your sins have been placed upon Him at the cross . . . He declares that while the Law’s testimony is true, it is incomplete . . . He reminds you that you no longer bear your sins because He was punished in your place . . . He points to the robes that you now wear in this great court . . . robes which He gave you . . . robes of perfect righteousness.

Nothing else can prepare us for that future day other than Jesus. Our hope is only found in Him! Old timey song captures this truth:

Once for All

*Free from the law—oh, happy condition!
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.*

*Once for all—oh, sinner, receive it;
Once for all—oh, doubter, believe it;
Cling to the cross, the burden will fall,
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.*

*Now we are free—there’s no condemnation;
Jesus provides a perfect salvation:
“Come unto Me,” oh, hear His sweet call,
Come, and He saves us once for all.*

Philip Paul Bliss (1838-1876)

2. Faith in Jesus adopts into God's family.

"for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." (Galatians 3:26 [ESV](#))

to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"
(Galatians 4:5-6 [ESV](#))

The Law reminds us that God is our Judge, but Jesus gives us the right to call God "Our Father". The Law shows us why God would cast us away from His presence forever. We are traitors! **But Jesus shows us why God would tenderly call us to His side. We are sons and daughters through faith in Jesus.**

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God," (John 1:12 [ESV](#))

Question: Are you a child of God? Believe!

When God invites us to spend eternity with Him in heaven, He invites us not as guests, but as beloved children. We belong with Him.

Jesus turns the frown of the Judge into the smile of the Father.
Do we displease the Father? Yes! But He remains our Father still!
Does He discipline us in our disobedience? Yes! But He does so as a Father who loves His own.

Modern song we sing that exults so well in this truth:

Who am I that the highest King Would welcome me I was lost but He brought me in Oh His love for me . . .

Who the Son sets free Oh is free indeed I'm a child of God Yes I am In my Father's house There's a place for me I'm a child of God Yes I am

*I am chosen, not forsaken I am who You say I am
You are for me, not against me I am who You say I am
I am chosen, not forsaken I am who You say I am
You are for me, not against me I am who You say I am I am who You say I am*

3. Faith in Jesus unites us to Jesus.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ..” (Galatians 3:27 ESV)

One of the arguments of the legalist is that if we stop focusing on God’s Law then we will become lawless . . . sin will run rampant in our lives and in our church. There is some truth in that. If we throw away the Law without anything replacing it, we would be in worse condition. But the Gospel replaces the weak Law with the resurrected Jesus!

Truth: We cannot have both Jesus and the Law as our governing principle. We must choose between the two!

When we place our faith in Jesus, our union with Christ gives us hope to overcome sin’s power in our lives.

The Law only shows our weakness, but when we are united to Jesus, we are united to His resurrection power. We are enabled to win in the fight against our flesh. Jesus joins us to Himself so that we are IN HIM and He is IN US! God does not impart Himself to us through the Law. God imparts Himself and His power to us through Jesus. All of God is given to us through His Son.

This is why everything in our life depends upon our active connection to Jesus.

MacArthur shares a great Illustration of this truth: After WWI, the famous British scholar and soldier Lawrence of Arabia participated in the Paris peace talks. Several Arab leaders came with him to Paris and stayed in the same hotel. When they went into their bathrooms they were astounded to discover they could bring seemingly unlimited amounts of water into the bathtub or sink simply by turning the handle on a faucet.

When preparing to leave Paris, the Arab leaders removed the faucets and packed them in their luggage, thinking that the faucets themselves magically created the vast amounts of water. **When they told Lawrence what they had done, he explained that the faucets were useless unless connected to pipes that were, in turn, connected to a source of water.**

In the same way, a person who is not connected to the Son is not connected to the Father and has no source of spiritual life or power.

But MORE! As the result of our union with Jesus, we are united with each other too!

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28 [ESV](#))

This verse is one of the most misused and misapplied verses in the Bible. It has been used by Amillennialists to suggest that there are no distinctions between Jews or Gentiles. It has been used by the egalitarians and homosexual groups to suggest that there are no distinctions between male and female. God is simply teaching us in this verse that in reference to spiritual standing before the LORD, there are no second class citizens. Gentiles are fully privileged members of God’s family with the Jews. Slaves are fully privileged members of God’s family with the free. Women are fully privileged members of God’s family with the men.

All are equally loved and embraced by God through faith in Jesus. We are ONE FAMILY without divisions.

What creates unity in the church? The Judaizers argue the Law does. But the Gospel says, “No!” The Law has no power to unite us together.

Law-based relationships are filled with envy, criticism, anger, harsh judgment, unforgiveness, divisions, feelings of superiority, and favoritism.

Truth: The church of Jesus is not united by cultural traits, but by the cross of Jesus. We are not united by our shared morality, but by our shared Messiah!

Our unity finds its focus, its foundation upon a Person . . . the resurrected Lord Jesus. What makes me call you brother and sister? What makes me push away our differences and embrace you as a part of me? Answer: Jesus.

We are one not because we sing the same songs or wear the same clothes or live by the same moral code. We are one because Jesus is our center. He is our Lord. We all listen to Him and follow Him and obey Him. We all value Him above every other value . . . above our preferences, above our politics, above our titles, above our wealth, above our bloodlines, above our ethnicity, above our team colors, above our hobbies. Faith unites us to Jesus and to one another!

4. Faith in Jesus makes us heirs of God.

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

(Galatians 3:29 [ESV](#))

Being an heir of God means so much about our present and our future. God possesses all of Creation. The LORD is bringing in His eternal kingdom. If we have a part in Jesus through faith, then we have full inheritance with Him.

Do you think often of your inheritance through Jesus?

*he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace **we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**" (Titus 3:5-7 [ESV](#))*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:3-5 [ESV](#))

This past week, members of our church family suffered a severe loss. One of our brother's dad was out working in the yard when he suffered a massive heart attack. His granddaughter found him lying face down and sought to revive him before the ambulance came. Such a grief. This dad and grandpa filled a daily place in the life of this family . . . filled the days with joy, service, support, encouragement, love.

Where is the hope in this story? Under the Law, there would be no hope. But this man loved Jesus and lived for Him. He is an heir of God. And guess what? Heirs of God never die!

How long we could talk of the inheritance that is ours: fellowship with God, power to overcome every sin, a home in heaven, a future secured, a peace that surpasses all understanding, a future reunion awaited, a return of Christ in glory, a participation in that kingdom.

This man loved fishing. I shared with the family a bit of our inheritance that we will experience when Jesus returns and establishes His kingdom on this earth.

And he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river . . . And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the

*Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. **Fishermen will stand beside the sea. From Engedi to Eneglaim it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea.***” (Ezekiel 47:6-10 [ESV](#))

Is it not so cool to be an heir of God?

“So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” (Galatians 4:7 [ESV](#))

Conclusion:

John Stott summarizes his comments on this passage in the following words: “*We cannot come to Christ to be justified until we have first been to Moses to be condemned. But once we have gone to Moses, and acknowledged our sin, guilt and condemnation, we must not stay there. We must let Moses send us to Christ*” (The Message of Galatians [London: Inter-Varsity, 1968], p. 102). [Galatians, page 103]

MAIN IDEA: The righteous shall live by faith. Let us reject the Law as our hope for God’s blessing. Let us cling to Jesus in faith and rejoice in the blessings that flow only from Him.

The Good Purpose of God’s Law

1. The Law imprisons us in our sin.
2. The Law painfully teaches us our need for the Messiah.

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3. Faith in Jesus unites us to Jesus.
4. Faith in Jesus makes us heirs of God.

The Galatians are being deceived by a FALSE GOSPEL. This false gospel proclaimed that obedience to the Law could bring them to God's blessing and pleasure. They saw the spiritual mathematics as THE LAW + PERSONAL OBEDIENCE = God's favor.

Our natural response to relational problems is to lean in to the Law for the solution. But change only comes from the life of Jesus that we receive by faith. The Law helps us to understand why a problem exists, but it does not give any help to overcome it.