

“BEFORE AND AFTER THE CROSS”

Has there ever been an event in your life that changed you and put everything else into perspective? I mean, you've never been the same since that thing happened. When you try to recall a date, that event becomes a reference point. Or perhaps, whatever it was completely changed your attitude or the way you live your life. Well, the cross of Christ is the most influential event in the collective history of man. It was not just one of many events in the annals of religious history; it was the pivotal point where everything God promised was made reality. It divides the history of man into two distinct eras...before the death of Christ and after the death of Christ. It separates two systems of religion or two divine economies: the age of the law and the age of grace; the age of slavery to sin from the age of glorious freedom in Christ. There were many things that ceased when Jesus died and there were many things that began, and that's going to be the focus of our study today.

Galatians 3:18-29 “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? 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. 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. 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 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. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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.”

In verses 23 and 25, Paul uses two contrasting phrases. He speaks of the time “*before faith came*” and what happened “*after faith came*.” What did Paul mean by that? And just what changed when faith came? Our subject today deals with some of the most misunderstood things in the Bible. People have made some grave errors in their interpretation of the scriptures because they fail to understand what changed at the cross. I want us to study some of those things today.

The cross marked a great change between many things the Bible now calls *old*, compared with some things that are described as *new*. What stopped and what started at the cross? As Jesus struggled beneath the weight of His own body upon the cross and was down to His last seconds of life, He uttered His final words, “*It is finished*” (**John 19:30**). He wasn't talking about His physical life. He was talking about the great plan of redemption that necessitated His death. He had to die to pay the debt our sins had incurred. Everything in the history of man from the fall of Adam to the day Jesus was crucified pointed to this great goal and played into the scheme that God laid out for our salvation. And so, when Jesus was breathing His last breath, those words were upon His lips, “*It is finished*.” His death marked the passing of something old and the beginning of something new and better! This is what Paul was

referring to in **Galatians 3**, which we read earlier. He contrasts the time before the cross with the time after the cross, and the revelation of the gospel plan of salvation. He compares the time “*before faith came*” to the time “*after faith came*.”

The word “*faith*” here refers to the plan which now enables us to be saved through faith in Christ. Before Jesus died and the gospel was preached, salvation consisted of the promise of something to come. It could be fully realized only when that time came. The promise had to be fulfilled by Christ coming and executing the plan God had in mind from the beginning. Everything that happened before Christ died on the cross was designed by God to facilitate that event and once it took place, those things of the Old Testament era had fulfilled their purpose and were set aside or taken away. That’s what Jesus meant when He said this:

Matthew 5:17 “**Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.**”

In other words, Christ didn’t come to oppose the ceremonies of Moses or dispute what Moses and the prophets had said. He was not teaching something independent of and foreign to what the law said. In fact, Jesus kept the law all throughout His earthly life and was the only person to ever perfectly do so. What He was saying was that His life and ministry, and ultimately His death were the fulfillment of the law’s teachings and its purpose. When it was fulfilled, it took its place in history and a new age and a new and better system were ushered in. I want to prove that to you today by showing you what changed at the cross according to the scriptures.

Let’s begin with the law itself, because the death of Christ marked the end of the old law and the beginning of a new law. That’s what Paul is teaching in **Galatians 3**. Throughout his letter to the Galatians, for that matter, Paul is confronting the false teaching of Judaizers who were trying to take new Christians back to the law of Moses as the basis of their righteousness. These men were enforcing the rite of circumcision upon Gentile believers, saying that unless they kept the old law, they could not be saved. Paul vehemently denies their teaching and says that it makes null and void God’s promise of salvation through faith in Christ. He shows that the law of Moses was assigned a specific purpose for the age in which it was given, but that purpose was fulfilled in Christ and the Old Testament law was taken out of the way.

There are a lot of people today who make no distinction between the Old Testament and New Testament laws. They believe that both are in force today and as a result, they’re as likely to look to Isaiah as they are the book of Acts to learn what to do to be saved. However, Paul teaches in many passages that Christians have been freed from the yoke of Moses’ law.

Colossians 2:14 “**Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances which was against us, and was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.**”

The Bible could not be any clearer about the fact that the Mosaic law with its ordinances and ceremonies (and that includes the observance of the Sabbath Day, animal sacrifices, the burning of incense, instrumental music in worship, and on and on...) was nailed to the cross of Christ and died, so far as their practice and authority were concerned. Now that bothers a lot of people and they say, “Don’t you believe the Old Testament is from God?” or “Don’t you go by the entire Bible?” That shows that they don’t understand the purpose of the Old Testament law and what the Bible says about it.

I believe the Old Testament is inspired just like the New Testament. I believe it came from God and is just as divinely perfect in its revelation as the writings of Paul. But I don't believe it is intended to

regulate the worship and the lives of New Testament Christians, and you don't either unless you're still practicing animal sacrifices and all of the other ceremonies of the old law. The problem is, people today want to go back and cherry pick what they want from the Old Testament and bring it over into this age and leave what they don't want back in that old era. Well, we can't do that because Paul taught that the man who tries to keep one part of the Old Testament law is a *"debtor to keep the whole law"* (**Galatians 5:3**).

So, someone says, "If we aren't to live our lives according to the Old Testament law then why was it given in the first place?" That's exactly what Paul is explaining in our text.

Galatians 3:19 "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made."

In other words, the law was given to show man his sinfulness and his need for a Savior. The Law of Moses was given to the Jews, or the children of Abraham, to reveal their own weakness. It was a law that no man was able to perfectly keep, except for Jesus Christ. As long as man was in bondage to that law and was trying to appear righteous by keeping it, he always fell short and was hopelessly frustrated. But man was not eternally trapped in that state of vexation and condemnation.

Paul says that law was given until the seed should come unto those to whom the promise was made. The seed Paul is talking about was none other than Jesus Christ, the promised One who came thru the lineage of Abraham. Remember how God promised Abraham thousands of years before that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed (**Genesis 22:18**)? Jesus the Christ was that promised Messiah. Paul says here that the law was only to exist during the interim between when the promise was given and the fulfillment of that promise by the coming of Christ. Now, notice what Paul says in verses 22-26;

Galatians 3:22-26 "But the scripture (or the Old Testament law) hath concluded all under sin that the promise, by faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, (or before Christ came to save us thru faith in Him) we were kept under the law (the law of Moses), shut up unto the faith (or the gospel) which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law (the law which came by Moses) was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith (or the New Testament system of faith as opposed to the works of the Mosaic Law). But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

Paul says the law was given to the Jews to serve as their schoolmaster until Christ came. Notice that it would last forever. It was only until Christ came and brought the gospel. In Paul's day, a schoolmaster was not a teacher, but rather a guardian. He was usually a slave who was appointed to mind the welfare of the slave owner's child until he reached adulthood. He was to care for him until he was educated and able to navigate through life independently. Now the law was a guardian for God's people during the time in which the plan of God was being developed and prepared. Renowned Bible scholars and commentators, J.W. McGarvey and Phillip Pendleton said, "It was intended to bring those under its authority to a state of spiritual development fit for the society and fellowship of Christ." It was to prepare them mentally and spiritually for the Messiah and then final message of salvation He would bring to the world when He came.

Now, Paul says when Christ did come, bringing the offer of salvation through faith, that law ceased to govern and regulate the conduct of man. He plainly says *“after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (v. 25)*. In **verse 26** he says, *“for ye are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”* We are not made the children of God through circumcision, or obedience to any other part of the Old Testament law. We are children of God by virtue of our obedient faith in Christ.

People today make a terrible mistake when they try to go back to the Old Testament for instruction in matters of Christian worship and salvation. We learn many important and valuable lessons by the examples given to us in the Old Testament, and we more clearly understand the teachings of the New Testament because of a knowledge of the Old, but the Bible teaches that Christians have no obligation or duty in regards to the Old Testament law and those who try to use that law as a basis for their religion today are doing harm to the cross of Christ and the gospel for which Christ died.

Galatians 5:4 “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.”

Now that leads us to another observation: before the cross, God’s covenant was with the Jewish nation, but after the cross, all nations are equal in God’s eyes. Something a lot of people don’t realize is that the law of Moses was given to the Jews and not to Gentiles. When God made His promise to Abraham, He said that promise would be fulfilled through His relationship to Abraham’s family. He promised to make a great nation out of Abraham’s people, and He did. Moses and the Hebrews who escaped Egypt were the ones who came from Abraham, through Isaac and on down the line. God told Abraham that he was to have every male child from that day forward circumcised on the eighth day and that was to be the sign of the covenant He had with Abraham’s family. From that day forward, every child of Israel was circumcised in accordance with that covenant. After Moses led the children of Abraham out of Pharaoh’s land, God called him up to smoking, trembling Mount Sinai and gave him the law that would govern His people. That law constituted a covenant strictly between the Jews and God. That’s why the apostle Paul later said this, speaking of the Gentiles:

Ephesians 2:11-12 “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:”

The Jews walked in the light of God’s covenant while the Gentiles lived in the darkness of sin, idolatry and the worship of pagan deities. They were excluded from God’s spiritual blessings. But all of that changed when Christ died. Paul continues:

Ephesians 2:13-16 “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off (the Gentiles) are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both (Jews and Gentiles) one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us (that’s talking about the law of Moses given to the Jews which excluded the Gentiles); Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body (or one church) by the cross...”

There you have it, my friends. Paul says Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ.

Galatians 3:26 “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

We are all the children of Abraham by faith. That is, we are the heirs of all of the things God promised to the children of Abraham, even though there's not a drop of Jewish blood flowing in our veins. We are the children of Abraham, in a spiritual sense...not because we can trace our genealogy back to him, because a Gentile can't do that. And I'll let you in on something else: a Jewish person can't either. Did you know shortly after Christ came to earth and established the new Israel—His church—that the Roman army besieged the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and destroyed it? The Romans toppled the Jewish temple and with it the genealogical records of the entire Jewish nation that went all the way back to the beginning. Today, a man could not prove that he is physically related to Abraham if his life depended on it. No such record exists anymore. The genealogies recorded in the Bible are there for one purpose and that is to show that Jesus Christ was the promised seed of Abraham and the Son of David and that's all that ultimately matters. That historic event of A.D. 70 was the final judgment of God upon the Jewish establishment of that day that rejected Christ and it was proof that now salvation or the special favor of God does not rest upon a group of people because of their lineage or their earthly heritage. It is a gospel that is universally offered to anyone who will place obedient faith in Christ. Now the result is that there is no difference in the eyes of God today between a Jew or a Gentile, or any other delineation of mankind for that matter. God doesn't favor one people over another. God doesn't look at who our ancestors are. He doesn't look at the color of our skin or our nationality. He does not elevate one nation over another. He looks for one thing and that is the blood of Christ upon our souls.

I get impatient with some of these televangelists today who preach these fanciful theories about a millennial reign of Christ upon the earth where the Jewish nation is reinstated. They preach that God is still using Israel to fulfill His purposes in the world and, in fact, much of our foreign policy today is based on that idea. Well, I'm not opposed to national Israel today and I don't want to see the people that live in that land mistreated in anyway. I love my Jewish neighbor and esteem my Jewish neighbor as highly as I do any other man. But I deny that he occupies a special or unique relationship to God by virtue of his birth. The Bible does not teach that. The relationship that God once had with the fleshly family of Abraham ceased after the cross, and His blessings were extended to all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike. God wants every Jewish person to be saved just as He wants every Gentile to be saved. But they must all be saved on the same terms: by putting their faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Now what does that mean? How can I become a child of God today? Before the cross, a man became a child of God by birth. But because of the cross, a man now becomes a child of God by virtue of the second birth or the "new birth." Remember that famous conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus:

John 3:2 "The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Entrance into the kingdom that Christ established is not the result of our first birth, but a second birth that is produced by the regenerating power of the gospel. The gospel which was revealed by the Holy Spirit causes a man to be born again. The "new birth" makes him a member of God's family, a child of the King himself and an heir to all of the inheritance that was promised so long ago. What do you suppose Jesus meant by saying a man must be born of water and of the spirit? Let's go back to our text one last time:

Galatians 3:26-29 "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. 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."

There it is. Are you a member of God's family? Are you an heir to the promise God made to Abraham so very long ago that was finally fulfilled in the coming of Christ and His death of the cross? You can be, if you'll gladly obey the terms of His will and become such as should be saved.