



### Galatians 3.23-end

Galatians is Paul's angry letter against the Legalists who had followed him into various churches he had started in Galatia and who were determined to corrupt the gospel of grace into a system of rules.

This is a very human tendency. Just last week we were speaking to a friend who was left by medical staff bleeding from a head injury until all the necessary paperwork had been completed. Presumably these medics were people who had a vocation to care for the sick, but form-filling and following rules had become the priority for them.

The Legalists in Paul's day were saying "having faith is all very well but in order to be one of God's people you have to follow all the rules of the Law of Moses." In today's reading Paul answers them in two ways.

#### 1. He tells them what the Law was for (v23-24)

As Paul sees it, the Law was basically a NANNY, employed to look after God's children until they could look after themselves. *The Message Bible* puts it like this:

*The law was like those Greek tutors, with which you are familiar, who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for.*

We see this a lot in Barcelona. (Some of you may know people who employ nannies, others work as nannies! ) The Law worked well in this nanny role for a while but it was never intended by God to be permanent; just as parents don't plan for their children to have a nanny for their whole lives!

God always planned for a time that the Law would not be required, because his people would be able to respond freely to him in faith. The prophet Jeremiah predicted this change in these words:

*"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

Jeremiah 31.33

This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus came, as Paul writes:



*So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.  
(v24)*

## 2. He tells them the Law is no longer required (v25-27)

Now, says Paul, everything has changed. The Law-Nanny has done its job and is no longer required...

Paul reminds his readers that a completely new way of life has begun with their Christian baptism. *The Message* again expresses this well:

*But now you have arrived at your destination: By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe - Christ's life, the fulfillment of God's original purpose.*

Let's unpack that a little. Part of the meaning of becoming a Christian and being baptized is being washed clean and having a fresh start, but it doesn't end there.

The most important thing is that because of Jesus we are in a new relationship with God, free of guilt and fear, with the status of sons and daughters. Every family needs rules, but it is loving relationships which keep families together, help them get through crises and enable each family member to flourish.

Going back to a rule-based religion would be as ridiculous as an adult dressing as a baby...

It would be like bringing back the nanny to look after our grown-up children and tell them what to do all the time. This may be what some people want, but it is not the way to live a mature and effective adult life and it is not what God wants for us as Christians.

Rather than baby clothes, Paul reminds Christians that at their baptism they were clothed with Christ. This is an interesting metaphor because our clothing has a number of functions:-

- It can protect us from the weather
- It can cover our unattractive parts
- It can make a statement about us (who we are/what we stand for)



Our relationship with God in Christ is like clothing because it protects us and not only covers but corrects our faults. It should also be visible to others, so that when people look at us they see the likeness of Jesus and are drawn to him.

Now I know I am a fashion icon and everybody tries to look like me - but I'm not talking about the way we look! I'm talking about the way we speak, behave, treat people; our goal should always be to be Christlike - and we need help to attain that with any degree of consistency.

We also need courage because not everybody cheers when they see a Christian and the life of a child of God isn't easier than other ways of life.

### 3. Life in God's family

The key for Christians is to live as members of God's family. Paul ends this chapter with a strong and clear statement about the equality of God's children. It is a verse which has often been ignored by the Church down the ages, but Paul (who often gets quoted out of context as being against the equality of women) could hardly make himself any clearer:

*In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal.*

All are equal; all are in the same relationship with Jesus; all are equally heirs of God's promises to Abraham, the prototype man of faith.

A large part of the old religious Law was about excluding non-Jews and about keeping slaves and women in their place. Paul insists those days are over, but unfortunately the Church has not been at all consistent in putting his teaching into practice. The current argument about whether or not women can be bishops illustrates this, but we also need to look in the mirror and ask ourselves some hard questions...

- Do we treat everyone as equal, as brothers and sisters in Christ? Or are we like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where all the animals were equal but some were more equal than others?
- What about our Christian "clothing"? When people see us do they see Jesus? When they encounter us do they encounter the love and truth and unselfishness of Christ?
- How can we as a Church fellowship become more consistent as ambassadors of Christ, without lapsing into the kind of rules-based religion which Paul hated but which can so easily take over?



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I think these are important questions and I don't have all the answers. Let's end with a short time of silence

and a prayer...