

**Galatians 3:23-29**

23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

The Apostle Paul founded the churches in Galatia but after he had moved on his work was being challenged by Jewish Christians. They insisted that the Gentile converts be circumcised as a sign of their inclusion into God's covenant and observe the Jewish laws and rituals. Paul's perspective is that this is a threat to the gospel; it is a different gospel, and a perversion of the gospel. He wrote this letter as an argument against adopting these Jewish religious practices. Paul insisted that righteousness is not about observance of the law but is a saving act of Jesus. Righteousness is fulfilled through the death of Christ. The crucifixion of Christ was an apocalyptic event. It was a game changer. It changed everything. The old covenant was replaced with a new covenant. The old covenant is based on observance of the law and the new covenant is based on love and grace. To require the Gentiles to implement Jewish faith practice is a matter of reverting back to era before Christ came.

I will paraphrase today's Scripture for the sake of clarity. Before Jesus came we were under the law for discipline and punishment. However, now with the advent of Christ, faith has come. Therefore, we are no longer under the restrictions of the law. We are children of God, full members of the household of God, all equal, all united with Christ. We are justified by faith so we are no longer subject to discipline but grow into likeness of Christ where we are no longer separated but made righteous.

The emphasis of the religious tradition has shifted. The religious tradition was narrowed to prophecy. The Spirit of God came to the people through the prophets. God spoke through Moses and the other prophets. However, with the advent of Christ, the era of prophecy came to an end. God no longer needs to speak through a prophet because God brings the word of God to us through Jesus. The Spirit of God is associated with Jesus, the risen and glorified Lord. He is everywhere in heaven and on earth. Understanding this is an eye opening, transformative, and awakening revelation. The law is replaced with love, fear is replaced with hope, punishment is replaced with redemption, and condemnation is replaced with salvation.

The scriptures are more than some written code; it is an experience, a direct and personal fellowship where God continues to reveal God's self to humanity. Therefore, the gospel is not based on the authority of God but is based on grace of God. The Holy Spirit is now with you and in you. This is a really terrific thing! The Spirit of God is not transcendent; it is not beyond our limits of experience and understanding. It is here, in us and with us. It provides a defense against evil desires and it produces the fruits of God's Spirit. As siblings of Christ we are united together in blood and love. There is no longer

Jew or Greek. There is no longer slave or free. When America had slaves people used biblical references for justification but you can see for yourself that today's Scripture condemns the practice. There is no longer male and female. This really needs to be emphasized in contemporary society because it goes on in spite of this Scripture. Gender equality is a biblical mandate.

I was at a wedding a few years ago. In the ceremony an authoritarian and patriarchal preacher emphasized that wives need to be subject to their husbands and the husband is head of the wife. After the ceremony while we were eating in the fellowship hall a woman sitting across from me stated "I am now reminded of why I did not get married." I simply responded, "we do not all preach like that." The Apostle Paul disputes that dominating argument and the patriarchal attitudes that support it. The Apostle Paul's argument is equality. There is no longer male and female. We are equal regardless of gender or race. No one is subservient of another in the realm of Christ.

Now, through Christ we have acceptance, salvation, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We have the word of God sown into our hearts with no mediator required. God can speak directly to every human individual with no need of a representative, angel, or prophet. God gives us love, a blood sacrifice, the Holy Spirit, and a direct and personal relationship.