

Church in the Wild Pastor's Devotional

December 10, 2017

Galatians 3:15-25

Let's continue to unwrap our Christmas "behind-the-scenes" package of verses:

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law... (Galatians 4:4)

Two weeks ago, we learned that "When the set time had full come" refers to how God prepared the Jews—even the Roman Empire—to receive the message of Jesus. Last Sunday we pondered the news that our Heavenly Father fulfilled His mission to restore relationships by choosing a shocking strategy, He "sent his Son." The eternal Prince left Heaven to be embedded in human history! It would be expected for the Son of God to arrive as a supernatural being. But God chose a surprising tactic—the Son would be embodied as Jesus—a fully human person. Jesus was even "born of a woman," God choosing to embed Himself in a vulnerable way, also requiring human partners (Mary and Joseph) to be vulnerable. That's why God's mission now requires us to be embedded...embodied...and vulnerable. Amen!

Today we'll unpack a 3rd aspect of Christmas behind-the-scenes: God's Son was "born under the law." Earlier in his letter to the Galatians, Paul addressed confusion often expressed by fellow Jews: *If faith in Jesus makes people righteous, what's the purpose of the commandments God gave to Moses?* (We Gentiles might also be confused😊) **Take a moment now to pause in this devotional and read Galatians 3:15-25.**

Many Christians (and some Jews) have wrongly thought that Jews are saved by obedience to the Jewish Law. But Paul reminds us that God established a covenant of grace with Abraham 430 years before Moses received the Law, for "God in his grace gave [the inheritance] to Abraham through a promise" (v. 18). In sheer grace, God called the Jewish people into a unique relationship. Verse 19 asks the obvious question: "What then was the purpose of the law?" Paul answered that the law was "added because of transgressions." The commandments served as "guardians" (4:2) to prevent God's children from losing their identity while protecting them from the dangers of unfettered sin. Yet rules designed to protect children can oppressive when they grow up:

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian (3:23-25).

Next Sunday we'll explore Jesus' mission "to redeem [Jews and Gentiles] under law." Today we remember that it was no accident that Jesus was born to faithful Jewish parents who obeyed the law's requirements, and that Jesus fulfilled the intent of the law even as when his ministry upset Jewish authorities. The Jewish Law was and is God's gracious gift. Prior to Jesus it constrained sin. In the aftermath of Jesus, it shapes our understanding of right and wrong.

When my daughters were young, Lynn and I gave them arbitrary rules: "Do this...don't do that." This lack of freedom provided structure, cultivated their identity, and protected them from bad choices. Now as adults they are free to make their own rules. Because of their healthy identity, they usually make good choices. As they discover the need, they set their own boundaries.

This analogy is limited, for we who are adopted as God's children in Christ are not separate from our spiritual parent. We have the benefit of the indwelling Holy Spirit, provided by our Father so that we can "live by the Spirit" (6:16) and bear the "fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." And with a measure of humor, Paul added: "Against such things there is no law." True dat!