

## ***“Redeemed Captives”***

The Christians to whom the Apostle Paul writes are living under the constant threat of God’s Law. They are being told that you have to be circumcised, follow the OT dietary laws, give the tithe, etc. – in order to be a child of God. And that kind of teaching resonates with our fallen nature – that faith + obedience = salvation.

Rather than a prescription for freedom, such a teaching only enslaved them. God’s Law condemned them – their sin bound them in guilt and shame – they had no confidence to draw near to worship God – and they were afraid to stand before God as a sinner.

And that’s why the Apostle Paul clearly and boldly repudiates that false teaching. When it comes to the salvation of the sinner – it’s either on account of Christ alone through faith alone – or, it’s on the basis of your obedience to God’s Law, which means that Christ died for nothing. Anything added to the cross of Christ for our redemption, leaves us as slaves, doomed to destruction.

“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.”

Apart from Christ, we were held in “protective custody” by God’s Law, so to speak. The Lord knows our sinful desires and how we would live if there were no fences, curbs, or “no trespassing” signs. Just look at what we do with the freedoms we have – we turn them into permission to “do whatever I please.”

And so He places us in protective custody under His Law – to keep us from hurting ourselves and others. We’re tempted to defy authority – and the Law threatens us with fines and punishment. We’re tempted to harm, commit adultery, steal, lie, cheat and gossip – and the Law says “thou shall not” – to curb our sin and the harm it produces.

But “protective custody” is still custody, a form of imprisonment – and no one likes a custodian. The little child wants to “do it myself.” The teenager can’t wait to be out from under their parent’s rules – and prisoners rarely love their prison and their guards. And we do not love God under the Law – we fear Him, His punishments, and judgment.

We either exhaust ourselves trying to please Him – or we shake our fists at Him for all of His rules. But we will not love Him, because under the Law – He is our jail keeper – restricting our freedom, and keeping us from doing what we want to do.

Paul says that the Law is like a schoolmaster, a tutor – teaching us, preparing us, softening up the hard-packed soil of our hearts, frustrating our attempts to rule our own lives – so that we do not look to ourselves for our salvation and our standing with God.

When you think of God's Law – don't think of your sweet 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade teacher – think instead of a drill sergeant. Think you're doing pretty good? "Not good enough" says the Law. Do you see yourself as a fine Christian man or woman? "Not even close" the Law says. "You're not perfect, and pretty good isn't going to cut it." Think you can stand before the judgment seat of God with your resume of good works? The Law says, "you and your works can go straight to hell."

The Law is merciless – it kills every pretension of goodness and worthiness before God. The Law strips away our fig leaves and tells us what we don't want to hear – God's truth – which says that "there dwells in me no good thing."

But the Law is good. It takes us out of the picture when it comes to our salvation. It prepares us to hear the Gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ – setting before us His death and resurrection – His Baptism, Absolution and Supper. This is God at work, directing you to look to Jesus in faith – trusting His obedience to the Father's will – His dying and rising for you, for your salvation.

"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian," Paul writes. Where Christ is, the condemnation of the Law is silenced. "Christ is the end of the Law for all who believe," the Bible says. He is the fulfillment of the Law for all who trust that His obedience is their obedience, His death is their death, and His life is their life.

That is not to say that the Law is of no use for the Christian, that we can simply throw it away. It remains God's will for our lives – showing us what is "good" for us and for our neighbor. But where there is faith in Jesus, there is no condemnation.

That's the freedom Christ has won for us by dying on the cross in our place, and being raised to life again. Freedom to live before God as the sinner who is forgiven in the blood of Jesus Christ – free to live as a child of God. It sets us free to serve others in love. It is freedom from the sin and death that seeks to bind you eternally.

The redemption that Christ earned by shedding His blood on the cross as the payment for all sin – is poured out on you when He baptizes you. You are all sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus – “for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Christ is your clothing. Rather than being wrapped in the chains of sin and death – you are clothed with Christ, His forgiveness, His righteousness – so that, even now, you stand before God as one who is holy and righteous in His sight – all because you are clothed with Christ.

In the stead of Christ, I proclaim to you, you are loosed from all sin! In Christ, eternal life is yours, salvation is yours, life and freedom are yours. This is your inheritance from the Father, through His Son Jesus, by the working of the Holy Spirit.

This is why Jesus hung on a cross. This is why you are baptized – why you are fed with His Word, and with His very own Body and Blood – so that you may know and trust that the inheritance is yours.

You can add nothing to what Jesus did. You can only live in His freedom. And, as Jesus Himself says, if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.