

“The freedom you desire” Gal 3:23-29

“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. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

When was the last time when you tried to explain to someone what this Christian faith is about? Can you remember? How did it go? Was it easy? Difficult? Challenging? I really struggle with it.

And the problem is not that I don't know what the Bible teaches. The problem is that I find it challenging to translate what the Bible says into a message that would be somewhat understandable to our contemporaries, to those who don't have Christian background, to those who need to hear it the most.

Today's reading from Galatians gives us this wonderful opportunity to reflect on how Paul the apostle explains the dynamics of Christian faith. And this is what Paul does, He compares two different states for us as human beings.

One is the state of captivity, of imprisonment, which Paul calls being “under the Law”. And the other is the state of freedom, or being in Christ, being justified by faith in Christ, or we could say – living “under the Gospel”.

Let's unpack what it means **to live “under the Law”** and what it means **to live “under the Gospel”** so that we can, having such opportunity, bring this message to those who so desperately need to hear it.

So, **first, let's talk about this imprisonment**, about living under the Law. What does this mean? How does this function? Whether we realize and acknowledge this or not, we all are created to live in certain relationships.

There is this God intended design for our lives, it is literary built into us, or as Paul the apostle puts it, it is written on our hearts, and our Creator will evaluate whether we have lived up to it, or not. It is briefly summarized in the 10 Commandments.

However, since the Fall, since the time we broke our fellowship with the Triune God, we do not want to live according to our Creator's good and wise design, we want to do our own thing. We want to decide what is good and what is not.

And because in the heart of our hearts we are rebellious against our Creator, we experience this Law, this build in design, as oppression, as imprisonment, for it stands in the way of our desires. How exactly do we experience it?

For one, as the voice of our conscience, which constantly evaluates us, either accusing or excusing us. Second, through our parents, families, as they restrain, discipline and teach us what is right and what is wrong since we are teachable.

Then through societal institutions, legislation, law enforcement, court system, which constantly reminds us what will happen if we disobey the Law. Finally, we receive also positive enforcement through rewards. We are often praised and rewarded when we live good and moral life, so it is beneficial and pleasant for us.

This is how the Law, or living under the Law produces civilized society, or good people, as we call them. But let's not forget that behind all these numerous fences of the Law – conscience, parenting, law enforcement structures, rewards – there are hearts that are full of evil potential.

The existence of any civilized society is dependent of how well all of these fences function. We can observe it. How do children grow up if they don't receive good parenting? How do we tend to behave if society doesn't form in us habits of good behaviour and don't expect to live accordingly?

What are people capable of if law enforcement structures are not able to carry out their duties, if there is no fear of punishment? Everything goes... And when the institutions of marriage and family deteriorate, when morality of society is on decline, we can expect misery, a lot of it... and this is exactly what we are getting.

The more society deteriorates, the more we can see this innate rebellion manifested, the more actively society toils to get rid of what they perceive as oppressive – God's holy and eternal will for our lives.

Fallen humanity wants to break free from this prison, not realizing that those efforts are not only harmful for us, but also futile. There is no escape. Whatever you do, whatever intensely you reject the Law of God, that doesn't lead to freedom.

What do I mean? Our all-wise Creator has built into us a function, a reminder of our accountability before Him. We may try to reject God's Law, we may reject the true God, we may strive to live contrary to His good design, the Ten Commandment, but we cannot erase this built-in reminder. How does it work?

It works as this necessity, as this need, as this deep yearning to be good. "Am I good? Am I good enough?" We all long to hear the answer "yes, you are!". And when people abandon God's Law, they immediately create new laws to replace it.

For we need to be able to evaluate ourselves: "Am I good enough?" For example, today we see the wisdom of God for our relationships and sexuality thrown out of window. Everything is permissible, everything is encouraged, everything goes...

It may appear that we have broken free from the prison of God's Law. Have we? As soon as we have chosen to reject God's Law, we need to replace it with something else, some other rules and moral standards that will help us to feel virtuous, to feel

that we are good enough. Thus, today we can see tolerance and inclusivity elevated as ultimate virtues. Have you noticed with what religious fervour these contemporary zealots guard their new morality? Anyone how dares to question it is seen as an enemy of everything good. There is no freedom...

We can't escape this life under the Law, we are imprisoned, sometimes more under God's Law, sometimes more under self-designed foolish virtues. But we can't be free. The judgment goes on, whatever we do: "Are you good enough? Are you?"

And by the way, this is true also for us, Christians. Are we free? More often not, than yes. Are you good enough? How would we know? We may provide different answers? I am a good Christian because... I lead a decent life.

I don't drink [too much], I go to Church [when there is nothing else to do], I don't lie [most of time], I don't steal, I don't commit adultery [at least not explicitly], I give money to the mission, I read the Bible, I try to serve my neighbour...

Have you done enough of these? Have you been generous enough? Have you done enough to bring others to Christ? Is your faith strong enough? Have you lived good enough life? Are you good enough?

Do you ever ask those questions? Dear Brothers and Sisters, if we ask these questions, it means – we still live under the Law, we are captives, we are prisoners of the Law. We are not free, for then our evaluation, our goodness still depends on what we have done and how much or how well we have done it. Still captives...

But then Paul the apostle describes the freedom of being in Christ, of living under the Gospel. And what a stark contrast this is, what a wonderful life it is! Let's see what it means and how this life under the Gospel works.

"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian [under the Law], for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

What you have always longer for, yearned for, dream about, consciously or unconsciously, it has happened. The One who gave life to you, who wonderfully and fearfully formed you in your mother's womb, who created you to live in loving and trusting relationships with Him, who will evaluate, will judge you at the end...

... before whom you will have to stand and to give an account, He looks at you with Fatherly affection and this is His judgment on you: "You are good, you are very good in my eyes, I am well pleased with you, dear child!" He says it to you, to every one of His beloved children.

What happens? This sets you free. You are free from that unceasing need to evaluate yourselves, to prove that you are good, from this never-ending toiling to match the standards set by the Law or the others or ourselves.

The voice of God the Father declares: “You are good, my son, you are good, my daughter!” This makes you free, truly free. You don’t need to labour and sweat to achieve your own goodness; you don’t need to worry: “Have I done enough?”

But how could this be possible? Because when you are baptised, you are united with the Son of God Jesus Christ with the most durable bond, by God’s own Holy Spirit indwelling in you. As Jesus and the Father are one, now you are one with them. You have put on Christ. You are in Christ. Under the Gospel.

You have been included into God’s family through Jesus Christ. What is His, now is yours as well. He is the Son of God, now you are adopted as God’s sons and daughters. He is the most beautiful, the most magnificent being, and because you have put on Christ, this is how the Father sees you too.

Jesus is fervently loved by the Father, and so are you. Jesus is the heir of the Father’s Kingdom, and you are co-heirs with Him. To Jesus all authority is given and He will reign forever, and you will reign with Him. This is our new reality in Christ, given to us as a wonderful gift of God.

Besides, when the Spirit of God indwells in us, He does something amazing, something that we can’t do on our own. He gives us new hearts. He renews and restores our very being and we begin to love what our Creator God loves.

His Law does not oppress us anymore, because now it has become a delight for us, God’s wisdom for us, we want not only to learn it, we want to live it, to share it. Instead of holding us captives, God’s Law becomes a light on our paths. Now we want to strive to lead holy lives, joyfully.

But then, something else happens, as Paul explains. In Christ now we see everyone differently. This undeserved and costly freedom, helps us to see in different light also our fellow Christians. As our beloved brothers, as our beloved sisters.

Because this – a child of God, has become our core identity for all God’s people. You are baptized, adopted, welcomed, loved, cherished brothers and sisters in Christ, God’s own family. This is what we are as Christians.

And because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, there are no more differences that would separate us in this world. In this community we don’t see any more one another through the lens of – having more prestigious jobs or less, being richer or poorer, more educated or less, lived good and moral life, or having went through hell and back, indigenous or immigrant, and so on.

Of course, being in Christ doesn’t erase our callings in our families, workplaces, communities, it doesn’t take away our wonderful uniqueness, but now we see one another first and foremost through our core identity – you are a child of God.

And because we all have been set free by grace alone, by what Jesus has done for us, not by what we have done, there is nothing that we could boast about. So we

don't need to evaluate others and to compare ourselves with them, we don't need to envy those whom our God has blessed richly, and we don't need to look down to those, who have been through much.

We all have received this status of God's children as a gift, we all are now equal before God, equally loved, having put on Christ, being good in the Father's eyes, now we can freely rejoice in the grace that our Lord Jesus has given to others and give thanks that we too have been found worthy to receive it.

Christ's church is a community like no other. For living under the Gospel, we don't need to worry about our goodness, remember! We don't need to lift up ourselves. Now we can delight in focusing on others. By trying to bless as many as possible.

Trying to tell to as many as possible about this wonderful and joyful freedom, about what Christian life is truly about. Not because we have to, but because we love to. This is what being in Christ, or living under the Gospel means.

You are free, for you know how much loved, how cherished, how good you are to the One who made you and who will greet you with open arms, when this life is over. May our Lord Jesus Christ help us to live for Him as He lives for us.

Amen.