

CUSTODY OF THE LAW UNTIL FAITH COMES - CHRIST

Life Study of John

Message 22

THE NEED OF THE BLIND IN RELIGION—LIFE'S SIGHT AND LIFE'S SHEPHERDING (2)

II. LIFE'S SHEPHERDING FOR THE BELIEVERS OUTSIDE OF RELIGION

A. The Sheepfold, the Door, and the Pasture for the Sheep

We must now consider the significance of the sheepfold in this parable. It is not easy to define the sheepfold. Perhaps you know something about the Bible and especially about the gospels. Perhaps you were told from your youth about the stories from the gospels in Sunday School. Perhaps you have even graduated from seminary. Let me ask you this question: what do you realize about the sheepfold? What have you been taught about this matter? The key to unlocking the secret of this parable depends very much upon the meaning of the sheepfold.

1. The Sheepfold Signifying the Law, or Judaism, the Religion of the Law

The sheepfold, in its better usage, signifies the law of the Old Testament, but in its common and ordinary usage, it signifies Judaism, the religion of the law. Originally, before the first advent of Christ, God gave His law to the people of Israel. What was God's purpose in giving them the law? Did He expect them to keep it? No, that was not His purpose. Galatians 3:23-26 reveals God's purpose in giving the law. "But before faith came we were guarded under law, being shut up unto the faith which was about to be revealed. So the law has become our child-conductor unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But faith having come, we are no longer under a child-conductor; for you are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Before faith in Christ came, we were kept under the law. In other words, we were kept like sheep in a fold. The Greek word translated "kept" means confined. Before faith came—that is, before Christ came—the chosen people of God were confined under the law. They were "shut up" under the law. "Shut up" is a special word in Greek, meaning to be kept in custody or under special care in a ward. For instance, if the parents of a family pass away, the children might be put in the custody of their aunt or uncle. In other words, they are put under the care of someone else. This shows how the chosen people of God were placed under the custody of the law before faith in Christ came. The law kept God's people under custody "unto the faith," which is better translated as "for preparation to the faith." Galatians 3:24 says that "the law has become our child-conductor unto Christ." Actually, the translation of the King James Version for this verse is not adequate. In the Greek text it means that the law was our slave to bring us to our schoolmaster, who is Christ. In ancient times, the children of the rich, Jewish families were escorted to their schoolmaster by a trained slave. Likewise, the law served as a slave to bring us to Christ. Before we were brought to Christ, the schoolmaster, we were under the care of a slave, the law. God the Father used the law as a slave to take care of us and to bring us to Christ. Before Christ came, we were put under the hand of the law which was to be our custodian. The law was responsible for the care and protection of God's chosen people and eventually it

brought them to Christ. Once we have been brought to Christ, we are justified by faith. Since faith has come—that is, since Christ has come—we are no longer under the custody of the slave.

Now we understand what is the sheepfold. Before Christ came, God put His chosen people under the custody of the law. The law was the fold. For example, if you visit the ranch country, you will discover that the sheep do not stay in the fold most of the time. Most of the year the sheep stay in the pasture. The pasture is the permanent place for them to stay, but the sheepfold is merely a temporary place. Only when the pasture is not ready will the sheep be kept in the fold. The fold is used temporarily to keep and protect the sheep until the pasture is ready. This illustrates that Christ is the pasture, the permanent place for the Lord's children to stay. But before Christ came, God prepared the law as the sheepfold to keep and confine His chosen people temporarily.

3. The Door Signifying Christ for “Going in” and “Going out”

The Lord is the door to the sheepfold. Originally, the fold was the law, and the Lord was the door into the law. The Lord was not only the door into the law; He is also the door for people to come out of the law. Verse 9 says, “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out and shall find pasture.” Christ is the door, not only for God's elect to enter into the custody of the law, as did Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., in the Old Testament time before Christ came; but also for God's chosen people, such as Peter, James, John, and Paul, to come out of the fold of the law after Christ came. So the Lord indicates in verse 9 that He is the door not only for God's chosen people to go in, but also for God's chosen people to go out. Those who went into the law were people like Moses, the psalmists, and the prophets. Christ was the door for these people to go into the fold of the law. In other words, they went into the fold through Christ and for Christ. If we adopt this point of view when reading the writings of Moses, the psalmists, and the prophets, we will realize that they entered into the law of God through Christ. Christ was their entrance into the law.

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I. THE REASON

God's original intention was to do the work of the new creation on the fallen man of the old creation according to His promised grace. However, because fallen man did not know his own weakness and corruption and therefore did not realize his impotence and his need of God's grace, God temporarily changed the way of His work of the new creation on the fallen man of the old creation. That is, He gave the fallen man the law, which was established according to what He is. Thus, in His work of the new creation on the man of the old creation, He initiated another dispensation, the dispensation of law, which extended from Moses to the coming of Christ.

II. THE INTENTION

God's intention in setting up the dispensation of law according to His economy was to accomplish the following things through the law:

A. To Keep the Chosen People in Custody

From the time that God called Abraham to be the father of a new race in God's new creation to the completion of the grace that He promised to Abraham was a long period of approximately two thousand years. Four hundred thirty years after He gave Abraham the promise, the descendants of Abraham, the chosen people of God, became foolish and stubborn. Knowing neither themselves nor the grace of God, they were arrogant and stiff-necked. Therefore, on the one hand, God caused His chosen people to contact Him and to fellowship with Him through Christ, who was typified by the tabernacle and the offerings, that they might enjoy the riches in Christ as the grace that He promised to Abraham. On the other hand, He preserved them in the divine economy by giving them, through Moses, the holy and righteous law, which was established according to Himself, who is love and light.

1. That They Might Satisfy the Requirements of the Law through the Offerings, Which Typified Christ, and Thereby Be Guarded

God did not decree the law that His chosen people might keep it by themselves; rather, His intention was that they would satisfy the requirements of the law through the offerings, which typified Christ, and thereby be guarded. After He gave the law to the children of Israel, He began to deal with them according to the law through the offerings and the tabernacle. He did not intend for them to contact Him through the law; rather, He intended for them to contact Him according to the law through the offerings and the tabernacle. This is the fulfillment in type of the grace which God promised to Abraham. Suppose an Israelite committed a certain sin. According to the law, that one should be condemned, perhaps even put to death. However, the sinner could present a trespass offering, which was a type of Christ. The trespass offering was then offered on the altar by the priest. In this way the sinner could be forgiven. Therefore, he was not cut off by God; rather, because he had satisfied the righteous requirements of the law through union with the sacrifice, which typified Christ, he was blessed and was able to contact and fellowship with God, be at peace and be one with Him, and enjoy His riches. Thus, he was kept in the way of God's new creation.

2. That They Might Be Guarded as the Flock Is Guarded in the Sheepfold

Through Moses God gave the law as the custodian of His chosen people, to guard them as the sheepfold guards the flock. Before Christ came, God's chosen people were watched over and guarded under law, as the sheep are watched over and kept in custody in the temporary sheepfold (since the pasture is the permanent place for them to stay), so that the thieves may not come to steal, kill, or destroy them (John 10:10). Persons such as Moses, Samuel, David, and the prophets and saints in the Old Testament were all kept by the law in this way.

B. To Provide the Chosen People with a Child-conductor

The positive function of the God-given law was, on the one hand, to keep the chosen people of God in custody for fifteen hundred years, and, on the other hand, to provide them with a child-conductor.

1. To Lead Them to Christ

God caused the law to be the child-conductor of His chosen people in order to lead them to Christ (Gal. 3:24). In the original language, child-conductor means escort, guardian, custodian, one who cares for a child under age and conducts him to the schoolmaster. The law was used by God as a custodian, a guardian, a child-conductor, to watch over His chosen people before Christ came, and to escort and conduct them to Christ when He did come. For example, the prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna, having been taught by the law, looked and waited for Christ and were thus led to Christ (Luke 2:25-26 , 36-38); God's chosen people, and John the Baptist in particular, also looked and waited for Christ, proving that they all were under the instruction of the law (Luke 3:15 ; 7:19).

2. To Lead Them to Receive God's Forgiveness through the Offerings

God caused the law to be the child-conductor of His chosen people. Therefore, on the one hand, they were taught by the law to look and wait for Christ. On the other hand, when the devout ones among them did their best to keep the law, they realized their impotence, shortage, and failures, because they committed sins through their deeds (Psa. 51:2-4) and had the sin that they inherited by birth in their nature (Psa. 51:5); hence, they presented the offerings, which typify Christ, to receive God's forgiveness. By presenting the trespass offering (which signifies Christ bearing the sins of the people and receiving God's judgment on the cross on behalf of man, thus dealing with the sins in man's actions— 1 Pet. 2:24 ; 3:18), they received forgiveness for their sinful deeds (Lev. 5:1-19 ; Isa. 53:5-6 , 10-11). Moreover, by presenting the sin offering (which signifies Christ being made sin on behalf of man and causing sin to be condemned through His death on the cross, thus dealing with the sin in man's nature— 2 Cor. 5:21 ; Rom. 8:3), they received God's forgiveness for their nature (Lev. 4:1-35). Therefore, as the child-conductor of God's chosen people, the law also led them to obtain God's forgiveness through the offerings.

3. To Lead Them to Enjoy the Riches of God through the Tabernacle and the Temple

The law also led the devout ones in the Old Testament to come before God to contact Him and thereby enjoy all His riches through the tabernacle and the temple, both of which typify Christ (John 1:14 ; 2:21). This matter is revealed and portrayed especially in the Psalms. The psalmists were devout people who were instructed by the law and who were forgiven by God through the offerings. Because they loved God (Psa. 18:1), sought God (Psa. 42:1-2), loved the habitation of God's house and the place where His glory dwelt (Psa. 26:8 , Heb.), and longed to be with God and to behold His

beauty (Psa. 27:4), they were infused with the riches of God in God's house (Psa. 52:8). They were planted in the house of Jehovah, they flourished in the courts of God, they brought forth fruits, and they were full of sap and green (Psa. 92:13-14 , Heb.). Furthermore, they were abundantly satisfied with the fatness of His house, and they drank of the river of His pleasures, enjoying His riches (Psa. 36:8-9).