

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 12 – “Why did God give the Law?”
Galatians 3:19-29
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Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 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. (Galatians 3:19-29).

The first question Paul asks in the text today is similar to that of Romans 6:1. It is designed to anticipate the charge from the moralists of Paul's day that preaching grace alone for redemption encourages and even causes more sin. His thought is that if salvation is by faith in the promises of God, why did God give the burden of the Law to His people in the first place? It is a reasonable question. Many today want the answer to that question as well. Tragically there are those who still contend that men can only be saved through obedience and keeping the law.

So, let's dig in a bit. Since we know that God is all-wise and all-good, surely his purpose in giving the Law must also be wise and good. While we may not always understand God's ways, we can be sure his ways are right. In the apostle's explanation of the purpose of the law, Paul points to two great intentions that were in the heart of God. He relates them primarily to the people of the old order, but they still have something about what the law can do in our lives. In another great New Testament passage, Romans 7, Paul relates his own experience of the law fulfilling these very purposes in his personal life. Most who have read that great chapter have been able to identify with the author readily.

THERE ARE TWO PRINCIPLES...

First, God Gave the Law for the Revelation of Sin.

NOTE: In presenting the purpose of the Law, Paul presents some things about the very nature of the Law.

- He calls attention to the Law being inferior to the promise of God because it was mediated through the angels. The promise was given directly, but the Law was mediated.

- He also indicates that the Law was given on a temporary basis. Basically it was to have a role only until the coming of the Savior. This is still basically true in the experience of man. Once you become a Christian the ministry of the Law has been fulfilled in your life. The Law then turns you over to the care of the Holy Spirit.

That being the case, we must understand the first work of the Law is that of revelation of sin. The Law was given to identify and define sin. How could anyone know for sure what sin was had God not given the Law? God gave the Law, which is a reflection of his own holy character, so that man might know what sin really is. Since God gave the Law we know certain attitudes and actions are sinful. They are not sinful because the Law commands or prohibits them, but rather the Law prohibits them because they are sinful. God wanted man to know these things were offensive to him, so he gave the Law to man.

However, there is a deeper suggestion found in this statement. Paul writes, *because of transgressions*. This indicates that the purpose in the giving of the Law was more for the provocation of sin, rather than the limitation of sin. Behind this is a deep insight into the nature of man. **MAN IS A SINNER. Man is a sinner not only by action, but by nature.** There is deep within man an inclination to do that which is wrong. He has within himself a spirit of rebellion toward God. **God wanted man to know what was in man, so he gave to man his holy law.** When man received this holy law of God, the result was that it provoked him to sin. It became the occasion of the revelation of the sinful nature that was in him. **God did this for the good of man.** The confrontation of the law provokes man to reveal the true nature that lurks within.

Second, God Gave the Law for the Preparation for the Savior.

In the process of discussing the purpose of the Law, Paul raises the question of its relationship to the promise. Are the two antagonistic to one another? The answer is an obvious “no.” The law and the promise have different, but complimentary purposes. The law was never able to impart life to man. It could show man the way to life, but could never give man life. The law has always been merely preparation for the One who could give life. In presenting this aspect of the truth, Paul uses two different figures of speech. Both are important for us to examine.

1. First, the Law functions like a jailor in getting man ready for the Savior (vv. 22-23).

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. (Galatians 3:22-23 ESV).

The Old Testament, mainly the Law of Moses, when properly understood and applied indicates that man is a hopeless sinner. Since this is the condition of man, the law served like a jailor to keep man “imprisoned” until a Savior should come. The idea is that the law had man cut off from any hope of ever saving himself, and further put him in such a position that he could recognize that his only hope was the appearance of a Savior. The law strips a man of his pride and self-sufficiency. It painfully reminds him of his inability in the matter.

2. Second, the Law functions as a schoolmaster (vv. 24-25).

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. (Galatians 3:24-26 ESV).

This is a reference to a slave that was a member of a wealthy Roman family. The slave was in charge of the care of a child. He would have the total welfare of the child under his control. He would determine what the child would wear, when and where he would go to play, what he would eat, when he would sleep; every aspect of the child's life would be determined by this "guardian." He also was responsible for his education. The bringing of the child to maturity was his sole responsibility. The child would escape his authority only after coming to the age of responsibility, coming to adulthood. It was an anticipated and celebrated day.

The Law is like. God gave the Law for the purpose of watching over the welfare of his people, to bring them to Christ at last. One of the things the Law did was imposing a sense of guilt on man. It was such a burden, such an attitude of despair about everything he tried to do to satisfy God and rectify his situation before God, that when the Savior came, they would certainly welcome Him.

Tragically this did not happen with those who saw it as hope. They continued in futility to do their best to keep the law. Jesus had harsh words for these people:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. (Matthew 23:1-10 ESV).

Where have you placed your hope?