

**LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works**

**Part twelve - Teaching #2153**

**Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 - 10 a.m.**

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**THE PURSUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT CAN LEAD TO PERDITION**

**Galatians 3:19-25 - “Why, then, was the law given? It was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come. The law was put into effect through angels by means of a mediator. [20] Now a mediator is not just for one person alone, but God is one. [21] Is the law therefore contrary to God’s promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law. [22] But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin’s power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. [23] Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. [24] The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. [25] But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian....”**

In many ways this week’s teaching is a summary of everything we’ve been studying in Galatians thus far, especially regarding the Old Testament law and the Christian’s relationship to it. Paul has said some very strong words to these Jewish false teachers who were trying to tell the Christians in Galatia that they needed to return to keeping the laws of ethnic Judaism regarding circumcision and dietary regulations and separation from the Gentiles.

Paul has been very blunt that to return to the keeping of the law as a means of earning righteousness before God was to nullify the power of the cross in their lives - **Galatians 2:21 - "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing."** - IPAD TEXT

So, we know Paul didn't endorse the use of the law as a means of salvation. The question that remains is, "***What is the purpose of the law? What is it for?***"

These questions are important because, to receive the maximum benefit from anything in this world, you have to know why it's there. The red light at the intersection is a wonderful invention. It saves countless lives everyday. But it only works properly if people ***understand*** what it's there for. If I drive my car, see a red light glowing in the dark in the intersection in front of me, but don't know what that red light ***means*** - what it's there ***for*** - then I will probably plough into some oncoming car in that intersection. The light is working fine. There is nothing wrong with the traffic signal. But, in addition to the signal working properly, I have to understand the ***purpose*** of it if it is to benefit me and save lives.

Now, you might think that is a very simple, and perhaps silly, illustration. But the Bible actually teaches that the law of God didn't function properly for many people because they didn't understand its ***purpose***:

IPAD TEXT - **Romans 9:31-32** - “But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, *has not achieved the righteousness of the law.* [32] Why is that? Because they *did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.*”

Paul says the reason Israel stumbled was *not* because they didn't pursue the law, but because they pursued it the *wrong way*. They didn't know the *purpose* of the law. They didn't understand what the law was *for*.

Then, in **Romans 10:3**, Paul goes even further on the very same subject and tells us *why* it's so important that the law be used for its proper purpose - **"Since they are ignorant of the righteousness of God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness."** - IPAD TEXT

So, if we miss the purpose of the law, and try to use it as a tool for establishing our own righteousness before God, we will actually miss out on the very righteousness God requires. In other words, if the law is used incorrectly, it can actually *pave the road to perdition* rather than the *way of salvation*. That's how important this whole issue is.

All of this is a long way of saying that Paul's question at the beginning of **verse 19** is really a question of fundamental importance - **"Why the Law, then?...."** This is a question every Christian needs to be able to answer. These are very densely packed verses. They don't yield their fruit to a casual, light glance. Let me try to bring some basic truths to light for our use:

- 1) **THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH OF THIS PASSAGE IS THAT THE LAW WAS ADDED TO THE PROMISE (430 YEARS LATER) TO ACCOMPLISH A DIFFERENT, YET COMPLEMENTARY PURPOSE TO THE PROMISE**

Paul hits this truth over and over again for emphasis. Notice all the *time* references in this passage:

***"It was added...."(19), "....until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come...." (19), "....we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed."*(23).**

Please notice the repetition of those **"until"** words. Nothing else Paul says about the law will make sense until this central, key concept is nailed down. The law was something **added**, something that was **brought along side** (that is literally what the word **"added"** means here) **after** the promise was already given.

And, equally important, the law had a specific function only *until* Christ came. In other words, in reference to its role in salvation, the law had both an *originating* point (Sinai and Moses) and a *terminating* point (Jesus Christ). Its central purpose was not ongoing. It was always designed to point to something else - someone else - Jesus Christ.

2) **THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF THE LAW, AS FAR AS SALVATION IS CONCERNED, WAS TO MAKE HUMAN SIN DEFINABLE AND OFFICIAL**

Paul says this several times in these verses:

***“It was added for the sake of transgressions” (19).*** Then again, ***“But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin’s power”....(22).***

So the law (contained in the Old Testament Scriptures) turns our wrong deeds into ***“transgressions”(19)***. This is the most ***legal and official*** term used to describe sin in the Bible. There was once a time when it wasn’t a transgression to smoke a cigarette in Toronto’s restaurants. It was always ***unhealthy***. It was always ***unwise***. But then a ***law*** came into being that made it ***illegal***. Once there was a law, smoking in a Toronto restaurant became a ***transgression*** against that law.

Paul makes this point about the law even more strongly in the epistle to the Romans:

**IPAD TEXTS - Romans 4:15 - "...because the law produces wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression."**

**Romans 5:20 - "The law came along to multiply the trespass...."**

**IPAD TEXT - Romans 7:12-13 - "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. [13] Therefore, did what is good become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin, in order to be recognized as sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that through the commandment, sin might become sinful beyond measure."**

These are very important words. We need to put them all into their proper place when we're thinking about the purpose of the law. What comes to light is that the law of God in the Old Testament wasn't **contrary** to the promise of God of a righteousness He would provide through faith through the coming Seed - Christ. The law was an **addition**, added due to human sin, to **prepare** us to embrace Christ and receive His love and grace.

In other words, the law must never be seen as a road going in the opposite direction of the way of salvation through Christ. Rather, like a small service road that runs along the 401 and then brings all its traffic back onto the freeway, the law, when properly understood, brings all the traffic back on to the main highway to Christ. It only **looks** like a different road. But it leads in the same **destination**.

3) **THE LAW WAS NEVER DESIGNED TO CREATE SPIRITUAL LIFE.**  
**ONLY THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN BRING THE RENEWING**  
**PRESENCE OF GOD IN A DIRECT SENSE INTO THE HUMAN**  
**SOUL**

This beautiful truth is expressed in some of the more difficult verses in the New Testament:

**IPAD TEXT - Galatians 3:20-21 - “Now a mediator is not just for one person alone, but God is one. [21] Is the law therefore contrary to God’s promises? Absolutely not! For *if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law.*”**

Paul strikes a contrast in these verses. The tricky part is **verse 20**. The law was a **mediated deal** between God and man, and it was **mediated** by Moses. In order for the deal to work, **both sides** had to do their part. This is always the problem with mere religion. It depends on more than just the faithfulness of God. And people always fail in their end of the deal.

But the promise, given through Abraham and fulfilled through Jesus Christ, was an **unmediated** deal. It hinged only on the faithfulness of God. In fact, the promise was **designed** for sinners - people who **weren't** faithful to God:

**IPAD TEXT - Romans 5:6 & 8 - "For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly....[8] But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

In verse 21 of our Galatians text Paul points out a truth that he was slow in learning himself. This is why it was so precious to him:

**IPAD TEXT - Galatians 3:21 - "Is the law therefore contrary to God's promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law."**



The law can't impart life! That's the problem in a nutshell. There was a time when Paul *thought* the law could produce righteousness. He worked very hard at keeping the law. We talked about this in earlier teachings in this series:

**IPAD TEXT - Philippians 3:4-6 - "...although I have reasons for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; [6] regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless."**

Paul said when it came to keeping the law, he was "*blameless*"(6). Now here's the important question. Is it possible to keep the law? Was Paul telling the truth?

Before we answer that question, we should consider another statement from Paul on the very same subject:

**IPAD TEXT - Romans 7:7-9 - “What should we say then? Is the law sin? Absolutely not! But I would not have known sin if it were not for the law. For example, I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, Do not covet. [8] And sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind. For apart from the law sin is dead. [9] Once I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life again.”**

These are great words of discovery for Paul. They describe that marvelous moment when the lights of truth went on in his heart. Of course, we all want to say, **“Well, which is it Paul? Did you keep the law or didn’t you?”**

And what Paul would say to all of us is, **“Yes and no.”** He found that **outwardly** he could keep the law. He could keep the regulations. He could go to the temple. He could keep the fasts. **Outwardly** he could, by sheer effort and great discipline, keep the law.

But there was another dimension of the law that Paul discovered he had no control over at all. He couldn’t keep the law **inwardly**. That’s why, in Romans 7, he zeros in on the law about **covetousness**. He found that, for all his law keeping, he was powerless to change his own heart.

That's what Paul means when he says in **Galatians 3:21** - ***"....if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law."***

This is the important point about the nature of the law. ***Even when outwardly kept*** - the way Paul said he kept it - the law is powerless to produce life. It can only ***restrain***. It can never ***transform***. The law can keep you from adultery and theft. But it can never cause you to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Consider a simple illustration from marriage. I can fulfill the ***laws*** regarding marriage in every way. I am faithful to my wife. I have a marriage licence. I am not a polygamist. But none of those things is the same as ***loving*** my wife. Keeping those laws can't ***produce*** love. They can ***safeguard*** a genuine love when it exists. But they can never ***create*** love.

Laws may help regulate bad behavior, but laws can't impart life. Only the Spirit of God can impart life. This was Paul's whole point back in **Galatians 3:2-3** - ***"I only want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard? [3] Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now finishing by the flesh?"***- IPAD TEXT

4) THE ROAD OF PROMISE FROM ABRAHAM TO CHRIST RUNS, NOT AROUND THE LAW, BUT THROUGH THE PATHWAY OF THE LAW TOWARD PROMISE AND GRACE IN CHRIST JESUS

**IPAD TEXT - Galatians 3:22-25 - “But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin’s power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. [23] Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. [24] The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. [25] But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian....”**

Very briefly, the law, says Paul, has this function of keeping us “*imprisoned*”(23), until we come to Christ. It does this by revealing *two different kinds of sin. First*, the law, as we have said, puts our failures into *legal, accountable terms*. Sin is seen for what it truly is in God’s eyes - *transgression*.

*Second*, the law, even when outwardly kept, brings to light the proud tendency fallen people have to *earn their standing before God by their own merit*. In other words, the law brings to light our desire to have, in Paul’s words in Philippians 3, “*a righteousness of our own*.” The problem is, says Paul, God has already decreed He will never accept our own righteousness.

The law keeps us fenced in with these sins in order that we might be made ready for Christ. Both **rebellion** and **self-righteousness** need to be exposed and brought to the Cross. The law is the custody agent that keeps us from **false freedom outside of Christ**.

Years ago, **G. G. Findlay** wrote these masterful words on the role of the law in bringing us to Christ. I close with them because they summarize everything I've been trying to say in this teaching:

***“The law was all the while standing guard over its subjects, watching and checking every attempt to escape, but intending to hand them over in due time to the charge of faith. The law posts its ordinances, like so many sentinels, round the prisoner’s cell. The cordon is complete. He tries again and again to break out; the iron circle will not yield. The deliverance will yet be his. The day of faith approaches. It dawned long ago in Abraham’s promise. Even now its light shines into his dungeon, and he hears the word of Jesus, “Thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace.” Law, the stern jailor, has after all been a good friend, if it has reserved him for this. It prevents the sinner escaping to a futile and illusive freedom.”***

May the Holy Spirit give us all deep understanding of this precious truth!