

Galatians 10 – The Purpose of the Law

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We are in a sermon series on the book of Galatians called Freedom Through Christ. Paul confronted the Galatians for believing that Christ and the cross were not enough for salvation, but they also had to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. They believed that you start by faith but you finish by works.

But the Bible teaches that salvation begins and is brought to completion by grace through faith. So Paul now teaches the Galatians and us that salvation is by faith alone by quoting Old Testament Scriptures and using the example of Abraham.

Last week we taught on six Old Testament Scriptures that Paul used to prove his point. He uses another verse to make his point in Galatians 3:15-16

Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

Paul quotes Genesis 22:18 where God told Abraham:

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

Then Paul points out that that the singular for seed is used, not the plural. When God said, "in your seed the nations would be blessed," He was not talking about all of the descendants of Abraham. He was talking about one: Jesus!

He is confirming the truths of the previous verses of Galatians which said that the blessing is not given because someone is a genetic descendant of Abraham. The blessing is given to those who are in Christ. **In Christ we receive the promises and blessing of Abraham. In Christ all the nations of the world are blessed.**

Galatians 3:17-18 says:

17 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. 18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

It is important to understand what an inheritance is based on. It is not based on works, but on the promise of the giver. **An inheritance is given, not earned!**

So – the awesome point made here is that just like salvation is given not earned, our inheritance in Christ is given, not earned by keeping the law.

So – if we are not saved by keeping the law, not sanctified by keeping the law, don't receive our spiritual inheritance by keeping the law, why did God give the law? I'm preaching on that today in a sermon entitled **The Purpose of the Law.**

We're going to explore ten facts about the law found in Galatians 3:19-26.

19 What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

1 – The law was added.

This means there was a time it did not exist. But why was it added?

2 – The law was added because of transgressions.

The New Testament Greek word for transgression means “to go beyond a boundary, to trespass.” But, how do we know the boundaries? How do we know right from wrong? How do we know what transgression is? We know because the law tells us. Romans 4:15 says:

Where there is no law there is no transgression.

Romans 5:13 says:

Before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.

Jesus said in John 15:22

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.

The point is that the law shows us what sin is. Paul said in Romans 7:7

I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

The law reveals transgression to us by showing us the boundaries. It's like a “no trespassing” sign. If there's no sign, there's no trespass. But when a “no trespassing” sign goes up, you know you are wrong if you pass that boundary. So, **we have no excuses because God's word shows us God's boundaries.**

Not only does the law show us what sin is – it also show us how sinful sin is! Romans 7:13 says:

By means of the commandment sin is shown to be utterly sinful.

Other translations say: even more terribly sinful, exceedingly sinful or sinful beyond measure.

We tend to minimize our sin by saying things like, “It’s no big deal, it didn’t hurt anybody, I don’t need to stop this.” But **one of the purposes of the law is to show us the sinfulness of our sin.**

Our kids used to minimize what they did wrong when they were teenagers. When they got into trouble for breaking the law of Joe and Deborah, they would say things like, “What I did was no big deal. At least I didn’t rob a bank or kill someone.”

And I would say, “Thanks so much for not robbing a bank or killing anyone today. I really appreciate that. But that’s not the point. The point is that you still broke the law of Joe and Deborah.” And then we would administer appropriate discipline to them.

Many Christians try to justify their sin by seeing it as no big deal. In their eyes, they are not committing big sins or maybe no sin at all.

Here’s an important truth: when we minimize our sin, we minimize Jesus. If you see your sin as a little sin – you will see Jesus as a little Savior! After all, if your sin is not that big of a deal, then Jesus dying for your sin is not that big of a deal. **But if you see your sin as great sin – you will see Jesus as a great Savior!**

So we need to look at the law to see the sinfulness of our sin, but we also need to look at the cross – to see the greatness of our Savior. The price that He paid for our sin on the cross shows us the immeasurable sinfulness of our sin and the immeasurable greatness of our Savior!

3 – The law was added until the Seed came.

Seed means offspring or children. The law was added until God’s Son Jesus came to earth. That shows the temporary nature of the law. This does not mean that the Law of Moses was revoked when Jesus came. After all, Jesus said in Matthew 5:17

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Jesus said He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. Some people believe that this means that since the law was not abolished, we are still obligated to obey it in order to be saved. But they don’t understand the purpose of the Law in the New Covenant.

Jesus did not abolish the law but He fulfilled the purpose of the law by: Obeying it perfectly so He could be the perfect sacrifice

Fulfilling the prophecies about the Messiah

Teaching it correctly and fully

Fulfill means to complete. To fill full. Jesus said our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees because their righteousness was only an outward obedience to the law. The Old Testament law just dealt with outward behaviors: don't kill, don't lie, don't steal, don't commit adultery. But **Jesus came to deal with the heart.** He was saying, "You can keep the law outwardly and still sin in your heart. You can do right things with a wrong motive." Jesus went beyond outward obedience to deal with the heart. In doing this, He filled the law fuller than it previously was.

4- The law requires a mediator.

Galatians 3:19-20 says:

19 The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. 20 A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.

When God gave the law, Moses was the mediator between God and the people. Moses received the law from God through angels then he gave the law to the people. But when God gave His promise to Abraham, He did not use a mediator.

That's because God takes the whole responsibility to fulfill His promise! It was God who made promises to Abraham, not Abraham who made promises to God. There were no conditions attached; the promise came from the generous heart of God.

This is good news for us because whereas the law was a two-party agreement brought by mediators, the promise of salvation in Jesus is received by faith. **We don't need a mediator between us and Jesus. We don't need Mary or saints or angels to go to Him on our behalf!** We approach God by a new and living way revealed in Hebrews 10:19-22

19 And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By His death, Jesus opened a new and living way through the veil into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting Him.

I remember when I would get in trouble as a kid and my Mom would say to me, "Boy, you just wait until your father gets home." At those times I was not excited for my dad to come home from work. I would be like Adam and Eve hiding from God in the garden! But just like God found them, my dad would find me. And I would pay the price for my wrongdoing.

Some of us carry that fearful attitude over to our relationship with God. We hear a voice in our heads saying, "Just wait until Father God finds out about this. You're in BIG trouble." And that attitude causes us to run and hide from God.

But we don't have to hide from God. We don't have to fear the presence of God. That's the old way. There's a new and living way.

That way is to approach God with boldness. How do we do that? By the blood of Jesus.

Stop thinking you have to sneak in or slink in to God's presence. Stop thinking you have to get cleaned up or do more good works. Get your eyes off yourself and onto the spotless Lamb of God whose sacrifice for your sins gives you an open door to heaven!! Galatians 3:21 says:

Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

The law does not oppose God's promise. But this verse shows two weaknesses of the law.

5- The law cannot give life to those who obey it.

The first weakness of the law is that it is a list of rules and regulations that have no life in them nor do they impart the power to obey them. **The Law of Moses brings no life; it simply states the command, tells us to keep it and tells us the consequences if we break the command.**

If the law could have given life, then it could have brought righteousness. That's why a new covenant was needed! Hebrews 8:7-13 says:

If there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people... because they did not remain faithful to My covenant.

So God made a new covenant based on faith in Christ and His cross. And God said that in the new covenant:

I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord, 'because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

By calling this covenant "new," He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

In this passage we see that God found fault with the Old Covenant. Why? Because man did not have the power to keep it. **The law was given to reveal our sin and lead us to Christ! Not only does the law not have power to give life, but...**

6 - The law cannot give righteousness.

Romans 3:20 says:

No one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Here we see again that the purpose of the law was not to impart righteousness, but to show us our unrighteousness and our absolute inability to keep the law in our own strength. In fact, rather than giving us righteousness through the law...

7 - The law holds us prisoners to sin.

Galatians 3:22 says:

The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

Before the arrival of Christ on earth, the law kept everyone in prison. The law was the jailer and the bars were sin that kept people confined. Being a sinner is a universal trait of mankind. Romans 3:23 says:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

No one is exempt from this. And as in the time before Christ, anyone trying to be saved by the works of the law today are likewise held prisoners to sin. And the law cannot help us out of that prison— only Jesus can set us free!

8- The law is a jailor

Galatians 3:23 says:

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.

Some people say, “I’m not a prisoner to sin.” Well, there is a simple way to prove it: stop sinning. But everyone who is honest with themselves knows that they cannot be perfectly sinless. The bars of our sin are too strong; we can’t saw through them ourselves. There is no chance of breaking ourselves out of this prison.

It would be like you were in jail for habitually driving under the influence. You keep getting arrested and put in jail for longer times and you keep trying harder to break your addiction and change. So you go the warden and say, “I really want to change, can you help me?” And the warden says, “Sure, drinking and driving are against the law, so stop doing it.” And you say, “I keep trying to stop. Do you have anything that has the power to change my life?” And the warden says, “Sure, drinking and driving are against the law, so stop doing it.” And you sadly realize that the law has no power to change you – it can only point out your sin and your powerlessness. That’s why we all need a Savior!

9 – The purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ.

That's why Galatians 3:24-25 says:

The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Once we come to a place of realizing that the purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ - once we are justified by placing our faith in Christ – then when are no longer imprisoned by the law. And our identity changes from sinner to child of God!

10 – The law divides us, but Christ unites us!

I taught on these verses last week, but Galatians 3:26-29 says:

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Remember - The problem that Paul addressed to the Galatian Christians was not only that they were putting the law before faith – but also they were causing ethnic division between Jews and Gentiles.

In those days, some Jewish Rabbis quoted a morning prayer that was popular among many Jews of that day. In that that prayer the Jewish man would thank God that he was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. Paul takes each of these categories and shows them to be equal in Christ.

Sadly, some Christians still draw lines today. Some draw lines between denominations, some draw lines between ethnicities, some draw lines between nations, some draw lines between political parties, and some draw lines between economic classes.

For example, if you feel you have more common ground with an unbeliever who shares your race or your political party than with a genuine Christian from another race or political party, you have drawn a line that Jesus died on the cross to erase. We are all one in Christ! Nothing else can make us one. **Unity is not a result of human achievement, it's a result of being in Christ.** This is amazing!

Some Galatians wanted Paul to exclude the Christians from a Gentile background because they hadn't come under the Law of Moses. Paul includes them by saying "You are all one in Christ Jesus."

Others may have wanted Paul to exclude some of the Christians from a Jewish background, because their theology was wrong on this point and Paul needed to correct them. Paul includes them by saying “You are all one in Christ Jesus.”

And today, some people want to exclude those who voted differently than they did, but Paul says, “You are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Some people want to exclude those who are a different ethnicity, but Paul says, “You are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Thank God that we are one in Christ, we have Abraham as our father in the faith, and we are all heirs of the same promise, the same inheritance, the same blessings on earth and the same eternity in heaven!

Can you give God some thanks for this?