

The law drives us to Christ

Galatians 3:19-22

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Several years ago I was part of an effort to start a new church in south Florida, in the United States. One Sunday morning we met in the home of one of our families for Bible study. One couple brought a woman who was in her 60s. She listened politely but at the end, after having heard the gospel, she said, "But I am not lost." Spiritually speaking that is a difficult place to be. One does not cry out for a Savior if they do not realize that they are lost. One does not cry out for help when they do not see danger. One does not ask for forgiveness if they believe they have no sin. So what has God given us to help us see our lostness? The law. We read about this in Galatians 3:19-22:

"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."

In the book of Galatians we see a heated debate about how a person can be made right with God. Some false teachers had infiltrated the churches that the apostle Paul and his co-laborers had started. They taught that for one to be right with God he or she must first follow all of God's laws that had been given to the Jews. Paul responded that none of us are able to obey all of God's laws. The only way to be right with God is to believe in Him. By faith we will then be forgiven and reconciled to God.

One can almost hear the response from the false teachers to Paul: “Okay. So if salvation is through faith and we can’t be good enough to obey all his laws on our own, then why did God give us His law at all?”

It was added because of our sinfulness. Paul used the word “added” because the promise of faith had already been put in place. The method of salvation was already given to us, as we see God’s promise to Abraham and his offspring in Genesis 15. This “offspring” is Christ, who would come 2,000 years later. Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness. In the same way that we would believe in Christ and be counted as righteous.

430 years later, God made a covenant with Moses and the people of Israel that was based on the law. But why did it need to be added? It says, “The Law was added because of transgressions.” Transgression has the idea of one overstepping his bounds into forbidden territory.

The law was to show us our sin, our personal guilt and our desperate need for a Savior. Let me explain.

In the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we see creation and it was good. God and mankind lived in perfect harmony. In Genesis chapter 3, Adam and Eve sinned against God and immediately shame, guilt, fear, blame and punishment rushed into our world. From then on every person who has been born has been tainted by the sinful nature.

Psalm 51:5 states that: *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”* Ephesians 2:3 says that we are all *“by nature children of wrath.”* Proverbs 22:15 says, *“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.”* Genesis 8:21 declares, *“. . . the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”*

All of us are naturally drawn to selfishness and sin. Watch a young child. Do they naturally share or take for themselves? Do they naturally submit or rebel? Are their motives pure or do they naturally manipulate? It is the same for us. What do we do naturally? Share or hoard? Control or submit? Become angry or choose peace? Lie or tell the truth? Think pure thoughts or lust? We are natural sinners. That’s why only the Holy Spirit can grant us a new nature, a “new natural” that results in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

This sinful, “old” nature is deep within every one of us, but most of us are only faintly aware of our sinful condition. Romans 2 tells us that even people who have never heard the laws of God are guilty of sin, because the laws of God are written on our hearts. Even without having heard the laws of God, our consciences bear witness and even accuse us (Romans 2:14-16):

“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

Some will not agree with this idea of “law of God written on our hearts”, but let’s take a moment to think about it. Did you see the story of the London jogger, this week, who pushed a woman down into the street, in front of a bus? Thankfully the bus driver was able to swerve at the last moment to avoid

hitting her. Many people were outraged? Why? Because we, as humans, have a general sense of right and wrong, even if one has never heard God's Word, "the law is written on our hearts."

Imagine it has been a long day. You are stopping by *Mercadona* to pick up something to prepare for dinner. The line is long. It is almost your turn and someone with a full cart of groceries comes and cuts in front of you to go next. How do you feel? Why? "The law is written on our hearts." We recognize the difference between right and wrong and expect people to honor it. We hear about slavery in Pakistan or human trafficking of young girls who are kidnapped and taken from their families, and we feel a great sense of injustice. Why? Why don't we naturally justify it by explaining the "Survival of the fittest?" Why does it bother us? "The law is written on our hearts."

This law on our hearts, this conscience that accuses us, makes us aware of our guilt of sin in a general sense, but we still need help. We still are not able to live holy lives on our own. We still are not forgiven and are not motivated to get right with God just because our conscience bothers us. We do not know who our sin is against. We do not realize how bad our sin is. We do not know that there is punishment that we will receive. Because of this, God gave His law, in specific, written form.

Through the law, we learn that we have sinned gravely against a holy God. It is personal. Yes, it may be against another person, but ultimately all sin is first and foremost against God. In Genesis 39:9 we read about Joseph, being tempted by his master's wife to commit adultery. As he fought this temptation, he said, *"My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"*

King David also shows us this truth. He was guilty of adultery and murder. Finally he repents of His sin and cries out to God, *"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight"* (Psalm 51:4).

It would be similar to a young brother and a young sister who are fighting. The mother comes in and tells them to stop fighting and treat each other with love. The mother then leaves the room. The brother then begins fighting with his sister again. The mother returns to the room upset and ready to discipline the brother. Why? Yes, the brother sinned against his sister, but more importantly he sinned against his mother who is in authority over him.

Or it could be between a father and a daughter. The daughter is getting a little older and is at times treating the mother in a disrespectful manner. The father pulls the daughter aside and lovingly but firmly looks her straight in the eye. The conversation goes something like this, "You may talk to your mother like that, but your mother is my wife. Every time you disrespect my wife you will have a problem with me." "Understood?" "Sí, Papá." "Good. Give me a hug."

That is one important role of God's giving us the law. It clearly shows us our sin, who it is against, and the judgment that our sin brings upon us. Our sin separates us from God, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Romans 5:20 also tells us that the, *"Law came in to increase the trespass,"* and it goes on to say, *"But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."* Because of our sinful nature, when we are presented

with the laws of God we will rebel. Our sinfulness will then become more evident. This will hopefully drive us back to God where our sin can be covered by His grace.

Without the law of God our sins would have continued somewhat hidden. We would not have realized our guilt against God. We would not have known about our condemnation and that we are destined for hell. We would not have been aware of our total inability to save ourselves. We would not have been convicted of sin and driven to Christ for salvation. This all would only have become clear at the end of our lives, when we would stand before God for judgment. And it would be too late. God's law is a gift of grace in itself. Without it we would never have turned to Christ for salvation. That is why God's law is key as we seek to point people towards Jesus Christ. It is only through His Law that a person will be convinced of their sin and turn to Christ for Salvation.

The law exposes sin but cannot deliver us from it. In a mirror you can see your disheveled image but cannot fix it. With a plumb line one can see the incorrect lean of a wall, but the plumb line cannot straighten it. A flashlight can help you find the fuse box when the lights have gone out, but it cannot turn the lights of the house back on for you. God's law is the same. It reveals to us the sinfulness of our heart, but it has no ability to free us from our sin. It shows us our sin. It shows us that we cannot fix it ourselves. It drives us towards Christ as our only source of salvation. God's Law is his tool to drive a sinful people back to Himself before it is too late.

“. . . until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.”

The law plays its role of exposing sin and driving people towards Christ. Once “the offspring,” Christ, comes into one's life the law is no longer necessary. 1 Corinthians 1:9 tells us, *“the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners.”* Yes, we still benefit from reading God's law from the Bible, but it will never be able to save us or empower us to live a holy life. We are saved by grace through faith. We are convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit. We are empowered to live in holiness because of the love that has been put in our hearts.

“. . . and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.”

Paul is highlighting the fact that the law, in its inferiority, was passed from God, through angels, to Moses (Deut. 5:4-5) and then to the people.

In Deuteronomy 33, the Lord is said to have come from Sinai accompanied by ten thousand angels who passed the law onto Moses. We see this also referenced in Psalm 68:17, Acts 7:53 and Hebrews 2:2. Moses was the mediator.

“The LORD spoke to you (ISRAEL) face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the LORD and you (ISRAEL) at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. (Deuteronomy 5:4-5)

Paul was once again showing the superiority of the Promise over the law. The law was given from God, to the angels, to Moses, and then to the Israelites, who had been instructed to stand far off. That is not how God shares His greatest gift. Look at Abraham. God talks with Him and calls him "friend." God draws near to Abraham and gives him His promise. Abraham believes and it is counted to him as righteousness. You see this same sense of Abba father in Proverbs 23:26, *"My son, my daughter, give me your heart."*

The need of an intermediary implies a two-sided agreement and that's what it was. The covenant of the law required that both parties, God and the children of Israel, honor their part of the covenant. God gave the law and promised blessings and His presence, if the children of Israel obeyed Him. If not, God would remove His hand of blessing and would bring judgment.

This covenant of the law is completely different than the promise that was given to Abraham. The promise to Abraham was a one-sided, unconditional promise of what God would do for Abraham, through faith. It did not depend on the works of man at all. God's promise to Abraham was greatly superior to the covenant of the law, because it depended on nothing but the faithfulness of God. The covenant of the law that was given through Moses depended on the faithfulness of Israel, and they were not able to continue in obedience. Because of this they brought judgment upon themselves. It is interesting to note that at the cross God plays the role of both parties of the covenant of the law. He fulfills His part of the covenant by bringing judgment on the sin of the world, while at the same time giving His Son to pay the penalty for these sins.

The promise of grace through faith that Abraham received is still available to us. The reason that it is available is because even though we have broken the covenant of the law, Jesus has paid for our sins. God made the promise to Abraham and all who would believe based on the fact that Jesus Christ would lay down His life for sinners 2,000 years later. The promise of the past was made possible because of the sacrifice that would come later through Christ.

"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."

The Promise and the law do not contradict. They do not conflict with each other. The law reveals our sin and need for a Savior, and faith saves us and empowers us to live rightly. 2 Cor. 3:6b: *"For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."* The promise continues in place ever since it was made to Abraham. The law was put in place to reveal our sin, show us our powerlessness to be holy on our own, and to drive us to salvation found in Christ through faith. Through the wisdom of God, faith and law continue to work together to bring people to salvation in Christ.

"But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

The law was given to expose and increase the futility of man, so that out of our slavery to sin we would be driven to salvation in Christ. We all are slaves to sin. As mankind is confronted with the law of God and the conviction of sin from the Holy Spirit, he is brought to his knees, where, like the prodigal son, he

finally “comes to his senses” and turns towards home as his only hope. Broken, guilty, humbled and . . . saved by grace through faith.

We will never be good enough to earn the love of God and make up for our sin. We are hopelessly separated from God, and there is nothing we can do about it. We have brought this state of lostness upon ourselves. But when we could not reach up to God, He reached down to us. Today, will you stop trying to earn the love of God and rest in the promise of His unconditional love for you?

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever **believes** in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)*

In the field of trapeze artists there are “flyers” and there are “catchers.” Imagine that you are a flyer. You just let go and are momentarily flipping through the air. As you finish your rotation, you are suspended and waiting, as the “catcher” approaches. Natural impulse is to start grabbing, clawing, grasping for whatever you can take hold of, to avoid falling. It might be the catcher’s hand, his arm, his shirt, his hair, it really does not matter. At that moment all you want to do is survive.

But the “flyer” has been trained to relax and not act out of impulse. He knows that the more he desperately grabs for the catcher, the more difficult it will be for the catcher to catch him. So he waits and trusts. This principle was attributed to Rodleigh of The Flying Rodleighs, which says, “The flyer is the one who lets go and the catcher is the one who catches. The flyer must never catch the catcher!”

This is not that much different from what Paul is trying to teach the Galatians. Do not try to catch God and save yourselves by your own effort. It is impossible, and in the end your pride and self-righteousness will keep you from being caught by Him. Have faith and trust in His promise. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). God will save you.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). In other words, don’t try to catch God, trust Him, and let God catch you!¹

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