

Text: Galatians 3:19-29: Why Then the Law?

Exegetical Big Idea: God's law has a glorious purpose. Though not life giving itself, it points to the true life in Christ.

Homiletical Big Idea: **God' law, if we see it correctly, is for our good.**

Fallen Condition Focus: The law is a curse for us inasmuch as we are under its obligations for securing our own salvation. However, it is also the case the God's law is good if we understand its purpose. Unfortunately, we often see grace and works as competing for the same thing.

Background:

In the previous verses Paul drew a direct line between the covenant that God made with Abraham, and Christ. It was a covenant of grace to Abraham, but it was also to be fulfilled in a specific offspring. That offspring was Christ. Paul argues for this straight line because the Law of Moses that was added 430 years after this did not add to this covenant of grace, nor did it nullify it.

In the verses previous to that, Paul goes so far as to say that the law is actually a curse for us. He means that if we endeavor to earn God's favor and merit and blessing by means of our performance to his law, then we are cursed to have to obey the whole thing! And that is something nobody can do...except Christ.

So why then the law? It's a natural question! And Paul answers it in the verses we are looking at today.

Intro:

I you're a parent, or even if you've been around kids for any length of time you would be familiar with a certain type of conversation that involves the word "why?" Often times I will be in a conversation with my child and they will ask "why?" I'll then give them an answer, and they will respond with again with "why?" That process is repeated until eventually all I can answer is that God made it this way because it was good for us, and it glorified himself.

Whether it's "eat your broccoli" or "don't run with scissors", if you trace the reason for these things it always ends with "because God designed it that way for his glory and our good".

I don't think as parents (or as adults in general) we should be annoyed or scared of the "why" questions! I think asking "why" is the most important question a kid can ask. Ultimately, it gives us as parents and adults an opportunity to draw everything back to the reality that God does all things for our good and for his glory.

God's law is no exception.

I think Paul anticipates this mindset in these verses. Why then the law? If it is a curse for us, then why did God give it to us at all? Because God in his wisdom has given it to us for our own good, and for his glory.

But wasn't it a curse? Yes, inasmuch as we walk the path of the law to lead to life. But if we let the law do its job, it actually serves to lead us to Jesus. But let's not forget that God's law comes *from* God, and

if it is true (and it is) that there is no evil in God, and that he is infinitely good, then it is impossible for anything bad to come from him. That includes his law.

God's law then actually serves a good purpose. Though it most certainly does not serve the *same* purpose as grace, it does still nonetheless exist for our good and for God's glory.

God' law, if we see it correctly, is for our good

Vv. 19-22 – God's law graciously reveals our need for Christ.

Paul starts this section off with a really good question: "Why then the law?" For the better part of two chapters now Paul has been really down on God's law. He's called it a curse. He's said that he's died to the law. He's said that the law is not of faith. It seems as though there is no good in the law. A person might think that the law is a horrible thing. Is it?

Well no, since the law came from God, and no evil thing comes from God, the law must therefore be good. The only reason why the law is a curse is because we turned it into that by our sin. We as human beings are very good at taking God's good gifts and ruining them. Paul show us here that the law serves a glorious purpose. One purpose of the law is to reveal our need for Christ.

So Paul starts by saying in verse 19 that the law was "added because of transgressions". Now we know from last week that when Paul says "added", he does not mean added to the covenant of Abraham, that would mean that God had changed his mind, and that certainly is not the case. By "added" Paul means simply that it was revealed to us by God. God revealed his holy law to us because of transgressions. This short statement is not exactly clear to us. There are a number of different interpretations of what this means, but the most likely interpretation is that it was added to reveal our sin.

If nobody sinned, there would not need to be any laws. That's why Paul can say later on in Galatians, after naming the fruit of the Spirit, that "against such things there is no law". The law was added because of our sin. It names our sin. It gives a face to our sin. How do we know that coveting is wrong unless the law says "do not covet"? It makes it so that no person is without excuse. The law reveals our sin, but it also in a way increases our sin. The law reveals to us the holiness of God, and our unholiness.

But it also has a temporary nature to it. In the same verse Paul says that the law was added "until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made". We talked last week about how the promises made to Abraham were not actually meant to be fulfilled in Abraham's "offsprings" in a plural sense, but actually fulfilled in a single offspring, that is Christ. Christians share in those promises by nature of being in union with Christ. So the Offspring that Paul is talking about here is Jesus.

Paul argues that the law was meant to be in place, until the coming of Christ. Which point to its temporary nature. It was never meant to be permanent. How can something that is not permanent, and never meant to be, bring permanent life? Compare this to the eternal nature of the promises given to Abraham and fulfilled in Jesus. That covenant is an eternal covenant, fulfilled in the one who lives forever. The law then was never intended to bring life!

Not only that, but the actual giving of the law is inferior to the giving of the promises given to Abraham. Paul goes on to say that the law was "put in place through angels by an intermediary. Here is another difficult verse. I think the key to understanding this lies in figuring out the meaning of verse 20. I think Paul is making a comparison in these two verses. He's comparing how the law was given, and how the

promises to Abraham were given. On the one hand, the law was given through angels through an intermediary. The angels part here is difficult to pin down. God did give message through angels in the Old Testament, and in fact the word “angel” means messenger. Easier to understand I think is the intermediary. This almost certainly means Moses. The basic thought here is that the law went through many hands before coming to the people.

The law started with God, was passed to Moses by various means including angel, and then from Moses it went to the people of God. Contrast this however with the promise that was given to Abraham. That was between God and Abraham. Paul make the argument here that even just looking at how the law was given verses how the promise was given, there is a clear difference and a clear superiority to how God gave the promise directly to Abraham.

So then, seeing a clear difference between the law and the promise, the natural question gets asked in verse 21. “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?” Is God then double minded? Did he give the promise, change his mind, and then give the law? Did God create two different paths leading to the same goal of life? Certainly not Paul say. The reality is that the law and the promise serve two different purposes. They are tools that do different things.

[Mostly everybody nowadays has a smart phone. It can do a lot of things. You can obviously phone people on it. But it’s also a web browser, a clock, a camera, a flashlight, a GPS, a banking tool, a calendar, a music player, a calculator, and you can even use it to order a pizza. It’s a powerful tool. Most people also own a hammer. That tool has been around for a long time, and it too is a powerful tool. A hammer can be very useful for a number of things, but different things than a smart phone. I have never seen anyone order a pizza with a hammer, and you would be a fool to use a smart phone to drive in a nail. In fact, if you try and use one of those for a purpose that it is not intended for, you’re going to fail. Are they both good? Yes. Do they both serve the same purpose? No.]

God’s law was never meant to serve the purpose of giving life! Don’t believe me? Ask the nation of Israel. Did receiving the law produce an obedient Israel? Not at all! And this is where the false teachers erred. They were making the fatal mistake in thinking that God’s law, and God’s grace, both served the same purpose of bringing life. They were thinking that if you mixed the two, you’d end up with eternal life. But nothing could be further from the truth. Paul argues in verse 21 that if indeed it was the case that the Mosaic law could give life, then we don’t need the promise given to Abraham and fulfilled in Jesus! We could just all obey the law that that would be the end of the problem! But that was never the purpose of the law.

Paul says in verse 22 “The Scriptures imprisoned everything under sin, *so that* the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe”. Through the law, we see our imprisonment. God has given us his Word, the Scriptures, and it has outlined his holiness and the expectation of his people to be holy as well. God’s law opens our eyes to our sin. But the phrase “so that” means that’s what it was designed to do! It is only when we see our wretchedness and sinfulness that we can actually turn to the true source of life!

Paul continues and writes “so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be *given* (not earned!) to those who believe. Thanks be to God that he has given us his law, because the law drives us to Christ. The law reveals our sin and shows us our sickness, so that we can seek the cure.

[If you have leg pain and are unable to walk, you go to the doctor. Before you visit the doctor, the pain is there for sure, but you don't know what's wrong. Is it a muscle cramp? Is it poor circulation? Is it something else? You don't know. And if you don't know, how can you treat it? Will it go away on its own? Suppose you go to the doctor and he or she orders an x-ray. The x-ray comes back and they discover that you broke your bone in half! Thank the Lord for x-rays! Did the x-ray fix the problem? Nope, that's not what it's designed to do. But did it highlight the problem? Absolutely. And now you can get it fixed. Without the x-ray you might have just sat around hoping it got better, but in actuality it would have just been worse.]

The law is not designed to bring life! It cannot do that, but it does show us where to get it. The law graciously reveals our need for Christ. Jesus himself said that he has not come for the healthy, but for the sick. The reality of that statement is that nobody is healthy! We are all sick with sin. Jesus is the cure for those who, through God's revealed Word, know that we are sick and in need of a saviour. It is only in seeing our sin in the light of God's holiness that we are able to turn to Jesus in faith, and receive the promise of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ.

God' law, if we see it correctly, is for our good

Vv. 23-25 – God's law built up the coming of Christ.

In these next few verses Paul uses some illustrations to show us the purpose of the Mosaic law in the Old Testament.

The first is the concept that Paul has just been talking about, namely, that the law is our captor. In verse 22 Paul said that we were imprisoned under sin, and he says now in verse 23 effectively the same thing but changes it to being imprisoned under the law. But now in verse 23 there is a time element to the captivity. He says we were held captive under the law..."until the coming faith would be revealed".

Our captivity under sin and the law is obvious elsewhere in Paul's letters. He writes to the Roman church that we are slaves of sin before we are freed in Christ. Slavery to sin is a major theme in Paul's writings. It is the idea by default, because we share the identity of Adam, when sin comes knocking at our door, we answer it. Sure, we can refrain a little bit, but not for long and not for all of it.

We can understand living under the Mosaic covenant much like this. The promises of grace have been made to Abraham, but they have not been fulfilled yet. In the meantime, the people of Israel do have the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic law, unlike the covenant of grace with Abraham, is one that does have stipulations! The problem, as we saw a few weeks ago, was that it was impossible for the people to obey fully all the commands of the law.

This is the picture Paul uses here. And we're in the same situation as the people of Israel in the Old Testament. We are in a jail cell with no way to escape, but there is hope in this verse. We are imprisoned "until the coming faith would be revealed". This of course means the hope of the gospel of Christ.

Here we are, under the law imprisoned by our sin, but now we hear the sound of the guard coming down the hall with his keys. Under normal circumstances the sound of jingling keys is pretty insignificant to our ears. But not so if you're locked up!

Living under sin, much like a jail cell, is a bad place to be! However, it can make us long for freedom. If apart from God's law we don't see or understand sin, and if the law then highlights and reveals our sin so that we yearn for freedom, is this not a good thing! That's exactly one of the purposes of the law in the Old Testament. Have you ever considered the goodness of God in that he can even turn the evil of our sin to use for his glory! Don't misunderstand, I don't mean God makes sin acceptable or good. But I am saying that the pain of sin can cause us to run to Jesus.

Just like the pain of a scraped knee causes a child to run to his or her mother for help and comfort, so the pain of our sin can cause us to run to Christ for freedom and forgiveness. Remember Anna and Simeon in Luke? They spent their lives at the temple waiting for the consolation of Israel, the redemption of Jerusalem. They knew of the salvation that was coming, and they longed for it!

Not only does the Mosaic Law show us our imprisonment under sin, but it also acts as a guardian. In verse 25 Paul speaks of the law as such. But what exactly does Paul mean by "guardian"? Is this more like a mean prison guard, keeping the theme from the previous verse? Is this to mean some kind of restraining of sin? It's hard to know exactly what is meant here, but the best way to understand this I believe is like a babysitter.

Who needs a babysitter? Children do. For how long do they need one? Until they become mature.

That's what Paul is getting at here I believe. So how is the law like a babysitter? Firstly one important role of the law is to show us how to live in relationship with God and with each other. Now this is not to be confused with actually *giving* life, but it does give instructions on how to live. We already mentioned that Paul himself points out elsewhere that he wouldn't even have known what coveting was unless the law said "do not covet". Just think of the Ten Commandments, the first 4 instruct in our relationship with God, and the last 6 (although 5 is kind of a both/and) instruct in our relationship with each other. This is why David can write in Psalm 119 that he has hidden God's Word in his heart that he might not sin against him. No, David cannot keep this fully, but the instructions for life are a gift from God!

And on a purely practical level, obedience to God just feels better. When was the last time your sin made you feel good. The answer is never. God only gives us commands that are for our good, and so to obey those commands only brings good.

But there's another way in which the Mosaic Law is our babysitter. The Mosaic Law, and in fact all of the Old Testament, points to the completion and perfection in Christ.

[There are good babysitters, and there are bad babysitters. What makes a good babysitter? As a parent, the babysitter that I want for my kids, whom I love, is one that reflects the value of me and my wife. I don't want a babysitter who, as soon as my wife and I leave the house, throws our instructions or rule out the window and lets the kids do whatever they want. The kids might want that, but we as their parents who love them and know what's best for them want the guardian to be our representative]

In this sense I think we see the Mosaic Law as a babysitter. The Mosaic Law serves to point to its true author, Christ who is God. Christ is of course the fulfillment of the law, keeping all of its regulations and laws. He is the True Moses who leads us out of the slavery of sin. Jesus is the true King who reigns in righteousness and justice. He is the great high priest who offered once and for all the perfect sacrifice for our sins. And he is the perfect sacrifice for sin that ended the sacrificial system for good.

Paul wants the Galatians to see the Mosaic Law for what it really is, a temporary guardian that's purpose is to drive them to the gospel of Christ. Paul writes exactly this in verse 24 when he says "in order that we might be justified by faith".

The babysitting nature of the law is now done! "But now" Paul writes in verse 25 "faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" When is a babysitter no longer needed? When the child has reached maturity.

The age of the Mosaic law is completed. When Paul says "but now that faith has come" he's speaking of the gospel of Jesus! Since Christ is the fulfilment of the Law, and the perfection of it. It is no longer necessary to babysit us, since we have Christ himself! We no longer have an external list of rules to try and keep, but now we have God producing the fruit of the Spirit in his people! We no longer have to travel to a temple to offer a sacrifice since the perfect sacrifice was made once and for all on our behalf, and we ourselves as the church are the temple of God.

Why is this important? Because the Mosaic Law could never produce this maturity! It could restrain sin a bit, but maturity is found only in faith in Christ. This is freedom in Christ. This is the difference between temporary good behaviour, and a new creation.

If you don't see the law of God for the purpose that it is designed for, then you're going to use it for good behaviour. Congratulations, you might be able to keep that up a bit. You might be able to make others think that you're the real deal, but you're still a prisoner to your sin.

Let God's law drive you to Christ.

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What Christ offers is true freedom. And that's what Paul show us next.

Vv. 26-29 – Understanding what the law can't do, shows what the gospel does do.

Paul begins with "for", meaning for those who are no longer under the babysitting nature of the law because they are mature in Christ, "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith". I hope you are not bored talking about the Christians union with Christ because this letter is full of it!

Based on our union with Christ we are sons and daughters of God! In Christ we are truly human the way God intended us to be. Paul will get more into this next week, but for now we can glory in the understanding that we have been adopted into God's family. God the Father looks at his sons and daughters with affection and love that can never be taken away. Do you know why he looks on you with love and affection and delight? Not because you've obeyed his law enough, but because you are *in Christ*, and he loves Christ. Do you want to know the answer to the question "how much does God love me?" The answer is "how much does God the Father love God the Son?" If you are in Christ by faith, then he loves you that same amount, but you are *in Christ*.

Look at verse 27. Have you been baptized *into Christ*? This is not saying that baptism saves anyone, this is pointing to what baptism means. When a person, by faith, goes under the water they are being *united to Christ* in his death, and when he or she comes up, they are declaring that they are by faith *united to Christ* in his resurrection. When a person has union with Christ by faith in his grace, they have "put on

Christ". You wear the righteousness of Jesus as you would a coat. It's still Jesus' righteousness, but now it belongs to you by faith. By faith, God declares you righteous!

But wait, there's more.

Look at verse 28. The lines of social identity and value are erased *in Christ* since "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, for you are all on *in Christ Jesus*". Paul is not saying there is now no longer any distinction at all between these categories. I've heard people use this verse to argue that there is no such thing as male and female. That's not what Paul is saying at all! The reality was back then that there was in fact a value difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free, man and woman. But now, *in Christ* you have an imperishable identity and value. Your primary identity is not Canadian, or Gentile, or rich or poor, or anything else. Your primary identity is *in Christ*. And *in Christ* you have no greater value or lesser value than me. For those who are *in Christ* by faith, we have the same value, and do you want to take a guess as to your value? That's right! Christ's value!

Finally, in verse 29, Paul again reiterates what he has been saying all along. If we are Christ's, then we are also Abraham's offspring. Offspring there is singular, meaning one offspring which is Christ. If we are *in Christ*, then we are offspring of Abraham, and heirs according to promise. The inheritance of the New Heavens and the New Earth, without stain of sin and eternally in the presence of God is coming!

All of these are based on union with Christ! They are *not* based on obedience to the law. That was never the purpose of the law. They are "according to promise". Why then the law? It can reveal our need for Christ, drive us to him, and highlight the glory of the gospel. But only the gospel of Jesus can accomplish all this. Only faith in his grace secures this for a person.

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