

The Purpose of the Mosaic Law

One of the great themes of Galatians about which we have discussed in many different ways over the last several weeks is the comparison between religious law and relationship with God by grace through faith. Grace is superior to religion in every way imaginable.

A natural question for people reading Galatians might be “so if the law of Moses is opposed to the greater truth of salvation by faith, what then is the purpose of the law that takes up a great deal of the Bible?”

This is, after all, God’s Law. It had to have a purpose. And repeatedly in the Scriptures we are reminded that it is good because God is good. So how can something that is good be distorted into something that is bad? That can only come about when the purpose is misunderstood and the law is not used according to its rightful purpose.

Galatians 3:19-29

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

²¹ 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. ²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Austin’s sermon lays out three purposes that God gave the Law according to Galatians 3:19-29.

- 1) The Hebrew people refused to live by faith (vv. 19-20).
- 2) The Law proves that religion of any kind can never free you from sin (vv. 21-23).
- 3) The Law kept the Hebrew people from abandoning the promise God gave them to bring forth the Savior of the world. (vv. 24-29).

To sum these points up, the Law is from God, and the Law is good. But the reason the law is good is not because it brought salvation on its own. The law was given as God’s plan to bring us Christ, and Christ is the one who brings salvation. Because Christ fulfilled the Law, there is no longer a present use for it, other than to appreciate salvation in Christ.

Discussion Questions

- How do you know that God's plan all along was that his people should live by faith rather than by Law?
- How did the Israelites demonstrate a lack of faith?
- What were some of the sinful attitudes that necessitated that God give Law?
- Why was Law a proper response to sin on God's part?
- Where do you find a similarity in the Mosaic Law and other types of religion that people use to attempt to be righteous?
- Why does all religion fail?
- How did the Law prove to be a guardian until Christ came?
- Why is it not necessary to access Christ by first going through the law?
- How does this matter as we share Christ with people of all different backgrounds?