

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE LAW AND LIBERATION FROM IT

Galatians 3:19-4:31

February 4, 2024

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Today, we're going to discuss four points:

- The purpose of the law.
- The law as a guardian.
- The law as a prison.
- The fulfillment of the law.

INTRODUCTION: We are reading through the book of Galatians and studying the message Paul wrote to the churches there.

- False teachers had infiltrated the church and were trying to convince new Christians that they had to follow Jewish laws in order to be truly saved.
- In chapter one, Paul reminded the churches that salvation is based on the work Christ completed on the cross and is not a result of anything we can do. He called the false teaching a perversion of the Gospel and warned about the dangers of perverting the truth of the Gospel.
- In chapter two, Paul gave a personal testimony emphasizing why he was authorized to preach the Gospel. He expounded upon the freedom that comes from faith in Christ, the diversity of ministries and people within the church, the importance of integrity, and the meaning of justification.
- In chapter three, Paul wrote about the Holy Spirit who calls us to Christ, gives us faith to believe, and indwells in believers at the point of salvation.

At the end of chapter 3 and throughout chapter 4, Paul addresses questions about the law.

1-THE LAW HAD A PURPOSE

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3:19-22

Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. ²¹ 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. ²² But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

EXPLANATION: Much like people today, early believers struggled to understand that there was nothing they could do to earn salvation. Since God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, Jews followed a strict set of guidelines that ruled how they should live, worship, and interact with others. They mistakenly began to believe that merely outwardly following the rules kept them in God’s good favor. They claimed they were God’s chosen people because their forefather was Abraham, but they forgot that God was the one who chose Abraham and blessed him. God chose Abraham not because of anything that Abraham did or did not do but because of God’s own love.

Genesis 12:1-3 says, *“The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s family. Go to the land I will show you. ² “I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you. I will make your name great. You will be a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you. I will put a curse on anyone who puts a curse on you. All nations on earth will be blessed because of you.”*

The Bible does not record any action other than the belief that Abraham took to seek out God. God sought him. Later, in Genesis 15:6, the Bible says, *“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”*

God promised that Abraham would become the father of a great nation of people, and from his family would come One who would bless the entire world. These promises were given hundreds of years before Moses received the law.

Why then was the law given? The law was given in order to help mankind recognize their need for God and to point the way towards the Savior.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember when I was a boy, a certain family would visit our home. They had a son who was rather wild. He would come to my and my brother's bedroom, pull out all the toys, and completely destroy our room. We really disliked it when he came over. It was as if no one had ever taught him any manners or right from wrong.

APPLICATION: Without the law, humans are like that wild child. We have no standard for right and wrong. What one person says is right might be right for him, but it might be wrong for someone else. How could a human understand his own sinfulness without a standard by which to judge sin? God gave the law to be that standard. God gave the law to help mankind understand what it means to transgress or disobey. Without the law, we cannot recognize our own sin, and if we cannot recognize our own sin, we will not see the need for a Savior.

- The law had a purpose.

2-THE LAW WAS A TEMPORARY GUARDIAN

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 3:23-4:7

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. (Your translation might say schoolmaster, so hold on to that thought, but let's go with 'guardian' for now.)

²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and 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. 4:1 What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. ² The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. ³ So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual force of the world. ⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

EXPLANATION: Paul used an example that the Galatians would have recognized. Many Roman children, especially those in wealthier homes, were actually kept under the care of a guardian until the child was of age. This guardian was often a slave. The slave guardian taught and took care of the child until the child received the full benefits of sonship as an adult.

The Greek word that is translated ‘guardian’ or ‘schoolmaster’ is paidagōgos which literally means “a boy's guardian or tutor, a slave who had charge of the life and morals of the boys of a family, not strictly a teacher.” But we can understand why the British King James translators used the word “schoolmaster” because it had better meaning to the British than the Roman concept of a slave being in charge of a boys’ life.

APPLICATION: Just like a guardian, the law was put into place for a defined period of time. The law was not the means of salvation. It simply pointed people towards the God who could save them. Like a guardian, the law helped teach the people the difference between right and wrong. It defined boundaries for protection and to help God’s people live differently from the rest of the world. It prescribed means of worship that were pictures of what was to come. All the elements of the temple worship foreshadowed what was to come.

So when Paul mentioned the guardian-child relationship, people understood it. But we might better understand the schoolmaster concept. All of us had schoolmasters growing up. They were not meant to be permanent – at some point, we did not need them, and comparing that to the law helped people understand the law was not meant to be permanent.

- The law had a purpose.
- The law was a temporary guardian.

3-THE LAW TURNED INTO A PRISON

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 4:8-9

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.⁹ But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

I'll stop there for sake of time, but Paul goes on to criticize them for observing Jewish laws and following the false teachers.

EXPLANATION: While God's purpose for the law was good and perfect, humans added to it, warping the regulations God had given into a complicated mess of impractical rules. For example, while God said to remember the Sabbath day and to refrain from work, the Pharisees didn't think that was specific enough. So, they said that a person could only walk so many feet, could not even spit, and criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Instead of pointing people to Jesus, the law had become a way for people to elevate themselves in the eyes of others. The rules were so many that most people felt helpless to obey them. In fact, Jesus said that instead of helping people come to God, the law according to the religious elite was distracting people from knowing God.

In Matthew 23:13, he said, *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”*

Under the Roman model of guardianship, when a free child reached adulthood, he walked into complete freedom. The time of guardianship was over. Let's use the schoolmaster translation. When I was a senior in high school, I was over it! I was more than ready to be gone. In fact, I planned to graduate a year early, but the school counselor talked me out of it.

Under the Roman model of guardianship, can you imagine a free child giving up the privileges of freedom for a life of slavery? Under the schoolmaster illustration, can you imagine a person graduating and starting first grade all over again?

Of course not, it would be ridiculous. Yet Paul says that is exactly what these Galatians were trying to do. The law had in essence become a prison, the very thing that enslaved the people.

- The law had a purpose.
- The law was a temporary guardian.
- The law turned into a prison.

4-CHRIST FULFILLED THE LAW

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 4:21-31

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. ²³ His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. (In verses 24 – 27 he says how the two women represent two covenants. Hagar represents the old covenant or the law and bears children who are slaves to the law.) ²⁸ Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. ³⁰ But what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” ³¹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

EXPLANATION: Paul gave an elaborate example using two women from the Old Testament—Sarah, the mother of Abraham, and Hagar, the mother of Ishmael. Hagar was a slave-wife of Abraham, and Ishmael was Abraham’s first son by her. Ishmael’s conception was not God’s idea. When Sarah and Abraham did not conceive a child of their own, they thought God had forgotten about his promise. So, they devised their own way of making it come true. Their sin in this matter brought about problems that are still affecting our world today.

Paul reminded the Galatians that as believers in Christ, they had been born into God’s family, the family that came from Abraham and Sarah. They were children of God not because of anything that they had done but because of the faith they had in Christ’s work.

The Galatian Christians were not children as in babes but adult sons and daughters with all the benefits and privileges as heirs of Christ.

Romans 8:17 says, “*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*”

Jesus had fulfilled the law. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus himself said, “*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.*”

Because Christ came, died on the cross, resurrected from the grave, and ascended into Heaven, Christians are freed from the Old Testament law as a slave master. It is now through the Holy Spirit's work that God calls people to himself, convicts them of their sins, and gives them the opportunity to believe.

- The law had a purpose.
- The law was a temporary guardian.
- The law turned into a prison.
- Christ fulfilled the law and set us free.

APPLICATION: You may wonder, if the law is fulfilled, what purpose is there in the Old Testament? What does that mean for us in terms of the way we handle scripture? Do we neglect the Old Testament or ignore the first three-quarters of our Bibles? Of course not. Although we are no longer slaves to the law, the law still has significance for us as modern-day Christians.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

A guardian does not have legal authority over a child once the child reaches adulthood, but even adult children can seek wisdom from their childhood mentors. Our salvation is not earned by following the rules and regulations of the Old Testament, but those rules and regulations and the stories that surround them give us a moral guide. They provide historical significance, reflect God's righteous standards, and reveal the nature of God. The law does not bind us, but it still provides a framework for righteous living and helps us to align our choices with God's will. Perhaps, most of all, the law is a great reminder of the blessings we have because of Christ's redemptive work on the cross.

INVITATION: Where are you in your walk with Christ? Do you think you can earn your way into Heaven by being good enough? The Bible says that no one is righteous on his own (Romans 3:10). Salvation is by faith in Christ alone.

In John 14:6, *“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”*

There is no value in going it alone. You cannot work your way into God's good graces. He loves you so much that he sent Jesus to pay the price for your sins so you would not have to. The altar is open if you want to come pray.

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