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Galatians

What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.* Galatians 3:19

Throughout his writings, Paul states several reasons why the law was given by God. One of them is included in this verse now. Here he first asks, "What purpose *does* the law *serve*?" The reason for explaining this now is because he has just shown that the law has no bearing on the promise. It cannot change or annul what has already been confirmed. Therefore, unless there is a reason for the giving of the law, it seems like a long and pointless part of the redemptive story. However, it is a logical part of it, fulfilling great purposes until it had served those purposes. After that, it was set aside.

To explain one exact reason for the giving of it, he begins with, "It was added because of transgressions." This statement can mean one of two things: 1) It was added in order to keep people from committing transgressions, or 2) it was given to cause transgression to increase in number (as is stated in Romans 5:20). As he says there, "...the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more."

Paul was probably thinking of both possibilities concerning the law. It was to keep people in check, but it was also intended to multiply transgressions. Thus it would show how utterly sinful sin really is (see Romans 7:13). The promise would stand, but man was being shown the extremely gracious nature of the promise through

the giving of the law. This aspect of redemptive history, however, had a set point of termination. It was only in effect until "the Seed should come to whom the promise was made."

As was noted in the commentary on 3:16, the seed there was speaking of the body of believers in Christ. Now it is speaking of the One who would bring in the fulfillment of those promises for that body, Christ. Christ is the fulfillment of all of the messianic promises. Therefore, when He came, fulfilled the law, and died in fulfillment of that law, the promises would then be made available to all who would call on Him. Thus, during in interim time, from promise until the coming of Christ, the law was introduced for instruction and learning. Paul will continue to clarify this as he progresses through the chapter and through the rest of the epistle.

To complete his thought, he says that the law "was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator." There is abundant speculation concerning this statement. Nothing in the Old Testament confirms that angelic beings gave the law. In fact, it is clear that the law was given by the Lord directly to Moses. The Greek translation of the OT in Deuteronomy 33:2 seems to refer to this though. Also, some Jewish traditions, such as that of Flavius Josephus (see *Antiquities of the Jews*. xv. 5. 3), claim the presence of angels during the giving of the law. Even a few NT passages in Acts and Hebrews seem to say this as well.

However, there is a reasonable explanation for this without adding to what Scripture says. In three New Testament passages which refer to this, it speaks of the law being given through "angels," plural. There are two things to consider on this.

First, in Acts 7:38, Stephen says that the Angel spoke to them on Mount Sinai and the word is singular. Thus it refers to the Lord alone (the second member of the Godhead). Secondly, the word for "angel," which is *aggelos*, does not necessarily mean a heavenly being. It simply means "messenger" or a "delegate." In Acts 7:53, here in Galatians, and later in Hebrews where this is noted, the word is plural and is therefore speaking of both Moses and Aaron who are considered *messengers* of

God for the giving of the law to Israel, even if Aaron wasn't with Moses at all times. And finally, Moses is the mediator of the same law as is noted in Exodus 24:3-8. Hence, the term "mediator" is in the singular.

Life application: The law had a purpose and it is not to save us from sin. Instead, it was to show us the great grace of God in Christ by highlighting our sin. Let us thank God that the curse of the law is removed through the shed blood of Christ!

Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only*, but God is one. Galatians 3:20

We arrive at one of the most widely interpreted verses in the entire Bible. At the time of Charles Ellicott, the 19th century Bible scholar, there were at least 430 different interpretations of what is thought to have been on Paul's mind. Therefore, it is without a doubt a verse which has a great deal of meaning contained within itself.

However, context needs to be ascertained for any verse. This one comes during a discussion about the covenant with Abraham which is followed by the giving of the Law of Moses. Vincent's Word Studies notes that the Greek term translated here as "now" is explanatory, not antithetic. Therefore, what has been previously said is now further explained.

Abraham was given a promise; Abraham believed that promise; and Abraham was declared righteous. After this, the Lord made a covenant with him, and He alone passed through the divided animals. The covenant was made and settled.

However, because the covenant was made, and despite it only being made by One, meaning God, to change it would still require both party's approval (verse 15). As Abraham was not alive 430 years later (verse 17), the institution of the Law of Moses could not have had any bearing on the promise.

Another note concerning the Greek is that there is an article attached to "mediator," and thus it is "the mediator." It is therefore marked as a class noun, thus "giving it the sense, 'a mediator as such'" (Pulpit Commentary). Understanding this, we can then look at what has brought about the annulling of the Law of Moses, which is the New Covenant. This is made explicit based on the words of Hebrews which states with all certainty that it is 1) annulled; 2) set aside; and 3) obsolete.

The New Covenant came through Christ. He is called in both Hebrews 9:15 and Hebrews 12:24 "the Mediator of the New Covenant." If He is the Mediator, and the covenant is based on grace in accord with the promise made to Abraham, not on works of the law, then Christ is God. The "fullness of the Godhead" bodily subsists in Him. It is certain that Paul is referring to Christ in this verse because He was mentioned in verse 3:19, He will be referred to throughout the rest of the chapter, and He will again be referred to in verse 4:4 - all in the context of this issue.

As we are counted in the "seed of Abraham" (verse 16) because of Christ, we become one with Christ - we are "in Christ," and we have "put on Christ," meaning we are clothed in Him (verse 3:27). This is why we are again called "Abraham's seed" in verse 3:29. Logically, this means that as God is One, and because we are "in Christ," we are fully reconciled to God through His work. This is made explicit in Colossians 1:20, 21 -

"For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell,²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

In anticipation of that marvelous position in which we stand by faith, Jesus made His intercessory prayer for His people just prior to the act that would make it possible -

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." John 17:20-23

Life application: There is a ton of theology tied up in this verse. To fully explore it requires fully exploring the entire Bible. Suffice it to say that if you have accepted Jesus, you are fully reconciled to God and are clothed in Christ. We could no more lose our standing with God than Christ could. And as God is One, and yet Jesus is called our Mediator, then Jesus must be God. The principle tenets of the faith are all wrapped up in understanding the marvel of what God did for us in Christ. However, being in Christ requires that we live by faith in Him and not by works of the law. This is the entire point of Paul's letter to the Galatians. The law is opposed to faith. To insert the law into one's attempt to be justified before God thus excludes one from being "in Christ."

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. Galatians 3:21

Paul now enters into an obvious question for those who have misunderstood the purpose of the law. Well, if God gave us the law, and the law "was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made," the question may be, "Is the law then against the promises of God?" Paul has already shown that the law cannot annul "the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect" (verse 17). Therefore, Paul's use of the word "against" is not insinuating some type of negative action of the law against the promises of God. Instead, the word is being used in a contrary sense; as if the purpose of the law was contrary to the promises. His answer is, "Certainly not!"

The law was given, but unlike the promises, it was not intended as a means of giving life (meaning declaring a person "righteous" or "justified" before God). The reason this is true is then clearly given in the words, "For if there had been a law which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law." If a sinful man could be justified by the law (supposing this were possible), then the law would, in fact, be contrary to the promise. There would then be two different means of obtaining righteousness. It would show fickleness in the plans of God.

But the law could not bring a sinful man to a state of righteousness. Therefore, "...the spirit and purpose of the Law were not contrary to the promises, inasmuch as the Law did not offer to interfere with the work which the promises were to do, but was designed, to be auxiliary to their function by preparing the way for its discharge" (Pulpit Commentary).

What again needs to be remembered is that Christ has come. The Galatians, who never had the law, had called on Christ and been declared righteous. The proof of this was the sealing of the Spirit. The same is true with the Jews who did have the law. None of them were granted the Spirit until they repented of trying to be justified by the law and instead believed in what Christ had done in fulfillment of the law.

This shows that righteousness was not of the law, and thus the law was not contrary to the promises of God. Instead, it was introduced as a means of leading sinful man to Christ who had no sin and thus was qualified and capable of fulfilling the law. If one is to trust in the law, it is only to be insofar as Christ fulfilled it for him. He is the embodiment of it. Therefore, He is the fulfillment of the promises.

Life application: If you encounter those who claim you must observe the law in order to be saved, you should be familiar with the arguments they will submit for their incorrect stand. Further, you should be able to come to Galatians and defend why their stand is both incorrect and nuts. Paul's words are precise and lead to only one conclusion; the law (meaning attempting to be declared righteous by deeds of the law) cannot save sinful man. Only faith in Christ can do so.