

“Why the Law”
Galatians 3:19-25
(Preached at Trinity, January 13, 2013)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul is continuing to defend the Gospel from the Judaizers who were perverting it by adding human works. At the heart of the issue was a faulty understanding of the Law and the Gospel. And this remains one of the chief causes of faulty theology today.
2. What is the Gospel and what is the relationship of the Law to the Gospel?
Last week we looked at Paul's defense to those who were teaching that the Law was added to the promise—that God gave a covenant of promise to Abraham which he received by faith, but the Law was added 430 years later which was added to faith. Their teaching was we are saved by faith plus works.
Paul's response:
 - A. No, the giving of the Law in the Mosaic covenant did not change or annul the promise given to Abraham.
Galatians 3:17 NAU - "the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise."
 - B. The Law was not essentially different from the Abrahamic Covenant in that it was founded upon God's eternal Covenant of Redemption. But it was also infinitely different.
 1. In both covenants the only way to be accepted by God was by trusting Him for His grace.
 2. But on the other hand, God's covenant with Abraham was a covenant of promise without any stipulations. It was received by faith alone. The Mosaic Covenant contained stipulations and curses for disobedience. But it in no way annulled or changed God's covenant of promise to Abraham.
Galatians 3:21 NAU - "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be!"
3. So if the giving of the Law did not change the promise what was its purpose?
If our justification and receiving of the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with keeping the Law what was the purpose of the Law?
If our inheritance is based upon grace and not the Law what is the purpose of the Law?
In **Verse 19** Paul asks this most important question - "Why the Law then?"
 - A. It should be noted that Paul isn't giving us a detailed analysis of God's purposes for the Law.
 1. In this portion he doesn't give us the use of the Law for believers. He'll do this in **Chapters 5-6**. In this section he's only describing the Law as it pertains to the history of salvation.

2. It is important that we make this clear distinction – a failure to do so can lead to great error. The Law has a clear function in leading unbelievers to Christ AND it has a clear place in the life of believers. This is at the heart of the Law and the Gospel.
 3. A failure to understand this relationship of the Law and Gospel has led to the errors of Roman Catholicism, of Dispensationalism, of the carnal Christian/lordship salvation debate.
- B. We must always see the Law as a blessing.
1. Paul declared that it is good and holy.
Romans 7:12 NAU - "So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."
 2. But he also added that the Law is good but demands that it be handled properly.
1 Timothy 1:8 NAU - "But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully,"
- C. The Law handled improperly is most dangerous. You can kill yourself with it. This was Israel's great fault. They tried to use the Law to obtain the righteousness of God and it crushed them.
Romans 9:31-32 NAU - " but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. ³² Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. "
- D. By nature we hate God. We deny Him His right to rule over us. Because of the sinfulness of our heart the Law can actually be used as just another expression of our proud rebellion. By insisting on using our morality and obedience to the Law to obtain God's acceptance we are actually just expressing our refusal to submit to Him and His way of righteousness.
Romans 10:3 NAU - "For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God."
- E. Human beings naturally desire to make their own solutions to cover their sin. Look at Adam and Eve's fig leaves. Sinful man wants to make God indebted to him through his actions. If there was a law that could impart life this would surely be man's desire.
Galatians 3:21 NAU - "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law."
- F. But there is no law that can lead to life. The very obedience to the Law that we expect to lead to life will only lead to death. The Law can indeed kill you. So then, the right answer to this question is of vital importance. "Why the Law then?"
4. In this passage Paul gives us two uses of the Law.
 1. First, he says the Law was given because of transgressions
Galatians 3:19 NAU - "It was added because of transgressions, "
 2. Second, he says the Law was given so that the promise might come through faith in Jesus Christ alone. The Law shuts us up under sin with no way of escape. Thus it serves to declare our guilt and helpless in order to points us to Christ.
Galatians 3:22 NAU - "so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

Galatians 3:24 NAU - "Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.*"

5. Let's look at the first of these this week:

I. The Law was added "It was added because of transgressions" - προστίθημι

A. The best commentary of Galatians is Romans

1. Romans 5:20

"The Law came in so that the transgression would increase"

The word in Romans 5:20 literally means to "join unnoticed"

2. The idea is the Law was added as a side thing to the main thing

B. Paul said it was added because of transgressions

1. There are two ways the preposition *χάριν* "because" can be understood.

a. One would be to give it a causal meaning (backward looking) – that the Law serves a preventive function. Because of sin the Law has come in to restrain it.

(1) There is a sense in which this is true. As civil authorities enforce the Law of God it does serve as a deterrent.

Romans 13:3-4 NAU - "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good."

(2) This is one of God's means of restraining grace. In His mercy God restrains men from being as evil as their wicked hearts are capable of. This is God's kindness for the sake of His elect. This restraint will be removed in hell.

(3) It is also true that the threat of God's condemnation brings the fear of judgment which restrains evil. God has written His Law upon the hearts of all men with the result of restraining sin.

Romans 2:14 NAU - "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,"

b. The other way we could interpret the word is to give it what is called a telic meaning (forward looking). In this sense it carries the very opposite meaning. It was given "for the sake of" sin. In this sense it would serve to actually provoke or increase sin.

2. Remember, the best commentary on the Book of Galatians is the Book of Romans.

Romans 5:20 NAU - "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase"

C. The Law increases sin by Inciting us to Sin

Rom 5:20 - "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase"

1. This is the very nature of our corrupt hearts

The very knowledge of the Law causes in us the desire to break it.

It's like the man driving and sees the speed limit is 50– he wants to drive 60

2. The Law provides us with opportunities to sin that were formerly not envisioned. It gives us something against which to rebel.

^{NAS} **Romans 7:7-8** – “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.”⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.”

II. Why would God send His Law if it serves to entice us to sin?

A. First of all, God never tempts a man to sin

1. Again, God is holy and His Law is holy. God’s Law reflects His holy character

Romans 7:12 – “Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”

2. God never tempts us to sin

James 1:13-14 NAU - "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."

3. The problem is not with the law. The problem is with our sinful nature that hates the Law.

The more we know about sin the more we are tempted to do it. This is why sin reigns upon the earth

Romans 5:21 – “That as sin hath reigned unto death”

βασιλεύω – to reign as a king – sin rules over us. We are slaves to sin.

B Paul always maintained a high view of the Law

Romans 7:12 KJV - "Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."

1. In **Verse 21** Paul declares that the Law is not contrary to the promises of God as if there was some flaw in the Law. If it were possible for men to keep it salvation would surely come from it.

2. Why then did God send the Law in order that sin might increase?

- a. Because it makes sin all the more sinful. It serves as a spotless light that shows us the dirtiness of our heart

- b. In provoking sin it declares all men all the more guilty

- c. It makes our desperate condition all the more desperate.

- d. It exposes our wicked hearts and declare us unmistakingly guilty.

Romans 2:5-6 NAS - "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,⁶ who will render to every man according to his deeds:"

3. But as our sinful deeds increase it makes God’s grace appear all the more glorious.

Romans 5:20-21 NAS - "And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,²¹ that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Conclusion:

1. This is the Gospel message. The Law declares you guilty as charged.
 Have you ever told a single lie?
 Your whole life has been characterized by lies and deceit.
 Have you ever taken anything that doesn't belong to you?
 We are thieves by nature robbing other men, but infinitely worse, robbing God of all that is rightly His.
 Have you ever been angry, ever lusted after someone you were not married to?
 Have you always served and worshipped God alone—only and always obeying Him?
2. You are guilty. And the Law that condemns you has no ability to remove your transgressions and make you righteous.
3. This is why we so desperately need a Savior. This is why we need Christ. The Law enflames our wretched hearts towards greater lust after sin. Paul says this continues until Christ comes:
Galatians 3:19 NAU - "until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made."
4. Only then is our heart changed from despising God's Law to loving it. Only then are we delivered from our bondage to the Law as a rule that we cannot keep to a measure of righteousness that we delight in.
1 John 5:3 NAU - " For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."
5. This sets before us how precious the righteousness that comes by faith is. This is the righteousness given to all who trust Christ.