

Why Then The Law? Galatians 3:15-25

Notes and Prayer
Requests:

Memory Verse: Galatians 4:6 - “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out ‘Abba, Father!’”

Text: “Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise. 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. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. 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. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come we are no longer under a tutor.”

Monday

In his classic book, *Pilgrim’s Progress* John Bunyan writes, “As I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden on his back. I looked and saw him open the book and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able to longer contain it, he broke out with a lamentable cry, saying, ‘What shall I do.’ A short while later the man encountered Evangelist, who asked, ‘Why do you cry?’ Pilgrim answered, ‘Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment.’ Evangelist then pointed the pilgrim toward a gate in the distance and a light beyond it and a hill. With the great burden on his back and the book in his hand, Pilgrim started off toward the hill, crying out, ‘Life! Life! Eternal Life!’”

The burden on pilgrim's back was his sin, the book in his hand was the Bible and the hill toward which he journeyed was Calvary, the hill where Jesus died. It was in reading the book that Pilgrim realized he was condemned to death and hell, and it was this knowledge that drove him to the cross of Christ. It is my hope this week that the truth of this illustration by Bunyan will become both clear and personal as we study our text.

This text is absolutely marvelous. Before we jump into it though, I think that it will be helpful to summarize where we have been during previous weeks, so that you follow the thought of Paul and get the full impact of what he is saying here.

What has Paul been arguing in the last several verses that we've studied?

In Galatians 2:15-21 we saw that justification before God, that is being declared not guilty of our sins was by faith alone in Christ alone. We saw that seeking to be justified by human works was futile in vv. 15-16, that it was sinful in vv. 17-19, that seeking to be justified by works was in opposition to the self-denying Christ-centered life in 2:20, and that it denies the necessity of Christ's death in v.21.

In chapter 3 verses 1-5 Paul continued the argument showing that not only seeking to be justified by works rather than faith was foolish, but seeking to be sanctified by works rather than faith was also foolish. In chapter 3 verses 6-9 we discovered that the children of Abraham are not Children by physical descent, but become his spiritual children when they have the faith of Abraham. In other words the true spiritual children of Abraham are the ones who are like Abraham in their faith, and finally the children of Abraham inherit the blessing of Abraham, which was justification by their faith and the promised Holy Spirit in their lives. And last week we saw in verses 10-14 two powerful truths. First that the law brings a curse on everyone (vv. 10-12), and secondly, and wonderfully that Jesus Christ bears the curse for those who through faith cling to Him (vv. 13-14).

Now this whole argument from the Apostle Paul, and truly from the Holy Spirit that inspired Him raises a critical question. That question is what confronts us this week: "Why then the Law?" Why did God give the law to mankind, if obeying the law and striving to be a good person can never bring one to God? If it can never bring salvation, why did God bother?

Paul has just demonstrated to us through very powerful scriptural arguments that no one will ever be justified before God through keeping

What are some possible objections to Paul's argument?

the law, through legalism, through religious rituals or through any human efforts at goodness whatsoever. He has shown us, in fact, that the law brings a curse upon all men (verse 10), and that the only way for anyone to ever be justified before God is through faith alone in Christ alone. It is **belief** that counts with God, not works.

And now this immediately raises the question, "Why then the law?" Why did God spend so much time and effort on the law if salvation comes by faith alone? And here you can see Paul dealing with a possible objection. Someone might go on to ask this, "Let's grant you your point Paul that Abraham was justified by faith. Maybe that's the way God wanted to *start* redemption and redemptive history. But there is no way you can escape the fact that 430 years after Abraham God thought it necessary to add the law through Moses at Mt. Sinai. And if the law, with its 600+ commandments, does not teach that our inheritance from God comes on the basis of works, what does it teach?"

Why is it important to answer these objections?

The argument might continue: "When we tell Galatian believers or anyone else who has begun with faith to exert their own efforts now to complete their sanctification through works of law, we are doing just what God did. He gave our people a promise through Abraham which, you say, was received by faith, and then he added the law to make clear what our part in the process is. So the course of redemptive history shows that our inheritance *does* come from works of the law. Why else would God have added a law 430 years later if not to make crystal clear that we must go beyond your view of Abraham and exert our own effort and in this way earn our right to the inheritance. I mean why in the world did God drop this huge bag of laws down on us in the front of the Bible, if it didn't have something to do with justification and right standing before God. And not only have you denied this Paul but you have said that all who seek to rely on the works of the law for any part of their salvation are in fact separated from Christ and damned. Why then the law!?"

Now Paul needs to answer these questions, if he's going to bring the Galatians around to the right way of thinking. So he begins to give three critical lessons about the nature of the law of God revealed in the Old Testament. Now this is important for you isn't it? If you want to have any chance at all of living the Christian life, you're are going to have to figure out what the relationship is between yourself, your life and the law of God. We've seen the wrong relationship, the law is not meant to be a means by which you earn your own salvation, so what is the right relationship between the Christian and the law?

How should a Christian view the law of God?

Tuesday

The first lesson that Paul gives in this text answers the possible objection I mentioned yesterday and it is this:

What kind of promises can never be taken back, once they are made?

1. The law was not given to invalidate the promise (vv. 15-18).

That is, the law was not given to invalidate the promise of justification by faith in the promised Seed who was to bless all nations.

Paul begins by saying in verse 15, “Brethren, I speak in the manner of men,” or you can say, “I speak in terms of human relations,” “even though it is a man’s covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.” In other words, even under human law, Jewish, Roman and Greek, there were certain promises, that once they are confirmed they became irrevocable. They cannot be changed or added to. They are a done deal. We have some of the same things in our society today. When someone dies, his will is set. You can’t change it at that point. And even in life, a person can set up an irrevocable trust for the benefit of someone else, and when it’s created, it’s a done deal. You can’t change it, even if the beneficiary of the trust becomes a turkey or a rat later in life, you’re stuck. You can’t change your promise. Now if that is the way that covenants can work among men, once they are ratified or confirmed as verse 15 says. How much more irrevocable are the promises made by God?

Verse 16, “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made.” The Seed being Jesus Christ. And verse 17 tells us that the law, which came 430 years later couldn’t annul it, it couldn’t change the covenant, it couldn’t make the promise of God of justification and blessing by faith of no effect. Abraham’s inheritance was fixed irrevocably and so was the inheritance of Abraham’s sons (verse 7), who are those that have the faith that Abraham had in the same Gospel preached to him beforehand (verses 8 and 9) of this very chapter. You say, “what in the

What is the difference between a promise of God and the promise of a man? Consider Titus 1:2 in giving your answer.

world are you talking about? What is this promise and covenant thing with Abraham?”

Well back in Genesis, God promised to bless Abraham, to give him land as an inheritance and to bless all of the nations of the earth through his Seed, which was a promised **individual**, Seed singular in the Hebrew as Paul points out (v. 16). This promise was reiterated multiple times to Abraham, and it says in Genesis 15:6 that Abraham believed God and this faith was credited to him for righteousness. Then Abraham asked a question of God. He said, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it.” In other words, “How do I know that you are going to fulfill your promises. So God told Abraham to take a heifer, a female goat, a ram, a turtledove and a pigeon, cut them in half and lay the sides opposite each other, so that there was a path between the two halves of the animals. Then He caused sleep to fall on Abraham and the Lord passed between the animals in the form of a smoking oven and a burning torch to confirm His promises.

What made God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 so incredible?

Ordinarily both parties to a covenant would walk between the slain animals, to ratify an agreement, but in this case, God alone walked through, indicating that the promise, though it involved blessing upon Abraham and His children, who are children by faith and not simply by physical descent as we learned earlier from Galatians chapter 3, though the promise involved them, the covenant was unilateral and unconditional. The only obligation was upon God Himself. He made a covenant with Himself. You say, what does all that mean? What it means is this, when the one making the covenant promise walked in between the animals, he was saying symbolically, let it be with me as it is with these animals, if I do not fulfill my promise. Let me be torn to pieces, if I do not do what I said I would do. That is how serious God takes His promise. And get this, it was not only a promise to Abraham and his spiritual descendants those saved by faith in Christ, but to Jesus Christ, God the Son according to verse 16. So God makes the promise to Himself, and there is no way that the law could nullify this promise to bless Abraham and his spiritual descendants.

Wednesday

Now beloved, we all know what it is like to be disappointed by broken promises. How many marriages could we think of that have been shattered by broken promises? How many children have had their hearts broken, because parents failed to keep their promises? But beloved, we also know beauty of a promise that has been kept don’t we.

Have you ever broken a promise? How did you feel afterwards?

I was reading a story in Focus on the Family magazine. It was the story of a single father, who had one little son in first grade. They lived in an East Asian country. His child was insecure, since his mother had passed away while he was young. And so at night the father after prayers would promise to his son, "If I am able, I will always come for you when you need me" and this little boy went to sleep with this promise from his father every night.

Has anyone ever broken a promise to you? How did that make you feel?

An earthquake hit the city, leveled many buildings and killed thousands. The father frightened for his son went to his school and found the building had collapsed. In tears and a panic he began to tear at the rubble in the place where he figured that his son's class was. Many came and joined him including rescue workers. They worked for hours, but after about 8 hours many gave up. The rescue workers concluded that there could be no survivors and moved on to other places where they could give aid. Then after sixteen hours of moving and digging through rubble the man was left all alone. He worked until his fingers and hands were literally bloody and cut to the bone in many places. People kept urging him to stop, saying it was hopeless, but he refused to listen. The news article said that the father persevered and then after 23 hours of working non stop in desperation to find his son, the man finally opened up a pocket, a crevice that had opened up beneath the school during the earthquake.

As soon as he opened up the hole and the light pierced through, he heard his own little son's voice cry out, "Daddy is that you?" He said weeping with joy, "Yes son, are you all right?" And his son said "Yes daddy, my class is down here, we are ok." Others quickly came at the father's cry and the children were lifted out. Then, after the children were rescued, the man asked his son if he was afraid, and the boy said, "No daddy, and when the other children became frightened, I told them, 'Don't worry. My daddy promised that he would always come for me when I needed him. He will be here.'"

Beloved, if that is the effort that the best of human fathers will go to in order to fulfill his promises to his children, then how much more can we expect from our Father in heaven, who is infinitely greater?

Look at verse 18, "For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise." In other words, if the inheritance were of law, then it would depend on you fulfilling and meeting the conditions of the law to get it, which you simply could not do, but how does the verse end, "But God gave it to Abraham by promise," An unconditional, unilateral promise, a

promise that extends to all who by faith trust in Christ and become sons of Abraham according to verse 6-9, a promise, in which the God of the universe says, **“Let me be torn to pieces, if I do not fulfill it.”**

Consider Hebrews 6:18. What are the two things “in which it is impossible for God to lie”?

Hebrews 6:13-19 adds to our understanding. It says, “For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.’ And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast....”

How does this give us “strong consolation”?

Thursday

We saw in the last two days that the law was not given to nullify the promise of salvation by faith. The second lesson Paul gives concerning the purpose of the law is this:

2. The law was given as a prison to confine all under sin (vv 19-22).

The law was added because of transgressions according to verse 19 and to confine all under sin, verse 22. The term translated “confine” all under sin is a strong word meaning to lock up securely and to enclose on all sides with no way of escape. So we see that far from being a means of freedom and a way to peace with God, the law is the means that God uses to condemn all men and lock them up under sin.

Now some people might say, “Well this seems like a rather negative view of the law doesn’t it? You mean those ten commandments were added because of mankind’s sin, to reveal it and make it manifest, and they were given by God to lock men up in the prison of sin.” That’s exactly right. Paul explains in Romans 7:13 that the law was a good given by God in order *that sin might be shown to us to be sin and through the commandment sin might become sinful beyond measure.* And of course, after we understand the law and we continue to sin, our sin becomes that much worse. Because, it is now high handed presumptuous rebellion against God.

It was therefore thoroughly impossible for the law to ever serve as a path to righteousness before God as verse 21 says, because it's purpose was never to give you a way to peace and true righteousness before God, but its purpose was the exact opposite, to confine you in prison. It was given as the evidence against you, which God would use to lock you up in jail forever.

Therefore, Legalism and vain efforts at self-righteousness before God will never rescue anyone from God's judgment. You say, is this the view of the law given by the Old Testament in the law itself? You bet it is. In fact Moses said in Deut. 31:26-27, "Take this book of the law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are." It was always meant to lock people up helpless in prison.

Someone else might ask, "Well what about those who never had access to the written law or even heard of the law of Moses, does the law also lock them up in the prison of sin?" The answer is "Yes," because Scripture tells us that God has written His law on the hearts of all men; and, their own conscience will bear witness against them that they failed to meet the standards of right and wrong, which God revealed to them by His general unwritten revelation. Thus all men are confined in the prison of sin by the law of God.

Paul gives an example of how the law fulfilled this function in his life in Romans 7:11. What does he say happened to him?

Has the law of God ever served as a prison for you personally by bringing conviction to bear and knowledge of sin?

Has your conscience ever served this same function in your life?

Friday

A third lesson we want to consider from the text this week and a second function of God's law is this:

What is the law supposed to teach us and how does "our tutor" "bring us to Christ"?

3. The law was given as a tutor to bring you to faith in Christ (vv. 22-25).

Beloved I want you to get this. The ten commandments and any other aspect of the law of God, were not given as a guide to aid you on a path of some kind of personal self-help spiritual reformation. They were given to utterly break you of all self-righteousness and all vain efforts at reforming yourself.

The law was never given as a do better guide, religion for dummies handbook, or a 10 step manual to living the Christian life. It was never given so that you might pull yourself up by your own boot straps and make resolutions to do better. It was given so that it might open up your eyes to your own complete helplessness before God, so that you might look at the law of God and realize your own shameful and utter sinful wretchedness before the Holy One. And if you look at the law of God casually and said, "Hey, you know I'm doing OK," then you are no better than a blind pharisee and a hypocritical Judaizer bound for hell. For the law itself condemns such wicked self-deceived self-righteous pride.

I went to grade school at Lewis and Clark Elementary. And while I was there I was what you might call a teacher's pet, a goody two shoes, who never got in trouble. I did everything that the teachers asked me to do; I always got all Es. - We used the E, S, U, and F system back then, and I always got all Es for excellent. - Whenever the teacher had to leave the room, I was the child that she would call forward, give a pad and pencil, sit on a stool and say, "Now if anyone talks, so much as says one word, passes a note, or gets out of their seat, I want you to write the name down on that paper and tell me what they did when I get back." Then, I would sit on that stool and the class would scowl at me, because they knew I wasn't going to let them get away with anything, and I would scowl right back at the class just daring someone to make a wrong move or say something. And when someone had to go to the office, I was the

enforcer chosen by the teacher to escort him there.

Now at Lewis and Clark the school worked on a points system, and if anytime during the year a child got three points, then he or she had an appointment with big Bertha. Then, for every point after three you had another appointment with Big Bertha, and folks the points didn't roll over and start at one again until the whole next school year.

Who was big Bertha, you ask? Big Bertha was a three foot tall wooden board about one inch thick and four inches wide with a handle on the end. It had it's name burned into the side in big black letters, Bertha, and it had wholes drilled through it in just the right places so that it would whistle as it was swung through the air.

Big Bertha was in the keeping of Mrs. Flassing, the principle. Mrs. Flassing was a sweet old gray headed lady, somebody's grandmother, who always smiled and called everyone, "Dear." But I tell you what, when she had Big Bertha in her hands she might as well have been Babe Ruth swinging at a high fast ball down the center of the plate. I mean she could make that thing whistle better than the gym teacher ever even dreamed. And at the beginning of every year, we would have an all school assembly, Mrs. Flassing would explain the points system so everybody understood, and then she'd get Big Bertha to whistling to make sure everything was perfectly clear in our minds.

Out of the six hundred or so kids at Lewis and Clark we tended to have orderly, quiet and studious class rooms, because Mrs. Flassing ran a tight ship. And there wasn't a whole lot of attention deficit disorder going on, because Big Bertha had a way of solving all deficiencies in attention, if you take my meaning. But of course I never had an appointment with her, because I was a golden boy teacher's pet. In fact, I never even got a single point for the first four years of grade school.

And then one day it happened. I was out on the playground with my two closest friends at the time, Ian Borath and Mike Kelley. We were down on a hill leading to a ditch with a fence at the bottom, out of sight of the school and the teachers; and, we decided to experiment using bad words, four letter words. We said them, trying out the sound, and there we sat laughing about it, when all of the sudden we heard a voice behind us asking, "Boys what are you doing?" We turned around and there was the gym teacher standing and listening to us. Well we were shocked and utterly dismayed that we had been caught, and he told us to march off to the office.

By the time we got to Mrs. Flassing's office, I had hatched a plan to try and save us. We arrived and had to confess what we had done, but I explained to Mrs. Flassing that we were just using the words to try to figure out what they meant, that it was really an educational discussion and we didn't intend to use them in a bad way at all. Even then the lawyer was working in me to find some kind of loop hole, and that of course was a bald faced lie. Mrs. Flassing, however, explained in her patient and sweet way that it was never appropriate to use those words under any circumstance, and then to our great horror she opened up the closet and brought out Big Bertha. We began pleading, "Mrs. Flassing, we don't have any points; this is just our first point." She responded, "But boys, bad words are worth an automatic three points and deserve three swats." With that announcement an icy chill gripped our hearts.

Mike was the first to go. She told him to lean over and touch his toes. Then she swatted him with such force that he lost his balance, fell forward and slammed his head on the office door. Mrs. Flassing was shocked; Mike started crying. She picked him up, cradled him in her lap, rocked him back and forth and said, "Oh I'm sorry dear. I didn't mean to do that. You can go back to your room now." Mike smiled and winked at us, the rat. But we looked at Mrs. Flassing, hoping that mercy might somehow prevail after this tragedy. But was mercy coming? Nope, she just got smarter and had Ian lean over and brace himself against the wall. He got the full three swats, big fat tears rolling down his face. And then there being no escape, I became personally acquainted with Big Bertha.

Well a few things happened because of that. Number one, I never said another bad word for the rest of grade school, junior high, or high school, in public, private or anywhere else. Mrs. Flassing taught me a lesson that day and because I respected her and knew she wanted the best for me I learned it well; and I still respect her for it today. Number two, I had some trouble sitting down in class for the rest of the day; and most importantly, number three, my pride was broken and I was ashamed. I knew that I had gotten what I deserved; and even worse, rather than owning up to it, I had tried to lie my way out. The teacher's pet was no better than anyone else; and, he had joined the Big Bertha swat club along with the worst offenders in the school. I went back to the room and the teacher and everyone else knew what had happened. Of course Mrs. Flassing was a member of my church as well, so the sin continued to confront me.

I had been confronted with the law, I was forced to the realization that I

Understanding that the law is a tutor designed to bring us to Christ, how should that impact preaching and teaching?

was guilty and wrong. And the point of the story is this: just as the confrontation with Big Bertha forced me to the realization that I was guilty, the law was added to demonstrate to man his total sinfulness, his inability to please God by his own works and his need for mercy and grace. It was given to drive men and women to desperate awareness of their guilt and their need for a deliverer. As Paul says in Romans 7, "I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'" He says in Galatians that the law was a tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. The impossible demands of the law were meant to compel men to recognize their violation of God's standards and to seek His grace and mercy through faith in His Son.

The law shows men their violation of the will of God, who rules the universe and will hold them accountable for their sin. And the preaching and teaching of the law today is still imperative as a means of driving men to cry out for mercy from Christ. Unless people realize that they are living in violation of God's law and understand the coming judgment, then they will see no reason to be saved. If you are not truthful and forthright about sin in people's lives, then they will never understand the need for a Savior. People will not seek help, if they do not know they need it. Grace is meaningless to a person who feels no inadequacy or need for help. He sees no purpose in being saved, if he does not realize he is lost. He sees no need for forgiveness by God if he does not know he has offended God. He sees no need to seek God's mercy if he is unaware that he is under God's wrath.

How should it impact evangelism?

Some pastors and Christians are afraid. They say, "Well if we talk about sin and confront it, if we talk about God's judgment, then a person might be offended. We might lose all opportunity to continue dialoging with them and influencing them. It's not very seeker friendly, you know, to talk about sin." Beloved, have you ever considered the possibility that you might be offending God by failing to speak the truth plainly and call people to repentance? Have you ever considered the possibility that offending someone might be the most loving thing you can do for that person? Have you ever considered the possibility, that giving offense to a person might be the one thing that a person needs more than anything else? Have you ever considered the fact that God never makes apologies for offending anyone's wicked, twisted and sinful sensibilities, and God never apologizes for calling sin sin? Have you ever considered that God simply does not desire or need **you** to make apologies on His behalf for the truth He has revealed in His word?

Who should we be concerned about offending?

I don't apologize for the truth of God's word. I don't apologize for hell; I don't apologize for the teaching that homosexuality is a sin or that anything else He calls sin is a violation of His law. I don't try to avoid the truth. I don't water it down, gloss over it, avoid it when asked or compromise and neither should you. Why? Because I'm more afraid of offending the authoritative Holy God who both loves and judges, than I am of offending the sensibilities of some finite sinful man or woman, whose opinion isn't worth a hill of beans anyway. Why? Because I'm more concerned about loving someone enough to tell the truth in the hope that he might turn to Christ in faith and cry out for mercy, than I am about hating their soul and giving them a false sense of security.

What should our greatest desire be for others?

The simple fact is that God gave the law to teach men of their need for a Redeemer, to drive men and women, you and I and everyone else, to despair over our sins and to long for the Sovereign grace and mercy that God freely offers to those that believe and place their trust in Him. John Stott once wrote, "We cannot come to Christ to be justified until we have first been to Moses to be condemned. But once we have gone to Moses, and acknowledged our sin, guilt and condemnation, we must not stay there. We must let Moses send us to Christ."

The ultimate purpose of the law was not to nullify the promise of inheritance and justification by faith, but it was to shut men and women up in the prison of sin and death, so that the promise might then be given to those who believe in Jesus Christ. The law was given to bring men under sin to the point of saying with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24). So that they might be led to the promise of God, and believing say, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25). Jesus is the one who sets us free, not foolish legalism or vain attempts at human goodness.

Have you learned the lesson of the tutor, that you are indeed a sinner in desperate need of God's saving grace? Has your pride been broken and are you clinging to Christ alone for salvation? Are you resting in the hope of an wonderful eternal inheritance in Him, which is given to all who believe?