

# **GALATIANS: Called To Freedom**

## **#11 The Law: A Diagnostic**

### **Galatians 3:15-22, 24-25**

“To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

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

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. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe...So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

### **I. Where we began: (Gal. 1:6)**

- Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone!
- JESUS + NOTHING = EVERYTHING! – TRUE GOSPEL
- JESUS + ANYTHING = DIFFERENT GOSPEL

### **II. What about the Law of God? (Gal. 3:15-18)**

1. A human example – signed contracts are not changed or annulled. Paul uses an everyday e.g. to explain the place of the law in God’s scheme. A covenant [contract] or a will cannot be changed, once it’s signed & sealed. So neither can God’s promises made to Abraham and to his offspring be changed just because a [later] law has come into the picture. [ESV Note]

2. Biblical application-- The Law of Moses given at Sinai (Exodus) was an interim covenant that did not over-ride the earlier promises of God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis)

a. God made promises to Abraham and he received them by faith; God’s promises involved:

- i. Land (Gen. 12:1; 13:7; 15:18-21)
- ii. Nation (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 17:4-8; 22:17)
- iii. Blessing (Gen. 12:3; 22:18)
- iv. Offspring (Gen. 22:18)

b. The Law was added 430 years after God made the promises to Abraham & to his “offspring/seed.”

5. The later law doesn't cancel or annul the earlier promises to Abraham.
5. The promise involves Abraham's "offspring/seed" (singular)—i.e. Christ. Paul knows that the singular (Heb. *zera'*) can be used as a collective singular that has a plural sense... But it also can have a singular meaning. Here Paul, knowing that only in Christ would the promised blessings come to the Gentiles, sees that the most true and ultimate fulfillment of these OT promises comes to *one* "offspring," namely, Christ. ESV

3. Conclusion – Inheriting comes through faith, not through works

### III. So, why did God give the Law? (Gal. 3:19-20, 24)

1. It is holy, righteous and good (Rom. 7:12)
2. The Law defines sins & transgressions, making us conscious of sins (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:13)
  - a. "...through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20)
  - b. "...where there is no law there is no transgression." (Rom. 4:15)
  - c. "sin was in the world before the law was given..." (5:13)
  - d. "that sin...through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure." (Rom. 7:13)

"Paul said nothing of this function in Galatians. "(p. 134) In Romans we see "the law in its function of defining sin, bringing sin to conscious awareness in its character as transgression, and serving as the measure of divine judgment on such transgression." [James Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 137]

3. It was '**added**' – it's secondary, not primary, but it does NOT change the promises God made
4. It was added '**because of transgressions**' (Gal. 3:19) The question arises: If the law has no impact on God's plan rooted in his promise [to Abraham], why was the law ever given?
  - a. To restrict/restrain sin within us
  - b. To show us that we have sin ("through the law comes knowledge of sin" Rom. 3:20; 7:7)
  - c. To convince us of our need of a Saviour

"**The Law is diagnostic not the cure!** The cure is Jesus Christ alone. The reason why so many Christians do not live in the freedom they have been called to live in, is because they keep returning to the diagnostic which keeps telling them they are sick. Our joy flourishes when we run to Jesus!" [Matt Chandler]

Before Christ's coming, in the OT context, "*the law was added because of transgressions*" (3:19) might mean "to provide a sacrificial system to deal temporarily with transgressions." [ESV Note] Taken in this sense, "the allusion... is probably to that major function of the law in the provision of the sacrificial system [e.g. Leviticus]" [James D G Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 139]

5. It was added because of transgressions '**until Christ should come**' – **TEMPORARY**
  - To provide protective custody--"Before faith came, we were held captive [in protective custody] under the law, imprisoned *until* the coming faith would be revealed." (3:22) "We were held captive' probably denotes what is best described as '*protective custody*'. The function envisioned for the law in Gal. 3:23...is to be understood not so much as oppressive and subjugative, but as protective oversight.... 'confined' certainly indicates a purpose and period of

restriction, even if... [it's] temporary restriction ('til the coming faith should be revealed.').” [James D G Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 141]

- It was a *guardian* [child conductor] until Christ came (Gal. 3:24). The coming of Christ means we are no longer “children” under a guardian; we are sons & heirs (3:25, 29) “The law was our *paidagogos*’ (3:24). The *paidagogos* [Greek] was a slave who conducted the son of the household to and from school... The role as such was essentially positive—to instruct in good manners, to correct as appropriate, to protect as necessary. In Gal. 3 Israel is likened to a child growing up in an evil world needing protection and discipline to keep it safe to the maturity of adulthood. And that protective, disciplining role was the role of the law, likened to the *paidagogos*.” [James D G Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 141-2]
- “*until*” means there’s an end-point to the law’s function as a “guardian, providing protective custody.” The coming of Christ (& faith) ends these roles of the law. “Paul’s argument in Gal. 3-4 [is] that Israel’s special relationship under the law was only temporary... The law was a kind of regent during the time of Israel’s minority (4:1-5). But that also means that this role was intended to end with the coming of ‘the faith’ (3:23-25), with the arrival of the promised seed [offspring] (3:16), with the sending of God’s Son (4:4).” [James D G Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 143]
- “*until Christ should come*’ implies the end of Israel’s special status under the law as God’s “most favored nation.” The law in its protective function [of guardian] has particular reference to Israel. However God’s promise to Abraham was also to the Gentiles (3:14). Paul criticized “Israel’s continued assumption that it enjoyed a favored nation status before God... Israel boasted because the law gave it advantages over other nations ... In continuing to assert this position of privilege, Israel was focusing on the outward and visible.. the flesh. But the promised Spirit was rendering all such evaluations outdated... Israel’s privilege had been abused by being still asserted after its time was past.” [James D G Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 145]
- It was put into place by an intermediary – not direct but indirect. God’s interactions with Abraham (giving promises & making covenants) were direct (without an intermediary). In contrast the Law was given to Israel through an intermediary.

#### **IV. Is the Law contrary to God’s promises? (Gal. 3:21-22) – NO!**

- 1) The Law only makes demands on us – its role is **DIAGNOSTIC, NOT THE CURE!** The law serves a limited purpose—there are things the law cannot do—“God has done *what the law could not do* [because the law’s effectiveness is] weakened by the flesh, by sending his own Son...”(Rom. 8:3) “The role of ‘making alive’ in biblical usage is almost exclusively that of God or His Spirit....The role of the law was to *regulate* life already given, not to *give* life where none was before.” [James D G Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 154]
- 2) The Law imprisons, so we can realize we need a Saviour – **DIAGNOSTIC** “The law (the Scripture), imprisoned everything under sin...” (3:22)

#### **V. Come to Jesus (Matt. 11:28)**

- Don’t be satisfied with the DIAGNOSIS that you are a sinner!
- Recognize the fact, and go to Christ – Don’t miss Him!