

Galatians 3: 19-29—¹⁹“What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. ²⁰A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one. ²¹Is 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. ²²But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. ²³Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. ²⁴So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. ²⁶You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

¹⁹What, then, was the purpose of the law?

- Given everything that has been said so far, this is the logical question. One might be forgiven if they had assumed by this point that the Law didn't have a purpose. But Paul states emphatically that the Law does have a purpose.

It was added because of transgressions

There are essentially two understandings of this passage.

1. The Law was given in order to provide a way of atonement for sins at least for an interim period until the coming of the Messiah. This is probably expressed and defended best by James Dunn.
 - **Dunn:** “What was in view, in other words, would be that whole dimension of the law so largely lost to sight in modern Christian treatments of Paul – viz. the sacrificial system, whereby transgressions could be dealt with, whereby atonement was provided (alluded to by Paul in his use of sacrificial terminology to interpret the death of Christ - particularly Rom. 3:25, with its talk of God’s ‘passing over sins committed in former times’). This would make better sense of the divine rationale implied in the [next] clause – ‘**until the coming of the seed to whom the promise was made.**’”¹
2. It is similar to the statement in **Romans 5: 20** “The law was added so that the trespass might increase...” In other words, it was given to make our situation worse, not better; to demonstrate to humanity our total sinfulness, our inability to please God by our own works, and our need for mercy and grace. It was given to drive us to desperate guilt and the awareness of our need for the Deliverer. **Romans 11:32** “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”
 - **Macarthur:** “The covenant of law is long past, but the moral demands of the law have not diminished, having neither begun nor ended with the Mosaic covenant. That is why preaching the moral, ethical standards of the law today is still imperative in driving men to Christ. Unless men realize they are living in violation of God’s law and therefore stand under His divine judgment, they will see no reason

¹ James Dunn, *The Epistle to The Galatians* in *Black's New Testament Commentary* series (London: Hendrickson, 1993), 190.

to be saved. Grace is meaningless to a person who feels no inadequacy or need of help. He sees no purpose in being saved if he does not realize he is lost. He sees no need of 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 he is under God's wrath."²

- It is at least conceivable that it is a combination of both of these that Paul is getting at.

until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

- As a reminder from last week, "the seed" was Christ.

The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.

- God was the Author and Giver of the covenant of law, and He was present with Moses on Mt. Sinai when it was given (Ex. 19:18–24) But in a way not fully explained, the law was given by God to Moses through angels.
- **Acts 7:53** "...you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." (Stephen's speech)
- **Hebrews 2:2** "For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment..."
- **Dunn**: "Paul accepted the implication of the traditional Jewish view of the law, as treating it in effect as equivalent to Israel's, guardian angel, but did so only to limit that role to the period before the coming of Christ."³

²⁰**A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.**

- J. B. Lightfoot already know of some 300 different interpretations at the time he wrote his commentary back in 1865.⁴
- But the point seems to be clear enough.
- Paul was probably attempting an epigrammatic play-off between the thought of God's oneness and the fact that mediation implies more than one.
- There is here a contrast between the law, given through intermediaries (angels and Moses), and the covenant, given *directly* to Abraham "by God Himself."

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.**

- The Law was inferior because it could not save, it was not able to impart life.
- In contrast, it is still held among Jewish communities today that Torah is the means by which God conveys eternal life:
 - "We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe: You have given us a Torah of truth, *implanting within us eternal life*. We praise You, O God, Giver of the Torah."⁵
- The law had virtually dominated Jewish life from the time of Moses. And because its demands were so impossible, the spiritually-minded, conscientious Jew who sought to love God and serve Him was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt and inadequacy. He sincerely wanted to obey the whole law but knew he could not.

²²**But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin,**

- **Romans 11:32** –"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."

² John MacArthur, *Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), n.p.

³ Dunn, *The Epistle to The Galatians* 197.

⁴ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Macmillan, 1865), 146.

⁵ Temple Beth Or, "Shabbat Shalom, July 28, 2007," Everett, WA. 8.

so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

- Paul uses two figures to represent God’s law and its effect on unbelievers:
 - First that of a **prison**
 - Second that of a **guardian**.

Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan writes:

- “As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and laid me down in that place to sleep; and, 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 upon 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 longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, “What shall I do?”
- “A short while later the man encountered Evangelist, who asked, “Wherefore dost thou 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 to 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!”⁶
- 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. It was in reading God’s Word that he learned that God’s law condemned him to death and hell because of his sin, and it was that knowledge of sin and judgment that drove Him to the cross of Christ, where the penalty for his sin was paid in full, and complete forgiveness was secured.

²³**Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.**

- The Greek word for “held prisoners” (*phroureo*) means to “protect by military guards.”
- When applied to a city, it was used both of keeping the enemy out and of keeping the inhabitants in, lest they should flee or desert.⁷
- Think about that for a moment, before the coming of Christ, the world was in a spiritual lock-down.
- As I’ve mentioned many times before, the law was never intended to be a substitute for or barrier to faith. Under Moses, a Jew could be saved by faith and counted righteous by God, just as Abraham and many others had believed and been saved.
 - They looked forward to a savior, we look back to the savior.
- However, when people began try and use the Law for purposes it was never intended to fill it became destructive.
- The first thing Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount was to undermine that false security. The Pharisees were the epitome of self-righteousness, and Jesus declared that their self-declared goodness was worthless in qualifying a person to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:20). “Do you think you keep the law?” He asked, in effect. “If you have ever hated your brother, you are a murderer, and if you have ever looked lustfully at a woman, you have committed adultery” (vv. 22, 28). They could not become righteous by keeping the law, be-

⁶ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bunyan/pilgrim.txt>.

⁷ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1968), 96.

cause their imperfect hearts prevented them from keeping it perfectly, as God requires (v. 48).

- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Sermon on the Mount*
- **Ills.** It's like a play doe set. When you extrude the play doe through the plastic die it always comes through in the same shape. It can't create a different shape. It is incapable of creating life-giving, Christ-focused laws—obviously!
- **MacArthur:** “The law, even when kept to the best of a person’s ability is nothing but a prison, a death row cell where one waits for eternal execution.”⁸
- **Dunn:** “The contrasting epochs can be summed up simply by their most characteristic features — law (for Israel) and faith. Faith (the faith of Abraham, and faith in Christ) brackets the interim epoch of the law...Paul was again deliberately drawing on the apocalyptic conception of two ages.”⁹

²⁴**So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.**

- A *paidagōgos* (tutor) was not a teacher or schoolmaster proper (KJV) but rather a slave employed by Greek or Roman families, whose duty was to supervise young boys in behalf of their parents. They took their young charges to and from school, made sure they studied their lessons, and trained them in obedience. They were strict disciplinarians. Scolding and whipping as they felt it necessary. He was often harsh to the point of cruelty, and is usually depicted in ancient drawings with a rod or cane in his hand.¹⁰
- The role of the *paidagōgos* was never permanent, and it was a great day of deliverance when a boy finally gained freedom from his *paidagōgos*. His purpose was to take care of the child only until he grew into adulthood. At that time the relationship was changed. Though the two of them might remain close and friendly, the *paidagogos*, having completed his assignment, had no more authority or control over the child, now a young man, and the young man had no more responsibility to be directly under the *paidagōgos*.
- **Kenneth Wuest:** “By describing the law as a *paidagogos*, Paul emphasizes both the inferiority of the law [verses] grace, and its temporary character. The law was therefore the guardian of Israel, keeping watch over those committed to its care, accompanying them with its commands and prohibitions, keeping them in a condition of dependence and restraint, and continually revealing to them sin as a positive transgression.”¹¹
- **Richard N. Longenecker:** “But there is no passage in the extant Jewish literature where the Mosaic law itself spoken of as a pedagogue.”¹²
- Plato (427-347 B.C.) in *The Republic* speaks of “pedagogues, nurses wet and dry, beauticians, barbers, and yet again cooks and chefs” as part of the retinue of Greek patrician households (373C), and characterizes pedagogues as “not those who are good for nothing else, but men who by age and experience are qualified to serve as both leaders and custodians of children” (467D). In chapter 4 of *Lysis* he provides us with a fascinating glimpse into the rearing of a

⁸ MacArthur, n.p.

⁹ Dunn, 198.

¹⁰ On the subject of *paidagogos* see especially Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians in the Word Biblical Commentary*, Ralph P. Martin NT ed., number 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990). Also, Stott, 97.

¹¹ Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, 4 Vols. *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 1: 110.

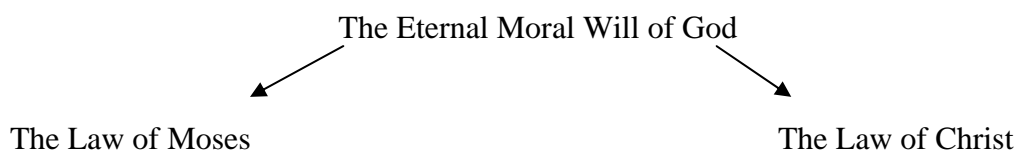
¹² Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians in the Word Biblical Commentary*, Ralph P. Martin NT ed., number 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 148.

son in a Greek family, from which the following dialogue between the boys, Socrates (who begins the dialogue), and Lysis is an excerpt:

- Do they [i.e., Lysis's father and mother] let you control your own self, or will they not trust you in that either? Of course they do not, he replied. But someone controls you? Yes, he said, my *pedagogues* here. Is he a slave? Why certainly; he belongs to us, he said. What a strange thing, I exclaimed: a free man controlled by a slave! But how does this *pedagogues* exert his control over you? By taking me to the teacher (*eis didaskalon*), he replied (208C).¹³

²⁵Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

- **Thomas McComiskey:** “The law is a temporary framework that prescribed the terms of obedience for the people of God in the Mosaic era.”¹⁴
- **Moo:** “Paul is saying that Christ is the one to whom the law has all along been pointing—its goal. But now that goal has been reached, the regime of the law is ended, just as a race is ended once the finish line, its goal, has been attained.”¹⁵
- **Galatians 2:19** “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.”
- **Hebrews 8: 7-13:** “For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸But God found fault with the people and said: ‘The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ⁹It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹²For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’¹³By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”



- **Moo:** “The ‘law’ under which Christians live is continuous with the Mosaic law in that God’s eternal moral norms, which never change, are clearly expressed in both. But there is discontinuity in the fact that Christians live under the ‘law of Christ’ and not under the Mosaic law. Our source for determining God’s eternal moral law is Christ and the apostles, not the Mosaic law or even the Ten Commandments.”¹⁶
- The “law of Christ” is Paul’s shorthand expression for the form of God’s law applicable to new covenant believers.

¹³ As quoted in Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians in the Word Biblical Commentary*, Ralph P. Martin NT ed., number 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 148.

¹⁴ Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 73.

¹⁵ Douglas Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 352.

¹⁶ Douglas Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 89.

- **Richard Longenecker:** “[The law of Christ] stands in Paul’s thought for those prescriptive principles stemming from the heart of the gospel (usually embodied in the example and teachings of Jesus), which are meant to be applied to specific situations by the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit, being always motivated and conditioned by love.”¹⁷
- So is there no purpose for the Law today? Yes!
- Luther, drawing from Paul, held that the Law of Moses was no longer binding on the Christian. For example, note a couple of quotations from him:
- **Luther:** “When we are involved in a discussion of justification, there is no room for speaking about the Law... This Bridegroom, Christ, must be alone with His bride in His private chamber, and all the family and household must be shunted away. But later on, when the Bridegroom opens the door and comes out, then let the servants return to take care of them and serve them food and drink. Then let works and love begin.”¹⁸
- At this point the reader may suspect that Luther is opposed to the law and good works; Luther insists that this is not the case. Both law and works have their place, their divinely appointed and absolutely essential functions. The point is simply that *they must not be allowed to intrude in the matter of justification.*¹⁹

¹⁷ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 275-76 (he is quoting from a previous book of his). See also Longenecker, *Paul*, 184-90;

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 55 vols. J. Pelikan, ed. (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26:137-138.

¹⁹ See Stephen Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and the Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 8.