

**Galatians 3: 19-29**—<sup>19</sup>“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. <sup>20</sup>A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>But 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. <sup>23</sup>Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. <sup>24</sup>So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. <sup>26</sup>You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, <sup>27</sup>for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

- Last week we began looking at this section of Scripture that asks the question: “What is the purpose of the Law?” Galatians appears to give two answers to that question
  1. To shut up the world under sin and increase trespasses; and
  2. To see to it that the inheritance will come to and through the promised seed, Jesus Christ, and no other way.
- When Paul answers that it was “added because of transgressions,” I said last week that this statement is almost exactly the same as that found in **Romans 5: 20**: “The law was added so that the trespass might increase.” On a similar note, **Romans 4: 15** states, “for law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.” I think a useful analogy is that you may distrust your doctor in your heart, but that distrust doesn’t become visible until he gives you a prescription and you toss it in the garbage. The prescription in the trash makes visible the invisible rebellion in your heart, visible. By prescribing the obedience of faith, the law turns the hidden sin of distrust and rebellion into the open transgression of disobedience.”<sup>1</sup>
- However, the Law doesn’t just give visibility to present sin; it gives rise to more sin. Again, **Romans 5:20** says, “The law was added so that the trespass might increase.” but it goes on to say, “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more...” Sin doesn’t simply become visible when we violate the Law; it increases.
- **Piper**: “The rebellion and insubordination and distrust of the human heart intensifies and expands when it meets the law.”<sup>2</sup>
- A number of passages in Romans bring this out. For example,
- **Romans 7:5**, “For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions *aroused by the law* were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.”
- The sinful dispositions of the heart are not just exposed by the law; they are *aroused* by the law. Here’s why.
  - Apart from the Holy Spirit our hearts are utterly self-centered, (this is the doctrine of total depravity) and when such a heart sees that it is being called into question and criticized by the authority of the law, it “seeks all the more furiously to defend it-

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper “Why Then the Law?: Galatians 3: 19-22,” April, 1983, <http://www.desiringgod.org/Search/?search=The+Standard+April+1983>.

<sup>2</sup> Piper “Why Then the Law?: Galatians 3: 19-22.”

self.”<sup>3</sup> The result is that people assert themselves more and more, becoming more and more hardened in their self-satisfaction, etc. This is how the Law increases sin.

- Another example: **Romans 7:8**—“But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead.”
- Covetousness is the kind of desire you have for something when you are not trusting in the mercy of God to satisfy you with all you need.
- How, then, did the law produce covetousness in Paul? Perhaps like this: the law held out blessings to Paul which he wanted.
- But instead of humbling himself to trust in God’s mercy to provide them, Paul undertook a rigorous program of Law-keeping, relaying on his own moral effort, and sought the blessings of the Law without trusting the mercy of God. And that is the essence of covetousness: the kind of desire you have for things when you are not trusting in the mercy of God.<sup>4</sup>
- So the law increases sin even in those who set out to obey it.
- One final example: **Romans 7:13**: “Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.”
  - This verse mentions both senses in which the law increases trespasses.
  - **Ills.:** I used to play basketball in high school. At lunch we would often play on what we called “dunkables.” Those were when we lowered the regular baskets down by a couple of feet. When we did that we looked strong and powerful; as though we could compete with the pros. But that was only because the standard had been lowered. The Law raises the hoops back up to their full 10 feet, and we were then seen to be the puny players that we actually were. That’s what the Law does. It shows us what we are really like. But it does more than that. The second point...
    - The first is “that sin might be recognized as sin.”
    - The second is that sin “might become utterly sinful.”
- The law reveals sin, and it intensifies it. But Paul insists that the law is itself not bad. The problem is with us—with the human heart. The very fact that we could take something that is, according to Romans 7:12, “holy, righteous and good,” and turn it into a vehicle for our pride, selfish ambition and covetousness is an indicator of just how corrupt the human heart really is.

**“<sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.**

**<sup>21</sup>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.**

**<sup>22</sup>But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin,**

- Moses himself had said in **Deuteronomy 29:4**, after giving Israel the law, “But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear.” And so he knew the law would not give life but only condemn.

**so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. <sup>23</sup>Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.**

<sup>3</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979),

<sup>4</sup> Piper “Why Then the Law?: Galatians 3: 19-22.”

- He said in *Deuteronomy 31:26-27*, “Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you. For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you have been rebellious against the LORD while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die!”
- The law increases transgressions and shuts people up under sin, not because it requires imperfect people to merit God’s favor, but because it requires proud and independent people to humble themselves and depend on God’s transforming mercy.
- The good news is that Moses foresaw a life-giving day.
- *Deuteronomy 30:6*—“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”
- *Jeremiah 31:33*—“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”
- *Ezekiel 36:26* “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

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

<sup>25</sup>**Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.**

- *Dunn*: “Here we can certainly say that Paul envisages the role of the law as at an end.”<sup>5</sup>
- *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.”<sup>6</sup>
- First, it certainly does appear that Paul is stating that we as Christians are no longer directly under the authority of the Law of Moses. True?
  - I think most people will grant that point. Even those that disagree with such a conclusion do concede that it certainly does appear that we are no longer under the supervision of the Law.
- What is usually argued, however, is that what Paul has in view here is the ceremonial law, not the Law of Moses in general. However, Douglas Moo, Stephen Westerholm and others are certainly correct when they state that the distinction between the ceremonial Law, the Moral Law (i.e., the Ten Commandments), civil Law, etc. is something that we impose upon the text. It is not something in the text itself. In other words, when Jesus or Paul talked about “the Law” they always meant the Law of Moses in its entirety unless they specified otherwise.
- *Moo*: “There is no evidence that Jesus isolated the Ten Commandments from the rest of the Mosaic law and put them in a separate category. He came to ‘fulfill’ the law as a whole, in all its parts.”<sup>7</sup>
- One of the questions that you may have been thinking about since I brought this up, is in *Matthew 5:17-18*—“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup>I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth

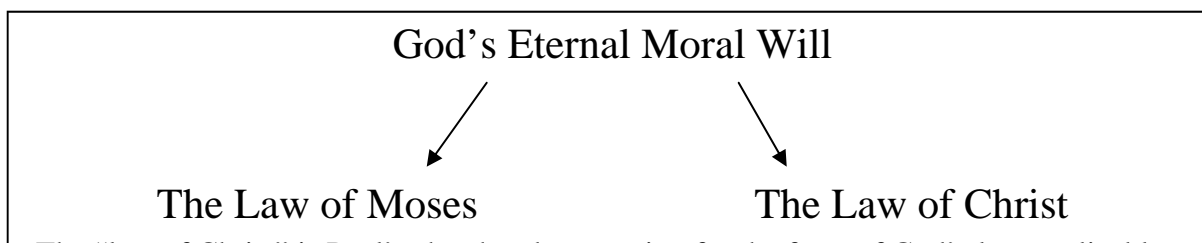
<sup>5</sup> James Dunn, *The Epistle to The Galatians* in *Black’s New Testament Commentary* series (London: Hendrickson, 1993), 200.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 352.

<sup>7</sup> Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 87.

disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”

- **Moo:** “Jesus’ insistence that he had come not to ‘abolish’ (*kataluo*) but to ‘fulfill’ (*pleroo*) the law and the prophets (v. 17) deserves to be ranked among the most important New Testament pronouncements on the significance of the Law of Moses for the new Christian era.”<sup>8</sup>
- **Moo:** “In Matthew’s bold perspective, *all* parts of the Old Testament ‘prophecy’ about Jesus and the age of salvation. Thus, as Jesus ‘fulfills’ Old Testament prophecies by doing what they predicted and ‘fulfills’ Old Testament history by reenacting its events, so he ‘fulfills’ the Old Testament law by making demands to which the law pointed forward.”<sup>9</sup>
- I made the point last week that Jesus turned the center of authority from Moses to himself.
- **Matthew 5: 27**—“You have heard that it was said, “Do not commit adultery” But I tell you...”
- **Matthew 5: 31-32a**—“It has been said, “Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.” But I tell you...”
- **Matthew 5: 33-34a**—“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.” But I tell you...”
- **Matthew 5:38-39a**—“You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” But I tell you...”
- **Moo:** “What does consistently emerge from the antitheses is Jesus’ radical insistence on what *he* says as binding on his followers. He taught ‘as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law’ (Matt. 7:29). This independence from both Jewish tradition and from the Mosaic law itself gives us an important indicator for our interpretation of v. 17-19.”<sup>10</sup>
- What emerges is the new way in which God exercises authority over the believer. The center (locus) of authority is not Moses but Christ.



- The “law of Christ” is Paul’s shorthand expression for the form of God’s law applicable to new covenant believers. Summarizes it well in the following:
- **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.”<sup>11</sup>
- So, this raises the question: Do we as Christians have any use for the Law of Moses today? The answer is unassailably, yes!

<sup>8</sup> Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 350.

<sup>9</sup> Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 352.

<sup>10</sup> Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 350.

<sup>11</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians in the Word Biblical Commentary*, Ralph P. Martin NT ed., number 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 275-76 (he is quoting from a previous book of his, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today*, 15). See also Longenecker, *Paul*, 184-90;

- When it comes to the subject of justification the reformers were very careful to make necessary distinctions.
- **Luther:** “Unless the Gospel be plainly discerned from the law, the true Christian doctrine cannot be kept sound and uncorrupt.”<sup>12</sup>

### Application:

- The lesson of the law is that we are utterly dependent on grace to remove our heart of stone and give us a soft heart of faith and love.
  - Contrition, humility, lowliness, gratitude—let your heart be filled with these as you recall, “Where sin abounded, grace much more abounded” (Romans 5:20).
- Finally, I want to read a segment out of Luke 13 in light of what happened with the bridge collapsing in Minneapolis. Just so you are aware, I am taking this point almost directly from an email from John Piper who lives and works less than a mile from the bridge. In Luke 13 some People came to Jesus with heart-wrenching news about the slaughter of worshipers by Pilate. Here is what he said.
- **Luke 13:1-5** “Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup>I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup>Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup>I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’”
- That those who brought him this news thought he would say that those who died, deserved to die, and that those who didn’t die did not deserve to die. But that is **not** what he said. He said, **everyone** deserves to die. And if you and I don’t repent, we too will perish. This is a stunning response. ***It only makes sense from a view of reality that is radically oriented on God.***
- All of us have sinned against God, ***not just against man. This is an outrage ten thousand times worse than the collapse of the 35W bridge.*** That any human is breathing at this minute on this planet is sheer mercy from God. God makes the sun rise and the rain fall on those who do not treasure him above all else. He causes the heart to beat and the lungs to work for millions of people who deserve his wrath. This is a view of reality that desperately needs to be taught, so that we are prepared for the calamities of the world.
- The meaning of the collapse of this bridge is that Jeffrey Anderson is a sinner and should repent or forfeit his life forever. That means I should turn from the silly preoccupations of my life and focus my mind’s attention and my heart’s affection on God and embrace Jesus Christ as my only hope for the forgiveness of my sins and for the hope of eternal life. That is God’s message in the collapse of this bridge. That is his most merciful message: there is still time to turn from sin and unbelief and destruction for those of us who live. If we could see the eternal calamity from which he is offering escape we would hear this as the most precious message in the world.

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 55 vols. J. Pelikan, ed. (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1963), 26: 302.