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The Law, Then and Now
Galatians 3:19-29
January 4, 2015, Jeff Germo
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Galatians 3:19–29 (ESV)

19 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. 20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. 21 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.

[3]

22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

[4]

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

We are continuing on with the same theme. Paul relentlessly carries on his line of reasoning about the law. Now, some of you might be a little bit confused by now about what the law actually was to Paul, and what that means to us today. I'm hoping that you don't leave even more confused today because this is a really important concept to grapple with. It's not easy because Paul can be so misunderstood if you read him out of context. If you really want to understand Paul's view of the law you need to spend some time in Romans as well as Galatians, and even after reading these you can feel very overwhelmed because it is quite complex. I'm hoping that we can simplify things a little this morning.

[5]

So, Paul begins this passage by asking a simple question; ***"Why then the law?"*** That's a perfect way to start, because I am sure by now you are all asking that same question. What was God's original intention for the law, and what relevance does it hold for us today? If the law is bondage, as Paul previously stated, what good was it? Well, Paul answers the first question right away.

[6]

"It was added because of transgressions..."

Let me give you a very over-simplified picture of what happened. To do that we need to go all the way back to the beginning. We are going to do a whirlwind trip through the Old Testament.

In the beginning, that is the very beginning, in the Garden of Eden before the fall there was one commandment. What was it?

[7]

Genesis 2:15–17 (ESV)

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

They had the simplest code of ethics and system of law in the history of the world. "You can do whatever you want except to eat from that one tree. If you do you will die." Very simple! Now, of course, just like small children, and even some adults, if you say, "Don't touch" what do they do? They touch. If you put a sign up that says "Wet Paint" many people will try to touch it to see if it's really true. Since Adam and Eve

ate from the forbidden tree everything went downhill. All of humankind has had a propensity to go their own way instead of God's. That is the definition of sin.

The earth became populated. The more people there were the more sin potential there was. Noah then entered the stage of history.

[8]

Genesis 6:5–8 (ESV)

⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

[9]

You know the story here. God sends a flood, and wipes out mankind, with the exception of Noah and his family. They start all over, populate the earth again, and the more people there are the more potential for sin, so things go downhill again until the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), where God confused the languages and people dispersed all over the world because they couldn't get along with each other.

[10]

Enter Abram in Genesis 12. God called Abram, and promised that he would make his name great, that he would give him land, and descendants too numerous to count, and that he would use him to bless every nation on the earth. Abraham believed that God was good for his promises, and God credited him with righteousness.

Now, remember, up until this point, there was no law, except for the first law that Adam and Eve broke. The law had nothing to do with whether or not Abraham was right before God. This is a very important point. We dealt with that last week.

[11]

Abraham and Sarah, 75 and 65 respectively, were childless. And after twenty-five years of waiting, Isaac, the promised one was born (Genesis 21). Several years later, when Isaac was a young man, God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. God supplied a substitute ram to take his place.

Isaac then fathered Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25). God's blessing fell on Jacob to carry on the promise that was given to Abraham and then Isaac. A whole bunch of drama happened. Jacob had twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joseph, one of the brothers, was hated by his siblings who sold him into slavery in Egypt (Genesis 37ff). He rose in ranks to rule over Egypt under the Pharaoh. Long story short, his family joined him in Egypt. After the Pharaoh died a new Pharaoh took over and forgot Joseph and enslaved his descendants. They multiplied like rabbits. They became so numerous that the Egyptians began to fear them, so the Egyptians began to systematically oppress the Israelites. The Israelites cried out to God. He miraculously delivered them through Moses. They wandered in the wilderness and camped out at Mount Sinai, for a while, where God gave Moses the law for the first time, 430 years after Abraham.

[12]

So, from Adam on until Moses there was no law. The people were naturally bent on evil, but they had nothing to gauge their actions by, so God gave the law to show them that they were sinful. In their actions, they were neither loving God nor loving people.

[13]

Here's what it looked like starting from the promise God gave to Abraham: **Abraham >(430 years) Israel's bad behaviour > Law of Moses > SIN.** So, the law was given to call their bad behaviour what it was – sin.

That's what Paul said in verse 19 of Galatians 3.

[14]

"It was added because of transgressions..."

And the law still functions like that today.

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1. The law reveals sin. It's like a mirror that reveals dirt on our faces.

Paul didn't say that the law was all bad. He simply said that it was not sufficient to make us right before God. The law cannot justify us.

[16]

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come

So, the law was added to show the Israelites that their bad behaviour went against God's holy nature. It was sin, but notice that Paul says that it was temporary. It was added only until the offspring should come. What does that mean? Remember last week, Paul said that the offspring, or the "Seed" was Christ. So, the law was a temporary measure put in place until Christ.

[17]

So, then the progression looks like this: **Abraham > (430 years) Israel's bad behaviour > Law of Moses > SIN > Christ.**

Now, I want to jump down to verses 24 and 25 of Galatians 3 for a minute.

[18]

24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

That word guardian here is the Greek word, *paidagogos*. It is translated "guardian" in the ESV, NLT and the NIV. The NASB translates it "tutor". The NIV84 translates it "put in charge." And the KJV translates it "schoolmaster".

[19]

A *paidagogos* was usually a slave who accompanied a male child wherever he went from the time he left his nurse's care. He would escort him to school, and back home again. He would be responsible for disciplining the child, teaching him good manners, taking him to school and ensuring that he learned his lessons. The *paidagogos* also imposed restraints on the child's liberty until he reached maturity, when he could be trusted to act responsibly. He wasn't the teacher, but he made sure that the child buckled down and learned the lessons he was supposed to learn.

[20]

2. The law, therefore, was a temporary measure put in place by God to bring people safely to Christ.

Let's read it again.

[21]

Galatians 3:19–29 (ESV)

19 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. 20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

Now, Paul implies here that there were angels who brought the law to Moses on Mount Sinai. We don't see that in the Old Testament narrative, but he must have known something that we don't.

[22 - diagram]

God>Angels>Moses * God>Abraham**

So, between God and Moses, who Paul calls the intermediary, were the angels. Between Abraham and God, when God made the promise to him in Genesis 12 and 15 there were no angels involved. It was God to Abraham. What Paul is saying here is that the Promise given to Abraham is greater than the law given to Moses.

[23]

21 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.

Does the law work against faith? Paul says an emphatic, "NO! Absolutely not!" The law was good, but it was not able to bring life, and it was never meant for that purpose. **The law as we have already noted, served to reveal sin, and to bring people safely to Christ, but God never intended that, in and of itself, it would give life, or improve our standing before God. The law cannot justify us. It was never**

intended to.

[24]

Romans 7:7–12 (ESV)

⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” ⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹

[25]

I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Before the law came everyone thought they were doing ok. But, they were blind to the fact that their behaviour was sinful, hurtful to themselves and others, and an abomination to God.

[26]

Galatians 3:22-24 (ESV)

²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

I underlined some key phrases in verses 22 through 24. They are all synonymous. “Imprisoned”, “held captive”, and “guardian.” They all mean the same thing. That may sound a little strange because imprisonment and captivity doesn’t sound like a positive experience does it? But, there are some cases in which imprisonment would be a positive experience.

For example, watch this video from a news story in Kansas from a couple years ago.

[27-VIDEO]

[WICHITA, Kansas – “Three children are in protective custody after a two-year-old was found wandering in a South Wichita apartment complex. A concerned neighbor reported the incident after finding the child just after 8:30 a.m. on Monday. The neighbor told police she found a two-year-old wandering in the Falcon Pointe apartment complex near MacArthur and Hydraulic. Police took that child along with two others into protective custody. “The 2-year-old was not in any danger other than wandering around the parking lot and it was determined that the 2-year-old probably had gotten out of an apartment while his mother was asleep,” said Lt. Doug Nolte.”]

[28]

So, in a case like that it’s good to be in custody. The police were able to put the child and his siblings into protective custody until they were safely brought to their parents. That is what Paul said the law’s purpose was between the giving of the law of Moses at Mount Sinai and the coming of Christ. It was a protective guide, like a guardian to bring them safely to Christ.

All through the Old Testament there is a scarlet thread that weaves its way through from Genesis to Malachi. It all points to Jesus. They needed the law in the Old Testament times because they didn’t have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was not yet a part of the picture. The Law was God’s way of guiding them to live in ways that would honour him until such time as Christ came. It was never meant to be followed in a blind robotic way. Through God’s Word, we see Christ on every page and we enter into a walk of faith with him as we trust that he is good for his promises.

[29]

Galatians 3:25 (ESV)

²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

¹ http://www.ksn.com/mostpopular/story/Three-kids-in-protective-custody-after-toddler/cs_m0pBVa0yToQRW0ybicw.csp

That is the difference between the law then and now. Since faith in Christ we no longer need the law in the same way they did.

[30]

Jeremiah 31:31–34 (ESV)

³¹ ***“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD:***

[31]

I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

We are living in that new day. If you know Christ, if you have received forgiveness through him, his Spirit lives in you. He is the Living Word. His law is written on your heart. That means that when you live in a way that is contrary to his Word, his Spirit will whisper to you that you need to rethink the way you are living.

Paul speaks to this further in Romans 2.

[32]

Romans 2:14–16 (ESV)

¹⁴ ***For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.***

This is the day we are living in. We are living in the most exciting era in the history of the world. If we know Christ we have his Spirit living in us, guiding, empowering, transforming, and convicting us. What an exciting life the Christ-follower has.

[33]

Galatians 3:26-29 (ESV)

²⁶ ***for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.***

Now, Paul addresses the nationalism of the Judaizers. It was their goal to make the Gentiles become Jews by observing the Old Testament Law. Paul told them that God is not a respecter of persons. Faith in Christ is open to everyone no matter what their status or ethnicity. Whether you are European, or Asian, or Middle Eastern, or African, or male or female, rich, or poor makes no difference in God’s economy. We are all Abraham’s offspring and heirs of the promise that was made to him back in Genesis 12 if we trust Jesus.

I want to make a couple of closing comments.

Firstly, did the coming of Christ abolish the law? Yes, and no. Yes, we are not justified by it.

Remember what Paul said in Galatians 2:16.

[34]

Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ ...a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

So, yes, the law is abolished in the sense that we do not live according to most of the 613 laws given in the Pentateuch. Those were given to a particular people in a particular time for a particular purpose, to guard them until the coming of Christ.

But, remember that the law is written on the hearts of those who are in Christ. Jesus came to satisfy the law. We live now by the law of love. What did Jesus say are the two most important commandments? (Matthew 22:37-40). Love God, and love people. He said if we do those two things we will satisfy all the law. What God wants to do in our hearts through his Spirit is increase our capacity to love. That only happens as we walk with him, and listen to his quiet, gentle voice whispering to us as we walk through life learning to trust him.

Living by the law will not change us. If we attempt to live by the law what happens is we naturally look for loopholes. There are 613 laws in the Torah (248 do's and 365 don'ts). I just need to make sure that I am doing these things and not doing these other things and anything outside of that is ok.

[35]

There's a story about W.C. Fields that illustrates this. If you know of him, you know that he was quite the drunkard and not very ashamed of it. He was not exactly a clean living guy. He was near the end of his life in the hospital and a friend came to visit him and caught him in the act of flipping through the Bible. He asked what he was doing and W.C. Fields replied,

[36]

"I'm looking for loopholes." He knew that he didn't measure up and he wanted to find out if there was anything in the Bible that would exempt him. That's what we naturally do when we attempt to live by the law. God has something much better for us. He invites us into a rich and full relationship.

Jesus said,

[37]

John 10:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

That kind of abundant life is only available as we receive the promise of Christ by faith. That kind of faith brings freedom, joy, peace, hope and an exciting life walking with Jesus. He produces in us the desire and the power to live and love in a way that satisfies every longing of our hearts. That kind of faith and life is made possible only through Jesus' death and resurrection, which we are going to celebrate right now in the Lord's Supper.



Galatians: Learning to Live in the Freedom of Christ
The Law Then and Now
Galatians 3:19-29
Week of January 4th, 2015

Objective of this study: To understand God's purpose for the law and what it means for us today.

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalms 32** meditatively to the group. Then pause for about a minute and let it sink in.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

Name some significant dates in history. What makes them stand out in your mind?

Word (20 - 30 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Galatians 3:17-29.
3. Take a quick tour of salvation history. Sketch out the key historical points used in the sermon. If necessary, you can refer the sermon online (screens **[7]-[13]**).
4. What is the significance of the fact that God gave his promise, his covenant, to Abraham well before he gave the law to Moses? See Romans 4:6-10 and Galatians 3:17-18.
5. Ok, so what was God's purpose for giving the law (to Moses, at Mt. Sinai, 430 years after he gave the promise to Abraham)?
 1. What does the law NOT do? See Galatians 3:21, 2:15-16.
 2. What DOES the law do? See Galatians 3:24
 3. How does the law reveal sin?
 4. How does it lead us to Christ?

Work (30 - 40 minutes)

1. Ok, so the law, although it is holy and reflects God's character, does not justify us or give us life. Where does that leave us?
 1. What is good about becoming aware of our sin? How does this lead us to Jesus? See Romans 11:32, and 3:22-26.
 2. Let's look beyond the law, what is God's overarching plan? See Jeremiah 31:31-33; Galatians 3:26-29. Pull out everything you can find.
 3. What is a fitting response to this good news? See Romans 3:27; 11:33-36.

PRAYER TIME/HOMEWORK

1. Spend time worship God for his amazing grace through Jesus.
2. Read Galatians again this week at least once more in one sitting.
3. Read Romans 11:33-36 in your own quiet time and use it to worship God.