

**Galatians 3: 19 and 20; “What Purpose is the Law?”, Message # 20 in the series –
“Christ has Made us Free”, a Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall
on January 21st, 2014, at the church.**

Paul has labored long and hard in this letter to attempt to persuade the churches of Galatia that salvation does not come through the law or the works of the law. Here in Chapter 3 alone, he mentions that the Spirit is not received through the works of the law, and there is actually a curse upon everyone who is trying to be saved by the works of the law. He has said that no one can be justified by the law in the sight of God, for the just shall live by faith. He has tried to show them in every way that the law is not of faith. Now the question that should naturally have arisen in their minds, as it should also arise in our minds, is this: What purpose does the law serve then? If God gave the law, and He did, then why did He give it? Well, there are a number of reasons that God gave the law, but these verses show 3 of the most important reasons why God gave it. 1st – It was added because of transgressions. 2nd – It was added as a covenant which would be a shadow of the good things to come when Christ the promised Seed arrived. And 3rd – It was given to show us that the ultimate Mediator between God and man must be the God-Man, not Moses.

The 1st Reason that God added the law was because of transgressions.

The law was added by God Himself, 430 years after the promise was given to Abraham, because it was evident to God that many men did not understand what sin was. One of the main reasons for God’s adding of the law was so that sin might be more precisely defined and thus exposed for what it really is; a selfish refusal to do exactly what pleases God. Sin is any transgression of God’s holy law. 1st John 3: 4 – “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” (KJV) The NKJV says: “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” So you see here that sin is both breaking God’s law, and it is trying to ignore it as though it does not exist. But ignorance of God’s law does not mean that it does not exist, or that there will not be consequences which will come to you if you are ignorant of it, or try to ignore it. Turn with me over to Romans chapter 7, verse 5. “For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.” “But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not the oldness of the letter.” “What shall we say then?” “Is the law sin?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.” “For I would not have known about covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.” “For apart from the law, sin was dead.” It is so very interesting that in these verses we find one of the main answers as to why the law was given. This whole passage is written especially to show not only how deadly an enemy sin is in our hearts, before conversion to Christ, but also to show how problematic sin is to the Christian, when they are really desiring to please God. Sin against God, we are being told here, is an evil of evils which delights to hide itself in the depths of our minds and hearts, and yet it is very active in its attempts to justify us in our pursuit of all kinds of selfish and sinful thoughts and pleasures. “Sin is an enemy that seeks our ruin and destruction, and takes all occasions to effect it.” (Whitby) If there is nothing to specifically tell us what we are doing wrong, we will justify ourselves in our plans and acts of sin, and we will not recognize where we are going astray in our hearts. This is what it means to be “in the flesh”. We are content with our own analysis of right and wrong and by nature we do not want to receive God’s definition of it.

Verse 5 says that the law, which tells a person what is right and wrong, arouses these sinful passions even more, by revealing that God is declaring that they are wrong. All people by nature do not want to believe that there is something intrinsically wrong with the way that they think and the way that they act; they want to live life to themselves and not to God. This was the way that the Apostle Paul was; he was a covetous man before he was converted to Christ, and he did not even know what covetousness was. “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” He says that sin took opportunity from this commandment being understood by him, to produce “all manner of evil desire” in him. “For apart from the law, sin was dead. The law thus slew Paul’s view of himself as being righteous and innocent of great transgression. This is what the law is intended to do. The law, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments, states very clearly what sin is, and what God expects every man to do. And we find that the 10 commandments are summarized in the two greatest commandments by our Lord Himself. Mark 12, verse 29 – “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all our strength.” “This is the first commandment.” But we must seriously ask ourselves; do we do this? And the answer must surely come back. No, in many ways we fall short of keeping this commandment. “And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ “There is no other commandment greater than these.” The first and greatest commandment is summarizing the first 4 of the Ten Commandments, and the 2nd greatest commandment is summarizing the 5th through the 10th commandments. Sin is any breaking, or not keeping, any of these commandments. The “Law, then, in making sin known to man, subjects him to its guilt, and consequently to its condemnation.” “But this is all it does; it is all that, in itself it can do.” “It cannot remove either the guilt or the dominion of sin.” “Its principle is simply to exact entire obedience to its requirements; and there it leaves the sinner.” (So says the Pulpit Commentary) Let us understand then, why the law was added; it was because of transgressions. It was because sin needed to be defined more clearly for every man to see and understand. And all people need to experience conviction of their sin so that they might repent of it.

The 2nd reason that God added the law was as a covenant which would be a shadow of the good things to come when Christ the promised Seed arrived.

“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.” The law was added until the Seed should come. And the law was an integral part of the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant was intended by God to be a temporary covenant and a typical covenant of the New Covenant which God would bring through Christ. There was a mediator of this covenant who was Moses, and there were priests who offered sacrifices, and there were angels who were appointed certain tasks in relation to the giving of the law. All these appointments were temporary and they meant to shadow forth the greater reality of the fulfillment of the law in Christ. Turn with me over to Hebrews Chapter 1, verse 13 – “But to which of the angels has He ever said: ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?’ “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with sings and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.”

You see here that the angels were considered as very great, by the Jews, because they had helped in the performing of so many things in relation to the giving of the law. They were there

helping to create all the fire and the smoke on the mountain in the giving of the law, showing forth God's majestic holiness and justice. They were there helping when the two tablets of the law were carved out of the rock, showing what God expected of all men. And no doubt, they were there helping during all the wilderness wanderings of Israel those 40 years in the wilderness in the display of miraculous events. But none of these actions of angels resulted in saving faith being exercised by any of the people under that covenant unless they were looking by faith beyond the type to the anti-type; what Jesus would come to do and fulfill in His first coming, as the promised Seed. Angels did a greater service for God when they came and declared to the shepherds the good news of Christ's birth. Their greatest service is to point to Christ and what He would do, of Christ and what He has done. This is why there were so many angelic appearances at the resurrection of Jesus; the angels who could not bring salvation to any person would fulfill their ministry in pointing to the empty tomb, and then accompanying Jesus into the skies at His ascension.

We can also think about Moses, the mediator of this Old Covenant, in this same regard; as one who points to Christ. Look at Hebrews Chapter 3, verse 1. "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all his house." "For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house." "For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God." "And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." Here we find that Moses was indeed faithful in all of his house, as a mediator. But we find One spoken of here who has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses. Moses was faithful in all his house; that is in all of his ministrations as a prophet, speaking and leading and teaching the nation of Israel on behalf of God. But the Lord Jesus Christ was faithful in all of His house as the One who built the house. That is He was the One who was appointed by the Father to fulfill all of the law given to Israel, and to build the house of the Lord, which would be composed of a great, great number of both Jews and Gentiles from all nations who would thereby make up the house of the Lord, all of God's elect people in every generation, Moses being one of them. This is great glory indeed. Therefore the churches in Galatia, Paul is saying, should not go back to seeing Moses as their mediator. They should not think of him as being as great as Christ, or think that the angels should be the focus of their worship. No, their focus should be completely upon the One who has fulfilled all of the types and shadows of the law.

And further, the 3rd Reason that God added the law was that it was given to show us that Jesus must be the ultimate Mediator between God and men.

Verse 20 – "Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one." It is true that Moses was a mediator. He was a prophet and he mediated God's covenant to the people; the Old Covenant and the law. He faithfully brought them God's word, of what God expected of them, which was to listen to God's voice and keep His commandments. But many of the people could not keep that covenant because they did not have the grace of faith. God had appointed a priesthood, through the instructions which He gave to Moses in the giving of the law. The high priest and the priesthood would minister according to the laws of the sacrificial system and pattern which was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. They were to observe the laws of sacrifices, which they would offer when they sinned against God. But again, these were only a type of what Jesus came to do in His High-priestly work. Look at Hebrews 8, verses 1-6. "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man." "For every high priest is appointed to offer

both gifts and sacrifices.” “Therefore it is necessary that this One (that is Jesus) also have something to offer.” “For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle.” “For he said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” “But now He (that is Jesus) has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”

So we see here that the purpose of God’s adding the law was not only to point out what sin was, it was also to show us that a greater mediator was needed, and a greater high-priest. “A mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.” How does God mediate the New Covenant of Grace which gives to sinful men better promises than the Old Covenant? He does it through Jesus Christ our Lord who is both God and man. God is One, but by sending His Son to be a Mediator He knew that Jesus would be the only One who could accomplish all things related to reconciling us to Himself, and satisfying His justice; for Jesus would fulfill all righteousness in relation to God’s holy law. God can therefore justify sinners on the basis of their faith, not on the basis of their works, and He can promise and give life to them on the basis of Jesus’ finished work as a High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, not of the order of Aaron. The New Covenant would have better promises; promises of the righteousness of the law fulfilled in Christ, and life which would be given freely to sinners according to God’s eternal purpose. Righteousness does not come by the law, but by faith in the Mediator Jesus Christ. So it was only those persons who believed in the promised Seed under the Old Covenant, who were truly blessed with father Abraham. Christ is the only saving Mediator between God and men in all generations of the world from Adam on forward to the end of the world.