

Why the Law?
Galatians 3:15-26
Sunday, November 16th, 2025
By Ryan Perry

Galatians 3:15–26

[15] 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. [16] 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. [17] 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. [18] For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

[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. [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. [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.

Let's Pray

Introduction

Illustration:

For most of us, unless you are a baby or young toddler, moving our bodies and talking are second nature to us. We freely string words together in sentences, and for the most part, can move our limbs without a whole lot of effort.

So, if I were to ask you, **“do you think a lot about how you talk or move?”** I would expect most of us to answer no.

And yet, we’ve probably all had that moment when someone points out something about the way we talk or move that seems strange to them, right?! Maybe it’s the fact that you say **bag-gull vs bay-gull, pellow vs. pillow, melk vs. milk, or maybe it’s because you have an unconscious habit of cracking your knuckles all the time.**

I know for me, my wife will do this with love, when I unknowingly use the word “like” in a sermon. **Because it is something that I apparently do a lot.**

But what happens once that oddity in our speech patterns or movements is pointed out?

We can’t stop thinking about it!

Because we begin to realize all of the times that we overused that certain word or said it wrong, or all the times we were unconsciously moving our body in a weird way. **What was once a hidden and unconscious speech pattern or movement has now been exposed and brought to the front of our minds by the revealing light of another person's comment or question.**

And as we get into Galatians 3:16-26, we are going to be confronted with another revealing light. **But instead of that light being a comment or question that exposes our odd word choices and movements, we are going to come face to face with the exposing reality of the law, so that we can clearly see our sin and need for a Savior.**

This is incredibly important, not only for the Galatians, but also for us as a church today. Because Paul has been hammering home the idea that Justification and with it, Salvation, are gifts that come to us through faith in Christ and not **by works of the law.**

And when you hear that over and over again, it’s only natural to ask the same question that the Galatians would have been asking: **Then what’s the purpose of the Law? Do we even need it? Should we even care about it?**

Of course, Paul’s resounding answer is **“Yes! We need the law.”**

[FCF] Because one of the things that many of us struggle to understand is how completely depraved and sinful we are apart from Christ. And if we don’t first understand our corrupt condition, apart from him, we will run the risk of living as if our good behavior can somehow make God happy with us, and as if our mess-ups and sins can make him mad at us **(that’s justification by works).**

But **(as we learned last week)** the only thing that our works can do is put us under the curse of judgment. So we need God's law to show us how bad we are so that we can fully come to Christ and find the true freedom and sonship that he has purchased for us as his people.

This brings us to our main point for today.

Main Point: God's law and his promises are not opposed to each other; instead, his law shows us our sinfulness and points us to our need for his promised Savior.

With that said, I have 4 points for you this morning, but it's actually more like two.

The first point will remind us that God's promises of a Savior are greater and stand above the law. Then the second, which will break down into 3 smaller points, will answer the burning question, **"then why the law?"**

So let's begin with our first point.

The Law cannot undo the promises of God.

Galatians 3:15-18

[15] 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. [16] 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. [17] 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. [18] For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

Illustration

As I mentioned two weeks ago, I am an avid consumer of 90's movies. And one of the 90's actors I really enjoyed was Michael J. Fox, who in 1994 came out with a movie called **Greedy**.

It's about a family that is trying to get their grandfather's fortune. They try to do this by getting Michael J. Fox's character to convince their grandfather to amend his will, so that they are all included. In fact, his family so badly wants to get this fortune that they try to get their grandfather deemed mentally unfit so they can make decisions about his money, businesses, and will.

But in the end, everything is left to Michael J. Fox's character, because his grandfather wrote it in his will. Which means that no matter what happens, the rest of the family is going to end up with nothing.

Text

Now, as we get into Galatians 3:15-18, Paul continues to build his argument that God's covenant promises with Abraham are greater than the law, and he is doing it by building on the example of man-made covenants. **In ancient Rome, these man-made covenants usually referred to someone's last testament or will.**

Paul's point in verse 15 is that once a human will is set in stone, for the most part, it can't be changed. So when Michael J. Fox's grandfather wrote him and him alone into the will, the discussion about who got his money was done, and the rest of the family couldn't do anything to change it.

Which brings us to a bigger question: Who did God make his covenant with? Meaning, who is written into God's will?

Paul answers this question in verse 16 by referencing Genesis 17:8, which says,

[8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.

Now, a good Jew would read this verse and think, "God made a covenant with Abraham and all the Jews after him, who live under the law of Moses. And if we do this, God will give us the physical land of Canaan (Israel) forever, and he will be our God."

But Paul, on the other hand, looks at Genesis 17:8 and points out that the word **offspring (seed)** is singular and not plural. So God isn't referring to all the faithful Jews that will come after Abraham, but he is referring to the promised seed or Messiah to come, who is Christ.

And so, the law, which came 430 years after God made his covenant with Abraham and his Messiah to come (V. 17), **cannot and does not nullify or add to those original promises.**

But why did Paul have to make this offspring distinction in verse 16?

So that the Galatians and the Judaizers will stop believing that they can receive the blessings of eternal life and an eternal land by heritage or obedience to the law.

And instead, they would come to see that the promise or inheritance (V. 18) is for all those who put their full hope in Christ, the promised Messiah.

Because the binding will or covenant made with Abraham and Christ is a covenant of promise that is fully given to all those who trust in Christ and not their works to justify them. They are the true offspring of Abraham.

Application

This brings us to a question that I believe God wants us to wrestle with this morning:

Where are we putting our hope?

Is it in doing good things so that God will be happy with us, or maybe so he won't be angry with us? Or is it in the finished work of Christ, which says: **"God loves you and will always be perfectly pleased with you, because Christ took all of your sin and shame upon himself on the cross."**

Now, this may seem like an easy answer to you, and yet, how many of us have spent days, weeks, or even months in the pit of despair, worry, or even doubt because we have been spending so much of our time trying to measure up to a standard that we can't meet because we want God to be pleased with us.

And yet, the resounding call of scripture is that it is impossible for us to measure up. We can't keep the law and we can't walk in perfect obedience, which means we can't do anything to attain God's promises or to make him pleased with us.

Because all of those things are only found when we put our hope in the person and work of Christ on our behalf.

Which brings us to the big question that we have before us this morning. **If that's true, then why do we need the law?**

And as I said at the beginning, this is my second point, but it's going to break down into three smaller points. Here's the first one:

Why The law? The Law shows us our true nature

Galatians 3:19-20

[19] Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring (Christ) 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, there is a lot going on in these two verses, and when you first read them, they can feel kind of confusing. However, when we break it down, we can see that Paul is making three things clear:

1. The law is inferior to God's promises

According to verse 19, God put the law in place by using angels and an intermediary (Moses). Now, I have to admit that there is no place in the Old Testament that says that the law was delivered by angels.

However, it is a common belief in Judaism, and there are other New Testament scriptures that say the same thing. We can see this when Stephen speaks in Acts 7:38:

[38] This is the one (Moses) who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles (the law) to give to us.

And the reason Paul wants us to understand **HOW** the law was given is so that we can see the distinction between the law and his promises given to Abraham and his offspring.

The law came from God through more than one being (**Angels and Moses**), because Paul says that an intermediary implies more than being in verse 20. **But God, on the other hand, is one.** And this one perfect, holy, and sovereign God made a direct covenant with Abraham, without any help.

Therefore, God's covenant with Abraham and Christ is far superior to the covenant of the law.

Secondly, Paul is telling us that:

2. The law is temporary.

As he says in Galatians 3:19, ***"It was added...until the offspring (Christ) should come to whom the promise had been made,"***

So the law had a beginning, which was 430 years after God made his covenant with Abraham. But it also has an end; when Christ came and fulfilled all its requirements (Matt. 5:17).

Which now brings us to the third thing that Paul tells us in Galatians 3:19-20.

3. The law shows us how sinful we really are.

As Paul said in verse 19, **[19] Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions...**

Which means that the law was given so that we would become aware of the fact that we are all giant lawbreakers. Because the word transgressions relates to disobeying the law.

Paul makes this point even clearer in Romans 5:20 when he says:

[20] Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Illustration

I didn't know how much I was using the word "like" in my sermons until my wife told me. And maybe you didn't realize that you always said a word a certain way or made a certain movement until someone told you.

But when they put that mirror in front of your face, you not only begin to see how bad the problem is, but it also became clear that it isn't easy to stop.

Text

The law is that revealing mirror for us, when it comes to our sin. But it isn't just showing us that we do bad things. Because we all inherently know that we are imperfect and do things wrong.

No, the law comes like a hammer to show us our true nature. That we are total and complete lawbreakers who are continually disobeying God's law.

Now, on the one hand, we might think, well, once we know that, then hopefully we will stop doing those bad things. **There is some truth to this.**

One of the reasons that laws are given is so that we know right and wrong and hopefully choose what is right. In this way, laws, and in particular, the law of God, does keep us from doing as many bad things as we could do. **This is what theologians call the civil use of the law.**

But the honest truth, especially when it comes to God's laws, is that we know them, and yet we still break them. **We fail all the time, even though we know exactly what God and even our local rulers want from us.**

Therefore, apart from Christ, all that the law of God really does is show us how bad and in need of a Savior we are.

Application

Which is actually good for us. Because if we don't see how bad, evil, and corrupt we are in and of ourselves, then we will never be able to truly experience the fullness of life that God has promised for us through Christ.

Because we will always be living as if we can somehow get to God and please him on our own. We will be like a hamster on a hamster wheel, believing we are getting somewhere when we are actually held captive in a cage.

Why the Law? The Law puts the whole world under a curse.

Galatians 3:21-22

[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. [22] But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Illustration

As I was thinking about this point, I came across an illustration that is really relevant for some within our body here at LEFC.

For many people who deal with cancer, one of the main treatments that they give is chemotherapy. Now, chemotherapy can be super effective at shrinking or killing many types of cancer cells. So in many ways, it is a great healer and life-giver when it comes to fighting cancer.

However, chemotherapy doesn't have the ability to distinguish between cancer cells and healthy cells. So, as it is killing cancer cells, it also attacks and kills healthy cells in the body. As a result, there are some who can't handle the treatment and actually end up dying from it.

So this thing that was meant to heal and bring life can actually bring death.

Text

This is the exact problem with the law. Many of the Jews were looking to it for life, but all it could bring them was death. They thought they could obey it and be made right with God, and instead, **all it did was expose their sinful hearts and make them even greater lawbreakers.**

So if this is true, then the law must be this horrible thing that's contrary to the promises of God, right?

We should stop reading it, talking about it, and we should probably rip it out of our Bibles like the heretic Marcion did in roughly 144 A.D.

But Paul abruptly stops us and says with a sense of horror, **“Absolutely not!”**

Because the problem isn't the law, the problem is our fallen and sinful hearts. Look with me at Romans 7:11-12:

[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.

It's the sin within us that makes us lawbreakers, not the law itself. In fact, this is why Paul says in verse 21: ***For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.***

Basically, if there was a way for the law of Moses or any law for that matter to give life, then we would be talking about how to get a right standing with God by obedience.

But because we are lawbreakers who continually disobey God, we can't use the good, holy, and righteous law of God in that way.

Instead, God has chosen to give the law for a different purpose. To show us our sin, to make us lawbreakers, and according to verse 22, **to take us captive so that the whole world would be imprisoned under sin.**

Application

Now, I realize that this sounds awful, but again, this is exactly what we talked about last week. The law puts us under the curse of death and God's judgment.

But he wanted the law to do that.....so that Jesus could take that curse for us, and we could receive the promise of a new and everlasting life by faith and not by works.

Which brings us to the last point for this morning.

Why the Law? The Law helps us find freedom and sonship

Galatians 3:23-26

[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. [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.

Here's where we get to see the goodness of God in giving his people the law.

Because we now get to see the fuller picture behind why he used the law to imprison everything under sin. **He did it so that the law could be our guardian (V. 24).**

That word **guardian**, in Greek is *paidagogos*, which has many meanings such as school teacher, tutor, or even nanny.

But one word that really gets at the heart of what Paul is trying to tell us is the word **disciplinarian**.

You see, in ancient Rome, many families would give their children over to a servant who was hired to raise and train them so they could function as an upstanding Roman citizen.

But instead of being a nice and peaceful nanny, they were harsh pedagogues who offered round-the-clock protection, were known for very strict and cruel discipline.

And Paul is telling us that this is what the law does.

It protects us by showing us our sin, making us lawbreakers, and teaching us over and over again that we are completely void of any ability to get ourselves out of the prison cell that we have been locked in by our sin.

The purpose of all of this is so that we would give up our self-justifying ways and instead we would throw ourselves on the mercy of Christ to find our freedom and justification before God by faith.

The good news of the gospel is that when we do that, Christ sets us free from the law (our guardian) so that we are no longer prisoners waiting for the punishment of judgment. Instead, we are washed clean of our sin and are given the forever privilege of being sons and daughters of the living God.

And if you are here this morning and you haven't put your full hope and trust in Christ to save you, I want to encourage you to run to him. See your need, see your captivity, see that you are under the curse of God's judgment, and see that your law-keeping ways can't give you the freedom and the acceptance that you truly long for.

Only Christ can.

Conclusion

But if you are a child of God this morning, I want you to leave today believing and seeing that the law of God is good. It's good because it showed us our sin, it's good because it made us lawbreakers, and it's good because it imprisoned us and was our guardian.

Therefore, its main purpose **in the history of salvation** is to show us that we can't save ourselves, and that our works can never make God happy with us.

Because real life, freedom, and sonship don't come by works. Instead, they are freely given to us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

And yet, as we will see in future weeks, once we find that freedom in Christ, and not in the law, the purpose of the law changes in our lives. Where it once was a harsh disciplinarian, it will now become a sweet source of spiritual counsel as we seek, by faith, to live a life of joyful obedience to Christ.

Because the good and holy law of God is not contrary to his promises.

Let's pray