

GALATIANS

Lesson 10

The Purpose of the law Galatians 3:19-22

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wondered why there is so much superficiality in Christianity today? Much is due to superficiality in evangelism. People are making professions of faith in Christ in great numbers, but many fall away from the truth, and others who hold on to their profession of faith, show no real evidence of having been truly born of the Spirit, and live as though they were not saved.

While there are many factors that contribute to superficiality in evangelism, there is one specific reason, which is very obvious when we compare much of modern day evangelism with the evangelism of the Bible. Modern day evangelism as a whole is not teaching the sinfulness of sin. One must realize he is a sinner before coming to Christ. There must be a genuine conviction of sin before a person can truly be saved through faith in Christ. A person must see himself as guilty before a holy God with no hope of saving himself, and this should cause him to turn from self to Christ for salvation.

The problem with superficial evangelism is that people are professing Christ because they have some problem they would like to see removed from their lives, or they want a happy life, or they do not want to go to a place called hell, but they have never really seen themselves as guilty, condemned sinners before a holy, sovereign, awesome God. They have come to Christ for the wrong reasons. Consequently, their reasons for coming were superficial, and through time and the crisis of life, they will fall away from their professions of faith. Only those who experience the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and trust in Christ as humble sinners shall be genuinely saved.

BACKGROUND

In the book of Galatians, the Apostle Paul is refuting the false teaching of the Judaizers who said that a person had to be saved by keeping the Mosaic Law. They propagated a salvation by works. The Apostle Paul taught salvation was by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone apart from any human works or merit.

Let me take just a moment to review Lesson 9 in Galatians. The Judaizers claimed that the Mosaic Law substituted for the Abrahamic Covenant as the basic way of obtaining salvation. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised that all the world would be blessed because of the Messiah who would come through the physical seed of Abraham, the Jews. God made a promise or covenant with Abraham that He would deal with men on the basis of grace and all anyone could do to be saved would be to trust in Jesus Christ, who was the one who fulfilled all the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. Therefore, all who receive Jesus Christ are spiritual seed of Abraham and heirs to all the salvation blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.

These Judaizers felt that because God gave the Mosaic Law after He gave the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Law substituted for, or at least took precedence over, the Abrahamic Covenant as the basis of salvation. In Galatians 3:15-18, the Apostle Paul showed that the Abrahamic Covenant was unconditional and in operation long before the Mosaic Law was ever given, and the covenant could not be broken by God. Paul's point was that men have always been saved by grace through faith in Messiah, even in the Age of Law. The Mosaic Law had nothing to do with salvation but was a rule of life for the nation of Israel. The Mosaic Law was temporary and transitory, ending as a rule of life at the Cross, but the covenant of grace as found in the Abrahamic Covenant is permanent and eternal.

THE DESIGN OF THE LAW 3:19-20

“What, then, was the purpose of the law?”

The legalistic Jew would naturally ask the question, “Why would God give the Mosaic Law if it was not to save? If men are saved through faith in Christ alone, what is the point of the law?” They reasoned that Paul so fused together Abraham and Christ that he squeezed out Moses and the law altogether. They concluded there was no room for law in Paul’s gospel. Of course they were wrong, for law is very much related to the gospel, but not as a means of obtaining salvation but as a means of bringing conviction of sin.

People foolish but wise in their conceits jump to the conclusion: If the Law does not justify, it is good for nothing. How about that? Because money does not justify, would you say that money is good for nothing? Because the eyes do not justify, would you have them taken out? Because the Law does not justify it does not follow that the Law is without value. We must find and define the proper purpose of the Law. We do not offhand condemn the Law because we say it does not justify.

We say with Paul that the Law is good if it is used properly. Within its proper sphere the Law is an excellent thing. But if we ascribe to the Law functions for which it was never intended, we pervert not only the Law but also the Gospel.” (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*)

“It was added because of transgressions.”

God added the Mosaic Law alongside the covenant of grace in the Abrahamic Covenant to show men they were sinners in the sight of a holy God. God gave the law to show all men that they were transgressors against God.

The law is a reflection of God’s holy character. The law is God’s holy standard. Through the law comes the knowledge of the sinfulness of sin (Rom. 3:19-20, 29: **“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”**).

Before the law was a law, there was sin, but after the law was given men now knew they had transgressed God’s law (Rom. 4:15 “. . . **law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.**”). Paul himself said he would have never known about sin except through the law (Rom. 7:7 **“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’”**)

The law is **“holy and just and good”** (Rom. 7:12) and it tells men of the righteousness God requires if they are going to live before a holy, righteous God. The law requires perfect righteousness and no man can keep the law perfectly. God gave the law not to bestow salvation on men but to show men they are sinners and in need of a Savior.

The law turns sin into transgressions, showing sin up for what it really is, breach of the holy law of God. Now sin is not only wrong acts but it is a legal offense against God. The law was designed to make plain the sinfulness of sin, showing men they are sinners in revolt against the will and authority of God.

As long as a person is not a murderer, adulterer, thief, he would swear that he is righteous. How is God going to humble such a person except by the Law? The Law is the hammer of death, the thunder of hell, and the lightning of God’s wrath to bring down the proud and shameless hypocrites . . . As long as a person thinks he is right he is going to be incomprehensibly proud and presumptuous. He is going to hate God, despise His grace and mercy, and ignore the promises in Christ. The Gospel of the free forgiveness of sins through Christ will never appeal to the self-righteous.

This monster of self-righteousness, this stiff-necked beast, needs a big ax. And that is what the Law is, a big ax. Accordingly, the proper use and function of the Law is to threaten until the conscience is scared stiff.” (Luther)

When sin is recognized as sin by law, when sin, death and the wrath of God are revealed to a person by the law, he grows irritated, complains against God and rebels. Law actually stirs up sin so one grows to hate law and the God whose character the law reflects. Sin, therefore, is increased and magnified by law.

At the new building site, people keep dumping trash in the dumpster illegally. They know it is wrong but do it anyway. We set a sign in front of the dumpster which said, "No trash dumping, please." They now knew it was a transgression of the law, hated the law and tore down the sign. They keep on dumping trash even though they have been warned by the law.

"Until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come."

The Mosaic Law was added as a rule of life for Israel until Christ would come, for He was the spiritual fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal. 3:19). Christ in His death put an end to the law as a way of righteousness (Rom. 10:4 **"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."**).

However, there is still a lawful use of the law as it relates to the gospel. The law is to be used to show men their sinfulness before a holy God so they will turn to Christ who alone can forgive them their sins and grant them eternal life (1 Tim. 1:9-10 **"We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me."**).

We should use the law, especially the Ten Commandments, to show men they are guilty before God and in line for His eternal wrath unless they turn to Christ. The law should be used to humble, terrify, bruise and break the proud, self-righteous person.

You shall have no other gods before me. God demands that men worship Him. Men break this commandment when they put something or someone in their thoughts or affections before God. It might be money, materialism, social status, pleasure, a girlfriend, a boyfriend, children, sports or some consuming hobby. Every responsible man is guilty of breaking this commandment, and all men are responsible to God.

Honor your father and mother. What person has ever treated his or her father and mother perfectly? Not one!

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Men take the Lord's name in vain by cursing and treating His name lightly. This command should convict most people.

You shall not commit adultery. Many men and women are guilty of adultery (having sex with another person's spouse). If they have not done the physical act, they are guilty of the mental act, and they stand condemned. In the United States, 75% of all husbands and 50% of all wives commit adultery.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. This is more than just lying or perjury. It involves all slander and scandal, idle talk, deliberate exaggeration or distortions of the truth. What person would dare say he or she has kept this command perfectly?

You shall not covet. You shall not desire anything that is not rightfully yours. The Apostle Paul said this was the one command that did him in.

The law slays us and shows us our rotten sin before a righteous God. We realize we have no righteousness in ourselves and stand condemned before God. When we put our lives up against the law the verdict is guilty, guilty, guilty! No wonder Paul says in Roman 4:15, **"The law brings wrath."**

“The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.”

This is a very difficult verse to understand and there are over 250 interpretations of this one verse. It probably means that when God spoke the gospel to Abraham, He did it directly without any intermediaries. But when God gave the law to Moses both Moses and the angels were mediators. This proves that the Mosaic Law was not as important as the Abrahamic Covenant in God’s sight.

THE LAW IS A FRIEND OF GRACE 3:21-22

“Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not!”

The law does not contradict the promise of grace in the Abrahamic Covenant because law was never intended to bring eternal life to any one. Law was designed to convict men of sin and to point them to Jesus Christ who alone can give the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who trust Him. The law and the gospel are not competitive or contradictory. The law is complementary to the gospel. Both have a part in the vast economy of God.

“For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.”

Again law was never given to make people righteous but to prove them sinners and in need of Christ. Men break the law every day; therefore, the law cannot justify them but only condemn them.

“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.”

The law simply declares all men to be sinners, condemns them and shows them they are headed for eternal judgment. The law makes the promise of salvation by grace through faith in Christ very desirable and indispensable if a person is going to be justified before God.

Man in his natural state is in a hopeless and helpless condition and apart from grace he will not be saved. (Rom. 3:9-11 **“What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God’”**).

The law lifts the lid off man’s respectability and discloses what he is really like underneath—sinful, rebellious, guilty, under the judgment of God and helpless to save himself. When we preach the gospel to others, we must never soft-peddle sin and the certainty of eternal judgment for all those outside of Christ. We must never by-pass the law to come straight to the gospel. To do so is to contradict God’s method of bringing men under the conviction of sin.

A failure to preach the sinfulness of sin to men in evangelism has caused many to mock, ignore and ridicule the truth of the gospel. No man has ever appreciated the gospel until he has seen his own sinfulness before a holy God. It is only against the inky, darkness of sin that the glories of the true gospel begin to shine.

When men preach the sinfulness of sin, they may not see as many people make professions of faith, but they will see genuine conversions because there has been the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, showing people their sinfulness and need of Christ who alone can save them.

When the law drives you to the point of despair, let it drive you a little farther, let it drive you straight into the arms of Jesus who says: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

The proverb has it that “hunger is the best cook.” The law makes affected consciences hungry for Christ. Christ tastes good to them. Hungry hearts appreciate Christ. Thirsty souls are what Christ wants. He invites them to come to Him for rest. Christ’s benefits are so precious that He will dispense them only to those who need them and really desire them. (Luther)

CONCLUSION

For you without Christ, you need to face up honestly to the law. You have not and cannot keep the law of God and you are a sinner. If a sinner, then you must be judged in time and eternity by a holy God. God has given the law to bruise you so you will admit your need of a Savior. Not until the law has condemned and killed your natural pride will you call upon Christ for deliverance from sin. Not until the law has driven you to despair will you ever believe in Christ? Not until you are humbled by your sin will you really turn to Jesus Christ to set you free?

My friends, the law condemns you and only Christ can save you. Sin, wrath, judgment and perdition are realities and the law confirms these things to be true. However, the promise of justification is to all who believe in Christ. The promise is not to all men in general but to all who believe in Christ.

If the law has humbled, bruised, broken and terrified you, the Holy Spirit is at work in your life. Do not labor over your sins, but turn to Jesus Christ, who forgives the worst of sinners and grants them eternal life. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who said, **“For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”** (Matt 9:13).