

God's Valuable Law
Study #9 Galatians 3:19-25
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The word **law** stirs up **different ideas** depending on what's being talked about.

We know there's **nothing we can do about** the so called, "**Laws of Nature**".

Gravity pulls things together because of the effect of their mass in space.

That's why we're careful to **avoid falling down** and **dropping breakable things**.

Inertia keeps things still until something moves them, then they tend to keep moving until some force stops them.

That's why we have to **start our engines** before the car goes somewhere,
and why we have to **be sure our breaks are working** once we get going.

We call these **laws of nature** because it's **how we see how the things God created work**.

We write **mathematical formulas** that help us **use** these laws to help us.

There are also **laws of economics** that describe **how we come to own things**.

If you have something another person wants, they can give you something you want in **exchange** for it.

The more something is wanted or needed, the **more it's worth**.

There are **laws of governments** too.

They tell us **who's in charge**, and set **limits** on how we **live together**.

These laws define our **responsibilities** and **liabilities**.

And they tell **how we determine guilt**, and what **penalties** are appropriate when these laws are violated.

Unlike the principles we call **laws of nature** or **laws of economics**,

the **laws of governments** are **made up by people**, and therefore they **can be changed**.

Often **situations change** and **old laws become outdated**.

Sometimes **people** pass **bad laws** that need to be changed.

But above all these things we call **law**, there are **the laws of God**.

The **New Testament** word for **law** is the Greek word "nomos" (νόμος).

In the **Old Testament** the Hebrew word is "tora" (תורה).

Basically the words mean "**instruction**" or "**direction**". They tell us **what's to be done**, or **not done**.

In the Bible, as in every language, these words for **law** are used in **a wide range of ways**.

There are **moral principles** that reflect **God's eternal and holy nature**.

Those laws were **built in at creation**. They can **never change** because **God the Creator never changes**.

For example, **it's always wrong** to **worship false gods**, **lie**, **murder**, or **steal**.

God also imposed **temporary laws** at particular times.

They are **for each stage of God's eternal plan** as God's promise and plans unfold.

For example, temporary laws were given in the time of **Abraham**, and in the time of **Moses**.

They were **to prepare God's people for the birth, life, and death of our Savior**.

These **rituals** and **detailed regulations** may have been **temporary**, but they **aren't unimportant**.

The main point of Paul's letter to the Galatians was **to correct a misuse of these temporary laws**.

The distortion was a **different gospel** that kept God's people from living for God's glory.

As we saw in our earlier studies,

Judaizers were teaching that the **new Gentile believers** had to **submit to the ceremonial laws**.

But those laws were only given **for Israel**, for the **time before Christ**.

Paul made it clear that **the Judaizers were wrong**.

The **ritual laws** were given to **teach** about the **coming Savior**.

When Jesus came the **original purpose** of those temporary rituals was **fulfilled**.

This **doesn't mean** they don't have **important lessons** for us **today**.

While there are changes in how God regulated the lives of his people at different times,
there's **also a unity** in his work all through human history.

We have one unchanging God, with **one unchanging plan**,
that moves all things toward **one unchanging goal and glorious end**.

While correcting the error of the Judaizers, Paul **didn't** want to **diminish** the *value* of God's law.

The struggling churches in Galatia **weren't just having debates** among scholars.

They were **ordinary people** trying to **learn how to live out their Christianity day-to-day**.

Today there's still serious confusion about God's law.

Some think of religion as **earning our way to heaven**.

Christianity is thought of by many as a religion of rules, popes, priests, and mystical rituals.

Some imagine that by **doing good works** God will be convinced to let us go to heaven when we die.

Some turn their attention to **strict rules, social reforms, and priestly incantations**.

Some don't accept that **Jesus Christ paid our debt and completed what the Old Testament laws pre-figured**.

Others want to **throw out all the Laws** of the Old Testament as if they all only had meaning for the Jews.

They replace it with a **poorly defined idea of "love"** -- what it is and what it's not.

They promote **faith** in a **poorly defined Jesus**. They **replace God's moral laws** with things defined by **culture**.

Often **worship** just plays to the **emotions**.

These distortions miss the main stream of what the **Bible** is telling us here.

The **Galatians** were being **mislead about God's law**, and it was having an **effect on their daily lives**.

It's still a problem for us today.

So to correct these confusing abuses, Paul asks this important question in Galatians 3:19,

19 Why then the law? ...

We have to keep in mind what *point* Paul was making here. Remember the **context**:

The ceremonial laws of Israel couldn't do away with God's original promise. Paul said in 17-18,

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.

The promise of the coming Christ, and the way of salvation by grace through faith,

was explained to Abraham 430 years *before* the **ceremonial laws** were given by Moses.

The Reformer Martin Luther makes a good illustration here in his commentary on this passage:

A **wealthy man adopted a son** out of kindness alone, then he **made the adopted son the heir** of his entire fortune.

After the son grew up he did **favors** for the man many years later.

Certainly the adopted son **can't then say** that **the favors earned him his inheritance**.

Then Luther says, "**How can anybody say that righteousness is obtained by obedience to the Law**

when the Law was given four hundred and thirty years after God's promise of the blessing?"

So the **temporary rituals** given in the time of Moses were *signs* telling more about God's plan.

The signs **can't possibly replace the covenant promises already made**.

We're made right with God because **God kept his promise**,

not because we preform some **rituals** or **abstain** from some things currently popular in our culture.

So then, **what good** are these *ritual laws* the **Judaizers** said were **necessary for salvation?**

Paul's answer helps us unravel the confusion.

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.

The particular laws being confused in Galatia were **the temporary laws** given to Israel at the **time of Moses**.

They included the **priestly order**, the **sacrifices**, the **annual feasts, cleansing and purity rituals, dietary laws,** and **other regulations** designed to **separate Israel out** as God's special people.

The various laws were **added because of transgressions** among the Covenant People.

God's laws had a very clear purpose.

They **expose sin**, show our **need for God's grace**, and **discipline the covenant community**.

They were to apply until the promised Christ came.

Jesus is **the promised seed** of a woman God promised in **Genesis 3:15**.

- He would ultimately **crush the head of Satan** and **rescue the fallen race**.

A Mediator is there to settle differences between two parties.

But the "**mediation**" here was **not** between two equal parties to reach some *compromise*.

It was a **one-way communication** as **God alone** restores fallen sinners back into his family.

The word **angels** (ἄγγελοι) simply means **messengers**.

(It sometimes describes human messengers in the New Testament.)

At times **God used spirit beings (angels)**, but he **also used men** as messengers (prophets). The **same word** is used. **God used messengers** to *reveal* his plan to his people. **They mediated** between God and man.

Moses was **one of these messenger prophets**, who stood between God and his people.

But God's covenant promise was a **sovereignly imposed promise**.

It was not a deal struck between **humans and God**.

God is one - the promise is **entirely his work**. There's **no input** from us at all.

God, by his messengers, gave Laws to show our obligations, to reveal our lostness, and to teach God's plan.

Therefore **the law**, given to explain our lostness and the plan of redemption, **could never replace the sovereignly imposed promise it represented.**

The promise existed before the law was given.

The **covenant of grace** is all that **actually ever redeemed and reconciled anyone**.

The law only reveals sin, depicts the promise, but it does not reconcile or redeem.

However, as our teacher it's important, and has **great value** to us.

The ritual laws **still** teach about our **lostness**, our **inability** to earn salvation, and the **uniqueness** of God's people.

They **display how Jesus would become the only real substitute sacrifice** for our sins.

So there's **no conflict** between the concept of **grace** and the teachings of **God's law**. They fit perfectly together.

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.

The contrast in Galatians 3 **isn't** between Moses and Abraham, or between Moses and Christ.

It's between the belief that there can be **righteousness by the regulatory laws**

and the fact of Scripture that **righteousness has always come by faith** in God's promise - and by faith alone.

No law can bring life to what's already dead. That was **never** its purpose.

The law **exposes our dead condition** by showing us that **we aren't innocent** before God.

But **until the coming of Christ**, before the fullness of the promise could be understood,

the **ritual laws were the path** to direct God's people **to understand what was to come**.

God's promise - not the **law** - *is* and *always was* the basis for our blessings.

In the next two verses, Paul shows that **the law is a teacher**.

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,

The law is our guardian - our **school master** to **bring us to Christ**.

The Greek word in the original letter is "pedagogos" (παιδαγωγός), a common word for "**teacher**".

So **to demand rituals** or any type of human works **to gain our salvation**

denies that **Jesus Christ fulfilled the promise** made sovereignly by God long before the laws were laid out.

It says we are **no longer under a guardian**, or "**teacher**".

But this **doesn't mean** that what the teacher taught **could now be forgotten**.

It means that **the lesson has now been fully taught** so the teacher **had now completed her job**.

So if the law doesn't justify us **is it good for nothing?** **No!**

It had a unique purpose from the beginning.

We still benefit by its lessons about our **need for a Savior**, and about **the Savior's work**.

So, what's the value of God's law for us today?

The **Judaizers weren't causing a problem with the moral laws of God.** They're **always binding on everybody.**

God's **Moral Laws** are those summarized in the 10 Commandments.

Paul **never criticized** the Judaizers for avoiding idols, keeping the Creation Sabbath, preserving marriage, telling the truth, and so on - he **openly promoted those moral principles as eternal and always important.**

He **also** made it clear that as sinners, **no one can earn his way to heaven** by being moral.

Jesus alone kept the moral laws perfectly. By **grace** he clothes us with his righteousness.

So **the moral commandments** of the Bible are **always valuable to us as guides.**

We still **learn from them** that it's **wrong to improperly worship** the one true God.

We **know from them** that it's **wrong** to disrespect authority, to be unfaithful to our spouses, to steal, murder, lie, and to covet what God doesn't give us.

The problem in Galatia - had to do with **those ritual laws** given to Israel by Moses.

Some **were insisting** that those **shadows** of what was to come - were **still binding.**

That was an **open denial** that **Jesus fulfilled what they stood for.**

The final and fully effective sacrifice for sin had been made on **Calvary.**

The **sacrifices** of bulls and lambs had to stop. Their **lesson was completed.**

The **Lord's Supper** replaced Passover because the **true Lamb of God** was slain.

The **purity of God's people** had been **secured** by our Savior.

Baptism replaced circumcision as the **sign** of God's Covenant People.

The other **sprinklings** and **dietary rules** had **completed their job.**

We are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and set apart to be lights to the world.

But with the coming of Christ, the lessons were completed. School was over.

Christianity **isn't working our way to heaven.** It's about the **finished work of Christ** which earned heaven for us.

Those who think that our deeds fit us for God's blessings, live with an irrational burden nobody can bear.

But after graduation - we aren't supposed to forget all we learned.

The **levitical laws** are **still there to teach us about what was coming.**

Now we rest in Christ as the substitute for our deserved penalty.

They show **our need for purity in our lives** as we stand in the presence of God.

And they show that **we're to be separate from the world** as those **saved by grace.**

Now, we take what those ritual laws taught us, and get to work.

We have a **job to do** as God's children.

His **law points us** to our own **inability** to live as we know we should.

It helps us **appreciate** how much we **need our Savior** who paid our debt in our place.

It also **reminds** us that **we're to stand out as different** than those still lost and without Christ.

So **this isn't just a scholarly matter** for theologians to debate.

It's an **important lesson for us** as we **read the Old Testament,**

and as we **go about our work and family life** every day.

It should **humble us** and **make us thank God** all the more

for his amazing grace that alone **adopts us** and **keeps us** as his own dear children.

Note: Bible quotations are from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

ESV: Galatians 3:19-25

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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,

Greek: Galatians 3:19-25

19. Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη, ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπήγγελται, διαταγείς δι' ἀγγέλων ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου·
20. ὁ δὲ μεσίτης ἑνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν, ὁ δὲ Θεὸς εἷς ἔστιν.
21. ὁ οὖν νόμος κατὰ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ; μὴ γένοιτο. εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζῶσαι, ὄντως ἂν ἐκ νόμου ἦν ἡ δικαιοσύνη·
22. ἀλλὰ συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφὴ τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν, ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοθῇ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.
23. Πρὸ τοῦ δὲ ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκεκλεισμένοι εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι.
24. ὥστε ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν, ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν·
25. ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς πίστεως οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν ἐσμεν.