

**WHY THEN THE LAW?**  
**PART 3**

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:19-22

August 29, 2010

**REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:**

Throughout Galatians, Paul has been emphasizing that the Mosaic Covenant plays no part in justification. The Law, in this sense, is inferior to God's promise.

Martin Luther, in his commentary on Galatians, observes that whenever a legal heart hears the words, "The Law does not justify," it assumes: "Then it is of no use," (*Luther's Works, vol. 26, p. 316*).

Therefore, in vv. 19-22, Paul replies to this objection and gives 5 reasons why the Law (Mosaic Covenant) is inferior to God's Promise (the Abrahamic covenant of promise). By showing the inferiority of the Law in relation to the promise, Paul sets forth the Law's proper purpose and keeps it within its lawful function and use.

First, Paul argues that the Mosaic Covenant is inferior to the Abrahamic Covenant of promise because:

I. THE LAW WAS ADDED TO REVEAL SIN. V. 19A

God gave the Law to expose our sin for what it really is, namely a transgression (overstepping) of God's holy and righteous Law. "The Law," writes Eadie, "so instructs in the nature of sin, that what before was reckoned innocent is seen to be transgression, and what was regarded as trivial comes to be recognized as 'exceedingly sinful,'" (*Galatians, p. 264*).

The Mosaic Covenant was never added for the purpose of justification. By it, men should have been driven to Christ. But, instead the Judaizers and unbelieving Israelites, expected to receive life and justification by their obedience to it.

In Romans 10:3-4, Paul writes, "<sup>3</sup> ...being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Justification was far from God's purpose for instituting the Mosaic Covenant. The purpose of the law was to expose sin as transgression and thereby drive men to trust in the One who promises and performs on their behalf.

A second reason the Mosaic Covenant is inferior to the Abrahamic Covenant of promise is because:

## II. The Law was Ordained through Mediation. vv. 19b-20

God spoke the promise directly (first-hand) to Abraham whereas the Law came indirectly (third-hand) to the people (God- the angels- Moses- the people).

The two-fold mediation of the Mosaic Covenant witnessed to the Law's conditional nature. It is precisely because the Law is conditional that it is inferior to the promise.

Paul brings this point out further in v. 20 when he says, "Now an intermediary implies more than one (i.e., party-J.F.), but God is one" (i.e., one party- J.F.).

The promise of God didn't need angels or Moses to act as intermediaries because it depended on God alone. The Mosaic Covenant, however, was a, "Do this and Live," covenant (3:12; Lev. 18:5).

In this covenantal arrangement, God (the Suzerain) obligates the lesser party (vassal) to serve faithfully and blessings or curses are held out as reward or punishment (see Michael Horton, *God of Promise*, pp. 74-75). In Gal. 3:10, Paul says the one who failed to perfectly fulfill the obligations of the covenant fell under the curse of the Law (3:10; Deut. 27:26).

In contrast, the Abrahamic Covenant was an unconditional, divine grant/oath.

In it, God (the Suzerain) freely and graciously obligates Himself to fulfill His promise regardless of the opposition He encounters even from the beneficiaries (i.e., Abraham) of the oath (see Horton, p. 74).

This is truly remarkable! Abraham had nothing to say about the matter (Horton, p. 57). For one thing, Abraham was in a deep sleep when God "cut" His covenant (Gen. 15:12). Further, Abraham's personal failures throughout his life (which the Genesis account clearly details) demonstrates two things:

1. Abraham was incapable of meriting the blessings of the covenant by his personal performance.
2. His sin was incapable of thwarting God's promises and purposes (Horton, p. 57).

This is why the Law is inferior to the Promise.

The Mosaic Covenant was a conditional covenant that imposed obligations and issued curses for failure to keep the obligations. But it was powerless to provide for its fulfillment (Horton, *God of Promise*, p. 70).

Even the sacrificial system, which was mere shadows, provided in the Mosaic Covenant could not take away sin. It left all who sought to be justified by it under its curse.

All the sacrifices could do was make the worshippers conscious of their sin and point them forward to God's forgiveness that will be secured by the sacrifice of Christ.

In contrast, the Abrahamic Covenant was an unconditional covenant that bestowed blessing on the basis of a divine promise. What man could not accomplish in obedience to the Law, God accomplishes unilaterally by His own eternal, unchangeable promise, for God is a party of one. All that God requires in this covenant is also given by Him!

This now leads us to a third reason the Law is inferior to the Promise.

#### LESSON:

### III. THE LAW WAS TEMPORARY. v. 19B

The covenant of grace is uninterrupted from Adam after the Fall and continues to Abraham, to David and all the way to the present. But, the Mosaic Covenant was temporary and because of the first coming of Christ has become obsolete (cf. Heb. 8:13).

Therefore, unlike the Abrahamic Covenant, which was based on God's eternal, unchangeable promise, the Mosaic Covenant was temporary, conditional and typological (i.e., it served as a type anticipating and foreshadowing New Covenant realities; cf. Horton, p. 75). This is what made the Mosaic Covenant inferior to the Abrahamic Covenant of promise.

Note what Paul says in v. 19, "It (i.e., Mosaic Covenant-J.F.) was added because of transgressions, *until the offspring should come* to whom the promise had been made," (emphasis mine).

Paul explained in v. 16 that the "Offspring" is Christ. The Law pointed forward to Christ, Abraham's Offspring, as the Person through whom transgression would be forgiven. So, when Jesus appeared, the Mosaic Covenant was no longer necessary because the reality displaced the types and shadows (Horton, p. 55).

#### A. THE LAW WAS TEMPORARY IN ITS DURATION. v. 19B

The Mosaic Covenant lasted only "until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made." Paul says the Mosaic Covenant had a beginning (Mt. Sinai) and an ending (Mt. Calvary), thus it is inferior to the promise.

God instituted the Mosaic Covenant only for a specified period of time (cf. Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, p. 96). This period of time lasted between the promise God made to Abraham and the fulfillment of that promise in the first coming of Jesus Christ.

In this way, the Mosaic Covenant served as a kind of parenthesis between the period of the promise and its fulfillment in the first coming of Jesus Christ. This

“parenthesis” means the Mosaic Covenant was in force and had relevance only during the theocracy of Israel.

As already mentioned, the Mosaic Covenant served a unique typological function, which was of temporary duration. The Mosaic Covenant, writes Michael Horton, “concerned earthly, temporary, measures that served as types of the heavenly, eternal reality promised and confirmed in the” Abrahamic Covenant, (Horton, p. 38).

For example, long life in the land wasn’t the final, ultimate reality (Horton, p. 54). The earthly, temporal blessings of the Mosaic Covenant merely served as types of the spiritual, eternal blessings that were inherited by promise.

The spiritual blessings, which were obtained by faith in the promise, “were shadowed” by the temporal blessings of the Mosaic Covenant. When Christ came, the Mosaic Covenant, with all of its types and shadows contained in sacrifices, offerings, ceremonies and blessings/curses ended. The shadows and types gave way to the reality that had come.

Thus, the Mosaic Covenant served a limited duration of time. This leads to a second aspect of the Law’s temporary design.

#### B. THE LAW WAS TEMPORARY IN ITS FUNCTION. V. 19B

In terms of the *history of salvation*, the Mosaic Covenant served a temporary, subservient function to the Abrahamic Covenant.

The author of Hebrews in 8:13 says that the Mosaic Covenant became obsolete precisely because its function had been fulfilled (cf. Gal. 3:23-4:7; Horton, p. 75). The Law’s mission was to point forward to Christ, Abraham’s offspring, as the Person through whom transgressions would be forgiven.

The sacrificial system in the Mosaic Covenant never took away the sin of the people. It just made them aware of their sinfulness and need for atonement. It anticipated Christ’s atonement. Hebrews 10:1-4 states,

“<sup>1</sup> For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? <sup>3</sup> But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

But, when Christ came His sacrifice was perfect and took away sin forever. Christ’s sacrifice gives entrance into the Holy of Holies behind the veil, which separated God’s glory from the people (Horton, p. 59). Hebrews 10:5-10 declares,

<sup>5</sup> Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. <sup>7</sup> Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" <sup>8</sup> When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup> And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

And so, the entire Mosaic economy served this temporary role as a preparation for the gospel but it could not itself take away sin. It was inferior to the promise because the missing piece in the Mosaic Covenant is the phrase "for the sake of your fathers," (cf. Horton, p. 55).

Every time God withheld judgment throughout Israel's history of rebellion or brought deliverance, it was for the sake of His commitment to the Abrahamic or Davidic Covenants not the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Horton, p. 55). For example,

<sup>30</sup> When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey His voice. <sup>31</sup> For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that He swore to them," (Deut. 4:30-31).

<sup>10</sup> For the sake of your servant David, do not turn away the face of your anointed one. <sup>11</sup> The LORD swore to David a sure oath from which He will not turn back: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne," (Ps. 132:10-11; cf. Ps. 89).

As we have been pointing out, the Mosaic Covenant was concerned with earthly, temporary, typological pictures. As an inferior covenant, the Mosaic Covenant required obedience from the Israelites in order to inherit temporal blessings (i.e., the possession of the Land of Canaan not individual salvation, Horton, p. 57).

We must distinguish between the typological and conditional aspects of the Mosaic Covenant (which is based on law) and the reality to which they point (which is based on promise; Horton, p. 57).

So, for example, Israel's right to remain in the land was based on their obedience/performance but it had nothing to do with their justification before God.

This typological/conditional arrangement served as a picture of Abraham's Offspring, Christ, who would come and by His perfect obedience and covenant faithfulness merit the eternal blessings that were foreshadowed in the Mosaic Covenant.

Whereas both Adam and Israel failed, Christ would succeed. Christ then is both the Last Adam and the true Israel!

And so Paul states in v. 19 that God instituted this subservient, temporary, conditional, typological function of the Law in order to drive men's hearts to look to the "Offspring" (i.e., Christ/Messiah) to whom the promise had been made.

Samuel Bolton, in his book, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, wrote,

"Blessings in the possession of Canaan were promised to obedience, and curses and miseries to those who broke the covenant, and all to this end, that God might thus encourage their hearts in the expectation of the Messiah to come ... This subservient or old covenant is that which God made with the people of Israel in Mount Sinai, to prepare them to faith, and to inflame them with the desire of the promise and of the coming of Christ..." (p. 95).

Paul then is clear that the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai was never instituted to serve as the means of justification (Gal. 3:11, 18, 21). It was inferior to the Abrahamic Covenant of promise because all it could do was point out sin but not remove it.

Its works principle of "Do this and Live" (Gal. 3:12; Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5) served to drive men to Christ by exposing their sin for what it is, namely transgressions.

Again Samuel Bolton wrote, "God spoke the words, "Do this and live", to show us our weakness and to stir up our hearts to seek Christ, who has fulfilled all righteousness for us, both positive and negative. He has undergone the penalties, and obeyed the precepts, borne our curses, and performed our services (p. 107). This is good news!

Only Christ is able to merit by His obedience and covenant faithfulness the eternal, spiritual blessings that the earthly, temporal blessings of the Mosaic Covenant foreshadowed (Horton, p. 57).

Michael Horton highlights the problem of the Judaizers in relation to the Mosaic Covenant. He writes, "Carriers of the legalistic virus in Galatia and elsewhere were not faulted for having a positive view of the law, but for failing to recognize that its purpose was to lead God's people to Christ," (*God of Promise*, p. 75).

The Mosaic Covenant's conditional nature was instituted by God to serve the promise, namely by exposing one's inability to keep its requirements perfectly and point men forward to Christ alone who is able to merit by His covenant faithfulness the eternal blessings which the Mosaic Covenant merely typified / foreshadowed.

Hence, the Mosaic Covenant, Samuel Bolton writes, "... was temporary, and had respect to Canaan and God's blessing there, if and as Israel obeyed. It had no relation to heaven, for that was promised by another covenant (i.e., Abrahamic-

J.F.) which God made before He entered upon the subservient covenant," (*True Bounds*, p. 99).

**REFLECTION:**

Seeing that the Mosaic Law was temporary both in duration and function, raises an important question for us:

*Does the Law have any place or role in our daily lives as Christians? If so, what?*

The answer is not as difficult as it may appear. We must make a distinction between the eternal moral law of God and the temporary Mosaic Covenant of Law. God's moral law neither began nor ended with the Mosaic Covenant. The moral law of God is eternal and unchanging because it is an expression of God's unchanging, eternal, just, holy and righteous character.

The Mosaic Covenant in terms of its historical administration is now obsolete and no longer binding upon New Testament believers. It has no more binding authority upon us than the Russian constitution has upon American citizens. However, the moral demands of God's law have not passed away.

Samuel Bolton notes this distinction,

"...the law, as it is considered as a rule, can no more be abolished or changed than the nature of good and evil can be abolished and changed...And for the *substance* of it, it is moral and eternal, and cannot be abrogated. We grant that the *circumstances* under which the moral law was originally given were temporary and changeable, and we have nothing to do with the promulgator, Moses, nor with the place where it was given, Mount Sinai, nor with the time when it was given, fifty days after the people came out of Egypt, nor yet as it was written in tables of stone, delivered with thunderings and lightnings. We look not to Sinai, the hill of bondage, but to Sion, the mountain of grace," (*True Bounds*, pp. 57-58; emphasis mine).

In Romans 2:14-15, Paul says that God's law is written on our consciences by virtue of having been created in God's image. This law of nature was engraved in Adam and made known to him in the Garden and will last throughout all eternity. Thus, the requirements of God's moral law still function just as they did in the Old Covenant, namely to expose our sin as transgression and drive us to Christ.

Samuel Bolton writes,

"The law was given us as a glass to reveal our imperfections in duty, and for this purpose the law remains with us. Through it we perceive the imperfections of our duties, our graces, and our obedience. By this means we are kept close to Christ and kept humble. The law takes us away from

reliance on ourselves and casts us upon Christ and the promises," (*True Bounds*, Bolton, p. 88).

Since the Law has a continued role, we must note one final but critical point. Just as the Law gave way to the coming of Christ in the *history of salvation*, so to it must give way to Christ in the *order of salvation*.

Once the Law has served its purpose of exposing our sin, it no longer has any claims on us. Judgment must give way to grace! Echoing Paul's sentiment in Galatians, listen carefully to the following words of Martin Luther,

"The Law must not rule in the conscience any longer than the predetermined time of that Blessed Offspring. Therefore, when the Law has disclosed my iniquities to me, has terrified me, and has revealed to me the wrath and judgment of God, so that I begin to blanch and to despair, then the Law has reached the prescribed manner, time, and purpose when it must stop exercising its tyranny, because then it has discharged its function by adequately disclosing the wrath of God and creating terror. Here one must say: 'Stop, Law! You have caused enough terror and sorrow. Thou dost overwhelm me with all Thy waves; Thy dread assaults destroy me (Ps. 88:7, 16). O Lord, do not rebuke Thy servant in Thy anger, nor chasten me in Thy Wrath (Ps. 6:1).' When these terrors and complaints come, it is time and the hour of the Blessed Offspring. Then let the Law withdraw; for it was indeed added for the sake of disclosing and increasing transgressions, but only until the point when the Offspring would come. Once He is present, let the Law stop disclosing transgressions and terrifying. Let it surrender its realm to another, that is, to the Blessed Offspring, Christ; He has gracious lips, with which He does not accuse and terrify but speaks better things than the Law, namely, grace, peace, forgiveness of sins, and victory over sin and death," (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 317).

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