

THE ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF LAW

GALATIANS 3:19-22

GOD PRESERVED A COMMUNITY IN WHICH HE COULD FULFILL ALL HIS PROMISES TO HUMANKIND BY GIVING THEM LAWS.

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The Origin And Purpose Of Law

Galatians 3:19-22

Again, I would like to apologize for crawling painfully slowly through the book of Galatians. However, I think what Paul is trying to convey in this letter is essential to the very nature of Christianity.

The first question human beings should ask is, "Is there a God?" If there is a God, then the second question is, "How can I be in a right relationship with Him?" Paul doesn't want us to be confused about either of these questions. There is a God. He exists One in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The only way to be in a right relationship with Him is to surrender our lives to Him by placing our faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross.

Any religion or philosophy that attempts to add to these truths or take away from them is false. In other words, our very salvation and eternal destinies depend on making right choices. Paul has been arguing from personal experience, conventional wisdom, philosophy, and theology that the way in which we are saved is by faith alone and not by adding any religious laws to it. We cannot be good enough, smart enough, or religious enough to earn or deserve God's love.

But for some strange reason, human beings seem to gravitate towards rule keeping. Let me give you an example of how people who govern every part of their lives by rules can go terribly wrong.

One day I was called to a house where the father was dying and was expected to pass in a couple of hours. I was in the room with he and his sons. The eldest son asked his father, "Is there anything I can do for you? Is there anything you want?"

The old man replied, "Son, I smell something wonderful and delicious. It smells like one of your mother's famous apple strudels. Please bring me a piece.

The son left for what seemed a much longer than expected time. When he returned his father asked, "Son, what took you so long and why no strudel?"

The son sadly looked at his father and said, "You know how strict mama is. She says the strudel is for after the funeral."

We laugh, but we all know people like this. In this week's sermon I will try and lay out for us the purpose of The Old Testament Law. In next week's sermon I will try to give us a way to approach the Old Testament Law today.

I know pastors who preach simply from Acts 2 through Revelation. They don't preach the Old Testament and they don't preach from the Gospels. Their reasoning is that The Old Testament and the Gospels, with all their commands and promises are for the Jewish nation of Israel. It is only with the arrival of the Holy Spirit giving birth to the church on Pentecost described in the second chapter of the Book of Acts that Bible texts apply to Christians.

They use the fact that Paul constantly argues against the law. I understand what they are saying, but we must remember that the Paul who is arguing his case in this letter to the Galatians is also the same Paul who writes to his understudy Timothy:

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do" (II Timothy 3:16-17 / NLT).

Paul insists that all Scripture is inspired by God. That includes the Old Testament, the Gospels, along with the entire New Testament. Paul is not saying the law is dead or useless. He just wants his churches to understand the nature and purpose of the law. He did not want them to try to make the law do something it was never intended to do. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **GOD PRESERVED A COMMUNITY IN WHICH HE COULD FULFILL ALL HIS PROMISES TO HUMANKIND BY GIVING THEM LAWS.** In other words, from the third chapter in Genesis, God promised to fix the sin problem created by Adam and Eve's disobedience. He promised that a particular person would enter the human experience, set us free from the bondage of sin, revive us from the death of sin, restore our broken relationship with God, and ultimately destroy sin and Satan forever. Further, God built a community that came to be known as Jews and settled them in a land known as Israel. The promise of redemption would be kept and developed through this nation. In order to keep this nation from deteriorating into chaos, laws were necessary.

I. THE NECESSITY OF LAW (VS 19a)

Laws Are Meant To Preserve Order In A Community.

In the first half of verse 19, Paul explores the necessity of law. **LAWS ARE MEANT TO PRESERVE ORDER IN A COMMUNITY.**

I think all of us know that intuitively of all nations, institutions, and organizations. If there are no rules, there is chaos.

A. WHAT'S THE QUESTION?

We may ask why does Paul raise this question, and what is the question? If we want to understand this we have to keep in mind that the Christian movement is less than 20 years old and it primarily consisted of Jews who came to recognize Jesus as the Promised Messiah. When they received Jesus, they still remained Jews. Their whole outlook on life was Jewish. When non-Jews started to come to faith in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Christians expected these Gentiles to accept the entire Jewish outlook towards life and the Jewish expression of Christianity. The danger was that if they added anything to the salvation message, it would no longer be the Christian message. We are saved by God's grace simply by placing our faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross. Following the Mosaic Law, being circumcised, eating kosher will not make us more saved. We receive the totality of salvation through faith.

In order to make this clear, Paul has painted the Law as an obstacle to salvation. Paul set out the argument like this. God promises us salvation and a restored relationship with Him. He satisfied all the stipulations of spiritual cleansing in sending Jesus to die on the cross and shed His blood for our atonement. All we have to do is to accept that offer in faith. When we receive Jesus into our lives as Lord and Savior, we are saved.

On the other hand, hard core Jewish-Christians wanted these Gentile converts to Christianity to also embrace the Mosaic Law. Paul said that anyone who tries to keep the law in order to earn their salvation or God's love would be lost for an eternity. I'm sure they heard Paul saying that the law was garbage and the law was of no use. Keep in mind, for about 1500 years, the nation of Israel governed their religious,

social, political and ceremonial lives according to the Law of Moses. God made a big deal about it all throughout Israel's history. No doubt the Jewish believers would ask Paul, "Then why did God give us the Mosaic Law?"

Perhaps anticipating this question Paul posits it himself. He says, "What, then, was the purpose of the law?"

B. THE BEGINNING OF THE LAW

At this point Paul goes back to discuss the beginning of the law. The first purpose was to lay out and clearly define what sin was. The Hebrews were a tough people. And they didn't always act nobly. For example, Abraham tried to pass Sarah off as his sister twice. Because he was frightened for his life, he was willing to let her have sex with two kings. His son Isaac pulls the same thing with his wife Rebecca. When their sister was raped, two of Jacob's sons, deceived a whole city by telling the prince who raped their sister that if he and the entire city agreed to be circumcised, they would allow their sister to marry him and all would be forgiven. When the men were crippled and recovering from the surgery, the two brothers went in and slaughtered all the men in the city, and carried away the women, children, livestock, and valuables. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. When Moses tried to stand up and help the Israelites in captivity by killing an Egyptian soldier, they threatened to expose him. And all throughout their journey through the desert, they continually talked about killing Moses. If this nation was going to survive and keep God's promise of a redeemer alive, then they would need strict rules to govern every aspect of their lives. If there were no laws, and if God did not supernaturally protect Moses, the Hebrew nation would have ceased to exist less than a month after leaving their slavery in Egypt behind. God gave Israel the Law in order to protect them from offending God so badly that He would wipe them off the face of the earth in anger. In fact He threatened to do that but Moses talked Him out of it. Secondly, God knew that they would prey on one another. The laws God gave Moses promoted a fair and equitable society. So the laws were meant to protect them from provoking God to anger and to protect them from exploiting one another. The purpose of the law was to keep this people together as a nation that would ultimately produce the Messiah Who would one day take care of sin, Satan, and death.

C. THE END OF THE LAW

And that thought brings Paul to the end of the law. The Mosaic law finished serving its purpose when the nation of Israel gave birth to Jesus. Think about it. In order to preserve the right Kingly line for Jesus to be born in, He even had to make sure the right country conquered them and took them into captivity as a nation where they could continue to keep track of their lineage. God only preserved two tribes, but one of those tribes was the tribe of Judah, the tribe that produced King David and the tribe that produced Jesus, promised way back in the book of Genesis. The Jews had remained intact as a nation, living in Israel, even though they were under the hand of Rome. Once Jesus appeared, died, and rose again, there was no need for the Mosaic Law. In fact, in just about 20 years after Paul wrote this letter, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple burned to the ground, and the Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire. In fact from that time on, the Jews have never occupied Israel as a nation until 1948. Most Bible scholars see that as some sort of miraculous fulfillment of prophecy concerning the end times. I don't know exactly what that event means, but I do know that it has Messianic significance for us who wait for the Second Coming of Christ. So the law served its purpose in preserving

Israel as a nation until Jesus could be born as the Jewish Messiah. So I think we could say that **LAWS ARE MEANT TO PRESERVE ORDER IN A COMMUNITY**. As I said before, I think that applies to every people group. If there is no law then there is chaos. No country or organization can exist for any period of time in chaos. As nations' laws become more unjust and confusing, the culture deteriorates into chaos and ultimately the country disintegrates and vanishes.

II. THE INSTITUTION OF LAW (19b-20)

God's Handshake Is As Good As Gold.

We all know how our country began with the constitution. In the second half of verse 19 thru verse 20 Paul describes the institution of the law. In comparing trying to live by law to living according to God's promise of salvation, we would have to conclude that **GOD'S HANDSHAKE IS AS GOOD AS GOLD**.

For those of us who are older, we can remember a time when we didn't lock our doors. We didn't have a lot of legal paper work to do. Land was sold and houses built on a handshake and a person's word. It was a good time to live when we could trust one another. Our handshake was our bond and our word was true and certain. But today, everything has to be written by a lawyer and notarized by a notary public. The fact that we have to do all this legal paperwork shows how much we don't trust one another. Paul's point is that talking with God face-to-face, up close and personal, is better than trying to hold Him to some legal document. I like the way Paul describes it in this section.

A. HAVE YOUR PEOPLE CALL MY PEOPLE

About ten years ago, there was a very popular saying, "Have your people call my people ... and set up a meeting." I understand that but wouldn't it be better if just you and I set up the time and date? When you read the entire Bible, it is difficult to reconstruct exactly what happened when Moses went up Mt. Sinai to receive the Law. But it seems as if God sends His people, the angels to the meeting and the Israelites send their people, Moses. There on top of Mt. Sinai, Moses enters a legally binding agreement with God on Israel's behalf. That may all sound o.k. but from the beginning, the Israelites preferred keeping laws to entering a personal and intimate relationship with God. When they saw the dark clouds, saw the fierce lightning, heard the thunder and felt the earthquake, they wanted nothing to do with God. Listen to how it is described:

"When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the horn, and when they saw the lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear.

And they said to Moses, 'You tell us what God says, and we will listen. But don't let God speak directly to us. If he does, we will die!'

'Don't be afraid,' Moses said, 'for God has come in this way to show you his awesome power. From now on, let your fear of him keep you from sinning!'

As the people stood in the distance, Moses entered into the deep darkness where God was" (Exodus 20:18-21/ NLT).

B. GOD CALLS PERSONALLY

But the whole point is that God wants to call each of us personally. That was God's preferred method of relationship. He spoke to Adam and Eve personally. He spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob personally. He spoke with Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, Samuel and others personally. In fact, God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus to communicate personally. And let's not forget Paul himself; Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus face to face. Again, I want to quote this verse again, and I hope you don't get sick of it. And keep in mind this verse is addressed to Christians. However, it applies to all people. This is a direct quote from the mouth of Jesus as recorded in the book of Revelation:

"Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends" (Revelation 3:20 / NLT).

The God of the Jews and Christians is a personal, passionate, and intimate God. He created and redeemed us out of His extravagant love. He calls out to each person and invites each person in this saving relationship. By grace through faith, God now wants to demonstrate His love by taking up residence in our hearts. Isn't that the kind of love and relationship we all want? That relationship is not being offered through any human person or human religion. It is a personal invitation by God Himself to each one of us. The question we must answer is, "Do I want to try and earn my relationship and right standing with God by doing a bunch of religious stuff or do I want to simply say yes to His proposal of love and relationship?" God is proposing. The only response is to say yes. When God promises to come into our lives and set up house, we can be sure that **GOD'S HANDSHAKE IS AS GOOD AS GOLD.**

So far we have seen that the purpose of the law was to preserve Israel as a nation. The laws prevented them from pushing God totally off the edge, thereby causing Him to wipe them out. Further, the laws were meant to prevent them from exploiting one another. And finally, the laws were meant to preserve this nation, culture, and religion so that the Promised Messiah could be born at exactly the right time and place in history.

III. THE CONTEXT OF LAW (21)

Laws Can Only Do What They Were Designed To Do.

In verse 21, Paul wants his churches to understand the context of the law. He wants them to understand that **LAWS CAN ONLY DO WHAT THEY WERE DESIGNED TO DO.**

A. WHAT THE LAW IS MEANT TO DO

First of all, let's review what the law was meant to do. We said that the law is not at odds with the promise of salvation and the promise of the Messiah. The law was created to preserve a community that would receive the promises of God, ultimately produce the One Who fulfill all the promises, and pass on the promises of God to the world. The law therefore was never meant to be in competition with God's promises nor was it meant to replace the promises of God.

B. WHAT THE LAW IS NOT MEANT TO DO

But people are easily confused. In fact, it is still easy for us to get confused. In this section, we can easily find comparisons to our religious life. The law was never set up for a method of salvation. In other words, the law was never set up to be means by which we can earn our salvation. We cannot earn our salvation or merit a relationship with God based on how well we are able to keep these religious laws. To illustrate this to us, we could say that we are not saved based on how many religious rules we are able to keep nor on how many spiritual disciplines we are able to successfully practice. If someone should ask us why we are certain we are going to heaven, we should never respond, "I pray regularly, read my Bible diligently, fast, tithe, and go to church regularly. In addition, I don't harm anyone. I try to be a pretty good person." The spiritual disciplines are not meant to save us nor fix us. Only God can save us and fix us. The spiritual disciplines are only tools that help us to grow and mature in our relationship with God. A right relationship with God is solely dependent on God's making us right with Himself when we respond to His offer of salvation in faith. People try to seek out all these mysterious ways to God through mystic religions, nature religions, and eastern religions. People think doing good and practicing religious disciplines can somehow make them right with God.

Here is the comparison between the early Jewish-Christian legalists and us. They started to actually look at keeping the law as a way to be saved. Some Christians in our day look to reading and keeping all the laws and disciplines spelled out in the Bible as a way to be saved. In the early church some were tempted to worship the law. In our day, some are tempted to worship the Bible. The law, and the spiritual disciplines are merely tools that God uses to shape us and mold us into the people He wants us to be. We don't get any salvation credit or extra credit for praying, reading our Bibles, etc. Keep this formula in mind. We were saved by grace through faith. We are being saved by grace through faith. And we will be saved by grace through faith. We must never ever get confused into thinking that we ever get to a place where we earn our salvation or deserve a right relationship with God. **LAWS CAN ONLY DO WHAT THEY WERE DESIGNED TO DO.**

IV. THE CONCLUSION OF LAW (22)

Law Imprisons Us; Jesus Liberates Us.

Let me just remind you that we will actually talk about how to use the Bible, which includes both New and Old Testaments, next week. But for now, Paul will talk to his churches about the conclusion of the law. To make it simple, Paul puts it like this. **LAW IMPRISONS US; JESUS LIBERATES US.**

A. ENSLAVEMENT OF SIN

First of all, he emphasizes the fact that if we seriously tried to keep the law, and if we were honest with ourselves, we could easily come to the conclusion that we are prisoners. We are enslaved to wrong thinking, wrong speaking, wrong desires, and wrong behaviors. And if we were completely honest with ourselves, we could see that we are powerless to really conquer all this sin. In the end we have to admit that we are in bondage to sin, Satan, and death. No one, even the best and most religious people cannot free themselves from this bondage. The more laws we become aware of and understand, the more in bondage we realize we are. In his

letter to the church in Rome, Paul describes this struggle with sin. He sums up his self-assessment in his own pursuit of righteousness through the law like this:

"I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it.

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?" (Romans 7:18-24 / NLT).

What makes this confession by Paul so remarkable is that he belonged to the strictest religious sect of Judaism. They prided themselves on their ability to keep the law. But once Paul met Jesus face to face, he finally realized how sinful he was. The point Paul makes to us follows a lot of Old Testament Scripture. He says that sin separates us from God. Being separated from God makes us spiritually dead. We are all born into sin, we all have a natural bent towards sin, and we all commit willful sin. Therefore, there is no one in the world who can be justified before God by being good. The Bible is clear. Everybody has sinned and find themselves far short of God's demands for righteousness. The penalty for this is death. So in our natural state, we are all spiritually dead, eternally separated from God. We, along with Paul have to cry out, "Who can rescue us from our sinful selves?"

B. LIBERATION FROM SIN

The answer of course is Jesus is our liberation from sin. After Paul cries out this confession of helpless bondage to sin and death, he immediately names the cure:

"Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus" (Romans 7:25-8:1 / NLT).

If we read the Scriptures carefully, prayerfully, and honestly, we can see the truth of what Paul is saying here. The whole world is a prisoner of sin. Literally it reads something like, "locked up in sin."

I've noticed as I have talked with people of other religions that when I ask them about the certainty of their salvation, they ultimately have to say they don't know. All other religions have this type of works evaluation. I will ask them, "In your religious system, how does one get to heaven?"

Invariably they say, "By being good and doing my religious duties."

And then I ask them, "Do you ever do things wrong or find yourself unable to do the religious duties or keep the religious laws?"

When they say yes, I follow up with this question, "How do you know if you have done enough good things to get to heaven and how do you know if your bad things have disqualified you?"

This question they cannot answer. That is why twisted Christian doctrine that portrayed salvation by works, so easily recruited soldiers to fight in the Crusades.

They were promised that if they died in a religious war, they would be guaranteed to be forgiven of their sins and gain immediate access to heaven.

Is it so hard to understand why people strap bombs to themselves and blow themselves up in the name of God? This really is the only way they can guarantee their entrance into heaven. Their reasoning is just like the misguided Christian Crusaders: they think that if they die in a religious act of war, this will guarantee them heaven.

The promise from God in the beginning was that He would provide an answer for our sin and our broken relationship with God. God The Father sent Jesus, God The Son, to come to earth, take on human flesh and sacrificially die for our sins. Through His death, Jesus atoned for our sins, and redeemed us from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death. When Jesus returns the second time, He will destroy evil and every evil person once and for all. On that judgment day, He will not ask how good we have been or how religious we have been. He will ask us in Whom we trust for our salvation. There can only be One Name: Jesus.

The fact of the matter is this. **LAW IMPRISONS US; JESUS LIBERATES US.**

There should never be any hesitation or confusion when someone asks us if we are going to heaven or why we are going to heaven. The answer is simply this, "I have placed my faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross on my behalf."

God uses laws to preserve us and protect us. **GOD PRESERVED A COMMUNITY IN WHICH HE COULD FULFILL ALL HIS PROMISES TO HUMANKIND BY GIVING THEM LAWS.** Many of us were alive in 1976 when the Israeli army made a daring rescue. The incident illustrates how obedience preserves lives.

In July of 1976, Israeli commandos made a daring raid at an airport in Entebbe, Uganda, in which 103 Jewish hostages were freed. In less than 15 minutes, the soldiers had killed all seven of the kidnappers and set the captives free.

As successful as the rescue was, however, three of the hostages were killed during the raid. As the commandos entered the terminal, they shouted out in Hebrew, "Get down! Crawl!" The Jewish hostages understood and lay down on the floor, while the guerrillas, who did not speak Hebrew, were left standing. Quickly the rescuers shot the upright kidnappers.

But two of the hostages hesitated – perhaps to see what was happening – and were also cut down in the gunfire. One young man was lying down and actually stood up when the commandos entered the airport. He too, was shot with the bullets meant for the enemy. Had these three heeded the soldiers' commands, they too would have been freed with the rest of the captives.

God gave the Mosaic Law to the Hebrews to preserve them as a nation and to fulfill all His promises to humankind. The laws were meant to obey, but they were never meant to be used as a way to earn God's love or merit His salvation. They were meant to be used as a method of protection and survival.