

The Law's Proper Place

Galatians 3:19-25

- A. The superiority of the promise over the law **19-20**
1. As already seen, the unchangeable promise was older than the law
 - a. Older is not always better, but when God establishes a thing, it takes on something of his character
 - b. This is particularly the case when we are speaking of his plan for how to save sinful mankind
 - c. The law had its place in his plan of salvation, but did not change or replace his promise to bless all nations
 - d. As it was with Abraham, so it was for all men: righteousness was to be given to those who believed God
 2. The law was in force as a guardian only for a set amount of time
 - a. The promise was irrevocable but the law was added only until the Seed to whom it referred had come
 - b. When the promise of that Seed was fulfilled, its supplement, the law, was no longer needed
 - c. As an external force demanding obedience it was no longer needed by those led by the Holy Spirit
 3. The law came thru a mediator, but the promise was directly from God
 - a. It sounds odd to us, but Paul here, Stephen in his final speech and the author of Hebrews (2:2)
 - 1) all speak of a widespread belief among Jews of that day that angels were involved in giving the law
 - b. Whatever their role was, we know Moses was the mediator between God and Israel in giving the law
 - c. Some have counted over 200 different interpretations of vs 20, but its central point seems clear enough
 - d. God's promise to Abraham made no use of a mediator for God made that promise directly to Abraham
 - e. To claim something given thru a mediator was better than something straight from God did not make sense
 - f. In terms of the time of origin, duration of validity and means of transmission, the promise was superior
- B. The law and the promise do not stand in opposition to each other **21-22**
1. Paul recoils violently to the very thought of this possibility
 - a. If law is separate from and subordinate to the promise some wondered if they were opposed to each other
 - 1) Marcion was so committed to this idea that he dismissed the whole OT as the work of another god
 - 2) Many today reject the OT in practice by never preaching from it, using it mostly for children's stories
 - b. We can see that Paul's reaction to this sort of thinking is emotional in his response, 'Absolutely not!'
 - 1) God is the author of both law and promise and thus to believe they are opposed is unreasonable
 - 2) There was no division in God's mind about how he would save people when he gave law and promise
 - 3) For Paul, to think this way would have come dangerously close to blasphemy
 - 4) If the two were opposed it would suggest God did not know enough to make one plan and stick with it
 2. They are not opposed because they do not serve the same purpose
 - a. In building a house the use of a hammer does not work in opposition to the use of a screwdriver
 - 1) They work together, each with its own proper usage, to build the house the builder as designed
 - 2) So law and promise have been used by the Master Builder to build his house, the church
 - b. The law was not given to man so that he might build for himself righteousness and eternal life
 - 1) Had that been so, there would have been two ways to salvation: obedience to law and faith in promise
 - 2) The grammar of this sentence expresses 'contrary to fact' condition; Paul does not think this the case
 - 3) Two ways to salvation would inevitably lead to conflict between those who took different routes
 - c. As it is, the church is united in the knowledge that we all came to God in exactly the same fashion
 - 1) None are good enough to do it on their own, none bad enough their works condemn them despite faith
 - 2) Each sinner is grateful faith is the way, and each is grateful the law defines the way to please God
 3. Law can't lead to life because we are already condemned lawbreakers
 - a. 'If the law could impart life . . .', but it cannot; it can only show us that we are prisoners of sin
 - b. Far from giving life, the law has proven that it cannot bring life to any of Adam's offspring
 - c. Lutheran theologians speak of the 'strange work' of the law, revealing to every person they are a sinner
 - d. In doing this the law demonstrates the utter bankruptcy of all human efforts to gain righteousness by works
 - e. It puts all men, Jew and Gentile, kind unbelievers and vile criminals, on the same footing—condemned sinners
- C. The first function of the law is to lead men to Christ **23-24**
1. It does not oppose the promise; it helps people see their need for it
 - a. Viewed properly, law and promise are not antagonistic; each has its proper role in saved sinners
 - 1) The law shows us the impossibility of gaining righteousness by means of our own work
 - 2) The promise provides us the Spirit (vs 14) that enables us to obey the law from our heart

- b. The law does not seek to do what the promise does, but leads people to want and trust that promise
 - 1) The law brings people to flee condemnation justly deserved and seek refuge in the grace of God
 - 2) Were it not for the law people would continue to believe their actions were righteous enough for God
 - 3) Verses like **Mt 5:21-22** and **27-28** convince most that our standards for godliness are too low
 - 4) Without law as a mirror that allows us to see our soul as God does, we would feel no need for grace
 - 5) Jesus makes clear his view on those who think their works make them righteous **Mt 9:13**
 - 6) The law has done its job when it drives men to seek their righteousness by faith in Christ's
 - 7) Were it not for the law we would be lost, self-righteous but lost, with no felt need for a Savior
 2. Law hemmed men in to keep them from self-destruction til Jesus came
 - a. Paul just spoke of being a prisoner to, hemmed in by, sin and now uses that word of our relation to the law
 - 1) Before Christ came into this world so faith in him personally could be exercised, 'we' were prisoners
 - 2) Though there is an application of this to all people, context suggests 'we' here is a reference to Jews
 - a) Let us remember that for the Jews, the 'receiving of the law' (Rom 9:2) was a great blessing
 - 3) Shut up under sin, men longed for the freedom that God offered through faith in Christ
 - b. Shut up (hemmed in, confined by) the law has a little different emphasis
 - 1) The law confined the Jews in the OT era so they were guarded and led down a predetermined path
 - 2) When Christ came those looking for the fulfillment of God's promises saw the end of that path
 - 3) They were guarded, protected from self-destruction that comes with a life guided only by sin
 - 4) They were not guarded until they learned to act righteously, but until the Object of their faith came
 - c. Those who were trying to bring Gentiles under the law failed to recognize a great part of the law's purpose
 - 1) It was there to usher those seeking godly righteousness into the age of freedom, and that had arrived
 - 2) They ignored the fact their own history as Jews proved the law never had made people right before God
 - 3) They were trying to lead Gentiles to take a giant step backwards in God's plan for people's salvation
 3. It was a guardian to keep people in the right way, to lead us to Christ
 - a. 'The law *was put in charge*' translates a noun so the HCSB is better, 'The law was our guardian'
 - b. In ancient Greek and Roman cultures a young boy was assigned a pedagogue ('guardian' here)
 - c. This slave was charged with supervision and conduct of the child until he reached age of maturity
 - d. A guardian was not a teacher who gave formal instruction, but a disciplinarian who supervised activity
 - e. He walked the child to school and waited for him until class was over, then drilled him on his lessons
 - f. He also made sure the boy did his chores, taught him good manners, and used a switch when needed
 - g. The law served this function, a guardian until God's people reached a level of spiritual maturity
 4. Once Christ came, its function as a guardian was no longer needed
 - a. As a guardian guided the child until he was mature, so the law guided God's people to spiritual maturity
 - b. The age of spiritual maturity arrived when Christ entered the world, then left his Spirit to indwell his people
 - c. To insist on having the law as guardian now would be like an adult demanding to be treated like a child
 - d. The function of the law was to lead us to Christ whose perfect righteousness would be ours thru faith
 - e. It was never meant to offer a way to salvation so to demand we live under it is to misunderstand its purpose
- D. In the age of the Spirit, that old function is not necessary 25**
1. The Spirit internalizes the discipline of the law by writing it on our heart
 - a. If we teach our children well, then the discipline we administer will become their own self-discipline
 - 1) Cleaning our room, rising early, being frugal are things I may not have liked as a child, but are me now
 - b. The law is no longer our guardian, guiding our actions until we are mature enough to choose wisely ourselves
 - c. Through faith in Christ we have left behind the necessity of an external guardian to make sure we do right
 2. For those led by the Spirit, its function as guardian is no longer needed
 - a. The reason for this is not that the law was bad, for Paul says elsewhere it is holy, righteous and good
 - b. It is just that the Spirit writes that law on our heart and fills us with a love for others so we want to do right
 - c. We do not return a worker's cloak because the law demands it, but our of love and a desire he be warm
 - d. The law is still useful to help us understand what God considers good; it is a wise counselor, not a guardian
 - e. Let us give thanks God tells us what right looks like, and that he gives us the Spirit so we can live it