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Moses Law.

(Galatians Chapter 3)

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



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Moses Law (Galatians Chapter 3).

Topics.

- Does Christ save by the works of the law or by faith?
- The Scripture preached the Gospel to Abraham.
- All who rely on works of the law are under a curse.
- Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.
- The Scripture imprisoned everything under sin.
- Until the coming faith would be revealed.
- The law was our guardian/schoolmaster until Christ came.
- You are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise.

Ceremonial law of purification

- **Galatians 3:1-3:** YOU foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? ²This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Law: from Strong's Concordance can refer to anything that is established it could be a custom, a command, a rule, the Mosaic law the Pentateuch, a law demanding faith, the moral law and the law of love or of any law whatsoever. From this it can be seen that the word law can embrace many various aspects of the law. It is the context that the word law is used and that determines which particular aspect of the full law the word is applying to.

Works of the law: in this context embrace all the Jewish ceremonial laws of purification, the feast days, Sabbaths, circumcision, eating unclean foods and such like things.

Perfected by the flesh: in this context means attempting to make ourselves righteous and worthy of eternal life by self-effort in contrast to trusting in our faith in Christ and God's grace.

Paul is talking to Jews who have been converted to Christ, but have gone back to trusting in Moses laws of purification, circumcision and Jewish religious customs and traditions that Moses had written in in the Book of the Law (also called the Book of the Covenant) to earn righteousness. The context of this letter is salvation by faith in Jesus Christ contrasted to justification by self-effort (i.e., keeping ceremonial laws of purification and religious customs and traditions). Even today, to be right with God the Jews endeavor to keep these laws to earn righteousness.

Does Christ save by the works of the law or by faith?

- **Galatians 3:4-7:** Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— ⁶just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? ⁷Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

Suffer so many things in vain means that they once believed they were saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and God's grace, but have now gone back under the Jewish ceremonial laws to earn righteousness with God. It's not that they have denied that Jesus is the Son of God and Saviour of the world, but they have forsaken grace and the terror is this is that no-one can be saved without grace. The following words of Paul show the enormous importance of trusting in God's grace in Christ. Paul in his letters wrote:

- I do not nullify the *GRACE* of God, for if justification were through the law (or any form of religious self-effort), then Christ died for no purpose (Gal. 2:21).

This means, when a brother or sister in Christ begin to justify themselves through the law and self-effort, they nullify the grace of God and by their actions declare that Christ's death was of no value. Equally as horrific as this Paul states:

- When we forsake *GRACE* we separate ourselves from Christ because it was only by *GRACE* that God made us alive in Christ (Gal. 5:4) (Eph. 2:5).

Paul to highlight even more the majestic glory of grace wrote with absolute boldness that:

- It is only by *GRACE* that any brother or sister has been saved (Eph. 2:8).

Paul in these verses is shining a brilliant floodlight on the truth that every brother and sister in Christ is saved, solely by faith and by grace and it is not their own doing, but the gift of God. This means that without grace no-one can be united to Christ and whoever is without Christ is separated from God and without God no-one can be saved to eternal life. This means in regards to eternal salvation, Christ, God, Grace and Faith, are all on an equal par with each other since no-one can be saved to eternal life without any one of them. This is the reason the author in the book of Hebrews spends so many chapters brilliantly and skillfully explaining to the Hebrews that they must stop their sin of trusting in religious works, the Levitical Law and their priesthood to be counted righteous before God and start trusting in the grace of God that is in Christ and in his righteousness to be saved to eternal life.

By extension this means that Christians must stop trusting in attending a church building every week, strictly adhering to ceremonial rites and holy days and keeping religious customs and traditions to be saved. Though the practise of some of these maybe good in themselves they become grossly sinful when believers trust in them for their salvation since not one of them has any power to save to eternal life. This is the reason Paul is telling the Galatians that they are suffering so many things in vain, because whatever they suffer for their faith will count for nothing if they are trusting in their own self effort to earn righteousness that leads to eternal life rather than trusting in God's grace that is grant to all who belong to the family of the Lord Jesus Christ.

TODAY: this same principal applies to any Christian who has been saved by faith, but then reverts back to self-effort rather than trusting in Christ. This is one of the greatest dangers of Christian life since forsaking grace is not an act of corrupt wickedness, but rather something that involves good things, (i.e., trusting in such things like going to church every Sunday, singing in a church choir, overseeing Sunday school, teaching the Bible, being a minister and preaching the Gospel). Obviously, these are all good things and should be encouraged, but if anyone is trusting in them to earn righteousness that led to Salvation, they become the very thing that will rob them from salvation and eternal life.

The Spirit Christ provides: is the Spirit of righteousness that makes us worthy of eternal salvation. It is that righteousness that God grants as a pure and free gift to all who by faith and God's grace belongs to the family of Christ. This Spirit of righteousness is one of the many aspects of the Holy Spirit (a title for the Spirit of God). Paul in this chapter is telling all

those who trust in their own works and ceremonial rites, religious customs and traditions that everyone (Jew and Gentile) is saved by faith and grace and not works of the law. The context of the chapter reveals two paths to justification and righteousness one that leads to eternal life and one that doesn't:

1. The path of works and self-effort.
2. The path of faith and grace.

The Scripture proclaimed the gospel to Abraham

- **Galatians 3:8-9:** And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Paul makes a statement that Scripture foreseeing certain events that would come to pass announced them beforehand, these climatic events that would change the world and were proclaimed long before they come to pass refer to the following promise of God's to Abraham: -

- In thee and in thy seed shall all nations be blessed. (Gen. 12:3) (Gen. 18:18) (Gen. 22:18).

God in this promise is telling Abraham that his seed (the Messiah, the Christ) will descend from him and that salvation to eternal life and glory would be through him. From this we see that the Gospel that was preached to Abraham was that the Messiah the Christ would come from his very own loins and that by him all nations (Jews and Gentiles) would be blessed (made happy) and that Abraham would be counted righteous by faith and not by works this is why he became the father of faith and why all nations (Jews and Gentiles) are blessed in Abraham.

All who rely on works of the law are under a curse

- **Galatians 3:10-12:** ----- ¹⁰For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

The Book of the Law is also called the Book of the Covenant it contained all the laws God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai and in the wilderness. Moses had written in this book the Ten Commandments, all the civil laws for Israel and all the laws regarding ceremonial rites and religious laws (i.e., the feasts, holy days, Sabbaths and such like things). Those who trust in the law (to be saved) are under a curse because if they fail to keep any one of the laws it is the same as if they have failed to keep them all (i.e., if a person steals they cannot use the fact that they have not broken any of the other commandments as their defence). No judge is going to set a thief free on the basis he has not broken any other law this is what the words, "All who rely on works of the law are under a curse" mean (i.e., if they break one law no matter how small they are held guilty before the law).

NOTE: even though the Book of the Law embraces the Ten Commandments the prime focus of the law in this chapter is the Jewish ceremonial law of purification it is about trusting in anything other than faith and God's grace to be counted righteous and saved to eternal life. The Jews who had been converted to Christ, but sadly were falling back under the law were not committing acts of wickedness (i.e., murdering or stealing etc.); it was the ceremonial law that was the problem, feast days,

Sabbaths, unclean foods and circumcision etc. For Christians today it is the same all faithful Christians are fully aware that stealing, murder, adultery and such like things are wrong the problem is not with acts of wickedness, but trusting in things like, daily Bible readings, church attendance, tithing, singing in a church choir, teaching Sunday School, ministering in a church or preaching the Gospel etc., to earn righteousness that leads to eternal life or maintain their salvation. Though these are all good in themselves and maybe storing up treasures in heaven, whoever trusts in them to earn righteousness and be counted worthy of eternal life will instead of finding life and freedom be brought into bondage by them. This is because whoever lives this way is under a curse because they will never attain to God's standard of Holiness and the perfection of the law by self-effort and are therefore always going to hear the condemning voice of law in their minds and be totally robbed of the mental peace that can only come by trusting in their faith in Christ and in God's grace. This is what Paul was warning the Galatians Christians of and why he called them foolish.

The righteous person shall live by faith: means they do not trust in their own righteousness, good deeds or self-effort to make them righteous and worthy before God for eternal life. They are totally persuaded that their righteousness that leads to eternal life before God is because of their faith in Christ and God's grace and not because of anything they can do to attain to the perfect standard the law demands or God's Holiness.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law

- **Galatians 3:13-14:** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The curse of the Law; comes to those who try to be justified and counted righteous by keeping the law and ceremonial rites, religious customs and traditions. This is because the LAW rightfully judges us all guilty and condemns us to eternal death.

The blessing of Abraham; was that he was counted righteous by faith and not by works. This blessing and promise of the Spirit today is that all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be granted righteousness not because of their own self-effort, but because of their faith in the LORD Jesus Christ and God's grace this is because eternal salvation is granted to all who belong to the family of Christ as a free and a pure gift from God to those who are devoted by faith to His Son.

No-one breaks a human covenant

- **Galatians 3:15-18:** To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. ¹⁷This 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. ¹⁸For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

Paul is shining a spotlight on the fact that even when mortal sinful human men make legal contracts and they are sealed and confirmed by both parties no-one can add to it or break it. Later in verse seventeen Paul writes, God sealed his promise to Abraham by Himself so who is able to set it aside or add to it. God's promise was made to Abraham and his seed (the Lord Jesus Christ) four-hundred and thirty years before the law came and just like a human Covenant cannot be broken nor can God's Covenant

with Abraham and his offspring be broken. The law with all its commandments does not do away with God's earlier promise to Abraham that righteousness and eternal salvation would be by faith and God's grace.

Why the law was added

- **Galatians 3:19-22:** 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 (mediator in the KJV) 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. until the coming faith would be revealed.

Intermediary: in this context refers to a go-between and by implication a reconciler (intercessor) (i.e., someone in the middle or between) and the word, mediator carries the same idea. In these verses it refers to God who gave the law and to Moses standing before Him and the people of Israel. Paul asks, "Is the law competing with the promise and in conflict with it." Paul then immediately answers his own question by saying, "Certainly not" (v21). Paul in these verses is explaining to the Jews and those being bewitched by them (v1) that the promise of God and the law are not in conflict with each other for the simple reason they both serve two entirely different purposes.

The Law: had no power to grant anyone righteousness since not one of us can attain to the perfect standard of holiness it demands so rather than give life it imprisoned us all under sin (v22). This is because the law without compassion or mercy states, "Whoever does not perfectly keep all its commandments is condemned not only to death (2 Cor. 3:9). This ministry of death carved in letters on stone is also called the, law of sin and death which states that, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) meaning whoever sins must die, thus all mankind is held captive to this law and imprisoned by it until the promised seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ came (v23). It is not the Ten Commandments that are at fault, since they are not only perfect, but express God's perfect will, it is our corrupt fallen nature with all its sinful dysfunctions and aberrations (self, ego, pride, greed, lust etc.,) that that are the problem since they prevent all of us from attaining to the perfection of the Law demands.

The glory, beauty, wonder and splendour of God's grace in Christ: the words, "For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law" (Gal 3:21) should give every brother and sister in Christ tremendous comfort and set them free from any form of mental torment or self-condemnation since these words clearly show that not only Paul, but God Himself knows that not one of us will ever attain to the perfect standard of the law no matter how much we might desire to or how hard we try. Both God and Christ know that any attempt we make to attain to God's perfect standard of holiness to make us worthy of eternal life by our own human self-effort is doomed to fail before we even start, thus the glory, the beauty, the wonder and splendour of God's grace in Christ. The promise by faith in Jesus Christ in total contrast to the law gives life and life abundant because it sets all who believe totally free from self-effort and striving to keep laws to attain to righteousness that leads to eternal life.

The Scripture imprisoned everything under sin: the expression, "The Scripture imprisoned everything under sin (v22) means that the Ten Commandments given by God Himself are so perfect they placed all of mankind under sin because fallen human nature has so many sinful dysfunctions and aberrations (selfishness, ego, pride, lust, greed etc., just to name a few dwelling within) not one of us can attain to the perfect

standard of the law. But the Good News is that God has a much the higher law that supersedes the law of sin and death which states, "The promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (v22) meaning whoever has faith in Christ will be counted righteous not because of self-effort to attain to the high calling of the law, but because of their faith in Christ and God's grace.

Until the coming faith would be revealed: (v23) refers to the majestic Good News of the Gospel which is about salvation from eternal death to eternal life. It proclaims that salvation is by faith and grace through believing in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is about recognising that one falls short of God's Glory and absolute Holiness and about repentance, baptism and faithfully abiding in the faith. Throughout the entire history of mankind there has only been one man who has ever been able to attain to the high calling of the law, Jesus Sermon on the Mount and God's perfect standard of Holiness. The Gospel of salvation is about recognising this reality, repenting before God and accepting His foreordained plan of salvation. Salvation is about trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, looking forward to his return and being raised to eternal glory. The majestic Good News of the Gospel, states that whoever comes to God through repentance and faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ is not only approved of and accepted by God the Father, but all their sins are forgiven, not because they are deserving of it, or by any self-effort or religious good works, but because through faith in Christ righteousness is imputed from God to them as a pure and free gift, but this is not the end of the Good News of the Gospel since God's promises also state that the faithful in Christ will be resurrected to eternal glory and everlasting life. Can there be any better news than this? This is the reason it is called, "the Good News of the Gospel."

The law was our guardian/schoolmaster until Christ came

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- **Galatians 3:23-25:** Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian (schoolmaster in KJV).

The purpose of the schoolmaster: the idea here is not that of an instructor, but of one who watches over his students for the sole purpose of restraining them from acting wickedly and from temptations that would bring their lives to ruin, thus the use of the word, schoolmaster in this context carries the idea of a principal of a school whose care students are committed to and who taught them in ways that would protect them and help them prosper in life. The schoolmaster made use of discipline and kept a strict eye and hand over the performance and duty those who were under his authority and restrained them from many things that their fleshy and sensual inclinations led them to by threatening them with the fear of death when disobedient and inflicting its penalties and punishments on those who broke its demands and thereby subjected them to bondage.

The schoolmaster taught: the moral law, the letter of the law, the writing on the two tables, with many other statutes and judgments, the duty to God and to mankind, what is to be done and to be avoided, what is righteousness and what is not, the nature of sin, its disadvantages, shortcomings, imperfection and consequences; but not one of these give any instructions about a Saviour nor about righteousness that comes by faith and by God's grace in Christ.

The schoolmaster was only intended to be temporary: the fact the law is referred to as a schoolmaster shows that the use of it was always only intended to be temporary and the duration of its use only for a certain period of time. No student is expected to remain forever under a schoolmaster, since the goal of every teacher is to bring their students to

a proper and mature age for a greater and higher exercise of life so the law was designed to continue and did continue to be of this use and service to the Jewish nation until Christ came.

The ceremonial law: the ceremonial law gave Israel some hints of the Gospel and the way of salvation by Christ by signs and by types and figures, by rites and ceremonies, by shadows and sacrifices. The ceremonial law had something both awful and tremendous in it, the awfulness was in the reality that every beast that was slain in sacrifice was not only an instruction to those offering it that they deserved to die as that creature did, but also carried in it an acknowledgment and confession of their own guilt and that God's handwriting of ordinances was against them.

The sacrifices and offerings: were designed to shadow and echo the Messiah and to introduce him to the world while the moral law of God was designed to show people their sin and the danger of living a life of sin. The purpose of the law is to condemn and thereby lead us to right behaviour and God's forgiveness and grace that comes through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the redeemer of us all. The entire focus of the law is designed to show us our sin and condemn us and even under the preaching of the Gospel it still does so that we see our hopelessness of achieving righteousness by self-effort and are therefore led to Christ the Redeemer.

This is the effect the preaching of Gospel should have since it is right that people should be made to feel that they are sinners in order that they may be prepared to embrace God's offer of mercy and grace that is received by faith in the Lord Jesus who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).

The schoolmaster acted like a military guard: there is no such thing as justification by the law it is clear that no blessing could be expected from a schoolmaster who acts like a military guard keeping those under it shut up as in a prison and who treats all who are under its rigid and severe discipline as convicted and condemned criminals until Christ the deliver came and by God free gift of grace through faith ended the schoolmasters unrelenting bondage of achieving righteousness by self-effort and by keeping the demands of the law and religious rites, practises and traditions. The following words of Paul should be of enormous comfort to every brother and sister in Christ since they clearly show that we are counted righteous and justified, and saved to eternal life totally apart from the law:

- Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom 10:4)

These majestic words beautifully show that the law has no power to condemn those who are faithfully trusting in God's free gift of righteousness which comes by grace and through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE: obviously keeping the law should be the aim of every Christian since it is not only the right and loving thing to do, but also fulfils the Royal law of God, "Love thy neighbour as thy self" (Mark 12:31) (Jas 2:8) and honours God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It only becomes wrong when our motivation to keep the law is not to glorify God and to benefit others, but is driven by our own self-effort to attain to our own standard of righteousness to make us worthy of eternal life rather than trusting in God's righteousness that comes by grace and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise

- **Galatians 3:26-29:** for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor

Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Here we see the brilliance of Paul's knowledge and the clarity of his thinking he begins with the Galatian brothers and sisters being bewitched by Jewish teachers and takes them through God's eternal promises to Abraham to bring them to this stunning and glorious conclusion, Christ is the promised seed of Abraham therefore whoever belongs to Christ are Abraham's decedents because of God's covenant to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that his seed would be the heir of the world. Thus, it is not those who are biologically Abraham's offspring that are counted as the heirs of the promise, but those who by faith belong to Christ no matter whether they are Jews or Gentiles if they belong to Christ God counts them as the offspring of Abraham. In some circles of religion today there is a mindset that Israel will have an exalted position in the eternal Kingdom of God, but these verses clearly show that this is a mistaken theory since God is now establishing one nation in Christ made up of both Jews and Gentiles. There are no favourite nations in Christ we are all one in him as Paul states:

- There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28).

These words of Paul's clearly show that concerning salvation to eternal life all are equal in Christ no matter whether they are a direct descendant of Abraham, born a Jew or Gentile, male or female and no matter how noble or how common, how gifted or how lowly, how rich or how poor, how powerful amongst nations or how ordinary, whether a leader of a global church or the church mouse we are all equal in Christ, no-one is superior to another if you are Christ's, you are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to God's promise (Gal. 3:28-29).

For greater detail of this chapter see:

- Galatians 3 in, Commentary NT (ON WEBSITE MENU).