**Studies in the Book of Galatians: Paul & the Gospel**

**The Christian and the Old Testament Law**

**(Galatians 3: 1-5, 15-18, 23-25)**

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You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (Galatians 3:1 – 5)

Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. (Galatians 3:15-18)

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. (Galatians 3:23-25)

# Introduction

A professor in a seminary once asked his students to find out the number of times each topic was expounded by the Bible. They are to find out which area in the New Testament was emphasised more than any other. Their findings revealed that it was warnings against false teachers that was emphasised the most. False doctrine remains the biggest threat to the church today.

Paul was not spared from false teachers. They have mounted powerful attacks on Paul’s ministry.

Why some Christians adhere to some laws, but ignore others?



**BIG IDEA**

**Faith is the Key, not Law.**

# The Law – Its Distorted Demand

Salvation is by Faith in Christ Alone.

When Paul brought the Gospel to Galatia, his message has been and has always been this: sinful men and women can be brought into acceptance with God, not through their works, but through their faith in Jesus alone.

However, the Jews insisted that trusting in Jesus alone is not enough. Their contention is man must contribute something to their salvation.

The Judaizers’ position is Jesus’ work + your work = justification

They said the law of Moses must be kept as well.

The ‘works of the law’:

* circumcision (2:3)
* dietary restrictions (2: 12, 13), and
* keeping of feasts and holy days (4:10)

The Jews are of the opinion that if you keep all of these Mosaic laws, you will then be accepted by God. These teachings have greatly influenced the church at Galatia.

This infuriated Paul, and he wrote:

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?” (v1)

J. B. Phillips translated it as follows:

“O you dear idiots of Galatia … Surely you can’t be so idiotic…?” (J. B. Phillips)

“Foolish” is Greek “anoetos”

* to act as though the mind is inoperative, or worse, non-existent.

The Alkitab Versi Borneo translates it as this: “Wahai orang Galatia yang tidak berakal…”

Why they should never have been led astray?

Paul gave three reasons:

1. Their own experience

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you have heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (v2, 3)

On the cross, Jesus did everything necessary for your and my salvation. To add any works to it would be an offense to Christ’s finished work. On the cross, Jesus cried “it is finished’. Paul renders this as spiritual treason.

1. The Scriptures of the Old Testament

Paul made reference to Abraham to prove his point.

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (v6)

The Judaizers looked to Moses as their teacher.

God told Abraham to look at the skies and count the stars; as many as they were, so shall Abraham’s descendants be. Abraham believed God, despite the situation being humanly impossible. Abraham counted on the faithfulness of God.

1. The futility of it all

“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” (v10)



Paul reminded that for those who wants to keep the law in order to be justified, they must do everything to fulfil each and every law; otherwise, they will be cursed.

“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” (James 2:10)

Scripture does not encourage everyone to keep the law in order to be justified.

Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “the righteous will live by faith.” (v11)

However, the Judaizers had this comeback: that God, 430 years after Abraham, gave the law through Moses at Mount Sinai. Why else would God give the law? Isn’t the law a supplement to faith?

How is Paul going to debunk the Judaizers’ argument?

# The Law – Its Proper Purpose

## A promise is a promise

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” (Genesis 22:17, 18)

A promise is usually one-sided: “I will…..”. Under the law of Moses, you need to fulfill the requirements before the blessings can come, i.e. “thou shall…”. Otherwise, you will be cursed. Promises and covenants are unbreakable and irrevocable.

Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. (v15)

Even in the example of a will, once it has been made, the terms cannot be altered. The instructions are to be carried out accordingly.

God is infinitely more trustworthy than man. God does not make promises to break them. God does not rescind on His word.

## It has always been that way

God gave His promises to Abraham long before He gave Moses the law. The Gospel has been there all along. It is all about Jesus. It has always been about being accepted by God on the basis of grace through faith in Jesus.

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. (v16)

God’s intention all along was to save mankind, not through the law, but through the gift of His only Son, Jesus Christ.

## A part to play

Paul explained the true function of the law.

“What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until “the Seed to whom the promise referred had come… (v19)

In Greek, ‘transgressions’ is *parabasis*; it means ‘to step over’.

The purpose of the law is to show man that they have crossed over the line.

Its main purpose is to expose sin.

“through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20)

“if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin” (Romans 7:7)

to “make wrongdoing a legal offense.” (Galatians 3:19b, NEB)

In the example of driving, people may not be aware of harmful driving. Only when traffic laws are introduced that people realise not to breach them. The function of the traffic law is to identify bad drivers and for them to be penalised accordingly.

The law reveals man’s wickedness and moral bankruptcy, and no more. Similarly, in hospitals, MRI scans provide only a diagnosis of the medical condition, but it does not provide a solution. The law provides no way of escape and does not make us right with God.

The two images of the law:

a. A prison

“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.” (v23)

The law can only hold us captive. We long for a saviour to help us escape.

b. A tutor

“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith

has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” (v. 24, 25)

Martin Luther said: the law is an usher that leads us the way to grace, that is, to Christ. The law points us to Christ.

The law is not contradictory to the Gospel; the law anticipates our need for a Saviour. It is not opposed to grace; it leads us to Christ.

# Conclusion

The OT law is not bad; only incomplete and never intended to replace faith.

John Stott said: we cannot come to Christ to be justified, until we have first been to Moses to be condemned. Once we have acknowledged our sin and guilt, we must not stay there; we must let the law to send us to Christ.





Sermon summary by May