

Galatians

Chapter 3:19-25

January 22, 1995

Galatians 3:19-25

As we continue to work through Paul's letter to the churches in the region of Galatia, for the last few weeks, we have repeatedly heard a theme, justification by grace through faith alone. The purpose of the entire book is to counter attack the heresy which was presenting itself as truth to the Galatian Christians. This is the nature of heresy. Heresy is always subtle and usually hard to distinguish. Someone doesn't come knock on your door saying, "Hello, I would like to lead you astray today by introducing you to this destructive heresy." Heresy is typically presented as Biblical and with substantial support from a variety of verses. This is why it is crucial for us to be students of the Word. Your exposure to the truths that God has left for us cannot be limited to our Sunday mornings. God's Word contains all that is necessary for faith and practice and we are expected to study with excellent rigor.

"Paul has proved, at least to his own satisfaction and perhaps even to that of the Galatians, that way of salvation is by means of the promise received through faith. But the legalizers might object that the approach he has taken has proved too much. He has demonstrated that the way of salvation is by promise and that the law brings a curse. But if this is so, it would seem to follow, 1) that the law has no purpose at all in the scheme of salvation, or 2) that it is actually opposed to it. This would be an intolerable conclusion for most persons, particularly those Jews whose lives had been dominated by the law for centuries. Paul answers these charges by denying both conclusions and by establishing God's true purpose in giving the law."¹

19 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.

- Paul anticipates the obvious questions that the Judaizers would have asked in response to Paul's instruction. They probably thought that if I cannot obtain saving favor from God by observing His rules (which He commanded me to obey) then what possibly could have been the purpose of the law? He answers this question here and in the book of Romans (Romans 3:9-31 & 5:20-21). The law was given for the purpose of revealing sin so that we would wake up and acknowledge our sinfulness and cry out for mercy.
- Notice that it was added until the Seed should come to whom the promise was given. In the previous section Paul has clearly defended that the promise was not given to the physical descendants of Abraham but rather to the singular Seed, that is, Christ. In the scheme of salvation, being an ethnic Jew was of no value for as John the Baptist said, "...God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" Matthew 3:9.
- Paul makes another extraordinary observation about the law. He says that it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator and that a mediator is necessary for more than one person. When a law is given, there are two parties, the law giver (legislator) and the law receiver (obeyer). But the promise made to Abraham did not have two parties; there was not a condition placed upon the recipients of the promise, rather, God swore that He would do these things by a promise unilaterally binding Him. (cf. Genesis 15, 17, 22)
- God did not make the promise dependent upon our performance. Christ's death wasn't conditional for the elect. He efficaciously secured their salvation. The fulfillment of the promise does not depend on us but it depends on God who is one.

21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

- The law is completely consistent with the promise. It is not a new failed plan of God but was added as a necessary component of the promise.
- Interestingly, Paul says that if it were possible for God to pass a law by which salvation could be obtained through obedience to that law, God would have created that law. But the reality is that there is no such law. There was no other way for God to justify sinners. As we can recall, in the Garden, Jesus asked the Father for any other way than for Him to die, but no other way was available. We are by nature dead in our trespasses and we must be made alive. Even if a law could have been formed for us to secure righteousness, we would have been dead to it. The life that God gives to us produces obedience; our obedience does not produce our life. The difference between the Judaizers and today's trivial gospel preachers is in the magnitude of what must be done to be saved.

- God's plan of salvation was comprehensive and complete although it is very simple to understand. The difficulty comes in when we have to unlearn things or we try to get God's word to say things that it doesn't.

22 *But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

- The Scriptures don't teach anything clearly if they don't teach clearly this point: All of us are sinners, deserving of death and unable to do anything about it. As Paul summarizes the Scriptures here he says that all are confined under sin. But we see that the promise of grace was given to those who believe. This type of sentence is where we can get into trouble. It would be completely and utterly inconsistent for Paul to mean by the term "...those who believe" those who have added to God's promise their own belief. If this were true, then the preceding chapters would be completely contradictory. Instead Paul is saying that we know who the recipients of the promise are by their belief. The promise produced the faith, not the faith producing the promise. Faith is not a work. (Cf. Phil 1:29, Eph 2:8-9)

23 *But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.*

23 ProV tou' deV ejlqei'n thVn pivstin,

before the But to come the faith

- This verse taken out of its context becomes very difficult to understand properly. We can easily determine what it is *not* saying; before Christ came we lived by works and now we live by faith. This would completely contradict all of the previous verses that Paul has written. Because it was slightly vague in the original language, the translators felt it important to not remove the vagueness. If we read the verse in context we can see from the previous verse that the faith he is talking about is faith in Jesus Christ. There always was faith in the Christ but when Christ came our faith matured

24 *Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*

- Paul finally comes to this grand instruction that the law was intended to be evangelistic. The law was to drive us toward Christ, that is, the grace of God. It is amazing to see how God intended that sinners should react to the law; fall on our knees and plead for mercy. Today, we are somewhat ashamed or skeptical about the law. Somehow we think that the law was a product of some inferior, less advanced and civilized culture. This is just false and inexcusable. The law was holy, righteous and completely in synch with God's plan of blessing the nations.

25 *But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (NKJV)*

- The picture of a tutor provide interesting facets. We needed the law to understand our sinfulness and thus our inability to obtain righteousness on our own. We have now come to the fullness of the faith through our understanding and faith in Christ. But we don't now say that the tutor was unnecessary. Just as when we move onto calculus we don't need to abandon fractions or believe that they are somehow unnecessary, but we do realize the greater understanding has now come.

¹ Boice, James Montgomery, "The Expositors Bible Commentary, Volume 10" p. 464, Zondervan, 1976