

The Purpose of the Law

Galatians 3:19-29

Galatians 3:19-29: *“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. 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. ²² But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³ But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There 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. ²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

Background Notes

The theme of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians is “Justification by Faith.” Not justification by good works and not justification by faith plus good works - but ***justification by faith alone!*** We are only declared righteous in God’s sight by means of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sin. That is really the gospel in a nutshell.

Even though we are sinners and we deserve eternal death (which is the penalty for sin), God has a created plan of salvation for us - and it’s better than any earthly insurance policy that money can buy! God promises that He will forgive our sins and declare us righteous if we turn to Him in faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior. God can declare us righteous because Jesus died on the cross as our substitute, and paid the penalty for our sins with His own perfect life.

Justification by faith in Christ alone is God’s way of salvation.

The false teachers of Paul’s day taught: in addition to faith in Christ, you also must do the works of the Law for salvation. And as a believer you certainly must do the works of the Law for sanctification. How could a person possibly be saved and sanctified apart from doing the good works of the Law? That’s what the false teachers, the Judaizers, were trying to teach in the churches in Galatia.

In this epistle, the apostle Paul went to great lengths to show that the requirements of the Law were ***not*** to be added to God’s way of salvation or sanctification! God’s way is by faith alone - ***not*** by works. Good works are the ***result*** of salvation and sanctification, not the ***means*** of salvation and sanctification.

When the word “Law” or the terms “works of the Law” or “requirements of the Law” are used, we’re not thinking of civil laws, such as “buckle your seatbelt” or “obey the speed limit.” Terms like the “works of the Law” were used in connection with the Old Testament Mosaic Law – and not just the Ten Commandments, but also all the other commandments that God gave to Israel, including circumcision. That is the “requirements of the Law” that the false teachers were wrongly attempting to add to faith for both salvation and sanctification.

The logical question that should arise in our minds at this point would be: “If God gave the Old Testament Law, and yet salvation and sanctification cannot be achieved through following the Law, then why in the world did God give the Law? What is the purpose of the Law?” And that’s exactly the question Paul answered in these verses.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Law revealed the condition of everyone under sin.

“But the Scripture has confined all under sin” (v22). And, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

But suppose someone says, “I’m not really all that bad. I think I can meet God’s standards on my own.” Well, that’s exactly where the Law comes in. The moral requirements of the Law revealed God’s high righteous standards, and the Law showed that everyone has fallen short of God’s righteous standards. All of us have transgressed God’s standards, and no one can meet God’s standard of perfection. We are all *“confined under sin.”*

Romans 3:20 says, *“Therefore, by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in His sight. For by the law is the knowledge of sin.”* So the Law was never given for salvation. It was given to show us that we all need salvation, because everyone is under sin. We are all born with a sinful nature, and we all sin. Verse 21 says, *“if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law...”* - but of course there is no law that is able to give life.

The moral Law of God revealed our condition under sin - but the Law does not have the power to take away our sin. You’ve probably heard this illustration: “The Law is like a mirror. The mirror can show you that your face is dirty - but it can’t wash your face.” Just as the mirror is powerless to wash the dirt from your face, so the Law is not able to wash the sin from your life.

What does verse 19 mean when it says that the Law *“was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator?”* The Old Testament Law that God gave to Israel was mediated through Moses, along with the holy angels who served God. But when God gave the promise to Abraham, He gave it directly to Abraham. He didn’t give the promise through angels or a mediator. The Law came after God’s promise to Abraham, and the fact that it needed mediation showed that the Law was inferior to the promise to Abraham - the promise of salvation based on faith. And the Law did not set aside the promise God made to Abraham of salvation by faith.

The Law was never given as a way of salvation, nor was it given to replace God's promise of salvation through faith. The Law was given as a temporary measure, until "*the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.*" The Seed is Christ, and Christ has come.

Now, even though God's Law leaves no doubt that everyone is under sin, "*the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe*" (v22).

2. The Law prepared the way of faith in Christ.

Verses 23-25: "*But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*"

The Law not only revealed that everyone is "*confined under sin*" – it also prepared the way for faith in Christ. The concept of the Law as a "tutor" or a schoolmaster does not mean that the Law leads a person to Christ. It means that the Law was a protective disciplinarian until Christ came. In 1st century days, a "tutor" not only instructed his students – he also protected and disciplined them.

In Old Testament times, God certainly used the Law to discipline and protect and shield His people from the evil cultures and pagan practices that surrounded them, but it was all to prepare the way for Christ. Now that faith in Christ has come (v25), we are no longer under that "tutor." We are no longer under the Law!

Verse 24 teaches that the Law does not justify us, and verse 25 teaches that ***the Law is not a rule of life*** for the believer. "*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith*" (v24). So the Law did not justify us, and because Christ has come, we are no longer under rule of the Law as our tutor. Even though some Christians teach that believers should follow the Law, Galatians 3:25 tells us that "*after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*"

The Law does not justify us, and the Law is not the rule of life for the believer. The rule of life for believers is to walk with the Lord, seek to please the Lord, and serve the Lord. The Law prepared the way for faith in Christ.

Practical Application

Don't make Galatians 3:28 say what it doesn't say!

Verse 28: "*There 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.*"

Does the phrase “*there is neither male nor female*” mean that there is no longer any role distinction between men and women - in the family or in the church - now that Christ has come and we are all Christians? No! That distorted interpretation rips this verse out of its proper context within the overall teaching of Galatians 3.

Let’s read verses 26-29, and notice while I read these verses that *the context is **salvation**, not roles in the family or the church*. “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There 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. ²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*”

The point of verses 26-29 is that the way of salvation for everyone is through Christ alone, not by adding the works of the Law. And *the way of salvation is the same* for Jews and Gentiles. The *way of salvation* is the same for slaves and free people. The *way of salvation* is *the same for men and women*.

There’s only one way of salvation for everyone. When you trusted in Jesus Christ by faith, you became a spiritual son of Abraham, because he also believed God and was saved by faith. Thus we are all one in Christ Jesus, and we are all heirs according to the promise.

So Galatians 3:28 is *not* saying that God has removed all role distinctions of men and women in the family or the church! Yet in Christian bookstores today, many books attempt to erase the difference in roles - particularly in regard to the distinctive roles of men and women in the church. And I can guarantee that they will pull Galatians 3:28 out of its context and use it as their theme verse.

Galatians 3 is speaking of salvation, and Galatians 3:28 is speaking of salvation, not roles in the church.

Galatians 3:28 teaches us that the ***way of salvation is the same for everyone*** – by faith in Christ alone! So don’t try to make Galatians 3:28 say what it doesn’t say!