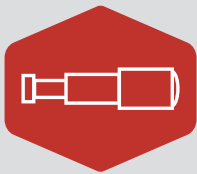




Lesson 7: The Purpose of the Law

Main Idea: Paul answered the Judaizers using familiar Scriptures to make his case on behalf of the gospel. In this lesson, you will discover that rules cannot fix problems; they are merely designed to guide. The Law could never solve the problem of sin: only Jesus Christ can.

Scripture: Galatians 3:15–25



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

In the last session (Galatians 3:1–14), Paul used Scripture to emphasize how people have always been made righteous because of their faith, not their works. Now in verse 15, Paul refers to a type of agreement called a covenant, which was very significant in ancient contexts. Paul explains that the Law doesn't cancel the covenant God had earlier made with His people.

In verse 16, Paul quotes Genesis 12:7, where God made a promise to Abraham and his offspring (Note that Paul uses *covenant* and *promise* interchangeably.). Paul emphasized that the word *offspring* is singular, not plural. This singularity is important because, although God told Abraham he would be given descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky, Paul contends that it all begins with the offspring called Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Paul stated that after the Abrahamic promise was given, 430 years passed. However, 645 years had elapsed from the first time that God gave the Abrahamic

promise. Why the discrepancy? Remember, God continued to restate the Abrahamic covenant to each generation. God gave the covenant to Abraham and then restated it to his son Isaac and then to Isaac's son Jacob. The last time God stated the terms of this covenant was to a man named Jacob just before he went down with his family into Egypt, which was 430 years before the law came into existence. The point Paul makes is that just because it had been 430 years since the last time God spoke about the promise, God did not forget, annul, or change it. The Mosaic law did not change the covenant because God had made it, and God does not change.

In Galatians 3:17-18, Paul begins his contrast of the Law with God's promise (His covenant) to show that the two are mutually exclusive in that no one can obey the Law to be right with God while embracing the promise to be right with God, too: the Galatians needed to choose. The law of Moses was God saying, "I will remain in relationship with you if you will remain in relationship with me." However, when God gave the covenant to Abraham, God simply said, "I will." He did not set up a performance agreement. He simply made the promise. That promise, according to verse 18, became the inheritance, the good news, that all nations would be blessed, including Gentiles like the Galatians.

The story of God's covenant with Abraham is in Genesis 15:1-21. God came to Abraham and promised that his seed would bless all nations on earth. Abraham wanted to know how he could be assured of God's promise. So, God instructed him to get a heifer, goat, ram, turtle dove, and pigeon, and cut them all in two and spread them out. Abraham knew right away God was making a covenant with him because this was how ancient covenants were established.

Abraham took the pieces of the animals and laid them out. Then, typically, the two parties making the covenant would walk through the cut-up animal pieces, proclaiming the terms of covenant to one another. It may sound gruesome to us, but the cut-up animal pieces were symbolic: If one party did not keep the covenant, they would be cut off from their people.

Then, as the sun was going down, God caused Abraham to fall asleep and dream that a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch were going between the pieces. These images symbolized God himself. Instead of God and Abraham walking through the pieces together, as in a human-made covenant, God alone walked through the pieces to demonstrate His promise to Abraham. In other words, the promise God made was not contingent on Abraham keeping his side of the covenant but relied instead on God's own trustworthiness.

D. Thomas Lancaster, Education Director for First Fruits of Zion, shows the power of this covenant:

The [Jewish festival of] Passover is celebrated on the anniversary of the covenant between God and Abraham. Four hundred and thirty years before the first Passover, Abraham slaughtered the animals for his covenant on the fourteenth of [the Hebrew month of] Nisan. On that same day Abraham sacrificed the animals to make his covenant with the Lord, our Master died as the sacrifice of the new covenant. The day of Passover draws a line of connection from Abraham’s covenant to his singular, promised seed, the Messiah.¹

In verse 19, Paul pointedly asks what purpose the Law serves. Why was the Law given 430 years after the last time the promise was stated? The answer is that there was a need to protect and guide God’s people until the promised offspring—the Messiah—came. Once He came, fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham, things changed for everyone who believed, including the Galatians.

In verse 20, Paul uses the phrase “God is one,” referencing Deuteronomy 6:4, which is part of the Torah, or first five books of the Bible. Lancaster considers why Paul cites Deuteronomy here, noting that

[It is likely] to remind the reader that, despite the fact that the Torah was given to Israel by the agency of angels and through the hands of a mediator, the revelation of the Lord that comes through the Torah is not separable from his being, but is indeed the divine word. The Torah is the revelation of God and godliness.²

In verse 21, Paul tells the Galatians that the Law is not opposed to the promise. In fact, people needed the Law to show that a promise was needed. Whereas the Law was never intended to give life, God’s Spirit does give life. Throughout the letter to the Galatians, Paul reminds them that the mark of following God is not circumcision but the Spirit. In verses 22–23, Paul tells the Galatians that God used the boundaries set by the Law to hem in His people so the offspring could be protected—and so Jesus could give the promise of Abraham to all who believe in Him.

Paul uses an interesting Greek word in verse 24 that the ESV translates “guardian”: *paidagogos*. In Roman households of this time, having slaves was a common practice. Slaves were usually educated, and Roman families would choose one to instruct their children and be the children’s guardian and tutor. Lancaster says,

The *paidagogos* was a type of caretaker entrusted with supervision and directing a child’s conduct and moral behavior. They taught the child social skills and manners. They were responsible for

¹ Lancaster, 172-173.
² Lancaster, 178.

coordination and overseeing the child's education by arranging tutors, lesson schedules, and course of study. They serve as a type of bodyguard, high school principal, and school guidance counselor all rolled into one, with the responsibility of ensuring the student's safety and good behavior on the way to school and back.³

Whereas the parents brought life to the children, the guardians or tutors regulated and instructed the children in an impersonal arrangement driven by rewards and discipline.

Similar to a *paidagogos*, the Mosaic law did not give life, but rather regulated it. It was not possible to have a personal relationship with the Law. The Law would instead drive people to despair of ever being able to keep it. However, the Law was instructive to protect and prepare the way for the seed, Jesus.

Paul tells the Galatians that when people mature spiritually—when they place faith in Christ—they will no longer be under the regulations of the Law. It is important to stop and notice that Paul is *not* teaching that by living in the faith in Christ, we are free to do whatever we want. So, what purpose does the Law serve for those who are followers of Christ? Paul never excuses followers of Christ from obeying the Law. The Law remains, and, when violated, immediately kicks in as that guardian and tutor *to turn us back toward Jesus*. This is why, explains New Testament scholar Craig S. Keener, “Paul is not against the Law but rather against depending on one's obedience for justification or honor.”⁴

³ Lancaster, 180.

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019): 274.

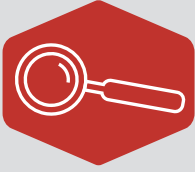


My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.

Read these statements and write below or in your journal what these truths say to you:

- The giving of the Law did not change the promise (vv. 15-18).
- The Law was given to show people their sins (vv. 19-20).
- We must see the Law as a guide, not a means for salvation (v. 24).
- Our confidence should be found in what Jesus has done, not in what we do (v. 25).



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Write down your answer to the following question here or in your journal:

- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage.

- Who appears in this passage?

- Where is this passage taking place?

- When is this passage occurring?

- Why is this passage important?

- What is happening in this passage?

- How does this passage apply to my life?

- How did this lesson cause you to think differently about God's Law?

- What are some ways people misuse God's Law? Have you ever used God's Law in these ways? Please explain.

- How does understanding God's Law increase your gratitude for God's grace provided through Jesus?

- What was your main takeaway regarding the difference between the law versus the promise (covenant)?

- » In the Old Testament and New Testament, how were people expected to keep God's commands?

- » What are some characteristics of God that the Law revealed?

- » Why did God give the Law?

- Look in your *FireBible* index for the chart "Old Testament Sacrifice" and answer the following:
 - » What thoughts come to your mind regarding the sacrifices?