

Spirit-Filled Living Series

The Purpose of God's Word (Gal. 3:22-24)

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At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. Reveal Our Moral Brokenness
- III. Restrain Our Moral Brokenness
- IV. Rescue From Our Moral Brokenness
- V. Conclusion

These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

The Purpose of God's Word

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: How do you read the Bible?

1. How do you read the Bible? In his excellent book *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners*, Dane Ortland provides a list of nine common but wrong ways to read the Bible.¹ This may sound surprising, but it is possible to read the Bible in a spiritually unhealthy way. A person may read the Bible in ways that don't promote their own spiritual health and growth.
2. Here are the wrong ways to read the Bible:
 - a. The warm-fuzzies approach: reading for a subjective experience of God through the words of the text, whether we understand the meaning of what is being said or not.
 - b. The grumpy approach: reading out of nothing more than a sense that is it something we must do to get God off our back for the day.
 - c. The gold-mine approach: reading with little expectation, assuming it is only on a rare occasion that a gold nugget of inspiration will be found.
 - d. The hero approach: reading to be inspired by the amazingly godly moral examples, but knowing you will never be like them.
 - e. The rules approach: reading to keep track of all the commands that need to be obeyed.
 - f. The Indiana Jones approach: reading a few thousand-year-old story that is irrelevant to my life today.
 - g. The magic-eight ball approach: reading as a road map to tell me where to work, who marry, what house to buy.
 - h. The Aesop's Fables approach: reading as a loose collection of stories strung together without a plan or purpose.
 - i. The doctrine approach: reading to gain ammunition for the next theological debate.

B. Can you identify with any of these approaches? While there is some truth and possible good in each of these approaches, they become problematic if they are the dominant lens through which we read Scripture because we turn the Bible into a book it was never meant to be. If we are going to read the word of God in a healthy and fruitful way, we must read it according to the purposes for which God has given it. God intends to accomplish specific outcomes through His word. The more familiar we are with what God's word is designed to do in people's lives, the more effectively we can interact with it.

C. Galatians 3:22-24 provides us with three major purposes of the word of God. Each purpose is good. There is potential with each of these purposes that we can benefit from the word of God if we are willing to use the word of God in our lives the way God intends it to work. While some

¹ Dane C. Ortland, [*Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners*](#), ed. Michael Reeves, Union (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 149–150.

of these purposes may be surprising to hear, and possibly a bit confusing because they may not conform to some of our expectations about God, when properly understood, we can recognize they are good for us.

II. Reveal Our Moral Brokenness

- A. The first of three major purposes of the word of God listed by Paul is an uncomfortable, yet especially important, one. The truth promoted in this purpose of Scripture is hard to hear, and many people deceive themselves into rejecting it. All of us don't want to think of ourselves the way God speaks of us in His word. Yet, our lived experience will teach us the truth present in the first purpose of the word of God is how we operate.
- B. The first purpose for which God gives us His word is:

²² But the Scripture has confined everyone under sin, (Gal. 3:22)
- C. Scripture is the written word of God. This Greek word is used fifty-one times in the New Testament, referring to both Old Testament and New Testament writings. In most of the occurrences, it is assumed and communicated as a written document.² Jesus used this understanding of Scripture when He asked, "Did you never read in the Scriptures?" (Mt. 21:42). God's word is broader than Scripture. Scripture is a subcategory of the word of God—a specific form of communication of God's Word. God's word can also be communicated verbally, visually, and audibly, as well as in written form. God Himself is the primary and ultimate source/cause of Scripture. Most often, God used human authors to write Scripture.
- D. What did the written word of God do? It revealed to humanity our true spiritual condition before God ("confined everyone under sin", v. 22). The word of God demonstrates to humanity their continued inability to be the person God requires them to be, which leads to ongoing violations of what God says is morally good in every sphere of life (thoughts, emotions, desires, motivations, decision making, and acting). Every person's character and conduct are broken so that we don't live the way we should—the way God requires as a perfect, morally good person. God wisely let humanity rebel against Him so that He could show His glory to all by showing mercy to every person (Rm. 11:32). God expresses His compassion, love, and moral character to every person by not punishing them as their actions deserve in this life, as He patiently endures our sin. God is good to both the righteous and the wicked to demonstrate that the good actions He provides is based on His character, not our actions (Mt. 5:44-45, Lk. 6:35).
- E. To be "confined" is to be put in a place where something cannot be removed or someone cannot escape.³ Humanity's default spiritual condition is that we are trapped, unable to free ourselves from the influence and power of sin (Rm. 3:9-18, 6:6, 6:12-14, 7:14, Jn. 8:34). We have a corrupted nature, which leads to immoral desires in our hearts that are harmful to us and those around us, and we can't stop indulging them. We are compelled by our very nature to do what is morally wrong.⁴ Sin is personified and presented as a jailer who locks up the law-

² Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, [*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*](#) (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 261.

³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Galatians 3:22 "has confined"

⁴ This doesn't mean every person is as bad or evil as they possibly can be. It also doesn't mean people can't do some good actions (Mt. 7:11, Lk. 11:13).

breaker into prison.⁵ Only the promise of Jesus can free us from the moral and spiritual prison humanity finds itself in.

- F. The word of God points out the moral standards of God which reveals to us how morally broken we really are. While we tend to convince ourselves that we are morally good, the word of God takes our blinders off so we can see ourselves as God sees us—as we really are. When we compare our attitudes, desires, thoughts, motivations, and actions by the word of God and the moral standard embodied by Jesus, we see how oppressed we are under the influence and power of sin. While most people will consider themselves to be a good person if they never commit murder, Jesus says a good person doesn't say bad things about others out of anger (Mt. 5:21-22). God's moral standards for what is good are much higher than ours.
- G. Illustration: Back Yard Badminton
 - 1. We recently celebrated one of our kids' birthdays, and we invited extended family to celebrate with us. In part, that meant Mandi's brothers participated in the activities. Mandi's two adult brothers, along with Caleb, played badminton against our daughters in the back yard for a long time.
 - 2. These types of situations are always interesting when the uncles, Mandi's brothers, get involved (in a good way). As they were playing, the "old men" needed a little help, so they started to make up the rules as they went along. Each time, the advantage was in their favor. This didn't really matter because they weren't keeping score, but it was very amusing.
 - 3. When the girls hit the birdie to the other side in bounds, the uncles would claim they get a point for some ridiculous reason, such as they didn't have enough time to run over and hit the birdie. If the uncles hit the birdie out of bounds on the girls' side, they would claim they get a point for yet another ridiculous reason. If the uncles hit the birdie through the net, it would mysteriously pass through the "10 point" or "5 point" hole in the net to give them extra points. Anything that happened, good or bad, ended up in points for the boys.
 - 4. Everyone knew what was really happening: the girls were getting more points than the boys, but the boys convinced themselves they were winning. They attempted to get the girls frustrated with their scoring methods (jokingly), but it didn't work.
- H. Many people go through life with a similar, although serious, mindset when we change the moral rules to a standard that we can "win" and feel like we are a good person. The problem is that God does not use our standards that we make up, He uses what is true—His standards for right and wrong. Although people may try to convince themselves that they are a good person and doing what God wants, we will be evaluated by God's standards when we stand before Him. The word of God gives us an accurate understanding of where we stand in relationship to God's moral standards.

⁵ Robert Stutzman, [*An Exegetical Summary of Galatians*](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 125, F. F. Bruce, [*The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 180.

- I. Those whose heart attitudes are properly directed toward God don't get irritated, bothered, or angry when the truth of the word of God points out their failures and faults. Healthy disciples openly welcome the correction of God into their lives, even though it can be uncomfortable and unpleasant. Because disciples value the work the Spirit of God is doing in them to transform them to be like Jesus and their own spiritual growth matters greatly to them, they accept God, confronting the remaining sin in their life.
- J. Those who think Christianity and the word of God should always be a self-esteem booster that helps people feel better about themselves will be resistant to this purpose of the word of God and will likely even get angry anytime they are made to feel guilty or as if they have not done what they ought to have done. If a person falsely believes God only does what makes us feel better about ourselves and anything that makes them feel bad is not of God, they will effectively eliminate one of the main reasons why God provides His word. God works in our lives to help us be better, not feel better.
- K. If we are going to use the word of God the way God intends, we should be open to allowing the word of God to show us where we are in the wrong from God's perspective. Elsewhere, Paul calls this rebuke (2 Tim. 3:16). Scripture reveals to us where we are hurting ourselves and others. Where we are following a course that is destructive and harmful. Whatever God's word indicates that goes against the character and will of God is morally wrong and will have a negative impact on us.

III. Restrain Our Moral Brokenness

- A. One of the primary purposes of the word of God is to demonstrate to us where we stand with God and how He views us. This knowledge helps us realize we are not doing as well as we think we are. While painful, this realization is good for us. We need to hear the truth so we can begin moving toward God. This movement of aligning our lifestyle and actions toward the moral standards of God is the second purpose of the word of God.
- B. The second major purpose for the word of God is:
 - ²³ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being confined for the faith that was destined to be revealed. (Gal. 3:23)
- C. The role of the word of God was to outline and enforce what a proper lifestyle before God looks like ("kept in custody under the Law", and "being confined", v. 23).⁶ Paul expands on this idea in the next chapter (Gal. 4:1-5). The word of God, the law, is personified as the household caretaker of the kids who is given responsibility for underage children to make sure they learn how they are to conduct themselves in life—not a teacher, but a caregiver.⁷ Think of a personal assistant, but for a child. The word of God is a spiritual babysitter for the people of God until they reach maturity in Jesus. Or more aptly, a full-time live-in nanny. Like children who are incapable of responsibly taking care of themselves need an older, more experienced, wise, and capable person to care for them, so, too, do we on a spiritual level—at least in our spiritual

⁶ We could even add "become our guardian" from verse 24.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 182, Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 248-249, Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 146-148.

immaturity. The person taking care of us is the word of God. The word of God was intended by God to watch over and supervise the behavior and lifestyles of the people of God until the time of Jesus.

- D. Remember the earlier definition of what being “confined” meant? Previously it was negative, but now it is positive. The place we are put in by Jesus cannot be escaped or removed (“confined for the faith”, v. 23). We are now held as tightly by Jesus as we once were by sin. Those who have the Holy Spirit living in them and grow to spiritual maturity no longer require the babysitting provided by the word of God. That is, mature disciples who embody the divine character provided by the Spirit no longer need to follow the commands of the word of God to do what God wants. Responsible children don’t need a list of rules to keep; they will simply do the right thing. A child who knows the value of sleep and understands their need to function effectively the next day will go to bed at a reasonable time without the need for a mandated bedtime. A disciple who loves others will not need to be told not to steal from others because they possess a loving character that is repulsed by doing another person harm. The commands of the word of God become unnecessary.
- E. We get more information about what is meant in verse 23 in an earlier verse in the same chapter:
 - ¹⁹ Why the Law then? It was added on account of the violations, having been ordered through angels at the hand of a mediator, until the Seed would come to whom the promise had been made. (Gal. 3:19)
- F. The Law is only needed when people are still rebellious and actively going against God and what is good (“It was added on account of the violations”, v. 19). Since the people of God, the Jews, were overstepping moral boundaries, God provided the Law to supervise and regulate their behavior and lifestyle.⁸ God promised to provide Jesus, but in the meantime, those who were given that promise were getting off track in how they were supposed to be living before God. Rules are for those who can’t self-manage effectively. The more rebellious and irresponsible a person is, the more rules are needed to control their harmful behavior. Because the people of God were doing wrong, they were given the commands of God to keep them in line and know what the right course is.
- G. This idea is further described in another writing by Paul. In Romans 7:7-12, Paul explains this truth more extensively; we will only look at the first few verses:
 - ⁷ What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? Far from it! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” ⁸ But sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin came to life, and I died; (Rm. 7:7-9)
- H. The word of God, specifically the moral commands and requirements of God (the Law), are good when used for their intended purpose—to teach and encourage morally good actions. The

⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Galatians 3:19 “violations”

commands of God are given for those who are confused or have trouble doing what is right (1 Tim. 1:8-11). Scripture is rightfully used to restrain immoral behavior and encourage good behavior. The word of God monitors and manages human behavior so that wrongdoing doesn't spread and become rampant. When Scriptures' moral standards are enforced, people learn to do good instead of harm. The word of God informs and strengthens the conscience so they will live by morally good standards (2 Cor. 4:2).

- I. The word of God empowers us with wisdom so we can make good life choices that align with the thoughts of God and what is good. Think of a parent who has wisdom and experience looking over a child to protect them from making foolish decisions or acting in dangerous and unsafe ways. This is the role the word of God played until the Spirit would internalize the word of God in our hearts.
- J. We can be cared for and protected by the wisdom of God every time we obey the word of God—even when we don't understand it. Obedience to the word of God protects us from harmful consequences that might happen due to our spiritual immaturity. As we learn and grow, we eventually figure out why God tells us what He does and why He established the commands ("rules") He does, but until we get that figured out, obedience does us good. Children don't always understand why parents tell them not to do something. Good parents set rules for the purpose of protecting their children from harm. A parent may not let their child have their own phone to prevent negative cognitive and emotional issues, but the child may not understand that. The child may simply think the parent doesn't want to give the child something they desire and think will be fun. The child is probably unaware of the negative effects.

IV. Rescue From Our Moral Brokenness

- A. The word of God doesn't just show us our failures before God, and it doesn't just keep us away from doing what is harmful by external rules; it also points us to the needed solution. The word of God teaches us how the ability to be the person God wants us to can be internalized through Jesus. Scripture provides the wisdom we need to be made right and live rightly before God. The word of God does this by pointing to and moving us toward Jesus.
- B. The third significant purpose of the word of God is:
 - ²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our guardian *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:24)
- C. The purpose of the word of God is to move us toward Jesus ("the Law has become our guardian to lead us to Christ", v. 24). The main intended purpose of the word of God is to help people understand their spiritual need for Jesus so that they will find spiritual life in Him. The Old Testament Scripture was intended and designed by God to keep people safe until the time was right for Jesus to arrive. Jesus is the centerpiece of the word of God.
- D. The word of God created an expectation for God to send the promised descendent of Abraham, who is the Messiah—the special and unique Ruler of God. The word of God provided indicators as to whom the Messiah will be so we would be able to identify Him. The word of God extensively explains how Jesus is the Messiah. The word of God also explains what Jesus expects His people to be doing until He returns as Messiah and Son of God.

- E. As Paul put it elsewhere, the word of God is able “to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). The information provided in Scripture is sufficient to give anyone the knowledge they need to be made right with God and to live in a healthy relationship with God.
- F. Jesus made the same point that Paul is making here:
 - ³⁹ You examine the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is those *very Scriptures* that testify about Me; ⁴⁰ and yet you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. (Jn. 5:39-40)
 - ²⁵ And *then* He said to them, “You foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to come into His glory?” ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the Prophets, He explained to them the things *written* about Himself in all the Scriptures. (Lk. 24:25-27)
- G. God is put in His rightful place in our lives when we understand our need for Him and realize Jesus can do a work in us that we can’t do ourselves. No matter how hard we try, we can’t live the way God wants us to by our own abilities. Recognizing that spiritual need causes us to rely on Jesus and trust that He can rescue us from ourselves. He will faithfully provide the eternal life that He has promised (Jn. 6:40).
- H. When this work of God is done in us, we have the power to become obedient to God from the heart (Rm. 6:17-18). Our attitudes, desires, and motivations change to want to do what is pleasing to God. For the first time in our lives, we are freed from the overpowering influence and control of sin. There is now a power in us that is greater than our tendency to sin—the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- I. The word of God is a means to an end, not an end. In other words, the Bible is a God given tool to be used for His purposes. We need to be careful not to think of developing knowledge of the Bible as an end. Understanding the word of God should propel us forward toward God and the life He desires us to live. The aim of the genuine Christian life and the true gospel is not to create theological experts who can win any Bible trivia competition; it is to create people who share the heart of God and desire to please Him in all that they do.
- J. It is problematic when we think we are pleasing to God simply because we know what His word says. As Paul says, “it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified” (Rm. 2:13). What Paul means is that true spiritual life produces a lifestyle that implements the contents of the word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. We become the type of person God wants us to be by living a lifestyle that pleases Him. This great transformation happens when a person trusts Jesus and lives for Him.

V. Conclusion

- A. These main purposes of the word of God is God’s way of responding to and meeting our deepest human need. The spiritual problem of our moral brokenness and our damaged relationship with God is repaired through Jesus as we become aware of the reality of our relationship with God and our inability to fix it.

- B. The word of God is not primarily aimed at giving us all our heart's desires. Instead, Scripture focuses on helping us understand what is wrong with us and our lives so that it can be fixed by the only person who has the power to do so: Jesus. When a person accepts Jesus as He presented Himself in the true gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit allows us to become the person God wants us to be.