



Time to Reflect

- What do you understand by the term *God's grace*? How is it different from the law and good works?
- Take a few minutes to think about the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Why did Jesus die on the cross and what was achieved by his sacrifice?

Last week we continued to see how Paul defended the gospel message and he did so by using personal and scriptural arguments. He narrowed his focus to the work of the Holy Spirit and the significance of God's grace, as opposed to the constraints of legalism and religious rule-keeping. This week's passage calls our attention to the law and its promise. Ultimately the underlying message of this passage is revealed simply in (v24): "...the law was our guardian until Christ came..."

"...the fact that Paul quoted six times from the Old Testament raised a serious problem: If salvation does not involve the law, then why was the law given in the first place?"

(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians*, p79)

Specifics

- Having spent a few weeks looking at Galatians, our studies have shown us how Paul emphasised grace as opposed to works and that we can all enjoy fullness of life through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - In this week's passage, Paul draws our attention to the association between God's promise and law. This is a rich and deep passage, one that needs to be read over several times. Yet there are some very important teachings contained in these verses.
- 1. The Law Cannot Change The Promise (v15-18)**
 - It is interesting that the word 'promise' is used eight times in this passage and it refers to God's promise to Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3).
 - Please remember that this promise involved being justified by faith and having the blessings of salvation – as we noted in last week's study (Galatians 3:6-9).
 - This promise to Abraham preceded, by centuries, the law of Moses. Warren Wiersbe reflects on this and he writes, "The Judaizers implied that the giving of the law changed that original covenant of promise. Paul argued that it did not."¹
 - Paul's articulated his case using an example from everyday life (v15). He was clear that Moses did not and could not alter the promise made to Abraham. Also, to imply that the law of Moses altered the original promise made to Abraham is to suggest that, somehow, God had changed his mind.
 - This is a point that Timothy Keller focuses on. He contends, "If the law of Moses came as a way of salvation, it means that God changed His mind. It would mean that God had decided that we didn't need a Savior, and that He would give out His blessing on the basis of performance, not promise."²
 - The Judaizers sought to add to God's grace and take away from His promises.

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (David C Cook, 2009), p80.

² Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You* (The Good Book Company, 2013), p78.

2. The Law Is Not Greater Than The Promise (v19-20)

- When we read Exodus 19, the account of the giving of the law is impressive. There was thunder and lightening, and people trembling with fear. It was a dramatic event.
- Yet, the law was temporary (v19a). The death and resurrection of Jesus brought the fulfilment of the law. Access to God is through faith in Jesus and not through religious rule-keeping.
- This is important, particularly because of the mention of the role of a mediator in (v19-20). The law was given to the Israelites by angels and Moses (v19). Salvation by grace alone is through Christ alone.
- Wiersbe suggests, “The Judaizers were impressed by the incidentals of the law – glory, thunder, lightening, angels, and other externals. But Paul looked beyond incidentals to the essentials. The law was temporary and required a mediator. The covenant of promise was permanent, and no mediator was required. There could be but one conclusion: The covenant was greater than the law.”³

3. The Law Is Not Contrary To The Promise (v21-26)

- A key question is recorded in (v21). A superficial understanding of the law and the promise could lead to the belief that they are contrary to each other. This is not the case. They are complimentary!
- It is important to realise that the law was not given to provide life (v21). We have reflected on this in previous studies. Wiersbe helpfully argues, “If life and righteousness could have come through the law, then Jesus Christ would never have died on the cross. But Jesus did die; therefore, the law could never give the sinner life and righteousness.”⁴
- The law was given to reveal sin (v19a, 22). This reminds us of the role of the law in helping to lead sinners to Jesus. Wiersbe summarises the importance of this in one helpful sentence. “Law shows the sinner his guilt, and grace shows him the forgiveness that we can have in Christ.”⁵
- Someone once likened the law to a mirror that helps us see our dirty faces, but we won’t actually wash our faces with the mirror.
- The law was also given to prepare the way for Christ (v23-26). The demands of the law reminded the people of the need for a Saviour. One of the main purposes of the law was to create a deep sense of spiritual need.

4. The Law Cannot Do What The Promise Can Do (v27-29)

- The law was able to reveal sin and, to a certain extent, control behaviour, but it could never offer eternal forgiveness or justification. Additionally, the law could never give a person oneness with God. For example, there was a veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.
- Only Jesus, as our Saviour and Lord, offers eternal peace and forgiveness (v26). As the ultimate fulfilment of God’s promise, Jesus brought unity and not division (v28).
- As he reaches a conclusion on this passage, Wiersbe writes: “This section of Galatians is valuable to us as we read the Old Testament Scriptures. It shows us that the spiritual lessons of the Old Testament are not for the Jews only but have application to Christians today...In the Old Testament we have preparation for Christ; in the Gospels, the presentation of Christ; and in the Acts through Revelation, the appropriation of Christ.”⁶

³ Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians*, p82

⁴ Ibid, p83.

⁵ Ibid, p83.

⁶ Ibid, 87.