

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW?

Galatians 3:19-29

By Andy Manning

Sola Fide (Galatians) – Week 8

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Rules and laws can be annoying. Sometimes they don't make sense. For example, the speed limit on Camelia Boulevard is way too slow. There's no reason to make people drive 35 mph down that road. It feels like you're walking. We have to travel down Camelia to get to the swimming pool, and one time this summer as we were driving, I looked over at the sidewalk and there was a woman in an electric wheelchair, and she was traveling faster than us! Why 35 mph?
2. One time Lydia and I went to a conference at the Maravich Assembly Center on LSU's campus. It was hard to find a parking space, so we parked far away and had a long walk. When we made it to the entrance, security told me that I couldn't bring my bag in the building. I was carrying a canvas bag with my Bible and a notebook. He expected me to walk all the way back to put my bag in the car. So, I did what any good husband would do. I tried to get my wife in trouble too. I pointed at her and said, "What about her. She has a purse." The security guard said, "Purses are allowed." I asked, "So purses are allowed, but bags are not allowed?" "Yup," he replied. So I pointed at my bag and said, "This is not a bag; this is a purse." He didn't buy it. What an annoying rule.
3. The Bible is filled with rules, and laws, and regulations. Why did God give us so many rules?
4. In Galatians 3 Paul asks and answers this question. And the reason he does is because he has just finished saying that the law was not given to save us. He has gone to great lengths to explain that salvation is by faith alone, and not by keeping the law.
5. The book of Galatians is all about justification by faith alone. That's what Sola Fide means, the title of this sermon series. "By faith alone." Justification means God declares you legally righteous in His sight. One day all of us will stand before the judgment throne of God. The righteous will be allowed to enter the new heavens and new earth to live with God forever; the unrighteous will be sent to hell. The biggest question facing mankind is what can we do today so that on that day God will declare us righteous and let us into heaven. Paul made it very clear that nobody can be justified, or declared righteous, by keeping the law. Why not? Because nobody keeps the law. Some are better than others, but in the end, we are all lawbreakers, and therefore nobody is righteous. So nobody will be justified by keeping the law.
6. Instead, Paul writes that God has provided another way for us to be justified. He sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins and rise again, so that anyone who believes in

- Jesus will be saved. They will be justified. They will be declared righteous on judgment day.
7. Justification is a free gift that is received by faith in Jesus the moment you believe. But the gift is ultimately opened when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ. On that day, because of your faith in Christ, you will be declared not guilty, righteous, and accepted into heaven. Not because you are a good person, not because you are righteous, but because Jesus paid for your sins, and you trust in Him.
 8. **Romans 8:1** “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”
 9. After making this very clear, Paul then asks the next logical question: What is the purpose of the law? If the law can’t save us, if we can’t earn our way to heaven by keeping the law, then why follow it?
 10. In this series we have been talking about the Protestant Reformation, which began on October 31, 1517, with a monk named Martin Luther. The main theme of the Reformation was justification by faith alone, and that’s what Galatians is all about. Galatians was Luther’s favorite book of the Bible. Another influential reformer was John Calvin, a French theologian. Calvin wrote the best answer to the question, “What is the purpose of the law?” Calvin said the law has three uses.

II. THE THREE USES OF THE LAW

1. The civil use.
 - i. The first use of the law is to restrain evil and promote righteousness in society.
 - ii. Life works better when you do it God’s way.
 - iii. When you live according to God’s rules, you are happier, healthier, and more prosperous.
 - iv. That’s true whether you are a Christian or not.
 - v. And when entire communities learn God’s law and live accordingly, society flourishes. That’s the first purpose of God’s law.
 - vi. God has given the entire world – Christians and non-Christians – access to His law. Everyone can learn and it order their lives by it. And when they do, individuals flourish, families flourish, and entire nations flourish.
 - vii. On the flip side, when nations are ignorant of God’s law, or when they reject God’s law, they decay and decline.
 - viii. So God has given His law to the world to restrain evil and promote righteousness in society.
 - ix. This is an extension of God’s common grace. Grace is extended in two ways. Common grace is God’s gifts to everyone, both believers and unbelievers. Special grace is God’s gifts to believers only, such as salvation. God shows loving kindness, or common grace, in many ways to unbelievers. He gives them rain, and sunlight, and allows them to enjoy good food, and beauty, and romantic love, and friendship, and family. One extension of God’s common

grace is His law. He has given His law to both believers and unbelievers to restrain sin and benefit all of society.

2. The normative use.

- i. The second use of the law is to reveal what is pleasing to God.
- ii. God's law reveals what God is like, and what God likes.
- iii. As Christians who love God, we want to please and honor Him. The law teaches us how to do that. It teaches us behaviors that God hates, and behaviors that God loves.
- iv. The Bible tells us to imitate God, and to strive to please God, but how do we know how to do that? God's law.
- v. It is true that the Bible says that we are not under law, but under grace (Rm 6:14-5). But the very same passage asks, "Does this mean we should sin? Absolutely not!"
- vi. When the Bible says that we are not under law, but under grace, it doesn't mean that God's law is no longer applicable. It doesn't mean that God doesn't care if we go around lying, stealing, killing, and committing adultery. God absolutely cares about those things. Being under grace rather law means that we don't use the law as a means of earning heaven. Instead, we use it as a means to love, please, serve, and glorify God.
- vii. In other words, we don't obey the law to earn salvation, but out of gratitude for the gift of salvation.

3. The pedagogical use.

- i. The third use of the law is the pedagogical use.
- ii. Martin Luther referred to this as "the principal purpose of the law, and its most valuable contribution."
- iii. The word "pedagogy" has to do with teaching. It comes from the Greek word *paidagogos*.
- iv. The purpose of the law is not to save, but to teach.
 1. It teaches us our sinfulness and need for a Savior.
- v. The idea is that God's law serves as a teacher by helping people to see how sinful they are, thereby driving them to seek the Savior. The law helps us to see our spiritual poverty, and inadequacy, and brokenness, so that we will no longer think it possible to be good enough to earn heaven, but instead will seek the mercy and grace of God.
- vi. The key passage for this concept is the text that we are studying today. So let's dig in to this text and learn about the third use of the law, the pedagogical use of the law.

III. EXPOSITION OF TEXT: Galatians 3:19-29

1. 19 Why, then, was the law given?

- i. There's our question. Since salvation is by faith, and not by keeping the law, then why was the law given? Since the law doesn't save us, what is its purpose?
- 2. *19b It was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come.*
 - i. "It was added for sake of transgression." Transgression is a synonym for sin. The law was added, or given, for the sake of transgression. In other words, the law shows people that they have sinned. It shows people that they have sinned against a holy God who cannot tolerate sin, and who is also man's judge.
 - ii. If you don't realize your sin, then you won't reach for a Savior.
 - iii. If you don't have the law, then you don't know you are a sinner.
 - iv. Without knowledge of God's law, a person may know that something's not right in his life. Something's not right with him. He is not perfect. He struggles to do what he knows he ought to do. But the more that a man understands God's law, the more it becomes abundantly clear that he is sinful and in need of a Savior.
 - v. **Romans 4:15** "where there is no law, there is no transgression."
 - 1. Without the law, people struggle to see that they are sinful.
 - 2. The law is like a mirror held up to a person, helping them see how bad they really are.
 - vi. **Romans 3:20** "For no one will be justified in his sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law."
 - 1. Paul is saying that the purpose of the law is not to justify; the purpose of the law is to give knowledge of sin; to help people see clearly that they are sinful.
 - vii. **William Hendricksen** wrote that the law as given "to bring about within his heart and mind an awakened sense of guilt... Only when he realizes that his sins are transgressions of the law of that God who is also his Judge and whose holiness cannot brook such digressions... will he... cry out for deliverance."
 - viii. "Until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come."
 - 1. The law's purpose was not just to make us realize how sinful we are, but to drive us to the Seed to whom the promise was made would come.
 - 2. The "Seed" refers to Christ, the descendant of Abraham (Gal 3:16).
 - 3. In this passage when you read "promise," it means salvation by faith. In the Old Testament, God promised to bless Abraham and his Seed, and all the world through Him (Gen 12:3). The promise was that Abraham and his Seed would inherit the earth, that is, the new heaven and earth, and be with God for all eternity (Rm 4:13). The

promise is the promise of salvation by faith, because it was given to Abraham before Abraham even knew the law.

4. Earlier Paul made the argument that the promise of salvation was not given to all of Abraham's physical seeds or descendants, but to just one; namely, Christ. And therefore, all those who put their faith in Christ become Abraham's descendants and inherit the promise of salvation.
3. *19c The law was put into effect through angels by means of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator is not just for one person alone, but God is one.*
 - i. Here Paul is explaining the superiority of the promise – salvation by faith – over the law. The law, or the law of Moses, was given by God through angels to Moses, and then to the people. In other words, it was given to people indirectly, through a mediator. But when God gave the promise to Abraham, God spoke directly to Abraham, and therefore, to all of Abraham's descendants through Christ. Therefore the promise of salvation by faith alone is superior to the law.
4. *21 Is the law therefore contrary to God's promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law.*
 - i. Since the law is inferior to the promise, and since the law does not save, is it contrary to the promise? Is it an enemy of salvation by faith alone? The law is only bad when it is used in the wrong way. It was not meant to save. It was meant to teach us that we need a Savior. It cannot save, but it can point us to our need for a Savior.
 - ii. **William Hendricksen** "As to the law, it is useful indeed. It accomplishes its very design by showing what it cannot accomplish! It causes the sinner to say, 'Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?'"
 - iii. The law wasn't meant to get you to heaven, but to get you to the cross.
5. *22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe.*
 - i. Now Paul is going to say the same thing in several ways.
 - ii. "The Scripture imprisoned everything under sin's power." The Scripture, or the law, declares that everyone is locked up in sin. That everyone is a sinner, and you cannot save yourself. You need a rescue. You can only be saved by faith in Jesus Christ.
 - iii. The purpose of the law is to show you that it is impossible to keep the law.
6. *23 Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. 24 The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith.*

- i. “The law... was our guardian until Christ.” There’s our word “paidagogos,” or *pedagogue*. In that culture, the *paidagogos* was a slave who took the master’s children to school. He also watched over the kids and even disciplined them. In the same way, the law takes us to school. It shows us that we are sinners, deserving of God’s judgment, unable to save ourselves. It drives us to seek salvation outside of ourselves so that we look to Christ.
 - ii. The law is not a Savior, it is a teacher. It is not a redeemer, it is a revealer.
7. *25 But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.*
- i. Now we don’t need the law to bring us to school, because we have Christ. Christ is our righteousness. Christ is our Savior. Christ is the way to God.
8. *27 For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. 28 There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.*
- i. Paul is not making a statement about baptismal regeneration; that we are saved by being baptized. We are saved by faith, not by a ritual. There are plenty of people who have been baptized and taken communion, but they are not true Christians. Paul’s assumption is that if you have put your faith in Jesus, then you have been baptized.
 - ii. The point here is that everyone is justified in the same way. Not by the law, but by faith in the one punished for lawbreakers. No one is justified by the law. We are all justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Abraham’s true descendants are not his physical descendants, but those who rely on Christ for salvation rather than the law. Believers in Jesus will inherit the new heavens and earth.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. To be saved, a person must have faith in Christ. But to have faith in Christ, they must first see their need for Christ. This is the pedagogical use of the law, to teach us our need for Christ.
2. Author Ray Comfort gave this illustration in his book *Hell’s Best Kept Secret*. Suppose you are a flight attendant and you want to convince the passengers to put on a parachute. If they believe the plane is in no danger of crashing, then why would they put on a big, heavy, uncomfortable, unattractive parachute? But if you told them that the plane was going to crash in three minutes, they would hurry to put on the parachute. Until a person sees their need for Christ, they won’t turn to Him. The purpose of the law is just that – to point out our sinfulness and need for a Savior.
3. This is an important principle for the task of evangelism. When you are trying to lead someone to Christ, you first need to convince them that they need Christ. How do you do that? You have to show people that to be good enough to earn heaven, you

- have to be perfect. The punishment for sin is eternal punishment. You need a Savior. Jesus came to take our punishment so that we could be forgiven.
4. You cannot be saved unless you know you need to be saved. You must understand that you have sinned against God, and the punishment for sin is hell, and you cannot save yourself. You need a Savior. You need Christ, who died for your sins and rose again so that you could be forgiven.
 5. Jesus called this attitude “poor in spirit.” He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs (Mt 5:3).” What does it mean to be poor in spirit. It is to recognize your spiritual poverty. To recognize that you are a sinner. You are not good enough to make it to heaven; you can never work your way into heaven. Your only hope is the forgiveness of God, and that is given through the death of Christ to those who trust in Him.
 6. Jesus illustrated this attitude with a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisees were the religious elites. They devoted their lives to keeping God’s law with the utmost strictness. Tax collectors were notoriously sinful. They were Jews who were recruited by Rome to collect taxes on their fellow Jews. And the Roman government gave them permission to collect as much as they wanted from the people, as long as they gave Rome what was required. So they were very rich, and very much hated. As the story goes, both men go into the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood and said, “God, I thank you that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth, of everything I get.” But the tax collector stood far off; he wouldn’t even raise his eyes to heaven; he kept striking his chest and saying, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” Notice how Jesus ended the story.
 7. **Luke 18:14** “I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”
 8. What was the difference between the Pharisee and the tax collector? It wasn’t that one was righteous and the other sinful. That’s what the Pharisee thought. It was that one knew he was sinful, while the other didn’t know.
 9. And did you realize the word that Jesus used: justified. Do you remember what that word means? It means that on judgment day, God will declare you righteous in His sight and let you into heaven. The one who will be justified, or declared righteous, is not the righteous person, because there’s no such person; it is the person who realizes his unrighteousness and looks to Jesus alone for salvation.
 10. The Pharisee’s problem was that he misunderstood the purpose of the law. He thought the purpose of the law was to get us to heaven. The law can’t get us to heaven. Its purpose is to teach us that we don’t deserve heaven, and that we need God’s forgiveness given freely because of the death of Christ to those who believe.