

Law: revealing sin to drive us to faith in Christ (Galatians 3:19–22)

The law does not provide a righteous standing before God, but it is not without purpose and it is not in opposition to God's promise to Abraham. Three divine purposes for the law are explained in Galatians and the first of those is explained in these verses: the law was given to drive a person to faith in Christ by revealing the character of sin.

I. *Under the law sin is revealed as transgression (3:19a).*

1. By giving the law God clearly gave definition to sin, setting the bounds for obedience and making sin "transgression", that is, overstepping a boundary. It gave knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20) and set penalties for disobedience (Hebr 2:2).
2. Because Christ fulfilled the law and provided atonement for the transgressions against the law (Hebr 9:15), the Law as a unified system came to an end, even though it continues to give a "knowledge of sin" and help in understanding what pleases God.

The law, in helping you see your sinfulness, should thereby drive you to the only true hope, faith in Jesus Christ.

II. *Under the law sin is revealed as distancing us from God (3:19b–20).*

1. The presence of angels at the giving of the Law at Sinai (cf. Deut 33:2; Psalm 68:17; Acts 7:53; Hebr 2:2) and the uses of a human mediator (Moses) shows the distance which sin demands between mankind and a holy God. This distance was continually demonstrated in the law as well.
2. In contrast God met with Abraham directly and personally. So also is it in the New Covenant, in which God is His own mediator in the perfect God-man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5) and indwells every believer by His Spirit.

The desire to be close to God, when sin as revealed in the law, keeps us distant, should drive you to faith in Jesus Christ who gives you access to God.

III. *Under the law sin is revealed as the grounds for despair: sin condemns & the law has no life-giving power (3:21).*

The law is not contrary to the promise, because it did not have the same purpose, which was not to give life. The law supports the promise by pointing to the need for the promise and thereby driving you to faith in Jesus Christ.

IV. *Scripture declares that everything is imprisoned under sin (3:22a).*

"Everything" (ESV) is imprisoned under sin in the sense that all mankind in all aspects of each person's being is locked under sin. Scripture, and not just the Law, declares every person to be corrupted by sin in their understanding, actions, and speech (cf. Romans 3:1–20), as well as their mortal, corruptible bodies. Scripture declares everything imprisoned under sin because there is no way out by self-effort. Scripture declares everything imprisoned under sin because all natural persons are condemned, awaiting judgment (cf. Romans 6:23).

The law is good in telling us of our imprisonment, so that we can desire a free pardon, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The law was never intended to give life. But one purpose of the law is to reveal the character of sin and thereby move a person to faith in Christ. Pardon is a free gift offered in Jesus Christ to anyone who believes. The law is good, when used properly. Its negative message, you are under sin, has a positive purpose: that the promise of a righteous standing before God may be yours by trusting in Jesus Christ.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What is the proper use of the law in evangelism? How might Paul have used the law in his conversations with Felix (cf. Acts 24:25)?
- How does a proper understanding of the law influence our understanding of God's love?
- Why might the experts in the law during Jesus' earthly ministry not have been affected by the law in the way the law was intended to work? How should that be a warning to us?

Prayer: Thank God for the free pardon which is offered by faith in Jesus Christ. Pray for a proper understanding of the law and God's purposes for the law.