

The Purpose of the Law

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[0 : 0 0] Well, about two weeks ago, a man who worked amongst the poor in Britain, referred to as the skint, apparently, a man who worked amongst these poor inherited a £50 million manor just two weeks ago.

The headlines on the next slide said the skint or poor care worker inherits £50 million estate after DNA tests proved he was the son and heir.

On the next slide is the man, Jordan, with his wife, Katie, and son, Joshua, in front of their new home. And for those Escape to the Country fans like my wife, here on the next slide is another photo you can drool over.

Now, the estate in Australian dollars is worth £91 million. Talk about inheritance, hey? And what did he do to receive it?

Well, nothing, really. It was simply by being related. That's how inheritance works. So that's why he had the DNA test to prove he was the son and therefore the heir.

[1 : 0 6] Well, today, in our passage, the ideas of inheritance and being an heir and even being a son, which has nothing to do with gender in this particular passage. It's about having the inheritance because, remember, in the ancient world, sons were the ones who were the heirs.

But this idea of inheritance and being an heir runs beneath our passage and it pops up a couple of times. It's over the page in your Bibles at the end of verse 29, at the end of chapter 3. It talks about being heirs according to the promise.

It pops up there. And then it pops up again at the end of our reading, chapter 4, verse 7. God has made you also an heir. But before we get to look at that, let me briefly recap.

Now, you might remember that there have been false teachers amongst the churches in Galatia. And the false teachers were saying that faith alone in Christ alone is not enough to be right with God, to be saved.

They were saying that it had to be faith plus works of law, works like circumcision and observing special days and months and seasons and so on.

[2 : 1 4] But this is a false gospel, as we've seen, that does not save but condemns. So it's dangerous, which is why Paul doesn't pull any punches in this letter.

I mean, if one of your children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren was about to run across the road in front of a car, you don't just say, oh, hang on my pet, just wait for me. You say, stop! Car! Wait, what are you doing?

Well, Paul last week called them foolish to wake them up because what they were doing was dangerous. It does not save. And we saw VJ shows four reasons why it's by faith, not works.

At first, they became Christians by faith. They've already begun their salvation by faith. So why need works? At second, Abraham was declared righteous with God by faith.

So God has always operated this way by faith. At third, the law only brings curses because we cannot keep it. And fourth, the law does not set aside God's promised inheritance.

[3 : 18] Because again, an inheritance is not something you can earn but receive. Now, I didn't quite get to that fourth reason, but it's there where Paul introduces the inheritance language.

So let me take us back to that so we can see it in preparation for our passage today. So have a look at chapter 3, verse 16. Just towards the top of the page.

Chapter 3, verse 16. He says, And then he goes on to say, What I mean is this.

The law introduced 430 years later does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. If the inheritance depended on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise.

They're two separate things. But God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. He is saying that the law doesn't do away with the promise.

[4 : 31] They're two separate things. After all, the nature of a promise is not something we earn by works of the law, but are given by grace. But what is this promised inheritance that he mentions here?

Well, we heard about it from our first reading. It's the promise of land. So on the next slide, you might remember from the top verse from our reading, where it talks about, and to your offspring or seed, it's the same word, I will give this land.

And in fact, in Genesis, whenever God talks about giving something to Abraham's offspring, it refers to the land. I've given you a couple of examples to show it. Now for us, the land is really the new creation.

It's inheriting the kingdom of God in the world to come. It's inheriting a share in the new heavens and the new earth. As Jesus said in the Beatitudes, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Yeah. That kind of makes the 50 million pound mansion seem like peanuts, doesn't it? But hang on a second. How does that then fit with verse 16?

[5 : 40] Let's see verse 16 again. It says that the promised inheritance was to Abraham and to his seed, offspring singular. And that single offspring, that rightful heir, is Christ, it says.

Not us. So how do we inherit it then? Well, Paul puts that issue on a coat hanger and kind of hangs it up for later. Because he then has to deal with another pressing issue.

Which is, if God has always operated by faith, and not by works of law, then why on earth did God give the law in the first place? That's the presenting question today.

And as Paul answers that presenting question, he also tells us how we too can receive the inheritance. And that's how the passage is working. So we're at point one in your outline, verse 19 in your Bibles.

He says, Why then was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions, until the seed, to whom the promise referred to, had come.

[6 : 44] The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. And a mediator, however, implies more than one party. But God is one. Here Paul points out that the law was given through angels and to a mediator, who was Moses, you might remember, at Mount Sinai.

It was indirectly given to the people through a few parties, you know, angels and Moses. Whereas the promise, on the other hand, is given directly from God to Abraham, wasn't it?

God who is one party. And so Paul is implying that the promise is greater than the law. So why then give the law? Well, verse 19, because of transgressions.

Now, you'd think that would mean to stop transgressions and sin, wouldn't you? But actually, the law caused transgressions.

How? Well, because as soon as you add a law, our sinful nature wants to break it. I mean, it's like the old sign that says, wet paint, don't touch.

- [7 : 50] As soon as you say that sign, what do you want to do? Touch it. And when you do, you become a lawbreaker. The law has caused a transgression, you see.
- And we're now deserving of judgment. In Ireland, there's some famous cliffs of mohair. And there's a law written on a sign that says, please do not go beyond this point, because it's dangerous.
- In fact, in 2006, someone was blown off the cliff and died. And there he is on the slide. But notice all the people behind the sign. Now, if the sign wasn't there, they would have still gone.
- But by adding this sign, adding this law, it's actually turned them into law breakers, you see. See, the law has caused transgressions. And it shows them to be sinners.
- In other words, it makes them guilty of sin. And that's what the Old Testament law does. So instead of being able to declare us right with God, the law actually declares us or locks us up under sin.
- [8 : 53] Under sin's power and penalty, judgment. Puts us in jail as guilty. See verse 21 and 22? He says, Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of God?
- Absolutely not. For if the law had been given in order to impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But Scripture has locked up everything under sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.
- And Paul says the law is not opposed to God's promises, particularly his promise of righteousness and inheritance. It's just that it was never its purpose to give it. If the law had that purpose, then verse 21, it would have brought righteousness and inheritance.
- But it wasn't its purpose. Rather, its purpose, verse 22, was to show that we're sinners, locked up under sin, both its power and its penalty. And so, to drive us therefore, verse 22, to faith in Christ, to point us to faith in Christ.
- That's the law's first purpose. To lock us up as guilty under sin's penalty in order to point us to faith in Christ. And the second purpose was to be a guardian until this faith in Christ came.
- [10 : 17] So we're at point 2, verse 23. He says, Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up, until the faith that was to come would be revealed.
- So the law was our guardian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. And now back in verse 19 and 22, people were locked up under sin, that's everyone.
- But here, it's particularly, we Jews, says Paul, who were under the law. And they were locked up under the law's authority and custody.
- You see, the law acted like a guardian to supervise Israel in their infancy as a nation. It guarded Israel, trying to keep it from being like the other nations around them.
- And it tried to teach Israel about God and holiness, about sin and sacrifice, and so on. But notice, its authority over Israel has a limited lifespan, doesn't it?
- [11 : 25] Verse 23, it was only until the faith in Christ that was to come was revealed. Or verse 24, it was only until Christ came.
- And once Christ had come, then the law's authority ended. It's a bit like a babysitter. I don't know if you've ever had your children babysat by someone, or perhaps you babysit your grandkids, or kids, or great-grandkids.
- The babysitter has authority over the kids, at least theoretically, right? But once the parents come home, their authority ends, doesn't it?
- Well, so also the law. Verse 25, now that this faith has come, we Jews are no longer under a guardian.

In other words, now that faith in Christ has been revealed, the Jews are no longer under the Old Testament law. They've been set free from its authority. Now, to be fair, this would have been a massive bombshell for the Jews.

[12 : 28] It's hard enough for some Christians to realize that we are actually free from the Old Testament law. even laws like the Ten Commandments. But it would have been even harder for them to realize because they'd studied it all their lives.

And so it took time for them to come to this realization, even though they should have known it from what they studied. But now that it has come, they've been set free from law's authority and instead become God's sons with us Gentiles.

That's that air language. Verse 26, it says, you're no longer under a garden because in Christ Jesus you are all children or literally sons of God through faith.

For all of you who are baptized in the Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ the Son. And so there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Jesus. In other words, we've all become sons of God with Christ the Son. How? Was it by works of the law? No.

[13 : 36] Verse 26, through faith. And Paul then explains in verse 27 that when we were baptized, which is another way of talking about when we were converted, when we put our faith in Christ, we put on Christ.

That is, we were united to Christ as, verse 28, as one. And that meant the old distinctions don't matter as much anymore.

I should say that verse 28 doesn't say we stop being male and female. The transgender groups like to misquote this verse. The Bible upholds gender differences and equality.

It's just that these earthly differences take a back seat to our unity in Christ. It's a bit like when my son joined a basketball team. When he joined, he put on this jersey like this.

Here he is, number 34, Price. And when he put this jersey on, he was united as one with the team. And so the distinctions of being a year eight boy or a year nine boy or being someone from Melbourne or someone originally from Africa or China or whatever it is, they don't matter anymore because having put on the jersey, they're now one team.

[14 : 50] That's what mattered. And by faith, we are one in Christ. The spirit comes to live in us and spiritually connects us to Christ such that we put on not a jersey but we put on him and become part of the one Christ.

And we don't stop being Jew or Gentile or male or female. It's just that those distinctions are no longer as important. What's more, now that we are all sons of God through faith in Christ, we can receive the inheritance too.

Remember verse 16? Verse 16 said that the rightful heir, that the singular seed was Christ. So if we want to share in his inheritance, we need to be connected to him.

And by faith, we are. For we've put on Christ, we've become sons of God by being united to the son of God. It would become the seed of Abraham by being united to the seed of Abraham.

Verse 29. He says, if you belong to Christ, if you've been united to him, then you are now Abraham's, notice, seed. And therefore, heirs according to the promise.

[16 : 07] You see what he's saying? Now that we belong to Christ, we will inherit the earth. It's extraordinary, really, when you think about it. You see, the purpose of the law was to act as a guardian until the time of faith in Christ came.

Its authority had a limited lifespan. For when faith in Christ came, Jews were freed from the law's authority and instead united with us Gentiles together as one in Christ.

Fellow sons, therefore, fellow heirs of the inheritance. But again, this was a lot for the Jews to take in. It's a lot for us to take in.

And so Paul repeats the ideas. But this time, he points out how the law also enslaved them. So chapter 4, verse 1. He says, what I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.

The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. He's saying, an heir might own a billion dollar estate, but if they are underage, then they are not free to enjoy it fully because they're bound by the guardians and the trustees who control the estate.

[17 : 28] And without this freedom to fully enjoy it, Paul says, they're like slaves. And this is what it was like for the Jews under the law. They may have been heirs of God's promises, but they were not free to enjoy them fully.

Instead, the law had made them slaves, not only to its own authority, but even to the elements of the world. See verse 3. So also, when we Jews were underage, we were in slavery under the elements of the world.

Now, we need to put our thinking caps on a little bit here because the phrase elemental forces or spiritual forces of the world is a guess at what this word means.

The original language just says the elements of the world. And so it's hard to know exactly what Paul is talking about. Is it kind of spiritual forces or is it the basic elements, building blocks of the world?

What is it? For my money, I actually think it refers to the elements, the physical elements of the world like the sun and the moon, that kind of thing. Because it's the sun and moon that creates days and seasons and months.

[18 : 39] And if you look down in verse 9, that's how it seems to be used. So have a look at verse 9 for a moment. Verse 9 and 10, he says, Now that you are known by God, or know God, or rather known by him as his sons, sons and daughters, how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable elements?

That's what the word is literally, saying one as verse 3. Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing, notice, special days and months and seasons and years.

You see, all religion, whether it's pagan, Gentile religion of Egypt or East or wherever, or whether it's God-given Jewish religion, it was all tied to the elements of the world.

Now, for example, the Sabbath was on the seventh day, from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. And so the Jews not only followed the law of the Sabbath, but they had to do it when the element of the sun told them to.

Sun starts to go down, now you have to obey. Or the law in the Old Testament prescribes certain festivals at certain months of the year. And so the Jews not only had to follow the law about the festivals, but they had to do so when the seasons told them to do it.

[20 : 00] And so verse 3, while Israel was underage, it was under the guardianship of the law, but it also meant there were slaves under the elements of this world too, having to do what the sun and moon told them to do, when they told them to do it.

But Christ has freed them from all that so they can be united to him as sons of God and heirs of the inheritance. So verse 4, But when the set time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

And because you are his sons, God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, the spirit who calls out Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave to these elemental things, or the law, but a child of God, or literally God's son.

And since you are his son, then God has made you also an heir. See, Paul is repeating what he's already said. The law's authority was only ever meant to have a limited lifespan, only until the set time had fully come.

Verse 4, For then God sent Christ to redeem those under the law and free us all, not just from the power of sin, but also from the slavery of religion, with its repeated rituals based on certain days and seasons.

[21 : 34] For Christ's blood paid for our sin so we could be freed and adopted as God's sons. and given his spirit that we can call the creator of the universe Abba, Father.

That's an amazing privilege, isn't it? We often forget about that. But you only need to talk to people from other religions who are not allowed to approach their gods easily or intimately to remember what a privilege we have.

I've got some people in one of my Bible study groups who last year became Christians from Islam and they are in awe of the freedom and intimacy they have with God to be able to call him Father.

They keep going on about it in Bible study. We have an amazing privilege. And what's more, as his sons, we not only get to call him Father, but he has made us heirs of Christ's inheritance.

So what does all this mean for us? Point three, well, one don't and two do's. First, don't depend on laws or religion to make you right with God. After all, the law's purpose was never to bring righteousness now nor inheritance later, but to show that we are all sinners locked up as guilty.

[22 : 54] And so it's ridiculous to try and use something in a way that was never designed to be used. It's a bit like that German commercial about iPads.

Have a look on the next slide. It's in German, but... Sag mal, Papa, have I not even asked you how you come with the new iPad to reach, what you've done on the next slide. Good. With the whole apps, are you ready?

What's that for apps? Go ahead and get to the side. Very useful. Sorry. That's the iPad. That's the iPad. That's the iPad. That's the iPad. That's the iPad.

That's the iPad. That's the iPad. That's the iPad. That's the iPad. What's it? What?

You get the point, aren't you? Clearly, the iPad was never intended to be used as a chopping board. It's ridiculous. But so, too, is trying to use the law to make us right with God because it was never intended for that purpose.

[23 : 57] And what's more, the law's authority over the Jews has ended. So to go back to it would be like going back to a babysitter when you're an adult or going back to becoming a slave when you're a son, an heir, or going back to prison when you're free.

It's crazy. Now, for us, it's unlikely we'll be tempted to add the laws of circumcision like the Galatians were tempted, particularly for those who are women, actually even for us who are men.

We wouldn't be tempted either, I suspect. But as someone said to me, we often find it hard to simply receive something, don't we, without earning it in some way. And so we can often be tempted to turn good things into salvation things in order to earn our righteousness with God now and secure our inheritance later.

Things like going to church, I must go to church every week and I'll be right with God then. Church is a good thing, it's a right thing to come, but not to make us right with God, it's because we already are right with God.

or I must have communion every week to earn my inheritance or I must keep being kind to my neighbours to get to heaven. They're all good things we should do, but we must not turn them into salvation things, we must not depend on them to make us right with God now or earn our inheritance later.

[25 : 20] As we'll see in a moment, it's in Christ alone that our hope is found. Now if you want to work out if you're depending on laws, then imagine what you would say if you're called to the pearly gates and God asked you, why should I let you into heaven?

What would you say? Because I'm good-ish? Because I go to church? Well, three out of four? That ain't bad? What would you say?

Or would you say something like, actually you shouldn't let me in, but by faith alone, in your son Christ alone, you've already made me yours? Which means God won't actually ask us that question.

He'll already know us and welcome us in. But you get the point, don't you? So firstly, don't depend on works of law to make us right with God now or earn our inheritance later, for that was never the law's purpose.

But second, do read the law. You see, while the Old Testament law no longer has authority over us or the Jews, while it no longer contributes anything anything to our salvation, it does contribute to our education.

[26 : 30] As Paul writes on the next slide in Romans chapter 15, verse 4, everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, educate us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures, that's the Old Testament in particular, and the encouragement they provide, we might have hope.

The Old Testament law still teaches us about God's character, about Christ's sacrifice, all for our encouragement and endurance. In fact, it also shows us how we might do the two great commandments we are still kind of under, you know, loving God and loving our neighbour.

And the Old Testament shows us how we can love God by having no other gods but Him. And the Old Testament shows us how we can love one another by not stealing or lying or murdering.

And so, do read the law. And lastly, do receive our inheritance greatly, our gratefully. For by faith in Christ, God has graciously given us His Spirit who not only strengthens us but connects us to Christ, making us sons of God and therefore heirs of His inheritance.

An inheritance that is worth much more than a 50 million pound estate. I asked my Bible study group last week, what do you do to receive an inheritance?

[27 : 54] Thinking they'd say something like being related or actually not by doing anything or by someone dying for you. They're all right things. I mean, we did nothing to earn our inheritance and Christ did die to share it with us.

But one person very quickly said, you receive it gratefully. and He's right. That's how we'd receive it, gratefully. Let's pray that we would.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank You for the law that it reminds us that we are sinners and therefore points us to faith in Christ alone.

But Father, we pray that You would help us not to therefore ignore it but to read it that we might be taught and educated by it. And help us, we pray, that it might remind us to ever be grateful for the inheritance You have given us, not because we deserve it but simply because You have caused us to have faith in Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Help us to continue to be grateful for this, we ask in His name. Amen.