

The Law & The Gospel Life

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[0 : 0 0] We're in Galatians 3. When Sam first launched us in Galatians, he told us about evangelism explosion and the two diagnostic questions in this training course. And last week, Deb mentioned the same questions, and so I felt like I didn't want to be left out, and so I should mention them too. The first question is, imagine you were to die now. Would you be certain that you would go to heaven? And so what that question does is it raises the issue of whether or not we are assured of our salvation and our eternal future. The second question is, imagine you were to die and ended up in front of God, and he was asked you, why should I let you into heaven? What would you say? And that question highlights the source of our assurance, or lack of it. What is the, where are we putting our hopes in? Where are we pinning our hopes on? And so like Deb and like Sam, I was trained in this course many, many years ago, and I remember an opportunity to use those questions in the very early days of me doing the training. It was one night, and it was about 20-odd years ago. It was the end of a Carols by Candlelight event, and I got into a lengthy discussion with this guy that I knew from high school. It was a lengthy discussion about the gospel of the Christian faith, and let's say this particular guy, academics wasn't his strongest point, and relational, he had relational challenges. In fact, he didn't have a lot of strong points, and I used the questions on him in this evening, and he didn't understand the point of the questions at all, or even how they related to the discussion we were having. Couldn't make the connection at all. Anyway, about a week later, I'm lining up in the supermarket, you know, to buy groceries, that's what you do there, and this is a small country town, right? And over from the other side of the supermarket, I hear this person call out, hey, Fox. Now, that was a nickname for me at school, Fox. I had red hair, and, you know, it's a country thing, and it was just a whole lot better than Bunsen burner, which is what I initially had. But this guy yells out, hey, Fox, I need your help to get to heaven. And it's like, you know, everyone in the supermarket hears it, and everyone now is looking around, who best suits the description of Fox in this room, you know? And he came over to me, and, you know, you're kind of wanting to have a quiet conversation at this point, but it's fairly loud. And he said to me, those two questions that you asked me the other night, what were your answers? I need to know your answers.

And so I repeated the questions and repeated the answers. Then he said, can I have your shopping list? Okay, so I gave him a shopping list. And have you got a pen? Yeah, I've got a pen.

He said, now, just say it again slowly so I can write it down. Okay, you know, so I'm writing it down. I'm just kind of wondering where this is going to go. At the end of it, hands my pen back and starts to walk away, and I kind of grave, I've got to know, you know, what are you doing? He's folding it up, puts it in his pocket, and he said, this is brilliant.

He said, like you say, if I was to die right now, I've got the answers about how to get into question, into heaven. He said, this is brilliant. He said, I could die right now and be guaranteed to go into heaven. He said, I'm going to keep these answers with me always. He said, this is so easy. I'm like, oh, forget it. I didn't know what to do at that moment. He totally, totally missed the point of the questions. And yet, he did have a point. Is it really that easy?

You see, whenever you hear the radical claims of the Christian gospel of salvation by grace, we should be prompted in some way to think the same. Is it that easy? That easy to be saved?

[4 : 3 7] You know, where does effort, obedience, work, where does that fit in with all this? Or to put it bluntly, if I'm always saved only by Christ's performance and not my own, why would I even bother living a holy life? Who cares about that? Just go on living as I am and just, you know, have salvation attached in some way. See, I think there's no more practical question than that of the relationship between the Christian and the law of God and the commands of God.

All of our questions about how to live the Christian life, marriage relationship, sexual ethics, use of money, retirement, church attendance, raising kids, and the plethora of other things that we deal

with are all linked to that central, central question. What is the relationship between the gospel, the Christian gospel, and the law of God?

Now, let me just do a little bit of announcement over here. This is a very short book, which is attractive to most people. Is forgiveness really free? It's written by Michael Jensen. It's cheap, it's accessible, easy to read, short chapters, big words. So there shouldn't be anyone who wouldn't want to read that. That's a really helpful little book if you want to delve into it a little bit deep and a bit longer than what I'm going to deal with it tonight. Is forgiveness really free?

So let's get back to this text. This is the question which is before us. Is forgiveness really free?

What's the relationship between the Christian and the law of God? Now, the first thing Paul does in Galatians 3 here is he outlines again for us what the law does not do. And Paul's been working on this right throughout Galatians. He's already established that we are saved, we are justified, we are redeemed only by faith in Jesus Christ, not through any righteousness of our own, not through any effort on our behalf. And he pushes the point again. Let's have a look at verses 15 to 18. Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say, and to seeds, meaning many people, but to your seed, meaning one person who is Christ. 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. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise.

But God, in his grace, gave it to Abraham through a promise. So he says, let me just try and help you understand this from an everyday example, everyday life. The example he uses is human contracts and the way that they are binding, the way that they are difficult, if not impossible to avoid. He says, no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that is being duly established. And the word he uses there for covenant is the word that is the term for a legal will, you know, like parents in terms of writing wills for kids and everything else. You see, once a will is made, it is normally considered binding no matter what circumstances happen, no matter changes in circumstances.

The only person who can overturn a will is the person who wrote the will in the first place. And so it is with the promises of God. So let me try and capture this for us. Imagine there's a woman, she's got two daughters, one is extremely wealthy, one is extremely wealthy, and one is really poor. And so she decides in her will to leave the really poor daughter, the bulk of her estate, and the really rich daughter, the cat and the dog, you know, and a bit of furniture or something like that. She's trying to help the poor daughter without recognizing the rich one doesn't need it so much. And that will is legally binding legally binding, even if circumstances change. So imagine the day after that woman dies, the really wealthy daughter loses her entire wealth. The will still stands. New circumstances don't change the will. It's still legally binding. And that's what Paul's saying here.

[9 : 27] Paul knows that some might see that the law was introduced by Moses 450 years after God's promise of salvation to Abraham and conclude, well, this changes everything. New circumstances. If we are to get the blessing of Abraham, we now have to obey the law of Moses. And Paul shows us here that's a false conclusion. He does it in verse 17. The law cannot turn God's promise to Abraham into anything else but what it is, and that's a promise. It's a powerful argument. If the law of Moses came as a way of salvation, it means that God ultimately has changed his mind about us needing a savior, and that he would now give us his blessing on the base of performance and not promise. And if the Old Testament law functioned in that way, notice what verse 17 says, it does away with the promise. And the basic idea is that the very concepts of promise promise and law are mutually exclusive. You don't add law to a promise to make it a better promise. You at that point negate it. You nullify it as a promise once you add law to it. They're two different ideas. Just indulge me for a moment here.

For a promise to bring a result, all it needs to be is believed. But for a law to bring a result, it has to be obeyed. So imagine, for example, I say to you, I've got \$20 behind this pillar right here, and I'm willing to give it to you. And I'm willing to give it to you. And the only way that you will fail to receive that \$20 is by failing to believe the claim, failing to believe the promise.

Yes, it does. That's the only way that you would fail to receive it. But imagine I say to you, I've got \$20 behind this pillar, and I will give it to you, providing you massage my feet and cut my toenails. You would need to fulfill the requirement in order to receive the \$20. You've got to obey the requirement in order to receive \$20. And at that point, you've got to go through cost-benefit analysis and go, my goodness, I'm not doing that for \$20. You know, no way. You see, a gift promise needs

only to be believed. You just need to believe it in order to receive it. But a law wage must be obeyed in order to receive it. They're two very different concepts.

And if the law of Moses was intended to be a means of salvation, then the promise to Abraham is not a promise. It's nullified. It's removed. It's gone.

[12:49] But this promise, as Paul says in verse 15, is sealed with a covenant. It's sealed with a legal deal. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.

And what Paul's referring to here is he's taking us back to Genesis 15. Back there in Genesis 15, in verse 8, Abraham says to God, how can I be sure that you are going to fulfill this promise of blessing to me?

How can I be sure of that? What does God tell him to do? You see how you can be sure? Verse 9, bring me a heifer, a goat, a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.

Notice, God doesn't give Abraham any more instructions than to go and get these animals. Verse 10, Abraham gets them and it says, In other words, Abraham knew exactly what he needed to do when he grabbed these animals and birds.

And now this is really strange for us what's going on here, but in Abraham's day, this is how a covenant, this is how a legal agreement was signed. It's fairly grueling, but this is how they did it.

[14:28] That's why God didn't need to give Abraham any more instructions because he knew exactly what's required here. They would get the animals, they would cut them in half, they would lay them on either half on either side.

You'd kind of find a walkway in between and everyone who's making this agreement, everyone who is signing this legal deal would walk between the two halves of the carcasses and as they walk between it, they are saying as a covenant maker, if I break this agreement, may I turn out like these carcasses.

May I die and be cut in two like these carcasses if I break this agreement. You seal it with your life is what you do. And what's astonishing here in this covenant between God and Abraham is that Abraham never walks between the halves.

Abraham, it says, falls into a deep sleep and the only thing that passes through, verse 17, is a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

But we are told in verse 18, on that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham. The promise to bless Abraham is not reliant upon Abraham.

[15:53] It's got nothing to do with his obedience at all. And what God was saying in this moment in Genesis 15, I would die before I break my promise to bless Abraham and his descendants and through him and through one particular descendant, his seed to offer blessing to the whole world.

I will die before I break that covenant promise. And in the end, this seed did die on a cross as the man Jesus Christ in order to fulfill the promise of blessing to all who trust in God as Abraham did.

That's what it took for the promise to be fulfilled. So Paul is just simply pointing out here to the Galatians the impossibility of God adding obedience demands to his covenant promise.

God had guaranteed that he would keep his promise. And so the first thing that Paul's doing here is he's just reminding us, we need to be really clear about the purpose of the law, what it does.

Otherwise, and for us, it's really crucial for this, for the Galatians and for us, we get the whole Christian life totally wrong. Totally wrong if we're not clear on this. Everything God created has a purpose and as such is a good thing.

[17:23] And as you know, even good things can become bad things when we use them for something that they're not intended. I love Charles Spurgeon, the 19th century preacher. He had a really unique way of capturing this as he does with most things.

He liked to say, a hand saw is a good thing, but not to shave with. A hand saw is good for cutting wood, but not facial hair. If you put your hand saw to that sort of use, you'll wind up losing more than hair.

A good thing is not good when it's out of place. And if we turn to the law as a means of salvation, it's out of place, it's not a good thing. And you lose everything. If the law does not save, then it must have a different purpose.

And let's see now what this law does. At last, verse 19, Paul tells us what the point of the law is. What then was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgression until the seed to whom the promise referred had come.

So the law didn't come to tell us about salvation, but about sin. That's the purpose of the law, to tell us about sin.

[18 : 42] Its main purpose is to show us our problem, not to solve our problem. It shows us that we are law breakers and to prove to us that our obedience as law breakers could not possibly be the solution for salvation because we are not perfect law keepers.

Paul picks this idea up again and again and again and again and again. Does it in verse 21? If the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God, is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?

Absolutely not. For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. So God never intended for the law to impart life.

In fact, verse 22 says, the scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin. In fact, the original language is even more vivid than that. It is literally scripture imprisoned all the world to sin. The law shows us that we do not just fall short of God's will, requiring just a little bit more effort on our behalf to do a little bit better, but that in fact we are completely under sin's power and that we require a rescue.

[20 : 16] The law has the power to show us that we are not righteous, but it cannot give us the power in order to be righteous. Ironically, if we think that we can be righteous by obedience to the law, we've missed the entire point of the law.

The law does its work to lead us towards recognition of our need for salvation by grace. That is, the law points to the promise.

The law points to the need for the promise. The law does not oppose the promise of salvation by grace through Jesus Christ, but rather it supports it. It points out to us our desperate need of salvation by grace.

And Paul uses two metaphors here in the next few verses to characterize the way the law works. The first one is in verse 23.

It says, The law is a guard. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.

[21 : 32] This verse carries the idea that we are being guarded by military guards. We're in prison. We're locked. We need freedom. And we can't get freedom because the law is keeping us imprisoned to our sin.

And the second metaphor he uses to show us how the law points to the promise is the tutor-student relationship. Verse 24. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. So the law is a supervisor. It's a tutor. It's a babysitter under whose instruction we live.

The law was put in charge over us to lead us to Christ. See, in the homes of Paul's day, 1st century Palestine, the tutor or the guardian was usually a slave who supervised the children on the parents' behalf.

And the interesting thing is when you look at both of these metaphors, the guard and the tutor, we see that what the law does is it removes our freedom. Both metaphors reveal that our relationship with the law is not an intimate one or a personal one.

[22 : 50] Both metaphors reveal that our relationship with the law is based on rewards and punishments. Both metaphors reveal that our relationship with the law means that we are treated like kids. There is, however, a difference between the two.

The guard metaphor represents human effort religion. And it's characterized by bondage, an impersonal relationship with the divine, and motivated by a desire for reward and a fear of punishment.

That's the guard metaphor. The tutor metaphor, on the other hand, shows us that the law's true purpose is in fact instructive.

In the same way, a tutor's role is to prepare children for lives as adults, as free persons, as grown-up, matured persons.

And in that sense, the law points to a life of freedom, not confinement. The law points to a personal relationship with God rather than impersonal. The law points to maturity of character rather than immaturity.

[23 : 58] That's what the law does. It points to the promise. Now, I think it's worth quoting here at some length the great John Stott.

This is from his commentary in Galatians. I think it just sort of sums up this second point so well. After God gave the promise to Abraham, he gave the law to Moses.

Why? He had to make things worse before he could make them better. The law exposed sin. It provokes sin. It condemns sin.

And the purpose of the law was to lift the lid of humanity's respectability and disclose what they really are underneath.

Sinful, rebellious, guilty, under the judgment of God, and helpless to save themselves. And the law must be allowed to do its God-given duty today.

[24 : 56] One of the great faults of the contemporary church is the tendency to soft-pedal sin and judgment. We must never bypass the law and come straight to the gospel. To do so is to contradict the plan of God in biblical history.

No person has ever appreciated the gospel until the law has first revealed to them themselves. It is only against the inky blackness of the night sky that the stars begin to appear.

It is only against the dark background of sin and judgment that the gospel shines forth. That's what the gospel does. It locks us up until the gospel reveals justification by faith in the Lord Jesus for salvation.

not until the law has bruised us and broken us will we admit our need for the gospel in order to heal our wounds. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned us will we long for Christ to set us free. Not until the law has condemned us and killed us we will call out to Christ for justification and life. Not until the law has driven us to despair of ourselves and our effort will we ever believe in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 25] Not until the law has humbled us even to hell will we turn to the gospel to raise us to heaven. That's how the law and the promise work together.

So, verse 25 how the law and the gospel life how this works together for us. Verse 25 says that once faith comes we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Our effort to gain God's approval by obedience to the law shows us that we need to go beyond the law to find that approval.

and when we see that and we allow Christ to be our saviour we learn the lesson that the law sought to teach us as our tutor.

Okay? So what now for the Christian? Does this mean we now forget about the law? Don't need any more? Don't need these commands from Jesus and don't need that anymore?

[27 : 29] Don't need standards values? Paul would say don't be ridiculous. Don't be ridiculous because you don't forget the law.

Let me just draw out just for a little bit the analogy of the tutor over the child or maybe you know parent-child relationship might be better for us. I don't do this so I can't imagine any parent designs their child rearing.

I don't think I can't imagine any parent that designs their child rearing in such a way that when that child grows to maturity that they cast off all of their values that have been instilled in them and live a totally different life.

I can't imagine there's a single parent who thinks that that is ultimately the goal of child rearing. that is I'm assuming that every parent when they're instilling values in their children they're instilling values that they think that their child needs in order to flourish in all of life not just while they're a child.

Is that correct? Am I stupid here? Well I mean don't answer that one. If all goes well and I'm assuming this for my own children if all goes well the adult child is no longer coerced into obedience as before but over the course of time they have internalized the basic values which have been instilled in them and they live in a similar manner not necessarily a total same manner but they live in a similar manner because that's what they actually want to do the values have been instilled they've been internalized within them.

[29 : 10] Paul isn't saying here that the Christian can no longer has any relationship you know the law's there the word of God's there the command of God's there you found salvation and grace and now you don't need any relationship with that stuff at all I don't think that's what Paul's saying here at all what he's saying is we no longer view that system of the law for salvation the law no longer

forces obedience through coercion and fear that's what he's saying the gospel means we no longer obey the law out of fear rejection or the hope of salvation by performance when we grab hold of salvation by promise salvation by grace in Christ alone our hearts are filled with gratitude and a desire to please and to be like our saviour and the way that we live like our saviour the way we be like our saviour the way we seek to please our saviour is through the way he's described as life should be lived through the law when you come to the law and it's totally different for the

Christian for the person who's been saved by grace totally different approach to the law when you come to the law motivated by gratitude because of grace we are better in our obedience to the law much better why is that firstly it's because when we think that the law obedience will save us we tend to by nature lower the standards of the law that's what the Pharisees did in Jesus' time it's like it's almost like we become emotionally incapable of admitting just how searching and demanding and penetrating the law actually is in our life it's almost become we just by nature give me ten simple rules to live by and that'll do and the law is so penetrating in every aspect of our life for instance Matthew 5 21-22 Jesus says that to resent someone is a form of murder and we sit in a culture and say murder nothing worse ta ta murder and Jesus said you resent someone that's a form of murder you've broken the command do not commit murder and frankly it's quite possible that a good majority of us sitting here right now has resented someone in our hearts you've committed that sin

Jesus made the law so penetrating and only if we know that we cannot keep it completely but that we don't need to keep it completely to be saved at all in fact to be saved because Jesus did it for us will we be able to admit just how broad and how deep this command is how deep the law is how deep the commands of God are if we think we are saved by obedience then we just by nature have to limit the scope of the law in order for us to be able to manage it and what flows on from that is a position of self righteousness you ever find yourself looking down on another human being because they don't live by the standards you live by that's because you're living by the law that's because you're living by the law not living by grace and you've made the law manageable and Jesus condemned the

Pharisees for that secondly grateful joy is a motive that will lead us to much more endurance in obedience than fearful compliance fearful compliance makes obedience a drudgery and it's a drudgery that cannot cope with the tough times the difficult times without the gospel we may obey the law but we will hate the law we will use it but we will not truly love it so if you look at the commands of Jesus and you go oh well I've got to do it I better do it it's kind of like my kids when I say you need to clean your room stamp stamp stamp you know try it with a smile on your face this time you know it's it's I'm gonna do it but I'm oh I don't love it don't see it as a good thing at all once we understand salvation by promise we do not obey God any longer for our sake we obey God for his sake we use the law to please him and to delight in our gracious father because the way he has defined life is for our flourishing for our good so the point of all this this text in front of us today is that the law and grace work together for Christian salvation many people want a sense of joy and acceptance but they will not admit the seriousness of their sin just give me the good news about Jesus without this sin stuff they will not listen to the laws searching and painful analysis of their hearts and their lives but unless we see how hopeless and how profoundly sinful we are the message of salvation will never be exhilarating it will never be liberating never be exhilarating or liberating unless we know how huge our debt is we cannot have any idea how great Christ's payment of it was if we think we're not all that bad the idea of grace will never ever change us the law shows us who we really are and points us to see Jesus as he really is a saviour that we need a saviour who obeyed the law on our behalf died in our place that we might receive the promised blessing to Abraham see friends salvation is so much more than just forgiveness it is so much more than being able to answer a couple of questions you know in the right kind of way grace and law work together to allow us to love Jesus and enable us to show true love in grateful obedience to him they work together for salvation law needs to be obeyed in order to get a result promise just needs to be believed in order to get a result