

## ***"WHY DID GOD GIVE THE LAW?"***

### ***Galatians 3:19-24***

"Wherefore then serveth the law?" or better, "Why therefore the law?" In light of Paul's comments about the law, and its inability to bring men to salvation, this seems like a reasonable question. If salvation is through faith in the promises of God, why did God give the burden of the law to His people through Moses at Mount Sinai? The defenders of the place of the law wanted to know. Since many still misunderstand the purpose of the law, it is still a reasonable question for us to consider. Many still think that men were saved in the Old Testament by the keeping of the law. But the law was never intended to be a Saviour!

Knowing that our God is all-wise and all-good, surely His purpose in giving the law must have been wise and good. While we may not always understand His ways, we can be sure that His ways are right. In his explanation of the purpose of the law, the Apostle points to two great intentions that were in the heart of God. He relates them primarily to the people of the old order, but they still have something to say about what the law can do in our lives. In another great New Testament passage, Romans 7, the Apostle does relate his own experience of the law fulfilling these very purposes in his personal life. Most who have read that great chapter have been able to identify with the author readily.

### ***I. GOD GAVE THE LAW FOR THE REVELATION OF SIN***

In presenting the purpose of the law, Paul presents some things about the very nature of the law. He calls attention to the law being inferior to the promise of God because it was mediated through the angels. The promise was given directly, but the law was mediated. He also indicates that the law was given on a temporary basis. Basically it was to have a role only until the coming of the Saviour. This is still basically true in the experience of man. Once you become a Christian, commit your life to the Saviour, the ministry of the law has been fulfilled in your life. The law turns you over to the care of the Saviour.

But the first work of the law is that of the revelation of sin. "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." How are we to understand these words? There are two basic ideas here. First, the law was given to reveal sin in the sense of defining or identifying sin. How would we know for sure which acts and attitudes of man are sinful if God had not given to us the law? God gave the law, which is a reflection of His own holy character, that man might know what sin really is. Since God gave the law, we know that certain sexual acts are sinful. We now know that certain acts toward our neighbor are sinful. In a sense they are not sinful because the law commands or prohibits them, but rather the law prohibits them because they are sinful. God in his grace wanted man to know the things that were offensive before Him, so He gave to man the law.

We can see this purpose illustrated among our children as they go to school this week. In spite of the liberalizing of the school situation in recent years, most schools still have some rules. The administrators and teachers have determined that certain things are necessary for the conducting of school so they hand down rules which will help have such a learning situation. At the beginning of school they make the rules known so that the children will know what they can do and what they cannot do. This is what God has done. In His wisdom he has determined what is necessary to have a good universe, so, he has made known to man the rules necessary for the operation of such a world. He wants man to know what is right and what is wrong. So He gave the law.

However, there is a deeper suggestion found in this statement. Only Paul really seems to have comprehended this aspect of the law in the New Testament. "Because of transgressions" indicates that the purpose in the giving of the law was more for the purpose of the provocation of sin, rather than the limitation of sin, Does this mean that holy God actually provoked man to sinful acts? Behind this insight of Paul there is a deep insight into the true nature of man. Man is a sinner---not only by practice, but by nature. There is deep within man a sinful inclination to do wrong. He has within him a spirit of rebellion toward God. Holy God wanted man to know what was in man, so he gave to man his holy law. When man received the holy law of God, the result was that it provoked him to sin. It became the occasion of the revelation of the sinful nature that was in him. God did this for the good of man.

A few years ago I became involved as a pastor-counselor with a young man and his parents. When I would meet with the young man, sometimes it was in my office, but more often it was in jail, he would try to convince me that his attitude toward his parents was good. My conversations with them led me to believe otherwise. So out of my concern for him, I arranged a meeting in my office for the young man, his father, and myself. In the counseling process, I asked the young man to share with us what he felt the problems were. Very calmly he proceeded to lay before us the problems as he saw them. He was an example of good manners, and respect, it seemed as he talked. My first impression was that I had misjudged him. But when he had finished, I then asked the father to share his impressions of the situation. In love and kindness the father began to share some personal concerns. Almost at once a strange change came over the son. He became very nervous and agitated. He began to contradict everything his father said. He began to shout at his father. After a few minutes, he jumped up and stalked out of my office in a rage. In a little while, I followed him to confront him with the falsehoods he had been feeding me about himself and his attitudes toward his parents. The confrontation that afternoon had not created any rebellion in his attitude, it had only served the purpose of revealing it. Out of love for him,

I had confronted him with a situation in which his true attitude would be revealed to the extent that he would no longer be able to deny its reality.

This is precisely what God did in giving the law. By confronting man with His holy demands, he provoked man to reveal the sinful, rebellious attitude that was in his heart. This was done so that man might know the ugly truth about himself. Man needs to know the depths and the extent of his rebellion toward God.

## ***II. GOD GAVE THE LAW FOR THE PREPARATION FOR THE SAVIOR***

In the process of discussing the purpose of the law, Paul raises the question of its relationship to the promise. Are the two antagonistic to each other? The answer is an obvious no. The law and the promise have different, but complimentary purposes. The law was never able to impart life to man. He could show man what he ought to do, but it was never able to enable him to do it. For this reason the man who knew the law was still in need of a Savior. Indeed, the very purpose of the law involved preparation for the coming of the Savior. In presenting this aspect of the divine purpose, Paul utilizes two different figures of speech.

First, the law functions like a jailer in getting man ready for the Savior. "But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." "The Scriptures" refer especially to the Old Testament Scriptures, and mainly to the law of the Old Testament. The Holy Scriptures when properly understood and applied indicate that man is a hopeless sinner. Since this is the condition of man, the law served like a jailer to keep man "shut up" until the Savior came. The idea basically is that the law cut man off from any hope of ever saving himself, and put him in such a position that he could recognize that his only hope was the appearance of a Savior. The law strips man of his pride and self sufficiency. It painfully reminds him of his inability.

The other statement is, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." The word translated "schoolmaster", refers to a slave that was a part of the household of the wealthy Roman family. This slave was in charge of the care of a child. He would have pretty much the total welfare of the child under his control. He would determine what the child wore, when he went to play, what he would eat. He would take him to school, and see that he did his study. The bringing of the child to maturity was his responsibility. The child would escape from his control only by coming to the age of responsibility, coming to adulthood. As you can imagine, young boys would dream of the day when they would become adults, and would be able to leave the "trainer" behind.

The law is like this. God gave the law for the purpose of watching over the welfare of his people, for the purpose of bringing them at last to Christ. One of the primary things the law did was impose upon man such a sense of guilt, such a burden, such despair about ever being able to rectify his situation before God, that when the Saviour came, they would welcome him.

In a measure the law still fulfills such a function in our lives. The law cannot give us life, but it is very effective in showing us what we ought to be. It is effective in helping us to find out that our only hope is in the one that came in fullness of time, born under the law, even Jesus the Christ. Anything that will help you realize your need of the Saviour is good. So the law of God is very good.

***CONCLUSION:***

What about the Christian then, and the law? Are we to utterly disregard the law, since we are not under the law, and we are not depending upon our obedience to the law for salvation? No, I would rather encourage you to study the law of God diligently. Understanding the law will emphasize to you two things. One, it will keep you ever mindful of how much you need the Savior. Second, it will keep before you the kind of character that the Lord God is trying to develop in you. The Holy Spirit is now seeking to bring about Christ-likeness in you. Did you know that Christ was obedient to the law in every part? It was fulfilled in Him. His character is a revelation of the kind of man God wants. So as you understand the law of God, it will help you appreciate the work God is doing in your life.

Another thing that we need to keep in mind as we use the law is that it is still a tool God is pleased to use in helping men realize their need of a Saviour. In our teaching and preaching, we must not neglect the law and the prophets. While we must not present the law as the way of salvation, we must present it that men might realize their need of finding the way of salvation.

Has the law of God done its work in your heart this morning? If you have come to that place that you know your deepest need to be that of a Savior from your sin, then come to the Savior. He invites, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And He will!