

**Wherefore Serveth the Law?  
Galatians 3:19-29  
August 12, 2012**

We have seen in previous messages that God always saves by the gospel of Jesus Christ. A man is never saved by any other method. Jesus performs the necessary work and the sinner simply believes. This has always been God's way of salvation. It was God's way in the Old Testament and it is God's way in the New Testament. Salvation through Jesus Christ has always been the way of salvation and there has never been another way.

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

Acts 4:12

If there had been another way to save, God would not have given his only begotten Son. Jesus would not have endured the suffering of the cross. But, there is only one hope for mankind and that is the atoning work of Jesus Christ. All other work is useless. There is nothing anyone else can do for you. And, more importantly, there is nothing you can do for yourself—it is useless. There is nothing that you can do to undo your sin. There is no hoop for you to jump through. There is no religion that will make you accepted. You were born into this world with a nature of sin and you have committed sins. And by your sins you have proven yourself to be a sure candidate for hell. And there is no hope for you except for the work of Jesus Christ. If you are to escape God's wrath, it will not be by your work, but it will be by his work. This is the message of the gospel. And the gospel is not a new message. It is that same old glorious message. I want you to notice that the message of the gospel was preached to Abraham in the Old Testament.

*And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*

Galatians 3:8

Notice that God came to Abraham and preached the gospel. And the essence of the message was that Abraham would have a seed, and through that seed blessing and salvation would come to all nations.

Now the gospel that was preached to Abraham was preached in the form of a promise. And the word promise is used seven times in this passage. (v.14; v.16; v.17; 18; 19; 21; 22)

And let's take a look at the nature of this promise. You will notice in verse 8 that this promise to Abraham was a promise of blessing. God came to Abraham and said, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

But the promise was also a universal promise. This was not a promise for Abraham only, or for Israel only, but for the whole world of sinners. The gospel of Jesus Christ has never been owned by one people exclusively. The gospel belongs to all peoples of the world. And the aim of the gospel has always been the world.

So, the promise that was given to Abraham was a blessing kind of a promise; it was a universal kind of promise; and it was an unconditional kind of a promise.

Now by this, I mean that God required nothing of Abraham whatsoever. God didn't come to Abraham and say, "Abraham, if you will obey me then I will bless you." God came to Abraham and said, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

When God spoke this word to Abraham, He was foreseeing that he would justify the heathen through faith. (v.8) God did not foresee that he might do it, but rather that he would do it. And the promise made to Abraham was a redemptive promise. Look at the saving words that are used in this passage.

*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen . . .*

Galatians 3:8

*In thee shall all nations be blessed.*

Galatians 3:8

*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law . . .*  
Galatians 3:11

*That we might receive the promise of the Spirit . . .*  
Galatians 3:14

*God gave it (the inheritance) to Abraham by promise . . .*  
Galatians 3:18

All of these words are to show us that salvation comes through the promise that was made to Abraham. We are not talking primarily about little earthly blessings like victory over enemies or a good harvest or an earthly land flowing with milk and honey. As nice as those were in an earthly sense for Abraham's physical descendants, those earthly blessings were merely tokens compared to the great promise of redemption that was graciously and unconditionally and universally spoken in this promise to Abraham.

So, in about 2000 BC, God gave this great promise of redemption to Abraham. In essence, God said, "Get ready world, a great blessing is coming."

And then, 430 years later, God gave Abraham's physical descendants the Mosaic Law which was a system of cursing. And you say, "Wait a minute, God promised a blessing and then sent a curse?"

It seems awkward that God would promise salvation through the seed that was to come and before the seed comes, he sends a law that pronounces curses. Now let's take our text this morning and learn about the law.

### The Law curses.

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*  
Galatians 3:10

Now the Mosaic Law was given to the people of Israel. And when God descended on Mt. Sinai the mountain quaked and trembled. And when the people came to the foot of the

mountain to meet with God, they quaked and trembled with fear because it was a sinful people meeting with a holy God. And God gave them the Law. It might be more accurate to say that God imposed the Law upon them. God didn't give them a choice. He simply said, "Here is my Law. Do it." And furthermore, he said, "Do it, or die." And because the people of Israel were sinners, the Law served as a curse. That's why it says,

*For as many as are under the law are under the curse.*  
Galatians 3:10

Again, Paul calls it, *the curse of the law*, in verse 13.

### The Law is a works system.

The Law is quite different than the Promise. The Law is a doing kind of system. You must do the Law. You must do all the Law. And you must do all the Law continually.

*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (v.10)*

The Law is not a faith kind of a system.

*And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. (v.12)*

The Law is not gracious. The Law is sheer mathematics. If you violate the Law in one point, you die.

*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (v.10)*

### The Law is powerless to save.

Many of the Jews misunderstood the nature of the Law. They thought that the Law could save them. But Paul makes it clear that the Law cannot save anyone.

*But that no man is saved by the law in the sight of God, it is evident.*

Galatians 3:11

There was no power in the Law. It was a holy standard. It was a set of rules that would condemn you, but could never save you.

It is impossible that a law could give life.

Not only was it impossible for the Mosaic Law to save anyone, it is a general principle that a law cannot give life. This is contrary to the very nature of a law. A law condemns but it has no remedy for the condemned.

The Law had no effect upon the saving Promise to Abraham

*And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.*

Galatians 3:17

Not only was the Law unable to save anyone, it was also unable to set aside the Promise. The Law had no effect on the Gospel Promise. The Gospel Promise was given long before the Mosaic Law ever came along. And the Law was not designed to set aside that promise.

So, the question is, "If the Law curses, if the Law is an impossible works system, if the Law cannot save, if the Law was not sent to have some effect on the Promise to Abraham,

*Wherefore then serveth the Law?*

Galatians 19

And we will take a few minutes this morning to address this question. The Jews, in their unbelief and in their self-righteousness, completely misconstrued the purpose of the Law. Perhaps the Jews thought that God had changed his mind about the Promise to Abraham and they thought the Law brought in a different way of salvation. But we have already seen that the Law does not bring in a different way of salvation. The Law doesn't save at all.

Perhaps the Jews thought that God had changed his mind about his promise to Abraham to bless all the nations.

*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

Genesis 12:3

The Jews began to think that acceptance with God now came through the Law. They forgot the Promise to Abraham that God would bless all nations through his seed. And they began to think of themselves as the exclusive people of God. In short, they turned things upside down and elevated the Law above the Promise. They forgot about the gospel promise and missed the true use of the Law. They forgot about grace, and preferred the Law. They forgot about Abraham and preferred Moses. And when Christ came along, they had elevated the Law to such a status that they could never give it up. And they thumbed their noses at Christ thinking that they were justified by the Law.

This is not a fault that is limited to the Jews. It is common to man. The universal impression is that righteousness is obtained by the deeds of the Law. Now Gentiles were never really under the Law of Moses. But, they were under the law of the conscience. You see, God has written his law in the hearts of man, whether a man be a Jew or Gentile. (Romans 2:15) A man instinctively knows that when he kills another man he has offended God. A man knows that when he lies and steals and commits adultery that he is offending God.

And in all the world men think that they may be justified by obeying the law. They think that they can do more to please God or they can perform some work to please Him or they can perform a magic ritual to please him. This is not limited to the Jews. It is a worldwide malady.

But there is nothing that a man may do to make himself pleasing to God. So, if it is impossible to please God through the Law, then what is the purpose of the Law? And specifically, we will be talking about the Mosaic Law; that Law that was given to Israel.

Generally there is a threefold purpose of the Law. There is a civil purpose, a ceremonial purpose and a spiritual purpose.

## The Civil Purpose of the Law

When God met the people on Mt. Sinai he created a nation. He said, "I am your King, and here are your laws. And God gave them a set of laws by which the nation of sinners would be governed.

You know, if we were all upright and righteous, then there would be no need of laws. No one would have to tell us not to steal from our neighbor. No one would have to tell us not to kill one another. But we are not upright and we are not righteous. And therefore, for the purpose of civil order, God gave Israel the Law.

Now under the Mosaic Law, there were severe penalties for sin. If you killed someone, then you would be killed. If you picked up sticks on the Sabbath Day you would be killed. And so, God gave them laws to restrain the outbreak of sin. I suppose that gross sins were severely curtailed when God issued the Law. More than likely, you would think twice about committing adultery if you knew that you would be stoned to death if you were caught. And so, for the protection of society and for civil order, God imposed the Law on Israel.

Now the Law didn't stop people from sinning, but it stopped them from carrying out the act in many cases. The Law didn't stop a man from wanting to kill his brother, but perhaps it stopped him from doing so. The Law didn't stop the lust in the heart, but perhaps it stopped the act itself. So you see that the Law perhaps restrained the outbreak of sin, but it did so not by making the man righteous. Rather, it did so by compulsion. The Jew was restrained from evil deeds because he feared the penalty.

**Example: Can you imagine the chaos if we had no laws in our country? Why, if your neighbor wanted your car, he would just come into your driveway and take it, because there would be no law against it. If a man was angry with you, he might simply take a gun and shoot you, because there is no law against it. So, you see how the first purpose of law is to restrain the wicked. So, God has instituted governments and laws for the protection of society against one another.**

So the Mosaic Law was designed first of all as a means of civil order for the nation of Israel. But there was another purpose.

### The Ceremonial Purpose of the Law

It is perfectly obvious, after studying the book of Hebrews that one of the chief purposes of the Mosaic Law system was to typify Christ. All of the ceremonies and all of the rituals were beautiful pictures of the coming Christ. And they are quite instructive even today as we study the meaning of these types. But, if you take Christ out of the rituals, if you fail to recognize that He is the one they pointed to, those rituals become rather strange and confusing religious acts. Killing animals; burning incense; dressing sinners up in fancy clothes and calling them priests; all of these things were empty and meaningless except that they typified Christ.

So, the second purpose of the Law was to foreshadow the coming of the real Savior, the real Priest, the real Mediator, the real King.

So there was a civil purpose of the Law and there was a ceremonial purpose of the Law. But, this is not really what Paul has in mind here in Galatians. The Law did more than just serve as a civil law. It did more than just serve as a ceremonial foreshadowing of Christ. There was a spiritual purpose of the Law.

### The Spiritual Purpose of the Law

Now we have already seen that the Law was not given to save anyone. The Promise to Abraham was given to save.

I. The first spiritual purpose of the Law was to reveal sin.

You will notice in verse 19 that the reason for the Law was transgressions. And when God laid out his Law in writing, in great detail, it was to reveal to the sinner his great sin.

The purpose of the Law was to show the sinner his utter sinfulness. The Law was designed to humble sinners. It was designed to be the hammer that pounds the conscience of the

sinner into pieces. It was designed to be the thunder that warns of hell. It was the lightening of God's wrath. It was designed to bring down the proud and to shame the hypocrites.

The things that happened at Mt. Sinai portrayed the proper use of the Law. When the people came out of Egypt by the power of God, why, the people must have thought they were full of God's holiness. They boasted, "We are the people of God." All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." (Ex.19:8)

And then when they prepared to meet God at the foot of the mountain, they washed their clothes and they refrained from their wives and they prepared all around to meet with God. And then, when Moses led them out to the foot of the mountain, they saw the whole mountain burning and smoking and cracking with fierce lightning all around them. And as God came down the mountain the sound of the trumpet blew louder and louder and thunder clapped and they were so frightened that they begged Moses not to let God speak to them. (Ex.20:19)

Why were they frightened to meet God? It is because they were unholy creatures and he is imminently holy. And this is the proper purpose of the Law. It is to reveal to us and to convince us that we cannot stand before Him.

II. The second spiritual purpose of the Law is leave us with no other option but grace.

When we have tried to gain acceptance by the Law and we have failed miserably day after day; when it has finally beaten us down and crushed all hope in us; when the axe has been laid to the root of our self-worth and our pride has been stripped away from us; then we are left with no hope but the sheer grace of God.

Let me leave you with a little story.

**Example: Perhaps you have come to the Law for salvation, thinking yourself to be something. And you knock on Mr. Law's door, and when he comes to the door, you are startled because he is a huge, terrifying man and he is holding an axe in his hand. And trembling at the front door, you ask Mr. Law, if he might give you a letter of**

**recommendation so that God might accept you and you will be allowed to enter heaven. But Mr. Law says, "I will not give you my recommendation, but I will kill you."**

**And Mr. Law pushes open the door and raises the axe to kill you and you turn and run as fast as you can go. And you hear Mr. Law behind you and he is chasing you and he is gaining on you and he is holding the axe in the air ready to strike.**

**And there is only one other house on this country road. And you run as fast as you can, but Mr. Law is about to overtake you. And in desperation, looking for anyone to help you, you veer up the walkway of this other house. And running up the walk, you notice the sign on the mailbox. It says, "The house of Mr. Grace."**

**And as you reach the front porch, hemmed in, with nowhere else to go, Mr. Grace opens the front door and pulls you in to safety.**

**And you hide behind Mr. Grace thinking that surely Mr. Law will overpower Mr. Grace and then kill you. But, to your surprise, Mr. Grace greets Mr. Law with a friendly greeting.**

**"Why hello Mr. Law. I see you have brought me another soul that I might show the way to heaven. I believe that is the fifth one this week."**

**"Yes, it has been a good week," says Mr. Law. "I hope to bring you some more next week."**

**"Good day, Mr. Grace."**

**"Good day, Mr. Law and keep up the good work."**

You see, the Law was not designed to save you. But it was designed to chase you and drive you to that only other option which is the free grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. If you refuse the open door of God's grace, then Mr. Law will overtake you and you will die.

Remember that the Promise to Abraham was a gospel promise of grace and mercy and salvation by faith. But no one is a good candidate for grace, until his self-righteousness is broken down by the Law. None of us will be receptive to grace until we are chased into the arms of grace by an unforgiving law.

There is a monster that lives within us that is called self-righteousness. It is the most dangerous beast of all. And it will cause us to look for heaven at the wrong door. Heaven is not found at the doorstep of the Law. Heaven is found at the doorstep of grace.

Now some will say that we preach that there is no value in the Law. But, we do not preach that at all. The Law is good if it is used lawfully. But I warn you that there is no saving power in the Law. There is only condemning power in the Law. And the law is very powerful to condemn. The Law has chased countless millions down the street and only those who flee into the house of grace will find refuge. All others are devoured by the unrelenting holy standards of God's law.

Jesus is Mr. Grace. His house is right down the street from Mr. Law. Though Mr. Law is a terrifying man, Mr. Law actually works for Jesus. You see, Jesus employs Mr. Law day by day to chase down and devour the unrighteous, but to drive the elect to the doorstep of Jesus.

Now let me say this, once the Law has chased you into the safe haven of the grace of Christ, don't ever go back and knock on Mr. Law's door again. This was the error of the Galatians. They were tempted to look once again to the Law for salvation. They were saying, "We must be circumcised. We must keep the Jewish food regulations. We must adopt the Mosaic Law."

And Paul says, "O foolish Galatians. Why do you want to go knocking on Mr. Law's door again? You tempted him once, and you fled to Christ. Are you going to go back to him again?"

The Christian life is faith in Christ and Christ alone. It is putting absolutely no confidence in yourself and all your confidence in Him. The Christian life says, "I can't do it, but he has done it."

All of our service to Christ is done out of grateful appreciation for what he freely has already done for us. Under the law, we do our deeds out of fear and compulsion. But under grace, we serve him out of love. And that makes all the difference.