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June 27, 2003

Posted: 6/27/03

LifeWay Family Bible Series for July 13

The law of Moses is not equipped for salvation

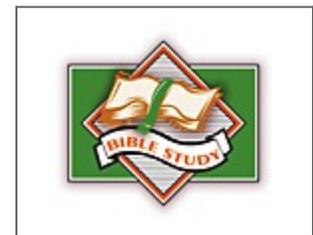
Galatians 3:10-14, 18-25

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Growing out of the historical context of Galatians 1-2, Paul addressed the question of the purpose of the Mosaic law in Galatians 3-4. Paul told what the law could and could not do.

The Mosaic law was never meant to be a way of salvation. The Mosaic law was never meant to be a means by which a person maintained a relationship of favor with God. Salvation is experienced by God's grace through a person's faith in Jesus Christ, not by striving to keep all God's commandments.



Even believers can begin to think that although they were saved by grace,

they must keep all of God's commandments to maintain their relationship with God. To adopt such a view is the attempt to earn and maintain God's favor through one's own efforts. In Galatians 3, Paul is encouraging believers to reject all forms of legalism and to live by God's promise and gift of grace.

What causes legalism (trying to earn salvation and God's favor by keeping religious laws) to be so enticing? One would think a person would be attracted by grace, not legalism. There seems to be something in the hearts of all human beings that wants to play a major role in securing salvation for themselves. To acknowledge one cannot save himself/herself, or at least play a major role in it, demands humility. Many people are unwilling to admit their total dependence on God. That is why every other world religion, unlike Christianity, teaches that human works contribute to gaining personal salvation.

The Galatians seemed captivated by this idea. Paul wrote them to show the impossibility of relating to God on the basis of keeping God's law.

In Galatians 3:10, Paul quoted Deuteronomy 27:26 to show the law requires complete and constant obedience. If people want to relate to God on the basis of keeping his laws, they cannot choose only the ones they want to keep; they must keep all of God's laws. If a person obeys every law of God except one, that person is guilty before God.

Paul assumes the impossibility for any human being to give complete and constant obedience to all of God's laws. Since God and his law are perfect, it is therefore impossible for any human being to earn favor with God by obedience to his laws. God gives his forgiveness and favor to those who by faith receive what Jesus Christ did for them. Through faith in Christ a person is counted righteous in God's sight.

This is the very heart of the Christian faith: Jesus Christ has done for

humanity on the cross what it could not do for itself. "He redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Paul is presenting the substitutionary nature of Christ's death. Through faith in Christ's death, people can be set free from the penalty and slavery of sin. How? Christ paid the price for them. He suffered the punishment for sin that human beings deserved to suffer. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

In Galatians 3:13, Paul quoted Deuteronomy 21:23 to confirm what he said about the cross of Christ: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Every criminal, who was sentenced to death under the Mosaic law and executed was then hanged on a tree as a symbol of God's rejection.

Hanging on a tree was an outward sign of a person who was cursed in God's sight. To be nailed to a cross was the equivalent to being hanged on a tree. Christ being crucified on a cross was the equivalent of having died under the curse of God. No wonder the Jews found it almost impossible to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. How could the Christ, the anointed One of God, instead of reigning on a throne, hang on a tree?

Such an act was incredulous. Jesus dying by hanging on a tree was an almost insurmountable stumbling block to the Jews, unless they saw by faith that the curse he bore was for them. Jesus did not die for his own sins; he became a curse "for us" (Galatians 3:13).

Christianity says only in the person and work of Jesus Christ did God act for the salvation of humankind. A person has to be in Christ in order to receive God's salvation.

How does a person become united to Christ? The answer is "through faith." Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 in Galatians 2:11: "The righteous will live by faith." He then says it himself in Galatians 3:14: "He redeemed us in order

that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”

Faith is receiving all of Jesus Christ personally. Faith is not a human work. The value of saving faith is not in faith itself; it is in the object of faith, Jesus Christ. Faith says, “Christ was lifted up on the cross for my sins. I believe it is only there that I am made right with God.”

Galatians 3:18-25 reinforces that the purpose of the law was to show a person's guilt before God and his/her need for Jesus Christ. Now that Christ has come, there is no longer a need for a tutor like the rituals of the Old Testament, which were designed to show people their sinfulness and guide them to Christ.

Does this mean that Christians are free to disobey the commandments of God? Of course not! The believer's freedom from the law is not a freedom to sin, but a freedom to serve and obey God even more completely—from the heart.

Questions for discussion

- ◆ Does the law serve a purpose today, or did Christ replace the law?

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