

## THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

"Why the Mosaic Law?"(1)

Galatians 3:19-23

### Introduction

1. The Galatian letter is a defense of the doctrine taught in Romans--justification by grace through faith alone. To be saved from one's sin and enjoy a right standing before the thrice holy God, only a gift from God can make it possible. God has done this through His Son Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8, 9).

2. There were some teachers who came from Jerusalem to the churches of Galatia. They exercised their efforts to persuade the believers that God's grace gift for salvation was not really available by grace through faith. This in effect said that the work of Jesus Christ at Calvary was not efficient to save. The Spirit of God inspired Paul the apostle to defend Christ's work against any dilution.

3. The argument of this letter focuses on the Mosaic law. It has been concluded that the law is not required to claim the gift of salvation by grace through faith (Gal. 2:16). In this chapter, the apostle has shown that Abraham's life, his faith, and God's promises to him all support the gift/grace/faith method of salvation. The question arises--why than the law (Gal. 3:19)? This is a logical question and receives a careful reply. Here are some of the reasons for the law as given in this context:-

1. The LAW indicates a transgression v. 19

The verb "added" should better be understood to mean "come in beside." In no way is it suggesting a modification of the promise (vv. 15-18). Such is an utter impossibility (cf. vv. 15, 18). The law, in effect, created transgressions. Nothing could be done to make a man a sinner. This he was by birth, as is every child of Adam. After the giving of the law, however, the sinners (which we all are!) now become transgressors! Actual violators of His law. To put it succinctly the sinfulness of mankind did not strike home by the promise, so law was given so that sin would be revealed in a form in which it could neither be mistaken nor excused. What a purpose!

2. The LAW indicates a limitation v. 19

The interim nature of the law is clearly stated: "'till the Seed should come by Whom the promise has been made" (perfect passive verb). There is a terminus ad quem noted, namely, till the coming of Messiah (Christ). This is an oblique reference to the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:17). The promise had an abiding arrangement while the law was only a stage in God's overall program.

3. The LAW indicates a distinction vv. 19, 20

It is clear that the law came by way of two mediators to the Jewish people. First, the verb "ordained" means "commanded" or "administered." The agent associated with

this is the "angels" (cf. Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:38, 52; Heb. 2:2). This fact shows the inferiority of the law over the Gospel, but also shares how the law served as a matter brought to man by the mediation of angels.

Moreover, beside the angels, the phrase "in the hand of a mediator" points to a human agency. While not stating it, the obvious connection is with Moses (Ex. 20:19; Deut. 5:5). Aside from here and v. 20, the word "mediator" is only used of Christ (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). In O.T., it is only found in Job 9:33 and translated "daysman" in the KJV.

Now, although there have been over 400 interpretations for v. 20, we believe the great message of the verse is the distinction between the law and promise. The former served mediators, but the promise was made directly by God to Abraham. The promise depends only upon God Himself. There were no mediators as with the law!

#### 4. The LAW indicates a salvation v. 21

So what else does the law serve? It was given to show that promise and law are not contradictory principles. God cannot be at war with Himself! Hence, the conditional clause of this verse is second class i.e. the matter is determined as unfulfilled (cf. 2:21). So the law serves to show that it cannot give life i.e. spiritual life. The law brings death, not life (Rom. 7:9, 10). Had the law not been given, this fact would not have been demonstrated.

#### 5. The LAW indicates a revelation v. 22.

Here is the testimony of the Scriptures. It is contrary to the 2nd class condition of the previous verse. The verb "concluded" is an aorist active indicative. It states a fact. The meaning is that Scripture has "shut up" or "enclosed as in a net" (cf. fish in Luke 5:6) all "under sin." The state of mankind before God had to be brought home so that those deeply and genuinely conscious of guilt would seek justification before the holy God. Let it be said: a man must see himself a sinner before he can seek salvation. Guilt comes before grace! Unless a person sees himself lost and undone, he will never go to Christ to be found and saved! This should teach us how to witness to lost souls!!! So the law evoked Scripture teaching about sin and the incredible truth of "the promise by faith (i.e. out of faith) on Jesus Christ (objective genitive) might be given to believers" (present tense). It was the law and works which caused this wonderful truth to come forward as outlined here!

#### Conclusion

So what services does the law have? Many! It shows without any question 1) That sin is transgression. 2) That law has a limitation which promise does not have. 3) That law came through mediation, but not so promise. There is a distinction. 4) That soul salvation is impossible by the law, 5) that the promise set on Christ is available only through faith. The law in brief, looks for "workers" while the promise looks for "believers." The law falls short, but the promise extends to eternity. Amen.