

# **GALATIANS: THE ONE TRUE GOSPEL**



## **WEEK 14 THE LAW: WHY AND WHY NOT? GALATIANS 3:19-22**

Van Nuys Bible Study  
Doulos Fellowship Group  
Grace Community Church

Prepared by Hans Kaufman  
2014

## Galatians 3:19-22 – The Law: Why and Why Not?

---

### The Text

---

Why then the law?

It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.

Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not!

For if a law had been given that could give life,  
then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin,  
so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

---

### Introduction

---

- “False brothers” (the Judaizers) have infiltrated the Galatian churches.
  - Paul is astonished that some of the Galatians are abandoning the gospel to be justified by the law.
  - He has shown the superiority of the promise God made to Abraham. The time has come for him to highlight the inferiority of the law.
- 

### Principal Proposition

---

The law was never intended to give us life, but to expose our sinfulness/inability to live according to righteousness. As good as the law is, we hold to a better promise that God made with Himself. Therefore, the only way to receive life is through faith in Jesus because He is the fulfillment of that promise.

---

## Literary Context

---

- A. Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel (1:11-2:21)
  - B. Paul's Explanation of the Gospel (3:1-4:11)
    - 1. The Experience of the Galatians (3:1-5)
    - 2. The Example of Abraham (3:6-9)
    - 3. The Curse of the Law (3:10-14)
    - 4. **The Law and the Abrahamic Covenant (3:15-4:11)**
- 

## Literary Structure

---

### The Law: Why and Why Not?

The Intermediary	(v. 19)
The Implication	(v. 20-21)
The Imprisonment	(v. 22)

---

## Interpretive Comments

---

### The Law: Why and Why Not?

#### The Intermediary

v. 19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary.

- “Why then the law?”
  - If salvation has always been by faith and not by observing the law... and Jesus is the promised fulfillment of the covenant God made to Abraham... what was the purpose of the law?
- “It was added because of transgressions”
  - Paul's answer is abrupt and blunt.



- This phrase could mean that the law was added to:
  1. provide a sacrificial system to deal briefly with transgressions
  2. teach people more clearly what God’s holiness requires and thereby to limit transgressions
  3. give credence to God’s commands via an explicitly written law
  4. reveal people’s sinfulness and need for a savior

What do you think Paul had in mind when he wrote this letter to the Galatian churches? Why?

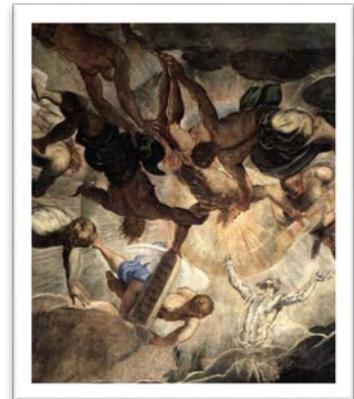
Romans 3:20; 5:18-21; 7:7-12 – No peeking!

➤ “until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made”

- The law was part of a temporary covenant. God never intended for it to last forever (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 7:12; 8:13; Romans 6:14; 7:4-6).
- Paul has already argued that the use of the singular noun (offspring) in Genesis 17:19 points directly to Jesus (Galatians 3:16).

➤ “and it was put in place through angels”

- Other versions say: "ordained through angels" (NASB), "put into effect through angels" (HCSB), "administered through angels" (NET)
- Contrary to coloring books and Sunday school felt board representations, Moses was not alone with God when he received the law on Mount Sinai. (Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2).



➤ “by an intermediary”

- When God gave His law to the people, it was not personal—like when He made His promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-7; 18:1-33). Instead, He used Moses as an intermediary (Leviticus 26:46; John 1:17).
- Moses and the angels were great, but they were just intermediaries in the exchange between God and man.

*God gave the covenant of law through two sets of mediators, first through angels and then by them through Moses to the people. – John MacArthur*

- We have one intermediary under the new covenant – Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).

### The Implication

v. 20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.”

➤ “Now an intermediary implies more than one”

- An intermediary is only needed when there is more than one party involved.



➤ “but God is one”

- However, when God ratified His covenant with Abraham, He did so alone (Genesis 15:7-21).
- God’s ultimate revelation does not come through channels, but from Him alone. Since Jesus is fully God, His truth is God’s truth.

v. 21 Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

➤ “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?”

- Are God’s promises and the law at odds with each other? Or do they work together somehow?

➤ “Certainly not!”

- Paul answers his question with the most emphatic negative of his language.

➤ “For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law”

- The law has always been powerless to give life or save a person (Romans 7:10; Hebrews 7:18-19; 10:1).

- If a law had been given that would make salvation possible, it would be at odds with the promise (rather than compliment it).
- The law came from God, displayed His holiness, and played an important role in redemptive history. Despite its inferiority, Paul still referred to it as “holy and righteous and good” (Romans 7:12). It is because of humanity’s sinfulness (our inability to keep the law) that the law was powerless to give life.

### The Imprisonment

v. 22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe

➤ “But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin”

- The word “imprisoned” means *to catch by enclosing, close up together, hem in, enclose*.<sup>1</sup>
- Everyone has been desperately trapped in sin.



➤ “so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe”

- “So that...” in other words: “here is the reason why...”

*The ultimate purpose of shutting up men under sin and death was that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

– John MacArthur

---

### Summary

---

*The law was not given to secure the promise. Instead, it was given to increase transgressions. Further, the Mosaic law was never intended to be in force forever. It was a temporary custodian until the arrival of the promise, namely, Christ Jesus. Now that faith in Christ has arrived, the era of the Mosaic law has passed away. – Thomas Schreiner*

---

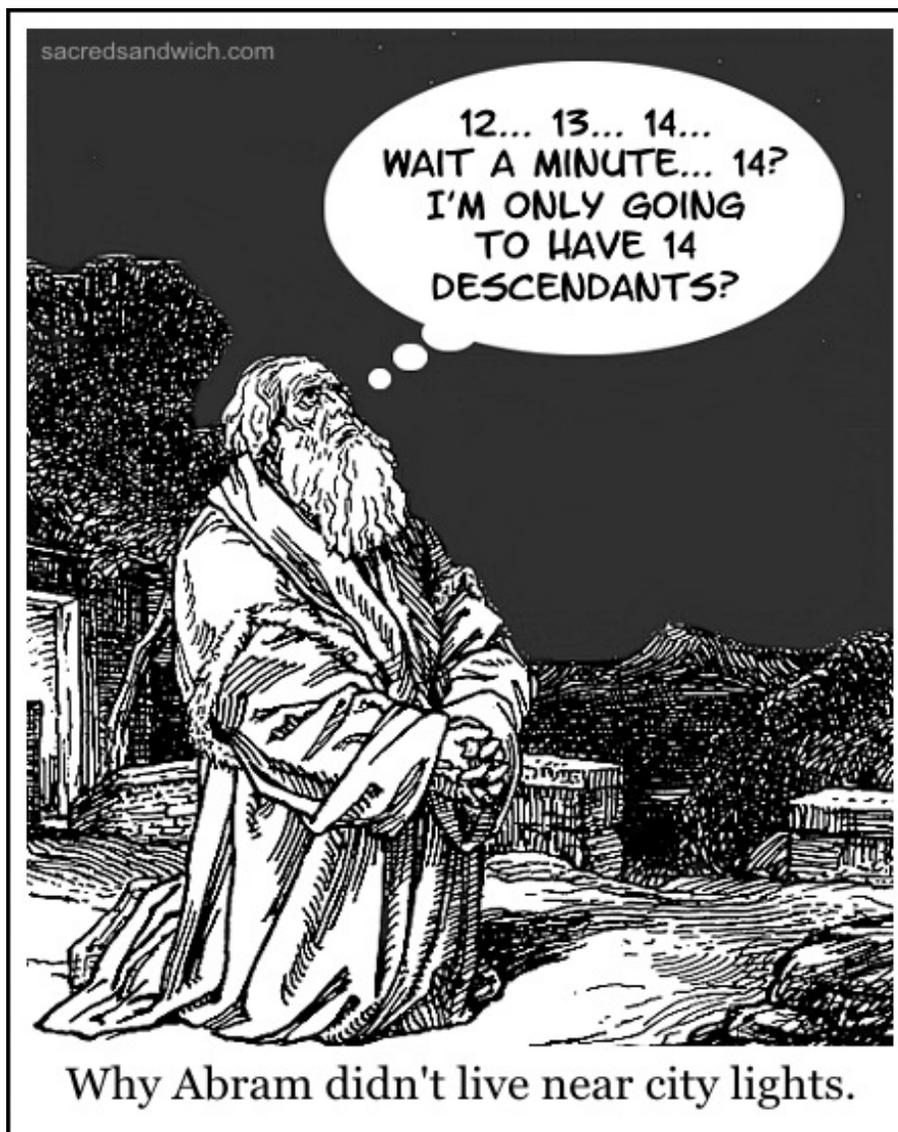
<sup>1</sup> William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 952.

---

## Discussion Questions

---

- What do you think Paul had in mind when he wrote this letter to the Galatian churches? Why? (pg. 4)
- Are God's promises and the law at odds with each other? Or do they work together somehow? (pg. 5)



---

## Final Food For Thought

---

How many purposes of the law are there?

Here is one popular opinion:

\* \* \* \* \*

### *The Three Purposes of the Law*

Scripture shows that God intends His law to function in three ways, which Calvin crystallized in classic form for the church's benefit as the law's threefold use.

Its first function is to be a mirror reflecting to us both the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness and shortcomings. As Augustine wrote, "the law bids us, as we try to fulfill its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask the help of grace." The law is meant to give knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:7–11), and by showing us our need of pardon and our danger of damnation to lead us in repentance and faith to Christ (Gal. 3:19–24).

A second function, the "civil use," is to restrain evil. Though the law cannot change the heart, it can to some extent inhibit lawlessness by its threats of judgment, especially when backed by a civil code that administers punishment for proven offenses (Deut. 13:6–11; 19:16–21; Rom. 13:3, 4). Thus it secures civil order, and serves to protect the righteous from the unjust.

Its third function is to guide the regenerate into the good works that God has planned for them (Eph. 2:10). The law tells God's children what will please their heavenly Father. It could be called their family code. Christ was speaking of this third use of the law when He said that those who become His disciples must be taught to do all that He had commanded (Matt. 28:20), and that obedience to His commands will prove the reality of one's love for Him (John 14:15). The Christian is free from the law as a system of salvation (Rom. 6:14; 7:4, 6; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 2:15–19; 3:25), but is "under the law of Christ" as a rule of life (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Do you agree or disagree with Calvin? Why?

---

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 264.