

Nothing but the Blood (Part 9)

Galatians 3:19-22

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We have already seen in Paul's letter to the Galatians that they readily accepted the gospel when Paul delivered it to them, but were quickly led astray by agitators who insisted on following the Law in order to maintain one's standing before God. In Galatians 3, Paul compares following the Law with having faith in Jesus, and explains why it is foolish to go back to the Law after being saved through faith. Furthermore, salvation has always been by grace through faith because it isn't in God's character to require us to earn what is impossible for us to earn.

Last time we learned that the Law is inferior because it is a conditional contract that requires two parties to adhere to the stipulations, it doesn't produce righteousness or lead to salvation, and it is cold and heartless. The Law is built on justice, not on love or grace. In the Law sin is punished, an eye for an eye. As a result, the Law is more about curses than blessings. Deuteronomy 28 spends 14 verses talking about blessings for obedience and 54 verses talking about curses for disobedience. This is because our disobedience will always outweigh our obedience. The Law shows us our sin, but it also shows us that the God we know couldn't possibly require us to earn salvation through the Law. The cold and conditional nature of the Law doesn't represent the unconditional love that God has for us.

Paul continues in vv. 19-22 to further explain the weaknesses of the Law. First, he explains why the Law was given in the first place if it was so inferior. The expression "because of transgressions" speaks of more than just sin, but has the connotation of violation. By codifying rules, the Law helps us recognize our own sin whenever we violate the rules. It reveals sin, and it condemns us for it. The Law is like many Chinese parents who always point out faults in their children. Yet this isn't the character of God. While God wants us to recognize our sin, He doesn't simply want to bring us down. Rather, He wants us to see our sin and its dire consequences so we will turn to Him in faith for salvation. God doesn't want to be known for His wrath. He wants to be known for His mercy, grace, and love.

Second, Paul says in v. 19 that the Law is temporal. It was *added* (meaning it had a beginning) because of transgressions *until* (meaning it had an end) the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. In contrast, salvation by faith isn't temporal. Salvation has been by faith from the beginning.

Third, the Law separates God from people. Verses 19-20 state that the Law was put into effect through angels by a mediator (Moses). It came from God, to angels, to Moses, then to Israel. Although Exodus 33:11 says Moses spoke to God face to face, it only means he spoke to God as directly as was possible, not that he actually saw God's face. Based on Exodus 33:20 we know that no man can see God's face, and based on John 1:18 we know that nobody except Jesus has ever seen God. Therefore as Galatians 3:19 suggests, Moses' encounters with God were through the Lord's emissaries (i.e, angelic messengers). This separation is further reinforced by the Law through the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. Only the high priest could enter, and only once a year, and only through atoning blood. The Law separates us from God, but through faith God draws us near.

Fourth, the Law isn't life-giving. Verse 21 says that it was never intended to give us eternal life and righteousness. Following rules cannot earn us eternal life; it is only given by the grace of God. If the Law could bring salvation, God wouldn't have sent His only Son.

But where the Law fails, God fulfills. Moses was a mediator between Israel and God because there was separation between them, caused by the sin that was revealed through the Law. But v. 20 says God is one. Jesus is our mediator, and unlike Moses He is one with God, and through unity in Him we are also brought close to God. This idea of one party also contrasts with the two-party contract aspect of the Law. God's promise to Abraham required only one party. God walked through the halves of the animals alone. The promise of salvation isn't conditional on our good work or obedience.

Finally in v. 22 Paul drives home the point that righteousness and eternal life cannot be earned through the Law. The Law merely points out the sins that imprison and condemn us. But through faith in God's promise, we are saved from sin. Paul emphasizes that salvation is given not earned. God offers salvation to anyone who will accept it in faith. This is who He is.

Though we don't tend to turn back to the Law, this passage applies because it tells us who God is. Romans 8:32 summarizes God's character well. He graciously gives us all things. God isn't vindictive. He wants to give us life and wants us to be close to Him. He gives it to us for free because we cannot earn it. So let us hold to our faith and praise Him for who He is in our lives.