

“The Law Guides Us to Christ”

Galatians 3: 15-25

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The Promise supersedes the law. Abraham (Abram) was called by God to leave his current home and follow God’s promise which would lead to the place of his inheritance. This inheritance would be for him and his offspring – an inheritance which would culminate in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the climax of Abraham’s offspring as the promised Messiah – the saviour of the world sent by God. Though Abraham may not have fully understood the promise, in faith he trusted God and accepted it.

Abraham’s life was good. He had great wealth in land and cattle, and a large family. Abraham was already 75 years old when he left the city of Ur. Ur was a highly developed place of skilled craftsmanship, wealth, advanced technology and science. It would have been a comfortable place for Abraham, yet he turned his back on a great metropolis and in faith set out for a land he knew very little about – and a place which would probably not offer much in the way of material benefits. Would you leave your place of comfort and respond to God’s call?

Paul, the author of the letter to the Galatians, asserts that God’s promise to Abraham and Abraham accepting that promise in faith brought the inheritance (God’s salvation) to Abraham. Abraham did not earn his standing before God because of his good works or any law he kept. It was a gift from God given in grace.

¹⁷ My point is this: the law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise.

The purpose of the Law: One could say that the purpose of the law (the Ten Commandments) is to lead us to Christ who is our saviour. We have many distractions in our daily life which tempt us to follow the morals and values of society. These societal values can build anxiety in us because we want to fit in and desire to feel successful and look good in relation to others. On the other hand, when we follow the law of God (God’s morals and values), we realize that we fail – we sin and need God’s grace through the Holy Spirit to strengthen and lead us back to Christ our saviour.

Jesus summarized the law with the most important ingredient – love! “Love the lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.” The first four commandments are summarized in “Love the lord your God with all your heart” and the last six are summarized in “Love your neighbour as yourself.” The purpose of the law then is to point us to our destination that is - God’s gift of our saviour Jesus Christ, and block out the ‘laws’ of society which distract us. The law of God, for example, functions like blinders on horses. Like humans, horses have peripheral vision. When a horse is racing, the blinders help it stay focused on the destination, the finish line. Without the blinders, the horse would easily be distracted and veer off track. For humans, the law functions to keep us focused on God’s loving grace and not be distracted by false commands from the world which increase our anxiety and make us forget that we are loved and that we belong to God and not to the world.

²¹ Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. ²² But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ^[g] might be given to those who believe. The law does not have life of its own. Rather, following the law of God keeps us focused on the gift of God's grace. When we think we can earn our way to heaven because we have done good things and are a 'good person' then we have missed the point and we have imprisoned ourselves to a law which we cannot keep.

The law is the guardian. **²³ Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.** Paul was teaching the people of Galatia that until Christ came, the law functioned as a guardian (disciplinarian) to keep people focused on the promise of God, not on their own righteous works. Paul was teaching that the law was not to function as a goal of reaching perfection because one can never attain that. Rather, the law functions as a guide to make us realize our own vulnerability and our need for forgiveness and reconciliation given freely to each of us in Christ.

The rules (laws) we live by. What rules (laws) do you live by? The laws of society are continually manipulating us through internet, television, the newspaper, friends, others. Do you have the newest cell phone? If we do not follow these rules, we feel we are not worthy, we do not belong, or that we that do not matter. If you do not act a certain way or haven't prepared properly for retirement, or do not have the images of success, you are not good enough. Are you living by these laws? You can do all the 'right things', but if you do not have love – you gain nothing (I Corinthians 13).

Risking for the Gospel. We can easily get caught up in the daily messages we hear in our culture. Those messages can become our point of reference in how we think and act. We respond to this messaging by wanting to play it safe to fit in and be seen as okay. Certainly, it is important that one is responsible in planning for the future. However, if security and playing it safe supersedes responding to God's call and getting out of your comfort zone, you are imprisoned by a false Gospel. Abraham risked losing the life he knew in favour of following the call from God to leave. He knew he could trust God.

Too often being efficient with our money is the law we follow. The question we hear in the media goes something like this: Have you invested your money in a way which will bring the best return? The monetary returns can become more important than anything else in life. Money can easily become our saviour and we become chained to it. The question is this: How much is enough money? The answer: Just a little more. Not only can this thinking lead to a lack of generosity and lack of trust in Christ, but also leads to pointing the finger at those who do not have enough to live. In our western democracies we are tempted to categorize poor people as those who are not quite as valuable as us. Somehow the thinking is that we deserve the material prosperity we have. The almighty dollar is behind arms deals being signed and renewed with countries that clearly use these weapons in causing suffering on the poor and vulnerable. The poor and the vulnerable are the people Christ calls us to love and embrace (Luke 4 18)!

As people of grace, let us be free to leave our privilege and comforts and embrace the promises of the true giver of life – our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Abraham knew he could trust God and accept his promise. We can do the same. Amen.