

## Galatians Chapter 3

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As most you know, I constantly preach that Christians are saved by faith alone. I always assume most of the readers here accept that we're saved just by believing Jesus is God, that He died for every sin we will ever commit, and He is now at God's right hand! That set of facts leads to the question, why study biblical laws if we're saved by faith alone? Obviously, they are important, or they wouldn't be biblical! As most of you know I've taught verse-by-verse through the entire bible! I'd argue those laws teach us His standards for right and wrong (the moral laws!) What Chapter 3 teaches and what I want to discuss here is simply, what's the Christian relationship to God's laws? Paul states in Chapter 3 the law teaches what obedience to God is! Let me put it this way, Jesus teaches us things we must do as believers! Yes, Jesus taught a lot of things on how we're to act as His witnesses to the world. It does not mean obeying those laws are required for salvation. It simply means living as He desires will make us into the type of people God wants us to be as a living witness for Him!

When I think of God's laws, I tend to divide them into three categories. The first is ceremonial laws, as to separate the Jewish people from the pagan cultures around them! Those laws include how they're to dress and what they could eat! The New Testament teaches Christians are not required to eat a Kosher diet (e.g., combining meat and cheese). That's because we're separated from nonbeliever by the way we are supposed to act (e.g. loving each other) and not by say our diet. The book of Acts in effect, declares all food clean when Peter had a vision of the sheet with all sorts of unclean animals on it! (See Chapter 10 of Acts.) Back to the law: The second "law category" are those that point to Jesus. For example, we don't burn animals on "The" altar as His Temple doesn't stand today, plus all those sacrifices described in the Old Testament point to Jesus. The final category is the moral laws. The 10 Commandments is a prime example of that! To me, the key word is gratitude. Since I'm grateful for what Jesus did for me, out of gratitude I want to live as He desires. As I preach, it's not about being "more saved" but being a good witness for Jesus.

The reason I'm getting into all of this is the people Paul was writing to in this letter, already believed in the fact Jesus is God. There were false teachers saying in effect "That's not good enough". They taught in order to be saved in effect one must live like a Jewish person! Why would they do this? Part of is a fear that God would permanently never care about Israel as a nation again (a false teaching Romans 11 makes clear). It was also the fear that just believing wasn't good enough! After all, if we do not change our behavior how will be different from the world around us? The point is this was not only a danger to the churches Paul wrote to, but it is to any and all believers as well. Let's be honest, we all can struggle at times with one or more particular sin! We can easily think, "I'm not really saved since I struggle due to this or that particular sin!" We may think if only I act better, or through willpower I quit doing what I am guilty of doing! That's why it's so essential to accept the fact we're saved by faith alone. As far as sin issues, the one thing I've learned in life is to deal with it first requires a belief in God who can guide us away from that sin on His timing and His way!

In this chapter Paul gives a series of ways one can have doubts why one is saved by faith alone. Paul's logic and use of the Old Testament accepting that as God's word is His ways of proving one's saved by faith alone! Again, you may not be struggling with that issue right now. However, a day may come, in the future when one is struggling with a sin or helping a person struggle with sin. It's essential to grasp the arguments Paul makes to help ourselves and others when those moments of struggle come! That is why I want to go through Paul's reasons here on Christians observing God's laws. Yes I realize most of

us already believe we're saved by faith alone. Still, I have my moments of sin struggle and I suspect all of us do as well.

The first thing Paul reminds the Galatians (an area of what is today Turkey) that they were saved when they first heard the Gospel message. Paul's question is, how can you then be "more saved" by obeying God's Old Testament laws? He asks in effect, does being obedient to those laws (including all of those ceremonial laws) make one a better Christian? Paul reminds them that when they first were saved, they saw a bunch of miracles in their midst as proof that the Gospel is true! (I've always argued: God's best miracles are done with those new in the faith, until they grow in their faith and learn to trust Him more in their lives!) Paul then uses a famous line from Genesis (Paul is preaching to non-Jewish people) the fact that Abraham was considered right before God (i.e., saved) because Abraham believed God's God, (to put it simply) and the law did not come till many hundreds of years later. What God told Abraham that all nations will be blessed because of him (Genesis 22:18)! That indirectly refers to the fact people from all nations can go to heaven by believing in Jesus!

The mistake Jewish people will make is they argue that since the law came later, they became saved in that they obey the law. Paul goes through a series of proofs that the law is in effect a curse! Think of it this way, if you pass a sign saying "do not step on the grass" what are you tempted to do? God gave the law to the Jewish people to separate them from the nations around them (the ceremonial laws) and then to point the way to Christ (sacrificial laws) and finally laws about obedience which God expects people to do again as it's the best way to live and be a witness for Him!

In Verse 11 is where Paul quotes the prophet Habakkuk who lived hundreds of years after the law was given with the famous line, "the just shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Referring to the fact those of us who are saved shall live by faith that God is God (and died for our sins, etc.) and we're not saved by obedience to any set of laws. In fact, the law of Moses says one must obey all the laws for salvation. I recall an old joke that goes, "There are only two ways to be saved, one is to trust in Jesus for salvation, the other is to never sin once in one's life and tell Jesus to "move over"! Of course, none of us can live like that which is why option one is always the best choice!

Paul then reminds us that the Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 21:23) says "Cursed is everyone hung on a tree". In effect that law points to Jesus because he was hung on a wooden cross that counts as one being hung on a tree. The obvious point is Jesus became cursed for our sake!

Then of all arguments, Paul uses a promise made by God as an argument for salvation by faith. It's the promise that God made that to his offspring (singular, referring to Jesus) all are blessed. The idea is the law came 430 years later (after the last time that promise was stated to Abraham's grandson Jacob, that all the nations will be blessed because of that promise). Paul's point is the "law" can't nullify a promise (an unconditional promise) made by God to Abraham centuries before the law was given to Moses!

So why was the law added? To show us what's God's standards for perfection. To show us when "we step on the grass" and disobey His law we are guilty in God's eyes and the only way to remedy is for a perfect sacrifice (i.e., God Himself paying for our sins!) That is why Jesus must be both fully God and fully man to pay that sacrifice.

The last few verses emphasize the fact that law is not contradictory to God's promises. For example, in the book of Leviticus, it says one gets forgiveness if one does specific sacrifices. Those sacrifices point to what Jesus did which is why the temple hasn't existed for about 2,000 years now! The point is if we could be saved by keeping the law, the promise to Abraham wouldn't be necessary! In other words, we

needed the law to show we are guilty, and we fail to live up to God's standards of how He expects us to live by! Since we trust in Jesus for our salvation, that means the ceremonial aspects of the law are not needed anymore. That's why in the church there are only believers, and no other division be it by race or sex. I realize a lot of this is old news to us! I just want us to remember when we mess up and we all do, we are still saved and can still lead others back to Jesus in such moments of doubt!