

Text: Gal. 3:19-29

Title: "Why the law when it comes to true justification?"

Time: 4/28/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: *Ezekiel 4:9 Bread*<sup>TM</sup> is a bread that is made of sprouted grains. It is delicious, and I have enjoyed my fair share of it over the years.

As a student of the Bible I have also enjoyed pointing out some interesting things about the manufacturer's choice in a brand name for the bread. It is called *Ezekiel 4:9 Bread* after the book in the Bible called Ezekiel, chapter 4, verse 9. What tickles me a bit about that choice is that the bread of that Bible verse is baked by the prophet over dung to illustrate the uncleanness of God's sinful people, who had fallen under His judgment.

So the branding strategy of *Ezekiel 4:9 Bread* really depends on the assumption that people will not read that verse, or at least read it without referring to its context. It is a great illustration to us of the importance of reading a passage of Scripture in its context as we seek to understand correctly its meaning.

We need to remember that principle of Bible interpretation as Paul asks and answers an important question in verse 19 - "Why the law?"

As we look at his answer, it is important that we remember that he is talking about God's true way to justify a sinner. True justification is how a sinner's legal problem before a holy God actually can be removed. So the question this passage answers is not merely "Why the law?" but "Why the law when it comes to God's plan for true justification?"

Paul's answer is a quick one, but it is one that requires some explanation. He answers, "because of transgressions" (v. 19). So the reason the law was given was that it is part of God's plan to deal with the transgressions of sinners. It was in that sense helpful in God's work of a sinner's true justification.

But Paul understands that he needs to explain what he means by this. How does the law fit into God's plan to deal graciously with the transgressions of sinners and help solve their legal problem in view of His holiness?

Paul begins telling us how the law works into the plan of justification by describing how it does not work (vv. 19-21). He then illustrates the role of God's law in our justification with two analogies (vv. 22-26). And then he finishes the passage by explaining how the correct understanding of the law's role gives us a proper view of our identity before the world around us (vv. 27-29).

I. The role of the law in justification is not a divine contradiction (vv. 19-21).

Illustration: I do not know much about farming, but even as a student of the Bible, I know the importance of soil preparation for a healthy crop. This time of year, you see piles of manure in the fields before you see any corn. Now the fertilizer for the field is not able to contain the life that causes a plant to grow. That life belongs to the seed. But still, if a farmer wants his seeds to give birth to healthy plants, he does well to first prepare the soil.

Application: Our passage is about the way God had promised to plant a Seed in human history, who would be the source of a condemned sinner's justification and a dead sin-

ner's eternal life. He is Jesus Christ (v. 16). But before He came as that Seed, Jesus ordained the giving of God's law to prepare the soil of the human heart. It is clear that this preparation cannot give life (v. 21), but God's law does prepare our hearts to trust in the Seed who has the life.

It does so in one important way. It does so by making the demands of a bilateral covenant (vv. 19b-20).

Illustration: You may remember two weeks ago I referred to a book called, *A Promise Kept: The Story of an Unforgettable Love*. The book tells how a faithful husband, who had promised to love and care for his wife, did so even when she fell sick with Alzheimer's Disease and could do nothing to requite his love.

Application: We said then that the Abrahamic Covenant of salvation through his Seed was very much like the marriage vow described by that book. This is true because the Abrahamic Covenant was a grant covenant, or an unconditional covenant. It is simply a promise, and we can enjoy its blessing by simply receiving it by faith.

By way of contrast, Paul is reminding us here that God designed the law as a bilateral covenant, meaning that there were two parties who had to fulfill responsibilities in order for its blessings to be experienced. Angels gave it; Moses mediated it as the inspired prophet of God; God kept his end of the deal; but we all broke the covenant on our end of the deal. We break it every day. God is one, but the success of mediation requires faithfulness of two, so for that reason the law fails to bring life (vv. 20-21).

But how does all this fit into the plan of God to deal with our transgressions? Very simply, the law prepares our

heart to understand our need for a grant covenant, one based in love and grace and not work requirements, by showing us how badly we do when it comes to a bilateral covenant – we simply fail to hold up our end.

When it comes to the Mosaic law, we are law-breakers, not law-keepers, and it is important for us to know that deeply within our hearts before we are ready to put our faith in God's salvation promise in Christ. Has your heart been prepared this way for God's Seed?

Paul explains further with two analogies. We will take them one at a time.

II. The role of the law in justification is like the role of incarceration in the life of a criminal (vv. 22-23).

Illustration: When does a criminal decide he needs a lawyer? He has no use for a lawyer when he is running around free committing crimes. Only after his arrest and incarceration does he suddenly come to the realization that has been true all along – "I need a lawyer."

Application: Paul says this same thing happens in the life of a sinner when he comes face-to-face with God's law. The word translated *hath concluded* at the beginning of verse 22 is a word that ordinarily refers to confinement in prison. The word is *sugkleio*. *Kleis* is the word for *key*, *kleio* means *to lock with a key*, and *sugkleio* means *to lock up together with a key*.

The word translated *shut up* in verse 23 is a word that describes how Paul was trapped by governmental authorities in the city of Damascus such that he had to be let down in a basket over the city wall (2 Cor. 11:32).

So that part of Scripture that is God's law takes a carefree lawbreaker and throws him into a prison where all that he can do now is ask, "Can I call my lawyer?"

Praise the Lord, He not only provides the law and the prison, but also the lawyer (v. 22b). Have you asked this Advocate for the legal help only He can provide? Have you seen your need for Him? If not, you need to spend some time reading what your Bible says about God's law and the breaking of it.

III. The role of the law in justification is like the role of a guardian in the life of a school-boy (vv. 24-26).

Illustration: The word translated *schoolmaster* in our text is a word that did not really refer to masters of schools as we think of them in our western culture. Here is what one Greek lexicon says about this word: "*attendant (slave), custodian, guide*, lit. 'boy-leader', the man, usu. a slave . . . , whose duty it was to conduct the boy or youth . . . to and from school and to superintend his conduct gener.; he was not a 'teacher' . . . . When the young man became of age the [παιδαγωγός] was no longer needed" (BAGD).

Application: The word *children* in verse 26 is actually the word for a *full-grown son*. Here the idea is very simple. When it comes to its role in our justification, God's law leads us along until we mature to adulthood, which we reach when we put our faith in Christ for salvation. When we find faith in Christ, the law's role in our justification is finished. What does God's law do for the sinner to point him to Christ? I would mention three things:

1. It tells him that he is a creature and that God is his Creator. God made us and we are responsible to Him.

2. It tells him that he is a son of Adam who sinned, and then it proves it to him by giving him law after law that reflects God's holy nature and that exposes his own sinful nature as he transgresses each one.

3. And then it tells him just as quickly, that God was going to send a Seed who would crush his enemy the serpent and bring him salvation. It makes right away the promise of salvation made to Abraham. Later, God's law instituted a system of animal sacrifice to illustrate what the Lamb of God would do to accept the punishment for our sin that we deserve. It promised a new Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. It offers us the opportunity and shows us the necessity of coming to Christ to be justified by faith (vv. 24, 26).

And when we come to Christ and are justified by faith, the role of the law in our justification is complete (v.25). There is nothing more for it to do for us in this regard. It no longer puts us in prison under sin. It no longer leads us to Christ as a schoolboy who would not go on his own.

After faith in Christ, our lives are dominated by our relationship with Him, not by the condemnation and strictures of the law. Which brings us to Paul's last point.

IV. The role of the law in justification means that we are Christians before anything else (vv. 27-29).

Illustration: Team chemistry is only as good as each team member's willingness to do what is best for the team rather than what is best for self. I saw a documentary about the New York Knicks of the early 1970's, and the point of the uniqueness of that championship team was especially how

they played a different brand of unselfish basketball, which gave them great success.

Application: The law identified the Jews as a distinct people, but Paul speaks of a new identity after faith in Christ. He speaks of our need to wear Christ.

I heard Hillary Clinton say in an interview one time that she does not like to wear her faith on her sleeve. Well, Paul is encouraging us to do the opposite. He says that when a Christian is baptized, he not only wears Christ on his sleeve, he makes Christ his sleeve and the rest of his clothing too. In Rom. 13:14, he teaches that this original commitment to publicly wear Christ before the world, which makes us willing to be baptized, must be something we commit ourselves to in an ongoing way (“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof”).

Identity politics and victim groupings are ideologies that are ruining our Republic. We have heard that the solution is that we must be Americans first, and then the things that divide us secondarily. That is great political advice.

Well, in the face of our church’s temptation to splinter and divide, Paul here says, “Baptized believer, be a Christian first.” “Be a Jew or Greek, bond or free, man or woman, or anything else only secondarily.” And then he tells us why, “For ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise!”

Conclusion: Life does not get any better than that. Are you a baptized Christian first and foremost, and whatever else God has made you only secondarily? The law brings us to

Christ, and when we trust Him as Savior He becomes our all in all, both now and forever. Has the law done so for you?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*