

Paul has been making the case that righteousness can only come through faith and never by the law, begging the question of why God gave the law in the first place. Paul answers that question, showing us that the law served to teach us God's standard of righteousness and that Christ is our only hope of salvation because of our inability to attain that standard.

19 Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was ordained* by angels in the hand of a mediator.

“Wherefore then *serveth* the law?” – In the prior verses in this chapter, Paul has been emphasizing that we are not made righteous through the law. At this point the Galatians were likely wondering what purpose the law served if it could not give eternal life. Paul now turns the discussion to that question in order give the answer.

“It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made” – There was a span of several centuries between the time the promise was made to Abraham's “seed” (Who was Christ, according to v. 16) and the time that the “seed” (Christ) actually came. During that span of time, mankind needed to be shown just how sinful we are and how incapable we are of being righteous through our self effort. The law teaches us that sin is not what we define it to be but what God says it is. Thus, the law was given to be our schoolmaster (v. 24-25).

“and it was ordained [to arrange, prescribe] by angels” – Although the OT does not record that angels took part in the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, the NT mentions their involvement. When Stephen was preaching to the Sanhedrin just before they stoned him, he alluded to the participation of angels at Mt. Sinai (**Acts 7:37-38** “*This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us*”; **Acts 7:53** “*Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it*”). The author of Hebrews also mentions the participation of angels with the giving of the law (**Heb. 2:2** “*For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward*”). Apparently Paul wants us to recognize the importance of the law (given with the help of angels) while understanding that its purpose was not a means of salvation.

“in the hand of a mediator [an arbitrator between two parties]” – A mediator must capable of enforcing his authority over both parties in order to bring them to a fair and equitable reconciliation. Since no human or angelic being has authority over God, God Himself had to be the mediator between Himself and Israel. The mediator may have been God the Father or, more likely, God the Son. Christ is the mediator between God and man, so it would have been natural for Him to mediate between God the Father and Israel (**1 Tim. 2:5** “*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*”).

20 Now a mediator is not a *mediator* of one, but God is one.

“Now a mediator is not a *mediator* of one” – Paul is reminding us that the job of a mediator is not to mediate between himself and another party. The mediator is only required when there are two other parties that seek reconciliation or agreement.

“but God is one” – It would be unacceptable for a human to be the mediator between himself and a second party but God is capable of mediating fairly between Himself and men. This is what happened when God gave the law to Israel at Mt. Sinai. Paul's point seems to be that the giving of the law was fair and legitimate. God did not take unfair advantage of Israel.

21 *Is* the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

“Is the law then against [contrary to; in conflict with] the promises of God?” – Paul has pointed out that the law places a curse on us because we are unable to keep it (v. 10), and thus it is apparent that the law cannot produce righteousness in us. From these facts we might be tempted to conclude that the law, which condemns us to death, is at cross-purposes with the promises of God, which provide eternal life.

“God forbid” – Or “may it never be!” Paul uses the strongest Greek negative to dismiss the possibility that the law and the promises of God are in conflict. God did not give the law in order to condemn us, but an act of love designed to enable us to see our need of Christ (vs. 22, 24) so that we could obtain righteousness though faith in Him.

“for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” – The law's goal is for us to be righteous and if it had been possible for a law to be given that would give us eternal life then there would have been no need for faith or the promises of God. However, the weakness of our flesh prevents the law from providing eternal life and therefore we need the promise of Jesus Christ to redeem us (**Romans 8:3-4** “*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*”).

22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

“But the scripture hath concluded [to enclose on all sides; confine] all under sin” – Since the law is incapable of producing righteousness in us, God's word has “confined” (some Bible translations use the word “imprisoned”) the entire human race under the condemnation of our sin. Not one human being is exempt from being guilty of sin and there is nothing we can do to redeem ourselves. **“that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe”** – The final purpose of this confinement is not to condemn the human race to death. Rather, it is to provide us with the awareness of our need for a Savior so that those who believe can receive the promise of righteousness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

“But before faith came” – Before Jesus Christ, the object of our faith, had died on the cross for our sins. The law was “added” until the coming of “the seed...to whom the promises were made” (v. 19).

“we were kept [guarded] under the law” – The Greek word translated “kept” means that the law guarded us so that we would have no hope of escape from the law’s condemnation and curse. Even though the law condemns us to death (v. 10), the giving of the law was an act of mercy and grace because being confined under its requirements demonstrated that we could not be righteous through our own efforts, leaving Christ as our only hope.

“shut up [to enclose on all sides; confine] unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed” – Cattle farmers often use a chute mechanism that confines a cow’s movements and directs it to the place the farmer needs it to go. God gave the law to take away our excuses and illusions of self-righteousness so that He could direct us toward faith in Christ.

24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [tutor] to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified [made righteous] by faith” – In Greek and Roman society, the tutor was often a slave who essentially raised the child to adulthood, overseeing the child’s education and behavioral discipline. The law served a similar purpose, educating mankind to understand God’s righteous requirements and enforcing our behavior to do what is good and reject what is evil. The law’s goal is to bring us to maturity so that we would trust in Christ and be justified by faith in Him.

“But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” – Just as the duties of a child’s tutor ceased at adulthood, the law’s purpose has been fulfilled now that Christ has come and faith in Him is now available. Thus the law no longer has the authority to condemn us (**Rom. 6:14** “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace”).

26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” – The fact that Paul says “ye” and not “we” indicates that he is addressing the Galatians as Gentiles, in contrast to the Jews who had been under the law. Gentiles had never been considered children of God since Israel, as descendants of Abraham, were God’s chosen people (**Eph. 2:11-13** “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ”). Paul is declaring that the Galatian believers are now children of God because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

“For as many of you as have been baptized [immersed] into Christ have put on [to be clothed] Christ” – Paul is not speaking of water baptism here since physical baptism cannot bring salvation. Such a thought would be contrary to one of the central points of Paul’s epistle (vs. 2-3) since he’s been arguing that we are not saved through our works. Rather, Paul is using baptism in the figurative sense of being immersed in Christ as a result of the new birth. Because of the new birth they are now “clothed” in Christ, forever associated with His death, resurrection and His righteousness.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond [slave] nor free, there is neither male nor female” – Paul declares that there are no privileged classes in the body of Christ. When it comes to faith in Christ, the Jews are not spiritually superior to the Greeks (Paul uses this word synonymously with the word “Gentile”), nor do free people have a spiritual advantage over slaves. In ancient Roman society, men were more highly respected than women, but Paul also says that women are not spiritually inferior to men when it comes to faith in Christ.

“for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” – Whether you are Jew/Greek, bond/free, or male/female, all are spiritually equal in Christ and God does not value one more than the other.

29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

“And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed” – Through faith in Christ we become “Abraham’s seed” in more than one sense. We become Abraham’s seed when we follow his example of faith (**Gal. 3:7** “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham”). We also are Abraham’s seed by being in Christ, the “seed” to whom the promises were made (**Gal. 3:16** “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ”).

“and heirs according to the promise” – Through faith and by being in Christ we become heirs to all the spiritual promises that God gave to Abraham (righteousness, forgiveness of sins, etc.). These promises can only come through Jesus Christ.