

Review Questions (Lesson #8)

Answer T for true, F for false

1. The Law of Moses was like a prison-keeper preventing criminals from escaping.
2. Before the Law of Moses was given, there was no sin.
3. The Law of Moses was like a guardian supervising a boy until he reached maturity.
4. Abraham's "seed" was not national Israel, but Christ.
5. God replaced the promises He made to Abraham by giving the Law of Moses.

Give short answers:

1. Not all of Abraham's descendants were counted as his promised "seed." Name two men we know were excluded: _____
2. What did the Law of Moses do that is similar to what a fish net does? _____
3. How does Galatians 3:19 show that God intended for the Law of Moses to be temporary? _____
4. Since sinners could not be justified by the Law, to what did God want them to turn for relief? _____
5. By clinging to the Law, what were the Judaizers implying about themselves? _____

Fill in the blanks:

1. Putting the _____ in company with the _____ to _____ did not affect the _____ at all; and removing the _____ when _____ died on the _____ had no impact whatever on the _____.
2. The _____, likewise, was not _____; it was _____ but _____ by design.
3. God _____ the Law to _____ the true _____ of _____.
4. It would be impossible for _____ to be _____ (acquitted) of the _____ against them) by the same _____ that found them _____.
5. Paul focused on a specific _____ of the _____: "In your _____ all the _____ of the earth shall be _____."

Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

Lesson #8 Why (Not) The Law? (Galatians 3:15-25)

People tend to be extremists, especially in religion. Paul was dealing with one extreme in Galatia: Judaizers taught that circumcision and Mosaic Law-keeping were essential to salvation. In refuting that error, Paul anticipated that some might misunderstand and go to the opposite extreme, despising the Law as though it were evil. To prevent this, Paul explained what was, and was not, the purpose of the Law – what it did and did not do. His insights remain important today, for few people understand the relationship between the Law of Moses and the Faith of Christ (that is, the Christian religion). Let us observe five major points in this regard:

1. **The Law did not alter in any way the promises given to Abraham** (vv. 15-18). God's promises to Abraham, first given in Genesis 12:1-3, were reaffirmed at various times. Paul focused on a specific element of the promises: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). The Judaizers saw this to mean that the nations (Gentiles) would be blessed by converting to Judaism and joining Israel in keeping the Law of Moses. However, as Paul pointed out, the promise had been in effect several centuries before the Law was given at Mt. Sinai. Therefore, receiving the benefits of the promises could not be conditioned on keeping the Law. Even in people's dealings with one another, once an agreement has been made, one cannot, as it were, "change the rules in the middle of the game." How much more is a promise from God unchangeable, being ratified by His own oath (Genesis 22:16; Hebrews 6:13)?

The Judaizers also erred in thinking that Abraham's "seed" meant national Israel. They correctly recognized that the promise did not include all of Abraham's descendants. God had assured Abraham, "In Isaac your seed shall be called" (Genesis 21:12). This excluded Abraham's other son, Ishmael, and his descendants. But not even all of Isaac's descendants were included; of his two sons, Jacob and Esau, only Jacob (whose name God later changed to Israel) inherited the promises. But again, not all of Israel's descendants were included – only those who imitated the faith of Abraham were counted. As Paul wrote elsewhere, "they are not all (spiritual) Israel that are of (national) Israel" (Romans 5:9). Bottom line, though the singular word "seed" is commonly used in a collective sense to mean "descendants," it never meant "all descendants," in fact, it referred ultimately to one "seed,"

namely Jesus Christ. Through Jesus (not national Israel) all nations (including Gentiles) inherit salvation. There cannot be two ways to inherit the same blessing. If it is by the Law of Moses, then it cannot be by promise. Since it is by the promised Seed of Abraham (Jesus Christ), it cannot be by the Law of Moses. This being the case, why did God give Israel the Law in the first place? Paul answers:

2. The law was added “because of transgression” until the seed (Christ) should come (vv. 19, 20). Note that Paul used a different word for “add” in verse 19 than he used in verse 15. Remember, one cannot “add” to an agreement once it is ratified. But “add” in verse 19 means to put in company with. An illustration may help. Suppose you bake cookies according to a certain recipe. If you alter the recipe by adding several teaspoons of instant coffee to the cookie dough, you are “adding” in the sense of verse 15. But, if you bake the cookies by the original recipe and serve them with coffee, you are “adding” in the sense of verse 19. Serving the coffee did not affect the cookies at all, and removing it would not affect them either. Just so, putting the Law in company with the promises to Abraham did not affect the promises; and removing the Law when Jesus died on the cross had no impact whatever on the promises.

Even before the Law of Moses was given, people were sinful. From the beginning, God has made known what He expects of people; and ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and Cain murdered Abel, people have been sinning. God added the Law to emphasize the true nature of sin – as Paul wrote in Romans 7:13, “that sin, through the commandment, might become exceedingly sinful.” God intended that people would understand their sinful condition and seek justification when the promised “Seed” (Jesus Christ) came. Note that the Law was added “till” the Seed should come. God never intended for the Law to be permanent, as the Judaizers falsely taught (and some religions still teach). Angels played a role in delivering it (compare Acts 7:53 & Deuteronomy 33:2). God did not give the Law directly to Israel; Moses was the mediator between the people and God (see Deuteronomy 5:4, 5). By definition, a mediator is needed only for two or more parties. In contrast to the Law, God gave His promise directly to Abraham; no angels participated, nor was any mediator involved.

3. The Law was not given in order to justify sinners (v. 21). As Paul noted at the close of chapter two, “If righteousness (justification) comes through the Law, then Christ died in vain” (Galatians 2:21). If the Law had

been able to give spiritual life to sinners, it would have been opposed to the promises to Abraham that justification would come through his Seed (Christ). As noted earlier, one cannot have it both ways. And it would be impossible for sinners to be justified (acquitted of the charges against them) by the very Law that found them guilty. The Law forced sinners to see their sins and to seek justification by faith, as per the promises to Abraham.

4. The Law confined the Jews under sin (vv. 22, 23). Far from providing justification, the Law (referred to as Scripture in v. 22) confined sinners (see also Romans 11:32). This term is used but one other time in the New Testament; in Luke 5:6 it refers to fish trapped in a net. As a net keeps fish from escaping, so the Law kept sinners from escaping their guilt and condemnation. Though Gentiles were never under the Law, they knew right from wrong and felt the same need for liberation from their sins. The result God wanted was that the promise, by means of the “faith of (not ‘in’) Christ” would be given to those who believe. Verse 23 pictures the Law as a prison-keeper holding criminals in custody (i.e. preventing their escape). They were kept “for (unto) the faith which would afterward be revealed.” Sinners would find no relief from the Law, so they would turn to “the faith” (i.e. the Faith of Christ, the Christian religion) for justification.

5. The Law served as a guardian (vv. 24, 25). Both “schoolmaster” (KJV) and “tutor” (NKJV) miss Paul’s point in v. 24. The Greek term gives us our word “pedagogue,” correctly translated in the English Standard Version as “guardian.” Wealthy families assigned a trusted slave to supervise a young son until he reached maturity. The pedagogue’s function had little or nothing to do with education. Rather, he would guide the behavior of the minor child, keeping him out of trouble. If pedagogues were used in our society, they might say such things as “stay out of that mud puddle! Eat your vegetables! Brush your teeth! It’s bed time!” The pedagogue wasn’t evil, he was necessary. But a boy would certainly feel the burden of always being told what to do and when to do it. No doubt he looked forward to being old enough that the pedagogue would no longer be his supervisor! (Paul will return to this point in chapter 4.)

The Law, likewise, was not evil; it was necessary but temporary by design. Its purpose was to supervise God’s people until Christ came. Once “the faith” had come, there was no need for the pedagogue (i.e. the Law) any more. By clinging to the Law, the Judaizers were making themselves out to be immature children. They were robbing themselves of the joy of behaving rightly out of mature love for God rather than out of rote duty.