

The Purpose of the Law

If we are going to reach our generation for Christ, we're going to need what God has provided. The modern gospel has degenerated into a means of happiness rather than one of righteousness. We have failed to show sinners that they are lawbreakers, that they have violated the Law of a holy God. Though, according to research, an overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe that there is life after death and that heaven and hell exist, according to a new study. What's more, nearly two-thirds think they are heaven-bound... only one-half of one percent said they were hell-bound. According to Barna Research Group 64% believe they are heaven-bound.¹

People think they are going to heaven.

They are deceived into thinking that they are morally good.

It is the Law of God that reveals this:

Outside of faith in Jesus there is no way they can please God.

Today I want us to look at God's way of preparing our hearts to receive the message of the Gospel.

²³But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

²⁴Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

²⁷For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:23-29).

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* a conversation between Pilgrim and his friend, Faithful, reveal the purpose of God's Law in preparing for Jesus.

Christian: "It was he (the Law) who did bind my heavy burden upon me."

¹ Ray Comfort, *The Way of the Master*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), p. 42.

Faithful: “Aye. Had it not been for him, we had both of us stayed in the City of Destruction.”

Christian: “Then he did us a favor.”

[Faithful then shows how the Law alarms us]:

“Aye. Albeit, he did it none to gently.”

Christian: “Well, at least he played the part of a schoolmaster and showed us our need. It was he who drove us to the cross.”

Martin Luther said of the Law,

“In its true and proper work and purpose it humbles a man and prepares him – if he uses the Law correctly – to yearn and seek for grace.”

J. C. Ryle said of God’s Law,

“But never, never let us despise it. It is the symptom of an ignorant ministry, and unhealthy state of religion, when the Law is lightly esteemed. The true Christian ‘delights in God’s Law’ (Rom. 7:22).”

Luke records Paul presenting the gospel.

“But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, ‘Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you’” (Acts 24:24-25).

This is a great example of Paul using the Law to share the gospel. Notice that as Though Paul was speaking about faith in Christ Jesus, he included three subjects:

- Righteousness – the Law
- Self-control – responsibility
- The Judgment to come – accountability

The Law brings people to Christ.

How does the Law, which cannot save, bring people to Christ, who can save?

By this time Paul had been arrested, having been accused by the Jews, and was being held by the Romans under Felix the governor over Caesarea. Felix and his wife had summoned Paul and were listen to him. As Paul was making his defense before them they were frightened and sent him away. The Law was doing its convicting work by exposing their sin. Combined with a warning of the coming

day of judgment in which God will hold them accountable for their sins, followed by a just sentence in the eternal lake of fire, they were frightened.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones answers our modern-day evangelistic methods,

“A gospel which merely says ‘Come to Jesus,’ and offers Him as a Friend and offers a marvelous new life, without convincing of sin, is not New Testament evangelism. True evangelism ... must always start by preaching the Law.”²

Paul’s words to Timothy describe the *lawful* use of the Law:

“But we know that the Law is good, if someone uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.”

(1 Tim. 1:8-11)

It is right to use the Law in sharing the gospel with sinful people.

The Law cannot save but it will convince them that they are lost, in need of salvation through Christ. Following Paul’s words concerning the use of the Law he includes himself as one of the sinners who found salvation through Christ.

“...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

(1 Timothy 1:15-16)

“Not until a person smashes himself against the demands of the law and the accusations of conscience does he recognize his helplessness and see his need for

² Ray Comfort, *The Way of the Master*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), p. 34.

a Savior. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned him and sentenced him to death will he be driven to despair in himself and turn to Jesus Christ.”³

The Law: reveals sins, imprisons the sinner, and leads the sinner to Christ.

1. The Law Reveals Sins

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the Law says,
it speaks to those who are under the Law,
so that every mouth may be closed
and all the world may become accountable to God;
because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight;
for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Romans 5:20-21

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase;
but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,
so that as sin reigned in death,
even so grace would reign through righteousness
to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Law’s purpose is to show people that they are sinners in need of a savior.

The Law makes the sinner thirst for righteousness, that he might live. Its holy light reveals the dust of sin on the table of the human heart, so that the gospel in the hand of the Spirit can wipe it perfectly clean. (Ray Comfort)

2. The Law Imprisons the Sinner

²³But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. (Gal. 3:23)
Our contemporary view of prisons keeps us from grasping the depth of despair surrounding the Law as a prison. A better description would be

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), pp. 88-89.

- a death-row cell where someone waits for eternal execution.

“Not until a person smashes himself against the demands of the law and the accusations of conscience does he recognize his helplessness and see his need for a Savior. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned him and sentenced him to death will he be driven to despair in himself and turn to Jesus Christ.”⁴

Someone is either in Christ or convicted as a “convict” by the Law!

3. The Law Leads a Sinner to Christ.

²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:24)

Tutor – paidagogos – wasn’t a teacher or schoolmaster, but was a slave employed by Greek or Roman families to supervise young boys in behalf of their parents.

The pedagogue took the son to school and made sure he paid attention in class, without causing any trouble. He could become a severe disciplinarian if the son were disobedient. He held the son to the father’s highest standards.

So many people have turned to Jesus by praying the sinner’s prayer, yet without being convinced of their own sinful condition and desperate need for a Savior. The result of not using the Law for conviction of sin, is that there is no repentance from sin, no deliverance from sin, and no salvation.

MacArthur writes,

“The purpose of the law was to demonstrate to man his total sinfulness, his inability to please God by his own works, and his need for mercy and grace. The Law was added to show the depth of man’s transgressions against God. It was given to drive him to desperate guilt and the awareness of his need for the Deliverer.”⁵

4. The Law’s Purpose is Accomplished in Christ.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 88-89.

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), p. 86.

The one who comes to Christ is no longer under the Law.

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...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise"

- Justified by faith
- Freedom in Christ
- Sons of God through faith
- Joined to Christ and clothed with Christ
- Joined to others who are in Christ
- Sons of Abraham and heirs

Now that faith in Jesus Christ has come, a person is no longer under the law as a tutor. He is now out from under the law's symbolism, the law's bondage, and the law's discipline. The law's purpose has been fulfilled, and the person is no longer "under law, but under grace." (Rom. 6:14) (MacArthur)⁶

When Israel was being chased by Pharaoh's army they found themselves helpless with the unforgiving Red Sea in front of them. The Law judges and condemns us because we fail to live by it. The coming Judgment lies ahead of all men bringing eternal death. When Israel cried out to God for mercy and deliverance, a pillar of fire came between them and armies of Egypt - the cross of Christ. Then they walked through the sea on dry ground. When the soldiers tried to follow them they were drowned. The Law that condemned us was put to death as we were justified in Christ.

⁶ Ibid, p. 97.