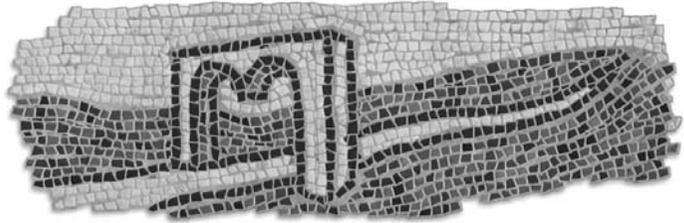


The Road *to* Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 3:21–25; Lev. 18:5; Rom. 3:9–19; 1 Cor. 9:20; Rom. 3:1, 2; 8:1–4.*

Memory Text: “Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (*Galatians 3:22, ESV*).

Homing pigeons long have been known for their ability to fly hundreds of miles a day and arrive at their destination with amazing accuracy. Yet, even the best homing pigeons at times have become disoriented, never returning to their starting point. The worst incident happened in England, when about twenty thousand birds (valued at more than six hundred thousand dollars) never came back to their lofts.

As most of us have experienced in one way or another, being disoriented, or lost, is not enjoyable. It fills us with fear and anxiety; it can lead us to moments of panic, as well.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. Even after we accept Christ, we can get lost, or disoriented, even to the point of never returning to the Lord.

The good news is, however, that God has not left us to ourselves. He has mapped out the road to faith, as revealed in the gospel, and that path includes the law. Many people try to separate the law from the gospel; some even see them as contradictory. Not only is this view wrong, it can have tragic consequences. Without the law we would have no gospel. It's hard, really, to understand the gospel without the law.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 12.*

The Law and the Promise

“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?” (*Gal. 3:21, ESV*).

Sensing that his comments might lead his opponents to conclude he had a disparaging view of the law, or that his comments about the priority of God’s promises were just a veiled put-down of Moses and the Torah, Paul asks the very question they were thinking: “Are you saying the law contradicts the promises of God?” To this Paul responds with an emphatic, “No!” Such a conclusion is impossible, because God is not opposed to Himself. God gave both the promise and the law. The law is not at odds with the promise. The two merely have different roles and functions in God’s overall plan of salvation.

What mistaken concepts did Paul’s opponents have about the role of the law? Compare *Gal. 3:21, Lev. 18:5, and Deut. 6:24*.

These people believed that the law was able to give them spiritual life. Their views probably arose out of a mistaken interpretation of Old Testament passages such as Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 6:24, where the law directs how life should be lived by those abiding in God’s covenant. The law did regulate life *within* the covenant, but they concluded that the law was the source of a person’s relationship with God. The Bible is clear, however, that the ability to “make alive” is a power exercised by God and His Spirit alone (*2 Kings 5:7, Neh. 9:6, John 5:21, Rom. 4:17*). The law cannot make anyone alive spiritually. This does not mean, however, that the law is opposed to God’s promise.

Seeking to prove the inability of the law to give life, Paul writes in Galatians 3:22, “Scripture has confined all under sin” (*ESV*). In Romans 3:9–19, Paul draws from a string of verses extracted from the Old Testament to show just how sinful we are. The passages are not strung together in a haphazard manner. He begins with the heart of the sin problem—the selfish attitude that plagues human hearts—and then moves to verses that describe sin’s pervasiveness and finally its universality.

His point? Because of the extent of sin and the limitations of the law, the promise of eternal life can come to us only through the faithfulness of Christ in our behalf.

Although the law cannot save us, what great benefits does our adherence to it have for us? That is, what practical good have you experienced in your own life through obedience to God’s law?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Galatians 3:22*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Explain how the law, while not giving life, protects us and points us to Christ.

Feel: Nurture a love for the law as it is reflected in the sacrificial system and the foundation of God's kingdom.

Do: Submit to the law's discipline as it leads us to the One who writes His law on our hearts.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Submitting to Discipline

A In what ways is the law a blessing as it serves as guard and disciplinarian?

B What relationship do believers in Christ have to the law?

C How are the requirements of the law fulfilled in us?

II. Feel: Loving the Law

A How do we come to love the law by reflecting on the depths to which the Father and Son went to ensure our salvation?

B How does the sacrifice of Christ illustrate the great value that God places on His beautiful, holy, and eternal law?

III. Do: Written on Our Hearts

A As we see at what cost Christ has met the law's requirements on our behalf, how do we respond?

B How do we cooperate as God writes His laws on our hearts?

C What part does faith play in the fulfillment of the law in our hearts?

► **Summary:** While the law acts as a guard and disciplinarian, it points us to Christ. By submitting to the Father's will, Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law. By living His life, we allow God to write the law on our hearts.

“Kept Under Law”

In Galatians 3:23, Paul writes that “before faith came, we were kept under the law.” By “we” Paul is referring to the Jewish believers in the Galatian churches. They are the ones acquainted with the law, and Paul has been speaking to them in particular since Galatians 2:15. This can be seen in the contrast between the “we” in Galatians 3:23 and the “you” in Galatians 3:26 (*ESV*).

Galatians 3:23 reads, “Before faith came”; but in the literal Greek it reads, “before the faith came.” Because Paul is contrasting the place of the law before and after Christ (*Gal. 3:24*), “the faith” is most likely a reference to Jesus Himself and not a reference to Christian faith in general.

Paul says the Jews were kept “under the law” before the coming of Christ. What does he mean by “under the law”? Compare *Gal. 3:22, 23* with *Rom. 6:14, 15; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18*.

Paul uses the phrase “under the law” twelve times in his letters. Depending on its context, it can have a couple of different connotations.

1. “*Under the law*” as an alternative way of salvation (*Gal. 4:21*). The opponents in Galatia were trying to gain life-giving righteousness by obedience. However, as Paul has already made clear, this is impossible (*Gal. 3:21, 22*). Paul later will even point out that, by desiring to be under the law, the Galatians were really rejecting Christ (*Gal. 5:2–4*).

2. “*Under the law*” in the sense of being under its condemnation (*Rom. 6:14, 15*). Because the law cannot atone for sin, the violation of its demands ultimately results in condemnation. This is the condition in which all human beings find themselves. The law acts as a prison warden, locking up all who have violated it and brought upon themselves the sentence of death. As we will see in tomorrow’s lesson, the use of the word *guard* (*Gal. 3:23, NKJV*) indicates that this is what Paul means by “under the law” in this passage.

A related Greek word, *ennomos*, normally translated as “under the law,” literally means “within the law” and refers to living within the requirements of the law through union with Christ (*1 Cor. 9:21*). By “the works of the law,” that is, by trying to keep the law apart from Christ, it is impossible to be justified, because only those who through faith are righteous will live (*Gal. 3:11*). This truth doesn’t nullify the law; it shows only that the law can’t give us eternal life. It’s way too late for that.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Without the law of God, human beings would not know what sin is or what God expects of them. However, keeping the law requires more than mere knowledge; it necessitates power that comes only from the Lawgiver, dispensed through His Christ.

Just for Teachers: Share the following in your own words. Some of the students may remember this iconic commercial and its unforgettable tagline.

Many years ago an auto commercial captured the fancy of the national audience, no doubt because of the simple yet profound message it delivered. The commercial featured a woman driving a vehicle and thinking what it would be like to cross the lines on the highway and “go for broke.” She remembers her childhood days, when she would “color outside the lines” of the figures in her coloring book.

The fantasy comes to an abrupt end when the voice of her kindergarten teacher jolts her back to reality. What did the teacher say? “Stay between the lines. The lines are our friends.”

Consider This: Ask the class why some people are fascinated by life outside the lines, while others obsess about staying within them. How can we keep God’s law without becoming legalists?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The Hebrews were selected by God to be His representatives on earth, leading others to Him by the example of faith and connection with God that they lived. However, that didn’t always work out as planned.

I. Legal Righteousness (*Read Galatians 3:8–10, 15 and Mark 7:1–7.*)

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The Law as Our “Guard”

Paul gives two basic conclusions about the law: (1) the law does not nullify or abolish God’s promise made to Abraham (*Gal. 3:15–20*); (2) the law is not opposed to the promise (*Gal. 3:21, 22*).

What role does the law actually play then? Paul writes that it was added “because of transgressions” (*Gal. 3:19*), and he expands on this idea using three different words or phrases in connection to the law: *kept* (vs. 23), *shut up* (vs. 23), and *schoolmaster* (vs. 24).

Read prayerfully and carefully Galatians 3:19–24. What is Paul saying about the law?

Most modern translations interpret Paul’s comments about the law in Galatians 3:19 in wholly negative terms. But the original Greek is not nearly so one-sided. The Greek word translated as “kept” (vs. 23) literally means “to guard.” Although it can be used in a negative sense, as to “hold in subjection” or to “watch over” (*2 Cor. 11:32*), in the New Testament it generally has a more positive sense of “protecting” or “keeping” (*Phil. 4:7, 1 Pet. 1:5*). The same is true of the word translated as “shut up” (*Gal. 3:23*). It can be translated “to close” (*Gen. 20:18*), “to shut” (*Exod. 14:3, Josh. 6:1, Jer. 13:19*), “to enclose” (*Luke 5:6*), or “to confine” (*Rom. 11:32*). As these examples indicate, depending on its context, this word can have either positive or negative connotations.

What benefits did the law (moral and ceremonial) provide the children of Israel? *Rom. 3:1, 2; Deut. 7:12–24; Lev. 18:20–30*.

While Paul can speak about the law in negative terms (*Rom. 7:6, Gal. 2:19*), he also has many positive things to say about it (see *Rom. 7:12, 14; 8:3, 4; 13:8*). The law was not a curse that God placed upon Israel; on the contrary, it was intended to be a blessing. Although its sacrificial system could not ultimately remove sin, it pointed to the promised Messiah who could; and its laws guiding human behavior protected Israel from many of the vices that plagued other ancient civilizations. In light of Paul’s positive comments about the law elsewhere, it would be a mistake to understand his comments here in a completely negative way.

Think of something good that is misused. For example, a drug created to treat a disease could be used by some people to get high. What examples have you seen in your own life of this principle? How does our knowledge of how something good can be misused help us to understand what Paul is dealing with here?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

The law given by God to Moses was very detailed. Specific blessings were attached to the keeping of it.

But God didn't stop at the enunciation of blessings that would attend obedience to His laws; He also listed a number of curses for disobedience, such as this one: "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country" (*vs. 16, NKJV*). Because any deviation from the law could bring on the curse of God, the Israelites took great pains to "keep the law." By doing so, they met its legal stipulations. Lawkeepers possessed a "legal righteousness."

Eventually, God's people added more laws than even God had given; they did this in order to be sure that the laws God gave were kept, or at least that was their idea. The Israelites were on a mission to master God's "dos and don'ts."

Consider This: How did Jesus respond to the brand of tradition-cum-religion promulgated and practiced by some of the religious leaders of His day? (*Mark 7:5–8*). Why was this brand of religion so odious to the Son of God? What was missing from it?

II. Faith in Practice (*Review Galatians 3:19–23 and Genesis 12:1–4*)

Tuesday's study examines Paul's "seemingly" negative statements about the moral law and its civil and ceremonial counterparts. However, Paul states unequivocally that the law does not nullify the promise of God to Abraham and his seed. It actually brings that seed to the foot of the cross of Jesus, where true justification occurs (*Gal. 3:24, 25*).

It bears remembering here that Paul is haggling with the Jews in an effort to share the gospel with Gentile believers, who desperately need it. Paul's effort is in line with God's original purpose in calling out a people, Abraham and his heirs (*Gen. 12:1–4*), through whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed. "The objective of God's covenant with Abraham was the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of men."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 957.

God's chosen people did not always follow Him in this venture. They copied the hedonistic practices of the world. In other words, the faith they practiced was one that bore little resemblance to the holiness of the God they claimed to serve.

Consider This: How does the practice of our faith impact those around us? What essential truths are we called to share with a dying world? Many in ancient Israel believed that the Abrahamic blessing was theirs and theirs

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The Law as Our Schoolmaster

In Galatians 3:23, Paul describes the law as a guarding and protecting force. To what does he liken it in verse 24, and what does that mean?

The word translated “schoolmaster” (*KJV*) comes from the Greek word *paidagogos*. Some versions translate it as “disciplinarian” (*NRSV*), “tutor” (*NKJV*), or even “guardian” (*ESV*), but no single word fully can encompass its meaning. The *paidagogos* was a slave in Roman society who was placed in a position of authority over his master’s sons from the time they turned six or seven until they reached maturity. In addition to providing for his charges’ physical needs, such as drawing their bath, providing them with food and clothes, and protecting them from any danger, the *paidagogos* also was responsible for making sure the master’s sons went to school and did their homework. In addition, he was expected not only to teach and practice moral virtues but also to ensure that the boys learned and practiced the virtues themselves.

Although some pedagogues must certainly have been kind, as well as loved by their wards, the dominant description of them in ancient literature is as strict disciplinarians. They ensured obedience not only through harsh threats and rebukes but also by whipping and caning.

Paul’s description of the law as it refers to a pedagogue further clarifies his understanding of the role of the law. The law was added to point out sin and provide instruction. The very nature of this task means that the law also has a negative aspect, and that’s because it rebukes and condemns us as sinners. Yet, even this “negative” aspect God uses for our benefit, because the condemnation that the law brings is what drives us to Christ. Thus, the law and the gospel are not contradictory. God designed them to work together for our salvation.

“In this Scripture [Gal. 3:24], the Holy Spirit through the apostle is speaking especially of the moral law. The law reveals sin to us, and causes us to feel our need of Christ and to flee unto Him for pardon and peace by exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 234.

When was the last time you compared your actions and words and thoughts to the law? Do it now, comparing them not just to the letter of the law but also to the spirit (*Matt. 5:28, Rom. 7:6*). How well do you fare? What does your answer tell you about Paul’s point in this epistle?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

alone. In what ways do we sometimes cherish our exclusivity to the detriment of those yearning for the good news of salvation?

III. A Little History (Read Galatians 3:19 and Romans 7:7–13.)

Humanity’s penchant for self-delusion is great. Hence, God does everything within His power to open our eyes to the sanctity of His laws, His ways, and His life. This was God’s objective in giving the moral law at Mount Sinai and the civil and ceremonial laws that followed.

Humans need the law because they need to know what is right and what is wrong. For instance, the Lord reiterated the law at Sinai because, after many long years in Egypt, the Hebrews lost sight of what God’s ways were.

Consider This: God’s laws function in much the same way today. They help us to see in stark relief God’s view of sin and point us to the Christ, the One who has made atonement for that sin. Is there a point at which the sensitizing influence of God’s law ceases to jolt us back to reality? Explain.

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Encourage your students to internalize the questions below. The objective is for each person to take a hard look at himself or herself.

Thought Questions:

- 1 Contemplating the law of the Lord, King David wrote the following: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (*Ps. 19:7, NKJV*). What do you think the psalmist meant by the word *perfect*? What’s perfect about God’s law?
- 2 In Joshua 1:8, God counsels Joshua to keep the book of the law in his mouth and meditate on it day and night. Why was it important that the nation’s leader know, speak, and live the law? How does this admonition extend to followers of God today?

Application Questions:

- 1 Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and

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The Law and the Believer (*Gal. 3:25*)

Many have interpreted Paul's comment in Galatians 3:25 as a complete dismissal of the law. This makes little sense, however, in light of Paul's positive comments about the law elsewhere in the Bible.

What, then, does he mean?

First, we are no longer under the law's condemnation (*Rom. 8:3*). As believers, we are in Christ and enjoying the privilege of being under grace (*Rom. 6:14, 15*). That gives us the liberty of serving Christ wholeheartedly, without fear of being condemned for mistakes we might make in the process. This is what true liberty and freedom in the gospel is, which is something radically different from no longer having to obey the law—which is what some people claim is “freedom” in Christ. But disobedience to the law, instead, is sin—and sin is anything but freedom (*John 8:34*).

Read Romans 8:1–3. What does it mean to be no longer condemned by the law? How should this wonderful truth impact how we live?

As a result of being forgiven through Christ, our relationship to the law is now different. We are now called to live a life that is pleasing to Him (*1 Thess. 4:1*); Paul refers to this as walking in the Spirit (*Gal. 5:18*). This does not mean that the moral law is no longer applicable—that was never the issue. How could it be when we have seen so clearly that the law is what defines sin?

Instead, because the law is a transcript of God's character, by obeying the law we simply reflect His character. But more than that, we follow not just a set of rules but the example of Jesus, who does for us what the law itself could never do: He writes the law on our hearts (*Heb. 8:10*) and makes it possible for the righteous requirement of the law to be fulfilled in us (*Rom. 8:4*). That is, through our relationship with Jesus, we have the power to obey the law as never before.

Read Romans 8:4. What is Paul saying here? How have you seen this promise manifested in your own life? At the same time, despite whatever positive changes you have experienced, why must salvation always be based on what Christ has done for us and nothing else?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

desperately wicked; who can know it?” (NKJV). How do God’s laws help to corral the human heart?

- 2 Which of God’s laws do you have the most trouble obeying? Why?

Questions for Witnessing:

1 When is it appropriate to share God’s requirements with people to whom we give the gospel? Many unchurched people are often surprised by what the Bible has to say on different subjects. How do we get by their initial surprise—and at times disdain—in order to share with them the blessing and joys of obedience to God’s dictates?

2 Think about the ministry of Jesus to the woman at the well (*John 4:1–42*). What was it about Jesus that drew this woman to Him? In extending grace to the woman, did Jesus gloss over dictates of the law concerning marriage? Contrast this experience with the woman caught in adultery (*John 8:1–11*). Why did Jesus embrace her with His forgiveness and love rather than condemn her for her adulterous behavior? How was Jesus able to find the right balance between applying the law and applying grace?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Share the following true story in your own words. The objective here is to see clearly the inability of the law to prevent human beings from behaving in unethical, and even criminal, ways. Emphasize our need for a deep abiding relationship with God!

Today we live in the age of identity theft. One woman recently came home to find a host of frantic messages left on her voicemail by a credit fraud division of a huge department store. What was the problem? Someone in another city was attempting to buy \$1,500 worth of goods using her credit card.

What prompts people to commit such crimes? Sure, there is obvious criminal pathology, but go beyond the obvious. How could a relationship with Jesus have played any significant role in changing the behavior of the identity fraudsters mentioned above? How do we quantify the difference that Jesus makes in the life?

Further Study: “I am asked concerning the law in Galatians. What law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ? I answer: Both the ceremonial and the moral code of ten commandments.

“Christ was the foundation of the whole Jewish economy. The death of Abel was in consequence of Cain’s refusing to accept God’s plan in the school of obedience to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ typified by the sacrificial offerings pointing to Christ. Cain refused the shedding of blood which symbolized the blood of Christ to be shed for the world. This whole ceremony was prepared by God, and Christ became the foundation of the whole system. This is the beginning of its work as the schoolmaster to bring sinful human agents to a consideration of Christ the Foundation of the whole Jewish economy.

“All who did service in connection with the sanctuary were being educated constantly in regard to the intervention of Christ in behalf of the human race. This service was designed to create in every heart a love for the law of God, which is the law of His kingdom.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 233.

“The law of ten commandments is not to be looked upon as much from the prohibitory side, as from the mercy side. Its prohibitions are the sure guarantee of happiness in obedience. As received in Christ, it works in us the purity of character that will bring joy to us through eternal ages. To the obedient it is a wall of protection.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 235.

Discussion Questions:

❶ We often struggle with the question of how we can overcome sin in our lives. What promises do we have in the Bible about victory over sin? How can we better position ourselves to help make these promises real? At the same time, why must we be so careful to make sure that we place our full hope of salvation not on whatever victories we get but on Christ’s victory for us?

❷ We often hear Christians claim that the law has been done away with. Of course, these same Christians will speak out against sin, which means, of course, that they really don’t mean the law has been done away with. What, in fact, do they really mean by that claim? (Hint: In the context of what commandment does that claim usually arise?)

Summary: The law was given to point sinners to their need of Christ. As a custodian, it provides instruction about God and protection from evil. But, like a disciplinarian, it also points out our sinfulness and brings condemnation. Christ frees us from the law’s condemnation and writes His law upon our hearts.