When Did the Law End?

Galatians 3:23-25

Last week we looked at the purpose of the Law. We saw that God gave the Law "because of transgressions." This means that God wanted to move sin into the specific category of flagrant violation of the expressed and clear will of God. Thus, the law was added to create transgressions - that is, to make sin clearly a specific act of rebellion against God.

So, God gave the Law to make man aware of the depths of his rebellion against Him. God didn't give the Law to make man aware of his disobedience so that he would cease it and begin to obey, but to show him he could not obey.

So, the purpose of the Law was negative - it made man aware of his sinfulness. Not only was the Law negative, it was also **temporary**. The Mosaic law came into effect at a certain point in history and was in effect only until a certain point:

Galatians 3:19 (NASB) Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.

From Paul's words here, we see that the Law was to be in effect "...until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made." Who was the "seed"? It was Christ. Paul already told us that:

Galatians 3:16 (NASB) Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Commenting on the phrase "Until the seed should come" - Adam Clark writes: "The law was to be in force till the advent of the Messiah. After that it was to cease."

So, the Law was in effect until "Christ came." Would you agree with that? Alright then, when exactly did the Law pass away? What are our options? Did the Law pass away at the: Birth of Christ; or at the Cross; or at Pentecost; or at the Parousia? We know that the Law did not cease at the birth of Christ. I know of no one who teaches that it did. There are many, though, who teach that the Law ended at the Cross. Is this correct? No! In 2 Corinthians, speaking of the Law, Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 3:11 (NASB) For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory.

This verse doesn't help much until you understand that "fades away" is present tense.

2 Corinthians 3:11 (YLT) for if that which <u>is being made useless</u> is through glory, much more that which is remaining is in glory.

Paul was writing this about 25 years after the Cross, and he says that the Law was then "passing away." The author of Hebrews also tells us that as of A.D. 67-68, the law was still in effect:

Hebrews 8:13 (NASB) When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is <u>becoming obsolete and growing old</u> is ready to disappear.

The law was still in effect, but it was "ready to disappear." In just a couple of years when the temple was destroyed, the Law disappeared:

Hebrews 9:8 (NASB) The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing,

As long as the temple was still standing, the Law was still in effect, and man did not have access to the presence of God. Now, since the Law was in effect until A.D. 70, we know that it did not end at the birth of Christ or at the Cross or at Pentecost.

Jesus Himself told us exactly when the Law would end:

Matthew 5:17-18 (NASB) "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

When did Jesus say the Law would end? He says that the Law, all of the Law - the smallest letter or stroke - would not pass away until heaven and earth passed away.

The word "smallest letter" in form was like an apostrophe, not even a letter, not much bigger than a dot. The "stroke" is the little projecting part at the foot of a letter, the little line at each side of the foot of , for example, the letter "t." The message is clear. Not even the smallest part of the law will be abolished until heaven and earth passes away.

So, Jesus is saying that not a single item of the Law - the Old Testament - will ever be changed until heaven and earth pass away. Is that what Jesus said? Yes, it is, then one of two things is true; either we are under the Law - all of it, or heaven and earth have passed away.

Are you under the Law? After 15 messages in the book of Galatians, I hope you know that the answer to that is, "No." Part of the Law was the sacrificial system. Have any of you sacrificed lately? Have you sinned lately? If you have sinned, then you should have sacrificed an animal - the Law required it. When is the last time you offered up a burnt offering? Let's say that you wanted to, and you had the animal for the sacrifice; where would you find a priest?

Numbers 3:5-7 (NASB) Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. 7 "And they shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle.

The Levitical priests were a special class of qualified ministering priests chosen from among the tribe of Levi. If you can't find a Levitical priest, then you cannot keep the law:

Hebrews 7:11 (NASB) Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron?

The "if" is a second class condition meaning: "If and it's not." Perfection did not come through the Levitical priesthood. The parenthetical statement, "for on the basis of it the people received the law..." is a reminder of the close interdependence between the priestly and the legal systems. The law and the priesthood belonged together for the simple reason that since the law, representing the divinely ordered standard of conduct and character was universally broken (Romans 3:9-23), there

was a continuous necessity for the ministry of reconciliation, which the Levitical priesthood provided, even though imperfectly.

The writer is saying that the Mosaic Law was given in order to validate the Levitical priesthood. If the Levitical priesthood is taken out of the Mosaic Law, nothing of meaning is left. Why? Because the whole purpose of having a religious system is to bring people into a personal relationship with the living God. If there are no priests to represent the people, then there is no reason to have a religious system.

It is very important that we understand what the writer is communicating in this verse. **The concept is that the Levitical priesthood and the Mosaic Law are inseparable.** If someone wanted to incorporate the Mosaic Law into their religious system today, they would also have to incorporate the Levitical priesthood, because it was the basis for the Mosaic Law. So, if there is no Levitical priesthood today, then the Old Testament law cannot be obeyed, and we are all in sin **unless** heaven and earth passed away.

Our text in Matthew teaches us that Christ **fulfilled** the Law. He did this by fulfilling all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament. All of the illustrations in the Old Testament sacrificial system focus on, and find their fulfillment in, Him. All of the prophecies given regarding the coming Messiah, His kingdom, and His salvation find their fulfillment in Him.

The ultimate way that Christ fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures, the one which gets the greatest emphasis in the New Testament, is that He met the righteous demands of the Law in providing salvation through His death on the cross. Thus, He has fulfilled the Law and brought it to completion by paying the penalty for our sins.

So, heaven and earth must have passed away because we are no longer under the Law. We can tell that Jesus obviously was NOT speaking of the literal earth He was standing on and the literal heavens He was standing under. If we understand heaven and earth in that passage to be physical, then the Law is still in effect, and we are all in big trouble. If we understand heaven and earth as figurative, then it is possible that they have passed along with the Law. If we understand the Old Testament, then we will understand what "heaven and earth" mean.

Isaiah 51:15-16 (NASB) "For I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea and its waves roar (the LORD of hosts is His name). 16 "And I have put My words in your mouth, and have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to establish the heavens, to found the earth, and to say to Zion, 'You are My people."

Let's take a close look at the things God tells Israel that He had done for them. Notice all the marvelous things He declares:

- 1. He says that He " stirs up the sea and its waves roar." i.e., He had delivered them from Egyptian bondage, dividing the Red Sea that they might cross over on dry land to safety.
- 2. "I have put My words in your mouth." i.e., to Israel was given the very oracles of God. They had received the Law through Moses on Mt. Sinai, which was to act as their schoolmaster, which was to ultimately bring them to their Messiah.
- 3. "I have covered you with the shadow of My hand." Yes, God had so graciously taken Israel under His hand, protecting them from their enemies while at the same time extending His providential care to suit all their needs.

Now, in light of all the marvelous things that we have just seen that God did for Israel, look very closely now in vs. 16 and see just what these things constituted. This is very important, for this

second half of that verse helps us to clearly understand all that is said before it. God said He did all those things "to establish the heavens, to found the earth, and to say to Zion, 'You are My people.'" God is not alluding to the Genesis account of His creation of the physical "heavens and earth" back at the beginning. The "heavens and earth" that are spoken of here were created AFTER God led them out of bondage and through the sea. That's what this text clearly says! God created for Israel, THEIR "heavens and earth."

In A.D. 70, God, through His instrument of Titus and the Roman Legions and allies, razed Jerusalem and the temple to the ground along with all that was IN the temple. In addition, with the slaughter of all the priests, this brought an end to the old Covenant priesthood with all of its animal sacrifices. Therefore, with all these things, one can see that Israel's world truly did come to an end! For fleshly Israel, "heaven and earth" indeed did pass away just as our Lord promised.

Luke 21:20-22 (NASB) "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. 21 "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, and let not those who are in the country enter the city; 22 because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

Here in Luke's account, Jesus tells us the same thing that He said in Matthew's account, but instead of saying, "Heaven and earth," He says, "Jerusalem." When Jerusalem was destroyed, Israel's heaven and earth were destroyed, and when this happened, "all things which were written were fulfilled."

Turn with me to Acts chapter 2, I want you to see something very important in this text.

Acts 2:1 (NASB) And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

I think that you are all aware of what happened on Pentecost. This is the birth of the Church. The people who were there and experienced it wondered what it meant:

Acts 2:12-16 (NASB) And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine." 14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. 15 "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

How does Peter interpret what happened at Pentecost? He says, "This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel." Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that Pentecost is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Then he quotes Joel 2:28-32:

Acts 2:17-21 (NASB) 'AND IT SHALL BE IN <u>THE LAST DAYS</u>,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT UPON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHESY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; 18 EVEN UPON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. 19 'AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE, AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BENEATH, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. 20 'THE SUN SHALL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS, AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME. 21 'AND IT SHALL BE, THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED.'

So if Pentecost was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, then Pentecost happened in the "last days." Would you agree with that? The idea of the last days is that they are the times of the Messiah, encompassing both His humble coming and His return in glory.

Please notice that this is one prophecy of one event that was to last for a generation or 40 years. This is a prophecy of "the Christ event." This "Christ event" encompasses the Cross, Pentecost, the Resurrection, the Judgment, and the Parousia. Please notice that Joel's prophecy covers from Pentecost to the Day of the Lord. It covers a 40 year period that was equal to a generation:

Matthew 24:34 (NASB) "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Jesus here, very plainly and very clearly, tells His disciples that ALL of the things he had mentioned would come to pass in **THEIR GENERATION**. This includes the Gospel being preached in all the world, the abomination of desolation, the great tribulation, and the coming of the Son of man. Notice verse:

Matthew 24:29 (NASB) "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,

This is what Joel talked about, and Jesus said it would all be fulfilled within that generation. Biblically, a generation is forty years. This is what is known as the "Transition period" - it is a time of transition from the Old Covenant to the New. So Joel's prophecy covered a forty year period. And this forty year period is the Christ event. We see this same idea in:

Matthew 3:1-2 (NASB) Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The same expression, "at hand," is used later in the Gospel as Jesus was drawing near to Jerusalem. It indicates that something is on the verge of coming; it is close. John is telling them that they need to repent, because this kingdom is at hand - a kingdom which will be set up by the Messiah.

What I want you to see this morning is that John's message also covered a forty year period. John announced in verse 2 that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, meaning it was very near - this is a reference to Pentecost. But John's message also involved judgment:

Matthew 3:10 (NASB) "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

In order for the kingdom to be consummated (which would happen forty years later) there must be a time of judgment. The axe is there at the root ready to cut down any tree that is not bearing good fruit. John places an emphasis on fire again in verses 11 and 12. In those verses there is a reference to the coming destruction.

The Jews of John's day knew these prophecies of the Old Testament. They understood that before the kingdom would be consummated, God's judgment would fall on unbelievers, who would be rooted out of the kingdom as the Messiah established His rule and reign.

Matthew 3:11 (NASB) "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Here John refers to the **Christ event** - it begins with Pentecost and ends with the destruction of Jerusalem. How long did Israel's exodus out of Egypt take? It took them forty years. This exodus was a type of a much more important exodus to come:

Luke 9:29-31 (NASB) And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. 30 And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, 31 who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His <u>departure</u> which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Moses and Elijah appear in glory, and they speak of Jesus' departure. The word for "departure" is the Greek word *exodos*. There was an exodus that was to begin at the cross and start another forty year journey. The first exodus period is one familiar to all of us. Israel, after the flesh, was removed from bondage to Egypt at Passover, and they were put in the wilderness on a physical journey to a physical promise land. Now the more important and the spiritual exodus, we are not so familiar with; this exodus runs from the Cross to A.D. 70. In this exodus, Israel, after the Spirit, left its bondage to the law of sin and death and begins a forty year spiritual journey to a spiritual inheritance; the Kingdom of God, or the New Heavens and New Earth.

So, when Paul says in Galatians 3:19 that the Law was in effect "until the seed should come," he was referring to the whole Christ event. Until the end of the forty year generation when the Parousia took place, the Law was still in effect.

Now the believers to whom Paul was writing in Galatia had not seen the Parousia yet, so weren't they still under the Law? No, there is another event which ended the Law on an individual level before A.D. 70, it was the New Birth:

Romans 7:1-4 (NASB) Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? 2 For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3 So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God.

The Law had no jurisdiction over any believer after Pentecost. The Jewish believers were free from the Law "through the body of Christ."

During the transition period, Old Testament Judaism was still a veritable religion, and the Jews were still "under the Law," because the old covenant was still in effect. However, Jewish and Gentile Christians were not "under the Law" (old covenant) but under the New Covenant" made in Christ's blood on the cross.

Alright, with that behind us, let's pick up where we left off last week. We want to continue to understand the purpose of the Law.

Galatians 3:22 (NASB) But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Now we can see how the law and the promise work in harmony to fulfill the purpose of God. The law puts us down under the curse; the promise lifts us up in Christ. We are left with no exit under the condemnation of the law, so that we might find our freedom only by faith in Christ.

Galatians 3:23 (NASB) But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

Notice the important shift of focus from universal to particular: in verse 22 the whole world is declared by Scripture to be a prisoner of sin, but in verse 23 Paul says **we** were held prisoners by the law. In the first case, the law is related to all people without distinction, Jews as well as Gentiles. All are condemned as sinners by the law. In the second case, the law is related to **Israel**. For a certain period of time, Israelites, in particular, were held as prisoners under law. When we read the Mosaic law, we can see how every aspect of Israeli life was restricted, restrained, and confined by the law. In this sense, the law was a jailer over the Israelites.

The Creator of the world personally gave the Israelites His standard. He didn't give it to any other nation:

Psalms 147:19-20 (NASB) He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. 20 He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!

As we read through the Mosaic Law, we are impressed with a complex system of laws that were set in place to guide the conduct of the Israeli people. According to Paul's imagery in verse 23, the law functioned as a jailer to lock up the Israeli people in a vast system of legal codes and regulations. But that lockup was meant to be only temporary.

Paul says, "We were kept in custody under the law." The word Paul uses for "kept" is the Greek word *phroureo*, which means: "to guard, protect by a military guard, either to prevent hostile invasion, or to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight." The word is used four times in the New Testament. Let's take a look at a couple of places where the word appears.

In 2 Corinthians 11:32, Paul writes about the time that a governor had an entire city surrounded and under surveillance so that he could arrest Paul:

2 Corinthians 11:32 (NASB) In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding [phroureo] the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me,

The word is used in a positive way in Philippians 4 where Paul tells us that God will "guard" our hearts and minds if we will turn to Him in the midst of our anxiety.

What a wonderful promise for those of us who are being attacked by anxiety and worry about what is going on in our lives right now. Turn to Him, trust Him, rely upon Him, cry out to Him, and He will guard your mind and your heart in Christ Jesus. God will guard our minds so that we will not be enslaved and held prisoner by anxiety.

The same word is used of the law, but in a negative way, as we are told that before the promise came, the law held Israel as prisoners. It shut them up and held them tight in its clutches always serving to remind them of their sin and their inability to meet its high demands.

"But before faith camefaith which was later to be revealed."

The coming of faith is synonymous with the coming of Christ in Paul's view of salvation history. This faith came to be realized at a time in history when it no longer looked forward to the promise in Christ, but it actually realized its fulfillment when He came.

Faith has always been the only way men are rightly related to God. It was faith that saved Abel (Hebrews 11:4), it was faith that saved Noah (Hebrews 11:7), it was faith that saved Abraham (Genesis 15:6), it was faith that saved Moses and Gideon and Samuel and David and everyone else who has ever been saved.

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

The word **tutor** is from the Greek word *paidagogos*, from which we derive pedagogue. The first meaning listed in Webster's Third New International Dictionary for *pedagogue*is: "a teacher of children or youth"; the second meaning given is: "one (as a slave) having charge of a boy chiefly on the way to and from school in classical antiquity." In Paul's day the pedagogue was distinguished from the teacher. The pedagogue supervised, controlled, and disciplined the child; the teacher instructed and educated him.

Josephus tells us of a pedagogue who was found beating the family cook when the child under his supervision overate. The pedagogue himself was corrected with the words: "Man, we did not make you the cook's pedagogue, did we? but the child's. Correct him; help him!"

Think of it in terms of parenting. Probably parenting is as close to the concept of a tutor as we have. When I was little, I needed my parents to tell me what to do: to get out of bed, to go to bed, to take a bath, to brush my teeth, to go to school, to do my homework. But eventually, when I became a man, I didn't need that anymore.

Can you imagine what it would be like if my mom called me every day: "David, take your bath David, brush your teeth David, get out of bed David, go to bed David, go to work." Believe me, I don't need that! But the legalist does. The legalist believes I still need my tutor - that I still need the Law telling me what to do; otherwise I won't do it.

In the Hellenistic world, the *pedagogue* was given the responsibility to supervise and discipline the conduct of children. He did not have the positive task of educating the child; he was only supposed to control the behavior of the child through consistent discipline. The point of Paul's use of this image in depicting the law is that the law was given this supervisory, disciplinary role over Israel. But the supervisory control of the law was only "until Christ."

The purpose of the disciplinary function of the law was to demonstrate that God's people could only be justified by faith; that we [Israel] might be justified by faith.

What does it mean to be "justified"? Being "justified" is facing a righteous court, in which God sits as Judge, and being declared righteous on the basis of the evidence produced. What is the evidence? Jesus died in our place, He took our sin, and He gave us His righteousness.

In verse 25 Paul draws a conclusion that demolishes any argument that Christians ought to live under the supervisory control of the law:

Galatians 3:25 (NASB) But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Since Paul is still speaking here in the first-person plural (we), his primary reference is to the freedom that Jewish believers now experience from the supervision of the law; because they have put their faith in Christ. If Jewish believers are no longer under the supervision of the law, then it is surely foolish for Gentile believers in Christ to put themselves under the law's supervision. No wonder Paul began this chapter with the rebuke: "You idiotic Galatians!"

Our new life in Christ is not under the supervision of the law; it is under the rule of Christ by his Spirit. Freedom in Christ from the supervisory rule of the Mosaic law empowers us to "live for God."

There are Christians who twist this verse and declare that we do not really need the Bible because "true believers have the Spirit." When Paul says, "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor," does he mean to do away with the necessity of written revelation?

Why would a person seek to set aside written revelation on the basis of the internal ministry of the Spirit? First, it takes away the burden of serious and, often, laborious study of the Scriptures. Second, it establishes an absolute freedom from criticism and condemnation (if the Spirit "led" in the taking of a certain position, or the doing of a certain action, what man is there that can criticize the Spirit?). Third, it establishes a profound authority in the one "led of the Spirit." Thus, the setting aside of the written revelation in favor of the internal leading of the Spirit is extremely dangerous, because it appeals greatly to those who are too lazy to study; too insecure in their theology to be able to bear criticism; and too desirous of having men think highly of them. In a word, such a position appeals to the flesh.

Secondly, it makes the entire ministry of God's Spirit to men to be totally internal and subjective. This would mean that man's only responsibility would be to properly interpret the internal urging of the Spirit.

In other words, if the ministry of the Spirit were only internal, Paul was wasting his time and ours to pen any of his letters. The fact that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians is abundant proof that the external word is as important as the internal Spirit.

Paul's words in verses 23-25 deal a decisive blow to the teaching of the Judaizers in the Galatian churches. The Law which once distinguished the Jews from the Gentiles is no longer binding, even on the Jews. It is antiquated. The Gentile Galatians had been persuaded by the Judaizers that to be truly spiritual, they must place themselves under the Law. Paul counters this by showing that if living under the Law is no longer necessary for the Jews, surely it is not required of the Gentiles either.

Believer, I want you to understand that the Law is not binding on you in any way. Does this mean that we are free to do whatever we want? No, as believers we are not under the Old Covenant Law, but we are under the Law of Christ:

Galatians 6:2 (NASB) Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

The Old Covenant is over, and we are living in the New Covenant age. Jesus Christ is our Lord, and we are to live in a way that honors Him.

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