

***Sabbath School Today***  
**With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

***The Gospel in Galatians***  
**Lesson 7. The Road to Faith**

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). Probably everyone has experienced a school teacher who was impossible to please and made difficult assignments. No matter how hard you worked, you could never—at least in that teacher’s mind—produce anything that was worthy of top marks. It probably discouraged you from ever thinking you could attain perfection in that course; the demand was too high.

Many people look at God and His law in the same way. They see Him as setting before us an impossible task when He says, “Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). Many believe that the demand for character perfection (to overcome all sinful propensities and inclinations) is too high a goal for our sin-filled nature. As a result, Paul’s plea in 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21—“be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”—is viewed as advice to modify our relationship with God rather than it being an admonition to overcome sin.

It is thought that Paul’s counsel is addressing the need for a “good relationship” with God as the only thing needed, and this “good relationship” is the road of faith, leading to spiritual renewal. With this view we’re told that the “relationship” must be maintained through Bible study, prayer, and good works. But think about this idea for a moment. In this situation, who has the burden to maintain the “relationship”? Who is responsible for making sure that the connection between God and the individual stays firmly plugged together?

The idea of “maintaining a relationship with God” is a subtle form of old covenantism. Even if you answered that last question by saying, Well, it’s me and God together that makes the relationship work, you will still be placing yourself under the old covenant. Salvation is not a partnership.

“That which makes all the trouble is that even when men are willing to recognize the Lord at all they want to make bargains with Him. They want it to be an equal, ‘mutual’ affair—a transaction in which they can consider themselves on a par with God. But whoever deals with God must deal with Him on His own terms, that is, on a basis of fact—that we have nothing and are nothing, and He has everything and is everything and gives everything.” [1]

“Here is no play on words. The issue is vital. The controversy is over the way of salvation, whether by Christ alone, or by something else, or by Christ *and* something or somebody else. Many people imagine that *they* must save themselves by making themselves good. Many think that Christ is a valuable adjunct, a good Assistant to their

efforts. Others are willing to give Him the *first* place, but not the *only* place. They regard themselves as good seconds. It is the Lord *and* they who do the work.” [2]

When “the glory of man is laid in the dust” then we are ready to be in-filled with Christ’s perfect character through the work of the Holy Spirit. “According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:3, 4). This is the only way we can become righteous “doers of the law.” We humbly let the faith of Jesus that has been given to every man “work out” in our lives (Rom. 12:3; Phil. 2:12; Gal. 2:16). In this way we “become doers of the law, not by doing but by believing” the precious promise of God to us. [3]

The “partnership” of our salvation lies in the Godhead and Their everlasting covenant that makes righteous all who will believe Their promise to us. “For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself ... Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:13–18).

“To everyone who remembered the oath of God to Abraham it was a revelation of the wondrous greatness of God’s promise; for all the righteousness which the law demands He has sworn to give to everyone who trusts Him. ... God’s precepts are promises; they must necessarily be such, because He knows that we have no power! All God requires is what He *gives*.” [4]

The wonderful good news of the everlasting covenant of Christ and His righteousness is that we are not under any burden to produce righteousness in our lives. The burden is not on our shoulders, but has been laid upon the shoulders of our Saviour. We are not “under the law” to keep every precept and example through our own power (which we don’t possess anyway). We are not “under the law” as receiving just condemnation from the broken law, because Christ was made “to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. 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” (Rom. 8:1-4).

It is the faith of Christ working in and through us that produces the required righteousness. “The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Gal. 3:22). The everlasting covenant promise comes to us by the “faith of Jesus Christ” that has been given to us (again, mark that little two letter word “of”). The “Scripture” Paul is referring to in this verse are the writings of what we now call “the Old Testament” which were the only “holy writings”

at that time through which knowledge of sin could be known (Gal. 3:19; Rom. 7:7). The righteousness of Christ has been preached from the time Adam fell.

The controversy over the law in Galatians that arose in 1886 concerned which law Paul was discussing in the focus verses of our lesson this week. Was the “schoolmaster” the ceremonial law, the moral law, or was it both? Which law is it that brings us under condemnation, the ceremonial or the moral law? Which law is it that must be kept to make one righteous? The Judaizing Christians to whom Paul addressed this letter had the same confusion.

In 1886 and the following years, George I. Butler, Uriah Smith, and others considered that the law Paul was referring to in Galatians 3:21-25 was the ceremonial law. To support their position, Butler compared the discussion in Galatians to the history of the early church found in Acts 15, claiming that the context of Paul’s discussion concerned the “ceremonial” matters of idol worship, diet (consumption of animals with their blood), and fornication (Acts 15:19, 20, 28, 29). Butler’s foundational argument was that “this has been Paul’s subject thus far in this letter.” Butler based his argument in favor of the ceremonial law on the fact that Paul was addressing circumcision in the previous chapters of Galatians. [5]

However, circumcision was never part of the ceremonial (sanctuary) law. When God gave Abraham the rite of circumcision it was intended as an object lesson that would teach Abraham and his descendants the uselessness of their efforts to fulfill God’s everlasting covenant promise through their own works. Circumcision, or cutting of the flesh, showed that the “flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63; Gal. 5:6). Salvation requires a circumcision of the heart, which is the work of God (Deut. 10:6; Col. 2:11, 12).

Therefore, “the only possible way in which anybody can be under sin is by that law by which is ‘the knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 3:20; 7:7); by that law which is ‘the strength of sin’ (1 Cor. 15:56); that law of which ‘sin’ itself is ‘the transgression.’ (1 John 3:4). That law is the law which says, ‘thou shalt not covet.’ (Rom. 7:7-13). And it is the law of God, the ten commandments. This is so certain that there can be no question about it.” [6]

The problem Paul was addressing in his letter to the Galatians was not that “the Jews were teaching [the Gentiles] to break the [ten] commandments, but because they were putting their trust in something besides Christ, and the man who does that cannot keep from sin, no matter how hard he tries.” [7]

Addressing the crux of Butler’s argument, Waggoner asked: “Do you mean to intimate by this [claim that the law in Galatians 3:18-21 is the ceremonial law] that there was ever a time when any people could approach God except through Christ? If not, then language means nothing. Your words seem to imply that before the first advent men approached God by means of the ceremonial law, and that after that they approached Him through the Messiah; but we shall have to go outside the Bible to find any support for the idea that anybody could ever approach God except through Christ. Amos 5:22; Micah 6:6-8, and many other texts show conclusively that the ceremonial law alone could never enable people to come to God.” [8]

If the ceremonial law was not the means through which persons in the Old Testament approached God, what then was the purpose of the sanctuary rituals? “In order that man might realize the enormity of sin, which would take the life of the sinless Son of God, he was required to bring an innocent lamb, confess his sins over its head, then with his own hands take its life, a type of Christ’s life. This sin-offering was burned, typifying that through the death of Christ all sin would finally be destroyed in the fires of the last day.” [9]

How are the Ten Commandments a “schoolmaster”? In itself, the Ten Commandment law has no mercy and can do nothing toward making anyone righteous, no matter how hard we try to keep them. Their purpose is to act as a mirror of God’s perfect character, and when we look into them we see just how dirty our face really is. At Sinai they were “added” in written form, in “more explicit detail,” because of the hardness of the people’s hearts. “It was given under circumstances of the most awful majesty as a warning to the children of Israel that by their unbelief they were in danger of losing the promised inheritance.” [10]

“... it is clear that if the man is awakened by the law to keener consciousness of his condition, and the law continues goading him, giving him no rest, shutting up every other way of escape, *the man must at last find the door of safety*, for it stands open. Christ is the city of refuge ... in Christ alone will the sinner find release from the lash of the law, for in Christ the righteousness of the law is fulfilled, and by Him it is fulfilled in us.” [11]

—Ann Walper

#### **Endnotes:**

[1] E. J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, a verse-by-verse study of Galatians, p. 71, CFI ed. (2016).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 69, emphases in original.

[3] See *ibid.*, p. 56.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 77, emphasis in original.

[5] G. I. Butler, *The Law in the Book of Galatians, Is It the Moral Law or Does It Refer to That System of Laws Peculiarly Jewish?*, Review and Herald, Battle Creek, Mich., p. 37 (1886).

[6] A. T. Jones, *Studies in Galatians*, April 3, 1900.

[7] E. J. Waggoner, *The Gospel in the Book of Galatians, A Review*, Oakland, Calif., p. 11 (1888).

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

[9] S. N. Haskell, *The Cross and Its Shadow*, pp. 20, 21 (1914).

[10] *The Glad Tidings*, pp. 73, 74.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 82, emphasis in original.

#### **Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/fbCJI5IDioc>

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