

LAW AND FAITH

(by Boyce Mouton)

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” (Gal 3:24-25)

WE HAVE JUST COMPLETED A STUDY ON LAW AND GRACE. NOW LET US CONSIDER LAW AND FAITH. IN THIS BRIEF STUDY WE WILL ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN HOW THE LAW WAS A SCHOOLMASTER TO BRING US UNTO CHRIST THAT WE MIGHT BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH!

CHRIST

First let us consider how the Law was designed by God to bring us unto Christ. Jesus Christ, as you know, is a real person. In fact, the birth of Christ has divided time into A.D. and B.C. As Christians, we love Jesus, but we must remember that when Jesus was on the earth a lot of people did not love Him. He was extremely poor and very unpopular. In fact, the Scriptures teach that He was “despised”. The prophet Isaiah wrote these words about Jesus hundreds of years before He was born:

“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (Isa 53:2-3)

Desperate people, however, were attracted to Jesus. People who were blind, or crippled, or lepers sought out Jesus. When they found Him and asked for mercy, He healed them every one. So the Law was designed by God to make us desperate so that we come to Christ and ask for mercy. Praise the Lord, whoever comes to Christ will not be cast out (Jn. 6:37).

We will give more information about this later, but remember! **THE LAW WAS OUR SCHOOLMASTER TO BRING US UNTO CHRIST!**

FAITH

Our text also teaches that the Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to faith. As you know, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is the window that enables us to see things that are invisible to the human eye. Faith enables us to worship God whom we cannot see (1 Pet. 1:8). There are, as you know, two worlds. One world is visible, and the other world is invisible (Col. 1:16). The visible world is temporal, and the invisible world is eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). Most people are only concerned about the things they can see. This is a mistake, for the things we see are only temporal! The things we can see will someday be totally destroyed (2 Pet. 3:11-13). All earthly treasures will some day disappear. The invisible world is different. It is eternal! The only way we can “see” the invisible world, however, is by faith. That’s why it is important for the Law to bring us to Christ and also to faith.

Jesus once told the story of the rich man and Lazarus (see Lk. 16:19 - 31). The rich man

invested his life and energy only on things he could see. He wore expensive clothing and lived in luxury every day. Since he only invested in this present world it was a poor investment. He died, left all of his earthly wealth behind, and went to a place of eternal torment. The poor man, by contrast, invested his life on spiritual treasures not seen by human eyes. His treasures were safe and secure. Moths and rust could not corrupt them and thieves could not break through and steal them. As Jesus said, he was laying up treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:20). It was a wise investment! He died and went to a place of eternal reward. Paul said it like this: **“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:18)**

Even though it is not easy to do, Christians are commanded to set their minds on things above and not on things of earth (Col. 3:2). Most people, however, do not focus on things above until they are desperate. We often wait, for example, until the doctor tells us we are dying before we think about heaven and hell. When we finally come to realize the temporal nature of earthly wealth, then it is much easier to “set our minds on things above.” He is no fool who gives up the things he cannot keep to gain the things he cannot lose.

Remember! THE LAW WAS OUR SCHOOLMASTER TO BRING US CHRIST AND ALSO TO FAITH.

JUSTIFICATION

The Law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, and also to justification by faith. Job asked how a man can be justified before God (Job. 25:4)? This is a good question. The Scriptures teach that:

- All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).
- Our iniquities have separated us from God and our sins have hidden His face so that He will not hear (Is. 59:2).
- So the question of Job is a valid one, how can sinful man be justified before a Righteous God?

The answer, of course, is that justification comes by faith without the deeds of the Law (Rom. 3:28).

Faith, as you know, existed a long time before the Law. The following Scriptures all refer to examples of faith before the Law.

- It is through faith that we “understand” that the things we see in the universe were made by God out of things that we cannot see (Heb. 11:3).
- By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain (Heb. 11:4).
- By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death (Heb. 11:5).
- By faith Noah built an ark and saved his family (Heb. 11:7)
- Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).
- Paul points out that Abraham was justified by faith 430 years before the Law was given (Gal. 3:17).
- These Scriptures can easily be multiplied.

If justification by faith was here before the Law of Moses, then how was the Law a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith?

The answer, of course, is obvious. When God created the heavens and the earth He put laws in place that man would not discover until later. Mankind matures and makes discoveries in much the same way that children mature and make discoveries. Plato, the ancient Greek Philosopher, said that “necessity is the mother of invention”. This is true! Quite frequently the inventions and discoveries we make grow out of desperation.

It is easy to imagine, for example, that man discovered a lever during an emergency when he needed to move an object heavier than he could move by hand. The principle of leverage was always there, but it took some special circumstance for man to discover it. Later man discovered how to harness the power of wind and water. Still later man learned how to make steam engines, and gasoline motors. In each instance, man was only discovering laws that already existed and learning to harness power that was already there.

So Paul makes reference in Rom. 3:27 to the “law of faith”. This law, of course, like all the other laws, was nothing new. It had always been there. Abraham, out of desperation, discovered that law. Remember, Abraham “did” a lot of things before he discovered the law of faith. He left Ur for Haran when he was 75 years old (Gen. 12:4). Then he left Haran for Canaan (Gen. 12:5). Then, because of a famine, he went to Egypt (Gen. 12:10). Then he returned from Egypt and separated from his nephew Lot (Gen. 13:8 - 12). Then he went to war and rescued Lot from the kings of the East (Gen. 14:14 - 16). Then he paid tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18 - 20).

By now, however, Abraham was desperate. He was 86 years old and had no child. He had been promised a son, but now he feared that this promise would never come true. If he had no son, then Eliezer of Damascus (his servant with the greatest seniority) would inherit everything he had.

Then the Word of the Lord came to him again and said: **“This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” (Gen 15:4)** In order to make this promise more credible, God took Abraham outside and showed him the stars of the heavens. On that night Abraham saw the stars in a new and different way. These were the same stars that he had seen all of his life, but now, “by faith”, he saw in them the creative power of God. On that night Abraham came to believe that nothing was impossible to God. If God could create the heavens He could do anything. Then the Scriptures state:

“Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6)

Abraham, in his desperation, had discovered the law of faith. Most others had not yet made that discovery. Most people still felt that the only way you can be acceptable to God is by “doing” something. That’s why God gave the Law. It was to convince mankind once and for all that the only way man could be justified was by believing.

It is difficult for most of us to believe that we can be justified by faith. We have to be desperate to choose faith. The thief on the cross was desperate. His hands and feet were nailed to a cross and he couldn’t “do” anything to earn salvation. He had no choice but faith. When he, in faith, called out to Christ he was promised a place in paradise (Lk. 23:43). The Law was designed to make us so desperate that we also would call out to Christ and be justified by faith.

HOW DOES THE LAW MAKE MEN DESPERATE?

1

There are many ways that the Law makes men desperate. First, God specifically designed the Law of Moses so that no man could keep it. It was not given to make men feel good, it was designed to make them feel guilty. (Rom. 3:19).

Take, for example, the book of Leviticus. The word “unclean” occurs over 100 times in this book. There were an almost infinite number of ways that the devout Hebrew could become unclean. The Law was designed so that once you touched something unclean you became unclean and guilty, even though you were unaware of it (Lev. 5:2). Once a person was unclean, everything they touched also became unclean (see Lev. 15). Consequently, the Hebrew people were afraid to touch anything for fear that some unclean person had already touched it. Remember, the Law was placed beside the Ark of the Covenant as a testimony AGAINST the people of God (Deut. 31:24 - 27).

#2

In the second place, the Law was designed so that innocent people could be punished for sins committed by their leaders. Take King David, for example. He lived and died under the Law. When David sinned by numbering the people of Israel God gave him three options. (1) 3 years of famine (2) 3 months of fleeing from their enemies (3) 3 days of plague (2 Sam. 24:13). Note that all of these examples involved punishing the people for a sin committed by David. David chose the 3 days of plague and 70,000 innocent people died (2 Sam. 24:15). God designed the Law this way on purpose. He wanted us to be desperate.

The same principle of law is found in Lev. 4:2. This time, however, innocent people became guilty because of sins committed by the priest. Can you not understand how the Law made people desperate? If people become desperate enough they will try anything, even faith!

#3

The Law was specifically designed to show no mercy. It was written on cold, rigid tablets of stone that could not be changed. Here are some examples of judgement without mercy under the Law:

- Levi, the father of the Levites, killed the men of Shechem without mercy (Gen. 34:25 - 29). Even though this happened before the Law, remember that it was the Levites who became the priests under the Law.
- The Levites also killed their brothers, friends, and neighbors without mercy when the Law was given. 3,000 people died on this occasion (Ex. 32:27 - 28).
- The Law required that even your very own brother, son, daughter, or the wife you love must be put to death without pity if they enticed you to worship other gods (Deut. 13:6 - 11).
- The Law required that a woman have her hand cut off without pity if she had touched the private parts of a man other than her husband (Deut. 25:11 - 12).
- **“Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy. . . “ (Heb 10:28)**
- There are obviously many more examples of the way that the Law excluded mercy.
- When students of the Law become desperate enough, they too will come to Christ for mercy.

#4

The Law was also designed so that the people could not escape facing the cruel reality of

punishment demanded by the Law. Note:

- In Numbers 15:32 - 36 we are told of a man who was caught gathering wood on the Sabbath day. They kept him in custody until God revealed what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses: **“The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp” (Num 15:35)**. It was not enough for one man to execute the convicted man, God specifically required “the whole assembly” to stone him. Why? Obviously God wanted the “whole assembly” to face the reality of the punishment required by the Law.
- Those who would entice Israel to worship other gods must be stoned to death upon the testimony of two or three witnesses. Again, however, “all the people” were to be involved in the execution (Deut. 17:7).
- When Achan sinned by stealing things from Jericho, “all the people” were again required to be involved in the execution (Josh. 7:25).
- Even a rebellious son was to be stoned to death (Deut. 21:18 - 21) Again, however, the execution was not to be a private matter, it was to be done by “all the men of the town” (vs. 21).
- Facing the harsh reality of Law is like a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

#5

Even Moses, as you know, could not be saved by the very Law he delivered. Remember, for example, God commanded Moses to “speak” to a rock (Nu. 20:8), but he “struck” it (Nu. 20:11). This was an infraction of the Law and no mercy could be given, not even to Moses. Therefore the Lord said: **“Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them (Num 20:12)**. While this may seem insignificant to man, it was considered as rebellion by God (Ps. 106:33). This act of disobedience is mentioned over and over as the reason why Moses could not enter into the Promised Land (see Nu. 27:12 - 14; Deut. 1:37; 3:26; 32:48 - 52, etc.). James wrote that whoever keeps the whole Law and offends in only one point, is guilty of it all (Ja. 2:10).

These are just a few of the many ways that the Law makes men desperate. IF YOU TRULY FACE THE HARSH CONSEQUENCES OF THE LAW OF MOSES, YOU TOO WILL BE DESPERATE ENOUGH TO TURN TO CHRIST AND BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH!

GOOD NEWS - THE LAW DOES NOT REFLECT THE NATURE OF GOD!

- There are many who believe that the Law reflects the nature of God, but it does not!
- The Law is “without mercy”, but God is not. The Bible is filled with many references to the mercy of God. The 136th Psalm, for example, has 26 verses, and EVERY VERSE REMINDS US THAT THE MERCY OF GOD ENDURES FOREVER!
- The Law is only a shadow. **“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming-- not the realities themselves” (Heb 10:1)**.
 - You are not a shadow, and God is not a shadow. A shadow is not reality, but God is reality.
 - A shadow is always changing, but God never changes. He is always the same and the Scriptures state specifically that God does not change like shadows do (Ja. 1:17). It is very hard to recognize anyone from their shadow, that’s why the Jews didn’t recognize Jesus.

- The Scriptures teach that it was “necessary” to change the Law (Heb. 7:12), but God never changes (Mal. 3:6).
- We do not understand the nature of God from the Law, we understand the nature of God through Jesus Christ. In Jesus dwells all the fulness of the Godhead in a Body (Col. 2:9)
- God is Light, and in Him there is no shadow (James 1:17) and no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1:5).
- Jesus is also known as the “Light of men” (John 1:4).
- We used words to communicate and Jesus, as you know, is the “Word” of God (Jn. 1:1).
- We learn about the nature of God, not from the Law, but from Jesus. Not from a shadow, but from reality. That’s why God gave us the Law as a Schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

GOOD NEWS - JESUS IS A MERCIFUL PRIEST

- As we have already pointed out, the Levitical priest was without mercy. His major job was to kill innocent victims. When you took your lamb to the priest you knew what was going to happen to the lamb. Jesus, however, had a different type of priesthood. He could not be a priest under the Law because He came from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14).
- Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4).
 - The priesthood of Melchizedek is much different from the priesthood under law. The Scriptures point out that it was also superior to the Levitical Priesthood (Heb. 7:1 - 22).
 - As we have pointed out, a major function of the Levitical Priesthood was to kill, but as far as the Scriptures are concerned, Melchizedek never offered a blood sacrifice.
 - Jesus was a Priest after the order of Melchizedek. The only blood Jesus shed was His own!
- It is important to remember that Jesus is a merciful and faithful High Priest (Heb. 2:17). He can perfectly understand our problems because He was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:14 -16).

GOOD NEWS! GOD GAVE THE LAW BECAUSE HE IS SHAPING HISTORY LIKE A POTTER SHAPES CLAY!

The prophet Jeremiah received a vision that helped him to understand what was going on in the world. He wrote: **“Then the word of the LORD came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.”** (Jer 18:5-8)

God knows everything, so before He created the heavens and the earth He knew that Jesus was going to have to die on the cross. Remember! God determined to redeem us with the precious blood of Christ before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:18 - 20).

So like a Potter shapes the clay, God has shaped the world and all human history. He did not give us the Law by accident, it was a deliberate part of His plan to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

- Remember! God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever

- believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).
- God not only created the heavens and the earth, He has even given a name to every star (Ps. 147:4). Not one sparrow can fall to the ground without God knowing about it. The Scriptures teach that the very hairs of your head are all numbered (Matt. 10:29 - 30). You are of more value to God than many sparrows
 - The present heavens and earth, will pass away. They are only temporary. God wants you to have an eternal reward in heaven (Matt. 6:19 - 21). God wants you to have a special place of honor in the new heavens, and the new earth (1 Pet 1:3 - 4; 2 Pet. 3:7 - 13).
 - From the very beginning God began teaching the world about Christ and faith. Remember! By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain (Heb. 11:4).

DO YOU HAVE FAITH?

Moses describes the righteousness that is by the Law by stating that "The man who does these things will live by them" (Rom. 10:5). But Christ is the end of the Law so that righteousness is available to all who believe. It is therefore not necessary to ascend into heaven, or descend into the deep, in order to have some physical contact with Christ. By faith, you can contact Christ right where you are! IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH THAT JESUS IS LORD, AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED! FOR IT IS WITH YOUR HEART THAT YOU BELIEVE AND ARE JUSTIFIED, AND IT IS WITH YOUR MOUTH THAT YOU CONFESS AND ARE SAVED! (Rom. 10:9 - 10).

If you study the Law correctly, it will be a schoolmaster to bring you unto Christ that you might be justified by faith!

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