

## Chapter Three

### The Beginning of the Law

A question that was always predictable in the days of Paul was, “*Is the Christian under the Law?*” – and, although the Bible is crystal-clear in the answer that was given by inspiration by the Holy Spirit, that the believer is **NOT** under the Law, but under grace – yet the proud heart of man does not seem to simply accept God’s grace, but would rather *try* to save himself by his own goodness and works.

And that is just exactly what Satan wants man to do. Satan, the enemy of our souls, wants us to be religious and morally good. He urges men to strive to improve themselves, to try and obey the Law, to keep on working and toiling, to be earnest and sincere and religious in all their efforts at keeping the commandments in an effort to make themselves worthy of God’s favor instead of accepting His grace. But Paul says this is another gospel, and just a clever trick of the enemy of our souls to keep us from coming to the Christ of grace as poor, hopeless, helpless sinners. The Law, says Paul, was giving not to save, but to show the awfulness of sin, and our need of salvation.

This brings us back to the question in the last lesson, and that Paul anticipated in Galatians 3:19,

*“Wherefore then serveth the law?”*

– (“*What’s the point, or “What’s the purpose of the Law?”*”

Paul immediately answers this vital question, he continues, “*It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come*” (Galatians 3:19).

From the answer Paul gives in this Scripture, we learn that the Law had a beginning and it had an ending. It was **added until**. But, *when* was the Law added, and *what* was it added to? When you add something, there first must be something to which it is added.

For instance, when a recipe for baking a cake says “*take the yolks of two eggs, and add them to two cups of flour,*” it is understood that there were first of all two cups of flour to which the rest of the ingredients were to be added. So when Paul says, “*the Law was added,*” we, naturally, ask, “*To what was it added?*” In the context of this verse in Galatians 3:19 is the answer. The Law was added to the **grace** of God. In this whole passage Paul is showing that Abraham lived under *grace*, not under Law. Notice carefully Paul’s argument:

*“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise”* (Galatians 3:17-18).

This is a pivotal passage. Paul says that the Law was not given until **four hundred and thirty years** after God made His covenant of grace with Abraham. When Abraham

lived, there was no Law – no written Law – but Abraham was under pure grace. There can be no mistaking the words: the Law was not given until 430 years after God made His covenant promise to Abraham. The covenant of grace with Abraham was unconditional. And then four hundred and thirty years later God “*added the Law.*” Abraham was under grace, Isaac was under grace, Jacob was under grace, the children of Israel were under grace while they were slaves in Egypt. They were delivered from Egypt by grace, they crossed the Red Sea by grace, and then when they reached Mount Sinai, God “*added the Law.*” The Law did not supplant grace. It did not take the place of grace. It did not annul the promises of grace. It was “*added*” and Israel was still under grace when God “*added the Law.*” Read again Galatians 3:17 – the giving of the Law did not make void the covenant of grace made to Israel. It was “*added*” to grace, so that Israel was under a Law that condemned them, but thank God they were also under grace that made provision for a broken Law. If grace had been removed when Israel was given the Law, they would all have perished.

### *When and Where was the Law Added?*

To understand why God added the Law to grace, we must see the setting in which the Law was given, and the circumstances bringing it about. A detailed record can be found in Exodus 19 and 20. Few Christians are familiar with the circumstances leading up to the giving of the Law. It would help a great deal to read and study these chapters in Exodus. In our churches we usually hear only the actual Ten Commandments read, without the all-important verses that precede and follow the actual declaration of the Decalogue (“*the Law*”). Let’s turn to the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus. Israel had been out of Egypt for three months (Exodus 19:1). But it was a stormy three months indeed,. Here was a nation delivered from slavery, redeemed from death, saved by grace, and yet they were scarcely out of Egypt with they rebelled against God. When they were three days out of Egypt, we read,

*“The people murmured against Moses, saying,  
‘What shall we drink?’”* (Exodus 15:24)

God dealt once again in grace and led them (in spite of their murmurings) to Elim where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees. But did they appreciate God’s grace? Did they realize the awfulness of their sin of rebellion? **No!** When they left the oasis of Elim they came to Sinai about two months later. What did they do here? Once more they murmured, and we read:

*“And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger”* (Exodus 16:2-3).

Can you imagine a people – after having been delivered from slavery, saved from casting their children into the river, redeemed from Pharaoh’s plan to exterminate them – being guilty of such rebellion against God? Can you imagine this people less than

three months out of bondage, accusing God, as well as Moses and Aaron, of deliberately bringing them into the wilderness to mercilessly kill them by starvation? They accused Moses of the sadistic plan of exterminating the people whom he had first delivered. Why didn't God punish them? Why didn't God send fire from Heaven to devour them? Why did God permit these delivered slaves to so wickedly accuse Him? Listen to the answer! They were under grace, and not under Law! If they had been under Law only, God would have damned them into the pit of Hell on the spot, and the glorious history of Israel would never have been written.

### Grace Did Abound

Israel was still under the grace of God. God had made His covenant of grace with them through Abraham their father, and so instead of granting their inane request and challenge to God to destroy them, He did the very opposite – He sent them bread from Heaven. It was the bread of God's mercy and grace.

### A Thirsty Nation

They still did not appreciate the grace of God. Soon after this the nation is again accusing God. In Exodus 17 we have the record of the rebellious nation in the wilderness of sin. Again we hear them complaining:

*“...and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” (Exodus 17:3).*

What a terrible accusation against God! But instead of judgment, God answered again in grace and not with the penalty of the Law. He caused Moses to smite the rock and the water gushed forth. All this happened within three months after they had seen the marvelous salvation of the Lord. What was wrong with this people anyway? The answer is simple. They did not know or recognize the gravity, the seriousness of their sin. They did not understand the character and nature of sin. They knew not the penalty of their rebellion. They did not appreciate the fact that it was God's mercy and grace that had spared them. They were not conscious of the greatness of their sin and their inability to live a life pleasing to God. They imagined that they were able to do God's will perfectly. It was not their fault (they reasoned) that they thirsted and hungered – it was God's fault. In brief, they did not know the seriousness and gravity of sin. For this reason God is now going to give Israel a Law, a perfect Law, to reveal to them what sin really is.

### The Background

It is with this background of murmuring, rebellion, and ingratitude that God is to give the Law on Mount Sinai to Israel. God calls Moses into the mountain, and gives him a message for Israel. Let's read Exodus 19:3-4,

*“And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell*

*the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.*

Observe carefully what God reminds them of before He gives them the tables of the Ten Commandments. He reminds them that they were under grace. Everything that had happened to them, their deliverance from the Egypt of slavery and death was the underserved grace of God. If God had dealt with them in justice according to the Law, they would have perished. So the Lord reminds them, before they make the mistake of choosing Law over grace, how that all God's blessings were of grace. And having reminded them of their position under grace, the Lord adds the word "**IF.**" God's grace was unconditional, but God now adds conditions, and says,

*"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine" (Exodus 19:5).*

God now proposes a new thing – *conditional blessing*. He says He will do something for them upon condition of their obedience. If they will **obey** God's voice and **keep** God's covenant, then the Lord will bless them.

How blind man is! The history of the past three months out of Egypt had proven that Israel could not *obey* God perfectly; they had *not* kept God's covenant perfectly. They had failed again and again and again, but the grace of God had forgiven them again and again and again. Apparently they did not realize the real gravity of their sin. They did not appreciate God's grace, but believed they could do anything the Lord required of them. One would have thought that when God suggests the giving of the Law and making their blessings conditional upon their perfect obedience, they would have cried out, "*Oh, no, Moses, Oh, no! God back up the mountain to the Lord and tell Him we do not want to be put under a Law that we cannot keep; we don't want His blessings to be dependent upon our perfect obedience, our merit, or works. We are unworthy and unable to do God's will perfectly. Tell the Lord we want to remain under grace.*" But though almost unbelievable, the answer of Israel is the exact opposite. Read Israel's answer to God's "**if**" –

*"And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD" (Exodus 19:8)*

Poor, foolish Israel! Poor, blinded people! They thought they could keep God's commandments, and so they say, "**All** that the Lord commands we will **do**." Yes, we will **do!** **Do!** **Do!** Instead of they ought to have said, "*Oh, God, we need grace and mercy- not Law, for we have already proven we cannot obey You and keep Your word perfectly.*" They chose conditional blessings (if) and chose to be placed under the Law, for they were confident that they were able to keep any Law that God gave them. And so God seems to say, "*You think you can keep My Commandments? Well, I'll give you a Law. I'll give you a set of rules, that will be the most perfect expression of the will of God, a perfect revelation of God's holiness, the perfect requirements for earning or meriting My blessing.*" God then gives them a Law that reveals the true nature of sin, and the requirements for complete, continuous, uninterrupted obedience, and shows the inability of man to keep it. God

was saying, *“If you think you can keep My commandments, here they are. See what you can do with them.”*

### God's Change of Attitude

Moses goes up to God and brings Israel's message back to God – that is, *“All that God requires, we are able to do.”* So the Lord, to show them the utter folly of their ignorant notion that they could do what He commanded, now gives a Law that would convince them of the very opposite – that man cannot be saved by keeping the Law, but rather, still needs the grace of God. This is the background for the giving of the Law – ending with Israel saying, *“all that God demands we will do.”* Israel chooses Law instead of grace, and immediately God's whole attitude toward Israel changes. God now hides His face and comes in a thick cloud (Exodus 19:9), and the giving of the Law is accompanied by prohibitions, threatenings, penalties of death, ceremonialism, thunders, lightings, the whole mountain smoking, and there is a terrible earthquake. In this setting of judgment God now gives the Law. We need to read carefully the description of the giving of the Law as recorded in Exodus 19:9-24. It is a scene of judgment, threatenings, and darkness. It is the picture of the ministry of the Law. The Law could only demonstrate God's displeasure upon sin, but could never save from sin.