

## [IN GOD'S IMAGE 62 – THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW]

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***Last time we looked at the amazing resource God has made available to His newly adopted children so they can develop the same holy nature and characteristics of God Himself.***

- ◆ Through the Holy Spirit, Christ comes to us and gives us His mind, the “mind of Christ.”
- ◆ Under the New Covenant, the “mind of Christ” is the resource given to God’s children to replace the external law of the Old Covenant, which failed to produce the righteousness of God in the people (Hebrews 8:10).
- ◆ The failure was not because the law was a failure, but because of the people’s unwillingness and inability to obey it (Hebrews 8:8).

***Today we are going to look at the subject of the purpose of the law.***

- ◆ To understand this whole question of the law in relation to humanity, we need to go back to God Himself.
- ◆ As mentioned earlier, we need to understand the law or commands of God are a reflection of God’s holy nature and character.
- ◆ He is a God of love, full of righteousness, justice, grace and mercy.
- ◆ Before the fall, there was no need for a law as Adam and Eve could witness for themselves this God of love.
- ◆ The two parties could relate to each other, face to face, purely on the basis of a loving relationship.
- ◆ This intimate relationship between Creator and created was shattered when Adam and Eve sinned.
- ◆ Man’s sin, because of its affront to the holiness of God necessitated a change in the way God and mankind were to relate to one another.
- ◆ Sin had distorted their humanity; consequently fellowship with God was no longer possible.
- ◆ This distorted humanity is also the reason humans have had such a difficult time relating to one another ever since.

***This rift did not in any way lessen God’s love for His creation, but it was now impossible for a holy God to relate personally to sinful mankind, as they would simply be consumed by His divine majesty.***

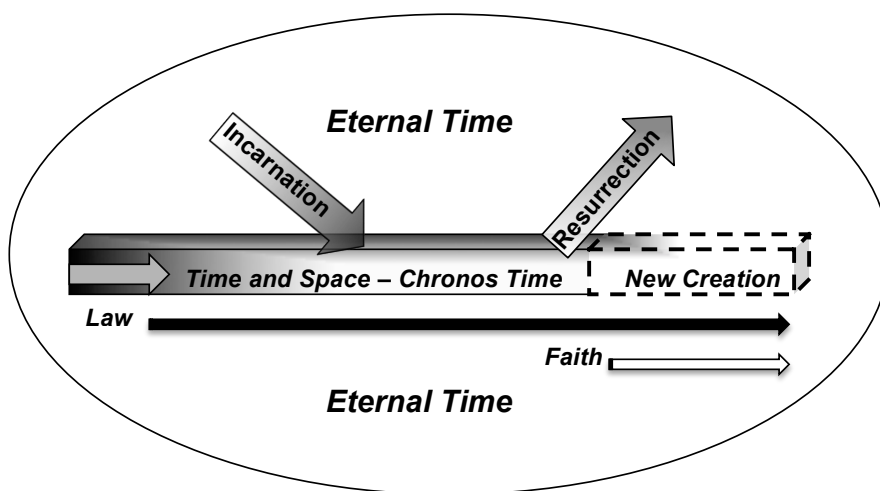
- ◆ So if God was to continue to relate to mankind without consuming them, the relationship had to be established on a totally different basis.
- ◆ This new relationship had to take into account the vast difference between the nature of a holy God and the nature of sinful man.
- ◆ But it also had to provide the means by which the two parties could be reconciled to again relate personally face to face.
- ◆ The divine solution to resolve this problem was the introduction of “the law.”
- ◆ The law not only revealed the vast gulf between a holy God and sinful mankind, but it also provided the means by which the parties would eventually be reconciled.
- ◆ But until then, the relationship between the parties would have to be conducted purely on a legal basis.
- ◆ It is under this legal system that all fallen mankind stands accountable and under which we all are judged and condemned because it points out the vast difference between God’s holiness and mankind’s sinfulness.
- ◆ ***Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.***
- ◆ And this legal arrangement came into existence the moment Adam and Eve sinned, long before any written code was given to anyone.
- ◆ So when we speak of the “law” we need to regard it in a more encompassing way than just a set of regulations such as the Ten Commandments.
- ◆ We need to regard it as more of a system or structure God instituted to govern the relationship between a holy God and a sinful humanity.
- ◆ We will see this more clearly shortly when we contrast this legal age of the “law” with the age of “faith.”

***So this is the system God introduced in order to govern the broken relationship with His rebellious children.***

- ◆ However, there was both an upside and a downside to this system, mostly a downside.
- ◆ The upside was it held lawlessness in check. Just imagine what our societies would be like without laws to govern anti-social behavior.
- ◆ Throughout history beginning with the account of Noah’s flood we have witnessed the rise of anarchy when there is no restraint placed on human behavior.
- ◆ So in this regard, the law was a blessing to societies willing to base their cultures on law.

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- ◆ A far more important upside was, in a way, a backhanded blessing as it was both a curse and a blessing.
- ◆ **Galatians 3:23 (NKJ) But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. <sup>24</sup> Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.**
- ◆ What we see here is Paul dividing salvation history into two parts, a time of “law” and a time of “faith.”
- ◆ **Luke 16:16 The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Law and Faith. (See figure below).**



- ◆ Again we see an overlap of the “already but not yet” situation.
- ◆ Just as we have the new creation overlapping with the old creation, so we see the overlapping of the age of the law and the age of faith.
- ◆ As mentioned, the law was a blessing in that it was a guard against lawlessness in society, but it was a curse in that society was made up of individuals like you and me who found it impossible to live up to its righteous demands.
- ◆ **Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.**
- ◆ However, this inability to live up to its demands (a curse) had a positive effect in that it exposed us as the pitiful sinners we are and pointed to our need for a Savior (a blessing).
- ◆ This is why Paul writes **“The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”**
- ◆ When we recognise our inability to obey the demanding requirements of the law, we are left with no alternative but to throw ourselves on God’s mercy.

**But it is while we are in this dire predicament of being sinners, unable to extricate ourselves, condemned to spiritual oblivion by the law that God comes to our rescue through Jesus Christ.**

- ◆ **Galatians 4:4-5 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.**
- ◆ Now we get to see what brings about this division of history into these two parts.
- ◆ **Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.**
- ◆ Like all good legal systems, God’s law contained penalties for crimes committed and it was uncompromising when it came to sin.
- ◆ **Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.**
- ◆ Again we see with the death of an animal after the sin of Adam and Eve and their own eventual physical death, the relationship with God was on a completely new basis.
- ◆ The law demanded justice.

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- ◆ However, this was not the complete story. The Lord used the skins of the sacrificed animals to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness symbolising God's future provision of mercy to cover the sin of those willing to throw themselves on God's mercy (Genesis 3:21; Galatians 3:27).
- ◆ It was a result of God's great love for us that Jesus came and willingly accepted ***"The curse of the law by becoming a curse for us."***
- ◆ This legal system as displayed with the sacrifice of animals in the garden, and the subsequent sacrificial system under the Law of Moses contained the means of redemption that relied entirely on the mercy of God.
- ◆ ***Romans 6:23 ...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***
- ◆ The curse of the law is nullified when we, in faith, accept the gift of God made possible by Christ's atoning sacrifice.
- ◆ We stand justified and forgiven before God as the death penalty demanded of the law has been paid, and Christ's righteousness has been attributed to us (Romans 4:23-24; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- ◆ The law has been satisfied; consequently this legal system has lost its power over us.
- ◆ The fact we need to be "justified" establishes the existence of this legal system ***"so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God."*** (Romans 3:19).

***Now we need to go back to the book of Galatians where it contrasts law and faith.***

- ◆ It's true in this particular setting; Paul is addressing the Galatians on their foolish adoption of the Law of Moses in addition to their faith in Christ.
- ◆ But we have to see the higher spiritual ramifications of Christ's sacrifice on this whole subject of the law in how God and humanity relate to one another.
- ◆ No longer does the relationship need to be on the legal basis governed by the law. Now through faith in Jesus' saving work, full adoption to sonship is once again possible.
- ◆ ***Galatians 4:4-5 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.***
- ◆ The intimate personal relationship humanity had with God prior to sin has been re-established.
- ◆ It was precisely this gracious act by Jesus on our behalf that has freed us from the curse of the law and has enabled the restoration of personal relationship with our God for those who choose it.
- ◆ This is why there is an overlap in this period between Jesus' atoning sacrifice and His promised return.
- ◆ The law has lost its power to condemn those who are "in Christ."
- ◆ To go back to the session we had on reconciliation, true reconciliation requires a response from both parties in order for it to be genuine.
- ◆ Christ's sacrifice has freed all humanity from the curse of the law in a general or universal sense.
- ◆ ***Romans 5:10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!***
- ◆ However, in order for it to become personal in an individual's life, this wonderful gift has to be accepted.
- ◆ And as all mankind has been implicated in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, each individual in God's good time will be given the opportunity to accept this gift.
- ◆ To reject it though negates what Christ has done on our behalf and the curse of the law is reinstated.
- ◆ This is where faith comes in. It is the simple acceptance of what Christ has done on our behalf that sets us free from the curse of the law (Romans 10:13).

***When the New Testament talks about "freedom" this is what it's talking about: freedom from the legal system that has enslaved and condemned us before faith set us free.***

- ◆ ***Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.***
- ◆ Paul is saying to the Galatians, "After being set free from the system that condemns you through faith in Jesus, why would you want to put yourselves back under the curse of the law?" He calls it "a yoke of slavery."
- ◆ Notice that the law with its consequences is still a valid option for those who refuse the gift of grace or those who want to add anything to it.
- ◆ ***Galatians 5:2-4 Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey***

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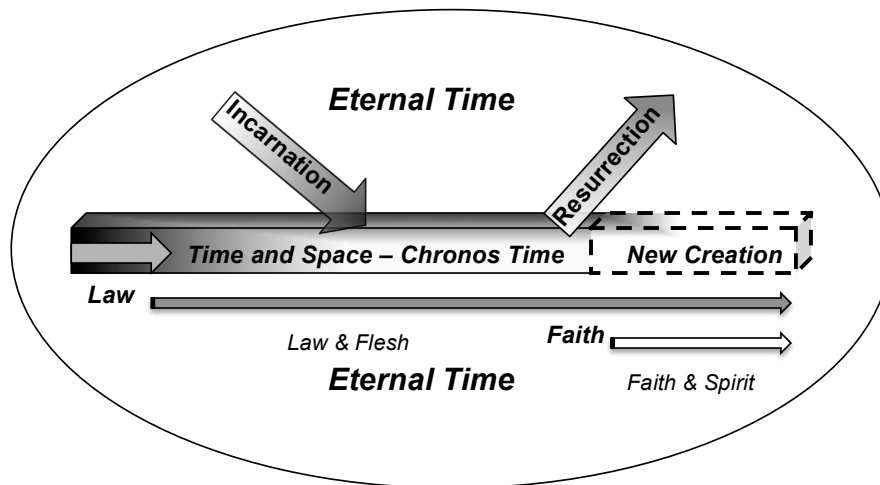
*the whole law.* <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

- ◆ The full weight of the law with its uncompromising demands is the default option for those who refuse to accept the gift of freedom bought with the blood of Jesus Christ.

*However, this freedom is not a license to do whatever we like as Paul goes on to explain in the rest of this chapter where he contrasts the two ways of life of either walking by the “flesh” or by the “Spirit.”*

- ◆ ***Galatians 5:13*** You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. <sup>14</sup> *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*
- ◆ Just because we are no longer under the “curse” of the law but under the “freedom” of faith, doesn’t mean newly adopted sons of God continue to act like they are still children of the “flesh.”
- ◆ ***Galatians 5:17*** So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> *For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.*
- ◆ What Paul is saying is, as new sons of God led by the Spirit of God, our new lifestyle needs to reflect the nature of our heavenly Father.
- ◆ Obedience is an overflow of the love relationship, not a contract.
- ◆ The “age of the law” goes hand in hand with the “age of the flesh,” while the “age of faith” goes hand in hand with the “age of the Spirit.”

***Law and Flesh and Faith and Spirit. (See figure below).***



***The take away points from all this are these.***

- ◆ When we talk about the law, we need to come to regard it in its larger sense, a system instituted by God to govern the relationship between a holy God and fallen humanity.
- ◆ The law loses its power over us when we express faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ and we become part of the new creation.
- ◆ Newly adopted sons of God leave behind the “age of the law and flesh” as they now belong to the “age of faith and the Spirit.”
- ◆ As such, they are given the means to reflect the nature of their heavenly Father.
- ◆ We have already discussed how God has given us a new nature by giving us the mind of Christ to lead us so that we can learn to reflect the nature of our heavenly Father.
- ◆ Today we looked at the purpose of the law as it governed the relationship between a holy God and His rebellious children.
- ◆ Next time we will get more specific and look at the purpose of the Law of Moses.