



SESSION 3

WHY CAN'T WE FIX IT?

▶ **The Point**

We are unable to live up to God's holy standard.

▶ **The Passage**

Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Galatians 3:10-12,19a,24-25

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

I bought a new car several years ago, and it drove perfectly. Now it's fully paid for, and I'd like to keep driving it. Recently, it kept losing power and I thought I had major transmission problems. I attempted to diagnose the problem and even fix it myself, but that didn't work out so well. After narrowly avoiding two accidents on the freeway, I took it to my mechanic. He found the problem: two small computer modules had gone bad (and cost \$900 to fix!). Although I wanted to fix the problem myself, there was no way I could restore the car to its original operating standards by myself.

I have an owner's manual that tells me what "standard operation" looks like; in other words, how my car is supposed to perform. God also has a standard by which we are to operate: perfect obedience to Him. Adam and Eve lived perfectly for a short time, but then sin entered the picture; now we just can't live up to God's standard.

We can't fix our sin problem. We're broken and we need help.

▶ **The Setting**

Forty years after the exodus from Egypt, as the Israelites prepared to enter the promised land, Moses gathered them together to reemphasize the covenant God made with them—including the law that was the standard for living in relationship with Him. Some 1,500 years later, however, the apostle Paul wrote to Galatian Christians who believed following the law was necessary for salvation. Paul noted the law was only intended to be a temporary provision until Christ came.

What does the Bible say?

The law (Gal. 3:10)—Paul used the Greek word *nomos* over one hundred times in his writings. Most often it referred to all of God’s commands and instructions as given through Moses.

The Seed (Gal. 3:19a)—The Greek word *sperma*, which means seed or offspring, can be singular or plural. Paul used it in the singular sense, referring to Christ, who was the fulfillment of God’s promise.

Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Galatians 3:10-12,19a,24-25

Deut. 5:32 **“Be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you are not to turn aside to the right or the left.**

³³ **Follow the whole instruction the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live, prosper, and have a long life in the land you will possess.**

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Gal. 3:10 **For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written, Everyone who does not do everything written in the book of the law is cursed.**

¹¹ **Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith.**

¹² **But the law is not based on faith; instead, the one who does these things will live by them.**

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Gal. 3: 19a **Why then was the law given? It was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come.**

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Gal. 3: 24 **The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith.**

²⁵ **But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,**

Deuteronomy 5:32-33 Commentary

[Verse 32] Long after sin destroyed humanity's original perfect fellowship with God, God established a standard by which humans were to live in relationship with Him. Following their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites encountered God at Mount Horeb (Sinai). With Moses as a mediator, God gave the Israelites His standard—the law.

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, most of the Israelites who had experienced the exodus had died, and their children prepared to enter into the promised land. Before they embarked, however, Moses addressed them and reminded them of the covenant they had made with God.

God had given them detailed instructions on how to live in covenant relationship with Him. Moses reminded the Israelites that they were to **be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you**. In Hebrew, Moses' admonition to *be careful to do* is a combination of two words. The word *shamar* carries the idea of keeping watch or guarding something, while the word *asah* means to do or obey. Used in relation to God's instructions, this pair of words emphasizes a serious responsibility. This is what Moses wanted to emphasize—being diligent to obey what *the LORD your God has commanded*. God's commands include more than just the Ten Commandments. They include all of God's laws, commands, statutes, ordinances, and instructions found in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

It was a common Hebrew literary technique to repeat a phrase (though using different words) to emphasize the importance of an idea or concept. Moses did this in the second part of this verse when he commanded the people **not to turn aside to the right or the left**—they were not to deviate from what God had said. Similar words are used in Proverbs 4:25-27, which pictures a traveler on a journey walking down a path—only by paying attention, avoiding distraction, and staying on course would the traveler reach his desired destination.

[Verse 33] Moses again reminded the Israelites of the centrality of God's words for their lives. He noted they were to **follow the whole instruction** God had given them; partial obedience was not acceptable. The word *follow* translates a Hebrew word that literally means to walk. It pictures someone walking behind a leader. In this case God's instruction would provide expert leadership for them.

Every aspect of the Israelites' future in the promised land was dependent on their obedience to God. Only by obeying what God had commanded would they **live, prosper, and have a long life in the land you will possess**. They would neither survive nor thrive if they turned away from God's instructions.

Moses would not accompany the Israelites into the promised land because of his sin at Meribah. (See Num. 20:6-13.) Thus his words to the Israelites were spoken more from a teacher's perspective (frequently using the second person plural—"you" and "your") rather than including himself in the exhortations he made to the people.

Galatians 3:10-12 Commentary

[Verse 10] Though God's commands give the standard for living in relationship with Him, our sinful human nature prevents any of us from living up to His standard. Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians primarily to refute the claims of the false teachers (known as the Judaizers) who were claiming obedience to God's commands (the law) was essential for salvation. Paul used Scripture to show the true standing of those **who rely on the works of the law**, that is, who trust that their obedience to the law makes them right with God. *The law* refers to God's specific words to Moses (found in Exodus through Deuteronomy) that instructed the Israelites on a variety of moral, ceremonial, and civil matters.

For centuries many Jews (including the Judaizers) thought that obedience to the law made them acceptable to God. However, just the opposite was true. Rather than bringing people into right standing with God, the law actually brought them into opposition with God. Such people were actually **under a curse**. God's judgment would be experienced by everyone who did not continue to do **everything written in the book of the law**. (See Deut. 27:26.) God expected and demanded perfection. Anyone who failed to keep even one of His instructions would be cursed. And since no ordinary human had perfectly obeyed all of the laws it meant everyone stood condemned before God.

[Verse 11] Because no human being is capable of perfectly keeping the law, **no one is justified before God by the law**. The Greek word translated *justified* was a legal term and referred to a person declared to be in right standing with another. Paul used this word to emphasize the status of those who were declared righteous by God, who were in right standing with Him. However, this did not happen by observing *the law*.

Only those who **live by faith** are right with God—that is, declared by Him to be **righteous**. (See Rom. 3:21-26.) The Christian rejects the notion that righteousness before God can be earned, instead trusting completely in the atoning sacrifice of Christ for his or her sins. By faith, the believer receives the perfect righteousness of Christ and is reconciled to God. The believer stands justified before God, now and forever. Furthermore, those who have a right relationship with God continue to live by faith.

[Verse 12] Paul noted **the law is not based on faith**. When a person bases his righteousness on faith he is trusting in what God has done through Jesus Christ; he is believing in God alone. In contrast, the law is based on doing rather than trusting. When a person bases his righteousness on keeping the law, he is depending on his deeds—what he does by his own efforts.

Paul referenced Leviticus 18:5 to support his argument. **The one who does these things will live by them**. *These things* refers to the works of the law. (See Gal. 3:10.) The law is a system of obedience—based on what a person **does**. Obeying the law is the ongoing, never-ending way a person must continue to **live**. Even though this is a futile effort for sinful human beings (see Rom. 3:23), it is the only alternative for those who reject the way of faith.

Galatians 3:19a,24-25 Commentary

[Verse 19a] The law was only a temporary provision until Christ came. Some may have thought Paul wanted nothing to do with the law, since he argued so forcefully against a works-based righteousness and clearly taught a justification that came through faith alone. (See Acts 21:28.) However, Paul was not against the law. He had come to understand God's purpose for giving it in regards to salvation.

Paul noted the law was just a temporary provision given to humanity. From the time of Adam until the time of Moses sin was a reality in the world, as evidenced by the continual death of people during that period. Unlike Adam, however, people did not die because they violated a specific command of God. Death was a reality because people continued to sin and everyone had a sinful nature—it was passed down from Adam, person to person through countless generations, like a genetic deficiency.

This was true even after God established His covenant with Abraham. Thus, God acted during the time of Moses to clarify His standards. He **added** His laws to the covenant **for the sake of transgressions**. When God gave the law, it provided a definite boundary for human behavior. Because of the law, it would be evident to everyone what was acceptable and what wasn't. Thus they would know specifically when they had done wrong and violated one of God's commands. As a result, they would recognize they were guilty and stood condemned by God.

The law was valid **until** the coming of **the Seed** or offspring God had promised to Eve in the garden of Eden. Christ is the Seed who came to fulfill God's **promise** to Abraham. This promise refers to the blessing that would be available to all people—the salvation made possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus and the righteousness that is available to all through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.

[Verse 24] Paul noted the provisional nature of **the law** as a **guardian**. Paul emphasized that the law was a moral supervisor/guardian for us. There was no escaping its oversight. Paul noted not only the law's disciplinary function (pointing out wrongdoing) but also its temporary nature, which continued **until Christ** came and we no longer needed a guardian. Not until Christ took on Himself the curse of the law through His sinless death and subsequent resurrection could humans be **justified by faith**. Even so, only those who actually trust in the justification that comes through what Jesus Christ has done will be in a right relationship with God.

[Verse 25] Writing and ministering some twenty years after the resurrection of Christ, Paul emphasized the certainty that **faith has come**. Paul was not saying that people living in the Old Testament era were somehow justified by keeping the law. All were justified by faith, as Paul demonstrated using Abraham as the example. *Faith has come* in the sense that Christ has come. Because Christ has come, Paul could rightly conclude that we are **no longer under a guardian**. Through faith in Christ we are released from the control, discipline, and oversight of the law which pointed us to Christ and are free to live as full sons and daughters of God. (See v. 26.) We don't do this by trying to perfectly keep the law, but on the basis of faith, trusting in the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that paid the penalty for our sin.

