

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 36** and ask **Question #1: When have you seen a “fix-it” job actually make things worse?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 37** of the author’s experience of having a car repair issue that he couldn’t fix.

SAY: “Today, we will see that our sin problem is something we can’t fix on our own.”

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 37: We are unable to live up to God’s holy standard.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to reveal to us the magnitude of our sin problem. Thank God that He gave His only Son, Christ Jesus, to fix this problem.

SESSION 3

WHY CAN'T WE FIX IT?



The Point

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

The Bible Meets Life

Many of us seek to improve our lives—and even make the world a better place. We know a certain way of living—a standard—will get us there, but try as we might, we fail to

live up to that ideal. God has the one standard that will get us there, and when we live in full obedience to Him, we experience a rich, full, and meaningful life. Yet in spite of our best efforts, we are unable to meet His standard on our own.

The Passages

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

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 1500 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.

Deuteronomy 5:32-33

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.

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 generation of Israelites who had experienced the exodus from Egypt 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.

1 ▶ 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 included 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. Proverbs 4:25-27 pictures a traveler on a journey walking down a path—only by paying attention, avoiding distractions, and staying on course would the traveler reach his desired destination. ◀

STUDY THE BIBLE Deuteronomy 5:32-33



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 38.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 5:32-33.

GUIDE: Refer group members to the story on **PSG page 38** describing the author’s experience on a camping trip as a student pastor, of setting boundaries and telling his students to stay on the marked paths for their protection. Share about one student’s consequences when he disobeyed and got into poison ivy, ruining his trip.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** to provide further insight into the Lord’s commands:

- *Be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded.*
- *Do not turn aside to the right or the left.*

DISCUSS: Question #2

(PSG, p. 39): How have you experienced the blessings that come from following God's instruction?

(Alternate: What are some things that distract us from sticking to God's plan?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we will see that the law provides the standard for how we are to live, but we cannot live up to that standard."

STUDY THE BIBLE

Galatians 3:10-12



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Galatians 3:10-12.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** (PSG, p. 40) to introduce what Paul is referring to when he used the phrase *the law*.

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 (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

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.

KEY WORDS: 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.

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. Writing about 1500 years after the time of Moses, the apostle Paul clarified this as he wrote to believers in the church in Galatia.

2 ▶ Certain false teachers (often referred to as Judaizers) who had infiltrated the Galatian church claimed that faith in Christ was not enough for living in a right relationship with God. They taught that obedience to God’s commands (the law) was essential for salvation.

Most of Paul’s words in his letter to the Galatians were designed to refute the claims of the Judaizers. Paul didn’t rely on his own arguments, however. He 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. Paul frequently referred to the law in his letters; occasionally it was a general reference to the Old Testament or more specifically to God’s will. Most often when he used the word (as he did here) it referred to God’s specific words to Moses (found in the Books of Exodus through Deuteronomy) that instructed the Israelites on a variety of moral, ceremonial, and civil matters.

For centuries many Jews (including the Judaizers) thought obeying the law made them acceptable to God. But Paul noted this was not the case. In fact, just the opposite was true. Rather than bringing people into right standing with God, the law actually brought them into opposition with God. Rather than experiencing a blessing, such people were actually **under a curse**. A *curse* represented more than a future state of suffering and despair brought on by God’s wrath. It also included the present state of being separated from God—cut off from everything good that comes from Him.

To support his words Paul referenced Deuteronomy 27:26, which was originally spoken by Moses to the Israelites. These words come at the end of a list of transgressions and accompanying curses that the Levites were to speak to all the Israelites. The verse Paul quoted was like a summary statement for the whole list—noting the judgment that would be experienced by everyone who did not continue to do **everything written in the book of the law**. 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.

Paul was not the only one to emphasize this truth. The apostle James (the half-brother of Jesus) wrote something similar when he noted, “whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all” (Jas. 2:10). ◀

3 ▶ **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

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 2 to provide background information about the context of Galatians:

- *False teachers (Judaizers) taught that faith in Jesus was not enough, new believers also had to adhere to the law.*
- *Paul referred to the false teachers as those **who rely on the works of the law** to be in a right relationship with God.*
- *Paul declared that adhering to the law actually brought people **under a curse**, because keeping the law perfectly was impossible.*
- *To do **everything written in the book of the law** demanded perfection.*

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Your group has been commissioned to create a rule book for how we are to live in our community. Your job is to list 5-7 of the most important principles every person should follow to be considered a citizen in good standing. Ask each member to write down several of these principles; or if your group is large enough, make this a group activity. Share responses with the entire group.

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 3 on page 41 and this page to provide further explanation to verse 11.

- **No one is justified before God by the Law.**
- **Justification** is a legal term that means that a person is in right standing with God.
- To be declared **righteous** by God means that we are in right standing with Him.
- The only way a person can be declared righteous is to **live by faith.**

GUIDE: Refer members to

DIGGING DEEPER on **PSG page 39** to provide further explanation of *justification by faith*.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read

Romans 3:21-26 (enlist the group member prior to the session so they can look up the passage and review it before reading it).

standing with another. Paul used this word frequently in Romans and Galatians to emphasize the status of those who were declared righteous by God, who were in right standing with Him. Paul noted, however, that it was clear this did not happen by observing **the law**—not even by keeping a portion of it, such as circumcision, which was one of the primary rules the Judaizers emphasized.

Instead, the only way a person could come into right standing with God—that is, be declared by Him to be **righteous**—was through trust rather than tasks. Only those who **live by faith** are right with God. In verse 11, Paul was quoting from the Old Testament Book of Habakkuk. The prophet Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah and ministered some time in the late seventh century BC. He dialogued with God (actually he asked a lot of questions of God) about why God had not punished the wicked people of Judah and why God would use the wicked Babylonians, whom Habakkuk considered worse than his own people, as His instrument of judgment.

The verse quoted by Paul, Habakkuk 2:4, is God's answer to Habakkuk's questions. In its original context, the verse emphasized how God's people were to live in the face of both injustice in their own land and with the threat of invasion by the Babylonians. They were to live by faith, even when things didn't make sense. This was not just a word for the Jews of Habakkuk's day, however. It is also a statement of how God's people (whether Jews or Gentiles) of any time period are to live—by faith in God.

Paul quoted this verse in his writings (also in Rom. 1:17) as God's confirmation for the basis of righteousness, which only comes through faith. Paul explained the nature of this faith more fully in his letter to the Romans:

“But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God presented him as an atoning sacrifice in his blood, received through faith ... God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:21-26).

The Christian rejects the notion that righteousness before God can be earned, instead trusting completely in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus 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, both now and forever.

True life, a right relationship with God, only comes by faith. In addition, those who have a right relationship with God will continue to live by faith. ◀

4 ▶ 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 (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 (Rom. 3:23), it is the only alternative for those who reject the way of faith. ◀

Galatians 3:19a,24-25

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.

.....

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,

KEY WORDS: The Seed (Gal. 3:19)—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.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to explain what Paul meant when he wrote that **the law is not based on faith.**

DISCUSS: Question #3 (PSG, p. 42): **What is the difference between living by the law and living by faith?**

(Alternate: What class in school did you barely pass? What was the standard for passing that class?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we will see the provision God made in Jesus Christ so we could be made right with Him.”

STUDY THE BIBLE **Galatians 3:19a,24-25**



15 minutes

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Galatians 3:19a,24-25.

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** (PSG, p. 42) to explain *The Seed*.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG page 42** to show some things the law can't do because of our sin, according to Galatians 3:

- *The law can't give us the Holy Spirit (vv. 2-5).*
- *The law can't bring us into a right relationship with God (vv. 7-9).*
- *The law can't save us; it can only pronounce our curse and condemnation (vv. 10-12).*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** to explain that the law was given ...

- ... *as a temporary provision.*
- ... *for the sake of transgressions.*
- ... *to establish God's standard and make it clear no one could meet that standard.*
- ... *until the Seed—Jesus—would come to fulfill God's promise to Abraham.*

5 ▶ Verse 19a. The law was only a temporary provision until Christ came. Since law and faith are mutually exclusive, and since it is impossible for sinful people to obey the law completely, it would be natural to wonder about God's intention for **the law**. Paul asked the question the Galatians might have been asking at this point as they read his letter: **Why then was the law given?** Did it have any value?

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. A number of years later he would be directly accused of teaching against the law (Acts 21:28). However, Paul was not against the law; but, 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. (Paul emphasized this in Rom. 5:13-14.) Death was a reality because people continued to sin and everyone had a sinful nature—it was passed down from Adam, person by 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—no one could claim ignorance. 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.

This was only a temporary measure, however, until the full revelation of God came in Jesus Christ. The law was valid **until** the coming of **the Seed** or offspring God had promised to Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). Earlier in this letter Paul identified Christ as the seed who came to fulfill God's **promise** to Abraham (Gal. 3:16). This promise refers to the blessing that would be available to all people (Gen. 12:3; 22:18)—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. ◀

6 ▶ Verse 24. In this verse Paul introduced a concept that would have been familiar to his original readers. Paul first noted the provisional nature of **the law** as a **guardian**. The Greek word *paidagogos* (from which we get the English words “pedagogue” and “pedagogy”) can refer to a teacher. While some interpreters have presented *the law* as having an educating function, Paul’s usage of the word carried a different meaning. In ancient times many wealthy people utilized a *paidagogos* to guard and correct their young boys starting at age six. A trusted slave was given the responsibility to supervise the behavior of a boy until he reached adulthood. Rather than a teaching function this slave primarily gave oversight to the child’s moral upbringing. He pointed out wrongdoing and usually was a strict disciplinarian, often using a stick or other harsh methods to bring a straying child back into line. There was no escaping the supervision of this guardian—he was a certainty until the child came to maturity.

Paul emphasized that the law was just such 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 (Gal. 3:6). However, “What Abraham glimpsed from a distance, we have seen up close; what he beheld in figures and types, we have received in fulfillment and reality.”¹ *Faith has come* in the sense that the long-awaited Messiah promised in the Old Testament, 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 (v. 26). We do this on the basis of faith, trusting in the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for our sins. ◀

1. Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30 in The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 267.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 6 to explain the term *guardian* and how the law functioned as a guardian.

- *As a teacher, having an educating function.*
- *Teaching right from wrong, moral training of a child.*
- *Included the roles of supervisor and disciplinarian.*
- *When Christ came, believers would be justified by faith, and no longer be under a guardian, the law.*

DISCUSS: Question #4

(PSG, p. 43): In what way did the law serve as a guardian that was not sufficient to meet our needs?

DISCUSS: Question #5

(PSG, p. 44): What does it mean to be justified by faith and become the sons of God in Christ Jesus?

(Alternate: What are examples of temporary fixes until a permanent solution could be provided?)

DO: Encourage group members to share responses to the activity “**I Can’t Fix This**” on **PSG page 44**.

LIVE IT OUT

5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point:**
We are unable to live up to God's holy standard.

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 45)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Encourage group members to reflect on their lives before Christ and their experiences with the law, a standard they could not meet. Remind them that they can be in right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

PRAY: "Father, thank You for providing a way for us to be made right with You. Thank You for sending Your Son, the fulfillment of Your promise, so that we can receive forgiveness of our sins."

LIVE IT OUT

Thankfully, the story doesn't stop with the truth that we are unable to live up to God's holy standard, but what will you do with this truth?

- ▶ **Seek forgiveness.** Admit to God your sin and failures. At your absolute best, you're still a sinner, so confess any and all sins. Thank Him for His grace and forgiveness in Christ.
- ▶ **Stop trying.** Evaluate your life for any actions you might do to gain a right standing before God. Self-righteousness might feel good, but it's an illusion. You can only stand strong when you stand in Christ's righteousness. Choose to rest in Christ and trust Him.
- ▶ **Start encouraging.** Encourage others to trust Christ instead of following a lot of rules or rituals to gain God's favor. Help them see Christ has fulfilled the law for them, and they need only to trust Him.

My car needed repair, but I could not do anything except trust my car in the hands of someone who could actually fix it. That's our story. We're broken and we need to trust our lives in the hands of Christ, the only one who can "fix" us.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Jewish men prepare for prayers and worship at the Western Wall in Jerusalem by tying on phylacteries.

Was the law a blessing or a burden to God's people when God handed it down to the Israelites through Moses at Mount Sinai? Some might think it was a burden since a number of passages in the New Testament appear to support such a notion. For instance, Paul wrote, "all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse" (Gal. 3:10); and "the law is not based on faith" (v. 12).

However, one must recognize Paul was speaking to specific situations where certain Jews were attempting to mix works with faith for salvation. Other New Testament passages convey a positive view of the law. "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12); "we know that the law is spiritual" (v. 14); and "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ..."

(2 Tim. 3:16-17). Further, Old Testament writers used only the most positive words to describe God's law; for example, David's words in Psalm 19:7-11: "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, . . . Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

The law proved to be a blessing to Israel in at least three ways.

1. The law provided Israel with God's will and expectations for His covenant people.
2. The law was a blessing because it provided a way for them to make the Lord's name known among the nations.
3. The law was a blessing to Israel because it revealed God's character to them. He is the one true God, and there is no other. God's people should be faithful because He is faithful; be trustworthy because He is trustworthy; care for the weak because He cares for the weak; and be holy because God is holy.

The excerpt above is from the article "The Law: God's Gift to His People" (Spring 2010), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.



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