

*Why the Law Then?*  
*A Biblical Theology of Law in Galatians*

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*This writing is dedicated to Nathan Pitchford whose concern and desire for doctrinal precision, godliness, and God's glory amongst the nations is both challenging and inspiring.*

There is arguably no issue more fiercely debated within orthodox evangelicalism as that of Paul's teaching regarding the Christian and law.<sup>1</sup> The debate has been around for centuries, and I am no position to say that I have come to an understanding that has been absent in church history. Actually, my understanding of the relation of law and gospel is similar to that of the reformers—in particular Martin Luther. He saw that the Mosaic Law had a temporal role in God's plan of redemption, and he tended to stress what is commonly called the "second use" of the Law which is to drive the unbeliever to Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Paul, I believe, espoused this position in his monumental letter to the Christians at Galatia. In chapters 3-6, he gives us a redemptive-historical perspective on the purpose of the Mosaic Law and life led by the Spirit in the New Covenant. Correctly understanding this perspective can, I believe, move Christians who are divided on the issue to a more fruitful discussion.

The structure of this essay revolves around my exegesis of Galatians 3:23-25. I will first provide the background of Galatians, and I will then analyze 3:23-25 through exegesis and contrasting various positions in Christendom on this passage. The essay concludes with a discussion on life in the Spirit over the age of Law and the Law of Christ as Paul explains in chapters 4-6.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Background of Galatians**

Paul wrote Galatians in response to a heresy brought in after he had taught the Gospel to the Galatians (1:8-9). Paul was also most likely attacked by the "Judaizers" (those

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<sup>1</sup> For a survey see Moo, Douglas, "Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987) 287-307.

<sup>2</sup> This position has various titles, but Douglas Moo's title of "Modified Lutheranism" is appropriate. Even though I disagree with Moo's thesis that the Mosaic Law offered hypothetical salvation I would agree with the rest of his thesis. You can read his article: "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View" in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views* (ed. Wayne G. Strickland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pg. 319ff. Another scholar close to my position is Schreiner, Thomas. *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993). The list could go on with D.A. Carson, John Piper, Stephen Westerholm, Frank Thielman, and Tom Wells among others.

<sup>3</sup> The first task of an exegete is to discern how the word "law" (νόμος) is used in the New Testament. For a good overview see Thomas Schreiner's *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, pg. 33ff.

seeking to syncretize Judaism with Christianity) to discredit his Gospel message.<sup>4</sup> That is why the first two chapters are devoted to the authority of Paul as an Apostle and his Gospel which he received by revelation from Christ Himself (1:12).

It is also apparent that the Judaizers were telling the Galatians that Paul was not teaching the Gospel from the original twelve apostles ("those of high reputation"). Paul then teaches that the original Apostles confirmed Paul's message with no addition or correction (2:6). He even gave the account of rebuking Peter for his hypocrisy associated with the circumcision party (2:11-14) to give further proof that Paul's Gospel was authentic.

At the end of chapter 2 we see come to fruition Paul's major thesis of Galatians, and that is that faith in Jesus Christ alone is necessary for our justification apart from works of the law.<sup>5</sup>

"[K]nowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." (2:16)

### **Abraham and the Gospel**

Paul uses stern language to describe the Galatian Christians calling them "foolish" and "bewitched" (3:1). Paul's main point starting chapter 3 is that if the Spirit of God started your salvation, then it will complete the race and is not dependent on their working of the law (3:3). In other words, Paul is telling the Galatian Christians to look to the Spirit as the source of their sanctification and not the law setting up his argument on explaining God's intention in delivering the Mosaic Law to Israel.

The Judaizers were also most likely boasting in having Abraham as their forefather, but Paul says that "it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham" (3:7).

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle to the Galatians: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans & Paternoster: 2002), pg. 25-7.

<sup>5</sup> The controversy of defining the "works of the law" brought on by the New Perspective on Paul is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is an important element to understand Paul's argument in this letter. For an introduction, see Schreiner's *The Law and Its Fulfillment* (pgs. 41-71). See also Westerholm, Stephen. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

Abraham, before the Mosaic Law was instituted, believed the Gospel promise that all the nations would be blessed in him (3:8-9). It is important for Paul to establish that the law brings only a curse and not soteriological blessing. The incarnation of Jesus was manifest to remove His sheep from the curse of the Law and also so the Abrahamic blessing might come to the gentiles (3:13-14). Jesus is then painted as the True Seed of Abraham who was promised (3:16), and only those are "in Him" enjoy this blessing (3:29).

This is all preceded by the lesson that "the Law is not of faith" which is Paul setting up a dichotomy between "doing" and "believing" with the latter being the only means to justification (3:11-12). Paul wants the Galatian Christians to see that faith, and faith alone, has been and will always be the only source of justification. To look to your own working of the Law is futile, and Paul then leads into a discussion on why the law came into being.

### **Why the Law Then?**

Paul's discussion of the Law at the end of chapter 3 is redemptive-historical in nature. This means that Paul's teaching is in the light of redemptive history. Paul can express that Yahweh can change the covenants and associated stipulations as He sees fit in the unfolding of His redemptive plan.<sup>6</sup> Meredith Kline helps us here:

"Each inscripturated covenant is closed to alteration, subtraction, or addition by the vassals (as the proscriptions of the treaty document clauses insist); yet each is open to revision by the Suzerain, revision that does not destroy but fulfills, as the history of God's kingdom proceeds from one epochal stage to the next, particularly in the passage from the old covenant to the new."<sup>7</sup>

This is the focus I want to pass along in the content of this essay in my exegesis of Gal 3:23-25. Paul's focus is to give the reason as to why God even gave the law to the Israelites.

The Law came 430 years after the promise made to Abraham, and this covenant did not nullify the promise and covenant made with Abraham (3:17).<sup>8</sup> It was important

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Moo, "The Law of Christ" (pg. 321)

<sup>7</sup> Kline, Meredith. *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Pub, 1997), pg. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Karlberg in *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000) says the following (pg. 275): "Reformed theology has rightly stressed the essential continuity

for Paul to show that salvation is always based on promise and not Law: "For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise" (3:18). The inheritance of salvation has always been granted by faith alone, in Christ alone, by promise alone.<sup>9</sup>

Paul then answers the rhetorical question: "Why the Law then?" If the inheritance is based on promise and never law then why would Yahweh even institute a law (legal) covenant? The Law was "was added because of transgressions" for Israel until Abraham's True Seed would be made manifest in history (3:19). The Law is not, however, contrary to the promises of God, but it has a specific purpose in seeing the promise come to completion (3:20). This time had "shut up everyone under sin" (3:22) and kept "under custody" until the Messiah came (3:23). Paul's shocking lesson is that instead of the law decreasing sin it actually stimulated the knowledge of sin and the need for justification for Israel (3:24).<sup>10</sup>

### **Contrasting Views on Galatians 3:23-25**

Then, what I believe to be Paul's most important statement on the Law is given:

"But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." (3:23-25)

A few answers have been given as to what this passage has meant. I will go over the three major views, and I will conclude with the support of the position I feel is most true to Paul's teaching in this passage. The first perspective we shall tackle is that of

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between the OT and NT. The law that was added 430 years after the promise to Abraham was limited in duration, serving a pedagogical role in the life of the old covenant people of God." I would suggest the reader to examine Mark Karlberg's works when investigating this issue.

<sup>9</sup> Because of texts like this I cannot accept Moo's thesis the Mosaic Law included a hypothetical offer of salvation. For a persuasive critic of this belief see Walter Kaiser's article: "Leviticus 18:5 And Paul: Do This & You Shall Live (Eternally?)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14:1 (Winter 1971) pg. 20-28. I also appreciate Mark Karlberg's analysis of Samuel Bolton who would say that: "The law was not given as a means of justification, otherwise the law would make void the promise of God and prove God unfaithful to his word" (*Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, pg. 33).

<sup>10</sup> Zaspel, Fred. "The Continuing Relevance of Divine Law". *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick: New Covenant Media, 2002), pgs. 146-76.

the traditional reformed, then the personal tutor view, and finally the redemptive-historical view.

### **Traditional Reformed Exegesis<sup>11</sup>**

The reformed tradition has, for the most part, viewed the Mosaic Law as having a three fold distinction (moral, civil, ceremonial). There are two camps who espouse this position among reformed theologians. The first are theonomists who believe that the only law that has been abolished in the New Covenant is the "ceremonial law" of sacrifices and Old Covenant worship.<sup>12</sup> The second, more widely espoused position is that the "moral law" (which is the Decalogue according to this interpretation) has passed into the New Covenant. Even though theonomy is in much larger error than the former, I will focus on their interpretations together, because they both rest largely on the same theological presuppositions. The 2nd London Baptist Confession of Faith espouses the traditional reformed position.<sup>13</sup>

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are, by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father for that end abrogated and taken away. (19:3)

The "besides" is talking about what from the Mosaic Law has passed in the New Covenant and advent of the Messiah. The confession also says that this "moral law" was present before the Mosaic economy,<sup>14</sup> and that the redemptive-historical shift

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<sup>11</sup> When I say "traditional" I am not excluding other interpretations within the reformed tradition. I myself am reformed soteriologically, but take issue with other stances within the tradition. What I mean by "traditional" is *most often associated with*. This stance on law and gospel is not relegated to Dispensationalists (nor is my position exactly similar to a Dispensational reading); I find the precepts of covenant theology regarding the people of God intriguing and persuasive. For a good introduction to the precepts of covenant theology see Holwerda, David. *Jesus & Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Bahnsen, Greg. "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel." *Five Views*. pg. 98-9.

<sup>13</sup> The Westminster Standards which predates the London Baptist Confession uses similar language.

<sup>14</sup> The confession states: "The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten

included the abolition of the "ceremonial" and "civil" laws. The texts that speak to the passing of the law refer to the removal of the law as a condemning force (2<sup>nd</sup> LBC 19:6).

This argument for seeing only the "moral" law as succeeding into the New Covenant rises and falls upon one presupposition and that is the threefold division of the law. In contrast to these reformed scholars, I believe that no writer of Scripture sees or uses a threefold division of the law.<sup>15</sup> The Mosaic Law was always talked about in sum total (cf. Jam 2:10). I believe this position is based more on presuppositional reading than true exegesis.<sup>16</sup>

The eternal moral law of God is also a point of contention between traditional reformed scholarship and my position. I think that the eternal moral law of God is expressed in natural law (Rom 2:14-15), Mosaic Law, and the Law of Christ.<sup>17</sup> The eternal moral law of God is more fluid than simply the Decalogue. The Decalogue served a redemptive-historical purpose as a summary statement of the Old Covenant (and that is the reason for its position in the Ark of the Covenant, cf. Exo 25:16), but with the passing of a covenant so to does its stipulations. It should be noted that I am stating that *the Decalogue is not supra-covenantal*. It is true that nine of the ten commands in the Decalogue are repeated in the New Testament, but they serve a different function in the New Covenant.

## **The Personal Tutor View**

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commandments..." (19:2).

<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that the writers of Scripture don't talk about the law in different senses (cf. Schreiner's *The Law*, pg. 40).

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Moo states: "I agree that we cannot reject the distinction between moral law and other kinds of simply because the Bible nowhere states it. But I would insist again, as I do repeatedly in this volume, that one must find clear implications of such a division in the Bible if we are to accept it...it must be pointed out that we have plenty of evidence from that time [first-century] and before that Jews viewed the tora as an essential unity" ("The Law of Christ", pg. 223-4). And Schreiner says: "[D]oes [Paul] distinguish between the so-called ceremonial and moral law? The use of does not indicate that he does. Indeed, texts like Galatians 5:3 show that Paul considered the law to be a unity [...] that came into existence at a certain point in history" (*The Law*, pg. 40).

<sup>17</sup> A helpful diagram illustrating this point is provided by Moo in his rejoinder to William VanGemenen's essay: "The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ", *Five Views* (pg. 89).

Another erroneous interpretation of this passage is the personal tutor view. This view views Gal 3:23-25 as referring about the individual experience of every believer.<sup>18</sup> That means that the [Mosaic] law leads every believer to Christ. While it is true that law can lead to an awareness of sin and need for the Messiah, but there is disconnect on how this passage is used by Paul.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the question of what covenant law leads the believer to Christ at their specific point in redemptive history, it is clear from the next few chapters of Galatians that the source of a "tutor" is now the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant. The source of sanctification changes from the Mosaic Law in the Old Covenant to the Spirit in the New.

### **The Redemptive-Historical View**

The redemptive-historical view on this passage is, I believe, the true summation of Paul's lesson on the role of the Mosaic Law against the Judaizers who sought to bind the Galatian Christians. Paul is not saying that only 2/3 of the law has passed, and he is also not saying that the Mosaic Law leads every person to Christ throughout God's economies. In contrast to these two positions, this view sees Paul as explaining a redemptive-historical shift in terms of law.<sup>20</sup> Let's revisit the passage.

Paul starts by saying that righteousness was never meant to be conferred through the Mosaic Law (3:21), and that the Law (Scripture) shut up everyone under sin while looking forward to the promised Messiah (3:22). He then extrapolates on that last passage by stating that before this "faith" came that "we" or the Israelites were kept in custody until the faith was to be revealed which is the Messiah (3:23). The Mosaic Law then become a tutor to lead Old Covenant Israel to Christ, and this lesson was imparted so that they may be justified by faith (3:24). In other words, the Mosaic Law had an eschatological focus that has now been realized and fulfilled in Christ.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> One of the most pronounced advocates of this view is the evangelist Ray Comfort.

<sup>19</sup> I believe this issue (the role of law in evangelism) is treated fairly by Steve Lehrer in *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (Independently Published), pg. 127ff.

<sup>20</sup> By stating that I hold a "redemptive-historical view" does not exclude other opinions on the issue from maintaining such a contrast. Most notably is Geerhardus Vos in his monumental work *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.; Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975). Regarding the permanence of the Decalogue he says: "If we may apply the term 'Christian' thus retrospectively to the Decalogue, we should say, what it contains is not general but Christian ethics" (pg. 132).

<sup>21</sup> Tom Wells in *New Covenant Theology*, pg. 31 says (emphasis original): "For Paul and the rest of the NT, *the law* is, generally speaking, the legislation and covenant that characterized the age in which God dealt primarily with Israel. The law began within history (Rom. 5:13, 20; Gal. 3:17, 19), and the law

This is the very teaching that Jesus espouses in Matthew 5 when He claims He came "not to abolish the Law but to fulfill" (Mat 5:17).<sup>22</sup> The word translated "tutor" παιδαγωγός is a slave-attendant whose duties including seeing a child until their time of maturity. F.F. Bruce extrapolates:

"As the slave-attendant kept the boy under his control until he came of age, so the law kept the people of God in leading-strings until, with the coming of faith, they attained their spiritual majority in Christ."<sup>23</sup>

The translation provided by the NASB: "Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us to Christ*" is misleading (the italicized text being inferred). The preferable rendering of the passage ημῶν γεγονεν εις χριστον is more properly rendered by the ESV as: "until Christ came" with the "until" having the meaning of a temporal force.<sup>24</sup> The focus of Paul's analysis is that the time of the law was temporary to show old covenant Israel her need for justification.

The next verse is important to understand Paul's redemptive-historical analysis of the Mosaic Law. After saying that the Mosaic Law led Israel to Christ, then what became of the Law you Galatian Christians? Paul's lesson is that the Judaizers want them to subscribe to something that's purpose has passed! Paul says, "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." (3:25). The appearing of the Messiah in the "fullness of time" (4:4) has rendered the Mosaic Law's purpose in redemptive-historical culminated and released. That is why Paul can finish the chapter with a

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ended within history (Rom. 7:4, 6; 10:4; Gal. 3:23-25), though its 'end' was a thorough transformation."

<sup>22</sup> This text is a pivotal one in understanding the Christian's relation to the Mosaic Law. After much exegesis it would seem to have the same manner of "fulfillment" as the first few chapters of Matthew strive to prove. The Mosaic Law pointed forward to Christ, and with His advent He has "fulfilled" (πληρώω) the Mosaic Law. I like the interpretation that stresses the "until all is accomplished" meaning His life and death on the cross, but even that interpretation has its pitfalls. For an even-handed analysis of this text see Fred Zaspel's exegesis in *New Covenant Theology*, pgs 77-123.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle to the Galatians*, pg. 182. See similar analysis by Phillip Ryken in *Galatians* (New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2005), pg. 138-41. It should be noted that both Bruce and Ryken adopt both a "salvation-historical view" but also see the lesson as applicable on an individual level thereby combining the personal tutor and redemptive-historical view. As I argue in this paper, Paul is not talking about an individual experience but explaining solely the redemptive-historical shift with the appearance of the Messiah.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce, F.F. *Galatians*. pg. 183.

startling lesson in God's soteriological plan for all nations.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (3:28-29)

Paul's argument throughout this chapter is that to be a child of Abraham all one has to do, is not be circumcised and subscribe to the Mosaic Law, but only believe in the Messiah. The Law served only a temporary, pedagogical role in God's redemptive history. The Galatian Christians needed to understand that if they were to subject themselves to the yoke of the Mosaic Law that they would, in fact, be going backwards in redemptive history!<sup>25</sup> The Mosaic Law is presented by Paul as a *parenthetical time* between the Abrahamic and New Covenants.

### **The “New Man” of Ephesians 2**

In Ephesians 2 Paul also gives a similar lesson on the role of the Mosaic Law and its abolishment in the New Covenant and appearing of the Messiah.

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands--remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Eph 2:11-16)

This passage has huge implications for our understanding of the New Covenant believer's relation to the Mosaic Law. His lesson is apparently targeted to a similar heresy in the Ephesian church. Some "circumcised" believers were telling the

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<sup>25</sup> “Paul is trying to convince the Gentile Christians in Galatia of the foolishness of adopting Jewish practices by showing that the time when those practices were necessary has now passed” (Douglas Moo, “The Law of Christ”, pg. 361).

"uncircumcised" that they are not truly God's covenant people without the sign of circumcision, but Paul once again has trouble with this teaching (and rightfully so!).

He acknowledges that the Gentile Christians used to be separate from Christ and the commonwealth of Israel without hope. The barrier that existed between ethnic Israel and gentiles was the Mosaic Law which, through Israel's obedience, was supposed to make much of God's name (Deu 4:4-5). But due to Israel's failure (Jer 31:32; Eze 36:23), and the success of Jesus this barrier has been removed because He "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances." With this redemptive-historical shift Jesus has made the two into one new man reconciling them both by the cross.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Inheritance Received and an Allegory**

Resuming our analysis of Galatians Paul, in chapter four, continues the lesson of the temporal purpose of the Mosaic Law by stating that: "Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father" (Gal 4:1-2). Paul's lesson is that even an heir, who is to receive an inheritance, is no better than a slave; because he does not yet own his inheritance.<sup>27</sup> But the one who leaves the inheritance has set a time when the heir will receive his inheritance and likewise have a different status than the slave. So also was the condition of Israel under the Mosaic economy. They were no better than a slave (spiritually speaking), because the Messiah had yet to be revealed in history. Then our Heavenly Father had set a time for Israel (and all the nations) to receive an inheritance: "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal 4:4-5).

Paul gives an important lesson by way of allegory at the end of chapter four. Reiterating to the Galatian Christians not to go back in redemptive history, he gives them an allegory concerning Isaac's sons and the mothers of those sons: "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in

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<sup>26</sup> There are many other passages in the New Testament that speak to this issue, but I haven't the space to tackle them all here. For the reader's study cross-reference Acts 13:39; 15; Rom 2:12-15, 28-29; 3:19-21, 31; 5:13, 20; 6:14; 7; 8:2; 10:4; 13:8; 1 Cor 9:20-21; 2 Cor 3; Col 2:16-17; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Heb 4:1-11; 7:12; 8-10; Jam 1:25.

<sup>27</sup> Ryken, Phillip Graham. *Galatians*, pg. 157.

slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother." (4:25-26).

The present Jerusalem corresponds to Hagar which symbolized Mount Sinai (and the covenant in general) to slavery. Those who desired to live a life under the Mosaic Law have inherited nothing but slavery, but those who live in the Messiah live in the "Jerusalem above" and "we [in Christ] are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman" (4:31).

### **Life in the Spirit and the Law of Christ**

Paul then goes on with his discourse on living life in the Spirit as superior to life in the Mosaic economy under law and bondage. He starts off the chapter with an admonition to stand firm against the Judaizers: "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). The New Covenant believer is also living "through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness" (5:5).

Paul then gives a startling teaching that only life led by the Spirit does one fulfill the law (5:14), and he then gives his law/Spirit contrast: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law" (4:18). The lesson is that the age of the Spirit has replaced the age of law now that the Messiah has appeared. The Mosaic Law led Old Covenant Israel to Christ, and the Holy Spirit leads New Covenant Israel to Christ. Paul then, in his traditional fashion, anticipates a rebuttal; he sees that the Judaizers will then label Paul "antinomian" to the Galatian Christians. Is the New Covenant believer completely free from all law? Paul then gives us an answer: "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ" (6:2).

Paul also talks about the Law of Christ in 1 Corinthians 9:20-21 when he says that he is not "under the [Mosaic] Law [...] though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ." Paul recognizes that he is not subject to Moses but Jesus in the administration of God's law. Even though he is free from the Mosaic Law, he is subject to the commands of Christ. New Covenant law does serve a different function than Old Covenant law. Covenant faithfulness was tied to Israel following the Mosaic stipulations, but that covenant was broken and was replaced by the New Covenant. Only in the New Covenant, led by the Spirit, can the believer "fulfill" law.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This covenant obedience established by God in the New Covenant is the teaching that "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people"

Reformed scholars have attempted to identify the Decalogue with the Law of Christ, but such efforts suffer from a serious misreading.<sup>29</sup> The prophets of old spoke of the change the Messiah would bring to the law (Isa 2:3; 42:4; 51:4, 7; Mic.4:2), and when Jesus commissioned His disciples He said to go to the nations "teaching them to *observe all that I commanded you*" (Mat 28:20). The message is that the New Covenant believer is not directly under the Mosaic Law as codified at Sinai. Paul also says that life in the Spirit producing the fruits thereof that "against such things there is no law" (5:23).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Even though Galatians introduces discontinuity concerning the Mosaic Law and the New Covenant believer there are great truths of continuity. By virtue of their union with Christ they are sons of Abraham heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:29). To properly understand Paul's message in Galatians we must recognize the same balance of continuity and discontinuity that Paul discusses in this fantastic letter of Christian liberty.

We must not forget that through all of his theological analysis, Paul reminds the Galatian Christians that the only thing they should boast in is the cross of Christ.

“But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.” (Gal 6:14-16)

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(Jer 31:33). This phrase (writing the law on the heart) is an idiom for covenant faithfulness. See Coxhead, Steven R. “Deuteronomy 30:11-14 as a Prophecy of the New Covenant in Christ.” WTJ 68 (2006): 309.

<sup>29</sup> Phillip Ryken strives to establish that, in the mind of Paul, that the law of Christ is the “moral law” which Ryken says is the Decalogue (*Galatians*, pg. 249). I find it interesting that when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was in the law He says that it is to love God with all our heart, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mat 22:37-40) neither of which are in the Decalogue. It would seem that Jesus would see these principles as the eternal moral law of God, because “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Mat 22:40).