



Galatians 3.²⁴— meditation 1

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Paul has much to say about law, our relationship to it, and its impacts, often negative, upon us. Many readers of this sentence, noting that it speaks of “*the law*,” understand Paul to be speaking of the Law of Moses. This is the plain reading of the text. It is certain that in writing this sentence Paul had the Law of Moses in mind. That said, much of what Paul has to say about the Law of Moses can be said of every law system, whether secular or religious. A broader discussion of law must await another time and place. However, we will offer just one example of how what Paul says about the Law of Moses applies to all forms and systems of laws. Earlier in this same chapter of Galatians, Paul asserted,

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.’”¹

It is not only the Law of Moses that demands total compliance before it can pronounce someone, “law-abiding” or “innocent.” Every system of laws makes the same demand. One cannot be pulled over for speeding, for example, and defend themselves to the traffic officer with the assertion, “But officer, I have not robbed a bank.” Though one have but one infraction of the law, even a minor one, one cannot claim to be law-abiding. It is all or nothing when it comes to law and its verdict: “innocent” or “guilty,” “law-abiding” or not. One is innocent and law abiding only through complete compliance with all aspects of the law all the time. This is Paul’s point in Galatians 3.¹⁰ concerning the Law of Moses. The point is equally valid in relation to all law systems.

Anyway, there is much to mull over in Paul’s assertion that the purpose of the Law of Moses was to “bring us unto Christ.” What exactly does this mean and how does the law accomplish this purpose? In this chapter and in many of his epistles, Paul provides clues to such questions. That too must await another time and place.

In this meditation, I share a few thoughts that Paul’s statement sparked as I considered the purpose of the Law of Moses and, indeed, of any law system.

During the reformation, such thinkers as Luther and those who followed him identified several purposes for law in general. Three of the most important, as they identified them were,

1. Laws order society and restrain the wicked.
2. Law reveals the existence and nature of sin.
3. Law reveals God’s will so that individuals can order their private lives.

And, of course, there is Paul’s insight concerning the Law of Moses. However unwillingly, individuals

¹ Galatians 3.¹⁰

come to recognize the impossibility of being law abiding in all things all of the time. They acknowledge the inevitable verdict of “guilty.” With this recognition and acknowledgement, individuals look for some way that they can once more be found, “not guilty,” “innocent.” In the search for an innocent verdict, they are driven to Christ who promises to remove the guilt and a verdict of “innocent.” Thus, the law schools us to recognize and acknowledge our inevitable guilt and teaches us to look somewhere other than our own behavior for a favorable verdict. That somewhere to which the law drives us is Christ Jesus.

But I would add another purpose of divine law. Divine laws are not simply anthropological as the purposes of law listed so far might lead us to believe. I believe that another purpose of divine law is theological. By that I meant that divine law is intended to reveal something about the very character of God. Divine law reflects principles by which God Himself lives.

Many examples could be brought forward. In our next meditation, we will examine but one example of how divine laws reveal something of the character of God and principles by which He lives in the broad expanse of eternity.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: November 4, 2024)

Galatians 3.²⁴— meditation 2

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

As discussed in our first meditation on this passage, Paul realized and taught that like every law system, the Law of Moses demanded total compliance to all its stipulations all the time. Only one transgression of the law made one “guilty.” In giving the Law of Moses, God intended that we learn this lesson and thus look outside ourselves to win a reprieve from the guilty verdict and experience a verdict of “not guilty.” Christ represents just such a means to obtaining a “not guilty” verdict, notwithstanding our breaches of the law. In this way, the Law of Moses schooled us to look to and for Christ.

The thinkers of the reformation found three other purposes for law systems in general.

1. Laws order society and restrain the wicked.
2. Law reveals the existence and nature of sin.
3. Law reveals God’s will so that individuals can order their private lives.

These three purposes apply to the Law of Moses, and can be applied to any divine law code.

But, as suggested in our first meditation, I would add another purpose for divine law. Divine law reveals the character of God and principles by which He lives in the cosmos. As promised, it is time to provide an example. Here is one stipulation found in the Law of Moses.

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.”²

We might understand the conclusion of this stipulation—“I am the Lord your God”— as a kind of arm-twisting, with God emphasizing that the law comes from a force superior to that of humans. Because it is God who institutes the stipulation, it ought all the more to be obeyed. However, the concluding, “I am the Lord your God,” might be a statement that something about God is revealed in the stipulation.

What might this stipulation teach us about God and the principles by which he lives? Probably more than we have time for here. But here are a few thoughts.

1. God is concerned for the vulnerable, the marginalized, and the weak. Human beings are to watch out for those weaker than themselves because God is the kind of Being who watches out for those weaker than Himself. This aspect of His character was in evidence in the foundational story of the Old Testament—the story of God’s emancipation of slaves from the oppression of those more powerful than they. It is also proven, of course, by His interest in little ol’ you and me.
2. Advantaged individuals (those “superior” in some way to others) are to sacrifice a little of themselves to benefit others because God is the kind of Being who sacrifices a little (or a lot) of Himself to benefit others. This aspect of His character is best exemplified in the sacrifice of both Father and Son in the incarnation, life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ, the “express image” of God’s person.

² Leviticus 19.⁹⁻¹⁰

3. Perhaps less splendid than the first two in revealing something of God's character, in issuing this stipulation, God reveals His contempt for "property," "property rights" and "profit margins."

I would like to make a few comments about this last one.

Some time ago, I was part of a class in which the stipulation found in this passage came up in a tangential way. I was amused (and disappointed) when one attendee commented: "I like that the poor aren't given a "free lunch" but must work for the benefit offered them." We moved on too quickly for me to respond. Had I had time, I would have offered this.

"How do you think the property owner felt about this stipulation which both restricted his rights to use property as he chose and cut into his profit margins?"

"Then too, given our false notions of economic principles and freedoms, wealthy landowners are going to be none too pleased with such a stipulation. There is zero doubt that such a stipulation would be seen as a wicked encroachment of a landowner/ business man's property rights. The stipulation will find its way to the courts, and, given the courts capture by monied interests, the courts will side with the landowner. No landowner, modern capitalistic/ legal theory goes, should ever, ever, ever, ever, no never be told how to use their property. In addition, the stipulation's cutting into the profit margins of the wealthy, even for the benefit of others, is absolute blasphemy and is viewed as another form of tyranny.

The fact that this stipulation both encroaches on property rights and profit margins demonstrates that God cares very little about either. The world would be a better place, and the people formerly known as Mormons and their leaders a godlier people and leadership if they gave far more consideration to the six word question posed to William Marks and Newel K. Whitney in the summer of 1838 when they resisted relocating from Kirtland Ohio to Missouri because of property/business interests:

"For what is property unto me?"³

The question is, of course, rhetorical and the answer obvious: "Nothing." "Property is nothing to me and if you would be godly, it will be nothing to you. The Lord's rhetorical question, like the Old Testament's stipulation concerning the use of agricultural land reveals something of God's character. Most if not all stipulations made in divine law reveal something of the character of God. In commanding that we not steal, God reveals that stealing is contrary to *His own* character and is something in which He does not and will not engage. In commanding that we not kill, God reveals that killing is contrary to His own character and is not something in which He engages. In commanding that we not envy and covet, God reveals that He does not possess an ounce of envy or covetousness in His Being.

God is who He is because of His character. He endures because of His character. In order to endure out in the cosmos, we must possess the same character of God. Among its other purposes, divine law reveals God's character and the manner of live He lives in the midst of whatever and however many other beings reside in the universe. In addition, the divine law reveals the character we must possess if we are to endure as a species on earth and as individuals in the cosmos. Thus, divine law not only reveals God's preferences for mortal beings, but helps shape mortals so that they might endure as immortal beings where forces of unimaginable power reside.

Divine law, then, not only brings us to Christ, to use Paul's language. Divine law reveals Christ's character in hopes that we will drawn to him and, being drawn to him, follow his example and become enduringly Christlike.

³ DC 117.⁴

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: November 5, 2024)