

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW

We realize that man's position before God is that of a sinner. Now, let us consider why God set up the law. Once we understand the law, we will be able to understand God's work.

God has always known man's condition, but does man know his own condition? Since sin has been manifested before God, it should also be felt in man's conscience. But is man's conscience aware of sin? Unfortunately, it is not. Because man is unaware of sin, we need the functioning of the law. Tonight we will study this matter.

What is the law? The law is nothing other than God's demand on man that man work for God. In Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians, the apostle Paul shows repeatedly that man is saved by grace, not by the law. In other words, man is saved because God works for man, not because man works for God. It is not a matter of being something before God or doing something for God, but a matter of God Himself coming into our midst to become something and do something for us. This is why the apostle, under the revelation of the Holy Spirit, constantly emphasized that, both for the Gentile and the Jew, salvation is absolutely of grace and not of the law. We want to spend some time to see that it is impossible for man to be saved by the law. I am not using the term law in reference to the law mentioned in the Old Testament. Law, as I use it here, refers to a principle, that is, the principle of man working for God. We will see whether or not our salvation is due to our working for God.

The way I use the word law is not without a biblical basis. The apostle Paul used words in a very precise and meaningful way. In the Bible the word Christ is often used. In the original language, sometimes there is no definite article before the word Christ. At other times there is a definite article, and thus we should understand it as the Christ. Unfortunately, not many versions translate this accurately. Another word that is often used is faith. Sometimes there is a definite article; in these places it is the faith. Similarly, there are places in the Bible where the word law has a definite article, and we should read the law.

The meanings of these words with the definite article is quite different from their meanings without the definite article. For example, when Christ is mentioned, it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ; but when the Christ is mentioned, you and I are also included. When the Bible speaks of the individual Christ, there is no definite article; but when it speaks of the Christ who includes us, we find the Christ. When the Bible speaks of our individual believing, it uses faith, without the article. But when it speaks of what we believe in, that is, our faith, it uses the faith. Bible translators all know that whenever the Bible mentions the faith, it is not referring to our individual believing, but to that which we believe in. What then is the law? In the Bible, the law always refers to the Mosaic law, the law in the Old Testament. But if there is no definite article before law, it refers to the requirement God places upon man.

Therefore, let us keep in mind that law in the Bible does not merely refer to the law given to us by God through Moses. In many places in the Bible, law refers to the principle God applies toward us, or the principle of God's requirement of us. The law does not only mean the Mosaic law, the law given on Mount Sinai, or the Old Testament law. It also means the condition for

fellowship between God and man. The condition for fellowship between God and man is God's requirement upon man, what God wants man to do for Him, to accomplish for Him.

Is man saved by the works of the law? Does God save man because man has done things for God? The whole world says we must do good before God will save us. If we put this in biblical terms, it means that we must have the works of the law in order to be saved. Those who talk this way have made two great mistakes. The first is that they do not know who man is. The second is that they do not know what God's intention was when He gave man the law. If we know what we are, surely we will not say that man needs to have works of the law in order to be saved. If we know the purpose of God's giving the law, neither will we say that man can be saved through the works of the law. Because man has made these two great mistakes, he bears the wrong concept and says wrong things.

## **THE FIRST GREAT MISTAKE— NOT KNOWING WHAT MAN IS**

Why would man say that he can be saved by the works of the law when he does not even know what he is? It is because man does not know how evil he is; he does not know that he is fleshly. Since man has become fleshly, there are three things in him that are unchangeable: his conduct, his lust, and his will. Because man is fleshly, whatever he does is sin and evil. At the same time, his lust within is actively tempting him, provoking him to sin all the time. In addition, man's will and desire reject God. Since man's conduct is against God, his lust is provoking him to sin, and his will is rebellious against God, there is no possibility for him to have the works of the law and be obedient to God. Therefore, it is impossible for man to satisfy God's requirement by the righteousness of the law. Not only do we have our outward conduct, but we also have the lust in our body. Not only do we have the lust in our body, but we also have the will in our soul. You may be able to deal with your conduct, but the lust stirring within you, even if it is not successful in precipitating sinful, outward conduct, exists and provokes you all the time. And even if you hate your lust and do your best to deal with it, your will is altogether not compatible with God. Deep in his heart, man is rebellious against God and wants to crucify the Lord Jesus. On the one hand, the cross signifies God's love; but on the other hand, it signifies man's sin. The cross signifies the great love God has in dealing with man; but it also signifies the tremendous hatred man has toward God. The Lord Jesus was crucified on the cross not only by the Jews, but also by the Gentiles. Man's will toward God has never changed. Man's will is totally at enmity with God.

Romans 8:7-8 says, "Because the mind set on the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it be. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God." The mind set on the flesh is enmity against God. Those who are in the flesh are not subject to the law of God, neither can they be. We do not understand man enough. We think that man is still curable and useful. Hence, we say that the works of the law can still save man. But man can never be subject to the law of God; it is just not in our nature. In our conduct there is not the power to be subject to the law, and our nature cannot be. Not only are we unable to be subject to the law, we simply are not willing to be. Being unable to be in subjection is a matter of our nature and our lust; being unwilling to be in subjection is a matter of our will. Basically, man is not subject to God in his will.

Therefore, the law will manifest nothing except man's weakness, uncleanness, and sinfulness. It will not manifest man's righteousness. If one says that a person can have life and be justified by the works of the law, he really does not know man. If man were not fleshly or sinful, the law could perhaps give him life. This is why Galatians 3:12 says, "He who does them [the works of the law] shall live because of them." Unfortunately, human beings are all sinners. They are fleshly and powerless in being subject to God, and they have no heart to be subject to God. Man does not have power to do the works of the law, nor does he have the heart to do the works of the law. The law is good but the person who does the works of the law is not. We all must admit this.

## **THE SECOND GREAT MISTAKE— NOT KNOWING GOD'S INTENTION IN GIVING THE LAW**

Man thinks that he can be saved by the works of the law because he has never read the Bible or seen the light or the heavenly revelation. He has never understood God's desire and intention. He has never understood the way of salvation. If you want to know whether or not you can be saved by the works of the law, you need to first ask why God gave the law. Only after you find out God's purpose in giving the law will you know whether or not you can be saved by the works of the law.

Before me is a podium. If I ask you what this is, some may answer that it is a high chair. A small girl may answer that it is a bed short of two legs. Another may say that this is a dresser because there are drawers in it. If I were to ask a brother, he may say that this is a bookshelf, because one can put books on it. If I were to ask ten people, I might get ten different answers. A bookseller, for instance, may tell me that it is a perfect sales counter. Every person would have an answer according to his own experience and concept. But if you want to know what it really is, you need to ask the one who made it in the first place. If he tells you that this is a dresser, then it is a dresser. If he tells you that this is a bookshelf, then it is a bookshelf. If he tells you that this is a podium, then it is a podium. In the same manner, if you ask me or anyone else what the function of the law is, you are asking the wrong person. The law was given by God, so we have to ask God about its function. Once God tells us His intention in giving the law, we will know whether man can be saved by the works of the law or not. Therefore, we must spend some time to look into the Bible concerning this matter. We must see how the law came in, step by step. We have to see historically from the record of the Bible why God gave man the law.

## **THE LAW NOT BEING GOD'S ORIGINAL THOUGHT**

The first thing we must see is that the law was not at all in God's original thought. The law was added in afterwards; it was brought in to meet certain urgent needs. It was produced to take care of certain things that came in along the way. The law was not in God's original thought; grace was in God's original thought. Second Timothy 1:9-10 says, "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages but now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." Here the apostle Paul tells us that God had a thought, and this thought began before the times of the ages, before the creation of the world. This was God's original thought. And what kind of thought was it? Paul says that this grace was given to

us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages. Before man ever sinned, and even before the creation of the world, God had already made the decision to give us His grace through Christ Jesus. Therefore, grace was God's original thought. It was something that God planned from the very beginning.

Why did God want to give us grace? Paul says that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace." God's will is to dispense His grace, and this grace saves us. He saved us and called us with a holy calling so that we may enjoy His glory. This is what God's grace is doing. He desired to save us and to call us with a holy calling according to His purpose, according to what He plans to do. Here Paul was very careful; he added a phrase to show us whether the law is according to God's purpose. He says, "Not according to our works." God's salvation is not according to how much we can do for God; it is not according to how much responsibility we can bear before Him. Rather, it is God coming to accomplish something for us, and it is God giving us His grace. This grace was always related to His plan. So let us remember that before the times of the ages, God's thought was grace, not works or the law.

Paul continues, "Which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages but now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus." This grace has not been manifested until now. Hence, you see that though this grace was planned long ago, it was not until the Lord Jesus came that we knew what grace really was. What does this grace do for us? Let us read on: "Who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." When the Lord Jesus was manifested, He abolished works as well as the result of works. The result of evil works is death. Even if you have done the worst works, the most that the law can do is require your death. After you die, the law cannot do anything else.

You may ask, "What happens if my works have not violated the law? Do I still need to die?" Yes. But the Lord has also nullified death. The Lord has done away with works, and He has done away with death. This is our gospel, which was planned before the times of the ages, even though it was not manifested until the appearing of the Lord Jesus. Hence, the basic thought with God was grace.

After man was created, both Adam and Eve sinned and rebelled. Sin entered into the world through one man. But God did not give man the law at that time. For a period of about 1600 years after man sinned, God did not give man the law. God had no demands on man during that period of time. God allowed history to take its natural course. Then one day, four hundred and thirty years before Moses instituted the law, God spoke to Abraham, the father of faith, and chose him to be the one through whom Christ would come into the world. God chose Abraham and gave him the great promise that all the nations would be blessed through his seed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). Notice that the seed is singular, not plural; it is one seed, not many seeds. Paul explained in the book of Galatians that this seed refers to the Lord Jesus (Gal. 3:16). When God spoke to Abraham, it was the first time God revealed His purpose that had been planned before the times of the ages. God told him that His purpose, from before the times of the ages, was that through his seed, Jesus Christ, the nations would be blessed. Abraham was an

idol worshipper, yet God chose him and gave him a promise. He was the first one to be without works; he was a person of faith. Hence, God unfolded His purpose before him.

You have to pay attention to one particular point here. God's word to Abraham is unconditional. God simply said, "I will save and bless the world through your seed." He gave no conditions. God did not say that Abraham's descendants had to be this or that, or that the kingdom to come forth from him in the future had to be this or that before he would have a seed and the world would be blessed. No. God simply said that he would have a seed who would save the world. It did not matter if Abraham was good or bad; it did not matter if his descendants were good or bad; and it did not matter if his kingdom was good or bad. There was no condition attached. This is the way He wanted it done. He would cause the seed to bring blessing to the people in the world.

After this word was spoken, Christ the Son of God did not immediately come to the world. Abraham begot Isaac, but Isaac did not come to save the world. Isaac was not the Son of God. Four hundred and thirty years later, Moses and Aaron came. And though they were very good people, they were not the Christ of God. Through God's revelation, Paul pointed out to us that the seed of Abraham does not refer to many seeds, but to one seed, who did not come until two thousand years later. There is a great reason why the seed did not come sooner. It is true that God wants to do things for man, that God wants to give man grace. However, will man allow God to do things for him? God sees that we are not doing well, and He wants to help us; but we may still think that we are quite capable. We are evil, but we may still consider ourselves to be good. We are filthy, but we may still consider ourselves to be clean. We are weak, but we may still consider ourselves to be strong in everything. We are useless, but we may still consider ourselves to be useful. We human beings are sinful and completely incapable, but we may still consider ourselves to be good and useful. God's purpose from before the times of the ages was to give grace, and in time He told Abraham that He would indeed give grace to man. But because man was ignorant, weak, useless, sinful, and deserving to die and perish, God had no choice but to give man the law four hundred and thirty years after He gave Abraham the promise. After God gave man the law, man found out that he was sinful. God put the law there to let man find out if he is right or not and if he is able or not. God put the burden of the law there to let man see if he could lift it or not. Let us remember that God's giving of the law was not His original intention. I must emphasize that the law was something added in for meeting a temporary need. It was not something in God's original intention.

Let us take a look at Galatians 3:15-22. We must consider these verses carefully because they are very important. Verse 15 says, "Brothers, I speak according to man, though it is a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one nullifies it or makes additions to it." Let us lay aside man's covenant with God for a moment and consider the covenants men make among themselves. Suppose someone is selling a house, and a contract has been agreed upon and signed. Can the seller come later and ask for two hundred dollars more? Can he, after signing the contract, go and consider a little more and then tear the contract up? No. Even with contracts between men, once they are signed, it is impossible to add conditions to them or to subtract conditions from them. If a contract between men is like this, how much more a covenant between God and man!

How did God make His covenant with man? The next verse says, "But to Abraham were the promises spoken and to his seed" (v. 16). God covenanted with Abraham through promises

because it concerned the future. What is already accomplished is grace; what is not yet accomplished can only be a promise. Because the Lord Jesus had not yet come, we cannot say that God's covenant with Abraham was grace. Its nature was indeed grace, but because it had not been manifested, it was still a promise. This promise was given to Abraham and to his seed. Paul says, "He does not say, 'And to the seeds,' as concerning many, but as concerning one: 'And to your seed,' who is Christ" (v. 16). The seed is singular, not plural; it is one, Christ. God promised Abraham that he would bring forth Christ and that through Christ the nations would be blessed. Verse 14 says, "In order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." This is the covenant God made with Abraham.

Since God wants to bless the nations through Christ Jesus, why did He give man the law four hundred and thirty years later? Since the covenant God made with Abraham could not be annulled or supplemented, why would not the Lord Jesus just come to give us grace? Why did the problem of the law intervene? You have to see the argument Paul was making here. Paul was explaining why after four hundred and thirty years the law came in. Verse 17 says, "And I say this: A covenant previously ratified by God, the law, having come four hundred and thirty years after, does not annul so as to make the promise of none effect." Although God gave the law to man, the covenant He made four hundred and thirty years before could not be made of none effect. God could not cancel the covenant formerly made after some further thought four hundred and thirty years later. The law is something absolutely contradictory to promise and grace. What is a promise? It is something given to someone freely. Although he may not have it yet, he will definitely have it later. But what is the law? The law implies that one has to do this or that in order to get something. You can see that these two things are completely opposite. The promise implies that God will do something for man; the law implies that man will do something for God.

Verse 18 says, "For if the inheritance is of law, it is no longer of promise." If what was to be given is according to the principle of the law, it cannot be according to the principle of promise. These two things are completely opposite.

Verse 19 says, "Why then the law?" Now the problem arises; here we have the problem. This is a most difficult problem to solve. The law and the promise are basically contradictory in their natures. If you have the law, you cannot have the promise; if you have the promise, you cannot have the law. These two matters cannot stand together. But now there is the law, and there is also the promise. God gave the promise, and then four hundred and thirty years later He gave the law. What should you do? If the covenant made by God could not be changed, either by subtracting from it or by adding to it, why then was the law given? Since a covenant cannot be changed, a promise will always be a promise, and grace will always be grace. Why then is there the need for the law?

In verse 19 Paul gives us the reason: "It was added because of the transgressions." What does it mean to add something? Recently I went to a certain place to work. During my stay there, I went with a few brothers to a restaurant for dinner one night. Because we do not have a home there, we went to a restaurant and ordered a meal of five dishes. These dishes were eaten very quickly,

and so we asked the waiter to add one more dish. The addition of another dish was not our original intention; it was added to meet the immediate need. In a similar way, Paul said that the law was added. Actually, God does not have to give us the law, and neither did He need to give it to the Jews. God gave the law to the Jews because He wanted to show the world through the Jews that He gave the law because of transgressions.

Why was the law added because of transgressions? Let us look now at the last part of Romans 4:15: "But where there is no law, neither is there transgression." And let us also look at Romans 5:20: "And the law entered in alongside that the offense might abound." The purpose of the law is to cause the offense to abound. What does this mean? Sin entered the world through man, and therefore, sin is in the world. Death came from sin and began to reign. From the time of Adam to the time of Moses, sin was in the world. But how can we prove this? It is evidenced by death being in the world. If there were no sin from Adam until Moses, man would not have died. The fact that from Adam until Moses all died proves that sin was there. Although there was sin during that time, there was no law. Hence, there was only sin but no transgression. What is transgression? Sin was real and present in the world, but man did not know that sin was here until the law of God came. Through the law God showed us that we have sinned. Actually, there was sin already within us. We were corrupted already, but we did not know about it until the law came, at which time the sin within was manifested as transgressions.

The law is like a thermometer. A person may be sick with a fever. But if you say to him, "Friend, your complexion does not look very good; you have a temperature," he may not believe you. All you would have to do is get a thermometer and put it in his mouth. After two minutes you could show him definitely that he has a temperature. We were already sinful; we already had a "temperature"; but we did not know about it. So God gave us a standard. Although the law may not be a perfect standard, it is a sufficiently high standard. God uses the law to measure us. By it we see that we have transgressed. Once we see that we have transgressed the law, we know that we have sinned. Sin was within man already; but without transgressions, he would never have confessed that he had sin. It was only after he transgressed that he would confess that he really had sin.

When I read the Bible, I marvel at the words the apostle used. In these verses he did not use the word sin; rather, he used the word transgression three times. Sin is always within man, but until it is carried out, sin does not become transgression. There must be something to transgress before there can be the possibility of transgression. Let me illustrate. Suppose there is a little child who always gets his clothes dirty. He always uses his sleeves to wipe his nose, and his clothes get dirty quickly. In his temperament, habit, thought, and conscience, he never considers that to dirty his clothes is a sin. His father does not consider it a sin either. The fact of sin is there even though there is no disobedience. The child's clothes are very dirty, but he does not mind it at all. His conscience feels fine, because his father has never said that this is wrong. He can be unconcerned about it. Even when his clothes are very dirty, he can still eat with his father, sit with his father, and walk with his father. Everything is fine as far as he is concerned. In other words, he has not transgressed. But one day his father tells him that he cannot get his clothes dirty anymore, and that if he does it again, he will spank him. If the child has been doing this habitually, his father's speaking will manifest his sins. Originally there was sin only, no disobedience. But once the child disobeys, there is transgression. In the same way, only when

there is the law will there be the transgression. When the law tells you to do this or that, transgression will be manifested. Originally this child could come before his father uprightly and without fear. But now if he behaves according to his habit and does this again, he will have no peace within and his conscience will speak.

All the Bible readers and all those who understand God's will know that God did not give us the law with the intention that we keep it. The law was not meant for us to keep, but for us to break. God gave us the law so that we would transgress against it. This may be the first time for many of you to hear such a word, and you may feel that it is strange. God has known all along that you have sin. God knows this; but you yourself do not know this. Therefore God has given you the law to transgress so that you will know about yourself. God knows that you are no good, but you think that you are fine. Therefore, God has given the law. After you transgress against it once, twice, and a number of times, you will say that you have sin. Salvation will not come to you until then. Only when you admit that you do not have a way, that it is impossible for you to go on conducting yourself in such a way, will you be willing to receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior. Only then will you be willing to receive God's grace.

We have already seen that in order to receive grace one needs to humble himself. We are sinners, and we have committed sins. What causes us to humble ourselves? It is the law. Human beings are proud. All human beings think that they are strong and consider themselves to be good. But God gave us the law, and once we look at the law, we have to humble ourselves and confess that we are really not good at all. This is what Paul was talking about when he said that before he had read from the law that we should not covet, he did not know what it was to covet. However, once he saw the law, he realized that there was coveting within him (Rom. 7:7-8). This does not mean that before Paul saw the law there was no coveting in him. There was coveting within him long before. He had always coveted, but he did not realize that it was coveting. It was not until the law told him so that he realized it. Therefore, the law does not cause us to do anything that we have not done before; the law merely exposes what is in us already. That is why I say that God gave man the law not to keep it, but to break it. Nor does the law afford man an opportunity to transgress; rather, the law shows man that he will transgress. The law allows man to see what God has already seen.

Romans 7 explains this matter very clearly. Let us look at this chapter, beginning with verses 7 and 8, "What then shall we say? Is the law sin? Absolutely not! But I did not know sin except through the law; for neither did I know coveting, except the law had said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, worked out in me coveting of every kind; for without the law sin is dead." Without the law, I do not feel that coveting is sin, even though there is coveting within me. Hence, coveting within me is dead; that is, I am not conscious of it. However, after the law comes, I resolve not to covet anymore. But I still covet, and the sin is made alive. Verse 9 says, "And I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died."

Friends, remember that God gave you the law for one reason only: to show you that you have always been full of sin. Because you did not see your own sin, you acted proudly. The law came to try you out. You may say that you do not covet. However if you just try



not to covet, what will be the eventual result? The more you try, the weaker you become and the more covetous you will be. You purpose not to covet, but the moment you purpose this way, you find yourself coveting everything. You covet today, and you will covet tomorrow; you covet everywhere you turn. Now sin is alive, the law is alive, and you are dead. Originally sin was dead and you were fine, but now that the law has come you cannot avoid coveting. The more you try not to covet, the more covetous you become. The problem is that man's being is fleshly, and because man is fleshly, his will is weak, his conduct is rebellious, and his desires are filthy.

Verse 10 says, "And the commandment, which was unto life, this very commandment was found to me to be unto death." If man can truly keep the law, he will live. But I cannot keep it; hence, I die.

Verse 11 says, "For sin, seizing the opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me." If the law had not told me that I should not do this or that, sin would go easy on me and would not be that active in me. But ever since the law came and told me that I should not covet, sin through the commandment has tempted me and put this matter of coveting in my mind. The law tells me that I should not covet, and I purpose not to covet; but instead of not coveting, I covet even more.

For a period of time I felt that I had been lying. I did not lie deliberately, but I would sometimes unintentionally say too much about something or too little about something else. When I realized this, I resolved that from then on with me yes would be yes and no would be no. Regardless of whom I spoke to, I resolved to speak accurately. Before I resolved this, I really did not lie that much, but after I made the decision, it became so easy for me to lie. I was actually getting worse. The following Sunday I sent a note saying that I would not give a message that day. When I was asked for a reason, I said, "I have found out that my speaking is full of lies. This is quite serious. I am afraid that even my message will be all lies." When I did not pay attention to lying, lying seemed dead. Of course, that does not mean that I did not lie. However, it was not until I started paying attention to lying, not until I was enlightened by the law to deal with my lies, that I felt that all my words were lies. It seems that lies were standing right next to me. Therefore, I have found that originally the lies were dead, but now the lies have been made alive. Everywhere I turn, the lies are there. Sin has killed me through the law and I become helpless.

Verse 12 continues, "So then the law is holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good." We should never consider the law evil. The law is always holy, righteous, and good. "Did then that which is good become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin did" (v. 13a). At the beginning, sin was dead and I was not conscious of it; but when the law came to check me out, I became dead. "Did then that which is good become death to me? Absolutely not! But sin did, that it might be shown to be sin by working out death in me through that which is good, that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful" (v. 13). Initially, we did not sense that sin is that sinful. But when the law came and we tried to keep it, we realized where our sins are and how sinful and thoroughly evil they are.

You can see the function of God's law here. The law is like a thermometer. A thermometer will not give you a fever, but if you have a fever, the thermometer will surely make it manifest. The law will not cause you to sin, but if you have sins, God's law will immediately show you that you are a sinner. Originally, you did not know that you are a sinner, but now you do.

The law came to judge man's sin. The law was established because man has sin. You never see God keeping the law because there is simply no possibility for God to transgress the law. Hence, no law is put upon Him. God never told the Lord Jesus to love the Lord His God with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His strength, and with all His will, and to love His neighbor as Himself. The Lord Jesus simply did not need it. He spontaneously loves the Lord His God with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His strength, and with all His will; He spontaneously loves His neighbor as Himself, even beyond Himself. Therefore, the law is useless to Him. And God did not tell Adam not to covet and not to steal. Why would Adam need to covet? Why would Adam need to steal? God had already given everything on the earth to him. The Ten Commandments were not given to Adam because Adam had no need of them. Rather, the law was specifically given to the Israelites because it showed fleshly man his inward condition and his sin within. If no Chinese had ever stolen, there would be no need for a clause in Chinese law concerning stealing. Because man steals, there is a clause in the law which says that one should not steal. Hence, the law exists because of sin. When man sinned, the law came in.

Now let us come back to Galatians 3 and continue with verse 19: "Why then the law? It was added because of the transgressions." Now we are clear. God purposed before the times of the ages to give grace to man. Later He gave Abraham a promise. In eternity it was merely His purpose. With Abraham, it was something spoken: He would deal with man in grace. Why then did God give man the law four hundred and thirty years after that? It was added because of the transgressions. In order for man's sins to become transgressions, the law was given to man. In this way, man realized that he had sin and would wait "until the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (v. 19). It was not until the whole world saw that they were sinners and that they were really hopeless that they were willing to receive the Lord Jesus Christ whom God had promised. Even if God had given man His salvation earlier, man would not have taken it. Man does not want God's grace, but because man has transgressions and is hopeless, he will possibly receive God's grace.

Verse 19 ends in this way: "It being ordained through angels in the hand of a mediator." The "it" here refers to the law mentioned above. The law was not only added because of transgressions, but was also ordained by a mediator. There are these two features to the law: it was added because of transgressions, and it was ordained through angels in the hand of a mediator. Why was the law ordained through the hand of a mediator? Verse 20 explains: "But a mediator is not a mediator for one." Have you ever been an intermediary or a go-between? An intermediary acts on behalf of two parties. Why does the law have a mediator? It is because with the law there is the side of God and the side of man. Man has to do certain things for God before God will do certain things for man. When parties A and B draft a contract, the contract states what A must do and what B

will do in return and vice versa. A mediator will then serve as a witness between the two parties. The law states what God's responsibility to man is and what man's responsibility to God is. If either side fails, the whole matter falls through.

Hallelujah! What follows in verse 20 is wonderful: "But God is one." But God is one! The law implies two sides. If either side has problems, the whole matter falls through. In giving the law, God said that we should do this and that we should do that. If we fail to do them, the whole matter will fall through. But in making the promise, "God is one," regardless of how we are. In promise and in grace, there is no mention of our side, only of God's side. As long as there is no problem on God's side, there will be no problem at all. The question today is whether God can save Abraham and whether He can preserve him. The question is not how we are. In the promise, there is nothing that involves us, nothing that depends on how we are.

The principle of the law can be compared to buying books from our gospel bookroom. If I spend \$1.60, I can purchase one copy of The Spiritual Man. If I give the brothers there the money, they will give me the book. If they have the book but I do not have the money, the transaction will not be made. Nor will the transaction be made if I have the money but they do not have the book. If one side has a problem, the deal falls through. Therefore, the law is of two sides. If one side fails, the whole matter falls through. But what about the promise? The promise is like our magazine The Christian; one does not have to pay for it because it is free. The law is: if you do something for me, I will do something for you in return. If you do certain things, you will get something back; if you cannot do them, you will not get anything. Hence, the law is of two sides. By making a promise, God gives us the grace regardless of whether we do well or not. It has nothing to do with us; how we are is not a problem at all. Thank God that promise is of one side only. All that is needed is one side.

Verse 21 says, "Is then the law against the promises of God? Absolutely not!" Those with little knowledge may say that the law contradicts grace. It is right to say that law and promise are two completely different things, but there is no contradiction at all; the law is merely the servant of the promise. It is something used by God and something inserted by God. Law and promise may appear contradictory in nature, but in God's hand they are not contradictory at all. The law was used by God to fulfill His purpose. Without the law, God's promise would not have been fulfilled. Please remember that God uses the law to fulfill this goal. Hence, law and promise do not contradict each other at all.

Paul concludes in this way: "For if a law had been given which was able to give life, righteousness would have indeed been of law" (v. 21). If a man could obtain righteousness by the law, he could have life through the law. However man cannot do this. Therefore, "the Scripture has shut up all under sin" (v. 22a). What did God use to shut us all up? He used the law. Whoever is shut up by the law has to admit that he is a sinner. God shuts up all under sin "in order that the promise out of faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (v. 22b). Hallelujah! The law of God is something God uses to save us. It is not something God uses to condemn us. The law is absolutely

something used by God. Tonight every one of us here has been shut up. Every one of us is a sinner. God has used the law to show us that we are sinners so that He may save us.