

January 14, 2007 – 9 & 11 AM
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Lawbreakers”

Gal. 3:1-25

I think we all would agree that laws are necessary. Without the law, there would be chaos, and people could do whatever they felt like and get away with it. It is the law that keeps things in check and in order. We are captivated by TV shows, like Law and Order and its many variants, which show how people don't get away with crimes. They are caught, tried and convicted, because it's just not right to break the law. People are expected to adhere to the law in order to live free and peaceful lives.

What if you found out that a promise was made long before the law was written that exempted you from following the law? For example, something that would really bring joy to my heart, let's say there was a covenant, an agreement that stated that Patchogue residents were exempt from the speed limits when driving in Patchogue? Now let's say you tested this out. You actually drove past the police and they didn't come after you when breaking the speed limit because you are a Patchogue resident. Would you ever go back to driving 30 MPH? I know this is a bad example, but a man can dream, can't he? Bear with me; I'm trying to make a point here. I realize that this is not the case and the speed limit is in place regardless of residence, so if you ever see my car driving over the speed limit it is because – someone else borrowed my car – not me. ☺

Paul was faced with issues that he had to deal with. In many of his letters to churches, he is correcting errors and misunderstandings. The letter to the Galatians is no exception. In our text for today we are going to read about the law, but it's the Mosaic Law of Israel. This Law goes beyond local ordinances, because this is the Law that God gave to His people to strictly adhere to in order to live a life that is pleasing to God – not humans. As a backdrop, Paul traveled around and established churches in the cities he spent time in. He also kept track of the churches he established by writing back and forth or receiving letters from the churches with questions or a log of events taking place among them. Paul had established this church on faith in Jesus Christ as he had all the churches he established since his own conversion from legalistic Jewish Law to the grace of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Some time after he established this church and moved on, Judaizers came along and began to teach and influence the new believers in Christ. This group of legalist Jews insisted that Paul was not a true apostle, his message was not from God, and they had to adhere to the Law along with belief in Christ in order to be in right standing with God – righteous. Paul makes his defense in this letter. He establishes that he is a true disciple called by God, even by the Lord Jesus Christ personally, even though he didn't walk with Him in His ministry years. He defends the gospel he preaches as being given to him directly by revelation from God Himself. In this section, he teaches the people that the Law was not something to be strictly followed in order to earn the righteousness that can only come by grace through faith.

I will be using the NLT today since it accurately renders the thought of this passage as Paul meant it, and it is easy to understand.

READ: Gal. 3:1-25 NTL (then I'll follow the sequence of this text – so follow along).

What an opening! Paul starts off by insulting this church, it seems. We heard from Mike last week that Paul was very passionate about the Lord and the gospel. Here we see first hand his passion. Once we understand something as true, it's hard not to be passionate about it. Paul is certain and the church here was certain originally, about the gospel, but now? Another group of teachers have come in and discredited Paul, and they have also begun to criticize the church for not adhering to the Jewish Law and its traditions. When Paul was with them, he clearly preached Christ and the value of His crucifixion. In fact when great orators of this time would speak, they often demonstrated or enacted what they were saying to give it special meaning and a connection with the crowd. Paul must have displayed the crucifixion of Christ to these people when preaching of God's grace and His promise. He says he preached Christ crucified as clearly as if he had a signboard (billboard) depicting the scene for them.

This church received salvation from the Lord by faith, and the gift of the Holy Spirit by faith, so why are they now feeling like they have to fulfill some part of the Law in order to be right with God? They know they accepted Jesus' sacrifice personally by faith, and then they were filled with the Holy Spirit. How can they now deny this very same blessing and say that they have to earn this righteousness by following the Law? If I gave you something very valuable as a gift, why would you then go out looking for jobs and working constantly to try to earn what you already have as a gift? I would ask you if you lost your mind. Actually, I would probably ask, "Are you insane?" Didn't you receive the gift of God by faith in Jesus? Didn't God confirm that you had indeed received this righteousness of God by giving you the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and has He been confirming all this by the miraculous things He is doing among you? What are you doing? How could you fall for this line of teaching knowing what you know? This is Paul's reaction too. He calls them "foolish." The word used here does not mean mentally challenged, or slow in intelligence. It means you aren't using your intellect to discern the truth! The Judaizers had somehow messed with their heads and got them trying to follow the Mosaic Law, when they were freed from the Law by faith in Christ. They were Lawbreakers.

Paul asks them again how they received the Holy Spirit. It was not by obeying the Law but by believing the message they received about Jesus Christ. Nothing has changed. This is the same way we received salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit today. As a way of explaining this concept, Paul begins in verse six to use Abraham and the promise God made to him as our example of receiving God's promises by faith. He tells them that Abraham believed God and that's what made him righteous. The Law didn't even exist yet. Verse eight tells us that God made a special promise to Abraham. God told him that ALL the nations of the earth would be blessed through him – not just Abraham, not just his family, not even just the people who would come through him as the nation of Israel, but ALL nations – that includes the Gentiles too. Paul is telling the Galatians that they are the result of this promise to Abraham, and all who would receive this promise that God made to Abraham, must receive it by faith – by believing in the One who would come through the promise to Abraham by God. All who put their faith in Christ will receive the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

Paul has explained the promise and that it must be received by faith. He now turns to the Law. So, let's talk about the Law. The Law still exists today. It is not only the Jewish people who try to obey the Law. They may be more sensitive to the exactness and the age old traditions of following the Law, but most people who desire to be right with God, try to follow the Law or a law to earn His favor. Our text tells us that if we try to be right with God by obeying the Law, we have condemned ourselves, since that approach would require absolute perfect obedience of every aspect of the Law and no one can do that. The ancient Hebrew people had a clearer understanding of this consequence. **Deut 27:26 – ‘Cursed is anyone who does not affirm the terms of this law by obeying them.’**

And all the people will reply, ‘Amen.’ NLT They knew, they understood, and they agree before God to obey all the Law or be cursed. Since no one can obey all the Law, all who try to be right with God in this way will be cursed. **Rom 3:23 - *For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.*** NLT Since it is impossible to have life by obeying the Law, why would I waste my time and energy fighting this losing battle? **Gal 3:13-14 - *But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”*** NLT Jesus became the curse of God for you and for me. I would be “foolish” to try to earn the righteousness of God by working at obedience to a Law that cannot save me. **Hab. 2:4 – says, “*The righteous will live by faith.*”** The promise of God and His Holy Spirit are received by faith as Paul reiterates in verse fourteen.

Let's consider an example from every day life, as Paul also does. Take a last will and testament, for example, you can't just go changing it or amending it, it's irrevocable. God made a promise to Abraham and to his child – not children. Now Paul was using a technique of arguing here by using the plural vs. singular tenses to his advantage, but we understand what he is saying. The promise to Abraham was to come through a single person born to fulfill this promise to humanity as a whole. This One descendant was Christ. Jesus' birth was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. The only way Abraham could be a blessing to all nations of the earth is for the Messiah to be born through him uniting all nations to God as one in His atoning sacrifice.

If this promise was irrevocable in ancient times, then the Law, which came 430 years later, could not amend this covenant. It cannot be changed, especially since it was sealed by God Himself. If one could receive the intended inheritance by keeping the Law, then it would not be by accepting the promise. It was given to Abraham as a promise.

So then, why was the Law given in the first place? Why does God do these strange things all the time that make us confused and bewildered? The Law was given as a temporary way for people to evaluate their lives against a standard that God established. It was given so people would see how far off the mark we actually fall when compared to God and His expectation. I used the example of the speed limit before. When we compare our driving speed against a speed limit law, we realize that we are speeding and breaking that law. We can look at this at a higher level. Let's compare the Law to a clock. When I look at the clock, I realize that I am nearing the time to be ready, or I am late. I wouldn't know I'm late without the clock to indicate my transgression from the intended time frame. So, the clock can be our enemy – it is mine – and it's Corinne's.

If we had no clock, we would not realize that we start our services five, ten, or more minutes late each week. We wouldn't know that, although most of the people come to service at fifteen minutes after we are supposed to start, that they are late. We wouldn't notice when Corinne is here on time or early like it's some monumental event in time. Time would not play such an important part of our lives and jobs, if there were no clocks to tell us when we have messed up. Our text tells us that the Law was given because of transgressions. It was a way to show people how guilty they are before our Holy God.

Moses was a mediator between the people and God, but when God made His promise to Abraham, there was no mediator. It was a covenant established by God Himself. An ancient custom for ratifying a covenant was to cut an animal down the middle lengthwise and spill its blood. Then the two parties walk between the pieces in agreement, sealing the promise as irrevocable. In Genesis 15:8-18, the story is relayed to us. God told Abram to prepare the animals cut down the middle and lay them out. After some time, Abram saw a smoking pot pass through the halves. God sealed the promise in Himself. Then in **Gen. 17:4-5** – *"This is my covenant with you: I will make you the father of not just one nation, but a multitude of nations! What's more, I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram; now you will be known as Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations."* NLT

Ab-ram means "exalted father." Ab-raham – means "father of many."

V. 21 – There is no conflict between the Law and God's promise. If we could have new life by keeping the law then we could have been made right with God by obeying it. BUT – Scripture says that all are prisoners to sin. When we break the law, we are subject to the consequences of the law - punishment. Therefore, the only way to receive the promise is to believe in Jesus Christ – by faith. However, until this faith in Christ was revealed to people as the only way to be made right with God, humanity was kept in protective custody by the Law – waiting to put their faith in the coming Savior.

Protective custody - it sounds kind of cool. It's like the multitude of criminal shows that are on TV every night. How free is protective custody really? Yes – you are protected and no harm will come to you, but you are not able to be yourself. You may have had to change your name and the names of your children. You may not be able to leave your living quarters, or you may have to have an armed guard with you everywhere you go. No – protective custody is not true freedom even if it is better than being out there totally vulnerable. The Law was a type of protective custody our text tells us. It was a temporary way to follow the Lord God until the true fulfillment of the original promise came. Once Christ came, true freedom and fulfillment of the promise was available to all who will believe.

The Law was the gauge by which to measure our inability to please God. It reveals to us a need for a Savior – One who can fulfill for us the promise of God. So God sent Jesus, the seed of Abraham, the fulfillment of the Law and the promise. He took the punishment we know we deserve because we cannot live up to the standard of God. He became the curse for us. By believing in His atoning sacrifice, and only by faith in Him, we can be declared righteous before our Holy God. This is the only acceptable way to please God.

There's no longer any reason to adhere to the imperfect Law. Righteousness can only be attained by faith in Christ. This is the good news. This is the gospel that Paul preached. Paul is passionate about his message to the church. Earlier in this letter he says, **Gal 1:8-9 - *Let God's curse fall on anyone, including myself, who preaches any other message than the one we told you about. Even if an angel comes from heaven and preaches any other message, let him be forever cursed. I will say it again: If anyone preaches any other gospel than the one you welcomed, let God's curse fall upon that person.*** NLT. That's pretty strong.

Most of us grew up with an understanding that we have to work at pleasing God. We have to try to do good and earn our way into His favor and ultimately into Heaven. We are trying to live by the Law if we are doing that, and this is impossible, as we have seen today. If we could be right with God by keeping the Law, then Christ would not have had to come and give His life for us. If we trust in the Law to save us, then we must keep every thing in the Law perfectly. But, we are Lawbreakers and God knows it. Thank God He has provided another way that fulfills His promise to us. It exempts us from the Law because it was established before the Law came into being.

I heard a story of a young couple who fell in love ... He could never be worthy enough for her to marry him – but she promised she would long ago, and that was all that mattered to her

We can never be worthy enough of God's gift of salvation and the Holy Spirit. No amount of good works could ever measure up to His requirement of perfection.

So, will you continue to TRY to be right with God by following the Law, or will you simply accept the promise that is available by putting your faith in Jesus Christ? And if you have accepted Christ's forgiveness and have been given the promised Holy Spirit, would you then turn back to the Law and try to please God in your own strength? It doesn't make any sense, but many of us do that very thing. Remember the forgiveness you had in Christ – that you are made right with God only through Him by faith, and commit your life to God for His use and for His purposes to be fulfilled in you. He has given us His promise, which cannot change, and He offers it to ALL who believe.