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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Why Then the Law? (Galatians 3:19–29)

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching examines Galatians 3:19–29, one of the most frequently misunderstood passages in Paul's writings. The lesson begins by asking the same question Paul asks in Galatians 3:19: "Why then the law?" Many interpret this passage to mean that God's Law was only temporary and became obsolete after Messiah came. The teaching argues that this interpretation conflicts with Paul's broader teaching about the Torah. Instead of interpreting Galatians in isolation, the lesson emphasizes reading it in harmony with the rest of Paul's letters and the overall message of Scripture.

The teaching first reviews Paul's consistent view of God's Law throughout his writings. Paul repeatedly describes the Law as holy, righteous, good, and spiritual. He teaches that the Law defines sin, that believers should not continue in sin, that faith establishes rather than nullifies the Law, and that the Holy Spirit writes God's Law on the hearts of believers. Paul also appeals to the authority of the Torah when instructing believers and agrees with Yeshua that love is the proper motivation for obedience. These passages demonstrate that Paul consistently affirms the ongoing value and authority of God's Law.

The lesson then reviews the historical setting of Galatians. False teachers had entered the Galatian assemblies teaching that Gentiles could not be fully accepted among God's people unless they underwent ritual conversion, beginning with circumcision according to the custom of Moses. This teaching is connected with the controversy addressed in Acts 15. Paul opposes this message because it turns salvation into something earned through human effort instead of received through God's grace by faith in Messiah. The issue is not obedience to God's commandments but the misuse of the Law as a means of obtaining justification and covenant status.

The teaching explains that the false teachers measured acceptance before God according to Jewish status obtained through ritual conversion and maintained through their interpretation of the "works of the law." Paul rejects this distorted gospel by insisting that

justification comes only through faith in Messiah. Genuine obedience follows faith but never produces salvation. The lesson emphasizes that Paul is correcting legalism rather than opposing the Torah itself.

The discussion then turns to Galatians 3:13–14, where Paul says Messiah redeemed believers from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for them. The teaching explains that the Law itself is not the curse. Rather, the curse is the penalty that God's Law pronounces upon those who violate His commandments. Since all people have sinned, everyone stands under that curse. Messiah bore that penalty through His sacrificial death so that both Jews and Gentiles could receive the blessing promised to Abraham through faith. Through Messiah, believers become Abraham's offspring and heirs according to God's promise.

The lesson next addresses Paul's question, "Why then the law?" The Law was added to the promise given to Abraham because of transgressions. Rather than viewing this statement negatively, the teaching presents scholarly arguments that the phrase "because of transgressions" is better understood as "for the sake of transgressions." In other words, the Torah was given to reveal God's provision for dealing with sin. Particular attention is given to the sacrificial system, which taught Israel that forgiveness comes through substitutionary atonement. The sacrifices pointed beyond themselves to Messiah, who became the ultimate sacrifice for sin. Thus, the Torah serves alongside the Abrahamic promise by revealing God's plan of redemption.

The teaching emphasizes that the Torah and the promise are not opposed to one another. Paul explicitly asks whether the Law is contrary to the promises of God and immediately answers, "Certainly not!" The Law cannot give life or justify sinners, but it reveals humanity's need for redemption while pointing forward to God's provision in Messiah. Salvation remains a gift of grace received through faith rather than something earned through obedience.

The lesson then explains Paul's illustration of the Law as a guardian, or pedagogue. In the ancient Roman world, a pedagogue was not a teacher but a servant responsible for escorting a child safely to the teacher. Paul uses this illustration to show that one purpose of the Torah is to lead sinners to Messiah. Once someone has come to faith in Messiah, the Law has fulfilled that particular role. However, this does not mean the Law loses all its other functions. It continues to define sin, instruct believers in righteous living, and reveal God's will. The teaching stresses that Paul is describing one completed function of the Law rather than abolishing the Torah itself.

The teaching concludes by examining Galatians 3:26–29. Through faith in Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles become sons of God and heirs of Abraham's promise. Membership among God's covenant people comes through grace by faith rather than ritual conversion or human effort. The lesson compares this pattern to Israel's redemption from Egypt. Israel was first redeemed through the blood of the Passover lamb and only afterward received God's Law at Mount Sinai. Likewise, believers are first saved through Messiah and then live in grateful obedience to God's holy, righteous, and good Law. Obedience is

therefore the response to salvation, not the means of obtaining it. The teaching concludes that Paul's message is entirely consistent with Moses: salvation comes by God's grace, while obedience is the grateful response of those who have already been redeemed.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Galatians 3 answers the question, "Why then the law?"
 - Paul's broader teaching consistently affirms God's Law.
 - The Law is holy, righteous, good, and spiritual.
 - False teachers promoted ritual conversion as necessary for salvation.
 - Paul opposed legalism, not God's Torah.
 - Justification comes by grace through faith in Messiah.
 - Messiah bore the curse resulting from humanity's disobedience.
 - The Law was added because of transgressions.
 - The sacrificial system pointed forward to Messiah.
 - The Law and God's promise work together in His plan of redemption.
 - The Law serves as a guardian leading people to Messiah.
 - The Law continues to define sin and instruct believers.
 - Believers become Abraham's offspring through faith.
 - Obedience follows salvation rather than producing it.
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FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. Paul asks, "Why then the _____?"
2. Paul describes the Law as holy, righteous, and _____.
3. The false teachers required _____ for Gentile salvation.
4. Justification comes through _____ in Messiah.
5. Messiah redeemed believers from the _____ of the Law.
6. The Law was added because of _____.

7. The Law serves as a _____ leading people to Messiah.
 8. Believers become Abraham's offspring through _____.
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Challenging

1. Acts 15 addressed the teaching that Gentiles must be circumcised according to the custom of _____.
 2. Paul says faith _____ the Law rather than nullifying it.
 3. The sacrificial system revealed God's method of dealing with _____.
 4. The Greek word translated "guardian" refers to a _____.
 5. The Torah was added to the promise given to _____.
 6. Paul says the Law is not contrary to God's _____.
 7. Israel received the Law after being redeemed by the blood of the _____ lamb.
 8. Obedience is the grateful _____ to salvation.
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GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to read Galatians in light of Paul's other teachings about the Law?
 2. How does understanding the historical setting of Galatians change the way you read the letter?
 3. What is the difference between obeying God's Law and relying on the Law for salvation?
 4. How does the sacrificial system point forward to Messiah according to this teaching?
 5. What does Paul's illustration of the guardian teach about the purpose of the Torah?
 6. Why does Paul insist that the Law is not contrary to God's promises?
 7. How does Israel's redemption from Egypt illustrate the biblical pattern of salvation and obedience?
 8. How can believers demonstrate that obedience is a response to God's grace rather than an attempt to earn it?
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ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. Law
2. Good
3. Circumcision
4. Faith
5. Curse
6. Transgressions
7. Guardian
8. Faith

Challenging

1. Moses
2. Establishes
3. Transgressions
4. Pedagogue
5. Abraham
6. Promises
7. Passover
8. Response