

The Law in the Gospel Life Gal 3:15-25

Tim Anderson 7/7/2019

Is a doctor there to give you good news or bad news?

Well doctors may give you both sorts of news.

Mrs Jones,

you have a beautiful healthy baby boy growing inside of you.

That's good news.

Mr Jones,

your cancer has spread and is gradually taking over your body.

That's bad news.

And your doctor may give you both kinds of news.

No doubt if you're a doctor,

it's far more enjoyable being the bearer of good news.

But it's far more important to bring bad news.

When a doctor brings you some good news,

that usually means that there's nothing you need to do.

Mrs Jones,

you have a beautiful healthy baby boy growing inside of you.

It's good news,

and all things being equal

all Mrs Jones needs to do is wait a few months,

and she will have a baby.

She doesn't need to do anything.

But when the doctor brings you bad news,

that's important to hear.

You need to do something about bad news.

Mr Jones, your cancer is spreading.

Well it's time for some chemotherapy

or radiation treatment or something.

And even if the doctor brings such bad news

that there's nothing medical that can be done,

well the news is still important.

It gives you time to put your affairs in order.

Mr Jones,

I'm sorry there is nothing more we can do.
You have somewhere between one and six months to live.
It's not good news.
But hearing the news might give Mr and Mrs Jones one last opportunity to visit their favourite place or their most loved people.
In many ways, bad news is important.

We've been preaching our way through Paul's letter to the Galatians. The Galatian church was facing a situation where they were being told to bring themselves under the OT Law. And so Paul has gone to considerable lengths to explain to them that all God's promises to us come by faith. We receive righteousness - right standing in God's sight by faith. We receive the Holy Spirit by faith. We live the Christian life, we grow in godliness by faith. Everything happens by faith.

But this begs a question.
If everything happens by faith, what on earth is the point of the Law?
Or as Paul puts it in verse 19, "Why then, was the Law given at all?"
You know, if everything happens by faith, do we even need a Law?

Now of course for the Galatians, the chief points of dispute surrounded ceremonial aspects of the Law. It was about their men being circumcised. It was about people of Jewish background maintaining ritual purity by not eating with people from Gentile backgrounds. And as Christians, we would very happily say, "Just jettison all that stuff."

Forget the food laws.
They don't have any real significance.
And I like bacon anyway.
And prawns.

But you see the argument that Paul has been making
has pushed it further than that.
He's taken us back to Abraham,
and shown us that the father of Judaism was justified by faith.
He was declared right in God's sight
by believing the promises God made to him.
He didn't need to keep any law at all.
And that would rather seem to demonstrate
that the whole Law is unnecessary.
And that means the bits that we are attached to
as well as the bits that seem irrelevant.
It's all very well saying circumcision is not necessary for Christians,
but how about "Don't murder"?
How about "Don't steal"?
How about "Honour your father and your mother"?
Do we really want to say that they don't apply to the Christian?
What is the Law for?
If we are saved by faith
and not by keeping the Law,
where does honouring your father and mother come in?
I'd hate to think it was not important.

Well in a sense the Law is like the bad news your doctor gives you.
It's not enjoyable hearing it.
But it's important to hear.
Because one of the functions of the Law
is to help us understand that we need a Saviour.
What will your average non Christian Australian say
if you tell them that Jesus is a wonderful saviour?
Lots of people will say,

"That's very nice for you.

But I don't need saving, thanks.

I'm pretty happy with how I am."

It's true, isn't it?

Your average person out there is not driven to despair about how terribly they have offended the loving God who made them.

Folks mostly think they aren't too bad.

Mostly what happens is that we make our own standards.

And then we measure other people by our standards, and we convince ourselves that we're better than they are, and so we actually aren't too bad at all.

You might be a very law abiding citizen.

And you might tut tut

when you see someone going over the speed limit.

And you might always speak politely and never have a bad word to say about anyone.

And by your standards, you are pretty good.

Certainly better than the hoons and foul mouthed bogans who live around and about.

But actually you might be quite judgemental in the way you look down on hoons and foul mouthed bogans.

You might be quite happy turning a blind eye to the grinding poverty that much of the world's population lives in. Someone else might set up their own standard.

They might always been there for their friends.

When one of their friends is in a spot of bother, which happens quite often in the broken social circles they live in, they might be really sacrificial in helping them out.

If a friend is in trouble with the police and in jail, they would go out of their way

to make sure no one was giving his missus a hard time.

Their language might be a bit rough, but their care for their friends is totally genuine.

And by their own standards,

they're actually pretty good.
They value loyalty to friends and family.
And for the most part they live up to that well.
But actually they don't have much respect
for the good of the society as a whole.
They don't for example
value the work done by the police in restraining evil.
Most people think they are OK when measured by their own standard.
But if you have a quick look out there into the world,
you'll see very quickly that things are not OK in general.
Human beings are doing an excellent job
of destroying their relationships and trashing the planet.

So what is the value of the Law?
Instead of us constructing our own standards to suit ourselves,
God sets out for us a standard of what he expects.
This is the bad news your doctor gives you
that is good to hear,
because if you hear it,
you can do something about it.
Most people think they are OK when measured by their own standard.
But when measured by God's standard,
we all fall short.
Not just a little bit short.
We are total, abject failures.
This is not an opportunity to look around the room
and nod to yourself,
yep I agree, this lot are a bunch of abject failures.
It's an opportunity to take stock of yourself and admit,
Yes I am an abject failure.
What's the point of that?
Won't we all get low self esteem?
The point is so that we recognise that we need a Saviour.
Until we hear God's Law,
we can kid ourselves that we basically measure up.

But once we know God's Law,
we recognise that we need a Saviour.

3:19

"Why then was the Law given at all?

It was added because of transgressions
until the seed to whom the promise referred had come."

God gave the Law,
and people convincingly demonstrated for centuries
that we are not able to live by it.

God was not under any illusions that we would be able to live by it.

But Jesus is the seed of Abraham,
the one promised who would bless the whole world.

When he arrived, we needed to know that we needed him.

In verse 21, Paul asks a question that many would ask.

"Is the Law then opposed to the promises of God?"

It would be easy to think

that the Law sets up a different way of being right in God's sight.

Abraham was justified by believing in God's promise,

but Moses was justified by following the Law.

And so Moses and those who followed him didn't need the promise.

But Paul says,

"Absolutely not!

For if a Law had been given that could impart life,
then righteousness would certainly have come by the Law."

In other words, the Law was never designed to bring life.

What was the point of it then?

3:22 "But the Scripture has locked up everything
under the control of sin,

So that what was promised,
being given through faith in Jesus Christ,
might be given to those who believe."

What the point of the Law?

To lock us up.

To demonstrate very clearly to us

that we are under the control of sin.

And then when we hear about the promise of free forgiveness in Jesus, we will grasp it as the truly remarkable good news it is.

Well being locked up is bad news.

But bad news is good news if it enables us to do something about it.

However the lock up is not the only image

Paul has for the law in our lives.

3:24-25 he presents us with a second image.

The Law as our guardian.

"So the Law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith..

Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."

The image is not longer of being imprisoned.

Now we are looking at child rearing.

In the ancient world,

wealthy families used to employ someone

who was sort of a cross between the modern concepts of a nanny and a tutor.

It would usually be an educated slave.

And it was their job to teach the children and discipline them.

Saved the parents from having to do the hard work of being a parent.

Now Paul is not advocating this family arrangement,

he's just using it as a picture of how the Law relates to us.

So let's think about our lives as adults.

We have freedom to make our own choices.

We decide for ourselves how we want to live our lives and then we go and do that.

That is the position our children are going to be in when they grow older.

So the question is,

"How do you prepare a child for freedom?"

Do you say to a child,
"You are going to have complete freedom as an adult,
so to get you ready for that,
I'm going to give you complete freedom now?"
I certainly hope you didn't say that,
because it would be a disaster.
Children need to be disciplined into good patterns of behaviour,
so that hopefully as the discipline is gradually removed as they mature,
they are in a pattern of making good choices.
They have been well trained to use their freedom.
Too much freedom too young and you are looking at a Miley Cyrus.
It's a train wreck.

The Law is like a guardian.
It trains us to know what God wants,
so that when the freedom of the gospel arrives,
we are prepared to use that freedom well.

You see now that we live by faith,
the guardian is no longer there.
We are not under the law.
But hopefully we have been well trained to live for God.
Hopefully the discipline of observing the law
means that when we are free to make our own decisions,
we will live in ways that please God.

Living to please God is never easy.
Our fallen human condition guarantees that.
But it is easier in the life of faith
than in the life of futilely trying to win favour with God
by living under the Law.
How is that?
It's actually easier to live God's way
when you aren't relying on obedience for your salvation.
Here's one reason.

If in your own mind
you think you need to comply with the law to be saved,
then you make all kinds of excuses in your mind,
because you really want to believe that you will be saved.
"My bad temper doesn't really matter
because I was made with a short fuse."
"Stealing from the tax department doesn't matter
because everyone does it."
"Jesus says that lust is committing adultery in your heart
but so long as I do nothing then it doesn't hurt anyone."
There are a million more excuses where those come from.
But when you know that you are saved by faith,
then you can have the courage to admit the real situation.
God's law is searching and demanding.
But I am emotionally free to admit that,
because I know that when I fail,
Jesus has already paid the price.
I don't approach it with a defeatist attitude.
Like I'm never going to manage this so why try?
But just an attitude of openness
to have the true state of my heart revealed to me.
I'm not threatened by that
because Jesus has already dealt with the problem.
And paradoxically, that means I can face things
that I would have avoided altogether
if I were relying on my good works.
I actually become better at doing good works
when I'm not relying on them.

It's actually easier to live God's way
when you aren't relying on obedience for your salvation.
Here's a second reason.
When we know that we are saved by faith,
our hearts are filled with gratitude.
And you know what?

Tim Keller puts it this way,
"Grateful joy is a motive
that will lead to lots more endurance in obedience
than fearful compliance."

If your heart is overflowing with thankfulness for what has been done,
you are going to stick at it far longer
than if you are looking over your shoulder
waiting for a kick in the pants.

We shouldn't let anyone tell us that salvation by faith
takes away our reason to live upright lives.

Totally the opposite.

Salvation by faith gives us gratitude
that really desires to please our Lord.

And the Law instructs us about what will please our Lord.

And together they can issue forth in lives that are truly beautiful.

Always flawed in this broken world,
but beautiful none the less.

Today we've been looking at the Christian's relationship to the Law.

We know it doesn't save us.

We're saved by faith.

But the Law is not opposed to the promises of God.

Like a doctor,

It gives us the bad news that we really need.

We won't work out that we need a Saviour

until we work out that we need saving.

And then the Law can help us live to please God.

For children, it can school us in patterns of behaviour
which will help us to grasp our freedom when we mature.

For adults, the gratitude we have to God for the free gift of salvation,
can allow us to live out the demands of the Law
in ways that would not have been possible for us,
if we were trying to be saved by them.