

Why The Law Then? (2)

Ryan Goodwin

Paul asks the question in Galatians 3:19, *“Why the Law then?”* It is an important question, since most of the Bible takes place under the Law and even Jesus Himself explained that one aspect of His mission was to fulfill the Law. In this short series of articles we have been exploring the answer to this great question.

To Define Sin and Its Consequences

The purpose of the Law was not to eliminate sin from the world. It could not extinguish it, nor did it abolish unrighteousness from man. Instead, the Law brought about the knowledge of sin. It made sin *“utterly sinful”* (Romans 7:13) in order to define what transgression is! So God enacted this Old Law of Moses to help define sin and righteousness so clearly that there would be no excuse for the people of Israel. He wanted His people to be so clean and pure that every nation around them would marvel at the wisdom of their God (Deuteronomy 4:6-8). And it worked! There were times in Israelite history when heathens (Gentiles) were more impressed with God’s law than Israel was! Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:2-3, the Assyrians in Jonah 3, King Artaxerxes in Ezra 7:25-28, and Cornelius in Acts 10:1-2 are all examples of Gentiles who saw the Law of God and admired it, in some cases followed it, and had a hand in fulfilling the will of the Lord.

Romans 3:19-20 – It is through or by law that lawlessness is clarified. If we did not have a law prohibiting murder, there would be no legal reason why murder is wrong. As Paul puts it in Romans 7:7, he never would have known that coveting was wrong had the law not said, *“Thou shall not covet.”* Law tells us what truth and goodness are, and it also clearly tells us what the antithesis is. Without an enacted law, something is not unlawful, as exemplified by the statement in Romans 4:15, which states that where there is no law, there is no violation. But do not be deceived – First of all, there has always been a law of God in some form. Since the day of creation until now, and until the day that this world is destroyed in intense heat, there will always be a law of God! Second, we are all held accountable to whatever that law is. Let me explain:

- We know for a fact that there was a law given to mankind before Mt. Sinai. Laws of morality and cleanliness were apparent in the book of Genesis, indicating that even before God outlined a specific Law in the times of Moses, He has moral and ethical requirements for His created beings.
- Gentiles understood that adultery was wrong (Genesis 12:18-20, Genesis 20:6-10).
- All sorts of immoral behaviors were being practiced by the entire population of the world in the time of Noah.
- Pride was a sin (Tower of Babel, Genesis 11).
- Homosexuality was a sin (Genesis 19).
- Personal revenge was wrong (Genesis 27:42).
- Stealing was wrong, even punishable by death (Genesis 44:9). And many, many other sins were apparently wrong even before the time of the Law of Moses.

There are those out there who want to argue that no definitive law has been given to man, except for the Old Law. And since we are not under the Old Law anymore, then all of the “specifics” of morality are no longer applicable to us. But we know that even those who have not pledged obedience to Christ (i.e., those who have not confessed and been baptized into Christ) are accountable to His words. Indeed, a truthful, doctrinal, *observable* law is in authority right now for all mankind! We know that it is observable because of 2 Timothy 1:13-14. We know that all mankind is accountable to it from John 12:48.