

Surprisingly, I have not gotten many questions about the current sermon series on Galatians 3:15-4:11. That means that either people are tracking with me better than I thought, or I've so confused you, that you don't even know what questions to ask!

Whatever the case, I thought it would be good to offer a few reading suggestions in the event that some of you want to follow up on the way I am interpreting this passage.

This is probably Paul's most important — and most difficult — passage on the Mosaic Law. You could literally fill a good sized library with books and articles on this text, and even if you read them all, you'd be left with questions. It's a very complex piece of Scripture and presupposes a very close reading of a lot of the Old Testament.

My guess is that a lot of what I've said about the text has been new for many of you, and therefore different from what you have heard in the past. My interpretation does not fit any of the more common approaches in American evangelicalism — namely, the dispensational, theonomic, or Lutheran law/gospel-antithesis frameworks. My approach does not focus on trying to determine how much continuity or discontinuity there is from old covenant to new covenant, because I think that's the wrong question to ask. Paul is thinking more in terms of organic transformation than continuity/discontinuity. I think the more common approaches all tend to miss the fact that Paul is telling a story. The Law of Moses is a vital chapter within the overall story — but it is not the last chapter, nor is it our chapter. The Law continues to be relevant (against dispensationalism) because the lessons God taught his people in that phase of their development are of abiding validity. But the Law cannot be the last chapter in the story (against theonomy) because the Law stood in the way of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, namely, his desire to form one family of faith out of all the nations of the world (Gen. 12:1-3; cf. Gal. 3:8). The purpose of the Law (contrary to the Lutheran reading) was not to expose the sin of individuals and show them they need a Savior (though the Law — and indeed, the entire Bible — can be used to do this). Instead, the Law was given to govern the people of God in their immaturity and to focus the sin of humanity upon a representative (priestly) nation. From that nation a single Seed would emerge who would deal with Israel's curse (and therefore Adam's curse as well). He would bring humanity to maturity and form the one family of faith God pre-revealed to Abraham.

The Law is not our covenant any longer — we are under Christ, not Moses. But the Law is still authoritative Scripture for us, and remains a source of guidance and wisdom for the church and the nations. However, the Law has to be read and applied in light of Christ's coming. The Law of Moses was nailed to the cross with Jesus and rose with him

on the third day in new form — specifically, what Paul calls the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ can be viewed in a number of different ways. Essentially, it is a new covenant Torah for the church. It is the Law of Moses in transfigured form, brought up to date for the new covenant situation we now live in. Understanding all of this allows us to agree with Paul's statement that we are no longer under the Law, without falling into an easy antinomianism (that is, lawlessness). In a passage like Galatians 3, and indeed in virtually all of Paul's writings, it is best to read "law" as "Torah" or "Law of Moses" (unless he is talking about the Law of Christ). For Paul, the Law is not a timeless system of ethics; rather, it is a particular period of history which has now been superseded in Christ. Paul is not attacking ethics when he says we're no longer under Moses. He is dealing with a different set of questions altogether.

Where can you find more on how to read Galatians?

Let me suggest, first, a few internet articles. Some of these are by me, others are by teachers who are taking roughly the same approach:

- http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/getting_the_galatian_heresy_right.htm
- http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/jeffrey_meyers/paul_discusses_galatians.htm
- http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/derrick_olliff/pauls_letter_to_the_galatians.htm
- <http://www.biblicalstudiescenter.org/interpretation/shouldhave.htm>
- http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/the_pca_and_the_new_perspective_on_paul.htm

I have a couple more articles on the law I hope to have out sometime soon. I also taught a series on Pauline theology at Auburn Avenue that is available on tape. Much of that course dealt with Paul's view of the law in Galatians.

Second, for more detailed study, commentaries on Galatians by Ben Witherington, Richard Hays, and Don Garlington should be consulted. N. T. Wright's book *The Climax of the Covenant* has very helpful and detailed articles on Galatians 3:10-14 and 3:15-20 that I highly recommend if you want to delve deeply into the meaning of these texts. Wright's view of 3:20 is simply brilliant, and models the kind of biblical scholarship the church today needs. All of these writers on Galatians have grasped that the book is not so much a tract about how individuals get justified, but about how God has acted in history to fulfill the promises of the Abrahamic covenant. That is to say, these commentators understand that Galatians is about ecclesiology (the church) every bit as much as it is about soteriology (salvation). The concerns that drive book include questions such as

“With whom should we have sacramental table fellowship?” (Gal. 2) and “Who are the true children of Abraham?” (Gal. 3-4) and “How should the inter-ethnic, inter-national family of Abraham live in community together now that Moses has been superseded?” (Gal. 5-6).

Third, there are several works on the law more generally that are very helpful. The best overall study on the Law of Moses is found in Vern Poythress’ book *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*. While many traditional ways of dealing with the Law, such as dividing the Law into moral, civil, and ceremonial categories, or thinking in terms of the three “uses” of the Law (to restrain evil, to convict of sin, to guide the life of the redeemed) have much value, in my opinion, none of them can really do justice to Paul’s overall understanding of the law, which is more complex, more nuanced, and more firmly rooted in the Old Testament itself. Poythress’ book will help you begin to get past vague generalities about the law and into a deeper grasp of how Christians should view and apply the Law of Moses.

Other books that provide helpful insight to the Law of Moses include Jim Jordan’s *Through New Eyes*, Frank Thielman’s *Paul and Law* and *The Law in the New Testament*, the relevant sections of Herman Ridderbos’ *Paul*, and Henri DeLubac’s *Medieval Exegesis*. Jordan’s book in particular is helpful in terms of understanding the place of the Law in redemptive history and how it should be applied today.