

# The Leap of Doubt: Examining Seven Toughest Objections to God and Christianity

## Objection 2: “Christianity is a Straitjacket (limits our freedom)”

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Galatians 3:19-4:7



### I. Introduction

Intro Video

We are on a series called The Leap of Doubt. We are examining seven toughest objections to God and Christianity. Today’s objection is this: Christianity is a straitjacket! It limits our freedom. Why would I want to become a Christian and be subject to all of those rules? I rather live in freedom!

I am going to give you a simple answer and then I am going to go one step deeper. What I will say is a little different than the book.

The simple answer is that if you treat Christianity like **a bunch of dos and don’ts**, as a duty, as rules to follow, then Christianity is a straitjacket! There is no joy in that kind of life. If you treat your marriage as a bunch of dos and don’ts, as a duty, as rules to follow, then your marriage is a straitjacket. That’s kind of marriage is no fun and completely restrictive and sooner or later, you’ll end up getting a divorce.

If you, however, approach God as a **love relationship**, when you come to realize how much he loves you, how awesome he is, and you get captivated by his acceptance and grace, then Christianity will be the most liberating thing in the world. It’s the same thing in marriage. If you come for each other and love one another, the last thing you think of it is as a straitjacket. Do you have to keep some rules? Yes, absolutely. You can’t cheat on your spouse! This is what Christianity is all about.

If you don’t get the rest of the sermon, just get this. Christianity is a relationship with God, not a set of moral rules to live by.

But, there is still the issue of what we do with the law. What are we supposed to do after we become a Christian? We get all confused. What do we do with the moral rules? We still have to keep them right?

- Right after I became a Christian, I was really excited about my faith and my new relationship with God. So, I got into the Bible and started to study it. I started to struggle with all these rules, particularly the Sermon on the Mount (where Jesus says to love our enemies and turn

the other cheek, and not even think of a woman with lust and stuff like that). I went to this youth meeting this mega-church where the speaker was talking about all these rules that we have to keep as Christians. So, I made a decision to live by all the laws and commandments.

- But, I had a hard time keeping up. I tried. I tried.
- The problem was that I was very inconsistent. A lot of times, I wasn't keeping the laws and even if I was keeping them, I only kept the external ones like, uh—not getting.... Actually, I had problems even with the external ones. My heart was very dark. When I was honest with myself, there were selfishness, hatred, temper, anger, jealousy, greed, lust, bitterness, manipulation, and all kinds of dark things. I tried to get rid of these things from my life because I felt guilty about these things. But, more I tried to get rid of them, the stronger it got. I focused on the externals in order to feel righteous. I focused on select external sins and looked down on them. And as long as I wasn't one of them, whom I considered below me morally, I was okay as a Christian. My Christian life became arrogant, hypocritical, homophobic, judgmental, and frankly, pathetic.
- Have you felt like your efforts to live a good Christian life seem to fail repeatedly, despite trying really hard? What do we do with all of these laws?
- What went wrong with me? I became a Christian, accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord, said the sinner's prayer, and tried really hard to live a righteous life. What happened? What went wrong?
- This is the issue that Apostle Paul addresses to us today.

Let's go to Galatians 3:1-5. Paul says:

3:1-5, NIV: **You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?** (The Message: does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving or because you trust him to do them in you?)

He is saying: You started this relationship with God through believing what you heard and not by moral striving. Now that you are a Christian, you think you can perfect yourself by moral striving? By keeping all the laws and rules?

- Paul says: don't do it. Christian life not about becoming Christian through faith, and then, living our lives by the law, by moral striving.
- Paul is saying: You foolish Angelinos! Who has bewitched you? How can you exchange the beauty of the gospel for the law? You understood the gospel and its grace when you became a Christian, how can you abandon it now after you've become a Christian? You think going back to the law is going to work?

Then, Paul goes on to explain one of the most important things about Christian living: the relationship between the gospel and the law.

- I think a lot of us are confused about the relationship between the gospel and the law. The law is a good thing; in fact, Paul says in Romans 7:12: **“the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.”**
- What God is calling us to do are good things: loving God, loving your neighbor, having a pure heart, getting rid of greed, lust, coveting, getting rid of selfishness, giving your money, honoring your parents, honoring your parents. All of these things are good things.
- But, Paul says we have to watch out.

**I want to look at three things as we look at this passage: (1) the purpose of the law; (2) the problem with living by the law; and (3) the differences between living by the law and living by the spirit of sonship.**

**First, let's look at the purpose of the law.**

Let's try to follow Paul's arguments carefully through chapter 3 (please stay with me as we go through the chapter).

First, Paul argues from the OT:

- Paul argues in verse 6-9 that the gospel was announced to Abraham, and so, Abraham knew that it was by believing God that he was approved by God, and

not by works. So, God's promise and grace came first. (We often think that the law came first because OT came before the NT gospel, but Paul is arguing that the gospel came first to Abraham and then the law came later.)

- Look at 3:17: “What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.”

Then, Paul addresses a couple of questions (which is the text for today; let's go to 3:19):

Paul asks: “What, then, was the purpose of the law?”

- Why did God give us the law? All the rules and commandments and dos and don'ts. The Ten Commandments. All that stuff. If the law can't set aside the gospel, why did he give us the law?
- Paul answers in verse 20: “It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”
  - It says two things here, one, that the law was added because of transgressions. In other words, the law is an objective standard by which we can measure our sins. The purpose of the law is to expose man's sinfulness.
  - This passage also tells us that it was a temporary assignment only until Jesus came. “It was added because of transgressions *until* the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.” (the seed refers to Jesus)
  - Now that Jesus came, what is Paul saying? Could he be saying that we are no longer under the law?
  - Let's go on.

Paul asks another question in verse 21: “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.”

- What Paul is saying is that the promise of God (or the Gospel) is *not* opposed to the law, but *compleMENtary* to it.

- One of the best illustrations I've heard on this: It functions like a flashlight which helps to identify what's wrong with a car. The flashlight could call attention to a broken fan belt, but you can't use it actually fix the problem.
- The law spotlights man's broken, sinful state, but the law is not the tool we use to fix our brokenness.
- In other words, the purpose of the law is descriptive; it shows us what is sin and that we are a sinner. It is not prescriptive. It does not tell us how we can actually live according to the laws!

Then, Paul uses three illustrations to drive home this point:

- First illustration, Verse 23: **“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.”** (we were held prisoners in the sense that we knew what we had to do (it showed us our problems) but we didn't have the power to do it. So, we lived in a spiral pit without a way out, until faith came)
- Second illustration, Verse 24: **“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.** (NRSV, which is a more literal translation, says: “Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came.” The law constantly beat us down like a stern disciplinarian, pointing out all our shortcomings and failures. This was designed to teach us that we could only be declared righteous by God through faith.) Then, Verse 25 is the huge: **25Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. 26You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus** (this is tremendous: he says you are no longer under the supervision of the law and that you are all son of God through faith;)
- And he goes on to a third illustration to clarify even further, 4:1ff: **“What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. 2He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.”** (in other words, the law is the guardian of a minor who supervises us until we reach the age of maturity; the life as a child under the supervision of a guardian is not different than being a slave even though he is a son) **3So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. 4But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. 6Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the**

Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." 7So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. (when we became an adult—when the time had fully come, we have been given full rights as sons; God has given us the spirit of his son into our hearts.)

So:

- A prisoner to freedom
- A child under a disciplinarian to a mature adult
- A child under guardianship to a son with full rights

The point is clear:

- The purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ by showing us our sins, showing us that we can't possibly do this on our own.
- Now that Christ has come and we have put our faith in him, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. Christian life is not about living out our lives under the law.
- The law is only descriptive of what we need to do and how we must live; as Romans 7:12 says: "the commandment is holy, righteous and good" and teaches us what is holy, righteous and good. So, don't get me wrong. I am not saying that we should ignore the moral laws. We need to study it, mediate on it, and understand the heart of it. But, we also need to understand the purpose of the law. It ultimately tells us how dark and sinful we are, and that we need to be healed, saved by God, and continued to be saved by God from the depth of our sins.
- And when we are saved by the gospel, and we start this relationship with God, and develop and grow this relationship, we start to see changes in our hearts, and we see changes in our lives. And you know what? We change into conformity with the heart of the law. We are actually able to keep the heart of the law.
- The law is not the power for us to live as Christians. The power to live is in the spirit of sonship, in a relationship with God through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
- But, I don't think Paul is saying that we shouldn't try to obey the law. What I think he is saying is that your desire to obey the law must come from your grace-enabled relationship with God. It must come from a transformed heart, or it's not going to work.

**Let's go to the second point: You might be asking: What's the problem with living by the law?**

The first problem with living by the law is that the law focuses you on the line between good and evil—takes you to the edge.

- For example, adultery: you're constantly asking how far can I go before I cross the line? What is the speed LIMIT? Instead of what is safe? The law thinking tends to take us to the edge and draw us to the edge. Essentially, we are asking this question: *How bad can I be without sinning?* How close to sin can I get without asking for forgiveness?

The second, it causes us to look for loopholes.

- You said to do the dishes but you didn't say to put all the dishes in the cabinet. So, I just put it on the counter.
- When Jesus showed up, the men who knew the law best had written a book of loopholes.
- It's like in Ephesians, it says to don't get drunk with wine, it doesn't say anything about beer... or whiskey
- We are constantly looking for the loophole.
- Living under the law or approaching life under the rule is that we will constantly gravitate towards the edge and constantly be looking for loopholes.
- Either you have to water it down so that you will feel good about yourselves or feel guilty about it all the time. This is the reason some of you have left Christianity when you were younger or are thinking about leaving Christianity. You said to yourself: I can't be that good and I don't even want to be that good because look what I am missing out on.

Third, the law focuses on the externals and not the heart.

- The law tends to focus on whether you do something or not, rather than where your heart is.
- As I talked about earlier, there is a tendency to focus on external righteousness, not on the condition of our heart. The focus is more on outward behaviors, not on inward sin.
- The problem is that we can bend our behaviors, but if our heart is not changed, it snaps right back and we have to continue to struggle with it.

The fourth problem with living by the law is that it actually empowers the sin in us. If we focus on not doing something, we actually end up empowering it.

- Illustration of lust.

**Let's go to the third point:**

**Now, living by the law and living by the spirit of Sonship are two very different approaches to life. I really want to make this clear to you. So, here are some contrasts between the two:**

1. The law is ultimately performance based and the spirit of sonship is grace based. This is what I mean: if you live by the law, and you do well, you will get trapped in pride and if you don't do well, you will be crushed by the burden of the law. If you live by the spirit of sonship, that means you establish your identity based on who God says you are—his son or daughter. He accepts you and receives you no matter how you did, even if you really blew it with the law. This grace-based identity drives you to a relationship with God, and when you experience this relationship with God, his love, his grace, his forgiveness, his joy, we have the power to live out our lives.
2. The law is about being committed to something (I am committing to obey these laws: I am going to do it); the spirit of sonship is about being surrendered to someone. There is a big difference between commitment to something and surrendering to someone. See that? What the Christian life is about is not a commitment to something. It is about surrendering to someone. Commitment says: here is what I am going to do. Surrender says: just show me where to go. Commitment says: I am going to follow the law. Surrender says: I'll just follow you.
3. The law is about following a list and spirit based sonship is about a following a person. There is nothing intimate and there is nothing personal about a list of laws. There is something very intimate about following your heavenly father, following your Savior, following the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit. This is the thing that takes Christianity outside the realm of religion. Religion is about following the rules. All the dos and don'ts. Doing something to please God. Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship. So, in order for us to maintain a relationship, we have to move away from

the law to this relational side of things where we learn to walk according to the prompting and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

4. Living by the law is like trying to change from the outside, and living by the spirit of sonship is like changing from the inside out. There is a transformation of the heart and that leads to change in behavior.
5. Living by the law is like the older son in the prodigal son story who obeys the father out of duty and living by the spirit of sonship is like how the younger son would have lived after he came back home. He would have lived a different life because of his experience of his father's grace and mercy.
6. Living by the law results in slavery and living by the spirit of sonship results in freedom.  
[elaborate]