

## THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

### GALATIANS 3:15-22, AFFIRMATION OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH: GOD'S COVENANT OF FAITH AND THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

- A. Justification by faith is demonstrated by the permanence of the covenant of faith (15-18)
1. Man-made covenants are permanent (15), ***To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.***
    - a. Paul shows the fallacy of relying on the law by examining the permanence of human covenants.
      - 1) *covenant*, the verbal content of an agreement between two persons specifying reciprocal benefits and responsibilities. Here, the illustration is that of a will since that demonstrates the part of the owner conferring an unconditional promise.
      - 2) Once a human covenant or agreement is ratified or validated, it is not invalidated or changed.
      - 3) Thomas Constable, . . . *even wills and contracts made between human beings remained in force until the fulfillment of their terms.*
    - b. *Brothers* means or can be translated as *brothers and sisters*.
  2. Covenants made by God are permanent, as well (16), ***Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.***
    - a. Paul points out that if a man's will cannot be set aside or added to, much more are God's promises unchangeable.
    - b. Judaizers implied that the giving of the law changed the original covenant of promise. They were declaring that justification by faith promised to Abraham became justification by works at the giving of the Law.
    - c. Notes on the Abrahamic Covenant
      - 1) It was a promise of land, Genesis 12:1-2, *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.*
      - 2) It was a promise of spiritual blessing, Genesis 12:3, *I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*
      - 3) It was a unilateral covenant made by God to Abraham and to his offspring who is Christ. This looks back to Genesis 3:16, *To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."*
      - 4) God made this covenant of promise with Abraham through Christ.
        - a) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *the only two parties who can make any changes are God the Father and God the Son. Moses cannot alter this covenant! He can add nothing to it; he can take nothing from it. The Judaizers wanted to add to God's grace (as though anything could be added to grace!) and take from God's promises. They had no right to do this since they were not parties in the original covenant.*
        - b) Thomas Constable, *Paul did not mean that Christ fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant completely. He meant that through Christ, the descendant of Abraham, God continued to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant.*
        - c) Jesus Christ is *THE* descendant (*offspring* or *seed*) of Abraham through whom all families of the earth are blessed. The faithful in Israel always recognized that blessing would come from a single individual, the Messiah, who is the offspring of Abraham, Jesus.
        - d) Grant Osborne, *Jesus is both the son of Abraham and the son of David, the "seed" in whom all the promises are realized, and the church, composed of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles, is united with Christ and thereby becomes the heir of these promises.*
  3. The Law did not invalidate God's covenant with Abraham (17), ***This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.***
    - a. *This is what I mean*
      - 1) Paul reiterates why faith is permanent.
      - 2) The covenant of faith made by God to Abraham could not be altered by the Law which came later.
      - 3) W. Foerster, *Paul's point is that what God has said is already in force by the mere fact that He has said it.*
      - 4) *430 years*
        - a) The time frame probably began with the promises repeated by God to Jacob at Beersheba as he left Canaan to settle in Egypt (1875 B.C.; Genesis 46:2-4).
        - b) It ended with the giving of the Mosaic Law (1446 B.C.; Exodus 19).

- b. The promise of God to Abraham was not invalidated by the Law.
  - 1) It was *ratified by God*, which means *established, validated*.
  - 2) The promise of God is justification by faith which has always been God's way of salvation.
  - 3) In Galatians 3:19-22, Paul explains the purpose of the Law which is not to remove promise.
    - a) Romans 4:14, *For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.*
    - b) Grant Osborne, . . . *the Abrahamic centers on faith and promise, while the Mosaic centers on legal obedience and transgression. God was central in the first and his people in the second. Paul's point is that the lesser cannot have precedence over the greater.*
    - c) Richard Longenecker, . . . *law of Moses had nothing to do with either annulling or adding to what God had covenanted with Abraham.*
  
4. God's dealing with Abraham was based on promise not on obedience to the Law (18), ***For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.***
  - a. Justification by works would invalidate God's promise to Abraham.
    - 1) *inheritance*
      - a) The first time used in Galatians.
      - b) Paul used this word interchangeably with *promise* and *justification*.
      - c) What God promised Abraham and all the families of the earth is the inheritance of blessing (salvation).
    - 2) Works and faith do not co-mingle; they cannot be combined.
    - 3) Donald Campbell, *Contrary to the claim of the Judaizers, obedience to the Law was not necessary to gain the inheritance.*
  
  - b. God's covenant was based on faith in His promise.
    - 1) God gave it (*the promise*), Hebrews 6:13-14, *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."*
    - 2) God keeps His word, Heinrich Schlier, (a) *it is God who has made the decision, which therefore stands and is not to be broken; (b) the decision was for promise, not law; and (c) it was a gracious decision which forestalled all merit and excluded every meritorious achievement.*
    - 3) God's promise is as sure today as it was for Abraham.
      - a) John Stott, *So every sinner who trusts in Christ crucified for salvation, quite apart from any merit or good works, receives the blessing of eternal life and thus inherits the promise of God made to Abraham.*
      - b) Donald Campbell, *God's way of salvation has always been by grace through faith.*
  
  - c. Summary thought by Grant Osborne, *The point of this section is that the Abrahamic covenant takes priority over the Mosaic, with faith taking precedence over works. The promised inheritance belongs to Christians, in Christ and in the Spirit, not in the works of the law.*
  
- B. The purpose of the Law (19-22)
  1. The Law was added because of transgressions (19-20), ***Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.***
    - a. *Why then the law?*
      - 1) Paul asks what is the purpose of the law?
      - 2) If God's promise has always been based on faith, what is the purpose of the law?
      - 3) The Law identifies or reveals *transgressions*.
        - a) Mankind is made accountable to a list of do's and don'ts.
        - b) Romans 3:20, *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*
        - c) Romans 4:15, *For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.*
        - d) Romans 5:13, *for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.*
        - e) 1 Timothy 1:8-11, *Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*

- f) John Stott, *The function of the law was not to bestow salvation, however, but to convince men of their need of it.*
  - g) Andrew Jukes (1800's), *Satan would have us to prove ourselves holy by the law, which God gave to prove us sinners.*
- b. Was the Law temporary?
- 1) It began at Mount Sinai and ended at Mount Calvary.
  - 2) The offspring is Jesus Christ through whom the promise to Abraham was made, Galatians 3:16, *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.*
  - 3) Thomas Constable, *Paul clarified that the Law was only a temporary measure designed to function until Christ came.*
  - 4) Leon Morris, *The function of the law was to point people to Christ, not to provide for all time the way the people of God should live.*
- c. Why did the Law have an intermediary?
- 1) *An intermediary is one who causes or helps parties come to an agreement.*
  - 2) The Law was a bilateral agreement between God and the nation of Israel with angels representing God and Moses representing the people as intermediaries.
    - a) Acts 7:38, *This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.*
    - b) Acts 7:53, *you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.*
    - c) The people were afraid, Exodus 20:19, *and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."*
    - d) Stephen Neill (Anglican theologian), . . . *the promise came to Abraham first-hand from God; and the law comes to the people third-hand—God—the angels—Moses the mediator—the people.'*
- d. Why was there no mediator of God's promise to Abraham?
- 1) *God is one* speaks of His unconditional covenant with Abraham which is unilateral where God alone has responsibility for fulfilling it.
  - 2) Richard Longenecker, . . . *God's redemptive activity is always direct and unilateral in nature, reflecting the oneness of his person.*
  - 3) The covenant of grace is greater than the Law, note Grant Osborne, *"Righteousness" in Galatians means being declared forgiven and right with God, and it is the result of the promise realized in Christ and attained by faith. The purpose of the law was to point out the need; only Christ could meet that need.*
2. The Law and promises do not contradict (21-22), ***Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.***
- a. Paul asks the question, does the Law and promises contradict each other?
    - 1) His response is that they do not contradict.
    - 2) They have two different purposes.
  - b. The purpose of the Law was not to give life.
    - 1) It was never designed to provide justification which is the purpose of faith.
    - 2) If law had been given to provide life, Jesus would have died for no purpose, Galatians 2:21, *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*
  - c. The purpose of the Law was to reveal mankind's imprisonment to sin and need for deliverance.
    - 1) The Law served the greater purpose of the promise which is justification by faith.
    - 2) Thomas Constable, *It served as a mirror to show people their sinfulness and that they are the slaves of sin. When they realize they cannot save themselves, they will be open to receiving salvation as a gift by faith.*
    - 3) Paul equates the Law to the whole Old Testament that shows people as sinners who can't save themselves.
    - 4) The Law did promise a life of temporal blessing on earth for those who sought to obey it, Deuteronomy 8:1, *The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers.*
    - 5) Donald Campbell, *Paul declared that the whole world is trapped and under the dominion of sin. When people recognize this and give up attempts to please God by their own works, the way is prepared for them to receive the promise of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.*

- d. John Stott on the mistake of the Judaizers, *To summarize, the Judaizers held falsely that the law annuls the promise and supersedes it; Paul teaches the true function of the law, which is to confirm the promise and make it indispensable. . . Not until the law has bruised and smitten us will we admit our need of the gospel to bind up our wounds. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned us will we pine for Christ to set us free.*

<b><i>CONCLUSION</i></b>
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- A. The Abrahamic Covenant is permanent and can't be changed.  
B. The Law condemns but the promise of God justifies.  
C. The content of Law is the works of man but the content of promise is the grace of God received by faith.