Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God's Promise: Why the Law?
Scripture: Galatians 3:15-22
Code: 1660

Galatians 3:15-22. I'd like to read this entire passage to you to begin with, so that you have it set in your mind as we begin.

"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man annuls, or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, 'And to seeds,' as of many; but as of one, 'And to thy seed,' which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot annul, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

I told you that was difficult and it is. It is very close logic on the part of Paul and we'll just hit it and see how far we get. We'll think it through. I promise you that if you stay with it, you'll understand it clearly. It will all unfold to you.

Now, as we come to the book of Galatians, we are reminded again that the Apostle Paul is expounding the truth of salvation by faith. That is his message. But he doesn't just expound it, he defends it with some tremendous evidence: the evidence of experience, which he has given in 3:1-5, and the evidence of Scripture in 3:6-4:7. In all of this large passage, from 3:6-4:7, Paul is amassing Old Testament verses that support the concept of justification, or salvation, by faith. The reason it's so very important for him to support it from the Old Testament is that the Judaizers have used the Old Testament to propagate the doctrine of salvation by works. So Paul takes the Old Testament, which they claim to believe and study and use to support their view of works, and he turns it around to show them that the Old Testament, in fact, teaches salvation by grace through faith.

The Judaizers had moved into Galatia where Paul had founded the churches and had really begun to undo his work. First of all, they had told the people there that Paul was not to be listened to because he didn't have authority, that he wasn't a legitimate apostle. So, for the first two chapters, Paul

defends his apostleship. The second thing the Judaizers said was, "His message is not true. Justification is not by faith alone, but by faith plus works." So in chapters 3-4, Paul defends the doctrine that he had preached of justification by faith alone. The third thing the Judaizers did was to try and undermine the liberty of the Christian life. So Paul takes chapters 5-6 of Galatians to defend liberty living for the Christian.

Now we saw in last week's lesson, as we began with 3:6, in this whole area of defending the doctrine of faith by justification from Scripture, that Paul used many Scriptures. He used Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3:6, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness." In other words, he says, "If you're going to try to teach justification by works from the Old Testament, listen to this. Abraham, the first of all the family of Israel, was justified by faith." That's quoting from Genesis 15:6. Then, in verse 8, he quotes Genesis 12:3 when he says, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abram, saying, 'In thee shall all nations be blessed.'" Here we find that the Gospel has to come to each individual on the basis of faith whether he's Jew or Gentile, and that it would be through the Messiah that all nations would enter into that blessing.

In verse 10, he quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26. "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law." In other words, he said, "If you're going to try to live by the law, you've got to do it all or you're cursed. That's Old Testament. If you want to advocate legalism, just remember, you break one law one time and you're cursed." Then he quotes, in verse 11, from Habakkuk 2:4, where Habakkuk said, "The just shall live by faith." Again, he uses Old Testament proof for justification by faith. In verse 12, he quotes from Leviticus 18:5. "The man that does them shall live in them." In other words, if you want to live by law, you're going to live and die by law. Paul, of course, resolved all this proof into the great statement of verses 13-14. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. He became a curse for us that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." So, just to give you a quick look back at that, the Apostle Paul has pointed out that God saves by faith and he has used at least five different Old Testament texts to prove that.

Now, he's not finished. He has clearly presented, from verses 6-14, that Abraham was justified by faith. There is no doubt about that. He has amassed all this various Scripture, and the Jew has been taken back to the history of Abraham and has had to see, the Judaizers have had to see, the Galatian Christians have had to see, that Abraham was justified by faith. The reason he was saved, the reason God accepted him, the reason he entered into a right relationship with God, was simply and only because he believed, not because of something he did. It was because of his faith.

Now here comes the obvious argument of the Judaizers at this point, and Paul is great for anticipating arguments. When you go to the book of Romans, he has this imaginary antagonist that he throws up in almost every chapter, for at least the first eight or so. He throws this imaginary response up. He

goes and presents a case for something, but he knows that, on the basis of what he has said, there are a couple of obvious questions. So he offers those obvious questions himself, as if he were his own antagonist, then he goes off and answers them.

So here, the Apostle Paul has presented that Abraham was justified by faith. All who followed Abraham were likewise justified by faith. Immediately, he knows there is a question that will pop right up. The question will be this, "OK, Paul, you say that Abraham was justified by faith, and the people who came after Abraham were justified by faith alone. That's fine. But, when the law finally came in 645 years after Abraham, that annulled the standard of salvation in Abraham's day and supplanted it with a new one." The were going to say, "We buy the fact that Abraham was justified by faith, but that was only because the law hadn't come yet. Once the law came, that changed everything." The law would annul the earlier faith agreement. So from the time of the law on, God would justify by faith plus works. The Jew would say, "Why else would God give the law?" That's an obvious question and I'm sure it's an obvious argument. Here comes Paul, the theological hawk, swooping down on his opponent. Beginning in verse 15, he answers the question that he himself anticipates. As I say, he makes much use of an imaginary opponent. He does this all the way through the book of Romans.

Granted, then, that Abraham was justified by faith. "Fine, Paul, you've supported that from Old Testament Scripture. We can see. But that was only good until the law came, and then the law replaced the promise of faith. Once the law was given, you had to live by the law to be saved." So Paul begins, in verse 15, to answer that question. To do so, he goes back in history to Moses. He went back to Abraham the first time, and now he goes back to Moses. Here, he shows that God, in dealing with Abraham and in dealing with Moses, had two entirely different things in mind. It's a tremendous passage, and you need to understand this. When you get a hold on this, man, do you ever understand the purpose of law and the purpose of the promise. There's a great difference. To Abraham, God gave a promise. There were no conditions, none at all. He said, "Your seed will be as the sand of the sea. In you will all nations be blessed." He made the statement that from Abraham's loins would come the seed that would bless all men. There wasn't anything for Abraham to do but just listen to the promise. When He came to Moses, he didn't just give Moses a promise. He gave Moses a law.

Let me show you the difference in another way. To Abraham, God said, "I will. I will. I will." To Moses, He said, "Thou shalt. Thou shalt. Thou shalt, or else." There is quite a difference. The promise set forth a religion for God; the law set forth a religion of man. The promise talked about God's plan, God's grace, God's initiative, God's sovereignty, God's blessing, God's promise. The law talked about man's duty, man's works, man's responsibility, man's behavior, man's obedience. The promise, which stood for grace, had only to be believed; the law, which stood for works, had to be obeyed. They were two different things. So, at this point, if the Jew were listening to what I'm saying, he'd say, "Right! Right! Now we've got to go with the law because it supplants faith." That isn't true. Let me show you why. Here comes the argument of Paul.

In his argument, there are two major points, a simple outline. First, the superiority of the promise of faith, and secondly, the inferiority of the demands of the law. People, this is really a great theology you're going to get tonight, an Old Testament theology. By this comparison, he shows that justification is still on the basis of the promise to Abraham, and the law does not change that. The law is still inferior to the promise. The law does not supplant the promise. If justification by faith was good in Abraham's day, he's going to tell us, it's good still and the law did not change that. That's what he means to say.

Let's look first of all at the superiority of the promise of faith from verses 15-18. Paul presents four reasons for the superiority of faith over law: its confirmation, its Christ-centeredness, its chronology and its completeness. Here his argument is really potent. It's clear, incisive, delicate, detailed, intricate, but boy, is it strong. Paul wails away on this concept of the superiority of faith, and he says, in effect, "The law is inferior. Faith is superior." Why? Because it is unalterable. Because it is fulfilled in Christ. Because it was given first, and because it is completely effective. Those four things.

First of all, its confirmation. Faith is superior to the law because of its confirmation; it is irrevocable. Verse 15. "Brethren," and it's kind of a soft introduction, because the last time he called them by anything was in verse 1. "Oh foolish Galatians. You blockheads." So he's eased off a bit. "Brothers, I speak after the manner of men," that is, "I'm speaking from the human standpoint, I'm speaking regarding a human custom. I'm using an illustration from your normal, everyday life. Though it be but a man's covenant [just an agreement, a human agreement that people make with each other], yet if it be confirmed, no man annuls, or adds to it." Paul says this, "Let me give you a simple illustration. To begin with, you people make agreements. Now if that agreement is ratified, or confirmed, then nobody can change that agreement. That's true in the human realm." Right? That's verse 15. "Brethren, though it be but a human covenant, a covenant between men, once it's confirmed, it cannot be annulled or added to."

The word 'covenant' here, diatheke, has in mind, I think, just the general word for covenant, agreement. This word diathekeis used in the Greek version of the Old Testament as the word every time God's covenants appear. Some would like to translate it 'a will,' or 'a testament,' like a last will and testament, but I don't think that's the meaning of the word here. I think the use of it here fits the category of Old Testament language, since that's what he's talking about, and the Greeks used the word diatheketo speak of an agreement, a covenant between two people. It didn't necessarily have to do with a will, although the word can refer to that. It seems best to me, in this case, to use it in the sense of an agreement or a covenant.
So, he says, "When men make an agreement, or a covenant, and confirm that thing, or ratify that thing, then it becomes a binding thing. No one annuls it or adds to it." Incidentally, there are two words that could be used for 'covenant,' sunthekeand diatheke. Just as a point of interest, diatheke

has a much more one-sided idea to it than suntheke. The idea of sunhas to do with an agreement from two parties; the diathekeword means more of a one-sided kind of covenant. God made a covenant like that, much more one-sided than two-sided, believe me.

Look at Genesis 15 and I'll show you how the covenant was made and how it was ratified. God made a covenant, an agreement, and bound Himself to it by having it ratified, or confirmed. Verse 1. "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, 'Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' And Abram said, 'LORD God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?'" He didn't have his own seed, his own son. So he says, "God, you keep telling me about this great inheritance, and I don't even have a child!"

"And Abram said, 'Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir,'" a child other than his own. "And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, 'This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own loins shall be thine heir.'" God says, "You're going to have your own child."

"And he brought him forth abroad, and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them,' and he said unto him, 'So shall thy seed be.'" You know what Abraham did? "He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." There's the salvation of Abraham by faith, right there. He believed God, and God made him righteous on the basis of faith.

God gave him a covenant. He said, "You're going to have a child, you're going to have people like the stars of heaven, and it's going to be a fantastic blessing that will come through these people." And Abraham believed Him. There wasn't anything for Abraham to do; he just listened. It was pure promise. God didn't say, "Now, you and I are going to work out a deal, Abram." No, Abraham just stood there and listened. It was, "I will. I will. I will." Abraham's only involvement was, "OK, so You will. I believe it." That's all.

Verse 7. "He said unto him, 'I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.' And he said, 'LORD God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?'" He's saying, "How do I know? You say I'm going to inherit, but how do I know this?"

"And he said unto him, 'Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.'" God tells him to go get all these animals. "And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst." So he took the ram, the heifer and the she goat and cut them in half, sliced them down the middle. "He laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not." I've always said that if you divide a bird, all you get is a handful of feathers, so there's no sense in that. He got two birds and he killed them. So he split these three animals down the middle, one piece here, one piece here, one piece here, and he's got

three divided animals with a little path in the middle. One dead bird over here, another one over here. You say, "What is going on?"

Well, in the Orient, one of the ways that a covenant was ratified was by blood, or the shedding of blood. In Oriental customs, when two men made an agreement, they would very often take a lamb or she goat or whatever it might be from each of their flocks, split them down the middle, lay the pieces on each side, and together, they would walk between the bloody pieces. By walking between the bloody pieces, they were making a visible ratification of their covenant. This confirmed the covenant. God was getting ready, according to Oriental custom (which Abram knew very well), to ratify His agreement.

Verse 11 says, "When the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away." He's standing there, beating off all these birds, waiting for whatever's going to happen, to happen. In verse 12, God gave him a little divine anesthetic. "When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and the horror of great darkness fell upon him." He just went out like a light. When he's out cold, and doesn't know what is going on, God makes a terrific promise. He talks about Egypt, and what's going to happen over there, and I'll bring you out of there, and this, that and the other. Verse 17.

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces." You know what this burning lamp and smoking furnace represents? It represents the presence of God. You know who went between the pieces? God did. Not Abram. Why? Because it wasn't an agreement between God and Abram, it was an agreement between God and God. God was binding Himself to His covenant. If you want to know whether the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional, then all you need to know is it was God's own promise to Himself. God bound Himself to the keeping of His covenant.

Listen; if then Abram was saved by faith, and God bound Himself to that kind of covenant, then that covenant was ratified for good. God does not repent of that which He designs to do. So God bound Himself to His own covenant, and once it was legally ratified, and ratified by blood, it could never be set aside, it could never be added to. Incidentally, friends, it went into effect immediately. Right in verse 6, it was in effect. As soon as Abram believed, it was counted to him for righteousness. Just that fast, that covenant was in effect. You know something exciting? It's still in effect today. Salvation still comes by faith. Now we can go back to Galatians.

So God made a covenant and ratified it. That's what men did too; men ratified covenants, usually by some symbol of blood or some other particular symbol, depending on the culture. Once it was ratified, nothing could be done to annul it or add to it. Now, if we want to be fair with the Judaizers, we would probably have to say that the Judaizers didn't want to annul the faith idea; they just wanted to add to it, right? They didn't want to wipe out faith altogether; they just wanted to have works plus

faith. So they wanted to add to it. The legalists, incidentally, have always wanted to do that. But once the covenant is ratified, you can't add to it.

So Paul begins his argument by saying the covenant was confirmed. It was ratified. That means it is set; it cannot be altered or added to. Here is his point: "Look, even a man's covenant, when it's confirmed, cannot be annulled or added to." The implication is, if that's true in the human realm, how much more true is it when God makes a covenant and confirms it, if even men do that? If the covenants of men are irrevocable and inviolable, then what must be the covenant of God? So Paul's first argument is, "No, the law cannot come in and annul the first promise, because that was confirmed by God. No one can change that."
The second thing that speaks of the superiority of faith over the law is that it was not only confirmed, but Christ-centered. Its Christ-centeredness makes it superior. Verse 16 is a very difficult argument. In fact, from here down through verse 20 is some of the most difficult textual work that you'd ever want to do to try to figure out what's going on here. The second thing he says, in essence, is that the covenant of faith (covenant means 'promise' or 'agreement', that God agrees to redeem man by faith, not works) or His agreement to redeem by faith is superior because of its Christ-centeredness. Look at verse 16. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, 'And to seeds,' [plural] as of many; but as of one [seed], 'And to thy seed,' which is Christ." Now this is most interesting, most interesting.

The immutability, or unchangeableness, the irrevocability of God's promise is all the more evident when you see that it relates directly to Christ. Now, if God makes a promise here that resolves itself in Christ over here, then you can't have something come in the middle to change that or you're fouled up on this end, you see? So the law came in between the promise to Abraham and the coming of Christ for that 1500-year-period and cannot alter that which was made here, which pointed all the way over to Christ. We'll clarify that later in further detail. Don't worry if you don't get all this, just get what you get and be happy about that. Don't worry about the rest.

In verse 16, Paul really does an exegesis on the seed. He says that, "When God made the promise to Abraham, He didn't say, 'To seeds,' as of many, but as of one. He said, 'Unto thy seed.' And when He said, 'Unto thy seed,' you know what He meant? He didn't mean all the Jews that would be born. He meant Christ." This is interesting. You say, "Wait a minute. What gives Paul the right to build an argument on that? How can he say, 'Because it doesn't say "seeds," it therefore refers only to one? The word 'seed' itself is often used to speak collectively." The Greek word spermais used to speak of collective seed. When we talk about the 'seed' that came out of Abraham or even in the Old Testament, in Genesis, "Your seed shall be as the sand of the sea." There, the singular word 'seed' is used to speak of a plurality; it's a collective singular. How, then, can Paul take the liberty of taking that singular and making it mean 'one?' He can do that for several reasons.

One, it could mean that. It could mean that. 'Seed' could mean 'one seed,' as well as a collective group. The Hebrew word for seed is used to refer to one. For example, in Genesis 1:35, it refers to Seth and Seth alone. In Genesis 21:13, it refers to Ishmael and Ishmael alone. In I Samuel 1:11, it refers to Samuel and Samuel alone. In II Samuel 7:12, it refers to Solomon and Solomon alone. So the word 'seed' is used in the Old Testament to speak of only one individual. Apparently, in the verse in Genesis where God talks about the seed of Abraham, He is using it in this sense, to refer to one individual. Incidentally, it has that same kind of possible use in the Greek as well.

Let me give you the best reason that Paul has a right to make the word 'seed' refer to one. It is because the same Holy Spirit that wrote Genesis also wrote Galatians. The Holy Spirit knows what He meant. This is good! So Paul has the right to interpret Genesis because the same Holy Spirit that authored that is guiding him in this. You know what this is? It's a case of the Holy Spirit interpreting the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit said in Genesis the words, "In thy seed shall all be blessed," the Holy Spirit had referenced Christ. Paul, here, gives us the exposition of that passage to show us that's what the Holy Spirit meant.

Listen to this, now this is interesting. Get this. Hang on to your seat. The one and only heir of everything, of every promise of God, is Christ. Did you hear that? The one and only heir of every promise of God is Christ. Every promise given to Abraham.

You say, "What about me? What about all the people in the world?" The only way you will ever get in on the promises of God is to be in Christ. That's what he's saying. You see, the promise resolves itself in Christ. All of God's promises are, in Him, yes. Right? Yes! So let it be. Amen. All of them. The only way you or anyone else will ever know the promise of God is to be in Christ. That's what he's saying. In other words, it is because of what Christ does that anyone else is blessed. The Bible tells us simply, in the book of Romans, "We become joint heirs with Christ. The Father gives Him all things," the Bible says. "The Father will deliver all things into His hands." He is the one who inherits the earth, right? He is the one in Revelation who has the title deed, the scroll. He is the one who possesses the earth. He is the King of the earth. We reign in Christ. So when God said to Abraham, "Thy seed is the key to blessing," He was talking about Christ. The only way any man can be blessed is to be in Christ, to be involved in that which Christ accomplished on the Cross.

You ask, "Were Old Testament saints in Christ?" Yes. In the sense that when Jesus died on the cross, He bore also the sins of Moses. Have you ever thought about that? Abraham, everyone in the Old Testament, He gathered the sins from before and after the cross, didn't He? All of history goes like this: the Old Testament goes to the Cross, the New Testament comes from the Cross. It peaks out at the Cross. He died for the sins of the whole world, right? Could the blood of bulls and goats take away sin? Were the Old Testament saints sanctified by the blood of bulls and goats? They were sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ not yet shed, right? But when it was shed, it covered the sins from both sides of the Cross. It is only as a man, by faith, accepting God, is placed by God in a

divine miracle, in Christ, that he will ever be blessed. That's what Paul is saying.

So he says, "The Abrahamic Covenant resolves itself in Christ. If the law, then, comes in between Abraham and Christ, it cannot annul that promise, for that promise comes all the way to Christ. The law may come and go, but the promise resolves in Christ." I hope you understand a little of that. In Him and in Him alone will all the multitudes of believing Jews and Gentiles be blessed. There is only blessing in Christ. Abraham's seed is Christ, and we are blessed with faithful Abraham as we are in Christ.

You know, an interesting verse that supports this thought is Genesis 3:15, where we find the first prophecy of Christ. It says, "The serpent will bruise his heel, but he will bruise the serpent's head." There, Christ is called 'the seed of the woman'. There you have the word 'seed' referring to one individual in opposition to Satan. Maybe Abraham knew that. Christ is called 'the seed' as far back as Genesis 3:15, so when we get later into Genesis and God refers again to the seed, He is referring to the same Christ that He referred to in Genesis 3:15 as the seed that would bruise the serpent's head.

Paul shows, then, that God's promise to Abraham, in its richest spiritual meaning, was to be fulfilled in one person - the true seed, Jesus Christ. Only those who are in Christ will know the blessing that comes with salvation. How do you get in Christ? Not by any works, but by the promise of faith. The promise of faith.

There's a third thing, then. The promise of faith is superior to the law because of its confirmation and its Christ-centeredness. Thirdly, its chronology. This just takes the argument a step further. Verse 17 is chronology. Interesting. "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ," wow. That's fantastic. The two words 'in Christ' are not in the best manuscripts, so we would read it this way. "The covenant that was confirmed before by God." Oh, I like that. That covenant was confirmed, ratified, and settled. "The law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot annul, that it should make the promise of none effect." The Johnny-come-lately law, 430 years later, cannot change the ratified, confirmed promise of God. Here you have the argument from chronology. He says that the promise of faith is superior because of its chronology; it came first. Not even the law can alter the promise of God, no.

There's an interesting footnote here. When you read this verse, he says here, "The law, which was four hundred and thirty years after," that's a problem, because the law came with Moses 645 years after Abraham. So we have a little problem here. Then some critics come along and say, "See! There it is, more error in the Bible." Is there an error in the Bible? No. So what do we do? We keep working on it until we find out what's going on here. What do we find out? Interesting things. Did you know that it was 215 years from Abraham's call to Jacob's descent into Egypt? Listen, 645 - 215 = 430. What's so significant about that? God repeated the promise of faith to Abraham, to Isaac, and

the last guy that he repeated it to was Jacob. Paul is simply measuring the time from the last statement of the promise to Jacob, to the arrival of the law. That was exactly 430 years. The Bible is not in error; the Bible is accurate.

You know the statement, "The promise was given to our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." It was repeated to each of those. So, from the last repetition to Jacob, there were 430 years until the law arrived. What Paul is saying is, "The law which came 430 years after the last statement about the promise cannot make the promise of no effect. It can't supplant it. Listen, God has been saving man on the basis of faith since Adam. Did you know that? Since Adam! God continued to save men on the basis of faith from Abraham's time right on out. All of a sudden, 430 years later, in swoops the law. It's only around for 1,500 years, and do you mean it's going to supplant the entire system of faith that God has ordained from Adam, throughout history, to be resolved in Christ? No. No." Salvation has always been by faith, and the law, which only arrived for a period of 1,500 years, isn't going to change that. So the superiority of the promise is seen by its confirmation, its Christ-centeredness, and its chronology.

Fourthly, and lastly, it's seen in its completeness. Verse 18. "For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." That's good! What is he saying? He's saying this. "If there's an inheritance here from this promise, it can't be by law and also by promise." In other words, salvation can't be by faith and by works. OK. So it isn't by faith, and it isn't by works - those are contradictory things. Why can't salvation be by the law? It didn't come until 430 years after.

What happened to poor old everybody who lived before Moses? If salvation is by the law, what about all those people? That's why the Judaizers, and many other Jews throughout history, have tried to prove that everyone before the law kept the law, even though it hadn't been written yet. They really did gymnastics to try and make sure they get everyone under that. What about all those people? He's simply saying this, "Look, if the inheritance was of the law, then it's no more of promise, you can't have both. But God gave it to Abraham by promise. Look at it! God saved Abraham by faith; it can't be by law. The inheritance didn't come." That is, the result, or benefits, or blessings of the promise didn't come through the law. If they did, there wouldn't be any promise. If you can get saved by law, promise doesn't mean anything. But God saved Abraham by promise!

So Paul established that being made right with God, salvation in all its fullness, the entire inheritance, everything came to Abraham by promise. Now he says, "Since it's complete, it is impossible, then, to bring the law into the situation. If you're going to do that, if you're going to make the inheritance by law, then you're going to have to just throw promise out. But you can't do that, because Abraham was justified by promise." If you try to mix the two together, they don't mix any more than oil and water do. If you add law to free grace, all you get is a mess. You will destroy faith and grace. So he's saying, in effect, "Look, you're either going to be justified by promise of faith or by works of the

law, not both. And just remember, Abraham was justified by promise of faith. The law came way later."

So the Galatians have to choose. They have to choose. Incidentally, everything in the verse chooses for faith. Look at the word 'inheritance'. What is an inheritance? Can you earn it? What do you do to get an inheritance? Nothing. You can't buy it, you can't earn it, it's a gift. Look at this word, a fantastic word. "If the inheritance be of the law, it is no more a promise but God gave," charizomai. Oh, what a great word. From charis, grace. It's in the perfect tense, which is something that was done, and done with continuing ramifications. It was done clear to perfection. It was done with continued results. What it's saying here is, "God gave it by grace, and it continues to be good even today." That's what he's saying; that's why he puts it in the perfect tense. God, having given it, still gives it. It continues to be good. It was given for good. Salvation was given, the inheritance was given to Abraham for good, forever, for all time, by grace from God. Paul says, "If you want to choose from those two ways, you might as well choose the one that God chose. He justified Abraham by faith."

Well, that's an interesting argument. It's pretty solid, and we've only just scratched the surface. There's an awful lot more behind the picture there. It's interesting to see that the Apostle Paul takes this imaginary argument, that the law supplants faith, and just shoots it down. This poses a question, and the question is in verse 19. It's very legitimate, so Paul throws it out and he's going to answer it. He's done this so many times, and he does it again.

He says in verse 19, "Wherefore then serveth the law?" The literal Greek reads this way: why then the law? That's a good question, Paul. I mean, if the law doesn't change the promise of faith, if the law can't justify you, if the law doesn't add anything to the original covenant of faith, then what is the law for? Paul knows that some guy is going to say, "Why the law? Is God just up there on that holy mountain wasting His time? Did God make one, big, pointless effort? Why the law?" Good question. Paul answers it in verses 19-22 by stating the inferiority of the law. Point one is the superiority of the promise of faith; point two is the inferiority of the demands of the law.

Paul says that the law is inferior in three ways. I originally found four, but reduced it to three. One, its purpose is inferior. Two, its mediators are inferior. Three, its accomplishment is inferior. First of all, its purpose is inferior. The law has an inferior purpose. It does have a purpose, but it's inferior. Verse 19. "Wherefore, then, serveth the law?" or, "Why, then, the law?" Let's face it, if the law can't save you, then it has no meaning. If the law doesn't add anything to the original covenant, if it adds nothing to faith, it has no point. Is it incidental? Is it a waste of time? No. Paul says, "Here is why it was given."

Verse 19. "It was added because of transgressions." Stop right there. The New English Bible, which very often has good translations (not always, but often), says this, "To make wrongdoing a legal

offense." The law was given to make wrongdoing a legal offense. Was there sin before the law was given? Of course; there has always been sin. But listen. "The law was not to show man that he was a sinner, he knew that. The law was to show man that he was not just a sinner, but he was willfully breaking the standards of Almighty God and that sin was rebellion against the holiness of God."

See the difference? He knew he was a sinner. What would tell him that? Conscience. What he needed to know was that such sinning was in absolute violation of the very law of Almighty God. In other words, he needed to see himself, not just as a bad guy, but as someone who was standing before the bar of a holy God as guilty for his sin and doomed to judgment. That's why the law was given - because of the transgression. It let man know that he was crossing over, transgressing. He was violating God's laws; he was disobedient to the standards. The law was given, then, to bring about in my heart and the hearts of all men, an awakened sense of guilt before God as judge.

You know, if you'll look at the law, you'll see this. The prohibitions, for example, of the Ten Commandments reveal their own purpose. They were given by God in order that men might know that these things violated God, and that men might know that God was a judge, and if they violated God, they would sit under judgment. God gave the Ten Commandments in order to repress the worship of false gods, to repress idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, disobedience to parents, murder, theft, adultery, false witnessing, covetousness. God gave the Ten Commandments to suppress those things. How? By showing men that when they did those things, they were putting themselves under the judgment of a holy God.

God gave the law, feeling that men who saw that they were so living in violation of a holy God would be less prone to do those things. That's why it's important for people to preach on the standards of God, that's why it's important to talk about God's standards and God's law to the unbelieving world. Why? Because they need to know that they're not just bad guys who do bad things; they're people who live in violation of the Almighty Judge of the Universe. See? That takes their sin from just the run-of-the-mill activity and makes it a legal offense against a holy judge. The law, then, was to reveal the sinfulness of sin and its terrible, terrible consequences when God moved in judgment.

Listen to Paul's argument in Romans 3:20. "Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight. For by the law is the knowledge of sin." The law came to reveal to man that he lived in violation of God's standards. Listen. Romans 5:20. "Moreover, the law entered that the offense might abound." In other words, that sin might become all the more sinful to men when they saw that it was in violation of an absolutely holy God who was judge.

Romans 7:7. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid! No! I had not known sin but by the law." In other words, Paul says, "I didn't know the fullness of what sin was until I saw what God's standards were." In verse 13 he says, "But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good, that sin by the commandment might become exceedingly sinful." In other words, sin

was bad. But when I saw that it violated God's law, sin became exceedingly sinful. So the law's purpose was not to cure sin. No, no, no. The law's purpose was to give men the full knowledge that sin was not just some wrongdoing, but sin was a violation of holy God. That's why God gave the law, that's why Paul makes the statement that he does. It was added because of transgressions. The law lets men know they have violated a holy God. Man, that's important, because God is the judge.

The law was not given, then, just to give men knowledge of sin. Men had that knowledge. The conscience does that. It was to give the knowledge that sin was a direct violation of God, a legal offense, in front of a holy judge. Isn't it interesting that somehow, throughout the history of the church and the history of the world, people have twisted it around?

Andrew Jukes made an interesting statement. He said this, "Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law which God gave to prove us sinners." Legalism reverses the purpose of the law! The law is like a mirror - it can't help you at all! If you look in it an you have a problem, the mirror won't do a thing for your problem, except show you that you have one. He says, "It was added because of the transgressions. Until the seed should come, to whom the promise was made." Who is the seed? Christ, to whom the promise was made.
The law had a temporary purpose. You know what it was supposed to do? The law was supposed to show you what a rotten sinner you were, living in violation of a holy God. When you saw yourself in that situation, you were supposed to say, "I need help!" So the law was to drive you to the deliverer. That was its purpose, to show you that you had sinned against Almighty God and you needed a deliverer, a savior, a forgiver, salvation from the judgment of God. So he says, "It was added because of transgressions until the seed should come, to whom the promise was made." The law's purpose was to point people to Christ until Christ finally came as the Deliverer. It had only a temporary purpose in that sense. It pointed us to Jesus Christ.

Much of this is covered in Hebrews 8. We won't take time to read it now, but you can read it for yourself. But he says, "In the new covenant, I will remove your sins, forget your iniquities," all those wonderful things that we know come in Jesus Christ. Isn't it a wonderful thing that once Christ came, we didn't need the law anymore? Do you need to live by the law? No. Romans 13. What law do you need? Love. If you love, you fulfill the whole law. Christ has planted in us, in salvation, a new affection, a new love. That love, consequently, eliminates the need for us to live by law. The law was for a time, then, to drive us to Christ, until the seed came.

Look at verse 24, and we'll see this more in weeks to come. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." See? The law was to rap our knuckles, driving us to Christ. But when a man looked into the law and saw that his sin was not just petty sin but a violation of the holy God who ruled the universe, and that he was sitting under terrible threat of eternal judgment, then he was to cry out for a deliverer. And here came Christ as the answer to his cry. That's the purpose of the law.

Beloved, that's why, today, we preach about sin, God's morality, God's standards, God's law, and that men are to conform themselves to those laws. Men are to acknowledge that God is in control of the universe and that He sets the standards. Why? That men might know that when they violate those laws, they violate the holy God who is the judge of the universe. It's no good to talk to people about the grace of salvation until they understand their position before God in sin, do you understand that? It's no good to talk to people about being forgiven, free, saved, until they understand what they're saved from. So often, in our evangelism, we ask people if they'd like to be saved. They say, "Oh, sure! I'd love to be saved. From what?" What does it mean? We throw the word 'saved' around all the time. Saved from what? Saved from the wrath of a holy God whose standards we've lived in violation of. Before we can ever understand grace, we have to understand law, right?

So the law was given to point men to their need for a savior. When a sinner, by grace, learns to see himself in the light of God's holy person, and sees his unholiness, and sees that he is a child of wrath, then he begins to yearn for a deliverer, a savior, someone to free him from the terrible bondage of being under the judgment of God. So the purpose of the promise was salvation. The purpose of the law was to drive us to salvation. Two different things: the purpose of the law was to define sin as a violation of God and drive us to the savior.

The law is, then, inferior in its purpose. The law can't save you, the law just shows you how rotten you are and that you're living in judgment. Now the law is inferior, secondly, because of its mediators. Look at Galatians 3:19 again. It had an inferior mediator. This is a very interesting point. "It was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." Here we have two mediators; the law was given from God to angels, (and here is the human instrument) to Moses, to people. You know that, when the people came to the Holy Mount, God told them to stand far off and not come near? When God gave the law, He did not give it directly to the people, He gave it to angels to Moses to the people. It was mediated. You ask, "Is God the author of the law?" Absolutely. Deuteronomy 33:2, Psalm 68:17, Acts 7:53, and Hebrews 2:2 talk about the law. God was the author, but He gave it through angels. Those verses have to do with the angels carrying the law from God. The angels somehow, on Sinai, gave it to Moses, and Moses came down and gave it to the people.

Listen, but in the case of Abraham, God gave it to Abraham through whom? Through nobody. God talked to Abraham several times. He even called him 'friend.' It's a whole different thing. God, giving the covenant of promise, talked to Abraham and called him 'friend,' but in the case of God giving the law, it came third-hand. The promise came first-hand.

Paul, then, reminds them of how the law was given to show the inferior, subordinate position of the law. By the very way that God gave it, it was obvious that it wasn't His greatest joy. It wasn't His redeeming work, or He wouldn't have had everyone stand way off. He wouldn't have had it so far removed from Himself. When God starts talking about salvation, then He starts talking like Proverbs

23:26. "My son, my daughter, give me your heart." There is something personal there, isn't there? The gospel of salvation was so precious to the heart of God that He came and gave it to Abraham personally. Why, He even visited Abraham's house once, didn't He? When Abraham found out he had company, it turned out to be God and two holy angels! Man. What a deal. The writer of Hebrews says, "You'd better be careful who you treat nice, because some have entertained angels unawares."

Moses was great, but God was greater. The Galatians must not allow the Judaizers to exalt Moses over God. They must not allow the law, which was given through a handful of mediators, to supplant the promise, which was God's blessed work of salvation, which He gave directly to Abraham.

Verse 20. This verse, according to two of the commentators I read, has 430 different possible interpretations. I'm just going to give you 273 of them. No, I don't have any idea what this verse means, honestly. But that's alright, because neither do 429 other people. No matter what you do with it, it's a tough one. It's just one of those crazy verses. "Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one." I know, I don't understand it either. Let me give you my guess. "A mediator is not of one." I think I can understand that. You don't need a mediator if you've only got one person, right? You only need someone to mediate when you have at least two parties. Understand? 'Mediator' comes from the Greek word for midst, or middle. There's not a 'middle' of one thing, there is no middle of one person. But if you have two or more parties, then you have to mediate the contract.

So he says this, "A mediator is not a mediator of one." What he means by that is this: since the law had a mediator (the angels and Moses), that meant that it was a two-sided agreement. Right? God says, "Here it is, I'll do this if you do this." That was the law. That's exactly the position of those who get into a contract with a mediator. Each party is subscribed to certain things. I'll do this, you'll do this, etc. Any legal agreement through a mediator demands that both sides keep the deal. That's the position of those who put their trust in the law. You want to put your trust in the law? God will keep His side of the bargain. Sure. You keep the whole law and He'll bless you. It's a deal. The law was between two, and it was conditional. Right? You're blessed if you obey. But look at this.

He says, "Now a mediator is not of one. But God is one." What is he saying? I think he's saying this, that the promise didn't need a mediator because Abraham didn't have anything to do with it. God just showed up and said, "Here it is!" He just gave salvation. He didn't say, "If you do 74 spiritual push-ups, and this and that, then you can hang on to salvation." He said, "Here it is. I give it to you, take it, it's free, it's a gift, grab it and go." So what he's saying is that the law is inferior because it had a mediator. That meant it was a two-sided agreement. The covenant of promise is superior because it didn't need a mediator because it wasn't two-sided. God just said, "I'll bless. Take it or leave it; you can have it for nothing." I'll tell you, it's better to depend on the unconditional, unchanging grace of God than it is to try and keep the law. Right? I don't want to get into a two-sided agreement with God where I have to do what I have to do in order for Him to keep His end of the bargain.

I'm just glad of this: I'm glad that He saved me as a free gift of grace no matter what I do, because you know something? I fail. I don't always obey Him, or love Him like I ought to. I don't always obey Him in the sense of a daily walk, but you know what? He's faithful, isn't He? Even if I lose faith, "Even if I believe not," said Paul, "Yet he abides faithful. He cannot deny himself." You see, He has bound Himself to a promise of salvation by faith. Even if my faith grows thin, He can't change what He has confirmed in His own promise. So, the covenant of promise is superior because it is not mediated. It is not a bargain between two, it is just God.

Lastly, the law is inferior because of its accomplishment. It can't really do anything. Verse 21. "Is the law then against the promises of God?" Oh, this is an interesting question that Paul throws up again from the antagonist. "Oh, OK, Paul. Are you saying that the law and the promise are in conflict?" That wouldn't be a good thing to agree to, would it? That would mean that God was fighting Himself, since He started both of them. Paul says, in answer to that question which he himself asks, "God forbid!" This is the strongest form of the Greek negative. No! No! The law and faith are not in opposition; both are from God, they just have different functions. I think you can understand that.

Look how he points it out. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, then verily righteousness should have been by the law." In other words, "Look. There isn't any conflict between law and faith." Why? Because faith saves and law just shows you're a sinner. They have two different purposes. There would have been a conflict if there had been a law given that could have saved you, because if you could have gotten saved by law, and could have gotten saved by grace, then you've got a conflict. Because you'd have two ways to get saved. Then you have a problem. So he says, "If there was a law given which could have given life, and righteousness would have come through the law, then we would have had a conflict." But there's no such law. The law can't give life, people, it can't give life. You can't be a legalist and gain spiritual life.

Paul said this in Romans 7:9. "I was alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." You know what the law does? It doesn't give life, it kills. Paul says in Romans 8:2, "The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death." All the law is good for is to kill you. Listen to this. II Corinthians 3:6. "The letter kills, the Spirit gives life." The 'letter' is in reference to the law. He says in verse 17, "The Lord is spirit and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." You see, the law cannot give life. It kills you, it slays you, it dooms you. In Romans 7, law takes you to the place where you say, "Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?" Grace comes in and says, "I thank God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is no conflict. There would only be a conflict if there was a law that could save. But since there is no law that can save, there is no conflict. He says that the law is inferior because of its accomplishment; it can't give life, it only shows you you're dead. That's all.

Well, Paul sums it all up in verse 22. "But the Scripture," or law, we can use 'law' right there, "The law has concluded all under sin." You know why God gave the law? To show all men that they're sinners against Him. Why? "That the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." He gave us the law to show us how bad we were to drive us to Jesus Christ, that we might simply believe and accept the promise by faith. The law came for that purpose. The law had one design: to lock us up, to put us in jail, to kill us. Men are chained prisoners. The law has the key, and every sin they commit tightens the chain until, at last, they are crushed in judgment. This is what the law was given to do: to tighten the screws on the sins of men, that in anguish, they might cry out for a deliverer. At that point, I love this, "The promise by faith of Jesus Christ is given to them that believe." What a tremendous thing. God just offers the gracious gift of salvation to those who see their sin.

Listen, not until the law and conscience and the Holy Spirit have bruised and smashed us do we admit the need of the Gospel to bind up our wounds. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned us do we long for the Lord Jesus Christ to set us free. Not until the law has condemned and killed us do we look to Him for new life. It's only when the law has driven us to despair, to despair of ourselves, that we embrace Jesus Christ. So he says to the Galatians, "The promise of faith is still in order. It is superior. Don't let anyone add to it or change it."

It is still true, beloved, that if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you can know forgiveness and righteousness in Him. That's all God asks. Let's pray.

Father, we're so grateful for free salvation. Not that it was free for You, for You paid the price, and what a price. But it is free to us, by simple faith. Father, we thank You that You gave the law, and that the law couldn't save us, but could show us that we live in violation of You. Thank You that, even when we pick up the Bible and read about Your holiness, Your standards, Your morals, Your ethics, Your commandments, we know we're in violation. We know we're worthy of judgment. Father, thank you that it is at that point that Jesus Christ offers Himself to us freely, just for the believing.

Father, if there are some here tonight who have not yet come to righteousness, who have not yet set themselves right before You, who cannot enter Your presence, who are not fit citizens for Heaven, we pray that they might, by the law, see the sinfulness of their sins, see that they are living in violation of the Holy Judge of the Universe, that they are worthy of judgment, punishment, eternal Hell. Father, in that situation, may they come and embrace the free gift of salvation offered in Jesus Christ by faith. May it be so, Father, tonight, for some. Father, because of what we've learned tonight, may we carry this same message to others. May there be others who will come to Jesus because of our time tonight. We pray in His wonderful name, Amen.

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