

## The Promise, The Law, and The Question of “Addition”

### Galatians 3:15–22

#### Ice-Breaker Table Talk:

We have yet to deep-dive into the Spirit (that will happen soon!) but why might knowing Him be critical when it comes to combating “law/works/nomistic” thinking in the Christian life?

*15 Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. 16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ. 17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. 18 For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.*

*19 Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. 20 Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. 21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (Galatians 3:15-22 NASB95)*

#### I. The Unbreakable Nature of a Ratified Covenant (3:15)

Text: “Even though it is only a man’s covenant...”

Paul begins with a *human legal analogy*.

Principle:

Once a covenant is ratified, it cannot be annulled or modified.

He uses common legal reasoning to prepare for a theological conclusion.

Key observation:

Paul assumes covenant stability.

Discussion:

- Why would Paul ground his support in everyday legal categories?
- What would happen if covenants were so easily modified?

Transition to verse 16 is implied through Paul's phraseology:  
If that principle applies to human covenants, how much more to God's covenant?

## II. The Priority of the Abrahamic Promise (3:16–18)

### A. The Promise Was Given to Abraham and His Seed (v.16)

Paul makes a precise argument about "seed."

Not "seeds" (plural)  
But "seed" (singular)

Ultimately fulfilled in **Christ**.

Meaning: The promise was Christ-centered from the beginning!

The following is an excerpt from **Disciple Makers Multiplied (DM2)** – an organization that partners with our youth ministry, who recently created materials on Galatians:

Paul explained the nature of the Abrahamic Covenant and assured the Galatians that the Mosaic Covenant *did not revoke it*.

Genesis 12:1-3 – Let us remember the promises contained in the Abrahamic Covenant!

Genesis 12:1-2a – There was a *national* promise that from Abraham a great nation (Israel) would arise on earth that would receive a land for itself.

Genesis 12:2b-3a – There was a *personal* promise guaranteeing Abraham a great name, blessing, and protection.

Genesis 12:3b – There was a *global* promise that through Abraham all families on the earth would be blessed. In this way God preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham.

Galatians 3:16 – The seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ, made possible global, or universal, blessing to every person on the earth. Genesis 3:15

Galatians 3:17a – Paul pointed out clearly that the Law of Moses, which came 430 years after the ratification of the Abrahamic covenant, did not remove any of the legally binding promises of the Abrahamic covenant.

Galatians 3:17b – The promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were not conditional and were imparted to the Gentiles by grace because God's promise to Abraham was given to them the moment they believed in Christ. Promise and grace go hand in hand.

## B. The 430-Year Gap (v.17)

Promise → 430 years → Law

The logical premise:

The Law came later.

Later cannot cancel what was given earlier. (Especially if the giver is GOD!)

The Law did not:

- Revoke the promise
- Replace the promise
- Add conditions to the promise (more on “add” later...)

## C. Inheritance: Promise or Law? (v.18)

“If the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on promise.”

Paul creates a categorical distinction.

Promise and law are mutually exclusive as bases of inheritance. They CANNOT mix.

Law implies:

- Performance
- Merit
- Condition

Promise implies:

- Grace
- Gift
- Divine initiative

Discussion:

- Why must Paul draw such a sharp contrast?
- What is at stake if promise and law are blended?

### III. The Critical Question: Why the Law? (3:19)

Paul anticipates the objection.

If promise is enough, why give the Law at all?

#### A. “It Was Added” – Greek Clarification

Word: προσετέθη (prosetethē)  
From προστίθημι (prostithemi)

Meaning:

- To place alongside
- To add in sequence

It does NOT mean:

- To merge into or mix
- To complete something insufficient
- To alter the nature of

Verb form: Aorist Passive Indicative (tense, voice, mood)

- Aorist → historical event (Sinai) --- WHEN (not just “past”, but a completed act)
- Passive → added by God --- WHO (the subject Abraham was on the receiving end)
- Indicative → real action in history --- HOW (reality and NOT a command, wish, or possibility)

[“??? IT’S ALL GREEK TO ME!” - **SEE TABLE 1 HANDOUT**]

Key theological clarification:

The Law was added **in history**, not added **to justification**.

Two exclusive options for addition (choose only one!):

1. Historical addition in redemptive timeline

OR

2. Theological addition as condition of salvation

Paul affirms the first.  
He rejects the second.

Discussion:

Why is confusing those two kinds of addition SO DANGEROUS and yet SO EASY for Judaizers?

B. “Because of Transgressions”

means: “for the sake of”

(Why the law?).... Well here are FOUR answers in ONE:

1. To reveal sin
2. To define sin clearly
3. To ensure awareness of guilt
4. To confine humanity under violation (v.22)

The Law functions *diagnostically, not procedurally!*

It exposes the disease.  
It does not cure it.

C. “Until the Seed Should Come”

The Law was temporary.

It had:

- A beginning (Sinai)
- An endpoint (Christ)

The promise, though, had no expiration clause. (both legally and literally NO clause found)

To overstate the point again: Temporary “addition” does not equal identity modification.

#### **IV. Mediation and Inferiority (3:19–20)**

Paul notes the Law was:  
“Ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator.”

The promise was given directly by God.

The giving of the Law was by nature:

- Mediated (angels!) – Heb 2:2, Acts 7:53, Deut 33:2
- Bilateral (two parties)
- Conditional

The giving of the Promise was:

- Direct
- Unilateral (one party)
- Grace-based

Verse 20 is a bit strange, but it's an issue of contrast.

The promise involved one party: God.

The Law involved mediation and conditions, and the awareness of parties.

#### **V. Well then... Is the Law Contrary to the Promise? (3:21–22)**

Paul anticipates another misunderstanding. (He's a good anticipator!)

Is the Law against God's promises?

“May it never be.”

The Law is not hostile to the promise.

It is just incapable of fulfilling it.

Key statement:

“If a law had been given that could impart life, righteousness would have been by law.”

But The Law cannot:

- Impart life
- Justify
- Produce righteousness

But The Law CAN:

- Imprison under sin
- Make grace necessary
- Drive sinners toward faith

**(Do you remember week 2 of our class?? There is one thing the law does PERFECTLY: condemns.)**

Verse 22:

“Scripture has shut up everyone under sin.”

The Law creates **universal need** so that promise might be received by faith.

Roadmap Summary of this Passage:

1. The promise came first.
2. The promise is binding.
3. The Law came later.
4. The Law cannot alter the promise.
5. The Law was added temporarily.
6. The Law exposes sin.
7. The Law cannot give life.
8. The promise is received by faith.

Paul’s opponents were in ERROR, functionally and socially demonstrating:

“Faith begins salvation, but Law completes it!” (nomism; BAD)

So Paul essentially says: NO!

The Law never justified anyone.

It prepared sinners to receive justification by faith.

***The Mosaic Law was added temporarily in redemptive history to expose sin, but it never altered, replaced, or completed the promise of justification given to Abraham.***

Paul proves that here, and will continue to do so in the words to come.

Closing Discussion:

If the promise came before the Law, what does that teach us about the foundation of our relationship with God?

In conflict with others, do you tend to weaponize the Law or extend grace?

What happens to joy when Christianity becomes primarily rule-keeping?

Why might it be necessary to feel imprisoned by Sin before Grace feels precious?

In subtle ways, where do you still try to earn what God already promised? (and what have we been promised?)

Where is the Spirit inviting you to stop performing and start trusting?

<b>TENSE</b>	<b>Basic Idea</b>	<b>How to Think About It</b>	<b>Example Meaning</b>
<b>Present</b>	Ongoing / continuous	“Is happening”	“He is teaching”
<b>Imperfect</b>	Ongoing in the past	“Was happening”	“He was teaching”
<b>Aorist</b>	Complete / whole action	“Happened”	“He taught”
<b>Perfect</b>	Completed with lasting results	“Has happened and still matters”	“He has risen”
<b>Pluperfect</b>	Completed in past with past results	“Had happened”	“He had risen”
<b>Future</b>	Will happen	“Will happen”	“He will teach”

<b>VOICE</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Active</b>	Subject does the action	“Paul wrote the letter.”
<b>Middle</b>	Subject participates in or benefits from action	“Paul wrote for himself.” (nuanced)
<b>Passive</b>	Subject receives the action	“The letter was written.”

<b>MOOD</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Indicative</b>	Statement of fact / reality	“Christ died.”
<b>Imperative</b>	Command	“Repent.”
<b>Subjunctive</b>	Possibility / purpose / contingency	“That you may believe.”
<b>Optative</b>	Wish (rare in NT)	“May it be so.”
<b>Infinitive</b>	Verbal noun (“to ___”)	“To believe.”
<b>Participle</b>	Verbal adjective (“-ing”)	“Believing, he...”

