

The Law and the Promise

Galatians 3.15-29

Introduction

God's covenant with Abraham was based upon faith. It was issued long before the Law was given on Mt. Sinai. In this, the system of faith established with Abraham was superior to the Law because it happened at a much earlier time.

3:15-22 – God's covenant with Abraham was superior to the Law

Galatians 3:15–18 (CSB)

15 Brothers and sisters, I'm using a human illustration. No one sets aside or makes additions to a validated human will.

16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say "and to seeds," as though referring to many, but referring to one, and to your seed, who is Christ.

17 My point is this: The law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously established by God and thus cancel the promise.

18 For if the inheritance is based on the law, it is no longer based on the promise; but God has graciously given it to Abraham through the promise.

In 3:15-18, Paul argues from a human perspective. When we make covenants, one party has no right to change the terms of the agreement without the express consent of the other party. This is the case, no matter how much time passes. God's covenant with Abraham was set. It could not be altered. God's covenant with Abraham was also with Abraham's descendants, because it was not fulfilled until the coming of Jesus Christ. Why use this example? Paul wishes to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Law was never a part of God's covenant with Abraham, therefore obedience to the Mosaic law is not a condition of salvation.

The Purpose of Law

After this line of argumentation, Paul realized some might ask about the purpose of the Law. Why did God give it? He says the Law was added *because of transgressions*, 3:19a. It is clear from these verses that the Law was entirely separate from the covenant with Abraham. The Law was added on a temporary basis *until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made*, 3:19b. When

Jesus came and died for our sin, no longer would anyone be under obligation to keep the Law. In 3:19-20, Paul speaks of a mediator. This is set up as a contrast between the giving of the Law and the establishment of the covenant with Abraham. The Old Testament law was given from God to angels and then communicated by them to a mediator (Moses), who then took it to the people, Deuteronomy 32:2; Acts 7:38, 53; Hebrews 2:2-3. God did not use a mediator with Abraham. Instead, He established it directly with him, Genesis 12:1-3.

Galatians 3:19–29 (CSB)

19 Why, then, was the law given? It was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come. The law was put into effect through angels by means of a mediator.

20 Now a mediator is not just for one person alone, but God is one.

21 Is the law therefore contrary to God's promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law.

22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe.

23 Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed.

24 The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith.

25 But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

26 for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

27 For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.

28 There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.

Another devastating argument to the Judaizing teachers is found in the second part of 3:21. The Law was *never* intended to bring spiritual life. It could not bring life, because no man can keep it perfectly. Spiritual life is given through God's grace and our faith in Him. Legal systems serve only the function of showing a person where he has fallen short. In essence, the Law pronounces a person guilty. Salvation will never be found in it. Salvation must come through Christ.

3.23-29: The Law Brings People to Christ

In 3:23-29 Paul shows how the Law brought the Jewish people to Christ. He compares it to a *tutor*. The wording is significant. The usage of *tutor* or *schoolmaster* (KJV) might give us the wrong connotation. In Greek culture, the *tutor* was often a slave in upper class families who minded the conduct and moral dealings of children. He would serve as their guardian and would oversee them until they reached maturity. The application is easy to see. The Old Testament Law was intended to guard the conduct and moral character of the Jewish people – leading them to Christ. Once Christ came, the purpose of the Law had been served and salvation would be because of faith.

Those who had been immersed for the remission of sin were made sons and daughters of God through their faith. The Gentiles were one with Christ. The Jews were one with Christ. In addition, Jews and Gentiles were to be one with each other. All the social barriers were taken out of the way because of the relationship with Christ. The Gentiles were not second-class Christians because they had not been born Jews. They were entitled to the

same blessings and privileges as everyone else. The Judaizing teachers were teaching a false doctrine that sought to rebuild the walls that Jesus removed through His death. The Gentile Christians were made descendants of Abraham, not through human works of merit or works of the Old Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Why was the Law added?
2. How was the Law given? How does this contrast to how the covenant was made with Abraham?
3. How did the Law bring the Jewish people to Christ?
4. What is the significance of immersion in 3:26?
5. In His death, what did Jesus do to break down the social and religious barriers between people?