

MBC – 6/12/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“Why Then the Law?”
 Galatians 3:15-22

Paul has been arguing against the Judaizers who had bewitched some of the believers in Galatia into believing that you start the Christian life by faith, but you continue by works – keeping the Law. He says, “No! Did you *begin* by works of the Law or by hearing with faith? Well then, continue the same way you began.” Here was their comeback: “Well Paul, why then did God give the Law, *after* the promise He gave to Abraham? It’s obvious that God was showing that we might start by faith, but we live by keeping the Law.” This is what Paul is answering in vv.15-22—(and I’m going to replace “offspring” with “Seed,” which is a better translation—

- Galatians 3:15–22 ¹⁵To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, “And to seeds,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your Seed (capital ‘S’),” who is Christ. ¹⁷This 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. ¹⁸For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. ¹⁹Why 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. ²⁰Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. ²¹Is 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. ²²But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that *the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe*. (repeat) Pray

Last week we saw Paul go over 6 OT passages to prove his point in v.14 that—

- Galatians 3:14 . . . in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (The great promise made to Abraham, to bless some from every nation, tribe, and tongue with salvation comes through Jesus Christ and is received by faith – not by works of the Law.)

That’s the one true Gospel, the Gospel that he received not from man, but by revelation from Christ. And it is the only message that will save you from God’s wrath and bring you eternal life.

But I acknowledge that last week’s sermon was a lot of information. It was hard to follow! It was tough-sledding – as they say in northern Idaho. And this morning will be more of the same. And whether or not you have the patience to sit through the next 50 minutes and hear an explanation of seeds and covenants, depends upon the way you live your Christian life: if you view life from the perspective of your own needs and desires, and what will make you happy and fulfilled, then this passage reads like a real snooze-fest. There is nothing in it that jumps out as practical – it’s history and theology – perhaps just what you *didn’t* come to church to hear, for the next 50 minutes!

- But I hope that as a child of God you seek to view your life from God’s perspective: God, your Creator and your Savior who knows *exactly* what you need to make you happy and fulfilled –

because He *made* you – and He has revealed His plan and will for you in His Word, on every page. He didn't waste a single word. That's where we begin.

- We should say, "This passage in Galatians is in the Bible because it contains essential information for my life, salvation, and happiness, and it's my job to listen attentively and mine the riches of this passage so that it can do its work on me!" So whether the next 50 minutes are a *snooze-fest* or a *treasure-chest* depends upon the condition of your heart. Paul commended the Thessalonians—
- 1 Thessalonians 2:13 ¹³For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

And how does it perform its work? Listen: *The Bible has power when it is understood*. This is why I pray and labor in study to help you *understand* God's Word, because that's when you grow.

*So many churches only give a few teaspoons of baby food on Sundays, and so many Christians are happy to have it so. But if you desire to be a sturdy tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season, and doesn't get blown over by the cares of this world or by false teaching, then you will work just as hard to hear this Word as I work to teach it!

- I mentioned a couple weeks ago about the writer of Hebrews who told his readers that he wanted to explain how Melchizedek was a type of Christ – but they were unable to hear it because they could only handle spiritual milk, not meat. I got a text this week from someone asking, "Do you have a sermon on Melchizedek, I want to hear more about him!" I thought, "Yes! This person is ready to grow."

So fasten your seatbelts and get ready for the ride this morning!

* * *

There are 3 important men mentioned in this passage: Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ. And every Christian needs to know how they relate to each other—

God's deal with Abraham was completely different than His deal with Moses. To Abraham, God gave an unconditional *promise*: "Abraham, I will . . . I will." But to Moses, He gave a Law: "Thou shalt. . . thou shalt not." The promise to Abraham was about God's initiative and God's grace. But the Law was about man's responsibilities, and man's obedience. God's promise of salvation by grace through faith to Abraham was unconditional. The Law's promises were conditional – and the condition was perfect obedience – which is impossible – which was meant to drive God's people back to Him for mercy – which He gives us through Jesus Christ. So both Abraham and Moses point to Christ: *Jesus* is the fulfillment of the Promise and the fulfillment of the Law.

So let's look at Paul's argument – remember, the Word has *power* when you understand it. His first point is that Moses didn't cancel Abraham—

I. The Law didn't cancel the Promise.

- ¹⁵To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Skip v.16—
- Galatians 3:17 ¹⁷This 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.

Wait, what? Covenant, annul, ratify, what are you talking about, Paul? Let me try to make this simple: The Judaizers said that since the Law of Moses came *after* Abraham, it superseded whatever deal God made with Abraham. So Paul makes an argument based on everyday life: if you make a covenant, or better yet, think of a will – once it is in force, a person can't just come along and change it. It is binding. (You say, "But you can get a lawyer and re-write it" – don't mess with my analogy, ok?)

God made Abraham an unconditional promise to bless him and his *spiritual* seed with salvation which would be received through faith. You could say, "No strings attached!" Remember, this was all about God's free grace—so you can't come along centuries later and add an addendum: "*as long as you keep these rules!*" That would cancel grace, wouldn't it? And as Paul said earlier it would make Jesus' death unnecessary. (He doesn't need to die on the cross if you can save yourself through law=keeping.)

- *Have you ever signed up for something that was "free" and then you find out that there was some 'fine print' that you didn't read, and it's really not so free? "If it's a free trial, why do you need my credit card?" That's exactly what these false teachers were doing with the Gospel: adding some fine print!

And here is his point—

- Galatians 3:18 ¹⁸For if the inheritance (salvation) comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

Once again, you can't mix grace and law, or faith and works – you can't add conditions to something that is unconditional. "*By grace you are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast!*" You might boast about works, but you can't boast about a gift!

So no, Moses doesn't come along and cancel Abraham! The Law doesn't cancel the Promise or add conditions to it. The Promise made to Abraham is the Gospel – which is received by faith – jump down to the end of our passage—

- v.22 - . . . so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who *believe!*

I ask you this morning: Do you *believe?* – Have you *entrusted yourself* to Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? If so, you are spiritual son of Abraham, and you receive the Promise of God through faith. No strings attached.

- You've heard my Costco illustration: you can't get into Costco without showing a Costco card, right? But there is one other way: you can point to that person ahead of you who has a Costco card and say, "I'm with them!" Jesus is the only One who is acceptable to God for heaven because He is the only perfect '10' who ever lived. He is the only One who gets into heaven – along with anyone tells God, "I'm with Him!"

But we skipped v.16. Now let's look at this amazing statement—

- ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, “And to seeds,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.

If you wonder if we should pay so much attention to every word of Scripture, and even rules of grammar – Paul would say, “Oh, yes.” So let's talk about this “seed” of Abraham. In Scripture there are 4 seeds of Abraham—

1.) Abe's physical seed.

That would be Isaac, but it would also be Ishmael. So ethnic Jews are the physical seed of Abraham, but so are Ishmael's descendants, the Arabs – Muhammed was the seed of Abraham! Palestinians are the seed of Abraham!

2.) Abe's physical/spiritual seed.

That would be Isaac, because the Promise came through him, not Ishmael, even though Ishmael was older—

- Romans 9:6–8 . . . For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷and not all are children of Abraham because they are his seed (physical seed), but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Remember the story: Abraham tried to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise his own way, through Hagar, who gave birth to Ishmael. God said, “No, I will give you a miracle child through your wife, Sara – Isaac. And the promise will come through the miracle child!”

Today, a Christian-Jew would be Abe's physical/spiritual seed. Then there is—

3.) Abe's spiritual seed.

- Galatians 3:9 ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Remember those nighttime stars that could not be counted? This is anyone, Jew or Gentile who shares the faith of Abraham, and since the cross, it is anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ for his or her salvation.

But there is a 4th Seed of Abraham—

4.) Jesus is the true and ultimate Seed of Abraham.

- ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to seeds,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.

It was the eternal plan of God to save some from every nation, tribe and tongue through His Son, Jesus, who would come from the line of Abraham – through Isaac. Every promise that God made to Abraham would come *through* Jesus and be received *from* Jesus—

- Galatians 3:14 ¹⁴so that *in Christ Jesus* the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.
- Galatians 3:29 ²⁹And if you are *Christ's*, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise.

Beloved, every promise of God is fulfilled in and through, Jesus Christ. Paul said so—

- 2 Corinthians 1:20 ²⁰For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

And even the very first promise, about a Seed, is fulfilled in Jesus too—

- Genesis 3:15 ¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Now let me explain the significance of what Paul says here: The real promise that God made was to Abraham and a specific singular *Seed*, Christ, not plural *seeds*. Are you with me?

- Dispensationalists make a big deal out of Israel and the Jews: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. The Jews are God’s chosen people,” they say, because the promise was made to Abraham’s seeds – the Jews – but Paul says, no, Seed singular, Christ. You only get in on the promise if you are related to Christ through faith – it has nothing to do with physical birth. That’s why Jesus told Nicodemus, “Even you, a physical son of Abraham, must be born again!”
- But people on the other theological side are Reformed folks who hold to Covenant theology and infant baptism. They say that the promise is for Christian parents and their children – again, plural. Paul would say the same thing to them: says, “No, the promise comes through faith in Christ. And it has nothing to do with physical birth – either being born as a Jew, or the child of Christian parents. It’s not about birth, it’s about the new birth.

You get in on the promise to Abraham through faith in Christ.

*“But aren’t the Jews God’s chosen people?” Good question. I read someone who said that 5/6ths of the Bible is about the Jews! Here’s the deal: If God’s Son was going to come to this earth and take on humanity, He had to be born from *some* people group, and God chose the Jews. And the story of the OT is the story of God preparing the world for the coming of His Son, and preserving the nation of Israel because Messiah would come from the Jews. Well, *Jesus came, as the true Israel of God; now every blessing and promise of God is fulfilled in Him and comes to us through faith in Him.*

Seed, not seeds! One of the first study Bibles was written to interpret all of Scripture through the lens of Israel and the Jews (seeds, not the Seed) – the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Later the *Ryrie Study Bible* made the same mistake (I have both in my library). Beloved, don’t interpret Scripture through Israel (seeds), interpret Scripture through the Seed – Christ. read your Bible through the lens of the Seed, Christ, because He fulfills the promise to Abraham.

- So final question here: Has God made any promise to the modern nation of Israel and unbelieving Jews? Yes: heaven if they trust in His Son, and hell if they don't. That's God's plan for Israel. – same as His plan for everyone else. We desire the salvation of Jewish people and evangelize them as we would anyone else. But the idea that unbelieving Jews are God's chosen people is wrong. Believers are God's chosen people – and jumping to Gal.6.16 – we are the true "Israel of God."

Back to Galatians, Paul says—

- ¹⁸For if the inheritance (salvation, the Holy Spirit, heaven) comes by the law (Moses), it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a *promise*.

You *do* the Law, but you simply *believe* the Promise. And Paul anticipates the next question—

II. So why then the Law?

- ¹⁹Why then the law?

You can almost hear the scoffing from these Judaizers: "Really Paul? It's that easy? A person becomes a beneficiary of Abraham's promise by just believing in Jesus? Then what was the point of the Law of Moses? – the whole basis of our religion – and yours – for the last 1,400 years? – the whole source of our lives and traditions – haven't you seen *Fiddler on the Roof*, Paul??"

Do you see their problem? And Paul was ready with his answer—

- It was added because of transgressions

"Because of transgressions?" Paul means this in 2 ways—

A. *The Law exposes sin.*

Legalistic Jews were the ones who had misunderstood the Law of Moses: They saw it as a way of salvation, but God gave it to show our *need* for salvation by exposing our sinfulness because we are unable to keep it. An old Puritan said it this way: "Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law. God gave it to prove us sinners."

I want you to see 3 other passages where Paul makes the same point—

- Romans 3:20 ²⁰For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes *knowledge* of sin.
- Romans 4:15 ¹⁵For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no *transgression*.

He doesn't mean there is no sin – even people without the Bible are guilty of sin! He means that the Law turned our sins into specific *transgressions* of God's commandments. Breaches of God's Law.

- Romans 7:7 ⁷What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

The Law uncovered sins that had been hidden in the heart – it exposed them as sin. And Paul goes on in this passage to say something that has always blown my mind—

B. The Law arouses sin.

- Romans 7:5 ⁵For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.
- Romans 7:8 ⁸But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.
- Romans 7:11 ¹¹For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

Now is Paul really saying that the law stirs up sin? Bring in the law and more sin is the result? Yes, that’s what he is saying. Sin takes opportunity—lit., establishes a foothold—through a commandment, and produces the very sin that is forbidden. That’s a bad thing! Yes, but it’s not the fault of the law, it’s the fault of the one who sins. This is Paul’s point: the fact that indwelling sin in us is aroused by God’s good and righteous laws, to sin even more, shows how evil and rotten sin is!

You might think, “That’s crazy, I don’t hear a commandment, and then start thinking, “I want break that commandment!” Really? When I was a kid, there was a song on the radio—

My mommy said not to put beans in my ears, Beans in my ears, beans in my ears
My mommy said not to put beans in my ears - Beans in my ears

Now why would I want to put beans in my ears?
You can't hear the teacher with beans in your ears,
What's that you say, let's put beans in our ears?
You'll have to speak up - I've got beans in my ears.

*Closer to home: you’re driving along on some desolate road, safely, conscientiously, until you see a speed limit sign: **45 mph, enforced by radar**. And you say to yourself: “Oh really? Well that’s a dumb law! It’s perfectly safe for me to drive 60 mph. Don’t tell me how to drive!” And the pedal goes down!

“The Law was added because of transgressions” = to make hidden sin, open rebellion – and show how rotten we really are: even God’s holy Law brings out the sin in us!

So this is the answer to “Why then the Law?” It’s purpose was to show God’s people their spiritual poverty and their need for mercy from God – which came in Christ! So once Christ came, what happened to the Law? Glad you asked!—

- V.19--*until* (key word) the Seed should come to whom the promise had been made

The Law of Moses had a beginning, and it had an end – and expiration date – right on the label. What did it say? “Good until – Calvary!” It is no longer in force. “Wait . . .the Law of Moses is a done deal? Uh. . .uh – jump ahead to—

- Galatians 3:24–25 ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian *until* Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian (So the Law was our guardian, and since Christ, we are no longer under a guardian = we are no longer under the Law – yes!)

More next Lord’s Day, but I’m just saying that if you get a new pastor who starts throwing the Law of Moses at you, someone stand up say, “But Pastor Doug said. . .” No. Do not do that. Let’s continue—

- It was added because of transgressions--*until* the offspring (Seed) should come to whom the promise had been made,
- and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. ²⁰Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

What does that mean? I was looking at an old sermon John Piper preached on this passage back in 1984. He said, “I’m not going to deal with because I don’t know what it means!” That’s honest!

Paul knew what he meant, I’m not sure either. But he is saying that the Law came through angels, through the intermediary – Moses – and then came to Israel. But the promise to Abraham of the coming Seed, came directly from God – no middle-man—

- ²¹Is the law then contrary to (or *against*) the promises of God? Certainly not! (It doesn’t save, but it does show our desperate need for grace and mercy. And that’s a good thing! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. ²²But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, **so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.**

So why then the Law? Why Moses? Why didn’t God just go straight from Abraham to Christ? “Luther put it this way: “The principal point of the Law is to make men not better, but worse; that is to say, it shows them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and by this means may be driven to seek grace, and so to come to that blessed Seed – Christ.”

- You have to admit that you are sick before you will go to the doctor, right? Jesus didn’t come for those who *think* they are healthy, but for those who *know* they are sick.
- Janice and I remember years ago when our daughter Rachel was teaching at a large Christian school in Tulsa, Oklahoma – right in the buckle of the Bible belt. She was so frustrated because most of those kids were convinced they were already saved. They came from “Christian” families, everyone around them was a “Christian.” Churches were on every street corner. She said, “Dad, I realized that I have to get these kids lost before I can get them saved!”

Beloved, there is a place for Law! I know that some people won’t come to Christ because they love their sins, but I believe *many* more people won’t come to Christ because they think: “Hey, I’m a good person, and God loves and accepts me just the way I am.” And then when we present the precious pearl of the

Gospel, it's despised and trampled on – “Are you calling me a sinner? I don't need anyone to die for my sins!” It's pearls before swine because people won't see the beauty of the pearl until they see the filth of their own pigsty.

This is 'why, then, the Law.' Not until the Law has bruised us, and broken us, and humbled us to hell, will we see our need of the Gospel to raise us up to heaven.

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Whoever you are, and however you live – you need Jesus Christ. Standing between you and the promise of God is *Moses*: with a scowl on his face, holding up those heavy stone tablets with the 10 commandments – ready to bring them down on your head! And you are no match for Moses. But Jesus comes along, and He stands up to Moses: He kept the Law perfectly! He fulfilled every commandment. And then He holds out His nail-pierced hands: He was crucified, He took the curse of the Law for disobedience – not His, but ours – on Himself.

If you trust in Jesus, you receive the robe of His righteousness, and your sins are removed as far as the east is from the west. And Moses puts down his tablets, walks away and says, “I'm finished here, my work is done!”

Not the labor of my hands, Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
 Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,
 All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.
 Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling;
 Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace;
 Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.