

The Promise to Abraham and the Law

Galatians Explained

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Bible Text: Galatians 3:15-24
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Congregation, think of opening the will of your parents. Your father has died, you know, your mother as well and you go to the notary and they have filed the will, the testament, and it's opened and it's read and you hear it and you're disappointed, you had hoped for, "But you know, I don't think my dad said that." "I'm sorry," the notary says, "I have his signature here." "I don't like this. I don't like to hear it and I'm upset!" "I'm sorry, we cannot add anything. We cannot annul this and we cannot ignore this. This is the official will and official document. There are witnesses and there's nothing you can add and nothing you can take away. You cannot nullify this." Well, if he cannot nullify a human document, a human pact, a human agreement, what about God's covenant? You can change that?

Our text is from Galatians 3:15-24. Now you see it. Let's read it. Galatians 3 from verse 15 to 24.

15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. 16 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. 17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. 18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. 19 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. 20 Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. 21 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. 22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. 24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

So far.

The promise to Abraham and the law. In the first place, the promise given before the law. So the promise to Abraham, right, was given to him before, the law came later so the Abraham covenant is before the Mosaic covenant. Before. So the promise given before in time, the law. Secondly, the promise helped by the law. The law did not contradict the promise and take it away and disannul and add but helps. So the promise helped by the law, the law can help the promise. And in the third place, the promise preferred over the law because the promise with Abraham is more important than the covenant with Moses. The promise to Abraham and the law: the promise given before the law came, the promise helped by the law, and the promise preferred over the law.

Let's go back to Genesis 15 for a second. Remember, children, young people, that Moses, no Abraham rather was discouraged and had no children and was worried about the future because the Lord had promised him he would have a seed and in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. He was concerned. He was old, didn't happen. He said, "I've never become pregnant so far." It was hopeless but, remember, remember, you remember, right? He had to go outside and count the stars and the Lord said, "So shall thy seed be," right? He believed it. He heard it. He heard it and believed it and that faith was counted unto him for righteousness, right? Remember that. But then Abraham said, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? How can I be convinced of that?" And the Lord said to him, "Take a heifer of three years old and take a she-goat, a female goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove and a young pigeon, take those animals and split them in half." Remember? "And then lay them over against each other. Half of the ram on this side, half on the other side. Identical. And also the heifer, and also the she-goat, and then the turtledove alongside and a young pigeon on the other side, and there is a path in between." That's how they did that and it was a common thing to do. Nothing new. Because when kings and people made agreements with each other, they always did that. They always split animals apart and made a path and then they made a pact, a covenant, they walked through the path together and they said, "In the name of God, I promise I will keep this promise and if not, may God do to me like as happened to those animals and are split up." So then they went together through that aisle or one after the other. So that was a familiar thing. That's how people made contracts. That's how people made covenants. That's how people made agreements and that were witnesses as well and you couldn't go back anymore. You could not disannul it anymore. You could not add to it anymore. It was an official agreement. That's the way they did that.

So he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And the vultures came down. He chased them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham and then a horror of great darkness fell upon him. And then he saw a fire, a burning furnace, smoking furnace, a burning lamp passing between those pieces. It was God. It was a manifestation of God himself promising because he had asked by, "How do I know this? How do I know for sure? Is the Lord promising this? Can the Lord sign this? Can the

Lord put his signature down?" So the Lord said, "See, this is my signature. I walk through the aisle and I swear by myself I will fulfill the promise."

So that's why the Apostle Paul writes about this in verse 15. Do you see that? "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men." Let us talk about daily life. Let's talk about how it goes in our own society, not spiritual but just daily life things. "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men," down to earth, "Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed," if it's confirmed, if it's ratified, "no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto." So why is Paul saying this? He's saying this because the Judaizers, remember the Judaizers, they were influencing the congregation of the Galatians and they said, "You know, that covenant with Abraham is over. That covenant with Abraham is annulled, or at least we add, we'll just add thereto, and there is given us now the law of Moses as the means of salvation so the law of Abraham is over, that the promise of Abraham is over, it has been substituted or at least something has been added thereunto." And Paul says, "No. God has put his signature down and that covenant with Abraham is still valid. It has not been annulled. Nothing can be added. That's how it is and always will be. It is the covenant of God with Abraham, his child, and in him all the families of the earth will be blessed in his seed, and that seed is Christ. Because Abraham already longed for Christ, longed to see my day, so Abraham has all the elements of true saving faith, that believing the Lord counted it for righteousness by faith only. That is still the case. It's still by faith only. Nothing has ever changed since."

Do you understand verse 15 now? Again 15, "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant," even if it would be a man's covenant, "yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto." Now the application, "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." So Paul's saw what Abraham saw, that Abraham believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior. There was already, there was Abraham and nothing has changed since. Although the law came, Moses came, he'll talk about that, but Moses' law did not change anything substantially. It only helped.

"And this I say, that the covenant," 17, that is the key verse, I think, "And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before," before, was it ever first gone before, the promise before the law, right? "And so this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ," the law cannot change, "the law that came at least four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." So the Apostle Paul means those Judaizers, right, those Judaizers, they said, "God is revealing more and more and things are becoming more clear, the Lord's revelation developed. So first it was the faith of Abraham and the Lord stepped it up and added the law of Moses to be more clear how you can be saved, also you have to do some works, and that's how the Lord develops things." And Paul said, "No, that covenant with Abraham remains intact. It does not change. Nothing added. Nothing annulled. Nothing changed. So the law of Moses came later but this was first and essential and the covenant with Abraham is more important than the covenant with Moses and the law. More important. It's priority. We prefer it over."

"For if the inheritance," we talk about the will, right? This is also a will, the Lord's will, the Lord's inheritance. "For if the inheritance be of the law," if it will be by the law, "it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." It's by promise only. Don't mix it into the law. The law came later, that's right, but before that was Abraham's covenant and it was the covenant of the promise only, by faith only without works, and if you people add the law, it's not by the promise anymore. It's not by faith anymore. You are changing things around. You're annulling and adding thereto and then it's not by faith anymore, it's not by the promise anymore, and you just ignore the covenant with Abraham. You can't do that.

You see, those Judaizers, they believed in different dispensations and dispensationalists, difficult word, dispensationalists, people that believe in substantially different dispensations in the redemptive history, they say, "No, the way the Lord worked first this way, and then the Lord starting working in that way, and the Lord changed it around and said it's a new way of getting salvation." No. We are not dispensationalists. The Lord has not changed substantially anything. There are stages in the redemptive history but the Abraham covenant is still valid and does not change. It's still by grace only, "For I am the Lord. I change not. Therefore, sons of Jacob are not consumed. God is not a man that he should lie, neither the Son of Man that he should repent. Has he said and shall he not do it? Or has he spoken and shall he not make it good?" Or think of 1 Samuel 15, "And also the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent."

So that covenant with Abraham is before. That's how it started and that's why God's people are all children of Abraham and not children of Moses. Children of Abraham still. Still today. That covenant with Abraham is still the covenant we preach and we hold onto, and that which is dear unto us, and not the covenant with Moses. No, the covenant with Abraham. Do we belong to that people? Is Abraham your father? Not genetically. I'm not talking about your DNA, not talking about your genes, but that same faith, that same faith to hear it, to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ and to believe in him? And it was counted unto him for righteousness, that faith, are you included in that Abraham? You know, how did they take that, those Judaizers and those confused Galatians? Paul's saying, "The law? Whatever. The law is not changing anything. It's still Abraham the covenant. It's still by faith only." "Really? So what about the law then? What about Moses then? No use for Moses? That's strange. You can't say that, Paul. Moses is our father as well. Abraham, the Lord had stepped it up but has changed it around a little bit. You can't say because it looks like as if you, Paul, are saying the law is worthless, as if the law doesn't matter."

Well, no, but the Apostle Paul understood that question. He anticipated that question. He didn't write that question down in the Bible, the question about, "But what about the law then? What's the purpose of the law then? It looks like as if the law has no purpose at all with you." Verse 19, "Wherefore then serveth the law?" Do you see that? He was expecting that question. "What of the law then?" Well, he brings it up. He's not afraid of that. "Wherefore then serveth the law?" And his answer is in verse 19, this is the second thought, "It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made." So it was added? Okay. So the Lord added it? "Yes." So why did the

Lord add it in? "Well, he added it because of transgressions." What does that mean? So there were transgressions and the Lord says now there's a law to solve those transgressions or something? "No, no, it's still there on. People did not feel much of their transgressions and that's why the law came. It was added because of transgressions, to make the transgressions transgressions."

You know, sometimes you have a bottle and for some reason there's some sediment at the bottom, right? You hold it up and you look at it and you say, "It's clear but there's some sediment at the bottom." You shake it and all of a sudden it's stirred up and it's going through the whole bottle and it's all murky, and that's what the Apostle Paul is talking about. The Lord, "I am going to give them the law to help them understand that sin is sin, to bring them in such a way to Christ, to help that covenant of Abraham."

It was added because of transgressions "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made," because there was a purpose. The purpose was that the seed should come and that the seed should be appreciated.

Let us skip a few verses and come back to that. Look at verse 21, "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." Look at verse 22, the Scripture, that's also the law, right? The five books of Moses, the law. The Scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. So the law stirs up the sin so that people feel their sins, feel hopeless, cannot solve it, cannot save themselves, and that so the covenant with Abraham becomes precious. It is by faith only. Do you see that? Verse 22, "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ." That is the purpose, the purpose is that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ "might be given to them that believe." Not that work. No, that believe.

Let me give you an example for young people. In the olden days in the Latin and Greek world, there were some people very rich and dad had no time for his family and mom neither, so they hired nannies for the girls, and they hired some slaves, some young men for the boys, let me say guide, let me say male nannies, and they just took care of them from the whole day. They could not even leave the house until manhood because they're paid agogos is what it was called. Their paidagogos. We'll come back to that. The child leader, it's translated in this chapter two times as schoolmaster. So that schoolmaster, that paidagogos, paid, I mean, a child, paid, old child, and ago, leader, the child leader, the male guide made sure that everything was okay with breakfast, their going to school. He was not a teacher, he was not the tutor, but he was the guide. Let me read what the dictionary says: the guide or guardians of boys. Among the Greeks and Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed too much, so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood.

Then do you see the word here? Verse 24, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." And again the dictionary in Galatians 3:24, the Mosaic law is likened to a tutor because of it arouses the consciousness of sin. It arouses, it stirs up the consciousness of sin and it's called paidagogos to Christ, meaning preparing the soul for Christ because those have learned by experience with the law that they are not and cannot be commended to God by their works, welcome more eagerly the hope of salvation offered to them through the death and resurrection of Christ, the Son of God.

So see that paidagogos? "It's time, boys. Dress up, boys. You're going to school. I'll bring you to school as the schoolmaster. I'm your paidagogos." And so the Apostle Paul says, "Yes, there was a law added, not to save people in a different way, not to annul the first covenant, not to add anything unto it to save yourself, but only to help understand it, to lead unto Christ." And you know that is true in redemptive history, that is also true personally. Let me quote that from other Scriptures, from other places in Scripture, especially Romans 7, because the law of Moses was not only important those days until Christ came but there is still a law that helps people to seek salvation only in Christ, a paidagogos, to lead outside of self unto the Savior. We need that because then its sediment is at the bottom of the bottle. We don't care. We don't feel it. We don't realize it. We don't have the urgency. Let me quote to you, I think this is an important thing which you can say the law is over. Well, the law is fulfilled by Christ and the ceremonial law is abolished after Christ's death, there is still a law helping as a paidagogos. Romans 3:20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." No flesh. There can't be. "For by the law is the knowledge of sin." Right? Romans 7, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." So that law gives the knowledge of sin, stirs it up. "Was then that which is good, the law, made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." That's Romans 7:13.

That law is important so that sin might appear sin. I need a law. I really do. And there is no law anymore to bring me as a paidagogos unto Christ, I don't care. It's fine. I'm fine. I'm completely fine. Well, sometimes a little worried about death but, you know, I do my best. But when that law comes and the commandment comes, sin revives that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. That's how it goes and I cannot deny that. But that sin became exceeding sinful. What about you? Sin became exceeding sinful. The lost sin against all God's commandments and hasn't kept any of them. That's the purpose of the law, not to kill you but to make sin exceeding sinful so you're seeking Christ as the paidagogos unto him.

Romans 4:15, "Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression." Or Romans 5:20, it's everywhere. "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." You see? That's the purpose of the law, that sin might abound. Why? That so grace did much more abound. So the law was needed to lead to Christ, not to qualify, not to fulfill the law but to make appreciative of the salvation in Christ by faith only.

Genesis 12 is the chapter where the Lord calls Abram the first time. Chapter 15 we read this morning, chapter 15 this morning about those pieces over against each other in the path. Genesis 15 is after that, to confirm it. Genesis 17 is about circumcision. So Abraham received that faith in Christ before he was circumcised as a Gentile. He was not even Jewish and he was circumcised. You see? So Paul makes it very clear to the Judaizers that covenant with Abraham is more important than the covenant with Moses and I hope that you may see it the same way. By faith only, before, the law only helping sinners to bring them to Christ to be exceedingly sinful, so that sin may abound and grace may abound the more.

Last thought. First we sing.

Please look at the last lines of verse 19 and verse 20, "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." You know, I studied those verses and apparently there are 200, at least 240 different explanations so that's hard. That's a very difficult text but what it must refer to is this: that the covenant with Abraham is more important, is preferred over the covenant with Moses. That's the context. That's what it must refer to. And also it speaks about mediators, right, and what I think, it needs this, in that covenant with Moses, how did God's message come to the people? By angels to Moses to the people. So not directly from God to the people, no, by the hand of angels the law was given. The hands of angels into the hands of Moses and Moses to the people. That's how the law was handed over.

So through mediators, through means indirectly, and how did God's message come to Abraham? Directly. God is one. No mediator, just directly. So the Apostle Paul wants to make clear in different ways that the covenant with Abraham is more important and preferred over the covenant with Moses. That's his purpose and that's important also today because the Mosaic covenant at heart is not any different. It is not so that Abraham was saved by faith and later by faith plus works, also during the time of Moses people could only be saved by faith. Also those days, only by faith.

It's interesting at first light, Deuteronomy 7:12-13, "Wherefore it shall come to pass," Moses, "if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers." The mercy which he sware to your fathers. So Moses refers back to Abraham. Moses is not saying now you can be saved in a different way but he says let's go back to Abraham. That's the purpose of the law. That's what Moses is doing also in Deuteronomy 7:13, "And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine," cows, "and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee."

So you cannot separate those covenants and say the dispensation with Abraham stopped and Moses came. It did not stop, it continued, and the covenant with Moses was only helping and we prefer the covenant with Abraham over the covenant with Moses because

the covenant with Moses was only temporary. Verse 19, "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come." So that covenant with Abraham was first and it was eternal, and the covenant with Moses was until, until the time that Jesus would come, and then he fulfilled the law and the ceremonial law was abolished and the law was still important to do the same work privately, personally.

So have you fled unto Christ for your sins, led by the paidagogos of the law, sin becoming exceedingly sinful, have you led to the Savior? If you say no, do you know why, what's holding you back? What's holding you back is that is the sediment in your bottle. I would love to stir it up. But you know, you are dead in your sins apparently with that sediment at the bottom, and you feel reasonably good because you can just look through the bottle and it's clear, right? It's clear and you think, "I'm fine. I'm not that bad." I would like to shake that bottle and you would see that it is not that clear at all, and that's such a dangerous situation to sit in church for years and years with the sediment at the bottom and clear water, you can just see through it, no worries. That is what you call legalism. That's one of the ways legalism works. "I don't see anything. Where are my sins? Yeah, at the bottom is a little bit, you know, everyone has that." And that sin of not seeing your sin is way more dangerous than being addicted to alcohol or pornography. Those are horrible sins, right? But being smug having that sediment at the bottom and no worries is more dangerous probably for you.

So I'd like to stir it up. Everyone that does not flee unto Christ is yet under the curse. All that pride, that pride of not understanding my sins, not even wanting to acknowledge my sins before him. So why is that law added? To make you depressed? No. To let you feel smug? No. That law was added to be a paidagogos unto Christ and that you may come unto him. If you begin to appreciate him, if you believe in him, then there's joy because sin abounded and God's grace abounded even more. There is freedom of the law. The law cannot condemn you anymore because it condemned Christ and he absorbed the wrath of God, and he completed it all, and he finished it, and he fulfilled the law, the ceremonial law with all the laws of the sacrifices. He is the sacrifice and he gave his blood and he fulfills also the moral law. What is the moral law? The 10 Commandments, right? He fulfilled the moral law. He was obedient. Where people don't need him, if they are not led unto him by the paidagogos, the Apostle Paul is writing to whom? He's writing to unconverted people? Kind of, "You people, I would like to stir up the sediment because you're dead and you need life"? No. Going back to verse 15, what's the first word in verse 15? Brethren. He's talking to God's people. He's talking to God's people and he says, "You know, that paidagogos, you're not so familiar yet with the paidagogos. A little bit but I would like to stir up even more. This law is also important for you. It helps. It has not taken the place of the covenant with Abraham but it helps to lead unto him."

So if you understand this experientially, then you'll rejoice, then there is freedom and God receives glory. But he did it all, that people cannot take any credit for themselves. By grace only. By faith only. To God's glory. Amen.