

Exposing Our Need

Galatians 3:15-29

An error that the Galatians evidently had made was to think that the law changed God's promise to Abraham. They seemed to think that now God's promise to Abraham is received by faith with obedience to the law added to that. Paul explains why the law was never enough to meet our need for salvation, it only serves to expose that need. Only Christ can meet our need through faith in Him.

The Law and the Promise

Read Galatians 3:15-20

1. What example from everyday life did Paul use to illustrate the endurance of the covenant God made with Abraham? (v. 15)

Even with today's covenants or testaments, such as wills, no one can make changes by replacing, removing, or adding to them after those covenants have been signed, sealed and notarized.

Once a person's will has been put into effect, and the person dies—that will cannot be amended. That is why it is often called the Last Will and Testament.

The word for a man's "**will**" (or human "covenant") in verse 15 is the same word used for "**covenant**" of God in verse 17. This word is only for an agreement (unilateral) made by one party with full power, which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot alter.

If two people were making an equal partnership (bilateral) agreement (like sometimes in the secular world), a different word was used. The covenant between God and man is a grant, not a partnership. We can accept or reject the gift of salvation but we cannot do enough to be worthy of it, nor can we change the terms of our acceptance.

It is also interesting to notice in the beginning of verse 15, how Paul addresses them ...**Brothers**. Turning from his scolding tone of "foolish Galatians," he now appeals to them as brothers – whether they are of Jewish descent or Gentile.

2. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Who is Abraham's seed? (v. 16)

In this verse, Paul identifies Christ as Abraham's seed. By focusing on the singular form of the word for "seed," Paul makes his point that God's promise in his covenant was ultimately fulfilled in Christ, who was descended (on his human side) from Abraham.

Yet, as we shall learn by the end of this chapter, "seed" also applies to all believers.

3. Why doesn't the law set aside or replace the promise of the covenant with Abraham?

(vv. 17-18)

The covenant with Abraham was given on the basis of a promise, not on the basis of law. So when the law came, it made no changes to the covenant, nor did it replace it.

God gave this promise to Abraham purely out of grace on His part and faith on Abraham's part. It was not contingent on Abraham's or his descendants' ability to keep the law.

God kept his promise to Abraham—he has not revoked it, though thousands of years have passed. He saved Abraham through his faith, and he blessed the world through Abraham by sending the Messiah as one of Abraham's descendants.

Circumstances may change, but God remains constant and does not break his promises. He has promised to forgive our sins through Jesus Christ, and we can be sure that he will do so!

4. What is the two-fold purpose of the law? (vv. 19-20)

The law has two roles. On the positive side, it reveals the holiness and will of God and shows people how to live. On the negative side, it point out people's sins and shows them that it is not in our capacity to be able to please God by trying to obey all His laws completely.

God's promise to Abraham was based on Abraham's faith; the law focuses on moral and ceremonial deeds.

One reason the law was given was to control the sins of men through revealing God's holy standard. God had to give us His standard so we would not destroy ourselves before the Messiah came.

But the law was also given because of sin in another way; the law also stirs up man's tendency toward rebellion through a strict standard; showing us also our need for mercy.

Faith does not annul the law; but the more we know God, the more we see how sinful we are. Then we are driven to depend on our faith in Christ alone for our salvation.

When God gave his promise to Abraham, he did it by Himself alone, without angels or Moses as mediators.

Although it is not mentioned in Exodus, Jews believed that the Ten Commandments had been given to Moses by angels (Stephen referred to this in his speech, see Acts 7:38, 53).

Paul was showing that salvation and growth by faith was far better than trying to be saved by keeping the Jewish laws. Christ is the best and only way given by God for us to come to him (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5).

Sons No Longer Under Law

Think about the two analogies of the law given in the next passage. The first compares the law with being a prison, and the second compares it to a “tutor”. This tutor was a slave who was put in charge as the guardian of young sons of the master. He was the supervisor whose main function was discipline. He was expected to be harsh and would use a rod to punish boys who were unruly.

Read Galatians 3:21-29

5. Why isn't the law in opposition to the promises of God? (v. 21)

The law and the promises of God have different purposes, but these purposes do not nullify one another or are in opposition to one another. Once the law's purpose had been fulfilled within God's plan, then men's hearts were prepared by the law to receive the fulfillment of God's promises.

The law doesn't justify or bring life—it simply shows us Who God is, what God expects of us, and what happens if we fall short of His expectations.

6. Before you became a Christian, did you realize you were a prisoner of sin? (v. 22)

The Scripture declared the whole world to be a prisoner of sin. This includes those without the law as well as those under the law. The law cannot help us, because the law put us in prison.

Before you knew Christ, you may have said, “I'm not a prisoner to sin!” There is a simple way to prove it: stop sinning. But if you can't stop sinning, or ever have a record of sin, then you are imprisoned by sin.

Being a prisoner of sin wasn't simply a measure of confinement. It drove us to seek freedom. And that freedom was offered through faith in Jesus Christ.

We confessed our sin, agreed that we deserved to be where we were, and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

7. In what way was the law like a prison? (v. 23)

The law was used to “**guard and keep watch over**” God's people according to a literal translation of the Greek. It was more like protective custody which served to keep God's people from living without any restraint.

8. In what way was the law like a tutor? (v. 24)

The word “**tutor**,” or “**custodian**” comes from the translation of the Greek *paidagogos* (from which “pedagogue” is derived). It refers to the personal slave-attendant who accompanied a freeborn boy wherever he went and was allowed to discipline him as harshly as he needed to. His role was more like that of a babysitter/guardian than a teacher.

Just as a guardian or custodian would lead the freeborn son of his master to his teacher or school, so the law was put in charge, or made custodian, in order to lead us to Christ.

It is astonishing that people could read these verses in Galatians and still defend the law as binding on us. To force people to stay under the rule of the custodian is to doom them to immaturity. Babysitters and nannies may be fine for children, but no adult is under guardianship unless he is mentally or physically incompetent.

The law was our custodian, but when we commit ourselves in faith to Christ, we are no longer under it.

9. What is the new status of those who come to Christ by faith? (vv. 26-29)

- SONS OF GOD
- BEEN CLOTHED WITH CHRIST
- ONE IN CHRIST JESUS
- ABRAHAM’S SEED
- HEIRS

10. What is the significance of all becoming sons of God? (v. 26)

God’s children have outgrown their nanny—the law that was put in charge. Jesus Christ has made this possible for us all, to be counted as adult children (sons) of God. And, as free sons of God we also enjoy equality with one another as well as fellowship with the Father and the Son. Since we came into God’s family through faith in Christ, we all share in this common fellowship and unity.

11. Why is baptism associated with putting on Christ (or clothed with Christ)? (v. 27)

The entrance into the new covenant with God is the act of baptism. There is, of course, no magic or holy properties in the water.

What counts is the humble surrender to God demonstrated in baptism. God has commanded that we submit to this deeply symbolic act (Romans 6:1-4), and we have no right or reason to protest.

In Christian baptism we “**clothe ourselves**” with Christ. Immersed into the cleansing water, we emerge wrapped in Christ. We will not stand before God in the filthy rags of our own attempted goodness, but in the white robes of Christ’s righteousness. (See Isaiah 64:6 and Rev. 6:11).

12. What divisions are erased in Christ Jesus? (v. 28)

In Christ Jesus, all cultural and spiritual divides are done away with. Paul mentions the divide between Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female.

“When we say that Christ has abolished these distinctions, we mean not that they do not exist, but that they no longer create any barriers to fellowship.” (Stott)

At that time, some Rabbis quoted a morning prayer that was popular among many Jews of that day. According to William Barclay, in that prayer the Jewish man would thank God that he was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. Paul takes each of these categories in that same order and shows them to be equal in Jesus.

13. Who is considered Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise? (v. 29)

ALL WHO BELONG TO CHRIST. It is not our ancestry, our bloodline that makes us Abraham’s seed, but our faith. The word for “seed” here is plural this time.

The Jews took great pride in being the children of Abraham. But as Paul wrote the Philippians, **“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:... But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ”** (Phil 3:4, 7).

Not only are we Abraham’s seed, we are heirs to his estate, the promise of the covenant. What was promised to Abraham is now our inheritance: justification by faith and eternal life.

You may have noticed how often Paul refers to Jesus as Christ in the book of Galatians. In fact, in chapter 3 in the last 17 verses, he uses it 11 times. **Christ** is the Greek version of **Messiah**. When Paul referred to Jesus as Christ, he emphasized that Jesus IS the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Anointed One of the Jewish people as well as of all the world.