

Promise and Law – Gal 3:15-22

Gal 3:15-22; In v7-14, Paul just made the stunning point, that God's blessing of righteousness and life, is for those who believe; And here, in v15-18 . . .

He basically says that blessing remains, and defends it; Saying in v15 . . .

[15] *To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.*

Now, that statement seems a little out of place on the heels of the previous verses, until you realize that he's referring to the covenant God made with Abraham

His promise to bless us; The very thing he's been *talking* about since v7, but hasn't *named*; That's what he's giving a *human* example of; The Abrahamic Covenant

And does so, to *defend* it; B/c evidently, one of the arguments being made by Paul's opponents, was that the OT Law changed or annulled it; Cancelled the Promise And Paul responds by saying – “No; No”

God's promise of blessing stands – rest _____ (v15-18)

It stands; That's the point; The benefits of our faith, remain; The *inheritance* awaits (18);

The blessings are sure; Including justification, fruitfulness, community . . .

And a Home; Capital H; Those things stand God says; His covenant is certain

➤ And Paul gives 4 reasons for it as part of his defense

1. That's how covenants work (v15)

Even a man-made covenant as he says in v15; *No one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.* Established

How much more a God-made covenant? It's how they work

Now, that's not to say that the *parties* to the covenant can't change it; They can

Like God did when he discontinued the *Mosaic* Covenant; Replacing it with the *New* Covenant; The *parties* can change it, but that's it

No one else *can*, and in this case, no one else *did*

The Abrahamic Covenant stands, b/c that's how covenants work

2. Jesus was a party to the covenant (v16)

V16 – *Now the promises* [the promises of the covenant] *were made to Abraham and to his offspring.* It does not say [quoting Gen 17:7], “*And to offsprings.*” referring to many, but referring to one, “*And to your offspring.*” who is Christ.

Now, he's not saying that the Abrahamic Covenant doesn't apply to *us*; Those of *faith*

That would contradict the plain sense of Genesis, where it was first given . . .

It would contradict the clear language of Gal 3:9, that those of faith are blessed along with Abraham . . .

And it would contradict Paul's reference to people *other* than Jesus, in v19; People to whom *the promise had been made* he says

So he's not saying that the covenant isn't for *us*, but that Jesus was the *focal* point of the covenant; The focal point of Abraham's offspring

The primary one that God had in mind, and therefore a *party* to the covenant

Jesus, was a party to the covenant Paul is saying, as much or more than we are

And the fact that he still lives, ensures that the promise still stands

3. The Law doesn't change it (v17)

V17 – *This 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.*

IOW timing has nothing to do with it; Yes, the OT Law was given to Moses *after* God made his covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:13; Ex 12:40) . . .

But that in no way annuls or *voids* the covenant with Abraham

Just like our laws don't change our Constitution; So the promise stands

4. God gave it as a promise (v18)

Supporting his previous thought in v17, Paul states the obvious in v18 . . .

For if the inheritance [the blessing of the covenant] *comes by the law* [by works], *it no longer comes by promise* [b/c the two are mutually exclusive]; *but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.*

The covenant God made with Abraham, and by extension us, didn't come conditional on obedience to the *Law*; Obeying a set of rules

Especially so, b/c the Law wasn't given for another 400 years

Rather, the promise of blessing came conditional upon *receiving* it; Embracing it;

Believing it; So once again, God's promise of blessing stands; 4 reasons

➤ Which means, we can – **rest assured**

It stands, and we're the recipients; Those of faith; Sons of Abraham

Full participants in the inheritance of eternal life, the justification that warrants it, and everything that comes with it; It's ours; For good; Rest assured (**Summary**)

➤ But that begs the question – *Why then the law?* The very thing Paul asks next

If it doesn't exist to secure God's promises, what's it even there for? What good is it? Why did God give it?

And the answer to that question, at least the first one, is found in v19

[19] *Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions* [violations of the Law], *until the offspring* [Jesus] *should come to whom the promise had been made* [Jews and Gentiles, as he says in v8]

So the 1st reason for the Law, is that *it was added because of transgressions* [violations, offenses]; IOW . . .

The Law was given to deal with our sin – and still _____ (v19-20)

That's the first response to the question he poses; It was given to address our sin

And does so in 3 main ways . . .

1. By exposing it (Rom 3:20)

Paul says in Rom 3:20, that *through the law comes knowledge of sin*; Awareness of it I'll never forget one of Becky's friends who came to Christ as an adult, after a long stretch of sexual immorality as a teenager and young woman

And the thing that struck us, is that she had never heard pre-marital sex was wrong

And the moment she did, the moment she saw it in the Bible, she repented (1 Thess 4)

Why? B/c it *exposed* her; Not just her actions, but her thoughts and intentions as well

That's the first way in which the Law deals with our sin

2nd, it prevents it; The Law deals with our sin by . . .

2. By preventing it (Ex 20:13-15)

It's the classic phrase from the 10 Commandments – “You shall not”

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness (Ex 20:13-15)

The Law deals with our sin by acting as a *preventative*; Telling us not to violate God's way of living

And though the *punishments* no longer apply, God's discipline does

Bringing consequences to bear, to keep us from *further* sin

Choose to sin, choose to suffer the Law says; It's a preventative

3rd, and this is probably the most important but least realized – the Law was given to deal with our sin . . .

3. By provoking it (Rom 7:5,8)

Inciting it; Stimulating it; Stirring us to do it

Like my mom's instruction to my brothers and me, to not drink the milk directly from the jug when we got home from football practice

Which was like throwing a piece of raw meat to a rabid dog, and saying don't bite

Her command, made us want to drink from the jug all the *more*

And that's exactly what the OT Law does; Especially *before* we gave our lives to Christ

It's implied here as we'll see a bit later, but *explicit* in **Rom 7:5**; Where Paul says . . .

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.

Before Christ, our sinful passions were *aroused* by the Law; Provoked by the Law

And a few verses later, he gives an example (**Rom 7:7b-8**)

For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” [8] But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.

Apart from the Law, apart from “thou shalt not,” apart from “don't drink from the jug” – sin lies dead; But *with* the Law? Sin is provoked; Sin is stirred*****

It's like seeing a “Wet Paint – Do Not Touch” sign on a wall

Even *now* it takes every ounce of self-control I have to not touch it

Whereas *apart* from the sign, I could care less

When the commandment came [Paul says], *sin came alive* (Rom 7:9) (**Summary**)

So in addition to *exposing* our sin, and *preventing* our sin, the Law actually *provokes* our sin; Arouses it; Incites it

And still does

When we're exposed to the Law, even as believers, it still exposes our sin

When we *heed* the Law, it still *prevents* our sin

And when we're weak, it still *provokes* us to sin

So that even as believers, we do the things we *don't* want to do, and don't do the things we *do* want to do; Or as Paul says it (**Rom 7:19**) . . .

I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

Making our sin, *become sinful beyond measure* he says (Rom 7:13)*****

➤ Really? God actually put something in place that arouses sin in our hearts, and makes it increase all the more? Why? Why would he do such a thing?

To *point* us to Christ, and *magnify* Christ

The Law *points* us to Christ, b/c he's the only one who can rescue us (Rom 7:24-25)

And it *magnifies* Christ, b/c his grace is greater than our sin (**Rom 5:20**); Greater!

The law [Paul says] *came in to increase the trespass* [provoking us to sin], *but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*; Abounded all the more*****

Put all that together, and the Law was given to make much of our *sin*, in order to make *more* of God's grace; Grace that is greater than *all* our sin; Combined

No wonder we call it amazing

➤ Now, that *doesn't* mean, that the OT Law is still in effect; The fact that it was given to deal with our sin, and still does in those 3 ways . . .

Doesn't mean it's still operative like it used to be; In fact . . .

It was temporary; 2 more thoughts here from v19-20 – the Law was temporary

That's the implication of v19, where *it was added* [Paul says] . . . until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made

The Law was fully in effect, atoning for sin and all, until Jesus, *the offspring*, came to those who *believe* in him; Those *to whom the promise had been made*

Making the Law temporary in that sense

➤ Not only that, but – **It was inferior** Paul says; Inferior to the *promises*

And I say that, b/c *it was put in place* [19b] *through angels by an intermediary*.

Most likely, referring to the participation of angels in *giving* the Law

Like Moses says in Dt 33:2 – *The LORD came from Sinai* [where he gave them the Law] . . . *from the ten thousands of holy ones* [angels], *with flaming fire at his right hand*.

That seems to be what Paul is referring to when he says that the Law was *put in place through angels*; They helped God deliver it

In fact, Stephen said so explicitly in Acts 7 (v53); And Heb 2, the same (v2)

The purpose for which, most likely, was to instill a healthy *respect* for the Law, help the people *embrace* the Law, and put the fear of God in them if they didn't

Angels were a part of it

➤ But God also used go-betweens Paul says

The Law was *put in place through angels by an intermediary* (19); Almost certainly referring to Moses; Moses was an intermediary, between God and the people

And not *just* him, but *other* prophets and priests along the way; *Other* intermediaries B/c, v20 – *an intermediary implies more than one* (20)

IOW God used *many* go-betweens to impart the Law to us

But the *promise*, God's promise of *blessing*, was given directly; Spoken *directly* to

Abraham; By God himself; That seems to be *point* of v20

Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

IOW while the Law was conveyed by many, the promise was conveyed by one

The Law was conveyed by men, the promise was conveyed by God

Making the Law *inferior*, and the promise *superior* (**Summary**)

And yet, it was given to deal with our sin, and still does
That's the *first* reason Paul gives, for "Why the Law?"

The 2nd is this . . .

The Law prepares our hearts to believe – don't _____ (v21-22)

And he makes *this* point by starting with *another* question; V21

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Are they in opposition to each other?

It's a strange question that doesn't seem to flow from what he just said

But it has to, b/c of the word *then*; *Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?*

It's an indicator that his question is based on what he said *previously* about the Law

But all he said previously, is that *it was added because of transgressions* (19)

So how is that contrary to God's promise of blessing? It's a question mark I've had in my Bible for 15 years; And the answer goes like this

Since the Law provokes us to sin, increasing our *unrighteousness* . . .

And God's *promises*, are centered on *righteousness*, justification . . .

Aren't the 2 things *contrary* to one another? And isn't that a problem coming from the same source, the perfect mind of God? *That's* the flow of thought

Since the Law provokes us to *unrighteousness*, and the promise leads to *righteousness*, are they not contrary to one another?

And Paul responds with his famous – *Certainly not!* As in, God forbid! Heavens no!

They're not contrary! For 2 reasons:

(A) The *purposes* are different

(B) The two actually complement one another

Let's take each of those in turn

➤ The first, that the *purposes* are different, is found in v21b

Is the Law contrary to the Promise? No! *For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.*

It's a *hypothetical* statement, to prove the *opposite* point; Like we say in *our* family sometimes, "If frogs had glass bottoms, they'd only jump once."

But they don't have glass bottoms, so they jump all the time

It's a hypothetical, if-then statement, to make the opposite point

And the same is true here; If the Law led to *life* as opposed to *death*, the curse for not *keeping* it – then yes, righteousness would *indeed* come through the Law

B/c life and righteousness go hand in hand

In which case, the Law would *definitely* be contrary to the Promise

B/c one would be saying that righteousness and life come by *works*, and the other, by faith; Making them mutually exclusive

But that's *not* the case, b/c the Law *doesn't* give life; Frogs *don't* have glass bottoms

In fact, the Law brings death; And only *adds* to our *unrighteousness*

Serving to *awaken* us to our need, while God's promise of righteousness, meets it

So they're not contrary, b/c their purposes are different

➤ In fact, they actually *complement* one another – the 2nd reason he says *Certainly not!*

If the Law could give life, then great; But that's not what it did; Rather, v22 . . .

[22] *The Scripture* [referring to the OT; the Law] *imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

And this is where we finally get to the point; That the Law prepares our hearts to believe

How so? By holding us captive to the grip and consequences of sin; And making us yearn to be free; Yearn to be released; Yearn to live life well, and live it for *him*

It would be like somebody in *prison* who longs to be free, and all they have to do, is believe that the President can and *will* pardon them

All they have to do is put their *faith* in him; Completely; And the door opens

If there was ever a *promise* somehow made like that, do you not think that every single inmate would *jump* at the chance? That every single 1 would believe in a heartbeat?

They would; Why? B/c their hearts have been prepared

They're sick and tired of being sick and tired; Sick and tired of the difficulties; Sick and tired of their sentence; Sick and tired of their limitations; And their hopelessness

➤ Which is the very purpose of God's *Law*; To bring those in the prison of *sin*, to the end of themselves; The end of rationalizing *their* lack of purpose . . .

Their lack of direction; Their lack of hope

And stirring their hearts to yearn for something more; Something better (Heb 11:16)

The Law, and the sin it provokes, is a *spiritual* incarceration, that serves a *vital* purpose – to prepare your heart to *believe*; To believe in *Jesus*; By faith

And thereby be free; Free of your sin, free of its consequences, and free to live; *Truly* live

In which case, the Law doesn't *contradict* the promises of God, it *complements* them
Preparing our heart to receive them, *by faith in Jesus Christ* (22b)

If that's you – **don't wait**

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, now; And be free; Be saved; Be blessed

With a righteousness that's not your own, and a promise that stands forever

That's the point; And now's the time

Prayer – The Bible says that whoever calls on the name of the Lord, will be saved (Rom 10:13); If that's you, if you never have, let me encourage you to do so right now

"Jesus, I believe; In you; To free me from my sin, and bless me with your righteousness;

And I'm ready to live for you, b/c I'm sick and tired of living for myself;" Don't wait

God, we're in awe of how you designed things, we're amazed by your grace, and we're grateful for your promises

Receive our tithes and offerings now, and use them to the utmost