
THE BOOK OF
GALATIANS
STAND
FIRM
IN THE GOSPEL
OF GRACE


The Relationship Between the Law and the Promise
Galatians 3:15-25
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Outline of Galatians

I. **The True gospel defended (Chapters 1-2)**

II. **The True gospel explained (Chapters 3-4)**

a) Righteousness comes through faith, not works (3:1-14)

b) The relationship between the law and the promise (3:15-3:29)

c) Not slaves but heirs in Christ (4:1-4:11)

d) Become as I am: Paul's heartfelt cry (4:12-4:20)

e) The allegory of the bondwoman & the free woman (4:21-4:31)

III. **The True gospel applied (Chapters 5-6)**

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3:15 “Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.”



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Once a will has been signed, it cannot be changed except by the one who made the will. Anyone else trying to change it would be invalid and illegal. This is the point of Paul's illustration.

If human contracts like a will cannot be broken without consequences, how much more so a covenant or contract initiated by God.

"Remember that Abraham did not make a covenant with God; God made a covenant with Abraham!"

Warren Wiersbe

The Judaizers would say that the coming of the Mosaic law after Abraham resulted in a change in how people are made right with God: by keeping the law.

Actually, this is a common belief today. If you were to ask someone, what does a person need to do to go to heaven? Many would say, you need to keep the 10 commandments!

The Bible teaches that we are made right with God not through our good deeds or law keeping, but by faith in God.

Last week we saw early in Chap 3 of Galatians that Paul used the example of Abraham to prove that we are counted as righteous in God's sight, not by the works of the Law but by faith in God, as it says in Gal. 3:6:
"Even so Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."



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Paul answers possible objections to using Abraham to defend the doctrine of justification by faith in three ways:

1) The superiority of the Abrahamic Covenant, verses 15-18

2) The inferiority of the Law, verses 19–20

3) The purposes of the Law and Promises of God, verses 21-25

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1) The superiority of the Abrahamic Covenant

3:16 “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed’ that is, Christ.”

* How were the promises to Abraham fulfilled?
  They were fulfilled in Christ!

In Genesis 22:18, God promised Abraham: “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

Paul points out that God’s promise was not to many seeds, but rather to One: “And to your Seed, which is Christ”.

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* What is significant about the use of seed (singular), not “seeds” (plural)?

1) It’s another indicator of how accurate the Word of God is, it is inspired right down to the letter! This is what we refer to as verbal inspiration, each word is inspired by God.

2) “Seed” can sometimes be plural, referring to many, like the multitude of descendants of Abraham. But here it refers to one Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the preeminent descendant of Abraham. (Luke 3: 23-38).

God promised to bless all nations through Christ.
The promise to Abraham was unconditional; it required neither good works nor legal obedience.

It was a simple promise, to be received by simple faith

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“No doubt the Judaizers argued that although the promises were originally made to Abraham and to his seed (the people of Israel) by faith, yet these same people of Israel were subsequently put under the law. Therefore, the Galatians, though originally saved by faith, must now observe the Ten Commandments.” Bill MacDonald

But the promises to Abraham and to his seed were not fulfilled before the giving of the law, but were fulfilled afterwards in Christ and are permanent and cannot be altered.

“God made this covenant of promise with Abraham through Christ, so that the only two parties who can make any changes are God the Father and God the Son. Moses cannot alter this covenant! He can add nothing to it; he can take nothing from it. The Judaizers wanted to add to God’s grace and take from God’s promises. They had no right to do this since they were not parties in the original covenant.” Warren Wiersbe

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3:17 “What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.”

* Where does this 430 year figure come from?
It is found in Exod. 12:40: “Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.”

“The 430 years are reckoned from the time that God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob, just as Jacob was preparing to enter Egypt (Gen. 46:1–4), and they extend to the giving of the law about three months after the Exodus.” Bill MacDonald

“During that long interval God blessed the patriarchs on the basis of faith alone, and the coming of the Law could not change this in any way. Additionally the Law could not alter God’s dealing with Abraham on the basis of a promise because the two are fundamentally different in nature. They do not co-mingle; they cannot be combined. ” D. K. Campbell

The Judaizers were probably saying that the law, that came 430 years after the promise, replaced or supplanted the promise. Paul says no. The coming of the law hundreds of years later does not invalidate or add any conditions to the covenant promise God made with Abraham.

3:18 “For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

* What is an inheritance?
  It is something freely received from someone who decided or promised they would give that to you when they pass away.

* Was Abraham’s inheritance based on law or a promise?
  In Genesis 22:18, God promised: “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

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“The inheritance must be either by faith or by works. It cannot be by both. Scripture makes it clear that it was given to Abraham by unconditional promise.

So it is with salvation. It is offered as an unconditional gift. Any thought of law-keeping or working for it is excluded.” Bill MacDonald

Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

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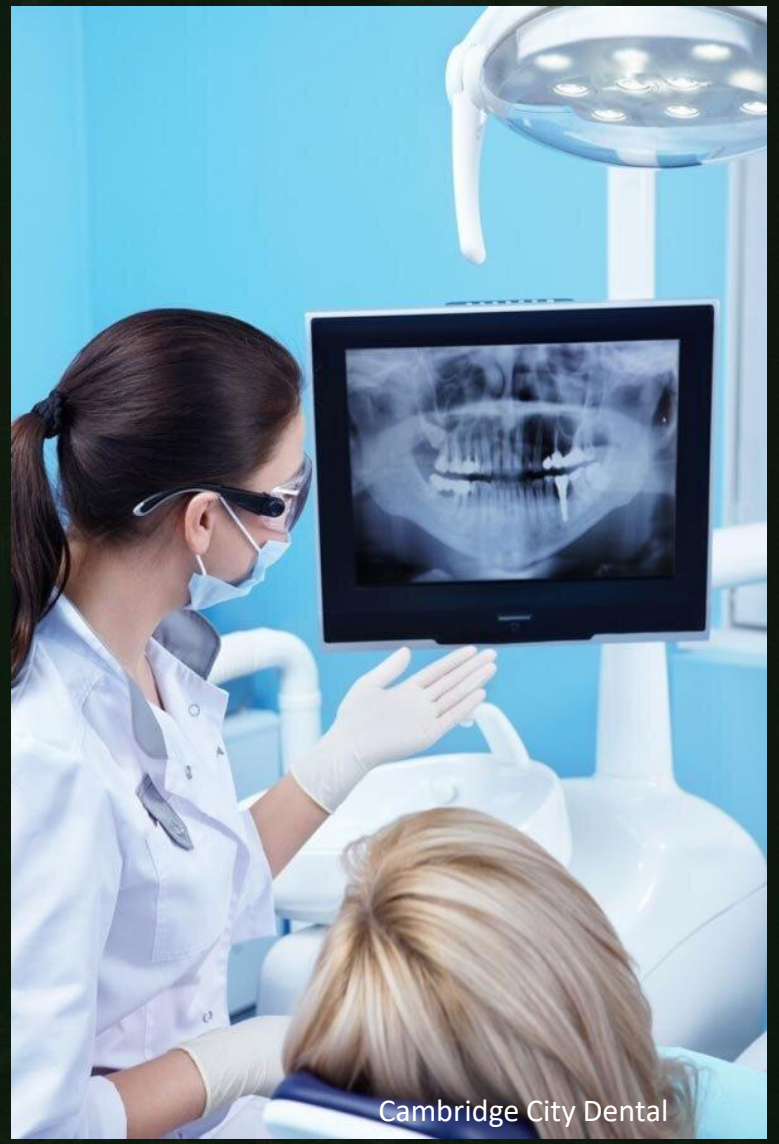
2) The inferiority of the Law, verses 19–20

3:19 “Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.”

* What characteristics about the law do we see here?

1) It was given “because of transgressions,”
The Law reveals our sinfulness. As Rom. 3:20 says, “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”





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The Law also serves as a restrainer of transgressions in a civil and societal sense.

Over the last few years, we've seen the horrible consequences of refusing to enforce laws especially in large cities run by liberal governments!
The result is lawless anarchy, chaos, crime and misery.
The Law serves as a restrainer against transgressions of God's Law as well (1 Tim. 1:8–11).

3:19 “Why the Law then?

2) The Law was a temporary addition: “It was added … until the Seed should come.”

* Which is greater, a temporary law or a permanent covenant?

3) The Law was fulfilled in Christ: “until the Seed [Christ] should come.” When Christ died and rose again, the Law’s righteous demands were fulfilled on behalf of all who believe.

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Rom 8:1-4 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

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4) The Law was “ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator” (vv. 19b–20).

“This means that the nation received the Law third-hand: from God to angels to Moses. But when God made His covenant with Abraham, He did it personally, without a mediator. God revealed to Abraham all that He would do for him and his descendants. A mediator stands between two parties and helps them to agree; but there was no need for a mediator in Abraham’s case since God was entering into a covenant with him, not Abraham with God.”

Warren Wiersbe

3:20 “Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.” * What does this mean?

“If there was only one contracting party, and he made an unconditional promise, requiring nothing from the other party, there would be no need of a mediator. The fact that the law required a mediator implied that man must keep his part of the agreement. This was the weakness of the law; it called for obedience from those who did not have the power to give it. When God made His promise to Abraham, He was the sole contracting Party. This was the strength of the promise: everything depended on God and nothing on man. No mediator was involved, because none was needed.”

Bill MacDonald

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* Does the fact that no mediator was needed in God's promise to Abraham contradict the fact that Christ is the Mediator of a New Covenant between God and man (1Tim 2:5, Heb. 9:15) ?

"The word mediator is used in two different senses in these two places. Moses served as a mediator simply by receiving the law from God and delivering it to the people of Israel. He was the go-between, or the people's representative.
Christ is Mediator of the New Covenant in a far higher sense. Before God could righteously dispense the blessings of this covenant, the Lord Jesus had to die. Just as death alone puts a person's last will and testament into force, so the New Covenant had to be sealed with His blood."

Bill MacDonald

3) The Purposes of the Law and Promises of God Vs 21-25

3:21 “Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.”
* Is God contradicting Himself?

Paul says no, “may it never be!” God gave both the Law and promises, but for different purposes.

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*What is the purpose of each?

It was not the purpose of the Law to impart or give spiritual life. The purpose of the Law was to reveal God's righteous standards and restrain evil. The Law shows us how far short we fall from those standards.

As it says in Rom 3:20: "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

"The Law of Moses regulated the lives of the Jewish people, but it did not and could not provide spiritual life to the people."

Warren Wiersbe

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Dialysis machine



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In the same way a dialysis machine reminds the patient they have kidney disease, the law reminds us of the much greater and more serious disease of sin.

Like a dialysis machine that only provides temporary relief, the law was given to Israel as a temporary restraint against the effects of sin.

The Law could not impart righteousness and spiritual life.
If it could, why did Jesus have to die? As Paul said in Gal 2:21
“I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

But like a kidney transplant God's covenant with Abraham provided a complete cure with the coming of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ the Messiah.

There is a right and wrong use of the Law.
The right use of the Law is to reveal sin and our need for a Savior who is the only cure for our sin.
The wrong use of the Law is to try to be saved by keeping the Law which none of us could ever do!
The promise points us to Christ, the only One who can save us from our sin.

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3:22 “But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

The Greek for “shut up” means to enclose like a school of fish trapped in a net.
The ESV translation: “imprisoned everything under sin”
The NKJV translation: “confined all under sin.”

The Law was given to convict us of sin and point us to the promise of salvation for all who put their faith and trust in Christ.

Here we see the purposes of the Law and the Promise working together to lead us to faith in Christ

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3:23 “But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.”

Paul likens the Law to a jailer or prison guard keeping us under custody, confined by requirements that none of us could keep and cursed as a result.



24 “Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.”

Paul pictures the law as a tutor, who back then was a slave who was like a guardian taking the child to and from school. He would watch over the child, teaching them and at times discipling them.

1) “The Jews were not born through the Law, but rather were brought up by the Law. The ‘tutor’ was not the child’s father; he was the child’s guardian and disciplinarian. So, the Law did not give life to Israel; it regulated life.”

2) “The work of the guardian was preparation for the child’s maturity. Once the child came of age, he no longer needed the guardian. So the Law was a preparation for the nation of Israel until the coming of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ.” Warren Wiersbe

3:25 “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” The Law was the tutor to lead us to Christ.

“The ultimate goal in God’s program was Christ’s coming. The Law performed its purpose: the Savior has come and the “guardian” is no longer needed. The Law cannot change the promise, and the Law is not greater than the promise. But the Law is not contrary to the promise: they work together to bring sinners to the Savior.”

Warren Wiersbe

This is key to understanding the relationship between the Law and the Promise.

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“In all of life there are really only two choices: God’s promises or our performance; the cure of the cross or the curse of the Law.
This is a decision initially made pertaining to our salvation, but it is also one which is persistently made regarding our sanctification. May God give us the grace to choose the cross over the curse.”

Bob Deffinbaugh

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Some Takeaways:

1) The Law has performed its purpose to reveal sin and our need for a Savior. That Savior, the Promised Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ has come and the “guardian” of the Law is no longer needed!

* Does this mean that Christians are lawless? No!

We are no longer under the Mosaic law but the law of Christ which actually is a higher standard.

Jesus spoke to this in His Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5.

2) With Christ's commandments come His enablement and His promises. 2 Peter 1:3,4:

"Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."