

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-22-14 AM NOTES  
"THE LAW AND THE PROMISE"  
GALATIANS 3:15-25  
#8 in Series, "Galatians: Living With Roots"

"Our faith is a logical faith and can be defended on rational grounds. While there are divine mysteries in the faith that no man can fully explain, there are also divine reasons that any sincere person can understand."  
—Warren Weirsbe

I. The Promise to Abraham (vv. 15-18)

Some biblical covenants are conditional and some are unconditional.

The covenant that God made with Abraham was unconditional.

The covenant that God made with Moses was conditional.

A. The Abrahamic Covenant Confirmed (v. 15)

**Galatians 3:15 (ESV)** "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."

**Genesis 12:3 (NKJV)** "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

**Genesis 15:4-7 (NKJV)** "<sup>4</sup>And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.' <sup>5</sup>Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' <sup>6</sup>And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. <sup>7</sup>Then He said to him, 'I *am* the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.'"

**Genesis 15:8 (NKJV)** "And he said, 'Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?'"

**Genesis 15:10a (NKJV)** "Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other..."

B. The Abrahamic Covenant's Focus (v. 16)

**Genesis 22:18a (NKJV)** "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed..."

In numerous other passages in the Old Testament, the word "seed" is singular (Genesis 4:25; 21:13; 2 Samuel 7:12).

**Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)** "And I 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."

**2 Corinthians 1:20a (ESV)** "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him."

C. The Abrahamic Covenant's Timing (v. 17)

**Galatians 3:17 (ESV)** "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."

D. The Abrahamic Covenant's Promise (v. 18)

II. The Purpose of the Law (vv. 19-25)

A. To Probe the Soul for Sin (vv. 19-22)

1. The Law and Its Lessons (v. 19a)

**Galatians 3:19a (J. B. Phillips Paraphrase)** “[The Law] was an addition made to underline the existence and extent of sin until the arrival of the seed to whom the promise referred...”

“The true function and the chief and proper use of the law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God.”  
—Martin Luther

**Romans 3:19-20 (NKJV)** “<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

*Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfill the 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.*

—Augustus Toplady (1776)

2. The Law and Its Limitations (vv. 19b-20)

B. To Prepare the Soul for Salvation (vv. 23-25)

**Galatians 3:23 (NIV)** “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.”

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 6-22-14 AM

“THE LAW AND THE PROMISE”

GALATIANS 3:15-25

#8 in Series, “Galatians: Living with Roots”

The Scriptures that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write consistently make use of solid logic to present truth and refute error. Let me say a few words about logical thinking. Our perfect, all knowing, all wise God is never illogical. Certainly there are some truths in Scripture that go beyond our ability to fully understand (such truths as the Trinity and the fact that Jesus is fully God and fully man). Warren Weirsbe gives a good summary. “Our faith is a logical faith and can be defended on rational grounds. While there are divine mysteries in the faith that no man can fully explain, there are also divine reasons that any sincere person can understand.” [Warren Weirsbe, *Be Free*, Page 75]. Paul never shied away from using logic and reason to proclaim the truth and confront satanically energized error. This is what he is doing in our text and indeed all through the book of Galatians.

Let me set the context of today's passage and really the whole book of Galatians. After Paul had planted several churches in province of Galatia, he taught them the fundamentals of the faith, appointed elders, and then he moved on to other places where the Gospel was not known to plant other churches. The foundation that Paul laid in each church was the foundation of the Gospel. He knew that these churches must be rooted in the Gospel. As we have seen in this series, there is the Gospel for the lost (how to be saved, how to be righteous before God), and there is the Gospel for the saved (our union with Christ which establishes our true identity and our freedom in Christ). After Paul left Galatia, a group of false teachers from Jerusalem came in (called Judaizers) and said that in order to be righteous before God (accepted by God) these Gentiles had to keep the law – they must all keep the ceremonial laws, the dietary laws, the feast days, and the moral law of God. The Gentiles in the Galatian church were listening, pondering, being drawn by the faulty logic, and considering trying to add the works of the law to the Gospel of grace. Paul is shocked, hurt, and extremely angry with these churches. After calling them foolish and telling them that they were acting like “bewitched” people, he begins laying out the logical case for **a grace rooted life which results in freedom** and the rejection of a law rooted life (legalism) that brings bondage. In making the logical case, Paul covers almost 2,000 years of Old Testament history. He goes from Abraham to Moses to Jesus.

In verses 1-14, Paul has proven from the Old Testament Scriptures that Abraham was justified (declared righteous, accepted by God) by faith and not by the law. Paul then shows them that every other person (Jew or Gentile) is also saved by grace through faith just as Abraham was. The only difference is that on this side of the cross, the object of our faith is much more clearly defined. On the BC side of the cross, the faith looked forward to God's provision for sin. On this side of the cross, our faith looks back to the cross to Christ who **has** paid for the curse of sin. In today's text, Paul is anticipating or answering an argument already being voiced by these false teachers (Judaizers). They would say, “We accept the fact that Abraham and His descendents were saved by faith, but several hundred years later when God gave the law to Moses at Sinai, the way man is saved was changed. After Moses, the keeping of the law (or at least adding the law to faith) became the means of salvation. On this side of the giving of the law, faith is fine, but it is the keeping of the law that makes us righteous or accepted by God.” Here is a summary of Paul's answer to this false teaching that was deceiving the Galatians. The covenant promise that God gave to Abraham was an unconditional, unending covenant that relies only on God's faithfulness. The covenant with Moses was a conditional covenant that was dependent on man's faithfulness. To Abraham God said “I will” and to Moses God said “You must”. Under the law the emphasis is on man's faithfulness, but the covenant promise to Abraham focuses on God's faithfulness. If that is not clear, hopefully it will be as we go through these verses.

Let me bring this down to 2014 for Christians today. How does the law (especially the moral law) apply to us? What does it mean that we are not under the law? Aren't we supposed to live a holy life that involves no murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting? Aren't we still to honor father and mother? If no one is saved by keeping the law, why did God give the law? If we are made righteous before God by faith alone in Christ alone, does the law of God have any relevance at all to those in Christ? We will try to answer these questions and more as we go through this text.

## I. The Promise to Abraham (V15-18)

As we go through this passage you are going to see the word “covenant” a lot. The word itself is a general term for a binding agreement. There are two types of biblical covenants. Some biblical covenants are conditional and some are unconditional. A conditional covenant takes the form, “I will if you will...” An unconditional covenant takes the form, “I will”. The covenant that God made with Abraham was unconditional. In essence, an unconditional covenant and a promise are the same. Sometimes it is called God's covenant and sometimes it is called the promise to Abraham. The covenant that God made with Moses when He gave the law at Mount Sinai after the Exodus from slavery in Egypt was a conditional covenant. If the Israelites would obey the law, God would bless them. If they did not obey the law, they would be under the curse of the law (which we looked at in the last message. **Paul is building a case for**

**the fact that the conditional covenant with Moses did not nullify or replace the unconditional covenant (the promise) that He gave to Abraham.**

**A. The Abrahamic Covenant Confirmed (V15)**

What Paul is going to do is to build a case that the covenant (promise) God made with Abraham is irrevocable and unchangeable. Paul begins his argument by taking an example from everyday life. The ESV is clearer. **Galatians 3:15 (ESV)** “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.” The example that Paul has in mind here is what we would call a last will and testament. After a will is duly and legally made, it is binding once the one who made the will dies. That is true, even if circumstances change. Suppose a man had 2 children and one was very wealthy and the other was just “dirt poor”. If the Father leaves 75% to the poor child and only 25% to the successful child and the day after the father dies the poor child wins the lottery and the wealthy child has a legal judgment against him that takes all of his wealth taken away, the will cannot be changed. The formerly poor child who is now “filthy rich” will get 75% of the assets and the formerly wealthy child who is now impoverished will get 25%. The new conditions do not change the will. As we saw in the last message, God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham. We see the groundwork for the covenant in **Genesis 12:3 (NKJV)** “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” We are told that the covenant specifically involved one of Abraham’s descendents that would come through Isaac (Jesus Christ) in Genesis 22:18 (we will look at that detail of the covenant a little later in the message). The clearest statement of the covenant is in **Genesis 15:4-7 (NKJV)** <sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ <sup>5</sup> Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ <sup>6</sup> And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. <sup>7</sup> Then He said to him, ‘*I am* the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.’” When Abraham asks God in **Genesis 15:8 (NKJV)** “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it”, the Lord ratified or confirmed the covenant in a way it was commonly done in mid-eastern culture. God tells him to get a cow, a goat, a ram, a dove and a pigeon. Abram was familiar with what he was to do with them. He cut them in two and **Genesis 15:10a (NKJV)** “Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other...” Again, that sounds strange to us, but in Abraham’s day that was the way the covenant was ratified. It was actually a graphic way of saying, “If I break this covenant, I deserve to die just as these animals have died”. Ordinarily both parties would walk between the slain animals to ratify the covenant. Here is something amazing about this covenant between God and Abraham. Abraham never walks between the halves. Only God ratified the covenant. Why? It was because this was an unconditional covenant that God promises to fulfill without any conditions being fulfilled by Abraham. The obligation was on God Himself. Paul’s point in Galatians 3:15 is that the promise to Abraham was not nullified or amended by the conditional covenant with Moses. God’s covenant with Abraham was permanent and unchangeable.

**B. The Abrahamic Covenant’s Focus (V16)**

Perhaps you have been listening to all of this and are wondering what in the world does all of this have to do with us? After all, Abraham was the Father of the Jews and most of us are not ethnic Jews. Paul tells us in verse 16 that this covenant was all about Christ and therefore it is relevant to us and it is superior to the covenant with Moses. Watch Paul build his case from the Old Testament Scripture. Those who don’t believe that every word of the Scripture is inspired would not have gotten along very well with Paul. He builds his whole point on the grammar of one Old Testament word, “seed”. The Greek word translated “seed” is *sperma* and it refers to offspring or descendents. In verse 16 Paul is referring to Genesis 22:18. In this verse, God is giving more detail concerning the Abrahamic covenant when He says to Abraham in **Genesis 22:18a (NKJV)** “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...” Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says that “seed” is singular. In Hebrew as in English, “seed” can be singular or plural, but Paul says that here it is singular. Remember that he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In numerous other passages in the Old Testament, the word “seed” is singular (Genesis 4:25;

21:13; 2 Samuel 7:12). We see the singular “seed” used earlier in Genesis obviously referring to Jesus in **Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)**, the first prophecy in the Bible. “And I 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.” This one descendent (seed) of Abraham through which all the nations of the earth would be blessed is Jesus Christ. **2 Corinthians 1:20a (ESV)** “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.” That would certainly include this promise to Abraham! The ultimate fulfillment and focus of the Abrahamic covenant is Christ.

Watch the logic that Paul is building. The covenant promise to Abraham is superior to the covenant with Moses because it was an unconditional covenant and it pointed to Christ and was fulfilled because of Christ and His cross.

#### C. The Abrahamic Covenant’s Timing (V17)

This is a short but a powerful point. I think that this verse is a little easier to understand in the ESV. **Galatians 3:17 (ESV)** “This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward [speaking of the Abrahamic covenant], does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.” Because the Abrahamic covenant was made by God and because it was unconditional, the giving of a conditional covenant could not cancel it. The promise to Abraham and the law given to Moses are radically different. They operate on entirely different principles. The covenant with Abraham centers on faith, and the covenant with Moses centers on works. The covenant with Abraham focuses on what God will do, and the covenant with Moses focuses on what man must do. The fact that the unconditional, irrevocable Abrahamic covenant came first is proof positive that it takes precedence over the conditional Mosaic covenant

#### D. The Abrahamic Covenant’s Promise (V18)

The inheritance here in verse 18 is the ultimate blessing of God to man – salvation. By definition, an inheritance cannot be earned. It is simply received because it has been promised. To work for that which is freely given is illogical. The argument is that if the Law of Moses came as a way of salvation, then God would have broken His unconditional covenant with Abraham. God would have decided that we didn’t need a Savior after all and now we could earn salvation by keeping the law, by our own works. If salvation comes through the works of the law, it would not add to the promise (the unconditional covenant); it do away with it all together! The very concepts of promise and law cannot mix; they are totally incompatible and mutually exclusive. Either salvation comes by grace or works, but it cannot be both. Either sanctification (spiritual growth) comes by grace or by the works of the flesh, but it cannot be both.

## II. The Purpose of the Law (V19-25)

If the law cannot justify us (make us righteous before God), Why did the Lord give the law to Moses? To use sports language, “Are the law and the promise on the same team?” The purpose of the Law is two-fold.

### A. To Probe the Soul for Sin (V19-22)

#### 1. The Law and Its Lessons (V19a)

The J. B. Phillips Paraphrase renders verse 19 this way: “[The Law] was an addition made to underline the existence and extent of sin until the arrival of the seed to whom the promise referred...” That’s good! Martin Luther said, “The true function and the chief and proper use of the law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God.” [Quoted in Phillip Ryken, *The Reformed Expository Commentary on Galatians*, page 132]. **The law was not given to show us how to be saved; it was given to show us how much we need to be saved.** The law is God’s plumb line to show us how crooked our lives are. There is still a need for the proclaiming of the moral law of God. John Wesley used to say that he preached law until people were in such desperate straits that they were ready to hear the marvelous grace of God. **Romans 3:19-20 (NKJV)** “<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every

mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.”

One of the old songs of the faith [“Rock of Ages”] proclaimed the purpose of the law clearly.

*Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfill the 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.*

- Augustus Toplady (1776)

## 2. The Law and Its Limitations (V19b-22)

The promise from God to Abraham came directly from God. The Law was mediated by angels and then to Moses and then to the people. The promise was so precious to God that He gave it directly to Abraham. Verse 20 is difficult to interpret. Probably it means that a mediator (one who stands between two parties) is needed only when more than one party is involved in a covenant. God came directly to Abraham because it was an unconditional covenant that only involved God. [Most of this interpretation of verse 19b-20 is from John MacArthur's commentary on Galatians].

Verses 21-22 tell us that the law was not given to “impart life” (NIV), otherwise we could become righteous through the law and the cross would have been in vain, unnecessary. The Scripture (that reveals the law) “confines all under sin” (V22a). The law is limited. It reveals sin; it exposes sin; it reveals our inability to overcome sin, but it cannot deliver us from sin or forgive us for sin.

What is the purpose of the law? It is to probe the soul for sin.

### B. To Prepare the Soul for Salvation (V23-25)

Before salvation, the law was like a guard that held us prisoner. I like the NIV on **Galatians 3:23 (NIV)** “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.” Prior to salvation we were all prisoners of sin under a guard who kept us from true freedom. The law is like a guard that holds us prisoner.

Verse 23 gives us another analogy to help us understand the law. The law is our “tutor”. Let's make sure that we understand what that means. The word “tutor” doesn't mean what we mean by that word. A tutor was a trusted Roman slave of high character in a wealthy family who had one primary purpose. He was to be charged with bringing up his master's sons to be disciplined and to get them to school. The tutor was not primarily a teacher. His task was discipline (pictures of them often showed them with a switch in their hand). He was also charged with teaching the child morals and ethics. But primarily, the tutor was a disciplinarian who punished behavior that was below the acceptable standard. Paul tells us that the law is our tutor. The law has no mercy, no “wiggle room”. The law reveals God's standards and stands over us with the rod of discipline. There comes a day when the tutor's job is done. The child knows what is right, what is required. The problem is that the tutor, law can't change the child's heart and give the ability to do what is right. Only Christ can do that. The law is our tutor to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith and changed into a new creation who now desires to please the one who has saved us, freed us by His amazing grace. There is no more need for the law standing over us to whack us to make us obey. We long to obey and now through the Spirit of Christ in us, we have the power to obey what our new nature desires to do. Praise God for the Gospel!