

THE LAW AND THE PROMISE

Galatians 3:15-22

Intro: What is the relationship between the laws of God---and the promises of God?

- That's the primary question facing us in Galatians.
- The Galatians had come to Christ on the basis of a promise.
- Paul had told them that God promised to forgive their sins---and would become their friend---if they would express faith in His Son.
- If they would acknowledge that they had sinned---and were unable to pay for that sin---but that Jesus could pay for their sin---and in fact had done so on the cross.
- And if they would spiritually join Him on the cross---die to self and bury the old man in the grave of baptism---and let Him live His life through them---they could live with Him forever.
- That was the gospel---the good news.
- And it was based on what Christ had done---not on what they had done.
- That's not to say---however---that they had to do nothing.
- Obviously---they had to accept the offer---and allow Christ to come into their life.
- Doing so would change them dramatically---it would alter their behavior in many ways.
- But they didn't earn God's friendship by agreeing to accept His offer.

- By accepting the offer they merely demonstrated that they had faith---that they trusted the one making the offer.
- And that they wanted to receive the promises made available through it.
- So the Galatians had come to God through faith in His promises.
- Promises made available through His Son.
- Then the Judaizers came to town---and said---“Fine---but don't forget the Law.
- God has made some promises---but He's also made some laws.”
- And they convinced the Galatians that they had to obey the Law---to receive the promises.
- That made sense to the Galatians
- And they began searching out God's laws---with a little help from their new found friends.
- And they tried to obey them.
- The men were making appointments for their circumcisions.
- The Ten Commandments were tacked on the wall.
- And they began watching what they ate---and with whom they fellowshiped.
- In short---they became Jewish.
- They entered into the same kind of relationship with God that the Jews had had for 1500 years.
- And they felt good about it.
- They felt special---they felt religious.

- Paul---on the other hand---was horrified by what they had done.
- In fact---he said they had been bewitched!
- By going back to the Law---they had said in effect that God's grace wasn't sufficient.
- That what Christ did on the cross was not enough.
- And that if a man really wanted a relationship with God---he would still have to earn it through obedience to the Law.
- The problem with that---of course---is that no one can do it.
- No one can perfectly obey the Law.
- And since no one can do so---the Law ends up condemning us.
- It doesn't give life.
- It puts everyone under a curse.
- The question then---is why was it given?
- Paul has already made it clear that Abraham came into a relationship with God by faith---by trusting in the promises of God.
- So why did God then give Moses the Law?
- And what affect did the Law have on the promise?
- The Judaizers argued that since the Law came after the promise---that the promise was conditioned by the Law.

- Paul---however---is going to counter their argument---in classic rabbinical style---and show the real reason the Law was given.
- Let's see if we can follow his thinking---and come to a proper understanding of the relationship between the Law and the promise.
- Paul begins by making it clear that...

I. THE LAW DIDN'T CHANGE THE PROMISE Galatians 3:15-18

- "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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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."
- Paul changes the tone of his letter here.
- Rather than continuing to refer to them as foolish Galatians---he calls them brethren.

- In spite of their poor theology---they were still his brothers in Christ.
- And he knew that they didn't understand the implications of what they had bought into.
- So he begins explaining it---in human terms.
- Using an illustration from life---that he knew they would understand.
- He asked them to think about a covenant---a contract---a will.
- And he pointed out that once such a document is ratified---it cannot be changed---unless all parties agree.
- One person can't set it aside---or add conditions to it.
- And God entered into such a covenant with Abraham---conditioned only by his faith.
- Because of his faith---God would bless Him---befriend him---give him an everlasting homeland---and bless all nations through him.
- And Abraham agreed to the terms of the covenant.
- The covenant was made between Abraham and God---but like a will---the covenant extended beyond Abraham himself.
- It was for Abraham---and his seed.
- Now the term "seed"---when used in this context---refers to a man's offspring.
- And the Jews were obviously Abraham's seed.
- They therefore insisted that the promises made to Abraham were promises made to them.
- And the Judaizers had convinced the Gentiles in Galatia that if they wanted to benefit from those promises---they would have to become Jews.
- Paul's argument against them is a little tricky for us to follow---because he resorts to some rabbinic hair-splitting.
- He ignores the fact that the word "seed"---when referring to someone's offspring---is actually a collective noun.
- And then makes a point out of the fact that God didn't say the promise was to Abraham's seeds---but to his seed.
- And that ultimately Abraham's seed was a reference to Christ---the one through whom Abraham's promise would be made available to all nations.
- Now we don't have to buy his rabbinic logic to understand the point he is making---which is simply that the promise to bless all nations finds its fulfillment in Christ.
- And that it's not a promise to all of Abraham's seed---or seeds.
- He then points out that the Law---which he said came four hundred and thirty years later---does not invalidate the covenant previously ratified.
- Now---the 430-year figure does create a bit of a problem.
- According to a timeline that can be created from records given in Genesis---the children of Israel went to Egypt 215 years after the promise was given to Abraham---and according to Exodus 12:40 they lived there for 430 years.

- That gives us 645 years from the promise to the Law---which obviously creates a numerical discrepancy.
- But it has been long noted---and several reasonable explanations have been given.
- So the issue can be left for the scholars to debate---and need not cause us undue concern.
- The point Paul is making is simply that the Law came hundreds of years after the promise---and therefore cannot be a condition to it.
- That God didn't give a promise to Abraham---and then qualify it through Moses.
- That He didn't tack on some conditions to His promise---several hundred years after the fact.
- Now---that's not to suggest there can't be conditions in a covenant.
- If the original covenant contained conditions---those conditions remain---but they don't change the nature of the covenant.
- They don't change a promise into something less.
- Our faith-only brethren apparently overlook this point.
- They insist that to condition our reception of God's gift by anything---baptism in particular---is to reduce the promise into something earned through obedience.
- But baptism is not a work that merits salvation.
- It's merely the way God has instructed us to accept the gift He wants to give us.
- It's the way we enter into the covenant with God.

- And---contrary to the assertions of some---God's promises are always conditional.
- You can almost always find an "if" within the context---if you look for it.
- And God's promises to Abraham were conditional.
- In the 12th chapter of Genesis we find God's first words to Abraham were---"Go forth...and I will bless."
- If Abraham had not gone forth---he wouldn't have been blessed.
- And in the 17th chapter God says---"Walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you."
- Obviously God wasn't insisting that Abraham be sinless in order to enter into a covenant with Him.
- That would be impossible.
- What God is insisting---is that Abraham not violate the conditions of the covenant---that he be faithful to them.
- And one of the conditions was circumcision.
- If Abraham wanted to accept the offer of friendship with God---he had to acknowledge it through circumcision.
- A physical act that would set him apart from those not in a covenant relationship with God.
- Now---the Jews would eventually forget the real significance of circumcision.
- And Paul will argue that what God really wanted wasn't a physical circumcision---but a circumcised heart.

- But that didn't invalidate the need for physical circumcision as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant.
- And those who today insist that physical baptism is not important---that God's only concern is spiritual immersion into Him---are making an assertion that is not supported by Scripture.
- If God made baptism a condition of the New Covenant---we have no right to change the terms of the covenant.
- We can no more take conditions away from the covenant---than the Judaizers could add conditions to it.
- And---contrary to what they were telling the Galatians---the Law was not added as a condition to the promise.
- It was added to bring about fulfillment of the promise.

II. THE LAW WAS FULFILLED BY THE PROMISE Galatians 3:19-20

- "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.
- Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one."
- Paul says the Law was given because of transgressions.
- And while we can't be absolutely certain what he meant by that---I believe he's saying that Abraham's descendants were not abiding by the conditions of the covenant.
- They were transgressing.

- They weren't expressing the same kind of faith and trust in God that Abraham had expressed.
- They weren't acting like friends of God.
- They may have assumed they were friends of God---because of their relationship to Abraham.
- But in reality---they had ceased being God's friend.
- They weren't listening to Him---they weren't trusting Him.
- And their behavior made it obvious they really weren't in a relationship with Him.
- In fact---they had been cut off from access to God---but didn't know it.
- So God commissioned angels to work through a mediator---Moses---to make them aware of the fact that they were not in fellowship with a holy God.
- And it was the Law that made them keenly aware of their inadequacies.
- It pointed out just how far they had transgressed against the will of God.
- It was the Law---in fact---that made them into transgressors.
- Because you can't actually transgress the Law---until the Law has been given.
- You can fall short by not meeting an expected standard---but you cannot be a transgressor until the standard is written down in black and white.
- Or engraved on stone.

- And Abraham's descendants had strayed so far from the standard of faith and trust that he had established---that it was necessary to write it down.
- Only then would they realize just how far they drifted out of fellowship with God.
- The Law---therefore---was given to make us realize where we stand in relation to God---to make us realize just how far we have transgressed against Him.
- It wasn't given as the basis whereby we could gain a relationship with God.
- All it did was make it painfully obvious how out of fellowship with Him we are.
- And since a relationship with God can never be earned---it can only be granted---God promised to make it possible through Abraham's seed.
- That through the promised seed---God would fulfill the promise.
- That He would fulfill His promise to make His blessings available to all peoples---through His Son.
- And since the fulfillment came through His Son---there was no need for a mediator.
- No need for a Moses to stand between God and man---and try to bring us back into a relationship.
- Until God fulfilled His promise through His Son---through Himself---there was a need for a mediated Law.
- A law that would make us realize just how alienated we were from God.

- But once the promise was fulfilled---and we entered into a relationship with God on the basis of faith in what He did for us through His Son---the Law was no longer needed---it had served its purpose.
- It led us to the promise.

III. THE LAW LED US TO THE PROMISE Galatians 3:21-22

- "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.
- 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."
- Is the Law contrary to the promises of God? Absolutely not!
- The Law is not an alternative way to God.
- If the Law had been able to impart life---if man could gain eternal life through obedience to the Law---then righteousness would have been based on the Law.
- And all would have to come to God through the Law.
- But the Law made it obvious that no one could come to God through law---no one could obey every law of God.
- And the more one would try---the more frustrated he would become---and the more obvious his imperfections would be.

- That's not a failure of the Law---that's what it's supposed to do.
- The Law---as revealed in Scripture---is intended to shut all men under sin.
- To condemn them---and make them see how out of fellowship they are with a holy God.
- And that's what the Law did.
- The Law showed us that it is impossible to earn a standing of righteousness before God.
- It therefore made us eager to accept the promise.
- The promise that by trusting in what Christ did for us on the cross---God would consider us to be acceptable.
- The Law led us to the promise---because it closed off all other approaches to God.
- It made it obvious that all roads to God were dead ends---except for one.
- That the only way to God is through His Son---the promised seed of Abraham.
- So the Law forced us to trust in the Seed of Abraham.
- To trust in the promises made to Him---and made available through Him.
- The Law made us realize that Jesus is the only way to God.

- So what's the relationship between the Law and the promise?
- The Law led us to the promises made available through Christ.
- So no---we don't have to fulfill the requirements of the Law to enter into a relationship with God---or to maintain a relationship with Him.
- Our relationship is given to us on the basis of a promise.
- However---as we've already noted---that's not to say there aren't conditions to the promise.
- Our covenant with God had some conditions when it was offered.
- And we have been told what we must do to accept the offer today.
- And if we accept His offer---He expects us to demonstrate our relationship with Him through expressions of our faith.
- And through the holy lifestyle He makes possible through His Spirit.
- But doing so is not earning salvation.
- It's merely accepting the terms of the covenant He wants to make with us.
- If we accept the terms---we can trust Him to do what He has promised to do.