

Galatians 3:15-22

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. If you want to turn to Galatians chapter 3, we're going to read Galatians chapter 3, starting!

So there's a stack of Bibles at the back, if you'd like to go and pick one up. We will be looking at the text as we go along, referring back to it, looking at verses there.

Okay, so Galatians chapter 3, reading from verse 15.

Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say, and to seeds, meaning many people, but, and to your seed, meaning one person, who is Christ.

[1 : 16] What I mean is this. The law introduced 430 years later does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise. But God, in his grace, gave it to Abraham through a promise.

Why then was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator.

A mediator, however, implies more than one party. But God is one. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?

Absolutely not. For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

[2 : 36] We're going to pause there for our reading, and I'm just going to pray and ask for God's help as we look at this passage this morning. Father, we thank you so much for your word.

Thank you that you have given it to us in a way that we can read and understand. And while often we will understand the words that we read, there is complexity.

Things seem foreign to us. We need your help in understanding what they mean, how they apply to our lives. And so, Lord, we pray now that your spirit would be working in us, working so that we would understand your word better and how it applies to each one of us.

So please teach us. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. The first ever telephone was made by, you know, Alexander Graham Bell back in the 1800s.

It was a bit of a race, I understand, to get the first patent in, and he was the first to do it. And this new invention allowed people to communicate when they weren't in the same room.

[4 : 01] Over long distances like had never been done before. And to be honest, when I was thinking about it, and maybe you have the same, growing up, this technology didn't seem so different from when it first began.

There were wires. The phone had to be in one place in the house. There were buttons. A handset. But then came the era of the smartphone.

The smartphone is everything that this first telephone wanted to be, and so much more. The era of telephone exchanges, wires, receivers.

But that era is finished. They're only for museums, history books, or maybe collectors. Because the era of the smartphone is here.

And that's revolutionized communication, and it's gone far beyond what the first telephone ever could have been. Well, let's take a little reminder of what our situation here in Galatians is.

[5 : 17] There were people who were insisting that Christians would conform to the Jewish law. There were people insisting that Christians would conform to Jewish law.

The Jewish law was being elevated to a place it did not belong, and Paul is addressing that. One writer helpfully explained that there were people reading their Bibles wrong.

They were reading them the wrong way around. They were looking at Scripture through the lens of the law. And that's what Paul is trying to address.

The first thing he comes to say is the promise came first. The promise came first. Well, we all know that age-old question, don't we?

Which came first? The chicken or the egg? Well, chickens hatch from eggs, and eggs come from chickens. So which way around is it? And there's been much debate, but to be honest, the order isn't vital when we affirm that God made chickens.

[6 : 36] That's good enough for me. But the order of law and promise is vital. It sets the foundation for how we understand salvation and is the basis for how we enter God's family.

The promise came first. Look at our verse 15. It says, Let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been established, so it is in this case.

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say, and to seeds, meaning many people, but unto your seed, meaning one person, who is Christ.

What I mean is this, the law introduced 430 years later does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise. But God, in his grace, gave it to Abraham through a promise.

[7 : 52] Paul here uses an illustration of the importance of the order, and he speaks about a human contract. Maybe you've had the experience of a family member or relative who has passed away, and they left behind a will.

And in their will, they left you an inheritance that they decided that they wanted to leave behind something for you. And that means from the time that the will had been made, a promise was made to you, whether you were aware or not, that at the time of their death, you would be given an inheritance.

No one could come along and change that will afterwards. No one could add extra conditions after the will was made. You are entitled to that inheritance because of the promise of the will.

Once it was established, it could not be changed. And that is how God established his covenant with Abraham, by a promise.

Even though the law was given afterwards, it didn't change the promise. You see, the promise is the foundation.

[9 : 15] The covenant with Abraham was established with promises from God. Listen to some of these promises way back in Genesis 12 that God gives to Abraham.

These are the promises that Paul is speaking about. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. Listen to Abraham's response we see in Genesis 15.

Where is it gone? Verse 18. He responds through faith. Abraham believed God, and he credited to him as righteousness.

It was always about faith, and it still is about faith. Look at the second part of verse 18, back in Galatians.

[10 : 26] But God, in his grace, gave it to Abraham through a promise. It was always about grace, and it's still about grace.

Don't be deceived into thinking or believing that we must uphold, or that we are bound to certain laws or practices.

Let's get one thing clear. Christians are not bound by any Old Testament laws.

None of them. The law of Moses was given to the people of Israel for a limited time until Christ came.

And Christ has fulfilled the law. No more need of it, because Christ has fulfilled it. It's done. Like prophecy, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

[11 : 35] The prophecy is fulfilled. It's done. Jesus fulfilled the law. He lived perfectly. He died as our sacrifice.

He rose to life and has sent his spirit. The law is done. Now, of course, God's law is still important in that it is part of his revelation to us.

It shows us his character. It highlights how we fall short. No one can live up to his standard. That all have sinned.

But we're not bound by this law of Moses. What we are commanded to do by Jesus is now to walk by the Spirit.

Loving God and loving others. And as we bear fruit by the Spirit. That's it. And we can live with a weight lifted off our shoulders.

[12:40] This is freedom. And as we go through the book of Galatians, we realize we need to move away from legal or religious obligations and towards freedom in the Spirit.

Freedom to love God and love others. Because what comes first? The promise. The promise comes first.

And that should shape the way that we understand salvation and God's Word. I said earlier on that Paul was responding to people who were reading their Scripture, their Bible, the wrong way around. So how do we understand the Bible? Do we understand it through the law? Do we look at the Bible as a collection of rules?

That I'll open it today and I'll see which command God is asking me to follow. Or which binding thing He needs me to do.

[13:49] Or do we read it through the promise? Not in light of the law. So what we need as we read the Bible is we need promise glasses.

We need to put our glasses of the promise on as we read the Bible. So as we pick it up and we open a passage in Leviticus and we read about regulations for sacrifices and food that can be eaten and cannot be eaten.

Well we need our promise glasses. We need to read that through the promise. We need to remember that the promise came before this.

And this law was given for a specific time, a specific purpose, and the promise remains.

And now as I read about these regulations or about these laws, how can I learn about God? Who He is? How can I learn about how His people responded to Him?

[15:01] Did they see the promise? Were they living in it? Or we pick up one of the prophets and we look at Jonah. And we see Jonah sent to Nineveh on a task from God.

Well we need to put on our promise glasses. Because we won't find in their rules we must live by. Rather God's revelation of who He is.

And His call to people to obey and repent and respond in faith. Or the New Testament. We look at Acts.

We come across ways in which the early church was doing something. Well with our promise glasses on, these are not rules or laws to be bound by.

But the promise of blessing by faith is first. And then we can live out that faith and community in the way that God encourages us and teaches us to do.

[16:05] Guided by Scripture and the Spirit. The promise is the promise. The promise is the foundation and is not changed by the law that followed.

We see Paul highlighting that. In verse 18. If the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise.

But he said the inheritance was given to Abraham through a promise. So let's remember our faith, our salvation, God's word is founded on promise.

On grace. And on faith. Well you might be asking, well what was the point of the law? If this promise is there and established, who needed this law?

Well Paul was expecting that question. He knew you would ask. Look at verse 19. He says, why then was the law given at all?

[17:14] Well the law was given because of sin. Read on verse 19. It was added because of transgressions. Added because of transgressions.

Until the seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator however implies more than one party.

But God is one. The law was given because of sin. Because of transgressions. Because the people walked away from God.

You see sin was already there. Sin entered the world right at the very beginning. Back in Genesis 3. And the law is given after the promise.

Revealing sinfulness in people. Seeking to constrain and help to rein sin in. It's given to govern and guide behavior.

[18 : 22] Does anyone here have or had family rules for your kids? Do you have family rules? Well we have some family rules.

And we probably have lots of family rules. And to be honest they're probably not as clear as they should be. We probably create new rules every day for the kids. But maybe be helpful to have some clear family rules.

Does anyone here have no rules in your house? Anything goes. Probably not. Well if you can imagine a situation where a family had no rules.

Do you think that would mean that there would be no misbehaving from the kids? That they could just do what they like? Perfect behavior. I don't think so.

Sin is already here. But as you introduce some rules. You can identify rule breaking. The rule helps to highlight bad behaviors.

[19 : 28] It helps to guide behavior. But what's important is while rules guide behavior. They don't create it.

Do you think introducing new rules in your house will eliminate bad behavior? Of course not. It will highlight to your kids and maybe to you ways in which people misbehave.

That maybe they didn't even realize they were doing. It will help guide behavior in the future. But ultimately rules do not create good behavior.

Behavior. The law was given because of transgressions. Because of sin. To reveal sinfulness. To highlight that we do not meet God's standard.

And for Israel. They were given to constrain sin. They were given to govern this society that they had on Mount Sinai. The law that was given to this new society.

[20 : 36] It needed to function. It needed not to self-destruct. And God established laws and rules to govern. And it was given until the seed.

Do you see that in verse 19? It was added because of transgressions. Until the seed. It was a limited time.

Like that illustration that we had at the start. We are in the era of the smartphone. The original telephone established in the 1800s.

Has been superseded with something better. And the desired function continues. But in a far greater and effective way.

And similarly the era of the law is finished. It was given until the seed.

[21 : 41] That is until Christ had come. Remember promise came first. And what was established in the law. Has now been fulfilled by Christ.

And has been superseded by something far better. Someone far better. The spirit of God. Just a couple verses earlier in verse 14. We see that by faith. We might receive the promise. Of the spirit.

The spirit. The spirit. The spirit does. What the law. Never. Could do. The spirit. Is the one.

Who changes hearts. Who creates that desire. In us. To follow God. To love. Others.

[22 : 37] We now have the spirit. And we live. We live. Under the law of Christ. As we live by the spirit. God's law.

Is lived out. Naturally. Organically. Spiritually. Without needing rules and regulations. Because God's spirit. Is within us.

It's far greater. And more powerful. Than the law of Moses. Because God himself. Is in us. And shows us the way.

We should go. And so Paul. Is writing in the context. Where people. Are going back. To the era. Of the law. Imagine ditching your smartphone.

And going on. Ebay. Or something. And buying an original telephone. From the 19th century. Even if you could find one. Or if you could afford one. And that would be your only form.

[23 : 34] Of communication. People would think you're mad. You wouldn't be able to speak to anybody. Nobody could call you. It doesn't make any sense.

If you want to stay in touch with people. That this original telephone. Be your only means of communication. Although. Not having a smartphone. Might be a good idea.

It's madness. To go back. To the era. Of the law. And to look at the law of Moses. And to say. These are the rules.

I must follow. It's madness. That's what Paul's saying. How can you do this. When the spirit has come. It's now the era.

Of the spirit. The promise. Is received. Through faith. In Christ. And maybe you're wondering about this.

[24 : 33] Interesting. Couple of words. In verse. 20. End of 19 and 20. That the law was given through angels. And entrusted. To a mediator.

The promise. I think what Paul is doing. Is he's highlighting. The superiority. Of the promise. Because God himself.

Gave the promise to Abraham. And he highlights that the law. He says it was given through angels. Through a mediator. Who's Moses.

Given to the people. That's a far. Lower. Covenant promise. Than this promise. Direct. From God. To Abraham.

The law. Given for a limited time. To a nation. The promise. Given directly by God. To all nations.

[25 : 30] For all time. It is the era. Of the spirit. The promise. Received by faith. In Christ.

So finally. Maybe you're asking another question. Do these two things. Are they just. Opposed. To one another.

That's what Paul asks. Look at verse 21. Is the law therefore. Opposed. To the promises. Of God. Verse 21.

Absolutely not. The law. Condemned. The promise. Brings life.

The law condemned. The promise. Brings life. Paul says. If a law could have been given. To bring life. Then he says.

[26 : 31] Righteousness. Would certainly have come. By the law. The law. Cannot. Bring life. In fact.

Through the law. The world. Is a prisoner. To sin. Verse 22. Scripture. Has locked up. Everything. Under the control of sin. So that what was promised. Being given through faith in Jesus Christ. Might be given. To those who believe. The world is a prisoner.

To sin. The law. Condemns. The law. Condemns the world. The world. Is locked up. The law.

The law shows us. We need the promise. We need. This promise. We're in prison. We're in chains.

[27 : 32] But the promise. Sets us free. And the law. It clarifies the function of the promise. To bring blessing.

Through faith. The law. Condemns. And the promise. Brings life. Adhering to this law of Moses.

Could never bring life. For the Israelites. They were God's people. Because of the promise. These promises given to Abraham.

That through his offspring. Through the seed. Jesus. All nations. Will be blessed. And that includes us. And through faith.

In Christ Jesus. What was promised. Might be given to us. This is the word.