

Relating to Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 October 2025

Preacher: David Skull

[0:00] I was open to Galatians chapter 3, verses 15 to 25, and we're going to explore these verses! which is part of Paul's argument flowing through the central chapters that our relationship with God, our justification, our rightness before God, isn't down to the works of the law or our performance.

It's down to the finished work of Christ, and it's down to God's gift of grace by which we respond to in faith. We're saved by grace through faith, not by works of the law. It's so important, getting to the heart of the Christian faith. Let's pray, and then I want to show you a couple of things, if that's all right. Father, thank you for bringing us together. Thank you for every dear person here, made in your image, whom you love. I ask that your word today from these verses would become alive in our hearts and souls, and that we really would hear your word, and you'd speak to us and shape us personally and as a church, I pray. Give me wisdom as I do that, and pray, Lord Jesus, that you would reign and rule through your word. We ask this for your glory. Amen.

Amen. Galatians chapter 3, from verse 15, page 1170 of the church bibles. But as we do that, in the middle of an argument, sometimes we can get lost in the argument with the details. So I do have a couple of things which I found quite helpful. I often think in pictures. So the first picture I've got, you can tell my standards of reading, is one of our children's Bible story books. This is called the Big Picture Story Bible. One of the joys over time, whether you work with children in the church or have your own children, is to keep reading through this storyline of the Bible. If we're going to understand Paul's argument in these verses, we're going to need to think about the storyline of the Bible. So the Bible is not just a volume of truth to believe, it is that. It's also an unfolding storyline of God's saving purposes in Jesus from Genesis to Revelation. So we're going to think of the Bible storyline in a few minutes, which will hopefully help us understand. The other thing is, so it's a bit like a youth children's talk, isn't it? It's something that I've had to use a little bit recently with our car, and that is a funnel. We've got a van that requires, add blue to the diesel, so I have to keep pouring in the jolly stuff all the time. I think it's clean, so don't worry about it. But a funnel, what has a funnel got to do with the passage that we've just read?

Well, it's a wonderful truth in the Bible that just that the Bible is a storyline of God's unfolding plans and purposes. So all God's promises, his plans and purposes kind of funnel down to the point. And what's the point? Well, who's the point? Well, it's Jesus. In these verses, you're going to see that the promises made to Abraham, way back in Genesis 12 and the other chapters in Genesis, about Abraham and his seed, were not just a physical promise about the land and blessing to Abraham's physical offspring, the people of Israel. But spiritually, it funneled all down to the true Israelites, as it were, Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham. So I want you to think about a funnel here.

[3:18] It's important for Paul's argument that all of God's promises funnel down to Jesus. And as God unites us to Jesus by faith, so we receive the benefit of all Jesus has done. So we've got a storyline and the funnel we're going to be thinking about as we go through. Okay, let's just look at Paul's argument, and then we'll think about the practical implications of that together. From verse, well, from chapter 3, verse 1, as you've been hearing through in the last few weeks, Paul has been continuing to defend the gospel, that the gospel is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not through our works. Completely freeing. It's amazing. But these people have been coming into the church in Galatia, as we know, and they were bringing in a sense of which if you're really going to be Christians, you've got to be serious about fulfilling

the Old Testament law. You've got to be a Jew and under the law of God, rather than trusting alone in Christ. And Paul saw that although that appealed in a religious sense, it was full of danger, because it took people away from the truth that we're right with God through Jesus alone, who is the fulfillment of the storyline of the Bible.

It all funnels down to him. So in verses 1 to 5, as you know, Paul appealed to Christian experience. He says, you know, you received the gift of the Spirit when you became Christians. All these things happened and miracles amongst you. They didn't happen because you had full obedience to the works of the law, but they happened because you heard the gospel with faith, and God works amongst you. That was your experience. And then, probably in the last week or so, you've been looking at verses 6 down to 14, where Paul goes right back to the Old Testament, and he gives six quotes from the Old Testament, kind of showing that it's always the case that salvation was through faith in God's gospel promises in Jesus.

believers are sons of Abraham. It's believers who are blessed along with Abraham. The works of the law, they just lead to a curse that you need to be saved from. The works of the law won't justify you.

They're not based on faith. God's solution has always been Christ. Christ sets us free from the curse of the law when we disobeyed God. And Christ has become a curse for us at the cross. And so in Jesus Christ, we can receive God's promised blessing that was promised to Abraham's seed. A relationship with God of justification, the gift of the Holy Spirit. So he bashes away all these six Old Testament quotes to show even the Old Testament taught this, if you look to the Old Testament through Jesus' lenses.

Now, from verse 15, Paul is continuing his argument. He's defending the gospel that it's about grace through faith, not through the works of the law. But now he's beginning to think about more about the storyline of the Bible, the storyline of the Bible. So we need to think about that a little bit together. The first thing he says in verses 15 to 18 is that when you think about the storyline of the Bible, God's gospel promises to Abraham in the book of Genesis came before the law was given to Moses at Sinai. So you've had a timeline, you know, Genesis, the creation of the world to Revelation. God's promises to Abraham came here.

[6:40] And then the law was given through Moses to Israel as they came out of Egypt here. And Jesus is here, and we're here, if that makes sense. But it's so important, says Paul, to realize that the promises came before the law was given in God's storyline of the Bible. There's more things you can say about the law and that kind of thing. But this is Paul's argument in these verses. And so he begins in verse 15 to think, just think about a human example, human covenant. So a covenant is like a promised agreement.

In his day, he says a human covenant in verse 15, a human covenant cannot be set aside or added to once it's been duly established or ratified. So once a human covenant was put into place, it couldn't be changed. It was set in stone. So it's not like today where we write a will, and then you maybe, you know, 15 years time, you might change the will because circumstances have changed. Our kind of promised agreements do change. If you think about it, you have your phone contract. You take your phone contract out. As soon as a better offer comes, you break the contract and go with the other offer.

You pay the fine and it's all fine. But the covenants or the promised agreements in Paul's day, where once they're made, they're set in stone. That's it. So he took that human example and he says, now think about two of these great promise arrangements in the Old Testament.

The promises given to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all nations. And then the covenant relationship that Israel had with Moses, through Moses at Sinai.

[8:26] Both of those set in stone, but one came before the other. And so if you're playing top trumps with Bible covenants, the promise to Abraham comes first, doesn't it?

It's the top trump. That's basically what he's saying in these verses. Look at verse 16. How much more is God's covenant with Abraham irrevocable? Because it contains the promises spoken to Abraham and his seed.

Look at verse 16. The promises that were spoken to Abraham and his seed, that's a quote from Genesis 13, is such a thing that they cannot be changed, but it happened before the law was given. Such an important set of promises. And Paul picks up on that word seed. So in order of importance, that comes first. It kind of trumps Moses and the law.

We'll think about that later. But Paul picks up on that word seed. It was a promise that was given to Abraham and his seed. So that word seed, in one sense, can mean, it's a collective word that can mean all those who physically came from Abraham.

[9:27] Abraham, his seed, his family that followed. It's one of those words that can either mean a collective group or it can mean a word individually. A seed or the seed, we would say.

It's still the word seed. And what Paul is saying here is that when the promises were made to Abraham and his seeds, ultimately it was funneling down to the single seed that is Jesus Christ. Okay? So God's promises to Abraham were to him and to his seed. And that's where you find the fulfillment of those promises in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And verse 17 tells us, well, when did that happen? When did God give these promises about the gospel, about Jesus to Abraham and his seed? It was before the law of Moses. You can see what he's doing.

Because these teachers were tempting the Galatians to go back to live under the law of Moses. Not just the moral, but the civil and the ceremonial aspects. He wanted them to be circumcised to show that they were truly in the family of God.

[10:31] And Paul says, no, we base our relationship with God on the promises to Abraham, which were fulfilled in Christ. And it came before the law of Moses.

So verse 17, 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, that's the great gospel promises of eternal life, the gift of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith. If the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise, the promise they've given to Abraham.

But God, in his grace, gave it to Abraham through a promise. He's kind of arguing the timeline arguments to say, look, what they're teaching you isn't a whole answer.

Our faith is based on the gospel which is found given to Abraham and his seed. So don't go back. Put yourself under circumcision or under the burden of the law of Moses to establish a relationship with God.

[11:41] That's not where you'll find your inheritance and your future. You've got to go back 430 years before that to the promises made to Abraham by the grace of God.

And those things are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Now, this is a little bit technical, isn't it? But it's so important to get the timeline right and to get these things right.

Because if you were to live under the promises to Abraham, fulfilled in Christ his seed, then you understand that your relationship with God is based not on your efforts.

It's based on God's promise. Okay? So the Christian life is about receiving and responding in obedience. But receiving. But if you're doing what these false teachers were saying, and you say, I've got to go back to fulfill all the Old Testament law to establish my relationship with God, including circumcision, then your relationship with God is about obedience as the basis of your relationship with God.

Of course, that's the horse and the cart, isn't it? The horse is grace and responding in faith, and the cart that follows it is loving, joyful, thankful obedience to God.

[12:58] But get it the wrong way around, and your relationship with God is in a complete mess. Because who can stand up under the law? None of us can, can we? In fact, we're told in verse 18 that Christ set us free.

He redeemed us from the curse of the law because we couldn't obey it. Christ has done it. He's dealt with that. It's a grace-based relationship. It's so important to get that right as the foundation for the Christian life.

It's a grace-based relationship based on God's gospel promises fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is the seed. Filled in Jesus that is the seed.

Now, Paul goes on to ask two questions about this. If it's about the gospel revealed to Abraham, promised to Abraham, and his seed fulfilled in Christ, rather than obedience to the law, verse 19, what then was the purpose of the law?

Why was the law given? That's the first question. Why did God give the law to Moses 430 years later? Well, if you look at verse 19, he says it's very clear that the law was added through Moses because of, or on account of, transgressions.

[14:12] Now, that's not everything the Bible's going to say about the law because there are positive things about it. But Paul's point here is that it's like at Sinai, God delivered his people from Egypt and he gave them his law, that the moral aspects, the ceremonial things with the temple, the sacrifices, the civil things about living in the land, as if when God did that with his people, it's as if God took a big highlighter pen for them and for the world watching in, and he took a big highlighter pen, and he gave his people this law.

He highlighted that one word, sin, or transgressions, breaking the law. The giving of the law just revealed the sinfulness of God's people, and by application, the sinfulness of every person in this world, even outside that relationship with God.

It's more than just revealing, actually, highlighting it. It actually brought it out. You know, you often think of the illustration, you're walking along, and you're walking, went through a nice kind of state, your home thing yesterday, and there's a sign saying, do not walk on the grass.

It's the first thing in your mind and heart. I want to walk on the grass. I want to break the rules. You know, it's a problem with the whole humanity, but particularly here with the law, that Israel was ever able to obey the law in its moral, civil, and ceremonial sense.

And that's true for everyone. Romans 2 tells us that the law was not just there given for Israel, but it speaks that the moral aspects of the law was written on all of our hearts, our conscience bearing witnesses to it.

[15:52] So the Ten Commandments, given in the law of Moses, very famously, reflect the moral law of God for the whole of humanity. You can see in the book of Genesis, very clearly, in creation, these things were there.

So what Paul is arguing about the storyline of Israel is also true for us personally, by creation. So, C.H. Spurgeon, I think, building on some Puritans, he called the Ten Commandments God's big guns.

God's ten big guns, you know, like a navy frigate drawing alongside on the broadside. Even people on the broadside, the big guns, go bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. And that's what the law of God does. It just kind of booms out our breaking of the law.

And actually, without Christ, would put us to death. Just an aside there, that's why today, in our culture, even though we don't see ourselves particularly moral, and moral is relative, it's always right to appeal to people's consciences with the Ten Commandments.

Are you obeying God? There's something in us that recognizes that things are not right there. So, Paul's first point is that the law was given because of transgressions to highlight to Israel and to the world that is not, they're not able to obey God and to receive life from him.

[17:19] But wonderfully, the rest of the verse, he says, that wasn't the final thing, was it? Look at verse 19. What was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions through Moses at Sinai until the seed to whom the promise referred has come.

And just, already, Paul is saying, the law was given, but the answer wasn't in the law. The answer was through the promises to Abraham funding down to Jesus. the seed. Jesus is the seed. He's the one who would come and bring the solution.

The highlighting of sin was there, but for Israel, it was an interim thing pointing to, waiting for, the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Jesus Christ, who has come, says Paul.

Jesus has come. Our relationship with Sinai is different now, now that Jesus has come. Well, what's the next question? Paul goes on to highlight the differences between the law given through Moses as a mediator and God's promises that doesn't require a mediator, well, the God in Christ comes. But then, in verses 21 onwards, Paul asks another question, is the law then opposed to the promises of God? What's going on here? Why was it there? Well, it's because of transgressions,

because of sin, waiting for Jesus to come.

[18:32] Is the law of God then, God's big guns and all the other aspects of God's law then opposed to the promises of God? Is there some kind of clash going on in the Bible? If it was a pantomime, should we boo and hiss when we hear the word Lord Moses?

Sinai, boo! Something instinctive. No, we don't think that, do we? Look at verse 21. Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not, says Paul.

He upholds the law, doesn't he? Both the promises about the seed through Abraham and the law of God through Moses are from God.

They have different functions and we get into huge trouble if we try and mess up the functions of what they're for. The function of God's promises to Abraham fulfilled in Christ the seed is to give us justification by faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit and adoption as a promise.

The function of the law, verse 21, was not to give life. It says, for if the law had been given that could impart life then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. So Paul goes on to say, just look at what the law did.

[19:44] Don't try and look to the law for life and relationship with God. He gives two word pictures here about the law. In verse 22 he speaks of the law functioning as a jailer for the people of God.

A jailer. Look at verse 22. The scriptures declare that the whole world is a prisoner or imprisoned, everything under sin. So that what was promised had been given through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Before this faith, verse 23, came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. Paul says that period between the law of Moses coming and God's solution in Jesus, the promised seed coming, was a period in which we were in prison.

It was a dark time. The scriptures, they were the jailer, the law of God, the Ten Commandments, as we could say. The prisoners were everyone and everything because no one could obey the law. And the prison, it seems, was inescapable, locked up, unable to be free until Jesus came. It's a lovely picture, isn't it? Not only is this the storyline of God's people's experience in the Old Testament, it's also a picture of every Christian's experience once the law gets a hold of your conscience.

[21:12] You're kind of, oh, I can't obey God. You try and wiggle out of it and you're in this prison. You're confined and there's no freedom and every time you go to the scriptures it just turns the key a bit more.

There's no escaping, is there, once you're convicted by God's moral law. But then comes Jesus, the promised seed. It's as if he kind of disarms the guards, breaks the arms of the strong arm of Sinai, breaks the door down, offers his hand and says, come with me.

And he grabs you by the hand and he pulls his people out of the prison to freedom. The prison was righteous, it was right, but the freedom that Jesus won was glorious.

And the prison break has happened for a Christian. You don't have to and you can't get out of the prison of the law by yourself. But Jesus came.

In fact, he took the curse of the Lord, didn't he? He took the punishment upon himself and then he came as the promised seed through Abraham, the promised seed of the gospel to come and bring him out.

[22:22] Wonderful, isn't it? That's the first thing. The Lord functioned as a jailer. Secondly, the Lord functioned as a guardian. Look at verse 24.

Verse 24, the Lord was our guardian until Christ came. The word guardian is the word pedagogy, which was described, I guess in Victorian terms, you would say a strict governess looking after the family, not allowing them to get away with anything, the kids.

But in Paul's day, the pedagogy was like a babysitter for teenagers until they came to mature manhood. But the job of the pedagogy wasn't to chase after them and make sure they didn't harm themselves.

It was to strictly control them until they came to the freedom of manhood. Spurgeon called the pedagogy as being stern and strict, armed with penalties and devoid of sympathies.

And Paul says that was what God's people were like in the Old Testament. They were imprisoned and they were under this strict governor, this pedagogy who couldn't change them but just lashed out and told them they were wrong all the time.

[23:43] It's hard, isn't it? You can't flourish like that. You can't change. Interesting, in parenthood you have that mixture, don't you? You need to discipline, you need the rules but you know the rules themselves don't change people's hearts.

You need to be grace along with the rules. Well, in the same way Paul says the law of God was like this pedagogy, this governor. It was there on this basis from Sinai until Christ came, until the moment when its job was done and of course the pedagogy could be a slave but they had this kind of master control of the teenagers of the kids but as soon as the kid reached the age of maturity of manhood the relationship with the pedagogy changed and they were no longer a master.

They were servants and that's what's happened with the law says Paul. The moment Christ came, the moment faith came verse 25, the law had done its job, Christ had paid it completely, he had freed us from its consequences, we're justified by faith in Christ and so you're free.

Not free to not obey God, he's not being lawless but free from having to be confined by this as to how your relationship with God is established. He says you're free.

I think in human terms what adult keeps running back to their baby sitter, please look after me again, please control my life. Our oldest is looking forward to going to university and there's part of her that just wants to be free.

[25:26] You're no longer under the supervision of the stern and strict pedagogy. Paul was someone who grew up as a law-abiding Jew and he clearly knows that that relationship of having to obey the law or pretend to obey the law to be in relationship with God was over now that Christ has come.

So how foolish for the Galatians to think that they can go back to the law as the basis of their relationship with God back to circumcision. In fact, if you look at verse 26, Paul's point is this, so in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God.

You've all reached that position of maturity, of freedom now from the pedagogy not because you've earned it but because you're united to Christ by faith.

So it's a different relationship, isn't it, with God. Well, how was your relationship with God by the way? Paul's giving an argument here that is based on the timeline about Israel, quite a bit of it in terms of what it was like to be under Sinai and he says the promises of Abraham fulfilled in Jesus trump that.

So don't go back to that. But it's true, isn't it, that we need the law of God to convict us of our sin which drives us to Christ and where we find freedom. So if you're not yet free, can I say to you, have you put your trust in Jesus?

[27:00] Look at verse 22. What does Paul say in verse 22? He says here, the scripture locked up everything under control of sin so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

You can't try and obey the Ten Commandments to have a relationship with God. The big guns will just take you out. What you need to do is to look to God's gospel promises to Abraham's seed, that's Jesus Christ, fulfilled in the one who took the curse of the law on the cross in our place and who promised to justify us with God and to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit and to welcome us into God's family as his adopted children all by grace.

And so the Bible says the promise, what was promised, the blessings that would come through Abraham, the blessings of this relationship with God are given through faith in Christ Jesus because it's all funneled down to him.

So if you're not sure am I a Christian or not today, you think, well, this argument I didn't quite get it. In some sense it doesn't really matter. What matters now is are you trusting wholly and completely in Jesus Christ?

Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to his cross I cling. And so for you, maybe you're a bit confused about the Christian faith, but it's all about it's about trusting in Jesus.

[28:35] Trust in Jesus, the lock turned, you're free. You're free to follow, free to love, free to serve him in this world. But Christians, I

want to say to you, you might know the doctrine of justification by faith.

You might know that your relationship with God is down to trusting in Jesus alone and you tick the box of truth. But is that evidence in your life?

Could it possibly be that having come to Jesus for justification by faith alone, you still live as if you need to appease God through the law in order to be right with him or in order to please him?

It's very interesting, isn't it? that we can be saved by grace but live as if we're not. Live as if we're not. Let me give an example of that.

Hopefully, we'll put this on the screen. Here you go. There you go. You become a Christian. You know you become a Christian through Jesus and his death upon the cross. Hopefully, if you're a member of the church here, you've got that in your head. It's through Jesus.

[29:42] It funnels down to Jesus. And you know that the way in the Christian life is through trusting in Jesus' death upon the cross. Praise God. You don't move on from Jesus. You stay with Jesus, trusting in what he's done completely and fully.

But as you're as a Christian, and I've been a Christian for a few years now, you start to grow and you start to grow in your awareness of God. You start to realise that actually God is far more holy, more glorious, more majestic, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit than I ever realised.

And then you also start to realise just how bad you are. Especially if you've come from a church background and maybe you've grown up more. You've realised actually even since you've become a Christian, you've done so many bad things.

And the gap between who God is and what you're like and what you realise you're like because you compare yourself to the word of God is just growing bigger and bigger and bigger all the time. Now the problem is you know that the cross is the solution to the way in the Christian life and the way on. but you can try and fill those gaps the awareness of God and the awareness of self as if you're under the law rather than under grace.

[30:53] And so what might you do? You might see yourself as I've just got to work harder and harder in the life of the church. If I can exhaust myself in God's service I can somehow make up for the fact that the gap between me and him is so great.

Or another way you start to fill the gap with actually trusting in other things. You start to trust your ability to be successful and in your job to get the right grades to get the right material possessions in your life.

You start to lean on those other things for your security through life trying to fill the gap. Or it might be you start to compare yourself with others and think actually I'm bad but I'm not as bad as that person.

They're really struggling. Or maybe you try and hide your sin. What people see in church and the church family is just a veneer.

You seem to be calm on the top but underneath like ducks you're going crazy paddling away and it's a bit messy. Maybe you try and make up for your sin. I can't believe I did that again.

[32:04] I'll just give it a few more days then I'll go back to church and then I'll pray and then it'll be sorted. Sometimes our relationships show whether we are filling the gaps with other things rather than Christ because we are not quick to forgive and forbear and love others who have messed up around us.

Well the wonderful truth I think from these verses is that that gap has been filled fully by Christ. it cannot be filled by going back to the Lord Moses and trying harder.

It has been completely filled through Jesus because he is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and to his seed and it's through Jesus that you're justified by faith.

It's through Jesus that you are adopted as a child of God. it's through Jesus that you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. The point is not how can I make up for the wrongs I've done but the point is am I trusting in Jesus today who's done it all.

That's why the gospel is good news isn't it? Both of our justification how we're made right with God and also as we work with the Holy Spirit in our sanctification. You do put the effort in as we'll see in Galatians chapter 5 walk by the Spirit but never never as the basic relationship with God.

[33:31] It's all through Jesus and his finished work. Is the cross this big? Is Jesus this big in your life with the gaps that have been revealed even this week by your failure as a Christian? He should be.

Otherwise you're going to live in a prison. Otherwise you're going to live with the frown of the stern governor overseer the pedagogue over your life and you'll just walk around a bit crushed and churches can be like that.

I'm not saying that yours is but churches can be like that. We're saved by grace but you come in and everyone frowns because you're not obeying the rules probably. But when you come through Christ you're free.

And when you come through Christ the governor's gone. Spirit indwells you. You are free to love free to follow free to obey Jesus. And that's a wonderful place to be.

Let me finish with these words which I think were words from John Bunyan about his relationship with the law. Run John run the law commands but gives us neither feet nor hands.

[34:41] Far better news the gospel brings it bids us fly and gives us wings. Let's make great let's pray shall we. Lord in the midst of these kind of dense verses I want to thank you that both in the storyline of the Bible and in our personal experience we know that the answer is not in obeying the law.

So thank you for exposing sin in our lives and we want to turn from all that and put our trust completely and fully in your son Jesus Christ. And with his help joyfully and free help us to learn to love and follow you we pray in obedience to him.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.