

The Gospel's Defense: Promise Not Law

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[0 : 00] If you would open your Bibles to Galatians chapter 3. Galatians chapter 3, we're going to begin in verse 15, and I just want to take a moment to kind of go back a little bit of what we're, where we are and what we're doing.

Paul's writing to these churches in the Galatian area. There's several churches altogether. He's defending the gospel, chapter 1 and 2. Basically, he's defending the gospel because it's the gospel from God.

It has divine origin. And then he goes on in chapter 2. The true gospel is about being united to Christ and his death. I've been crucified with Christ. Then last week we looked at chapter 3, and it was the idea that the true gospel is about faith and not works.

Today we're going to talk about how the true gospel is about promise and not law. And then we'll be looking at the true gospel is about being made sons, about freedom in Christ, and about the Holy Spirit, and walking and living by the Holy Spirit.

So just giving you sort of that bringing it all together kind of a thing. So Galatians chapter 3, we're going to read verses 15 through 24. Hear the word of the Lord.

[1 : 13] 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'm saying is this. The law, which came 430 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.

Why the law then? Well, it was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

[2 : 21] Now a mediator is not for one party only, whereas God is only one. Is the law then contrary to the promise 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 everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith, which was later to be revealed. Therefore, the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for how you've given us this perfect treasure, that by your spirit, you have given us every single word that we need, so that we would know who you are, what to believe, and how we ought to live.

And we pray that you would help us to understand what your word says. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Well, this morning, what we're looking at, and what is the constant refrain in Galatians, is how do we live out our salvation?

[3 : 49] How are we going to live? If we say we believe in justification by faith alone, how do we live that out? What does that look like? And a part of what Paul is doing as he lays this defense for the true gospel is that he gives us glimpses into how this happens.

And one of the things about this particular passage this morning is that he's helping us to live out the true gospel by understanding two things about our salvation.

Two things about our salvation we need to understand. The first is that the basis of salvation is the promise, and the motivation for salvation is the law. So we're going to look at the basis and the motivation for salvation.

The first, then, is the basis of salvation. It's the promise. And what we're going to have to do, because I don't know about you, but you read through a section like Galatians 3, we just read through, and sometimes I have to read it about 700 or 800 times, because it's so dense what Paul is saying there.

He's just compounding statement upon statement and repeating some things that make you think, what are you saying, Paul? Were you like half asleep when you were writing this?

[4 : 59] No, no, he wasn't. But we need to understand some background to kind of break this apart for us. And that background is going to be the promise to Abraham or the covenant to Abraham. So I want to read to you from Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 through 3, and make a few comments about this to kind of understand this promise to Abraham.

In verse 1 of Genesis chapter 12, it says this, Now, a couple things we need to understand about this is that this promise is a unilateral promise.

That's a big old word that I don't, you know, know that everybody has in their language, but the unilateral promise, it's not a bilateral agreement. That helps you understand, right?

Bilateral means that somebody over here and somebody over here, they get together and they share what they're going to do and make a contract, and they both have stipulations, promises, and whatever.

They make this agreement together. Unilateral, one direction. God is unilaterally telling Abraham what he's going to do.

[6 : 31] Abraham, this is what I am going to do. These promises are not promises with conditions. These are promises that are unconditional. That's the first thing about this.

The second thing is that this promise includes four basic things. It includes land, nation, blessing, and seed.

Let's do that again. Land, say land, nation, blessing, seed. Excellent, excellent.

These blessings, then going back to Galatians, were to Abram, this promise was to Abram, and to his seed. And here's where we have to understand how we read the Bible, because I understand that the word seed is one of those words that it's like deer.

Like there's a deer or there's the deer. Like we don't say, look at all the deers. Well, some of you might. I don't know. Seed happens to be a word like that, that because of the nature of it, the plural of it is exactly the same as the singular of it.

[7 : 41] But Paul is drawing a comparison and helping us understand, under the inspiration of the Spirit, that the promise to Abraham, to Abraham and to his seed, was not just about the physical descendant, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and on what was about Jesus Christ.

And so we have to keep that in mind. And that means then that this old covenant, this promise to Abraham, had two different kinds of fulfillment.

On one hand, what you have, is you have Abram being told that he's going to have land, nation, blessing, and seed, and he gets all of those things. As a matter of fact, through the Exodus, and into the conquest of the land in Joshua, all of these promises have a physical, prototypical, foreshadowing fulfillment.

It really was promised, it was really fulfilled, and it really prophesies about something into the future. Let me just give you one passage on this. Joshua chapter 21, verse 43 through 45.

This is at the end of the conquest, and Joshua is here speaking to us. So the Lord gave Israel all the land which he had sworn to give their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it.

[9 : 05] Now, I'm just going to pause there and say there are some out there who say that the Jews have never owned the promised land, and that is not true. The Bible very clearly tells us here that all the land that was promised to Israel, they possessed.

That will change the way you view the end times, but we'll move on. Verse 44. And the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that he had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them.

The Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed. All came to pass.

That's one way in which this promise to Abraham was fulfilled. But it is also fulfilled in Christ, who is the seed. These promises to him are the same.

He is promised a land, and so we see in the Great Commission that he has all authority in heaven and on earth. It is all his. That's why he can say in the Beatitudes, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, because it is his to give.

[10 : 18] One of the things we need to understand, and I'm just going to chase a small rabbit here, is that this world is not owned by the wicked of the world. This is our home. And one day when the Lord comes back and makes all things new, this is where we will live better than the beginning.

Jesus, this promise was fulfilled to him, in him, as he has all authority. He has the nations. In Revelation chapter 5, verse 9, it talks about how he's ransomed people from every nation.

He has a huge nation made up of all the nations. He has the blessing, because he's the one who pours out the Holy Spirit of promise upon his people, and he has a seed.

In other words, he's a father. Jesus, the Son, is a father. I know that's a little confusing, but that's why the popular Christmas verse in Isaiah chapter 9, verse 6 says this, For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us, and the government will rest on his shoulders, and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God.

The one who is called the child will be called Eternal Father. How is that? Because you are his offspring, because he has saved you.

[11 : 46] All whom he has purchased by his blood, who have trusted in him, are his offspring. And so that's how these promises get fulfilled to Christ.

And so here's the point of verses 15 through 18 then, right? So this is what I've been trying to kind of bring together some meat for you. The promise that was given to Abram and to his seed, this promise which was fulfilled to Abram and fulfilled to Christ, is a promise that cannot be broken by the introduction of the law.

In other words, the law comes 400 and something years after this promise, and it cannot change the promise. It cannot nullify the promise.

It cannot put away the promise. The promise stands. Now that right there, that right there is your salvation.

Your salvation is just like that. That's Paul's point. That we are saved, not because of law, but we're saved because of promise.

[13 : 00] And what that means is that because it is this unilateral promise by God himself, that's what the new covenant is, because it's his promise, it's unilateral, it is a promise that he makes to his creatures, and he's the one who fulfills.

This means this. It means that your salvation is secure. Your salvation is secure because it's built upon the promise of God.

The basis of your salvation is not what you do, but what he has said. Maybe this will help you. Your salvation is never about your performance, but about his promise.

You see, the new covenant being that outworking of this Abrahamic covenant says, I will be their God and they will be my people. They will all know me to the least of them to the greatest.

I will write my law upon their heart. I will remember their sin no more. The self-swearing God promises salvation, salvation, and that's why our salvation is secure.

[14 : 20] So maybe this last week, maybe this last week, as a wife or as a mother, or maybe as a husband or a father, or maybe as a son or a daughter, maybe this last week, you blew it.

Maybe this last week, you did and committed sin in your role as a mother or as a father or as a son or as a boss or as a co-worker or as a neighbor.

Maybe you just blew it this week. Maybe your performance was terrible this week. And maybe you walked in here this morning thinking to yourself, I'm not even sure I should walk in here. Just look how bad I blew it this week.

I want you to understand your salvation is secure not because of your performance, but it's secure because of the promise of God. He is the one who promises He will remember your sin no more.

This is so vital for us to get. And if you're a Christian today and you're hearing this and you're understanding what I'm saying, then the way you need to live your life is this.

[15 : 29] You need to go to 1 John 1, verse 9 because He says that if we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Christian, you might have blown it this week. Your performance might have been terrible this week. But you're not saved because of your performance. You're saved because of the promise.

So go to Him daily. Go to Him daily and say, Lord, please forgive me. I bombed it today. I didn't act the way I should.

I didn't act in kindness. I didn't act in love. I didn't act in interest to you and who you are and what you stand for. And I'm sorry. And His promise is, I'll remember their sins no more.

But perhaps you're not a Christian. And I want to just talk to those who are not Christians for a second because here's the problem. Here's the problem with thinking about law. The problem with thinking about law and thinking about our sin is that we have a tendency to think of our sin from the standpoint that we're sort of victims of our inabilities.

[16 : 49] We have a tendency to not define sin properly and sin is always defined as a breaking of God's law. And so when we begin to think about that, we begin to look at our behavior and we think to ourselves, well, you know, I mean, it's just a little white lie after all.

I mean, it's not a really big deal. It's just a small deal. It's not like I was in court or anything. I didn't, you know, put my hand on the Bible and swear to it. I mean, that would have been a really bad, you know, breaking of that commandment, right?

That's our attitude as humans is we have a tendency to think that this thing is neutral. But the problem is, is that we have not grasped that the wrongness of breaking the law is not built upon the thing that we've done, but upon the person we've offended.

Even the law of our land works this way. The victim of our crime, depending upon their worth, if you want to say it that way, but depending upon who they are, depends upon the increase of our punishment.

Being cruel to an animal gets you something different than taking and attempting to assassinate the president because of the worth of the victim that's there. Our breaking of God's commandments is a violation of himself.

[18 : 05] And he is of infinite value. That's why you could live your life from birth to death completely obeying every single command, but break one command one time.

You would suffer for all eternity in hell because he is of infinite value. And so what are you going to do?

Because I guarantee you that no one in here is in the place of having only broken one law one time. What are you going to do to pay God back?

Well, the good news of the gospel is that God himself, the self-swearing God, sent his son into this world to pay that price for us.

And so today, come to him and be saved. that is the basis of our salvation that it's built upon the promise.

[19 : 12] But right there in the middle of the section of Scripture we're looking at, verse 19, ask this question, why the law then? And I want to talk about verses 19 through 24. It's the motivation for salvation and it's the law.

And one of the things that we, a couple of things that we see here is we see how the law is added. And you'll notice that verse 15 uses the word added and verse 19 looks at this word added but there's two different Greek words there.

One is the idea of I've got your name and your telephone number here and I'm going to erase your telephone number and I'm going to rewrite a new number in there. I've added your phone number to it, which is in essence I've changed it, right?

Well, that's the one that's in verse 15. It's a change. And so the law doesn't change the promise. That's not the way it's added. The way it's added is this way.

I have your number, I have your name, I have your number and I add a piece of paper on the back side of this one that's got your email address. I'm just adding it to it. I'm not changing anything. Does that make sense? That's the kind of added that this law is.

[20 : 16] It was addendumed to the promise of God and it came through a mediator. Now the reason it's important to think about this mediator, we know that this is Moses. We know this is on Mount Sinai.

This is where the law comes from. But the reason this is important is to show the greatness of the promise over the law because the law comes by God himself directly without a mediator.

But the law comes through Moses to the people through a mediator. That's why verse 20 talks about that a mediator is between two people.

You've got two parties and so it implies no direct communication. This guy talks to him and this guy talks to him and he talks to both of them and they're not directly talking to one another.

That's the law. But the promise of God is direct communication from God to his people. The second thing we need to understand about the law is the character of the law.

[21 : 11] Verse 21 talks to us and shares with us that it cannot produce life. The law cannot produce life. Now what does that mean?

It cannot produce life. In other words, unlike God who in the garden grabs up the dirt and puts it together and has Adam and then breathes into his nostrils the breath of life and he becomes a living being, the law can do nothing of the sort.

Why is that? Because it's law and not God. the law was never meant to breathe life into a person. The character of the law is that it cannot produce life and so this is a problem in Romans chapter 8 verse 3 it says, for what the law could not do weak as it was through the flesh God did sending his own son.

You see, the problem is is that we can't obey the law of God and therefore get righteousness because we have no life in ourselves. Let's see if I can help you here.

We need righteousness. We need that 100 trillion credit of righteousness to be able to be with God. We had 100 trillion debt of sin that we were forgiven of because we've trusted Christ that brought us back to zero but he covers us with the righteousness of Christ.

[22 : 42] Now we have 100 trillion credit of righteousness so if we're going to die and go before the Lord we're covered with the righteousness of Christ therefore we are saved. Right?

So when it comes then to the law the law can't do that for us because the law has to be obeyed perfectly to get the righteousness but the reason that the law can't do that is not because there's a problem with the law it's because there's a problem with us.

We are dead in our trespasses and sins. We were born God haters. We were born rebellious. We were born enemies of God and not wanting to do anything with God whatsoever.

That's where we were born and because of that something has to change in us. That's why Ezekiel uses the image of a heart of stone and a heart of flesh. He says God promises I'm going to take out your heart of stone and put into you a heart of flesh.

A heart of stone is the dead and sinner. The heart of stone is the person who doesn't want to trust God. The heart of flesh is a heart that beats with faith for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 50] And so the law the character is that it cannot produce life and therefore we can't use it to get righteousness. So this is why Paul says things like that the law shuts us up to sin.

So then if you can't use the law to get righteousness why the law?

What is the purpose of the law? Verse 19 Paul says because of transgressions and he either means to expose transgressions condemn transgressions or restrain transgressions.

Verse 23 talks about that we're in custody under the law. It rules over us. It's external to us. And then verse 24 says it's a tutor to Christ. It's external to us.

It walks with us. It shows us how we ought to live. Go this way. Go that way. Do this. Do that. And when we don't do right this tutor tells us that we're not doing right and what's going to happen to us because we didn't do it right.

[25 : 02] In other words the law is like a little brother. Right? Some of you didn't have little brothers. You have no clue what I'm talking about. You know when you teach a teenager to drive a car the law is is that you have to have somebody 21 years and older to be in the car with them.

And what you do and I know this because I've taught five how to drive. you're welcome. You get in the car with them and it's always start the engine.

Move the mirrors. Adjust the seat. Put on the seat belt. Turn to the right. Turn to the left. Hand over hand. Blinker. Signal. Slow down.

Stop. Speed up. Move over. Look over your shoulder. Hold the steering wheel still. I mean there's all these commands that are constantly going out. And the whole time the goal is for them to get to the place that they can be set free from the provisional license and be a full-fledged driver.

I'm the tutor leading them to a point. That's the point of the law. The law is there to show us all the things we need to be doing. Showing us all the things that we ought to be doing and then also bringing upon us condemnation when we don't do it so that we're driven to Christ.

[26 : 28] apart from the law convicting us apart from our consciences being pierced by the law and by condemnation and by guilt and by shame we don't run to Christ.

And so the law is to pierce our conscience to point out our sin to bring the condemnation so that we feel the sorrow so that we feel the guilt so that we would run to Christ for mercy.

You and I as Christians we ought to think to ourselves daily I deserve nothing in this life but death and hell. I'm telling you as a Christian if you can't come to the place of saying to yourself I deserve nothing but death and hell your Christian walk if it is one is going to be stunted and never be pleasing to the Lord.

The more that you think that God got a good deal by saving you the more pride that's in your heart that needs to be broken. There's not a one of us that's good.

God did not get a good deal on us and I will side with the Apostle Paul who says I am the chief of sinners. And I would beg you join us over here in the land of reality we deserve nothing but death and hell.

[27 : 53] yet God has mercy that abounds to sinners. You see that's the problem.

The problem is that we're so fixated on the love of God that we don't really understand it because we don't understand how wicked we are. But he has grace he has mercy to abound.

Do you understand your own sinful self? Even as a Christian do you understand the depth of your own depravity? You know I'm reminded of that place in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says if you come to the altar about to offer your gift and remember there your brother has something against you.

He's saying that we can have moments that we come even into the place of worship and we can bring our sin laden problems right there with us. Even at the point of prayer.

Do you understand that there is no one who is righteous? There is none who understands. There is no one who seeks for God. Everyone does what's right in his own eyes. There is no one good. We go astray from birth.

[29 : 06] We're born God haters. We walk according to the course of this world. We walk according to the prince of the power of the air. We're by nature children of wrath. This is who we are. And why in the world are we talking about it this way?

Because if you don't understand that then how are you going to go to Christ? Why would you go to him? You have to understand how you were saved Christian.

Christians you've got to understand how your salvation works. I could ask you tell me about your salvation experience. Tell me about when you were saved. And all of us have our experiences but what we must do is we must submit our experiences to what the word of God teaches us about our salvation so that we understand where we are.

It's like a foundation of a house. How many of you have ever built your own house or oversaw the building of the house? There's a few of you. Yeah? the most important part is the paint on the wall.

Now, the most important part is the foundation. If you do not get that foundation right, then nothing else you do matters. It's all going to be wrong.

[30 : 29] It's all going to be built in some sort of janky sort of way where somebody's going to fill up big old hole with caulk great stuff. The foundation of the Christian life is your own salvation.

The foundation for you living out the Christian life is your salvation. If you don't understand how you were saved, why you were saved, why you needed to be saved, you understand we're saved from what?

Just answer that question in your head. Our salvation saves us from what? I'll give you the answer. And if my answer shocks you, then you're not believing rightly about this.

We're saved from God. Our salvation is being saved from the holy righteous God whose law we broke.

And the salvation we get is the salvation that he himself promised self-swearing promised and gave his son for. Do you see that?

[31 : 42] That is awesome. That's what makes us sing. That ought to be what thrills our soul. God and listen as a church body as a church body we must get the foundation of salvation right because it does not matter anything else we do.

It won't be right. It won't be right if we don't get this right. God will be right to help people.

Because we can go out and we can try to help people. We can give them food. We can give them money. We can give them housing. We can try to share some spiritual message with them. But if we don't even understand how we're saved then how are we going to share with somebody else how they can be saved?

because just like we were saved by understanding that we were sinners and yet God sent his son for us we must understand that coming to a lost person means we have to help their conscience be pierced.

You know the most the people who are most at ease in this world are lost people. Because they don't understand that they're under condemnation that they're under judgment.

[33 : 12] You know the Bible is full of places where believers are looking out upon this world and they're going like why can't I be like them? Trusting God doesn't seem to be paying off for me.

I should be like the world. They're at ease. They're at ease. They're at ease. They're at ease because they're repressing and holding down who it is that God is it's like in Pilgrim's Progress.

How many of you know Pilgrim's Progress? You need to read it at least two times a year. And we have a video we can hook you up with and you can watch it.

If you're not a reader you can watch it and if you're not a reader or watcher you can listen to it. In the story of Pilgrim's Progress the only one who ran from the city of destruction was Christian himself.

His wife wasn't afraid of the city of destruction. His friend pliable was not afraid of the city of destruction. His friend obstinate was not afraid of the city of destruction.

[34 : 20] They didn't even know that it was to come because their conscience had not been pierced. So if we're going to share the gospel we need to understand but also we need we need to use the law to lead lost people to Christ.

And I just want to close out with just one more final thought that we need to use the law of God in a lawful way as a church body.

And I'm going to come back to this illustration about the driver instructor for just a second. because the whole point about telling your kids how to drive or instructing them in something like that, I don't tell them how to drive down the road and make that curve and put on the blinker and make that turn.

I don't tell them that in order for them to have this moment where they go like, oh great, now I can drive backwards down the road. The idea is that once they are full-fledged drivers, they're going to keep driving the way I taught them.

Let me change the image completely. I love these little bonsai trees, these little dwarf trees. They're just awesome. And there are so many people who are so ingenious and so talented in being able to shape these things.

[35 : 42] And one of the things that they do with those trunks is that when they're small and they're pliable, they will put things on them and they will wrap them with all kinds of things to shape those trunks in a certain way so that they get a certain shape out of them.

It's an external thing added to the outside of it and when that trunk is big enough and all those fibers are strong and they're in the way that they want it to go, they will remove that external part and that trunk will stay exactly in the shape that it was.

Why am I saying this? because you and I as Christians we don't obey the law to get life because it can't give it.

We don't obey the law to get righteousness because we already have it. But we obey law because that's the promise of the new covenant.

He says in Jeremiah 31, I will write my law upon their heart. that tutor that leads us to Christ and tells us, do not murder, yet you murdered.

[36 : 45] You're angry at somebody and that anger is the same thing as murder and look at you, you've got to sin and that law that does that to a lost person that then pierces their conscience and then they see, well, what am I going to do because I have broken God's law?

You run to Christ and so they run to Christ. But as a Christian, it's not as though all of a sudden, murder's got free force. We can do what we want to. No, we still have to follow that law because it's what pleases the Lord.

And not only that, but here's the thing. Here's the thing. Every day, every one of us, we break some sort of commandment from the Lord.

And you can just about trace everything back to one of the Ten Commandments. And like I was talking about in that first point, maybe you had a bad week this week.

Part of that law is not only so you know what pleases God, but it's so that even as a Christian, when you know you've not done the right thing, let's just go back to murder for a second.

[37 : 57] Jesus is the one who said that anger is basically breaking that commandment, the sixth commandment. how many of you got angry this last week?

I did. You don't have to raise your hand. It's on camera. I don't want anybody to catch you. I did. That's not right.

But I hope right here you can see the genius and the glory and the splendor and the majesty of what God has done for us. because if the law is a tutor that leads a lost person to Christ to be saved, how much more is the law a tutor to you Christian?

So you got angry this week. Sixth commandment, that's a violation. Do you sit there and say to yourself, oh, no, no, no, that doesn't apply to me?

Or are you the kind of person that sits there and says, like, well, I'm just trash. Somebody ought to just throw me off the cliff. I just, I have no use. I would say to both of you, stop looking at yourself.

[39 : 23] You broke that law and you turn your eyes upon Jesus. That law is meant to lead you to Christ.

And maybe you bombed it this week. Maybe you failed this week. Maybe you just didn't do what you should have done. Go through them. Did you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind? No? Yeah, I probably didn't either this week.

Did you take the name of the Lord God in vain? And I don't mean just using his name as a cuss word, but using it thoughtlessly. Did you make a graven image and make idols for yourselves?

Some of you are kind of going, no, I don't do that, and you probably do. Honor your father and your mother. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. You should not murder, you should not commit adultery, you should not steal.

don't run from the conviction of that, but instead turn your eyes to Christ.

[40 : 25] Look at him paying the price for you. The law is to be a tutor to lead us to Christ.

Let's pray. Let's pray.