

Law and Gospel

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, words are powerful things, words. If you want God powerfully present in your life, then let me share with you some words from Galatians that should shape you, that you need to be strong in.

Here are some words. Promise, grace, faith, inheritance, covenant, blessing, believing, redemption, fruit of the Spirit, belonging, God as Father.

If you love Jesus, if you love that he was crucified for you, then these will be precious words, precious concepts for you. They are your life.

On the other hand, if you want to avoid true Christianity and go the Galatian way, which was to go goodianity, then here are some words to characterize dodgy goodianity from Galatians.

The words are law, regulations, rules, works, curse, circumcision, factions, doing or doings, works of the flesh, transgressions, slavery, earning your way, God as lawgiver as opposed to God as Father.

[1 : 34] Well, friends, ideas, words, concepts have important consequences and these ideas really matter. What we're looking at are two modes of thinking, two mutually exclusive types of spiritualities.

They can't both be right. One of them must be wrong. Paul has established in the book of Galatians very clearly so far that we are saved by grace, not through works of the law, not through the things in that second list.

We are saved through Christ, through the work of Christ or through the works of Christ or through the faith of Christ or the faithfulness of Christ, especially his death, his crucifixion in our place.

To be a Christian is to be essentially a receiver, a recipient of great things, recipient of great promises. Remembering that the original kind of Greek letter Paul wrote wouldn't have had chapter numbers, just look back at the end of chapter 2.

Now, at the middle of chapter 3, I mean, last week's reading, chapter 3, verse 13 and 14. Here is what we have received. It's wonderful. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

[2 : 58] For it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. In order that, and here's what we receive. In Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, that's us, non-Jews, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

So in Christ we receive everything that was promised to Abraham, that great patriarch, that man who was the beginning of God's redemptive plans and purposes in the Old Testament.

Where did God's rescue plan start? It started with Abraham back in Genesis. And our life direction is to match the life of Abraham, and that is the life of faith, the life of trust, the life of living by promises of God.

Jesus becomes a curse for us so that we receive the Holy Spirit by faith in the same style as Abraham, the great believer.

Now one of the things that makes Paul's job very difficult, and you may have experienced this, if you've dealt with, people from cults or really kind of messed up, crazy versions of the church, is that his enemies in Galatia, the Judaizers, have heaps of Bible verses, and they're using the Bible a lot, and so it's sort of Bible versus Bible.

[4 : 24] And the question that they would raise is, well, there's this whole section of the Bible called Torah, called Law. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the first five books, they are the law of God, and so they've got sort of this moral high ground that they're claiming that to be a Christian, you have to obey this law because there it is in the Bible.

It's in black and white. And so Paul tonight has to answer the question, well, why is that part even in the Bible? Why do we have law at all if it's not the way of salvation?

But just as an aside, you ought not to be surprised. If you meet someone from a cult that uses the Bible or from a Christian spin-off group or a wishy-washy teacher that teaches the opposite of the Bible and yet still seems to have some verses, don't be put off when false teachers have verses.

It's always been like that. They've always had verses. Interestingly, I think the fault is not with the Bible. It's with the readers. We are sinful, and sin affects the mind, which therefore affects our interpretation.

People misuse, misread the Bible, I think, either on purpose or because they're deluded by their own sin. Now, Paul's answer, he shows his confidence in the Word of God because he's going to, as last week, settle the issue with Bible.

[5 : 53] So I'm sure that you'll see by the end of going through the rest of chapter 3 that the Bible is clear on how we are saved and the place of the law. Well, he begins with this sort of seemingly harmless illustration about wills.

And he says, brothers and sisters, I give an example from daily life. Now, he's playing a bit of a trick here because it's a very loaded example. Once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it.

Now, the trick here, there's a double meaning going on because the word for will is the same word for covenant. And he's making the point that if God establishes a covenant, you can't annul God's covenant or add to God's covenant after it's been ratified.

And in a moment, Paul will explain that the covenant with Abraham, the promise, came a long time before the law came, hundreds of years.

And so that's where he's getting to. But then he has this little sort of bracketed bit in verse 16. So I'd put this in brackets. Now, the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring, or if you look at your footnote, literally seed.

[7 : 04] The promise was made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say and to offsprings as of many, but it says and to your offspring, that is to one person, that is the Christ.

Paul's is making a little side point here about the number one. And the number one comes up a lot in this part of Galatians. And he's making the point that there's an implicit promise of Jesus Christ in the promise to Abraham because he says, it's not to your seed, it's not to your offsprings, but to your offspring, as in to one man.

The one man to come is Christ. And so he's saying that even there back in Genesis when God says, to your seed I will give this land, to your seed I will give this covenant, all these promises of grace, is really promising that it will come through the seed that is Jesus.

Anyway, we'll come back to this theme of one in a moment. Let's get to Paul's main point in verse 17. And helpfully, he tells us, this is my main point. My point is this, the law which came 430 years later does not annul a covenant or a will previously ratified by God so as to nullify the promise.

For if the inheritance comes through the law or from the law, it no longer comes from the promise but God granted it to Abraham through the promise. This is pretty, this is basic math at this point.

[8 : 32] If you look at the timeline of God's acts of redemption and rescue of Israel, the promise, the inheritance, the covenant, all came to Abraham.

His faith was credited to him as righteousness and it was ratified way back early in Genesis and the law came a long time later. The law came, you know, there was Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and then the sons of Jacob go to Egypt and then their slaves 400 years later they become a great nation, they get out of Egypt, then they get the law.

That's a long time later. So whatever God is doing in the law in these five books of the Old Testament, it cannot undo the covenant of faith, salvation by faith alone, by grace alone.

Whatever the law is meant to do, it can't sort of wreck the fact that we are saved through God's promises. So the million dollar question is, well, why is this in the Bible?

Why did God take Moses to Sinai and give them all these rules? That's the million dollar question that we need to answer. By the way, this is an aside. I think non-Christians, unchurched people, think the whole Bible is rules.

[9 : 50] And one of the most helpful things we can do is actually tell them, actually, most of the Bible is not rules. Most of the Bible is either promises or the history of God enacting out his promises.

The Bible is more like a big, massive, sort of epic story like Lord of the Rings with a start and events in the middle and a climax and an end than it is more like sort of a rule book, sort of like the rules of the Australian football league or something.

But people all the time speak as if the Bible is all rules, but it's not. But there is a significant section called the law which has very kind of full-on rules.

You know, there's death sentences and there's animal sacrifices and there's food laws. And it's pretty heavy, the actual part that is rules. So we need to work out why is it there?

Well, here Paul's, he's got several answers and they kind of come together. Verse 19, Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions until the offspring or the seed would come to whom the promise had been made, that is Jesus, and it was ordained through angels by a mediator.

[11 : 01] Now, another kind of bracket is for Paul. Now, a mediator involves more than one party but God is one. What's his point? He's saying the law was given because of transgressions.

That is to, I think he's saying to curb or sort of in a very harsh way control and limit the sin of Israel.

They were given a very strong law to kind of cage them in to curb their transgressions until Jesus came, until Jesus came. I mean, if you think about some of the stuff that's in the law, it's pretty heavy.

Like, there's a law that Jesus quotes actually about if you curse your parents, you are to be put to death. Just imagine if that was a real law in civic society today.

If you lived in a society that had that law, A, you'd be a much better child and you'd probably be a much more serious parent because you've got to raise kids that don't do that otherwise they're gone. That's in the Old Testament, in the law.

[12 : 05] Or imagine you have strict and they're kind of somewhat arbitrary, the food laws of the law. If you have rules like that, you would be constantly thinking God is serious.

I've got to obey God. I've got to, every meal, I've got to think about what does the Lord want of me? That's a very good way to focus you on God with a very blunt instrument of the food laws.

Or another example, adultery, death penalty. I think more people will be keeping their pants on, don't you? Sin.

Whenever you do a sin that's not a stoning, death sentence kind of sin, you have to reach into your wallet and pay a lot of money or pay out of your agrarian, out of your flocks for an animal to be sacrificed, very specific lists of what animals, what kind of things, that costs you a lot if you sin to do those sacrifices.

And that's going to make you at least at a very kind of blunt kind of surface level take sin seriously. So the law has this effect of curbing the transgressions of God's people.

[13 : 20] Now I just want to make a little comment. There's another bracket comment here and the number one comes up again in this comment. He talks about the law was ordained through angels by a mediator, that is Moses.

Now a mediator involves more than one party but God is one, that's the number one. Now what is he saying? That's probably one of the hardest verses. I think he's making a couple of points.

He's making a point about the covenant given to Abraham was like God, Abraham, direct. But when the law was given, it was given through angels, through Moses, to the people.

And I think he's giving a little swipe at the fact that there were more levels involved, whereas this was just that the foundation was given straight from God to Abraham. The other thing, there's a theme here about oneness, one offspring, one God, one covenant that we'll come back to at the end of the chapter.

Let's come back to why would God give the law? If he gave the law to curb transgression, isn't God actually shooting himself in the foot? Because if he hadn't given the law, we wouldn't have this fight in Galatia.

[14 : 34] You know, it looks like on the surface that Paul and the Judaizers are opposed, and they are, it looks like that the law is opposed to God's promise. Well, let's answer that.

Verse 21, Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not. For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed have come through the law.

The point here is that the law is not meant to be opposed to the promise. The law is not meant to be a different system as opposed to living by faith, and grace in the promises of God.

The people who are doing that with the law are misusing the law. Paul says, none of them have been made righteous by the law. Why do you think that is? Because they're misusing the scripture and so they're abusing the scripture in the way they're using it.

In fact, if you read the law properly, it ties in with the promises of God beautifully. I mean, just to give you one example, a pretty big one, the law gives you this whole infrastructure of sacrifice for sin which prophetically points you to the promise of the seed, the one who is to come, Christ, who will be crucified for us.

[15 : 48] There's this whole kind of prophetic infrastructure in the law, in the temple, in the sacrificial system that points you to Jesus in a promise kind of way. So the law and the promise do go together if you read the law rightly.

But here's what the law has done and what it was meant to do. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin so that what has been promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

What is Paul saying? He's saying that what the law was really good at was making you see that you need a saviour because you know that you're failing God and when you see it in his law, black and white, how you fail God, it's really crystal clear that you need a saviour, that you're a sinner, that we're all sinners and that's what the law does.

The law works perfectly with the gospel to drive you to the saviour, to drive you on God's mercy, on God's promise. I mean this is a great test to give anyone who's a bit smarmy, a bit self-righteous, just say to them, I say it to you, try and obey the Ten Commandments for one week without breaking one.

Okay? Just try it. You will not do it. You will get to the end of that week knowing that you are a sinner, that you are a failure. That's what the law is meant to do. It imprisons you under the power of sin to drive you onto the mercy of God, onto the promises of God.

[17 : 11] You are in a prison if you just have the law. And so there's sort of two angles to this answer of Paul's. Two purposes of the law. One is to curb or sin or guard Israel from their own sinfulness.

And the other law is to sort of expose their sinfulness and to imprison them so they'll be driven to God's mercy. So these two things come out in verse 23.

Now, before faith came, we were, one, imprisoned and two, guarded under the law until faith will be revealed. So they're the two purposes of the law. And now Paul gives his really big illustration of what the law was meant to do.

And this is where he has this beautiful, like this amazing picture of the disciplinarian, the disciplinarian, the pedagogue, the really kind of rough school teacher, the really kind of full-on trainer, trainer from the army or something like that.

He says, verse 24, therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came so that we might be justified by faith, i.e. not by works, not by the law.

[18 : 26] But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. And so, this is what the law was meant to do.

It was meant to be a disciplinarian. It was meant to be full-on. You are meant to read the law and shake a bit and kind of feel a bit relieved. We're not under that anymore. The law is meant to scare you. It's a disciplinarian.

It's like a nanny to prepare you for Christ but not like super nanny but kind of like a really harsh nanny boot camp from hell that really scares you and drives you to Jesus, drives you to the mercy of God alone.

See, what Paul is not saying is he's not saying oh yeah, just rip the law out of your Bibles. You don't need that anymore. I think Paul's saying the law is still the word of God. There are principles in the law that still reflect the heart of God.

You know, there's much there we can learn from God but we're no longer under the regime of the law. We're no longer meant to be under the nanny of the law, the disciplinarian of the law.

[19 : 32] The law is meant to drive us to Christ and for us Christ has come. We shouldn't go back to the nanny, back to the law. The law was not a mistake. It was not ill judged.

It was good, useful, effective but it's now done its job and therefore the Judaizers are wrong to keep bringing it into things. Now, here Paul's wonderful conclusion.

Instead of needing this harsh nanny, you've got Jesus and he just ends with this beautiful picture of, back to that number, one, oneness in the New Covenant, verse 27 to 29.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek.

There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male and female for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. You are one in Christ Jesus and if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

[20 : 42] There's so much in those three verses. I'll just make a few observations. Earlier he said the offspring of Abraham referred to Christ. The seed was Christ.

But now he says you are Abraham's seed. How can the seed be both Christ and us? Answer, because we are in Christ. We are one in Christ and so we are Abraham's seed.

Everything that God promised to Abraham is ours. Ours because we trust in Jesus. God's intention then is to create one family in Christ.

We are meant to be one family, one household by the grace of God in Christ. We are not meant to be a church of many different subsections and families but one family who receive the same inheritance.

You can see how all these number ones ought to come together in our life at Holy Trinity. One God, one seed, one Christ, one Saviour, one people of God, one church who are one in Christ Jesus.

[21 : 49] That is who we are. That's why Paul can say there's no Jew, Greek, no slave, free, no male, female. You are Abraham's seed together in Jesus.

Jesus. We cannot allow the Christian church today to be divided on racial lines or on gender lines or on hierarchy in society, slave or free.

The Galatian church, I think the danger was, and you see this more in the second half of the book where he talks more about the kind of fighting that's happening, they were going to become two churches in one but there should only be one church, those who trust in Jesus alone.

Paul is talking about whoever you are, wherever you come from, you have an equal status in salvation. So there's no hierarchy, no one's closer to God than anyone else in this place.

We're all one in Christ Jesus. The blood of Christ levels us out. It doesn't depend on your works of the law or how much you've obeyed God's rules, you're one in Christ Jesus.

[23 : 00] Now I don't think, just as an aside, Paul is removing those distinctions from within church life. He's saying that those distinctions shouldn't split church life but elsewhere you can find Paul talking about mission to the Jew and he's proud of being a Jew.

Those distinctions remain in the church but they don't divide the church. Similarly you find Paul giving different teachings to men and women in his letters.

The distinctions remain but they don't divide the church. You find Paul giving different instructions to slave and free. The letter to Philemon for example. This verse is sometimes I fear misused to become a kind of a magic eraser that rubs out other bits of the Bible we don't like.

But Paul's point is clear. in terms of our salvation we are one in Christ Jesus. We are all one seed of Abraham. We are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

That's what verse 26 says. You are all children of God. It's literally sons of God. That is we are all inheritors of the inheritance.

[24 : 15] What God is going to give we will all receive in Christ Jesus. And interestingly knowing that the Judaizers are really big on circumcision.

That's one of their things that uncircumcised pagans who become Christians have to get circumcised because it's like a law thing. And interestingly Paul says those who have been baptized where is it 27 as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

And what is that saying? Well he's saying the Judaizers need to get over the fact that they're obsessed with circumcision. That's no longer the right of entry into the body, into the church.

The right of entry is baptism and not circumcision. I mean ironically circumcision came with Abraham back in the time of faith and grace and promise.

It didn't come with Moses. They should get the fact that it's now baptism. And baptism is a very good leveller by the way. It's a great protection against bragging.

[25 : 26] I mean think about it. It's very hard to brag about your baptism. It's very hard to boast about your baptism because baptism is essentially something that is done to you not something done by you.

And so it's very hard to be proud about that. Baptism is done to you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit clothing you with Christ. So you can't boast about your baptism.

The only thing you should boast about is Christ. Paul is saying live up to your baptism. Live up to Christ. Well let me just conclude with some reflections and this is where I think the rubber hits the road.

The big question is this. In your life is Jesus Christ enough? Is he enough for you? Are you able to live for him just because of what he has done for you and done in you?

Are you able to be a Christian merely because you've been crucified with Christ and now he lives in you, now you're clothed with him? Is that all you need to live the Christian life?

[26 : 39] Or do you actually in your heart of hearts think that you need to be nannied, that you need to be kind of coerced by rules and regulations, so-called spiritual laws to kind of slap you around and make you live for Jesus?

Are you able to stay sober, stay pure, stay faithful, stay modest, stay good, stay praising God, stay serving others, stay serving and suffering for Jesus only because Christ lives in you through the Holy Spirit and you are crucified with him?

Is that all you need to live the Christian life? or do you actually in your fallenness are you saying Jesus isn't enough?

Are you saying that you need threats of judgment? Are you saying that you need lists of rules and regulations? That you need watertight legal definitions about what I can and can't do and how far can I go and those kind of things?

Do you think you need sort of secret compartments of your life where Jesus isn't allowed in or you need two sets of friends you know the Christian friends we act like a Christian and non Christian we act like a non Christian do you need constant comparison with other Christians in order to move along the Christian life do you need continual self assessment as to your progress or scoreboards about your good works friends all those things are works of the law and you do not need them why do you need a nanny why is not the gospel enough do you need law is not the gospel enough is not Jesus as Lord enough to live the Christian life is not God as father enough is not being declared a son of God through faith enough is not the promise of God enough is not the cross of Christ enough is not the

[28 : 53] Holy Spirit dwelling in you enough friends may you not insult the Lord Jesus by falling back to the harsh nanny of law he is all you need and so I pray that it may be so in your life and mine that he is enough amen