

9. The Promise and the Law

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We make them easily, but we often break them willingly or unwillingly. But our faithful God always keeps His promises to His children as well as unbelievers. Someone who had a lot of time counted the promises of God in the Bible. That person claimed that there are 7,487 promises of God. It doesn't matter how many promises there are in the Bible, because God has kept them and will keep them all.

Nothing, not even our disobedience, can invalidate His promise to save us through faith in Jesus Christ. Though we fail to keep His Law, God never fails to keep His Word.

2 Timothy 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

This timeless trustworthiness of God's promise, as Paul explains in our next verses, should be yet another reason for the Galatians to reject the Judaizers' claim that keeping the Law must be part of salvation.

Thus far apostle Paul has unrelenting message:

Galatians 2:16a knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ

He has called the Judaizers "accursed" in chapter 1. He has shown that his Gospel came directly from Jesus Christ and matches the message preached by the other apostles. Paul even confronted Peter in Antioch when Peter's legalistic behavior obscured the Gospel.

How, Paul wondered, could the Galatians abandon the very message that gave them life? Not even patriarch Abraham, the father of the Jews, was justified by the Law but by faith. How could the Galatians expect to please God according to the Law, which is impossible to keep due to mankind's sinful nature and condemns rather than justifies? It is by faith in Christ, who bore the curse of the Law for us, accepting our deserved judgment, that we receive the blessing of eternal life. Paul was precise and logical.

Who could argue with that? The Judaizers, of course. Their legalism blinded their spiritual eyes. Rather, they'd never had spiritual eyes to see the truth by their choice. Even if the truth stood in front of them, they wouldn't and couldn't see it.

A. THE LOGIC OF GOD'S LAW

Galatians 3:15-18 Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. 16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. 17 And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. 18 For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Since apostle Paul was hammering the inability of the Law to save sinner so hard that the Galatians began to wonder if Paul saw any value or goodness in the Law at all. Knowing their thoughts, the apostle who was inspired by the Holy Spirit began to explain them from Abraham's life in chapter 3.

Paul wants to do more than focus on the patriarch Abraham's salvation experience. He wants to show that Abraham's justification – and, in fact, the salvation of every believer – was and is based on God's covenant, His eternal plan to provide salvation to sinners. The Mosaic Law, though coming centuries after Abraham, didn't change that plan. On the contrary, the Law was part of the plan; it was intended to drive us to God's gracious promise.

The Greek word for 'covenant' is "diatheke." We'd now prefer to use the word 'contract.' A covenant held both parties to certain obligations and specified penalties for breaching the pact. Covenants of the OT were often sealed with a solemn ceremony, such as the slaughtering and dissecting of animals – a gruesome picture of what would happen if either party broke the covenant as it was described in Genesis 15.

Please note the last portion of v15:

Galatians 3:15b yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.

Covenants, in general, cannot be dissolved by one side or third party. It must be done in an agreement by the original parties of the covenant. In other words, binding agreements, whether they are formal covenants or legal wills, are unalterable. And if that's true in human relationships, how much more when God draws up the document – like the covenant He made with Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15.

In v16, the apostle explains to us about the Seed of Abraham. He didn't leave the interpretation to us in case someone might come up with another heresy. The Seed he talks about is Jesus Christ.

God promised an inheritance to Abraham and his posterity. Paul knew perfectly well that the immediate, literal reference of this promise was to the land of Canaan, which God was going to give to Abraham's physical descendants. But it is more than a Jewish nation or physical land for them. Rather, as the Lord mentioned that through One of Abraham's descendants will be the Savior of the world and through Him the whole human race will be blessed.

God's covenants with people are often designated as "conditional" or "unconditional." His promise to Noah not to destroy the world by water again was unconditional – God didn't require anything of Noah for that promise to be kept. In contrast, the Mosaic Law was conditional – Israel was obligated to keep the Law to receive God's blessing.

However, the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12 and 15 was both unconditional and conditional. God's choice to bless Abraham and his descendants had nothing to do with Abraham, but Abraham's faith relationship to God obligated the patriarch to trust and obey Him in all things.

By the way, when you study the Bible, please pay attention to pronouns, singular or plural. Our Holy Spirit, the Author of the Bible, doesn't throw words around and hopes that they would fit in somehow. When we pay attention to those little things, we get to have some incredible insights from the Lord.

Since Paul pointed out the Seed that is Jesus Christ, all those who are in Christ by faith are spiritual descendants of Abraham. We are part of the fulfillment of God's covenant to the patriarch. I said this to an unbelieving Jew, he looked at me like I just walked out of a lunatic asylum.

Though 430 years had elapsed between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic Law, the Law did not supersede God's covenant with Abraham. Even before Abraham, in eternity past, as a matter of fact, God decided to call a people to Himself and give them the gift of eternal life through His Son Jesus. Faith in Jesus Christ, not our vain attempts to keep the Law, is what saves us.

B. THE LOGIC OF GOD'S PROMISE

Galatians 3:19-22 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. 21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. 22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Our faith is a logical faith and can be defended on rational grounds, not as unbelievers would like to think as 'blind faith.' While there are divine mysteries in the faith that no man can fully explain, there are also divine reasons that any sincere person can understand.

Here apostle Paul is explaining the purpose for the Law – "because of transgressions." Satan would have us to prove ourselves holy by the law or good behaviors, which God gave to prove us sinners. God wanted to provide His people with a clear statement of His standards, with only one definition of righteousness and sin, so that when they failed to meet His perfect requirements, they would seek His grace.

Paul's reference to 'angels' emphasizes that these heavenly beings were somehow involved in the giving of the Law at Sinai along with the "mediator," who was Moses. But for the covenant with Abraham, there was no need for a mediator in Abraham's case since God was entering into a covenant with him, not Abraham with God.

Since the Judaizers are still digging their heels in their argument for legalism and the Law, Paul asks another rhetorical question to his readers in v21:

Galatians 3:21a Is the law then against the promises of God?

Actually, the Law and the Gospel are both part of God's plan. The Law shows us our sin, and the Gospel shows us the way to escape from sin's penalty and hold onto our life. In that sense, the Law and the Gospel are complementary, not contradictory. If the Law could "impart life," God would really be inconsistent. That would mean He had two plans for salvation – one by human performance and one by faith in Christ.

Obviously the Mosaic Law came from the Lord, so it is holy, and just, and good as it was mentioned in Romans 7:12. But we are unholy, unjust, and bad. The Law does not make us sinners; it reveals to us that we already are sinners.

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

In other words, the Law is a mirror that helps us see our "sinful dirty faces" and we cannot wash our face with the mirror, the Law.

C. SUMMARY

If a person is true to oneself, he should realize that he NEEDS the Savior, not the systems of law or good behavior to be saved.