

GALATIANS 5

Abraham, Moses, Jesus

*"Not until the law has bruised and smitten us will we admit our need of the gospel to bind up our wounds. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned us will we pine for Christ to set us free. Not until the law has condemned and killed us will we call upon Christ for justification and life. Not until the law has humbled us even to hell will we turn to the gospel to raise us to heaven."*¹

"My parents set up irrevocable trust agreements for each of us seven children. Once the trust papers had been signed, they could not be annulled or changed. These irrevocable trusts demonstrate our parents' generous, unconditional love for us."² Imagine you are the beneficiary of a will or trust, it would be automatically assumed that once promulgated, no one could annul or alter your benefactor's last wishes. These legal documents could not be shifted in the least bit once initiated. In today's world, most of us are familiar with the nature of wills and deeds. In the last portion of Galatians three, Paul uses this familiar analogy to help his readers understand the supremacy and authority of the Abrahamic covenant (We learned about Abraham's covenant with God in the first portion of chapter three). By comparing the nature of the covenant to that of a will, the Galatians could effectively understand that the Mosaic covenant, delivered approximately 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant, could not over-rule, shift, or alter the authority of the original testament of God! David Guzik, a Biblical scholar, writes: "Paul first establishes the principle that even with a covenant among men, the covenant stands firm once it is made - no one annuls or adds to it. Paul's point isn't really about covenants among men, but to say "how much more with a covenant God makes...This covenant and promise was made not only to Abraham, but also to Jesus the Messiah. So we cannot think that it was over-ruled by the covenant God later established with Israel at Sinai."

Pre-Article Questions:

1. How did God encourage and speak to your hearts during prayer partners last week?
2. What would you say is the purpose of "rules"?
3. In your life, what has been the hardest set of "rules" to follow whether coming from home, school, or work? What made those rules so difficult to follow? If you broke any of those rules, how did you feel afterwards?

The traditional view held by the Jews was that the covenantal blessings, promised to the "seed" of Abraham, found in Genesis, were meant for the Jewish nation. In verses 15-18, Paul counters this, explaining that the covenantal promises bestowed on Abraham's "seed" was a direct and ultimate reference to Jesus Christ. "It is no longer necessary to be in the Jewish nation to be a recipient of the promises; it is necessary to be in Christ... Since Christ is the heir of the promises, all those and only those who are in Christ by faith are beneficiaries of the irrevocable trust agreement God made with Abraham."

Not only does Paul counter their idea of "seed," later in this chapter he reminds them that Abraham and Moses are connected even though the nature of their covenants and the way they were received varied. The differences in the manner and matter of the Mosaic covenant certainly did not and could not nullify God's original dealings with Abraham!

1. Stott, John. 93

2. Galatians 3-IVP New Testament Commentaries: Understanding the Promise. www.biblegateway.com

3. Guzik, David. A Study Guide for Galatians 3. www.blueletterbible.org

4. Galatians 3-IVP New Testament Commentaries: Understanding the Promise. www.biblegateway.com

This brings us to the next logical question: if the law is pretty much separate from righteousness, faith, and God's promise to Abraham, why was it given at all? Why did God choose to make another covenant with Moses? Verses 19-25 bring great clarity to the purpose of the law and the covenant God made with Moses. John Stott writes: "He [Paul] was far from declaring the law unnecessary, for he was quite clear that it had an essential part to play in the purpose of God, the function of the law was not to bestow salvation, however, but to convince men of their need of it. To quote Andrew Jukes, 'Satan would have us to prove ourselves holy by the law, which God gave to prove us sinners.' ...So the law's main work was to expose sin. It is the law which turns 'sin' into 'transgression,' showing it up for what it is, a breach of the holy law of God."⁵

Before the law was given, there was 'sin' in the world (Rom. 5:13), but no way of actually measuring the offenses enacted. The law provided that standard and made it possible to establish a true violation. It was never meant to be an end in itself, simply a means to an end, the end being Christ. The law was given as a temporary addition to the Abrahamic covenant and was to be terminated when Christ died on the cross, making a final payment for sin and death. Righteousness could never truly be gained by keeping the law, faith in God's promises, and ultimately Christ's fulfillment of those promises in His death and resurrection were always the basis of God's mercy for His people. Righteousness, acceptance/justification before God was, and forever will be, based on faith in God's Son. Hence, God's promise to Abraham was confirmed through Moses and thus fulfilled in Christ.

So it is with this history in mind that we appreciate the law; it renders the message of the cross of Jesus Christ indispensable for those of us who believe. We need a Savior and the law exposes that need and leads us to Him! The Mosaic covenant, the law, entered then: "that it might fail, but that failure has been turned into blessing. The "side-road" of the law, which (had we remained there) could only lead us to the gallows, has by the great mercy of God directed us back toward the royal road of salvation, toward the Via Dolorosa and another set of gallows designed for the Prince of Glory."⁶

Article Question:

1. Any initial thoughts, questions, or comments from the article?
2. Before you read this article, what did you think about the laws, codes, and commandments God gave the Israelites in the Book of Exodus?
3. For those of you who may already be familiar with Moses and the law, how would you describe the role of Moses with God and His people the Israelites?

Galatians 3:15-29, NIV

Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. 16 The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. 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. 18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. 19 Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. 20 A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. 21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?

5. Stott, 89,90.

6. George, 261

Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. 22 But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. 23 Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. 24 So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. 26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Study Questions:

1. Since giving your life to Christ, what is best about having a new family of brothers and sisters in Christ?
2. From verses 15-18, what argument does Paul use to justify his argument that the promises of Abraham cannot be set aside, added to, or replaced by the law? (Thought: Just like a will, trust, or deed, once ratified, God's promise to Abraham could not be changed, nullified, or reversed, the law was given later, and it was not meant to override God's covenant with Abraham. It had a different purpose for coming on the scene.)
3. According to verses 19-25, what was the purpose of the law? (Thought: To expose our need for God and to establish what a true transgression was before God; the law was a temporary "side-path," if you will, that was designed to lead us to Jesus Christ.)
4. Read Romans 3:20, 4:15, and 7:7. How do these verses compare with verses 19-25 of Galatians 3?
5. When did you realize you needed a Savior? Since this time in your life, what have you come to appreciate the most about the "good news of the gospel and why?
6. Re-read verse 21. In what ways were the false teachers making the law and God's promise to Abraham seem contradictory? (Thought: By placing the law in the same category as "faith/righteousness/promise" for justification, they were creating a contradiction. The law's purpose, was to expose our need for a Savior, it was not and is not how one is saved and accepted by God)
7. How do God's promise (Abraham's covenant with God) and the law (Moses' covenant with God) work together to bring us to Christ, the goal of redemption?
8. How is your faith in Christ strengthened tonight knowing that from the time of Abraham God had a plan of redemption that spanned 2,000 years?
9. Why was it so important for Gentiles, especially Galatian Gentiles, to hear and receive the truth of the gospel?

Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meet with your prayer partner this week to read Exodus 19 & 20 and discuss:

1. What from these chapters is most surprising and touching to you and why?
2. What did you learn about God in these passages?
3. What did you learn about Moses and the Israelites from these passages?
4. Describe God's relationship with Moses from these chapters. How did Moses act as an "intermediary" between God and His people, the Israelites?
5. How does taking a fresh look at a part of the law given to Moses, the Ten Commandments (there is a lot more law in the following chapters), make you grateful for the cross of Jesus Christ today?

Scripture Memory:

Galatians 3:25-26

Galatians 3:28-29