



Sermon Questions

Date: *October 15, 2023* | Scripture: *Galatians 3:15-29*

1. Read the passage from the sermon together. What do you find convicting? What do you find challenging? What do you find confusing? (It may be helpful to [read the paraphrase of this passage written by Dr. Thomas Keene](#), who preached at our McLean evening service, included on the back)

Paul is making a complex argument here. He starts by comparing two covenants, or two contractually bound agreements: the covenant with Abraham, and the covenant with Moses and Israel

2. Read Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:7-21. What is the promise God makes to Abraham?
3. Gal 3:16 says that the “offspring” who receives these promises is actually Jesus himself. How does Jesus receive the promises of God in the covenant to Abraham?
4. Paul states that the law, the covenant made with Moses and Israel, does not annul the promise made. This is the mistake the false gospel makes. By reasoning that one can be justified by obedience to the law, it ignores the fact that God made promises to Abraham before the law, and Abraham was justified by faith. What does Paul say the purpose of the law actually was?

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. The prophet Jeremiah writes to God’s people in exile. They had been driven out of the promised land because they had broken the law of Moses. As Paul argues, the law of Moses had made them fully aware of their sinfulness and their need for grace. Jeremiah prophesies of a new covenant which will not be broken like the old one. This new covenant will not be taught, but will be written on their hearts. It will not be mediated, but will be given directly by God himself.

5. How does Christ fulfill the new covenant in himself? How does Christ apply that new covenant to believers?

Inward Grace in Action

The conclusion to Paul’s argument is all about unity in Christ. The Judaizers distinguished between “insiders” and “outsiders.” There were Jews who kept the law and Gentiles who didn’t even know the law. There were free people who were blessed by God and slaves who were not blessed. There were men who were allowed deeper into the temple than women who were restricted to their own court. But in Christ, no such distinctions exist.

Think about it this way. Paul is intentional when he identifies the whole Galatian church as “sons of God.” This is not a dissolving of gender. Rather, it is an assertion of our total union with Christ. Because he is the Son of God and we are in him, we are *sons* of God. That transforms the way we relate with one another in the church. In other words, our *union with* Christ leads to our *unity in* Christ.

- Where have you seen disunity in the church? What tends to cause it? How can union with Christ inform the solution to disunity?

ACTION: Ask God in prayer to reveal ways you have caused disunity and repent of them. Pray for greater unity in our church via deeper appreciation of union with Christ.

(The paraphrase) There's another reason why you should be confident that you have received the inheritance of salvation through the promise, that is the covenant made with Abraham, and not through the law, that is, the Mosaic covenant. This reason comes from ordinary life. This is how covenants work even in our own daily experience: it cannot be modified or cancelled after it has been formally certified. In our case there was already a covenant in place before the Covenant of Law came, namely, the Covenant of Promise made with Abraham. This covenant was made with Abraham's seed—that is, to a single line of offspring, which ultimately is fulfilled in the promised Messiah, the Son who is the Christ.

The Covenant of Law came later—a lot later in fact, about 430 years!—and it was not given in order to annul or amend the prior Covenant of Promise. The Covenant of Promise was certified and confirmed by God himself, and the Covenant of Law cannot and does not void that promise. Therefore the inheritance—which is to say all of salvation, and preeminently justification and the sending of the Spirit—was never to come by adherence to the Covenant of Law. That would be to contradict the earlier Covenant, which God assured to Abraham not through conditions and commandments, but by his promise.

Ok, but then why add the Covenant of Law at all? What purpose would it serve? Why not just fulfill the Covenant of Promise without any intermediate Mosaic period? (Why do we need a national covenant, one which would establish the seed as national Israel)? The law was added to illustrate, illuminate, incubate, impede but also *aggravate* the problem of transgression. [The Covenant of Promise, after all, does not address the deadly power of transgression, but simply promises blessing.] It was added in order to do this until the offspring promised should come into the world and receive the promised inheritance. What is more, the fact that it was put in place by various intermediaries—Moses for one, but even he received it through angels (rather than directly from God, who is one)—further proves that it cannot and does not annul the Covenant of Promise, which was ratified directly by God Himself.

Is the Covenant of Law then working against the Covenant of Promise? Absolutely not. If a different set of commandments could have been given, a different covenant of laws, one which was able to guarantee new-creation life (which is to say, the blessings of the promise) to its recipients, then righteousness would certainly have come by adherence to that covenant's laws. Since that was not possible [as no set of laws can solve the problem of sin, but only make it worse], The Scripture (you will remember that we read from Deuteronomy earlier that “everyone who does not do all of the law is under a curse”) was given to enclose and contain all sinful things under the power and rule of sin. He did this so that the blessing promised in the Covenant of Promise might be given to those who believe through faith in Jesus Christ.

What was life like under the Covenant of Law, before the era of faith came in the coming of Jesus? [I Paul know it personally, since I was there!] It was like being kept in custody, like being confined while waiting for something, in this case waiting for the era of faith to be revealed? The Covenant of Law was thus like a kind of warden or custodian or tutor that watched over us until the Christ should come, so that we might be justified not under the era of the Law, but under the Covenant of Faith.

Now though the Era of Faith is here, and so we are no longer under the custody of a warden. Rather, we have reached maturity. In Christ Jesus you are all—we are all!—sons of God [which means we have received the promised inheritance]. For when you were baptized, you were baptized in Christ, and therefore you have put on Christ. Because we have put on Christ there are no longer the divisions and classifications that there were in the old age; there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free person, no male or female. Everybody is one in Christ Jesus. This is the sum of it all: if you belong to the Christ, then you are the one seed of Abraham. You have received the promised inheritance that has been given to the Son of God.