

# Galatians 3:15-29

## An Outline

- I. Paul's Authority and True Gospel Declared (1:1-5).
- II. The Galatians' Openness to a False Gospel Exposed and the Perpetrators Condemned (1:6-10).
- III. Paul's Authority to Preach the True Gospel Validated (1:11-2:10).
- IV. Paul's Consistent Witness for the True Gospel of Faith Affirmed (2:11-21).
- V. The Galatians' Inconsistent Reliance on Faith Versus Works of the Law Questioned (3:1-5).
  - Salvation is BY FAITH ALONE from START to FINISH
- VI. Justification through Abrahamic Faith and Condemnation through Law Contrasted (3:6-14).
  - Justification comes BY FAITH, FORETOLD in Abraham and FULFILLED in Christ, because anyone who does not keep the Law PERFECTLY is cursed, but Christ REDEEMED us from this curse by becoming a curse for us on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- VII. The Enduring Abrahamic Promise and the Temporary Mosaic Law Explained (3:15-4:7).**
  - **Paul responds to the possible objection from Judaizers, who might argue that even if justification originally came by the faith of Abraham, it was replaced by the works of the Law 430 years later. Paul would argue that the latter does not nullify the former.**
    - A. The Abrahamic Promise was based on a binding covenant (3:15).**
      - So the Mosaic Covenant (Law) does not annul the Abrahamic Covenant (Promise).
    - B. The Abrahamic Promise was established on an enduring covenant (3:16-18).**
      - 1. The Promise endures to a singular Seed, that is, the Christ (3:16).**
      - 2. The Law of Moses does not negate the Promise to Abraham (3:17).**
      - 3. The Inheritance endures through the Promise, not through the Law (3:18).**
        - Galatians 2:21 If the Law (earned righteousness by works) replaced the Promise (imputed righteousness by grace through faith), then Christ could not be the fulfillment of the Promise, and He died for nothing!
    - C. The Law was temporary and inferior to the Promise (3:19).**
      - 1. The Law was given on account of transgressions until the Seed of Promise Came (3:19).**
      - 2. The Law came by angels and a mediator but God acted alone [in giving the Promise] (3:20).**
    - D. The Law trapped people in their sin so that people might find life through faith (3:21-23).**
    - E. The Law served as a guardian until Christ came to justify people by faith (3:24-25).**
    - F. Through faith in Christ all peoples without distinction are children of God, Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the Promise (3:26-29).**
    - G. We went from being slaves under the Law to become adopted as children and heirs through Christ (4:1-7).**
      - 1. Before we became children of God we were slaves to the sinful world system (4:1-3)**
      - 2. Through God's Son we were redeemed and adopted to become children and heirs of God (4:4-7).**

## Many “Seeds” (Greek) or One “Seed” (Greek) in Galatians 3:16, citing Genesis use of Singular Collective “Seed” (Hebrew)?

Paul makes the argument that the promise was given to Abraham and to his “seed” (i.e. offspring) singular and not “seeds” plural, so that the promise was to one future individual, namely, Christ, and not all the offspring of Abraham.

One problem with this argument is that in Hebrew (see Genesis 12:7; 13:15-16; 24:7), there is no morphological (i.e. form/spelling) difference between “seed” (*zera*) and “seeds;” (*zera*) that is, the terms are exactly the same. For example, in English, we use the word “sheep” to refer to a single sheep as well as many sheep with only context to distinguish the number.

Was Paul not well versed in the Hebrew language to know this? Paul was a Hebrew among Hebrews, a Pharisee trained under Gamaliel, and he wrote more powerfully than he spoke. So I doubt he was grammatically-challenged. Also, clearly from his other writings Paul understood the use of the singular to refer to the plural offspring of Abraham, as evidenced in Romans 4:18 and 9:7.

Paul may have simply sought to argue that NOT ALL of Abraham’s offspring received the promise of God. Abraham’s offspring by Hagar (i.e. Ishmael) and Keturah (i.e. Midian, etc.) were not part of the promise, even though they were of the “seed” of Abraham. Only Isaac received the promise (cf. Romans 9:7). Even after Isaac, the promise only came to Jacob, not Esau (Romans 9:11-13), even though he too was the “seed” of Abraham. In other words, there were many offspring of Abraham who did not receive the promise of God. So it would be wrong to interpret the Genesis passages to mean that all Abraham’s seeds inherited God’s promise. The key to the promise was not how many offspring would enjoy the promise of God, for none of them received the promise of God while they were living (cf. Hebrews 11:13), but rather which Offspring would finally fulfill the promises of God, and that is Christ. The Promise was not nullified by the Law but endured through the Law, through the Prophets, even until John the Baptist, who made clear to the priests and Levites that he was NOT the Messiah but a simply a witness to Him (John 1:20-22).

## What was the Purpose of the Law in Romans 3:19, 22?

### “Law was added because of transgressions” (3:19)

**The Law Reveals Sin as Sin:** “Did that which is good [the Law], then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful” (Romans 7:13).

**The Law Makes a Visible Transgression out of an Otherwise Invisible Rebellion:** “And where there is no law there is no transgression” (Romans 4:15).

**The Law Increases Transgression:** “The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase.” (Romans 5:20).

**The Law Arouses Our Sinful Nature:** “For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death” (Romans 7:5).

The Law is like an X-Ray of a ruptured artery. It shows and magnifies the problem, but it does not displace the requirement for surgery (faith in Christ) by which the problem is fixed.

## What does Galatians 3:19-20 mean with reference to the mediator and God being one?

Sometimes a good explanatory translation is helpful. Compare the *NIV* and *NLT*:

The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

God gave his law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people. Now a mediator is helpful if more than one party must reach an agreement. But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when he gave his promise to Abraham.

Paul may have been using a bit of theological shorthand to make his point. God used Moses to mediate His covenant of Law with the people of Israel. God used no such mediator when He made His covenant of Promise with Abraham. Abraham was not the mediator but simply the recipient of the promise. So we speak of “the Law of Moses (the mediator)” and “the Promise to Abraham (recipient).”

What perhaps is Paul’s point? The Promise was directly initiated and ratified by God, so that something mediated by a man and through angels (cf. Acts 7:38, 53; Hebrews 2:2; ) would not have the authority to nullify it.

## Law could NOT impart life (3:21)...Kept people in sin (3:22)?

In addition to the impossibility of keeping the perfect standard of the Law, the Book of Hebrews makes the extensive argument of the inferiority of the Law in the priesthood and sacrificial system, which made no provision for willful sins and could not take away sins (Hebrews 9:7 and 10:28; Hebrews 10:3-4).

**“But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin” (3:22).**

- “Scripture” and “everything” are the terms used here instead of “Law” and “us” so that everyone is included, not just those under the Law or those living in the time the Law was given, including both Abraham and Moses, both Jews and Gentiles. So, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). While everything is locked up under the control of sin, only “those who believe” receive “what was promised.”

- The Jews stumbled over the stumbling block of Christ, even the way of faith in Christ, because many held to the way of “earned” righteousness by the works of the Law. Romans 9:30-10:4:

<sup>30</sup>What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup>but the people of Israel, **who pursued the law as the way of righteousness**, have not attained their goal. <sup>32</sup>Why not? **Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.** They stumbled over the stumbling stone... Brothers

and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. <sup>3</sup>For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. **Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.** <sup>4</sup>Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

## No Longer Under a Guardian?

Christians are no longer under the Guardianship of the Law (Galatians 3:25). Christ came to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17). The Law has for Christians become obsolete and of diminishing significance (Hebrews 8:13). The Old Covenant Righteous Demands of the Law of Moses has been replaced by the New Covenant Imputed Righteousness of Grace in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:7-13; John 1:16-17).

As a Guardian cannot make children righteous, the Law could not make anyone righteous. It simply exposed sin and amplified the sinfulness of sin and demonstrated the weakness of people to keep the Law. The Law prepared the way for Faith, so that people would acknowledge their sinfulness and helplessness before the Law of God and lean completely on Christ, the bearer and fulfillment of the Promises of God to Abraham.

"We" in Galatians 3:23-25 vs. "You" in Galatians 3:26-29. The "We" refer to the experience of the Jews with respect to the Mosaic Law. The "You" refers to Gentiles. This distinction is consistent throughout the Book of Galatians (cf. Galatians 2:15 "we who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles"; Galatians 4:8 "Formerly, when you did not know God...")

**There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (3:28).**

- Just like in 3:22, where Paul universalized the corruption of sin, here he universalizes the reach of FAITH. That there is no distinction between Jew ("we") and Gentile ("you") reminds us of Galatians 3:8, where Paul cited Genesis 12:6 ("All nations will be blessed through you."), so that the Promise of God to Abraham was always intended for all people. Since FAITH knows no ethnic, social, economic or gender distinction, it becomes a great unifying principle in Christ, so that everyone who believes can belong to Abraham's Seed and become heirs according the Promise.

## Major Applications

**KNOWING THE RIGHT WHY HELPS US TO DO THE RIGHT WHAT:** When we understand the WHY of the LAW and the PROMISE, it will shape our ATTITUDE to be one of humility, gratitude and dependence, our EFFORT as motivated by a loving obedience to the One Who has secured our righteousness and eternal hope, and our MESSAGE, which is to call all people to trust in Christ, who alone can give us the righteousness that leads to eternal life, a righteousness that we cannot merit nor should we live as though we could.

**FAITH GIVES PERSPECTIVE TO OUR SPIRITUAL PREJUDICES:** You don't have to become a Jew. You don't have to become more man-like for significance. You don't need to strive for a better economic status.