

Galatians Chapter 3 Continued

Verses 15-22: Paul anticipated and refuted a possible objection to his use of Abraham to prove the doctrine of justification by faith, that the giving of the law at Sinai after Abraham brought about a change and a better method of salvation. The apostle dismissed that argument by showing the superiority of the Abrahamic Covenant (verses 15-18), and the inferiority of the law (verses 19-22).

Galatians 3:15 "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though [it be] but a man's covenant, yet [if it be] confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto."

“Brethren”: This term of endearment reveals Paul’s compassionate love for the Galatians, which they may have begun to question in light of his stern rebuke (verses 1, 3).

“Man’s covenant”: Even human covenants, once confirmed, are considered irrevocable and unchangeable, how much more a covenant made by an unchanging God (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17).

“Confirmed” (ratified, validated): The stipulations of a will, once ratified, cannot later be invalidated or added to.

A covenant is an unbreakable agreement. Many times, the covenant was sealed with blood. Even covenants between two earthly men were binding.

The word "disannulleth" means neutralize, or violate. A covenant was more than just an agreement. It was an unbreakable agreement. We see then, that the covenant that God made with Abraham was not ever to be broken.

Galatians 3:16 "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

“Promises”: Those associated with the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:3, 7; 13:15-16; 15:5, 18; 17:8; 22:16-18; 26:3-4; 28:13-14). Because they were made both to Abraham and his descendants, they did not become void when Abraham died, or when the law came.

“Seed” (verse 19). The quote is from (Gen. 12:7). The singular form of the Hebrew words, like its English and Greek counterparts, can be used in a collective sense. Paul’s point is that in some Old Testament passages (e.g., Gen. 3:15; 22:18), “seed” refers to the greatest of Abrahams’ descendants, Jesus Christ.

This leaves no doubt at all, that the promises that were made to Abraham belong to all believers in Christ. We need not try to explain this Scripture, just know that it is true, and accept it.

Romans 12:5 "So we, [being] many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

We see beyond a shadow of doubt that these promises made to Abraham were for all who believe in Christ.

Galatians 3:17 "And this I say, [that] the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect."

“Four hundred and thirty years”: From Israel’s sojourn in Egypt (Exodus 12:40), to the giving of the law at Sinai (1445 B.C.). The law came 645 years after the initial promise to Abraham (2090 B.C.; Gen. 12:4; 21:5; 25:26; 47:9), but the promise was repeated to Isaac (Gen. 26:24) and later to Jacob (in 1928 B.C.; Gen. 28:15).

The last known reaffirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob occurred (in Gen. 46:2-4; 1875 B.C.), just before he went to Egypt, 430 years before the mosaic law was given.

“The covenant”: The Abrahamic Covenant (see note on Gen. 9:16; 12:1-3; Rom. 9:4).

“Confirmed before of God” (see note on verse 15). Once God ratified the covenant officially (see notes on Gen. 15:9-21), it had lasting authority so that nothing and no one could annul it.

The Abrahamic Covenant was unilateral (God made the promise to Himself), eternal (it provide for everlasting blessing), irrevocable (it will never cease), unconditional (in that it depended on God, not man), but its complete fulfillment awaits the salvation of Israel and the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The verse might be read as follows: “I say this: the law, which appeared 430 years later, cannot void the covenant earlier ratified by God, so as to make the promise ineffective.” Paul’s point is this: If a human will, once confirmed, cannot be altered (verse 15), how much less will the divine covenant be changed 430 years after its ratification by God.

The Abrahamic covenant promised justification by faith. In the 430 years after its ratification by God, the Abrahamic covenant promised justification by faith. In the 430 years between the giving of this covenant and the law’s appearance, God justified man by faith.

When the law appeared, it did not, indeed it could not, void this principle of justification by faith. Had it done so, the law would have made God’s promise of no effect.

This is saying, that even though the law was given to Moses about 430 years after this promise was made to Abraham, it does not fulfill the promise made to Abraham, or do away with it. God had to bring them this way, so they could see that law alone would not save anyone.

This 430 years was really the time the family of Jacob lived in Egypt before Moses, sent by God, delivered them. This is certainly not the exact time from the time of Abraham, until the children were delivered out of Egypt.

The law was like Ishmael, it was of the flesh. Grace and Isaac were of the Spirit. This covenant, made with Abraham, was not flesh, but Spirit. The first was not the Spirit, but the second.

Galatians 3:18 "For if the inheritance [be] of the law, [it is] no more of promise: but God gave [it] to Abraham by promise."

Paul again emphasized that there is no middle ground between law (works), and promise (grace); the two principles are mutually exclusive ways of salvation (Rom. 4:14). An "inheritance" by definition is something granted, not worked for, as proven in the case of Abraham.

The first half of this verse is only hypothetical. Were "the inheritance" (salvation), a result of obeying "the law," then it would not be the result of believing God's "promise." The verse's latter half rejects the hypothesis of the first half: "Abraham" was divinely given justification because of his faith in God's "promise."

If the keeping of the law could bring the inheritance, it would not be an inheritance. An inheritance is something you receive at the death of another, which you have not earned. It is given to you because of your relation to the one who died. This shows, not only the greatness of the inheritance, but the greatness of the giver of the inheritance. God, through Jesus Christ, willed us the great inheritance. It is ours by sonship.

Verses 19-22: Having shown the superiority of the promise to Abraham (verses 15-18); Paul described the inferiority of the law, and its purpose.

Galatians 3:19 "Wherefore then [serveth] the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; [and it was] ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator."

"Was added because of transgressions": Paul's persuasive argument that the promise is superior to the law raises an obvious question: What was the purpose of the law? Paul's answer is that the law reveals man's utter sinfulness, inability to save himself, and desperate need of a Savior, it was never intended to be the way of salvation (Rom. 7:1-13).

"By angels": The bible teaches that angels were involved in the giving of the law (Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2), but does not explain the precise role they played.

"Seed" (see note on verse 16).

Since the law can neither save (verses 10-14), nor can it annul the Abrahamic covenant (verses 15-18), what purpose did it serve? "It was added" [alongside the covenant], "because of transgressions," that is, to reveal the hideous character of man's sin. Transgression was subsequent, not prior to, the law.

The law laid down the divine standard, and when man overstepped it, he became guilty of transgression. The inferiority of the law to the Abrahamic covenant is seen in three ways.

- (1) The law “was added” after the covenant and thus was subordinate to it.
- (2) The law was temporary; being in effect only “till the seed” (Jesus), “should come.”
- (3) Unlike the covenant God gave directly to Abraham, the law “was ordained” (handed down), indirectly by God through “angels” to its “mediator,” Moses (Acts 7:53).

The laws and ordinances were for a purpose. Had there been no law, we would not have been aware of our need for the Savior. Every man was doing what was right in his own sight, and God gave the law to show the error. All of the sacrifices for sin and transgressions were a type and shadow of the great sacrifice that Jesus made for all of us.

The mediator (go between), we see here, is no other than Moses. Moses received the law and passed it on to the people. God used angels to communicate with man, as he did with the three angels that appeared to Abraham. The seed (singular), the promise was made to, of course, was Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:20 "Now a mediator is not [a mediator] of one, but God is one."

“Mediator”: Paul’s point is apparently that a “mediator” is required when more than one party is involved, but God alone ratified the covenant with Abraham (see notes on Gen. 15:7-21).

We see from this, that the mediator is actually a go-between. In the case of Moses as mediator, he is between God and mankind. He represented God to mankind and mankind to God. The way “God is one”, is in the Spirit.

1 John 5:7 "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."

Galatians 3:21 "[Is] the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law."

Paul uses the strongest Greek negative (see note on 2:17), to disdain the idea that the law and the promise are at opposite purposes. Since God gave them both and does not work against Himself, law and promise work in harmony. The law reveals man’s sinfulness and need for the salvation freely offered in the promise. If the law could have provided righteousness and eternal life, there would be no gracious promise.

The many differences between law and covenant (“promise”), might seem to imply that the two are opposed to one another. This is not the case. Assuming for the moment that “righteousness” (salvation), could come by meritorious works, then law and promise would be in competition. But as it is, they are complementary.

This is saying, if man could have lived up to the law, it would have brought life. Man, however, could not keep every little detail of the law. Jesus did not come to do away with the law, but to fulfill the law. He took care of all the sacrifices and the ordinances for us.

The sacrifice of Jesus' body on the cross took care of all sacrifices for all time for everyone who will believe. Our righteousness is ours, because we have been washed in the blood of Jesus and been clothed in His righteousness.

Verses 22-24: In antiquity the "schoolmaster" was a family slave who led a boy to and from school, overseeing his conduct. In like manner, "the law" pointed out our "sin" and led us to "Christ," who alone can put away sin.

Galatians 3:22 "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

"Concluded all under sin": The Greek verb translated "shut up" (concluded), means "to enclose on all sides." Paul portrays all mankind as hopelessly trapped in sin like a school of fish caught in a net. That all people are sinners is the express teaching of Scripture (see note on Rom. 3:19; 1 Kings 8:46; Psalm 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:9-19, 23; 11:32).

If you say you have not sinned, you are a liar, and the truth is not in you. We have all sinned; we are just forgiven if we believe that Jesus was our payment for our sin.

John 3:17 "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

Romans 4:13 "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, [was] not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."

Galatians 3:23 "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed."

"Before faith came": From the viewpoints of both the history of redemption and through all times in the area of individual salvation (verses 19, 24-25; 4:1-4), only saving faith unlocks the door of the prison where the law keeps men bound.

"We were kept under the law": Paul personifies the law as a jailer of guilty, condemned sinners, on death row awaiting God's judgment (Rom. 6:23).

"The faith ... afterwards be revealed": Again, Paul was looking at the coming of Christ, historically and at each believer's salvation, individually. Faith in Christ alone releases people from bondage to law, whether the Mosaic law, or the law written on the hearts of Gentiles (Romans 2:14-16).

Those who depended on the law did not operate in faith. They felt that the keeping of the law made them perfect in the sight of God. The sad thing about all the sacrifices that they made was that it did not clear their conscience of their sin. Their sin was covered for a year, but not done away with.

Jesus does away with our sin. He put our sin as far away as the east is from the west, and He does not want us to remember it any more. His blood washed our sin completely away. The "we", which was spoken of in the verse above, is all God's people, not just Jews.

Galatians 3:24 "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

“Schoolmaster”: The Greek word denotes a slave whose duty it was to take care of a child until adulthood. The “schoolmaster” escorted the children to and from school and watched over their behavior at home.

Schoolmasters were often strict disciplinarians, causing those under their care to yearn for the day when they would be free from their tutor’s custody. The law was our schoolmaster which, by showing us our sins, was escorting us to Christ.

When I study the laws and ordinances of the Old Testament, I feel terrible guilt. That is what is meant by the law being our schoolmaster. The law taught us how guilty of sin we really are and that within ourselves there is no way to pay the awful price that we owe.

We needed a Savior. Jesus Christ took our place on the cross. The pain that He bore should have been paid by each of us. He substituted Himself for us. He paid our debt in full.

Verses 25-26: Believers, through faith in Jesus Christ, have come of age as God’s children. Thus, they are not under the tutelage of the law (Rom. 6:14), although they are still obligated to obey God’s holy and unchanging righteous standards which are now given authority in the New Covenant (6:2; Rom. 8:4; 1 Cor. 9:21).

Galatians 3:25 "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."

After one’s conversion to Christ, he is no longer under the curse of the law, as it has fulfilled its divinely intended purpose.

There is a confidence that comes in knowing (having faith), the Lord Jesus has taken care of it for us. We do not go around trying to keep a group of laws in a book. We keep the law God has placed in our heart.

Jesus said, If you love me, you will keep my commandments. His commandments are written on the fleshly part of every believer's heart. We no longer need a schoolmaster; we just follow Jesus in our heart.

Galatians 3:26 "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

“Children of God”: While God is the Father of all people in a general sense because He created them (Acts 17:24-28), only those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ are God’s true spiritual children. Unbelievers are the children of Satan (Matthew 13:38; John 8:38, 41, 44; Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:10; Eph. 2:3; 1 John 5:19).

“For” corroborates the assertion of the Christian’s no longer being under law. The reason is “ye are all the children” [or, sons] “of God.” The Greek word rendered “children” is *huiioi*, which means full-grown, adult sons. As the minor is no longer under his schoolmaster upon reaching adulthood, so one is no longer under the condemnation of the law upon believing in Christ and becoming God’s son.

Romans 8:15 "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

Look, with me, at what happens just because we believe in Jesus.

John 1:12 "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name:"

In the following Scripture, we will see that the promise to the seed of Abraham is our promise, as well, if we believe in Jesus.

Romans 8:17 "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and jointheirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with [him], that we may be also glorified together."

Galatians 3:27 "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

“Baptized into Christ”: This is not water baptism, which cannot save (see notes on Acts 2:38; 22:16). Paul used the word “baptized” in a metaphorical manner to speak of being “immersed,” or “placed into” Christ (2:20) by the spiritual miracle of union with Him in His death and resurrection. See notes on Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 6:17.

“Put on Christ”: The result of the believer’s spiritual union with Christ. Paul was emphasizing the fact that we have been united with Christ through salvation. Positionally before God, we have put on Christ, His death, resurrection, and righteousness (see notes on Phil. 3:8-10). Practically, we need to cloth ourselves with Christ before men, in our conduct (Rom. 13:14).

“For” confirms the Galatians’ place as the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus. “As many of you” means “all of you.” “Baptized into Christ” means “brought into an intimate relation with Christ.” As such they “have put on Christ.” To “put on someone” is an ancient idiom for assuming the standing or position of another person.

To “put on Christ,” therefore, means to assume (adopt); His standing before God. Since Jesus is God’s Son, the Galatians are God’s sons, thus confirming verse 26. This verse may be

paraphrased, "For all of you who have been brought into an intimate relationship with Christ have assumed His own standing before God, namely, His Sonship."

True baptism for a believer is being buried in the watery grave and rising to new life in Him. We no longer live, but Christ liveth in us. We are actually clothed in His righteousness. We were clothed in sin, before we became a Christian, but after we receive Him, He takes our sin and clothes us in His righteousness.

Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

"For ye are all one in Christ Jesus": All those who are one with Jesus Christ are one with one another. This verse does not deny that God has designed racial, social, and sexual distinctions among Christians, but it affirms that those do not imply spiritual inequality before God.

Nor is this spiritual equality incompatible with the God-ordained roles of headship and submission in the church, society and at home. Jesus Christ, thought fully equal with the Father, assumed a submissive role during His incarnation (Phil. 2:5-8).

This expresses the logical outcome of the Galatians' having "put on Christ" (verse 27) and, hence, being "the sons of God" (verse 26). God views them all the same ("ye are all one"), as His sons. There being no ethnic ("Jew, Greek"), social ("bond, free"), or sexual ("male, female"), distinctions.

I have said so many times in these lessons, that God is not interested in the flesh of mankind. It is in the flesh that we are different nationalities and different genders. The spirit does not have a color or a sex. It is the spirit of mankind that Jesus quickens, not the flesh. The part of us that is made in the image of God is the spirit. God is a Spirit.

If we are in the image of someone who is Spirit, then we must be spirit, too. The real me, is not the flesh you see with your eyes, but is the spirit which dwells within this body of flesh. My spirit is a son of God. Look in the words of Jesus, how we are one in Him.

John 17:21 "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

Galatians 3:29 "And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

"Abraham's seed" (see note on verse 7). Not all physical children of Abraham are the "Israel of God" (6:16), that is, true spiritual children of Abraham (Rom. 9:6-8). Gentile believers who are not physical children of Abraham are, however, his spiritual children in the sense that they followed the pattern of his faith (see note on Rom. 4:11-12).

"Heirs according to the promise": All believers are heirs of the spiritual blessing that accompanied the Abrahamic Covenant, justification by faith (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3-11).

The only "if" in all of this, is if ye be Christ's. Have you given yourself over completely to Christ? Are you truly His, or are you pretending? He knows the difference. He will separate the pretenders, when we stand before Him on judgment day.

His sheep will be gathered into heaven to be with Him. The pretenders will go the way of the goats to eternal damnation. The seed of Abraham is Jesus. We inherit the promises, because we belong to Jesus. Do not let even one more hour pass, before you give yourself completely to Jesus.

Galatians Chapter 3 Continued Questions

1. What is a covenant?
2. What was the covenant sealed by many times?
3. What does disannulleth mean?
4. What does that tell us about the covenant God made with Abraham?
5. Who were the promises made to?
6. Who is the seed of Abraham?
7. Did the law do away with the promise?
8. Is this 430 years a literal time?
9. What son of Abraham was the law like?
10. How was it like him?
11. Which son of Abraham was the son of promise?
12. What is an inheritance?
13. The law was added, because of _____.
14. Who was the mediator spoken of in verse 19?
15. All of the sacrifices in the Old Testament were a type and shadow of what?
16. Who was Moses the mediator between?
17. Jesus did not come to do away with the law, but to _____ it.
18. What has the Scripture concluded about all men?

19. What is the law called in verse 24?
20. When are we no longer under a schoolmaster?
21. What law does the Christian keep?
22. How can we be children of God?
23. What special name can we call the Father, after we have been adopted?
24. What is true baptism?
25. The part of us that is made in the image of God is our _____.
26. What is the only "if" to becoming heirs?