

Unlocking Freedom: A Study in Galatians

Galatians 3:15-22

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist

March 31, 2019

Introduction

Open your Bibles to **Galatians 3:15-22**, read with me **verses 15-22**. *Prayer.*

From a very young age my father and mother instilled in me a love for sports. I loved reading about them, listening to them on the radio, watching them on the tv, and I especially loved playing them. Football, Soccer, Basketball, Baseball, you name it I most likely loved playing it. There were no video games on my phone or tablet in my possession, and so if you wanted to know where I was most days, you only had to look and listen to where the noise of happy children playing sports was – there you would find me. And because of my love for sports I collected all kinds of sports memorabilia, especially cards. Whenever we were out, if I could, I would use my money to buy a pack of sports cards. When it was all said and done, I had quite the collection of football, baseball, and basketball cards – some worth a lot of money and others not so much. It didn't matter to me, because I loved my favorite sports teams and players so much that I wanted to collect cards of them. And although I could tell you the most minuscule detail about my favorite sports player – like **Kirby Puckett, Cris Carter, or John Stockton** – I had never met them. I was simply a huge fan of theirs, *a stalker really*. There was no relationship with them, just a creepy sort of love for them – I mean I would go to war in order to protect some of their dignity with other kids who didn't like them – I even tried to act like them. But again, no relationship with them. Most of you can relate, as we do the same thing to our favorite TV show actors and movie stars, political champions and sports heroes. We could tell you every little detail about their personal lives and their lives on stage, but we in all actuality do not have a relationship with them. This in a way is what Paul is trying to tell us. He is showing us, to great lengths, the importance of having a relationship with Jesus Christ as your Savior. The implications are eternal. And yet, there are many who have been bewitched into believing that knowledge accompanying obedience saves; they would say that they know of Jesus, even most of the details about His life and ministry on this earth – they know His decrees - and yet when it comes right down to it, they have no relationship with Him. They are simply fans, relying on their behavior to save them, and not truly saved.

Paul's heart goes out to these people who have been deceived, and he spends much time showing them personally, theologically, and historically that salvation is only received by faith through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and nothing else. You are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone – you bring nothing to the table except a guilty condemned spirit, riddled with sin from birth. Therefore, the work of salvation is completely done by God. This is what Paul is reminding the Churches in southern Galatia. And yet at the same time that he is reminding them of this foundational truth, there are Judaizers who are preaching and seeking to persuade them in a faith + works salvation. They put the faith of Abraham and the Law of Moses on the same level – as if the Law was a supplement to faith. This was the heresy they were preaching. And this

caused many of the Galatian believers to be confused, bewitched, and even led astray (deserting Him who called them by grace). But you may say, we are not living in those times, so why are we spending so much time addressing this heresy? Now why we need to know all of this, coming at it from every single angle? Because there are millions of men, women and children who are walking down the broad path that leads to destruction due to their having believed this fatal heresy presented to the Galatians years ago. Do you understand that? This heresy brought into the Church at the beginning of its existence still exists today. And God relies on you to reach them with your life. He has placed you where you are in your life, at this perfect time, to share Christ with others shattering any false gospel they may believe in. And when you come here on Sunday, it is my goal to equip you to better do that. So, we need to be prepared to unveil the errors of it to your friends who have been blinded by it, by opening up Scripture and elevating the truth of Christ with your words and by your behavior.

So let's begin where Paul begins this morning – by expressing the superiority of grace in comparison to the Law. Read **verses 15-18**.

1. The Superiority of Grace (vv. 15-18)

In seeking to elevate Grace and Faith above Law – Paul reminds us again of Abraham. Now we spoke a bit about Abraham last week and so let me just quickly remind you of why Abraham makes an appearance here in these verses. Abraham appeared approximately 2,000 years prior to Paul and during his time on this earth God blessed him with some unconditional promises. He said to Abraham, *“I’m going to make your name great, as you will be the father of a nation.”* And furthermore, *“Abraham, I am going to give you much land.”* And finally, *“In you...through your offspring (in your seed) all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”* There was nothing Abraham had to do but to trust God, and take Him at His word – “. And so we read that Abraham passed down these words to Isaac and then from Isaac to Jacob, and then Jacob makes his way to Egypt to be with his son Joseph, and then after 480 years Moses entered the scene with the Law in hand. But before we get to Moses, let's look deeper in to Abraham.

Verse 15 - God made a binding covenant, a promise, with Abraham – a covenant, similar to man's covenants - that when *it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it*. In **verse 15**, Paul is taking a foundational truth in the human realm and applying it to God's covenant with Abraham. **For example**, if you were to walk on a car lot, find a vehicle you absolutely love and then purchase the vehicle, you would have to sign a contract with that dealer that is binding. He would not be able to, after your purchase of a \$20,000 car, after you have signed the contract, add another \$10,000 to it. The contract/covenant you made is binding, and thus to do so would be illegal here. Paul is saying that those rules apply for God's covenant with Abraham also. *“Abraham, I will bless all the nations of the earth through your offspring...”* What Paul is saying is that salvation came through Christ, the seed of Abraham, as promised by God Himself to Abraham – Jesus is the One who was promised, He is that seed of Abraham, and His life, death and resurrection bringing forth salvation is the blessing for all nations - and God did not nullify or cancel this covenant (promise) with Abraham when Moses entered the

scene with the Law 430 years later. **Verse 17** – “*The Law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate (cancel) a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify (render useless) the promise.*” Just because God made another covenant with Moses 430 years after He made His with Abraham does not mean that the Law was given by God to add to or cancelled God’s previous covenant; because God’s covenant with Abraham was binding, like human contracts, and there was no need to add to it. And again that covenant with Abraham was that *his seed* (Christ) would bring salvation to those who would believe. Thus salvation has always been by grace through faith in Christ alone and not by the Law. **Verse 18** – “*For if the inheritance is based on the law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.*” When God makes a promise, He keeps it – and that promise is that salvation would come from a descendant of Abraham, not through the Law. Paul is showing the superiority of God’s Gracious Promise above the Law. One wasn’t given to replace the other.

If that is true, then the logical thought that would follow verse 18 is ‘*then why the Law at all?*’ None of this would be confusing to so many people if the Law never came. But the Law did come, and God was the One that gave it, therefore it must have a purpose. So, what was the purpose of the Law? I assure you, it was not to confuse. Look with me at verses 19-21.

2. The Purpose of the Law (vv. 19-21)

“Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained by angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made” (v. 19).

As Paul seeks to answer this logical question, he begins with this answer, “*it was added because of transgression.*” “Transgression” means to “step over the boundary” – We have stepped over the line out of God’s holy presence – like Adam and Eve. Therefore, the purpose of the Law – the reason it had to be added to the original covenant given to Abraham - was to reveal humanities total sinfulness. Without the Law we would have no standard in which to understand God’s holy expectations of us and our complete inability to live up to that standard. **For example**, studies have shown that most people see themselves as good people, when in fact they are far from it. So then why do they see themselves as good people? It is because they are measuring up to the standards of others. “I am not as much of a gossip as her!” or “I have not done as many bad things as him”. And when we line up next to the worse of the worse we end up looking pretty good. But when we hold ourselves to the perfect standard of God’s righteousness and holiness we find ourselves nowhere close – and full of sin. So then, why the law? It is God’s holy standard, and it’s purpose is to expose our sinfulness leading us to understand our need for a Savior.

Paul then continues on, “*Having been ordained by angels by the agency of a mediator...*” What Paul is doing here is he is reminding us of that day when the Law was ordained, or carried out, through the assistance of angels on Mt. Sinai to Moses who would then become the mediator between God and the people of Israel. **Exodus 19:18-21** tells us of that day. It was 3 months after their exodus out of Egypt, and the nation of Israel had

made camp near the base of Mt. Sinai. And after hearing a loud trumpet sound Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God at the base of the mountain. The mountain was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire and as smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, the entire mountain quaked violently. And when Moses spoke to the Lord, He answered him with thunder. The awesome holiness of God surrounded the mountain – striking fear in the hearts of a nation - and God instructed Moses to *“Go down and warn the people to not break through to the Lord, or they would perish.”* It was in that setting that God, along with the assistance of His angels gave the Law to Moses, as mediator.

‘Until’...I absolutely love this word, it adds a temporary sense to this old covenant. *“Having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.”*

Paul is reminding us, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the Law will only weigh down on us *until* we place our faith in the person and work of Jesus and in His Righteousness. At that point, we know that the law no longer terrorizes and crushes us, because righteousness has been granted to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and we are now holy and blameless in the sight of God. God no longer sees our sinful rebellion to His perfect law and order, He sees His Son’s righteousness. Now do you see the reason for the Law? It has and always will be used as a vehicle to reveal to us our sinfulness and our need for a Savior, and then when we trust in the Savior, the burden is lifted. So in essence we are no longer under the covenant of Moses and the Law, we are walking in the covenant of faith and grace given first by God to Abraham.

Verse 20 reads, *“Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.”* I think in this verse, Paul is again highlighting the superiority of Abraham’s covenant of faith in relation to Moses’ covenant of Law. With Abraham, God spoke directly to him as Friend to friend without a mediator. With Moses, God spoke to Moses as a mediator to the many. There is a difference in relationship.

So then is the law of Moses in opposition to, pitted against, the promise of salvation through faith? **Verse 21** – *“Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.”* Absolutely not! The Law was never intended to give eternal life, our righteousness was never granted through the Law (if it was then our righteousness would have been based on Law – which is what you are hearing from these Judaizers). They are not in opposition, but in fact, the Law and Grace work together beautifully in God’s remarkable plan for salvation.

3. The Relationships between Grace and Law (v. 22)

Verse 22 - *“But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”* This word “shut up” in the Greek means to “enclose together” – it carries with it the word picture of being imprisoned, locked up in a high security facility with no way of escape. The Law, expressed through the Scriptures, serves a wonderful purpose in relationship to the Saving Grace offered by

God through faith in Jesus Christ. All humanity has been imprisoned by the Law because we have all fallen short of its perfect requirements – and this was God’s plan. *The Scripture has shut up everyone under sin...So that we would see our need for a Savior, place our faith in Jesus Christ, and receive the promise of eternal life.*

The Law of Moses and the Promise of Abraham work together in beautiful cooperation, for the benefit of your salvation. What a gracious God we serve. Praise Him for His provision of salvation.

This is the beautiful relationship between Grace and Law.

Conclusion

Coming full circle. Over these past few chapters God has given you the argument to defend the Gospel against the greatest heresy the Church has ever faced. And with it in hand, accompanied by your testimony of love and faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit, some may escape that broad road that leads to destruction. Who is it that God has placed in your life, that could use this understanding of Grace and Faith? May we equip ourselves through study of God’s Word to better evangelize the lost.

Let’s pray.