

Galatians
“Living Free”
Main Teaching: 1:10-6:10
B. 3:1-4:31 Reasoned Grace
1. 3:1-14 Lessons learned

3:15-21
“Law and order”

I. Intro.

II. Vs. 15-18 No “If’s” in a promise

III. Vs. 19-21 The purpose of the law

I. Intro.

This article recently appeared in a Salt Lake City news paper: Max Melitzer, a 60 year-old homeless man, was tracked down by a private investigator and was told that his recently deceased brother had left him an undisclosed sum of money in his will. Before the life-changing news, Melitzer had been pushing around a shopping cart filled with his personal belongings. Melitzer’s family reports they had a written with him in September in which they gave him a phone number to reach them, but he never called. When they discovered his brother had left him money in his will they had to hire the private investigator, David Lundberg, to find him. It took two months, a few interviews and 60 or 70 phone call tips to finally find “the mellow guy in his 60s.” There are a lot of Christians like Max pushing around a cart of their belongings living on the street of self effort and works who don’t realize that they are heirs to a promise.

The word “*promise*” appears 8 times in verses 15-29 and each time Paul uses the word he does so in the context of God’s promises to Abraham. It was the Judaizers contention that the Law changed the original contract with Abraham but Paul argues that

it didn't. To begin with once two parties concluded an agreement, a third party cannot come along years later and change the agreement. The only persons who could change the agreement are the two original parties. To add something to it or take something away from it would be illegal. Since that is true with man how much more so with God? Furthermore when the original contract was made according to Genesis 15 Abraham was asleep and as such it wasn't Abraham making a contract with God it was God who made one with him and God choose no conditions for Abraham to meet. Thus this was a contract of grace whereby God made promises to Abraham and Abraham made no promises to God! Moses could add nothing to the contract and could take nothing away from the contract.

II. Vs. 15-18 No "If's" in a promise

Vs. 15-18 In the last section Paul showed that the law didn't work in as much as it couldn't institute change in us. In fact the "*fine print*" was that *we are required to do all of the law all of the time* and if we failed then we are under the curse of the law. The good news is that Jesus took that curse upon Himself while giving us His blessings and that was all given us as we simply trust in Him. Here Paul moves to the unchanging nature of the covenant made with Abraham. Notice that Paul hasn't lost perspective even though some had embraced legalism as he starts off in verse 15 calling them "*Brethren*" a term exclusively used for fellow believers.

The first point Paul makes is a legal one: Prior to the issuance of the law there was already a binding contract in place, it was the covenant with Abraham. And with that contract it couldn't be annulled or add to, since that is true with men how much more so with God. In Genesis 22:18, God promised Abraham that "*in your seed all the nations of*

the earth shall be blessed.” Paul makes sure that the reader understands that the contract blessings was for Abraham and a **specific descendant** as the word in the contract was “**SEED**” singular and not “**SEEDS**” plural which would make the contract for all of Abrahams descendants in general. The contract blessings are clearly written that in this “SEED” (SINGULAR) all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. The point Paul is making is that nothing written 430 years later (the law) could over rule the contract God established with Abraham especially when God was the one writing both contracts. There was nothing in the 2nd contract (the law) that voided out the first contract, (the covenant with Abraham). Reading that contract with Abraham you find three tenants listed:

- a. Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15: **“UNCHANGING” and “ONE SIDED” in nature**
- b. Genesis 17:7-8: **It’s “PROMISES ARE FOREVER”**
- c. Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 15: **There are no “IF’s” thus it is “UNCONDITIONAL”**

Now when you compare that to Deut. 28 and the Mosaic Covenant you see there are five times we read the word “IF” (1, 9, 13, 15, and 58) which tells us that the law is clearly **conditional**, a **2 sided contract where two parties were necessary to uphold it, thus its promises are not forever**. What this means is that all the promises of blessings comes through to Abraham and his descendant’s, spiritually through Jesus by faith. The final point Paul wants to make is that if the inheritance of these blessings offered to Abraham was on the basis of the law, they wouldn’t be permanent and they would have depended upon Abraham keeping the law (*something he couldn’t have done especially since it was written until 430 years latter*). But the blessings were offered on the basis of God’s

promise, thus it stands sure. The Greek word for promise is GRACE and it is in the perfect tense which means that it is a permanent FREE GIFT!

All of this demonstrates two very important points:

- a. The approach to God on the basis of Faith alone is 100% biblical
- b. The law (*though it came after the contract with Abraham*) does not overrule it

The Judaizers quoted the law, Paul quoted the promise, they quoted tradition Paul quoted older tradition! The 430 years mentioned by Paul in verse 17 have puzzled bible students for years. As we know that from Abraham's call in Genesis 12 to Jacob's arrival in Egypt in Genesis 46 is 215 years. But Moses tells us in Exodus 12:40 that Israel sojourned in Egypt for 430 years which would make the total number of years from Abraham's call to the giving of the law 645 years, not 430 years. Yet the 430 year number is repeated elsewhere where the number is rounded off to 400 years. The best answer to this math problem is in what Paul is counting: It seems that Paul is counting from when God appeared to Jacob in Egypt (Genesis 46:1-4) and reaffirmed the contract with Abraham until the giving of the law at Sinai.

III. Vs. 19-21 The purpose of the law

Vs. 19-21 Having established that the law didn't set aside the original contract Paul anticipates a logical question: "***What then is the purpose of the law***"? Paul says **the purpose of the law was fourfold**:

- a. First, it clearly establish God's standards as holy and perfect
- b. Second, it keeps man from destroying each other (moral law)
- c. Third, it reveals man's real problem of rebellion

d. Finally, it shows us are need for a savior in Jesus

The law remains in effect till Jesus came and still is in effect for those who have yet to receive Jesus by faith as Jesus came to fulfill the law, not destroy the law. But for those who have by faith received Jesus the law no longer is the basis of approaching God. Based upon Paul, the law was given to Moses at Mount Sinai by the hands of angels who were the mediator for Moses when he received the Law from God. Moses needed that “*go-between*” between Moses and God but we don’t need a go-between between Jesus and us because Jesus is our Mediator. The difference is *A promise depends on one person; a mediated agreement depends on two.* The weakness of the law compared to the covenant of Abraham is shown because it depends on two parties (*and one of them is us and we aren’t promise keepers we are contract breakers*). Whereas a promise depends upon God alone, who is always a promise keeper. The nation received the law 3rd hand from God to angels to Moses. But when God made a covenant with Abraham He did it personally, without a mediator. Paul is not saying that the law contradicts the promise, he is saying that the law cooperates with the promises as they complement each other.

Vs. 21 Paul asks yet another hypothetical question that he thought the readers would ask: “*Is the law then against the promises of God?*” And he answers “*Certainly not!*” The problem with the law is not to be found in the law but rather what it has to work with, us! We can’t keep the law and the law offers nothing to enable us to do so or even the desire to do so. If the law could have given us the desire and the power to enable us to keep its requirements then it could have brought about righteousness. Think of it as speed limit signs: **In order for speed limit signs to truly work all of the time they would need to affect two things:**

- a. **The driver**: First the sign must change the desire of the driver to always drive the speed limit because without changing the desire of the driver and only changing the car, the car will obey but the driver will always try to alter the car so he can speed.
- b. **The car**: Second it must automatically change the car in case the driver whose desire has been changed isn't paying attention and unintentionally goes over the speed limit. Getting a sign to change every car is relatively easy to accomplish but getting a sign to change the desire of every car driver all the time is impossible!