

The Gospel According to Galatians

Scripture Text: Galatians Chapter 3

LAW AND GOSPEL

Rev. Charles R. Biggs

^{ESV} **Galatians 2:19** For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. [Paul no longer lives to the Law, but to God (two mutually exclusive ways of living: one by flesh, and one by faith). Paul can say that Jesus died for him personally: "loved me...gave himself for me."]

3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? ["O Galatians, who has cast such a spell on you?"]

It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. [Reference to preaching of the gospel of Christ crucified; they would not have seen "before their own eyes". Reference to the Lord's Supper?]

² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain- if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith- [Important to notice the contrast between flesh=Law and Spirit=Faith; at one time in redemptive-history Law served its important purpose as Paul will explain in a few verses, but now trying to keep the Law, not understanding the condemnation of God's holy Law, is to live to the flesh, not the Spirit by faith. Cf. 2 Corinthians 3-4: Spirit written on human hearts and received by faith, not like the Law written on external tablets of stone.]

⁶ just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? ⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. [Paul begins to explain justification by faith alone from the Old Testament teaching, primarily from the life of Abraham, the Father of the Faithful. Paul reminds them of the universal, global, extensive promise to Abraham by faith: "In you shall all nations be blessed." God always had covenantal plans to justify the Gentiles by faith with the believing Jews.]

¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and

do them." ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"- ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. [Christ redeemed us by becoming a curse for us on the "tree" or on the cross by taking God's just wrath for sinners upon himself in our place. This is substitutionary atonement made for those whom Jesus loves.]

¹⁵ To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. ¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. ¹⁷ This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. [Paul continues his exposition of the Law of God, and shows that the Law did not make the promises to Abraham and "to his Seed" void or vetoed. The truth is that the Law came after the promises and the promises were ultimately made to Christ, the "Seed of Abraham" (singular). The promise was not to Abraham's children according to the flesh, but to Christ, the "Seed of Abraham" and those who believe in him by faith, whether Jew or Gentile.]

¹⁹ Why then the law? [Indeed. If we are following Paul's argument, we would not be asking, "Why the Law then?" What was the purpose of the Law to Israel, if all was based on God's promises to Abraham given over 400 years earlier?]

It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. ²⁰ Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. [Paul answers this important question: The Law was added "because of transgressions" (explain this Greek phrase 'because of transgressions': tw/n paraba,sewn ca,rin prosete,qh.)]

²¹ Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. ²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. [The Law is not contrary to the promises of God to Abraham, but the Law had no Holy-Spiritual power to impart life to sinners; Law could only condemn sinners. The Scripture (Law) was like a sentence of imprisonment (condemnation: opposite of justification as we learned in previous studies), and so it was only by faith in Jesus Christ that we could be delivered from this condemnation-bondage under Law.]

²³ Now before faith came [before “redemptive historical” faith came; it is not as though there was no faith, but before faith specifically in Christ’s objective work in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension came...], we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. [The Law was like a sentence of imprisonment or condemnation, but a good tutor, teacher, or guardian as well. It was a guardian for “sons given to God before the foundation of the world” to teach true sons of God to turn from Law to faith in Christ alone, the True and alone Lawkeeper and faithful Israelite.]

²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. [Now that “faith has come” that redemptive-historical objective faith in Christ has come, we are no longer under a guardian, but we are full adopted sons or children of the living God through faith (alone!). Baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Because of this, there is neither social identity (slave nor free) that takes away from our identity in union with Christ, nor sexual identity (male or female) that takes away from our identity in union with Jesus Christ, nor ethnic identity (Jew or Gentile) that takes away from our ultimate identity in union with Jesus Christ.]

Summary statement of this particular part of the letter: “If you are Christ’s (that is, if you belong to Christ by faith and are in union with him), then you are indeed Abraham’s offspring (seed) too! Therefore, you are heirs according to the promises made to Abraham through Christ Jesus!”

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Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote of law and grace: "It is only when one submits to the law that one can speak of grace...I don't think it is Christian to want to get to the New Testament too soon and too directly." *Letters and Papers from Prison*, pg. 50.

Summary statement of this particular part of the letter: "If you are Christ's (that is, if you belong to Christ by faith and are in union with him), then you are indeed Abraham's offspring (seed) too! Therefore, you are heirs according to the promises made to Abraham through Christ Jesus!"

The Judaizers had cast a wicked spell on the Churches of Galatia (Gal. 3:1). He is surprised and astonished that they so quickly are turning from the gospel of promise fulfilled in Christ back to the Law that condemns.

It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. [Reference to preaching of the gospel of Christ crucified; they would not have seen "before their own eyes". Reference to the Lord's Supper?]

Paul sets up a contrast here between Law and Gospel in chapter 3 of Galatians. What the Judaizers were teaching was that one could be a full Christian by becoming Jewish outwardly through circumcision according to the Mosaic Law.

Paul is responding by saying that while this was once the "way of the Spirit" at a certain time in redemptive-history, now that Christ has come, this is the "way of the flesh"- -and therefore no gospel at all (of the flesh literally and spiritually).

Paul explains to the Churches of Galatia that the promises were given to Abraham by faith, and that all who want to share in Abrahams "faith-inheritance" are to be believers (Jew or Gentile) who believe in God's promises as Abraham believed.

In Christ Jesus, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but one Church, one people united to the heir of Abraham, his "Seed", who are the sons and heirs of all that Christ, Abraham's "Seed" accomplished in his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

I. History of the Gospel Promises

- a. Law *and* Gospel as revealed in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2).
"Don't do this" but "believe God," or what God has said.

- b. Failure to do the Law, or obey it, and Adam and Eve are condemned by it.
- c. *Protoevangelion* or “First Gospel Announcement” in the Garden (Gen. 3:15).
- d. Gospel Promises to Abraham (Gen. 12; 15; 17)
 - i. In Galatians 3 (as in Romans 4) Paul is concerned to show that the gospel was given in the Old Testament.
 - ii. Abraham believed God, or his gospel “good news” and was considered righteous (Galatians 3:8).

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."**

- iii. The truth revealed here is that all those who are truly Abraham’s children (whether Jew or Gentile) are those who believe God’s promises to Abraham’s Seed, who is Christ (Galatians 3:9).

⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

[Paul begins to explain justification by faith alone from the Old Testament teaching, primarily from the life of Abraham, the Father of the Faithful. Paul reminds them of the universal, global, extensive promise to Abraham by faith: “In you shall all nations be blessed.” God always had covenantal plans to justify the Gentiles by faith with the believing Jews.]

- iv. Gospel Promises to Abraham and “His Seed” (Gal. 3:16):

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, **"And to your offspring," who is Christ.**

[Paul continues his exposition of the Law of God, and shows that the Law did not make the promises to Abraham and “to his Seed” void or vetoed. The truth is that the Law came after the promises and the promises were ultimately made to Christ, the “Seed of Abraham” (singular). The promise was not to Abraham’s children according to the flesh, but to Christ, the

“Seed of Abraham” and those who believe in him by faith,
whether Jew or Gentile.]

- e. Gospel Promises Further Elaborated to David (2 Sam. 7:12-17)
- f. Gospel Promises Realized in Jesus Christ (“Seed of Abraham” and “Descendant of David”)

II. History of the Law

- a. Mosaic Law given in Exodus 20 after the Exodus from Egypt
- b. If promise was already given to Abraham and “his Seed”...
- c. **“Why then the Law?”** (if the promises were made to Abraham and to “his Seed”). Galatians 3:19-22:

¹⁹ Why then the law? [Indeed. If we are following Paul’s argument, we would not be asking, “Why the Law then?” What was the purpose of the Law to Israel, if all was based on God’s promises to Abraham given over 400 years earlier?]

It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. ²⁰ Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. [Paul answers this important question: The Law was added “because of transgressions” (explain this Greek phrase ‘because of transgressions’: tw/n paraba,sewn ca,rin prosete,qh.)]

²¹ Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. ²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. [The Law is not contrary to the promises of God to Abraham, but the Law had no Holy-Spiritual power to impart life to sinners; Law could only condemn sinners. The Scripture (Law) was like a sentence of imprisonment (condemnation: opposite of justification as we learned in previous studies), and so it was only by faith in Jesus Christ that we could be

ESV **Romans 8:1-4:** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be

fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- d. The Law was to be kept by the Israelites in order for the temporal promises to be realized and continued for ethnic Israel.

Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5, Habakkuk 2:4, Deuteronomy 27:26-28:1, the Mosaic Law and the Prophets to show that this was always the case:

^{ESV} **Leviticus 18:5** You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

^{ESV} **Habakkuk 2:4** "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 27:26** "Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'
28:1 "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:10-12:** For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

- e. This is part of the Law's "tutoring" aspect: Israel's temporal blessings were meant to show forth God's eternal blessings of dwelling in the midst of his people, both Jew and Gentile for eternity (not merely in the land, but in the New Heavens and the New Earth).

The Gospel is this:

Galatians 3:13-14: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"- ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The Law brings a curse of condemnation and death on sinners; the gospel promise brings life, justification, and blessing to those who believe in Christ crucified: he was cursed, condemned and

died on the cross- -this was what was publicly placarded through the preaching of the gospel to the Galatian Churches (cf. Gal. 3:1b) !

“It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.”

[Christ redeemed us by becoming a curse for us on the “tree” or on the cross by taking God’s just wrath for sinners upon himself in our place. This is substitutionary atonement made for those whom Jesus loves.]

III. The Law in Paul’s Theology

A Look at Paul’s Doctrine of the Law in Romans: Rom. 3:20, 31; 4:15; 5:13, 20; 6:14; 7:6-12.

Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Romans 4:15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

Romans 5:13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.

Romans 5:20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

Romans 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 7:6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit. ⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹ I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰ The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹ For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Law is good, righteous and holy (a reflection of God’s character)- Rom. 7:6-12.

- a. The Law is Holy, Righteous, and Good (Romans 7:12)
 - i. The Law is a Reflection of God’s Character
 - ii. The Law is a Revelation of God’s Requirements for Man

- b. Through the Law comes a knowledge of our sin (Romans 3:20)
- c. We are to uphold the Law (Romans 3:31)
- d. The Law reveals sin in all its sinfulness (Romans 4:15; 5:13,20).
- e. The Law is Impossible for Sinners to Fulfill

- i. Therefore, the Law condemns (Romans 3:19ff)
- ii. Therefore, the Law points us away from ourselves to a substitute (Romans 3:22-24; 8:3-4)
- iii. Therefore, the Law is a tutor, guardian, schoolmaster (teacher/ Gk. *paidagwgo.j*) (Galatians 3:19-24)

f. The Law Fulfilled “in Christ”

[The Law is not contrary to the promises of God to Abraham, but the Law had no Holy-Spiritual power to impart life to sinners; Law could only condemn sinners. The Scripture (Law) was like a sentence of imprisonment (condemnation: opposite of justification as we learned in previous studies), and so it was only by faith in Jesus Christ that we could be delivered from this condemnation-bondage under Law.]

- i. Every human being ever born is in one of two categories: “under law” and condemned (“in Adam”), or “in Christ” and justified (“in Christ”)- this is all whether you are Jew or Gentile.
- ii. Living, or Being “Under Law”
 1. A state of “being in the flesh” or condemned in Adam (Romans 5:12-21).
 2. Paul contrasts the flesh and the Spirit in Galatians 3:

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:1** O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² **Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?** ³ **Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain- if indeed it was in vain?

[Important to notice the contrast between flesh=Law and Spirit=Faith; at one time in redemptive-history Law served its important purpose as Paul will explain in a few verses, but now trying to keep the Law, not understanding the condemnation of God’s holy Law, is to live to the flesh, not the Spirit by faith. Cf. 2 Corinthians 3-4: Spirit written on human hearts and received by faith, not like the Law written on external tablets of stone.]

Although the Law was a good thing in that it was a righteous revelation of God and his holiness was “flesh” if it was used in order to try and gain the righteousness of God apart from his promises.

In other words: Gospel or Work of the Spirit: faith in God’s promises through a realization that the Law condemns the sinner, ultimately looking to God’s promises fulfilled in Christ; Law or Work of the Flesh: faith in one’s striving to keep the law, nullifying God’s promises and the ultimate realization of those promises in Christ Jesus!

3. A state of slavery or imprisonment because the Law is powerless to change us (Gk. *evfrourou, meqa sugkleio, menoi*/ “held captive” “imprisoned” or “guarded” as a prisoner).

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:23-24:** Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

4. A state of bondage for those who are condemned and cannot keep it as God requires (perfection!).

One theologian remarked: **“Satan would have us to prove ourselves holy by the law, which God gave to prove us sinners.”** (Andrew Jukes, quoted in Stott’s Commentary on Galatians, pg. 90).

Luther in his commentary on Galatians wrote: “The principal point...of the law...is to make man not better but worse; that is to say, it shows unto men their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and by this means may be driven to seek grace, and so to come to the blessed Seed.”- Luther, pg. 316.

John Stott in his commentary on Galatians writes: “[The Law’s] purpose was to shut us up in prison until Christ should set us free, or to put us under tutors until Christ should make us sons.” –pg. 98.

iii. Being “In Christ”

1. We are no longer imprisoned slaves, but sons, united to Christ by faith:

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:25-26:** But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

2. A state of being one, or unified whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female.

[Now that “faith has come” that redemptive-historical objective faith in Christ has come, we are no longer under a guardian, but we are full adopted sons or children of the living God through faith (alone!). Baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Because of this, there is neither social identity (slave nor free) that takes away from our identity in union with Christ, nor sexual identity (male or female) that takes away from our identity in union with Jesus Christ, nor ethnic identity (Jew or Gentile) that takes away from our ultimate identity in union with Jesus Christ.]

3. A state of “being in the Spirit” or “Spirit filled”
4. Law written on the heart
5. **From “Guard” to “Guide”**“In Christ” the Law is no longer a prison guard, imprisoning us all to condemnation and God’s wrath, but...
6. ...The Law is a friend and guide for the Christian “in Christ”

IV. The Gospel as Fulfillment of Law

- a. The “Badness” of the Law for the Christian
- b. The “Goodness” of the Law for the Christian
- c. The Gospel is about Christ and His Law-Keeping