

GALATIANS - SERMON 13
GALATIANS 3:15-25 – THE PURPOSE OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT
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INTRODUCTION:

Read Galatians 3:15-25

The doctrinal error of the Judaizers was directly related to a misunderstanding of the covenants of God (Abrahamic and Mosaic). In chapter three of Galatians Paul argues from the covenants. In summary, a covenant that has been ratified and confirmed cannot be set aside by a subsequent covenant coming later (v 15). The Abrahamic covenant established the promise that people of all nations would be saved through faith in Abraham's seed, who is Jesus Christ (v 16). The law, which is the old covenant (Mosaic) coming along some 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant, could not and did not invalidate or nullify the promises of the Abrahamic covenant nor its terms of salvation (v 17). If the observance of the old covenant (Mosaic covenant) were necessary in order to achieve salvation, it would then invalidate the Abrahamic covenant which had promised salvation through the seed of Jesus Christ. Paul says that such a thing is impossible.

Galatians 3:18

For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Nothing has or can change the method and promise of salvation proffered by the Abrahamic covenant which is salvation by faith alone.

What then is the purpose and function of the old covenant (Mosaic covenant) which was instituted at Sinai 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant. Paul anticipates and asks this question himself in verse 19, *what purpose then does the law serve?*

OUTLINE:

- I THE PRIMACY AND INVIOABILITY OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT. (LAST SERMON)
 - II THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT. (THIS SERMON)
 - A THE PURPOSE OF THE OLD COVENANT WAS ONE OF RESTRAINT.
 - B THE INAUGURATION OF THE OLD COVENANT WAS INFERIOR TO THAT OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.
 - C THE INADEQUACY OF THE LAW (OLD COVENANT) TO GIVE LIFE.
 - D THE OLD COVENANT IS REPLACED BY THE NEW COVENANT.
- II THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT (old covenant).
Paul, in verses 19-25 demonstrates that the old covenant was not contrary to the Abrahamic covenant, but it was a necessary means to secure the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.
- A THE PURPOSE OF THE OLD COVENANT WAS ONE OF RESTRAINT, v 19.
What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.
In this verse the reason for the adding of the Mosaic covenant is simply stated.

it was added - the word *added* means to lay alongside of. The old covenant was laid alongside of the Abrahamic covenant. It did not change or annul the first covenant, it was merely added to it (like adding a child to an already existing family - the second child does not replace or amend the first child).

The question then is why was it added. The text says it was added *because of transgressions*. This is interpreted in two different ways. Pastor Doner understands this statement to mean that the old covenant was given in order to contain the idolatry and apostasy into which the descendants of Abraham so easily fell. Hence, the old covenant was given for the purpose of restraint. The old covenant was like a fence to impede the decline of Israel from the Lord. This can be easily demonstrated by the very history of Israel. They often and easily fell into idolatry, inter-marriage, and apostasy. Had this gone on unchecked the nation would have been utterly absorbed into the surrounding nations and ultimately disappear completely. The ongoing transgressions of the nation Israel rendered some kind of additional covenant as absolutely necessary. The seed of Abraham, the Messiah was not to appear for several centuries. Therefore, some means was needed to insure that the nation and lineage of Abraham was protected and preserved until Christ the Messiah was born. There was need to preserve the purity and the record of the bloodline and the covenant promises until the Christ was come.

This was the main purpose of the Mosaic covenant. It was not primarily designed to reveal or manifest the sins and transgressions of Israel. Neither was it designed primarily to punish the sins of Israel, but rather it was instituted in order to restrain the sins of Israel until Messiah's advent. This is why we read in verse 19 that the covenant (Mosaic covenant) was added *till the Seed should come*.

The old covenant was added for a specific purpose and only for a specific duration. It was to function only until something else happened, the advent of the Seed. Once Christ was come, then the need for the old covenant was exhausted. Hence, the old covenant was done away with at that time.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Peter is saying that the new nation is now made up of Jews and Gentiles who are spiritual descendants of Jesus Christ. This will also become clear in the remainder of the third chapter of Galatians.

The Mosaic covenant was successful and it did fulfill its purpose in preserving the bloodline and the promises (record of them) until the Jesus Christ was born. It did what it was intended to do. Therefore, the Mosaic covenant is no longer necessary or needed. When Christ came the need for restraint, formerly instituted by the old covenant, was no longer needed, because the people of God, after the advent of Jesus Christ, have the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which occurred on the day of Pentecost. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit has provided and does provide the body of God's people with the maturity that makes the external restraints of the Mosaic covenant no longer necessary (the argument of Galatians 4).

When the people of God were in their immaturity they needed a very strict, structured, and theocratic environment in which to function. But now that the Spirit of God has come they, the people of God have reached their majority (maturity) and so the external restrictions have been removed (the law is now written on our hearts Jer 31).

What was the purpose of the old covenant? According to Galatians 3:19, the purpose of the old covenant was restraint until Christ should come.

- B THE INAUGURATION OF THE OLD COVENANT WAS INFERIOR TO THAT OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT. The Judaizers, in Galatia, were exalting the Mosaic covenant above that of the Abrahamic covenant. Paul now sets out to demonstrate that the two covenants were inaugurated in an entirely different fashion (in verse 19 and 20).

Galatians 3:19-20

What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.

When the old covenant was given the Bible tells us that it was not given directly by God to the people. It was given by God to the angels. It was given by the angels to Moses. It was given by Moses to the people. The old covenant was *appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator* (Moses).

- 1 The old covenant was conveyed by means of angels. When we read the record of the giving of the old covenant in Exodus it is not clear that angels are involved. Nevertheless, others places in the Scriptures plainly and clearly state that such is and was the case - angels conveyed the Mosaic covenant.

Psalm 68:17

The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place.

Acts 7:53

". . . who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

Hebrews 2:1-3

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation . . .

The point in these verses, as well as Galatians 3:19, is that when the law was given to Moses it was not given directly by God to him, but through angels.

Furthermore, the old covenant was mediated to the people, not directly from those angels, but through Moses the appointed mediator.

Deuteronomy 5:5

"I stood between the LORD and you at that time (at the inauguration of the covenant), to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain. He said:

- 2 However, when the Abrahamic covenant was made there was no mediator between God and Abraham. God spoke directly to Abraham. God spoke indirectly to Israel through Moses the things of the Mosaic covenant, but directly to Abraham the things of the Abrahamic covenant.

Galatians 3:20

Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.

Paul is stating that a mediator is always the mediator between two parties. If you do not have two parties you cannot have or do not need a mediator. However, when God deals directly, no mediator is needed. When God dealt with Abraham, He was alone without a mediator. There was no second party. God dealt personally with Abraham in the establishing of His covenant with him.

Therefore, to set up the old covenant as equal to the Abrahamic covenant, or even worse as superior and superceding the first covenant, would be entirely contrary to the facts related to the very inauguration of the covenants. The very methods of inauguration demonstrate that the Abrahamic covenant was superior to the Mosaic covenant.

C THE INADEQUACY OF THE LAW (OLD COVENANT) TO GIVE LIFE.

Having stated the things of verses 19-20, Paul anticipates the belligerent objections that might arise. Thus far, Paul has systematically been lowering the old covenant in its relationship to the Abrahamic covenant in the eyes of the Galatians. Actually Paul is merely putting the Mosaic covenant into its proper place and perspective, but in the eyes of the Judaizers and the Galatians under their influence he is demoting the very covenant (Mosaic covenant) by which they think salvation is obtained.

Galatians 3:21

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.

The objection anticipated here is that of making the two covenants contradictory. Paul's objectors are trying to taking him to an inappropriate extreme. Paul's response to this objection is, *Certainly not!* The Abrahamic covenant is not contrary to the Mosaic covenant. They do not contradict one another.

Paul states that there is no contradiction between the covenants. If law had been an acceptable means of justification, then the law of the Mosaic covenant would have been good to that end. Nevertheless, no law has been given by which justification can be successfully secured. This was not the purpose or intention of the Mosaic covenant at all. Human depravity and the testimony of the Scriptures utterly rule out all possibility of justification by law and performance.

Galatians 3:22

But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

The Scriptures (especially the Old Testament) consistently witness that all have sinned and we have seen that *cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them* (Galatians 3:10). The law condemns rather than justifies.

Psalm 14:2-3

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.

Paul quotes this very passage in Romans 3.

Isaiah 64:6-7

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us because of our iniquities.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

There is abundant testimony from the Word of God that God has concluded all mankind under sin and condemned them. Therefore, since the Scriptures have concluded all under sin it is impossible then that a law could be given which would have given life and which would have been a means of righteousness. The problem is that all subjects (all men) were already all unrighteous. The possibility of salvation by law is utterly ruled out by the Word of God. Man's performance has already fallen short of the standard and, thereby brought the curse upon him.

Galatians 3:22

But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

The scriptures do not leave us in such a state of hopeless and despair according to this verse. The purpose clause of this verse is our great relief and hope. By the Scriptures we ought to be led to give up any hope of justification by law or performance. Likewise, by the scriptures we are introduced to *the promise by faith in Jesus Christ* by which men might receive the promise of justification. This will lead us back to the Abrahamic covenant, not the Mosaic. It is by the Abrahamic covenant we have the promise that in the seed of Abraham shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Salvation was to be brought to mankind, not by the law of the Mosaic covenant, but by the promised Seed, Jesus Christ, of the Abrahamic covenant.

The purpose of Paul's exhortation is that we might seek salvation through the promise of God, through faith in the promised seed of Abraham, and by believing as did

Abraham in God's promised Deliverer. There can be no dispute as to who that promised Deliverer is for He is identified explicitly in this verse.

D THE OLD COVENANT IS REPLACED BY THE NEW COVENANT.

Galatians 3:23

But before (the - τὴν πίστιν) faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.

It is important to the understanding of this passage that we realize that the word *faith* in this verse is not to be understood as a reference to personal subjective faith (faith exercised). In the original language the definite article is included with the word *faith*. It is properly rendered *the faith*.

When Paul refers to *the faith* he refers to the new covenant. Time and again the new covenant and its features are referred to as *the faith*.

Jude 1:3

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our (the) common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

The phrase *the faith* refers to a body of truth or divinity rather than to the exercise of subjective trust or faith in something.

If we understand the use of the word *faith* in verse 23 as a reference to subjective faith exercised then it would follow that none had exercised faith before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, until the law was over no one ever had exercised faith in Jesus Christ. This goes beyond what is reasonable and acceptable upon the grounds of other examples from the scriptures. Hebrews 11 is replete with examples of Old Testament saints who had exercised faith in the Lord.

What Paul is talking about in Galatians 3:23 is that new arrangement that was to replace the old arrangement. The new arrangement was and is the new covenant which the Lord Jesus Christ instituted at the Lord's Supper. This new arrangement was spoken about in Jeremiah 31:31ff and in Hebrews 8 & 10.

Hebrews 7:18-19

For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Hebrews 8:6-13

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant,

and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

This is the record of the replacing of the old covenant by the new covenant.

What is *the faith* Paul refers to in Galatians 3:23? It is the new covenant.

Before the new covenant came (instituted by Christ at the Lord's Supper) we were kept under the old covenant (instituted and inaugurated by Moses), shut up unto the faith (new covenant) which had afterwards been revealed.

Galatians 3:24-25

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith (no definite article - therefore subjective personal faith is meant here). But after (the) faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

The *tutor* is the old covenant. The *tutor* conducted, guarded, oversaw, and taught national Israel through the centuries until Christ came. When Christ came the *tutor* was dismissed. When Christ came the people of God came to their majority. There was no longer a need for the old covenant.

Some interpret this passage as a portrayal of the law convicting us individually of sin and drawing us to Christ. Though that is a true concept, it is not the teaching of this passage. Romans 3 teaches that concept. Galatians 3 teaches a chronological - historical process of a covenant conducting a people to the time of Christ in which a new covenant is then inaugurated, thus obviating the necessity of that old covenant.

To interpret this passage in any other way you will be led into antinomianism. To wrongly interpret this passage results in the discarding of the law of God as summarized in the ten commandments. Mis-understanding the covenantal progression of this passage leads to that serious error. The word *law* in this whole passage is not a reference to the ten commandments. The word *law* in this section is a reference to the old covenant (Mosaic covenant). The subject of the passage is that of the relationship between the Abrahamic covenant (new covenant) and the Mosaic covenant (Mosaic covenant). The subject is not that of the validity of the ten commandments. The error stems from equating the use of the word *law* with the Ten commandments only. The proper reference is to the old covenant, not the moral law of God.

Conclusion:

Such is the purpose of the old covenant. Understanding these things is essential.

Hymn # 424