

**Galatians 3: 21-26; “The Law and the Promises”, Message # 21 in the series –
“Christ has Made us Free”, Conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall on the
evening of March 19th, 2014, at the church.**

Is the law against the promises of God? This is a very good question. Because the Apostle Paul has been showing us all along that we, as sinners, cannot be saved by attempting to keep the works of the law. We can only be saved from our sins by faith in the promise of God; that promise being completely fulfilled in, and by, the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our believing in the promises of the gospel. Therefore, the obvious conclusion would seem to logically follow, that the law is intrinsically against the promises of God. But this is not so. And Paul emphatically affirms to us that the Law is “certainly not” against the promises of God here in verse 21. In the NASB it says – “May it never be!” And in the King James Version it says – “God forbid!” So this evening I would like to open up to you the relationship between the law and the promises so you will see that God uses both the law, and His promises for very specific reasons. 1st – The law cannot give spiritual life or eternal life, but the promises are given to show us that faith in Jesus Christ will both justify and sanctify us. 2nd – One of the law’s main purposes was to be a tutor to lead us to Christ. And 3rd – Once faith in the promise has come, we are no longer under a tutor, for we are sons of God.

1st of all – The law cannot give spiritual life or eternal life, but the promises are given to show us that faith in Jesus Christ will both justify us and sanctify us.

(verse 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.” We plainly see here the weakness of the law is that it cannot give life to sinful people so that they would have the strength to keep it on their own and thus please and glorify God. The commandments of God are those statements which we find in the Bible which are God’s righteous expectations of how we should think, and what we should do, in every situation of our lives. He expects us to be holy and to live to Him, and not ultimately to ourselves. “You shall have no other gods before Me”, He says in the Decalogue, as first of the Ten Commandments. “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart and mind, and soul and strength,” and , “love your neighbor as yourself,” He says, as the summary of the Ten Commandments. And yet, we find the Apostle Paul saying here that the law does not have any life in itself to give to us to help us to keep His commandments perfectly and from right motives. He is saying that if there had been a law given which could have given life to us so that we could keep the commandments of God, then truly our being able to attain to righteousness would have been by the law. We could then justify ourselves in the sight of the holy God. But we need to understand that the law of the 10 commandments is a reiteration, a giving again, on a broader national scale, of the covenant of works which God gave to Adam in the garden of Eden at the beginning of the world. It was God saying over again, to His people as a nation whom He had delivered from bondage, and who He was bringing to the Promised Land: “Remember My promises to the fathers, and keep my commandments.” “Do what I command you and you will be blessed.” “If you do not do it, I will curse you.” He specifically lists the blessings and the curses that He would bring to them as a nation in Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Deuteronomy 28: 1 - “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your god will set you high above all nations of the earth.” But we read in Galatians 3: 19 that the law was added because of transgressions. The sins of men needed to be defined. But God did not give them His law to show them that they could justify themselves in His sight; rather that they needed the grace of the promise of Christ to keep

the least of His commandments. He knew that they would not be able to keep His commandments without life; without a new heart being given to them through the New Birth, based upon a New Covenant of grace which would come through Jesus Christ. Deuteronomy 5: 29 – “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” God said this right after He gave Israel His law in Deuteronomy 5: 1-22.

But they should have known that they could only come to know God and please God through faith in the promise of Christ. For it is mentioned specifically in Deuteronomy 18: 15 – “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren.” “Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore lest I die. “And the Lord said to me; ‘What they have spoken is good.” “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” This refers to our Lord Jesus Christ. They needed to look forward by faith to His coming and believe in Him. They should have remembered that Adam was not able to keep the covenant of works in the beginning. And so, over and over again in the nation of Israel’s history, we see those whom the law was given to, were not able to do and keep the commandments of God in a perfect way. Turn with me over to Hosea Chapter 6, and verse 4. “O Ephraim, what shall I do to you?” “O Judah, what shall I do to you?” “For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away.” “Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and your judgments are like light that goes forth.” “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” “But like men they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt treacherously with me.” The words, “But like men”, can very legitimately be translated, “But like Adam” they had transgressed the covenant. If the people could have kept the law of God perfectly, they would have lived, but most certainly they could not keep it at all, as fallen men who were descended from Adam. They pursued keeping the law as though they had the strength in themselves to do it. When the law was first given, the children of Israel broke it before Moses could get down to the bottom of Mt. Sinai, where He had received it, as written on two tablet of stone, written by the finger of God.

And here in these verses they were still being religious and offering sacrifices, but they were not keeping the moral duties of the 10 commandments. It was mercy that God was looking for; mercy that they would show in truly caring for the spiritual and physical needs of the people around them which was based upon their first trusting in all of the promises of God for themselves, that their own sins would be mercifully forgiven by God. They first of all needed mercy which they would could only receive from the Lord Himself in their mercifully being forgiven of all of their sins by believing in the Promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. Then, by faith in Him, they would be spiritually healed in their hearts by God’s justifying of them, and His sanctifying of them by the grace of Christ, who would come. Life could only come to them by God’s promise, not by their trying to be religious and keep the commandments in their own strength. Look back up at verses 1-3 of Hosea 6. “Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up.” “After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.” “Let us know, Let us pursue (or press on to) the knowledge of the Lord.” “His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.” The law was given specifically to the nation and ethnic people of Israel. In verse 19 Paul says that 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; that is, Moses. But the children of Israel, and all people who would come to know God, need a greater mediator than Moses.

Moses could tell them of their duty to God, but only Christ could pay the penalty for our sins and heal us of the disease of sin. God can only take away sins and declare us righteous through Jesus Christ our Lord. God can only heal us and grant us the grace of repentance to return to Him through the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

This is why Jesus had to die for us; it is so that by His purchase of grace that we might spiritually live. This is shown forth in the wording of these verses. God had torn them; He had hewn them with the words of the prophets preaching to them the law. He had slain their self-righteousness and He had brought to them conviction of sin through the preaching of the law. But then He would also heal them. And He would do this through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. It is faith in this heals the sin-sick soul. Christ lay in the cold tomb on Friday and Saturday nights, having fulfilled the law and having suffered for our sins. On the third day He arose, and thus all who believe in Him, whether Old Testament or New, have found and will find, spiritually live; eternal and everlasting life. In the context of these verses, we have to know God before we can really serve Him in a way that pleases Him. "Let us know; (Let us by faith in the promise of the Messiah - Old Testament), be justified by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ - New Testament), and then "let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord". Then following our being justified - Let us grow in the knowledge of the Lord and be sanctified by the word of truth; that is, the knowledge of the Bible rightly read and understood as teaching that we cannot be saved except through the grace of Christ, received by faith in Christ. We have to be given life through the promise of God.

2nd - One of the law's main purposes was to be a tutor to lead us to Christ.

(verses 22-24)

"But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." "But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed." "Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." This how the Lord intended the law to function; as a pedagogue to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Him. It is true that the law brings us to conviction of our sins, but cannot bring us life. The whole Scripture, we are told here, has confined all men under sin, so that the promise by faith might be given to those who believe. Salvation is by none of our works; it is all of Christ's finished work. But the law does do a good work in this regard, according to God's holy purpose. It acts as a pedagogue who brings us to Christ. Now, many have somewhat misinterpreted this verse as its reading: The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, as it is the King James translation; but the words, "to bring us" are not in the original. So, that it should read, "The law is our schoolmaster unto Christ". What B.H. Carroll says about this, I think, is very helpful: "The Greek word is compound, pais, "a child", and agogos, "a conductor." Agogos is the verb agein, to lead or conduct." "To complete the analogy we have only to refer to the heathen custom of entrusting the care of a child in his nonage, to a slave." "This slave was not necessarily the teacher, in the modern sense of pedagogue, but would lead the child to the school where the real teacher would instruct him." "So the law, a slave, leads to Christ, the great Teacher." "In this sense the law evidently was not to annul the previous covenant of grace, but was added to it in a subsidiary or helpful sense." (End of Quote) In verse 23 we see the words, "Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed." In explaining this first phrase, "before faith came", we only need think of Christ as the object of the faith, who was revealed in the fullness of time, in God's good time. It could read this way: "Before Christ, the object of faith came, we were kept garrisoned by the law.

As John Gill says, "The law considered and used them as sinners, as criminals convicted and condemned; it did itself accuse, convict, and pronounce them guilty, and condemned them to punishment; and detained them as prisoners in its dark dungeon, where they had little light and

comfort; and were in a pit, wherein is no water, though they lay there as prisoners of hope, in expectation of the Messiah's coming; who was to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, and to say to the prisoners, 'Come forth, and to them that sit in darkness, show yourselves.'" (End of quote) What verse 23 is saying is that this is what the law's purpose was. It could not give life, it could only condemn us before Christ and His mighty grace came to us personally. And the law's only consolation to the Jews was that in many types and shadows it pointed forward to Christ; that His coming was to be looked forward to, as the fulfillment of all of God's righteous requirements. Only faith in the promise of His coming to fulfill the law on their behalf would set them free, and justify them in the sight of God. But they were justified in the same way that we are now; by faith in Christ. The law keeps us as its prisoner until Christ comes to free us from the confinement of the law. The Jews were kept in this confinement before the coming of Christ, the object of faith; and all unbelievers, seeing the righteous requirements of God in the moral law of the 10 commandments, are also in this confinement until they are personally freed by faith in Christ. The more that we look into the law and try to keep it, the more we are brought into spiritual confinement by the law, showing us our sins of omission and commission. But faith would be more clearly revealed as that which justifies the sinner when Christ was revealed; lived the perfect life of fulfilling the righteous requirements of the law, and then dying for our sins.

And then 3rd - Once faith in the promise has come, we are no longer under a tutor, for we are sons of God.

This ought to be very encouraging to everyone who has tried so hard to keep the law of God and failed, which invariably you will. The law is not against the promises of God. Although it cannot give us life, and can only keep us in confinement until Christ comes to our heart, the law does willingly release you unto Christ, seeing as your Lord Jesus has perfectly fulfilled all of his righteous requirements. You have nothing more to do with the law anymore, in a way of confinement and bondage. Turn with me over to Romans 7, verse 4. "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you might be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should be fruit to God." What great release! You are no longer married to the law, as you once were before you came to faith in Christ. Now look at Romans 8: 3 – "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh (that is in the strength of what I can do in myself to please God and fulfill His law, and keep His commandments), but according to the Spirit." What a blessed thing it is that through His Spirit Christ has given us life, where the law could not.

\Footnote on Hosea 6: 2 from John Gill which I found very interesting:

John Gill says here: “The Jews, in their present state, are as dead men, both in a civil and spiritual sense, and their conversion and restoration will be as life from the dead; they are like persons buried, and, when they are restored, they will be raised out of their graves, both of sin and misery; see Romans 11:15; the time of which is here fixed, after two days, and on the third being raised.” “Vitringa’s (s) notion of the text, that the first day was between Israel's coming out of Egypt and the Babylonish captivity; the second day between that and the times of Antiochus, which was the third night; then the third day followed, which is the times of the Messiah: but the Targum comes nearer the truth, which paraphrases the words thus, “He will quicken us in the days of consolation which are to come, and in the day of the resurrection of the dead he will raise us up.” “Where by “days of consolation” are meant the days of the Messiah, with which the Jews generally connect the resurrection of the dead; and if we understand them of the last days of the Messiah, it is not much amiss; for the words respect the quickening and raising up of the Jews in the latter day, the times of Christ's spiritual coming and reign: and these two and three days may be expressive of a long and short time, as interpreters differently explain them; of a long time, as the third day is a long time for a man to lie dead, when there can be little or no hope of his reviving, Luke 24:21; or of a short time, for which two or three days is a common phrase; and both true in this case: it is a long time Israel and Judah have been in captivity, and there may seem little hope of their restoration; but it will be a short time with the Lord, with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years: and this I take to be the sense of the words, that after the second Millennium, or the Lord's two days, and at the beginning of the third, will be the time of their conversion and restoration, reckoning from the last destruction of them by the Romans; for not till then were Israel and Judah wholly in a state of death: many of Israel were mixed among those of Judah before the Babylonish captivity, and many returned with them from it; but, when destroyed by the Romans, there was an end of their civil and church state; which will both be revived on a better foundation at this period of time: but if this conjecture is not agreeable (for I only propose it as such), the sense may be taken thus, that in a short time after the repentance of Israel, and their conversion to the Lord, they will be brought into a very comfortable and happy state and condition, both with respect to things temporal and spiritual;