



LESSON 7: “The Argument Continues”

Date: October 26, 2014

TEXT: Galatians 3:15-22

INTRODUCTION

Galatians has been referred to as Diet Romans (or Romans Lite, if you’re more liberal ☺) due to similarities in both its style and substance. Regarding style, Paul portrays the same logic and argumentation that he does in Romans; regarding substance, his concern is to similarly defend the gospel of grace alone through faith alone. In the previous lesson, Paul offered three reasons for the sufficiency of faith in salvation:

- the experience of the Galatians (3:1-5)
- the example of Abraham (3:6-9)
- the expiation of Jesus Christ (3:10-14)

In Galatians 3:15-22, Paul’s argument continues as he offers two additional evidences.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COVENANT (vv. 15-18)

Paul’s fourth argument is a “human example” (v. 5); that is, it is something we are familiar with “from everyday life” (NIV). Paul uses the common civil practice of establishing a covenant, and one particular Old Testament covenant—the Abrahamic Covenant—to further prove the sufficiency of faith for salvation.

In the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; cf. Genesis 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; 22:15-18), God promised three things to Abraham: land (vv. 1, 7), descendants (v. 2), and blessing (vv. 2-3). These promises are fleshed out further in later covenants: land in the Palestinian Covenant (Deuteronomy 29:1-30:10), descendants in the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-16), and blessing in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).¹ And, as we already saw in verses 6-9, even Gentiles benefit from God’s promises to Abraham!

The word “covenant” (i.e., an official contract, a binding agreement) is indeed the term that Genesis 15:18 uses to describe God’s activity toward Abraham in the passages Paul has been alluding to (cf. Genesis

12:1-3, 7; 15:1-21), but Paul uses it for the first time now in verse 15. Previously, Paul was more concerned with the content of God’s promises as he argued for salvation by faith alone. Now, he wants to emphasize the contractual nature of those vows, and that is why he uses the word “covenant” here as he continues his defense of faith’s supremacy.

Paul makes this subtle shift, because he undoubtedly recognizes the rebuttal that his detractors will offer. Although he has convincingly demonstrated that Abraham (pre-Law and pre-circumcision) had been justified by faith alone (v. 6 ref. Genesis 15:6), Paul anticipates that the false teachers will retort that when the Law came 430 years later, it annulled the Abrahamic Covenant and its divine promises, it “entirely changed the basis for achieving salvation.”² To refute that teaching, Paul highlights three different features of the Covenant.³


1. *The permanence of the Covenant (v. 15)*


Paul’s first observation has to do with the nature of a covenant: “even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.” When a covenant has been agreed to, confirmed, ratified, and made legally binding, no one can invalidate it or modify it unilaterally or individually (i.e., apart from an official and agreed-upon process). And, if this is true of a “man-made covenant,” how much more is it true of a covenant established by God?!⁴

Illustration: This is vividly illustrated in Genesis 15:7-21. In Genesis 15:1-6, God reiterates His promise to Abraham that he would have a biological son and innumerable descendants (cf. Genesis 12:2). In verse 7, God rehearses His commitment to Abraham of a great land that would be his possession (cf. Genesis 12:7; 13:14-17). Abraham inquires in verse 8 for assurance that God’s promises would come to pass, and God ratifies the covenant with him (v. 18a) in verses 9-21 (i.e., the equivalent to our signing official documents).

The details of this ratification ceremony are quite interesting. God commands Abraham to bring “a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon” (v. 9). Abraham gathers these animals, “cut[s] them in half, and [lays] each half over against the other” (v. 10). When “a deep sleep” and “dreadful and great darkness” falls upon Abraham

(v. 12), God declares his covenantal intentions (vv. 13-15, 18-21) and binds it with a symbolic act recorded in verse 17, “A smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.” The significance of this is suggested in Jeremiah 34:18-19 where God says to those who “transgressed” and “did not keep the terms of the covenant,” “I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts.” In other words, the imagery was clear—if one of the covenanting parties were to break the agreement, their fate would be that of the slaughtered and divided animals.⁵ This is apparently similar to the Old Testament oath, “God do so to me and more also” (Ruth 1:17; 1 Samuel 14:44; 1 Kings 2:23; 2 Kings 6:31). Furthermore, because only God is seen to be passing between the animal pieces in this ratification ceremony, we see that it was an unconditional promise (i.e., “no strings attached”), in no way dependent upon the sleeping Abraham, but solely up to God to fulfill.⁶ And, because “God is not man, that He should lie” (Numbers 23:19), this covenant of promise to Abraham was immutable and irrevocable. It could not be abrogated by the Law.

 **Application:** How does God’s ratification ceremony encourage you regarding His covenantal relationship with you? *God has bound Himself in loyalty to us, beyond the mere immutability of His character, by a vivid depiction of the (theoretical) consequences of infidelity. He has made it as plain as day that He is a God of His word, that He will be unwaveringly faithful to us, that His relationship with us is based on a divinely-initiated and unconditional covenant, and that nothing is waiting upon me (even as Abraham was asleep!) except mere belief in His trustworthy promise.*

 What covenants do we enter into today, and how should this point apply to them? *Marriage vows, work contracts, personal promises, etc. should all be entered into with caution and fulfilled with great care. Such covenants are to be permanent, and the righteous man “swears to his own hurt and does not change” (Psalm 15:4).*

2. The promise of the Covenant (v. 16)

In verse 16, Paul references one specific promise⁷ from the Abrahamic Covenant, the promise of land recorded in Genesis 12:7 (cf. 13:15; 17:7-8; 24:7), “To your offspring I will give this land.” He then draws attention to one small grammatical feature of this promise to show that although the promise came long before the Law, it was ultimately inherited by and fulfilled in Someone who came much later than the Law (cf. v. 19).

Paul’s observation is that when “the promises [of the Abrahamic Covenant] were made” in Genesis (i.e., the “blessing” of Galatians 3:8-9, 14 and the “inheritance” of Galatians 3:18), “it [or He] does not say, ‘And to offsprings’ [plural], referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring’ [singular], who is Christ.” While the Greek and Hebrew words for “offspring,” like the English, have a collective meaning that often does denote more than one person (even when used in its singular form), Paul is using this grammatical observation (that the word is indeed singular, and not plural) to show that “the faithful in Israel had always recognized that [the Abrahamic] blessing would ultimately come through a single individual, the Messiah (cf. Gal. 3:19).”⁸ This is clear (1) from how the same word is used in its singular sense in Genesis 3:15 (i.e., the “offspring” of the woman would bruise the head of the Serpent); (2) from even Abraham’s understanding that this promise was specific in nature, for it would be found in Isaac and not Ishmael and later in Jacob and not Esau; (3) and from Matthew’s declaration of “Christ to be *the* Son of Abraham and the true Heir to the First Covenant’s promises (Matt. 1:1).”⁹ “Paul is appealing to the generally accepted idea that all the blessings were to be wrapped up in a single deliverer.”¹⁰

Paul’s point in this parenthetical verse is this:


If the promises made to Abraham were made only to Abraham and his immediate descendants, they might well be considered fulfilled even before the giving of the law; the law would simply inaugurate a new era in God’s dealings with mankind. But the promises were not fulfilled in the period before the giving of the law, Paul argues. They were embodied in the coming Redeemer through whom the fullness of blessing was to come. That Redeemer was Christ.¹¹


Another commentator drives home the point of this verse even further:


The one and only heir of every promise of God is Christ. Every promise given in the covenant with Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus Christ and only Jesus Christ. Therefore the only way a person can participate in the promised blessings to Abraham is to be a fellow heir with Christ through faith in Him [cf. 3:29].¹²

From the first salvific promise of God (Genesis 3:15) onward, God's promises "find their Yes in [Christ]" (2 Corinthians 1:20-22)¹³ and are appropriated only through Abraham-like faith.


Application: Paul will go on to show the purpose of the Law in God's plan of salvation (vv. 19ff), but for now we must simply recognize that it was never to actually grant righteousness and provide deliverance. Instead, God gave a "promise" that pointed to a Person who, in inheriting and fulfilling the promise, would provide redemption for those condemned by the Law (cf. Galatians 4:4-5). So, because the promise points to the Redeemer (v. 16; cf. vv. 13-14), cling to Christ by faith in the promise and do not "so quickly desert Him who called you in the grace of Christ and turn to a different gospel" (1:6)!


 In Luke 24:26-27, what did Jesus say about Himself in the Old Testament? *That it all pointed to Him and His ultimate death and resurrection; that He was the theme of the Old Testament (i.e., it was "concerning Himself") "beginning with Moses" and throughout "all the Scriptures"*


 What does Jesus call it when we fail to "believe" the promises about Jesus in our Bible (i.e., "all that the prophets have spoken...concerning Himself") in Luke 24:25? *Foolishness and slowness of heart*

 In Romans 4:17-25, the raw difficulty of living by faith is evidenced in Abraham's own life—he "believed against hope" (v. 18) in God's promises of innumerable descendants, even when "his own body...was as good as dead" and his wife was "barren" (v. 19). What anchored his faith, even when it was challenged and even when it "grew"? *His faith was anchored in a powerful Source—verse 17 says that he believed "in God" and verse 20 reiterates that "he gave glory to God," refusing to allow*

"unbelief" to "make him waver." He always gave God the benefit of the doubt, being "fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised" (v. 21).

 According to Romans 4:17, 23-25, what particular displays of divine power should cause us to have faith in God's promises? *His creation of the world (i.e., He "calls into existence the things that do not exist," v. 17) and resurrection of Jesus Christ (i.e., God "gives life to the dead," v. 17, and "raised from the dead Jesus our Lord...for our justification," v. 24-25)*

 In this passage, who is doing the performance—Abraham/us or God? *God* What is left for us to do? *To have faith in God*

 While our performance will accomplish nothing but a curse (cf. Galatians 3:10), what does our faith in receive according to Romans 4:22-5:5? *Justification (4:22, 24; 5:1), peace with God (5:1), grace (5:2), the hope of glory (5:2), purpose (5:3), character (5:3-4), love (5:5), and God's Spirit (5:5)*

3. **The priority of the Covenant (vv. 17-18)**

Paul now comes to his climax (i.e., "this is what I mean") in referencing the establishment of the Abrahamic Covenant, and in building upon his first two points he establishes the priority of the Covenant—

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

Verse 17 builds on verse 15. God made significant promises to Abraham that He reiterated over and over again to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 6-7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22:15-18), Isaac (Genesis 26:2-4, 24), and Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15; 35:9-12; 46:1-4). Having previously ratified those promises in a covenant, bound by His own integrity God did not invalidate or void that covenant with the introduction of the Mosaic Covenant (i.e., the Law) 430 years later.¹⁴ Instead, the Abrahamic Covenant with its twin principles of grace and faith continues unchanged, and whatever purpose the Law was meant to serve, it is obviously inferior to the promise in terms of salvation.

Verse 18 builds on verse 16. God made a promise to Abraham by which He “gave” him an “inheritance” (i.e., roughly equivalent to the “blessing” of vv. 8-9, 14 [justification and the Spirit]). The word “gave” is the verb form of the Greek word for “grace” and is used in the perfect tense (lit. “has freely given”) to indicate an action with ongoing results. In other words, God has and is gracing Abraham and his offspring (cf. 3:7) with an inheritance in Christ (v. 16, 29). This inheritance is not based on (“comes by”) performance (i.e., obedience to the Law), but on a “promise” (i.e., faith in God’s Word; cf. Romans 4:13-16). It cannot be both—grace and works are mutually exclusive in regards to salvation; promise and Law are fundamentally different in nature and serve entirely different purposes. In reference to salvation, the priority of the covenantal promise over Law is unquestioned.

In the last phrase of this section (v. 18b), the Greek words “to Abraham” head the sentence and are thus in emphasis. Abraham serves as the prototype of the believer (cf. v. 9), and in the progress of redemptive revelation, God’s covenantal promises to him serve as the first clear proclamation that God’s plan of salvation was by grace alone through faith alone.

To Abraham, God said, “I will.” Through Moses He said, “Thou shalt.” The promise set forth a religion dependent on God. The law set forth a religion dependent on man. The promise centers on God’s plan, God’s grace, God’s initiative, God’s sovereignty, God’s blessings. The law centers on man’s duty, man’s work, man’s responsibility, man’s behavior, man’s obedience. The promise, being grounded in grace, requires only sincere faith. The law being grounded in works, demands perfect obedience.¹⁵

Illustration: Interestingly, the word for “covenant” in our passage (and in the Septuagint) was also employed in Greek usage for a personal will, and this double-meaning actually provides a fitting illustration of what Paul is saying in these two summary verses:

[God’s] promise was like a will, freely giving the inheritance to a future generation. And like a human will, this divine promise is unalterable. It is still in force today, for it has never been rescinded. God does not make promises in order to break them. He has never annulled or modified His will.¹⁶

When God established His covenant with Abraham and His will with humanity, He clarified in the contract that His inheritance of spiritual blessings and eternal salvation would be graciously (freely, undeservedly) given to those who believe His promise. The will reads today as it did when it was ratified thousands of years ago, and it still bears the immutable signature of God.

Application: Are you relying on God’s promise or are you working to earn God’s favor? Performance cannot save; instead, it actually disqualifies. See, God’s will and covenant is clear and will not be voided—it has been read in our hearing and it states unequivocally and irreversibly that God’s inheritance comes through His promise and is received by faith. To work for that which God has willed to be free is to be troubled by another so-called gospel (1:6-9), is undeniably foolish (3:1), and is worthy only of a curse (3:10-11). Friend, see here the priority of the promise and cast yourself in faith alone upon that grace!

Transition: At this point then, it is only natural for us to ask with Paul in verse 19, “Why then the Law?” The Law was obviously confusing a lot of people concerning the means of salvation, even as it does today. So, why did God “invent” it in the first place? Paul begins to answer that in verses 19-22, and as he does so, he gives us his fifth argument for the sufficiency of faith in salvation.

THE ESSENCE OF THE LAW (vv. 19-22)

When Paul does finally begin to talk about the essence of the Law, we cannot help but notice its inferiority. It did indeed serve a purpose, and Paul clearly outlines that purpose, but it was never intended to accomplish what the promise could! Salvation by grace alone through faith alone was never undermined by the Law; instead, it was highlighted. Let’s trace Paul’s teaching about the essence of the Law to discover both its inferiority and its intention.

1. **The inferiority of the Law (vv. 19b-21)**

Paul delineates the Law’s inferiority by analyzing three aspects of the Law.

a. The duration of the Law (v. 19b)

The Law “was added...until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.” We’ve already learned that the “offspring” is Christ, and so Paul’s purpose here is simply to demonstrate the temporary character of the Mosaic Law—it was “added¹⁷ until” Christ came. Ironically, while the Judaizers were teaching that the Abrahamic Covenant was a provisional program that was replaced by the Mosaic Covenant, it was actually the Mosaic Covenant that was temporal. This verse teaches that the Covenant of Law served its purpose and is no longer binding, now that the promise has been fulfilled in Christ.

Application: Verse 19 touches on two truths that we may have forgotten or never knew about the Mosaic Law—(1) The Mosaic Covenant was temporal and is no longer in effect for New Testament Christians since it served its interim purpose before Christ came; (2) while the Mosaic Covenant dealt with the concept of salvation, it was not added as a means for earning salvation but as a guide pointing to salvation. More to come on these truths in the upcoming verses.

b. The administration of the Law (vv. 19c-20)

While verses 19c-20 are admittedly difficult in their translation and interpretation, Paul actually seems to be making a simple point that further proves the Law’s inferiority to the Abrahamic promises. The Mosaic Covenant was “put in place through angels by an intermediary” (v. 19c). While angelic involvement is not clearly explained in Scripture, it is suggested in Deuteronomy 33:2 and Psalm 68:17 and it is directly referenced by Stephen in Acts 7:53 and by the author of Hebrews in 2:2. The intermediary is certainly Moses, even as we associate his name with this body of Law (cf. Exodus 19ff, esp. 20:18-21 and 31:18). So, verse 19c is suggesting that the revelation of the Law was thrice removed from God Himself—given by God through angels to Moses to God’s people. Verse 20 is probably just further intensifying the remoteness of that covenant as compared to the directness of God’s promises to Abraham.

The law utilized a mediator between two parties, and this was viewed by Paul as involving remoteness and hence

a certain weakness. But the covenant made with Abraham emanated from God alone. It was unconditional, and its fulfillment was not weakened by having several contracting parties. Since God is one and is immutable, the provisions of His covenant are certain.¹⁸

Even in the manner in which the Law was administered, we discover its inferiority in God’s redemptive program.

Application: In chapter 1 we were reminded from Paul’s own autobiography that we, too, have received God’s gospel revelation directly. True, many of us heard it from a messenger, but God Himself was “pleased to reveal His Son to” us (1:16; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:3-5, 10-16) and “bring us forth by the Word of Truth” (James 1:18; cf. 1 Peter 1:23-25).

c. The restriction of the Law (v. 21)

In verse 21, Paul reminds us of what he already touched on in verses 10-12, that the Law cannot give life. That was never its purpose, and even though it was theoretically true (that is, Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 in verse 12—“So you must keep My statutes and My regulations; anyone who does so will live by keeping them,” NET), it was realistically impossible because the demand of the Law was perfect obedience and no one is able to “abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them” (v. 10 quoting Deuteronomy 27:26). This is the great restriction of the Law—it cannot save, it cannot “give life,” righteousness and justification cannot come “by the Law.”



Application: How does the story of the Rich Young Ruler in Mark 10:17-22 (cf. Matthew 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-23) illustrate the inability of the Law to “give life”? This man acknowledges that he has lived his life in conformity to the Mosaic Law (vv. 18-20), and yet he has no rest in his soul, evidenced by his inquiring about how to “inherit eternal life” (v. 17). His question betrayed the inferiority of his performance to save and secure.

Transition: So, then, what is the purpose of the Law? Why did God inaugurate it? What is its function? In light of what we've discovered so far about the essence of the Law in this paragraph, it seems almost that it is "contrary to the promises of God." Is that true?

"Certainly not!" Paul exclaims in verse 21. While the Law cannot save and was never intended to save, it actually complements the promise of God and serves a specific function in regards to God's plan of salvation. Paul explains that intention in verses 19 and 22.

2. The intention of the Law (vv. 19a, 22)

Since the intention of the Law will be discussed further in this epistle, we will only briefly consider the two purposes that Paul addresses here in these verses.

a. To prove the sinfulness of every person

Paul states that the Law was "added because of transgressions" (v. 19). The Greek preposition for "because" is best taken here to indicate goal.¹⁹ In other words, the Law was added in order to objectify people's sinfulness by proving specific "transgressions" of which they were guilty.²⁰ "When a man looks at the law, he sees that his living is more than simply wrong; it is sin, an offense against the holy God, before whom no sinful person can stand."²¹ Boice further explains:

The law was given to make the transgressions known, even in one sense to encourage them or to provoke them to a new intensity....In Romans, Paul argues that "through the law we become conscious of sin" (3:20) and that "where there is no law there is no transgression" (4:15). The point is that though sin was in the world before the giving of the law, sin was not always known as such. The law reveals sin as sin. Hence, it may be said that it is the law that turns sin into transgression—transgression of law—and even accentuates it (Rom 5:20).²²

Law does this job so well (i.e., identifying specific transgressions and condemning those who do them, cf. Romans 7:7-14) that Paul can vividly write in verse 22, "The Scripture imprisoned everything under sin" and its penalty (cf. Romans 3:19-20; 4:15; 6:23a; 8:2).

Because of this, Law cannot be used for justification (cf. 1 Timothy 1:8-11), for that was never its intention. It is pure deception and destruction to misuse the Law in that way, and as Paul indicated in Galatians 3:1, it is a tactic of the devil—"Satan would have us to prove ourselves holy by the law, which God gave to prove us sinners."²³

b. To point to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ

If the first intention of the Law is to remove hope by proving mankind's sinfulness, then the second purpose of the Law is to give hope by pointing people to a Savior. Paul writes in verse 22 that the imprisonment of the Law was "so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

It is here that we see the way that Law and grace cooperate in bringing the lost sinner to Jesus Christ. Law shows the sinner his guilt, and grace shows him the forgiveness he can have in Christ. The Law is "holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12), but we are unholy, unjust, and bad. The Law does not make us sinners; it reveals to us that we already are sinners (see Rom. 3:20). The Law is a mirror that helps us see our "dirty faces" (James 1:22-25)—but you do not wash your face with the mirror! It is grace that provides the cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:7b).

There is a lawful use of the Law, and there is an unlawful use (1 Tim. 1:8-11). The lawful use is to reveal sin and cause men to see their need of a Saviour. The unlawful use is to try to achieve salvation by the keeping of the Law. When people claim they are saved by "keeping the Ten Commandments," they are revealing their ignorance of the true meaning of the Law. The Law concludes "all [men] under sin" (Gal. 3:22), Jews and Gentiles alike. But since all are under sin, then all may be saved by grace! God does not have two ways of salvation; He has but one—faith in Jesus Christ.²⁴

Illustration: In Hosea 2, God contends with His adulterous wife, Israel, and describes the judgments He will bring upon her for her infidelity. But in the midst of punishment is mercy, and that is particularly clear in verses 6-7. God says, "Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her,

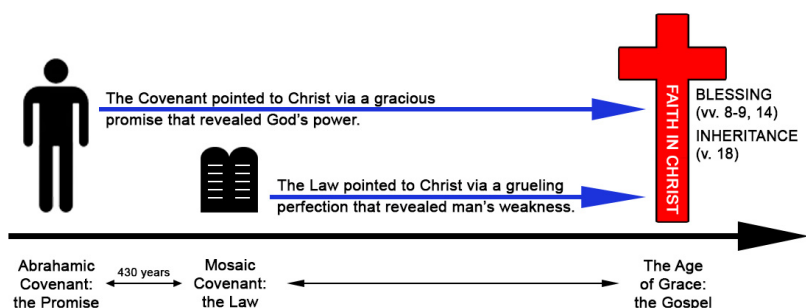
so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, 'I will go and return to my first Husband, for it was better for me then than now.'" Similarly, the intention of the Law is to show us our miserable hopelessness so that we return in faith to our "first Husband," to Jesus Christ, the Lover of our soul and our Redeemer.

Application: From the intention of the Law, several applications can be drawn.

- While the Mosaic Law is no longer in effect (cf. v. 19), the moral standards of the Law still serves two important function²⁵—(1) to convince people of their sinfulness, and so God's moral will should be proclaimed to people in order to heighten their conviction of rebellion against God and to direct them to a Rescuer; (2) to reveal to us God's character, and so God's moral will should be studied by believers in order to guide us in our sanctification (cf. James 1:22-25; 2:10-12; 1 Peter 1:14-16).
- The Law points us to faith in Jesus Christ (v. 22), just as does the promise (vv. 6, 18), but in a different way. Whereas the promise stirs us positively with confidence in God's faithful and powerful assurances, the Law stirs us negatively with convicting self-awareness and neediness. Both programs—promise and Law—direct us to a gracious Savior who is related to only on the basis of faith.

CONCLUSION

"In Luther's commentary on this text he drew the individual believer into the sequence of salvation history Paul had outlined and encouraged those who felt condemned by the accusation of the law to reply: "Lady Law, you are not coming on time; you are coming too late. Look back 430 years; if these were rolled back, you could come. But you are coming too late and tardily; for you have been preceded for 430 years by the promise, to which I agree and in which I gently rest. Therefore you have nothing to do with me; I do not hear you. Now I am living after Abraham a believer; or rather, I am living after the revelation of Christ, who has abrogated and abolished you." Thus let Christ always be set forth to the heart as a kind of summary of all the arguments in support of faith and against the righteousness of the flesh, the law, works, and merits."²⁶



- John Newton aptly summarizes an appropriate response to this two-fold intention of the Law. Toward the end of his life he declared, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things—that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior."

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Abrahamic-covenant.html>

² Donald K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 598. MacArthur words their rebuttal this way (John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 1983], 82):

Now the apostle anticipates the probable argument his adversaries, the Judaizers, would likely make against what he has just proved. “Very well,” they would argue. “But granted that Abraham and his pre-Sinai descendants were saved by faith, it is obvious that when God gave the law to Moses, the basis of salvation changed. A new covenant was made and a new means of salvation was then established. After Moses, the basis of salvation became law in place of faith or at least as a necessary supplement to faith. The covenant with Moses annulled and supplanted the covenant with Abraham, a temporary measure God provided until He gave Moses the more perfect and complete covenant of law. Abraham and others who lived before the law saved by faith only because they did not have the law. Why else would God have given the Mosaic covenant of law?”

³ In verses 15-22, Paul uses “covenant” 2x and “promise” 7x in contrast with “the Law.”

⁴ “Even human beings hold their covenants to be inviolable and unamendable. Once ratified, they are irrevocable and unchangeable” (MacArthur, 83). This is an *a fortiori* argument.

⁵ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 135. John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 130–131.

⁶ “Ordinarily, both parties to a covenant would walk between the slain animals, whose blood would symbolically ratify the agreement. But in this case, God alone walked through, indicating that the covenant, though involving promises to Abraham and his descendants, was made by God with Himself. The covenant was unilateral and entirely unconditional, the only obligation being on God Himself” (MacArthur, 83). Cf. Hebrews 6:13-14.

⁷ While verse 16 references the specific promise (singular) of land, it states that “the promises [plural] were made to Abraham and to his offspring.” This serves to show that Paul is using one particular promise to refer to the entire covenant.

⁸ Campbell, 598. Cf. James Montgomery Boice, “Galatians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 463, and D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1215.

⁹ Campbell, 598.

¹⁰ Boice, 464.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 462–463.

¹² MacArthur, 84.

¹³ “Paul knew perfectly well that the immediate, literal reference of this promise was to the land of Canaan, which God was going to give to Abraham’s physical descendants. But he also knew that this did not exhaust its meaning; nor was it the ultimate reference in God’s mind. Indeed, it could not have been, for God said that in Abraham’s seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, and how could the whole world be blessed through Jews living in the land of Canaan? Paul realized that both the ‘land’ which was promised and the ‘seed’ to whom it was promised were ultimately spiritual. God’s purpose was not just to give the land of Canaan to the Jews, but to give salvation (a spiritual inheritance) to believers who are in Christ” (John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986], 88).

¹⁴ The 430 years is probably “covering the time from the final ratification of the covenant to Jacob just before he went to Egypt (Genesis 46:1-4 [cf. Psalm 105:9-10]) until the giving of the Law at Sinai a few months after the exodus. This view agrees with the 430 years in the Hebrew text of Exodus 12:40; it understands the 400 years of Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6 as the bondage portion of the Egyptian sojourn (the first years under Joseph were prosperous, Exodus 1:7-9), and regards Acts 13:19, 20 as making use of a round number in its computation” (Homer A. Kent, *The Freedom of God’s Sons* [Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1976], 94-96).

¹⁵ MacArthur, 82.

¹⁶ Stott, 88–89.

¹⁷ This word “added” is different than “add” in verse 15. It doesn’t refer to an adjustment to the legal document, the covenant/will, but rather to something that operates simultaneous to it. “This meaning is further clarified when we look at the parallel verse in Rom 5:20: ‘The law was added so that the trespass might increase.’ In Romans the word for ‘added’ (*pareisēlthen*) means literally ‘came in by a side road.’ The main road is the covenant of promise—inviolable, irrevocable. The law has the character of something additional, a side road intended to carry extra traffic and excess baggage and, if we may anticipate Paul’s argument, designed not to lead to a separate destination but to point its travelers back to the main road” (Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994], 253).

¹⁸ Kent, 100. Also, “A mediator implies a covenant between two parties both of whom have responsibilities, facts true of the Mosaic Covenant. On the other hand God is One, that is, the ‘promise’ (v. 19) was unilateral and was given to man directly without a mediator, God alone having responsibility for fulfilling it” (Campbell, 599).

¹⁹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1079.

²⁰ “Law came in order that sin might take on the character of actual transgression of clearly indicated standards. Unless there is a revealed law, sin in sinful but it is not transgression (Rom. 4:15)” (Kent, 96).

²¹ MacArthur, 87.

²² Boice, 464–465.

²³ Stott, 90.

²⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 703.

²⁵ “The covenant of law is long past, but the moral demands of the law have not diminished, having neither begun nor ended with the Mosaic covenant. That is why preaching the moral, ethical standards of the law today is still imperative in driving men to Christ. Unless men realize they are living in violation of God’s law and therefore stand under His divine judgment, they will see no reason to be saved. Grace is meaningless to a person who feels no inadequacy or need of help. He sees no purpose in being saved if he does not realize he is lost. He sees no need of forgiveness by God if he does not know he has offended God. He sees no need to seek God’s mercy if he is unaware he is under God’s wrath” (MacArthur, 87).

²⁶ George, 250.