

Galatians #10

September 29, 2024

Series: Galatians: Treasuring the Gospel of Grace

Today's Message: The Prevailing Supremacy of the Covenant of Promise; Galatians 3:15-22

In Galatians 3:1-14 Paul proved that Abraham was justified by faith and received the Holy Spirit by believing the promises of God and not by “observing the law. (Gal. 3:2)” Subsequently, then, everyone who has the same “faith as Abraham [is] blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Gal. 3:9)” And Paul made it abundantly clear that the faith of Abraham and the faith of everyone who is of the same faith as Abraham was made “effective by Christ’s taking sin’s curse upon Himself.” (MacArthur)

Today we begin a most wonderful and spiritually edifying look at the prevailing supremacy of the Promise of God. In Galatians 3:15-22 Paul challenges the strong view of the Judaizers who would concede that indeed Abraham was justified by faith, and that faith, then, would prevail until the Law of Moses came along. But, they would say that when Moses came along then the foundation for justification shifted from *faith* to *keeping the Law of Moses*. Their argument would stand on this premise: That after the Law of Moses was given and then ratified by Israel (Exodus 19:7-8), then God set aside the law of faith as something obsolete. The Judaizers would contend for the law of Moses as being superior to the law of faith, which they viewed as inferior. They would reason that there was no other purpose for the law to be given to Moses if justification was still by faith.

Paul anticipates the arguments just mentioned and responds to those arguments by showing 1) the permanence of an established covenant, that is, the covenant of promise; and 2) that this covenant with Abraham was both unilaterally and unconditionally dependent upon God’s faithfulness! These two arguments established by Paul are rooted in the character and nature of God and His faithfulness, “whereas the covenant of Moses was a conditional covenant of law relying on man’s faithfulness. (MacArthur)”

MacArthur writes brilliantly, “To Abraham, God said, ‘I will.’ Through Moses God said, ‘Thou shalt.’ The promise set forth a religion dependent upon 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.” (p82)

Today we will look at a fairly short section of Galatians in two major parts. The first part focuses on the prevailing supremacy of the covenant promise of God, and the second looks at the good but subordinate covenant of the law.

I) (Galatians 3:15-18) The Prevailing Supremacy of the Covenant Promise of God.

- A) (3:15) Paul uses the covenant practice of people. Once ratified, a covenant between two or more people is binding.
 - 1) Remember, the Judaizers were saying that the covenant of promise to Abraham was temporary until Moses and the Law came into being.
 - (a) But Paul is making a point. If man’s ratified covenants are binding how much more when God makes a covenant with man, or in this case, with Abraham and His Seed.
 - (i) Though Paul is comparing man’s secular covenants with God’s sacred covenant with Abraham, we should consider the infinite distance between God and man.
 - (ii) If human terms of covenants are binding and therefore cannot be added too, how much more must God’s covenant be considered supreme and beyond adding anything to it.
 - (a) Certainly, Paul has struck a fatal blow to the Judaizers belief. But he’s just getting started!

- B) (3:16) Next Paul identifies the parties involved in the covenant promise of God: “Abraham and his Seed,” “meaning one person, who is Christ.”
- 1) But how do we know that Paul is right in saying that “Abraham’s seed” does not mean many people?
 - (a) Most modern translations use the word “offspring” and “descendants,” meaning many people descending from Abraham. Abraham is the father of many nations.
 - (i) Didn’t God promise Abraham descendants and numerous as sand on the seashore in Genesis 15:5? Yes!
 - (b) But Paul is referencing Genesis 22:18 where “offspring” or “seed” is singular in the Hebrew.
 - (i) “...and through your Seed/ offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” (Gen. 22:18)
 - 2) It is good to notice that before, in Genesis 12:3, when God established the promise covenant with Abraham, He said, “...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”
 - (a) Now in Genesis 22:18, God tells Abraham that it is “through your Seed (singular) that the nations of the earth will be blessed because you have obeyed Me.”
 - (i) This covenant promise is fulfilled in one person, the person of Jesus Christ, the Seed of Abraham!
 - (a) Therefore, every promise of God is ultimately fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ!
 1. Paul says this also in 2 Corinthians 1:20 “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so, through Him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”
 2. And are ratified through the New Covenant which is sealed by His blood shed on the cross! That covenant is also irrevocable, and it stands forever!
 - (b) It should also be mentioned that “Seed” is used in the singular form in Genesis 3:15 when God says to the serpent, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and hers (seed (singular)); He (her Seed) will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.”
 - (i) Her Seed is Christ!
 - 3) Paul is saying, then, that the covenant promise made to Abraham is superior to the law covenant and is fulfilled in Christ alone!
 - (a) MacArthur: “Therefore, the only way a person can be a participant in the promised blessing to Abraham is to be a fellow heir [of the promise] with Christ through faith in Him!
- C) (3:17) Paul directly addresses the Judaizer’s claim that the covenant of law replaced the covenant of promise made to Abraham.
- 1) He is arguing that God’s covenant is superior to human covenants, which are binding.
 - 2) And a second point Paul makes is this: **God established the covenant with Abraham** 430 before the covenant of law.
 - (a) The covenant of promise was unilateral and unconditional in nature as we see in Genesis 15.
 - (i) **See Genesis 15:8-21**
- D) (3:18) The covenant of promise was given to Abraham by God as a gift of His grace!
- 1) The keeping of the covenant of promise was completely dependent upon God!
 - (a) God is the promise keeper! Our faith must be anchored in Christ through whom all of God’s promises find their “yes” and “Amen!” (2 Corinthians 1:20)
 - (b) And **2 Corinthians 1:21-22** says, “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ (believing/ trusting). He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come.”
- E) Next Paul explains the good purpose of the law and how it is subordinate to the covenant of promise.
- II) **(Galatians 3:19-22) The Good but Subordinate Covenant of Law.**
- A) (3:19a) “What, then, is the purpose of the law?”

- 1) To expound the question: If justification has always been by faith and never by works, and if the promise covenant to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ Jesus, then why the law? (MacArthur)
- 2) Answer: “The law was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”
 - (a) Mankind continuously steps over the moral boundaries, continually sinning against God.
 - (b) The law demonstrates man’s sinfulness and man’s utter depravity and hopelessness to restore what has been broken.
 - (c) The law is intended to drive mankind to despair and reveal his absolute need of a Savior!
 - (d) The law shows sinful man that they live in constant violation of God’s holy standard and are doomed to the judgment of God against them, unless they receive the salvation that God, according to His sovereign grace, has offered in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ!
- B) (3:19b-20) Another reason why the law, though good, was subordinate to the covenant of promise.
 - 1) The law was given through mediators: by angels through Moses.
 - 2) The promise was given by God to Abraham in person and is fulfilled in the person of God the Son!
 - (a) In this way, God comes directly to a person who believes in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit!
 - (i) The promise covenant of God is better than the law covenant which is mediated by angels, etc.
 - (a) Paul is warning the Galatians that though Moses is great, and the angels are great they are only mediators; and it is dangerous to choose them over God! (MacArthur)
 - 3) (3:20) Difficult to interpret.
 - (a) The covenant of law involved Moses, the angels and the people, and it was conditional.
 - (b) The promise was given to Abraham by God alone. He alone made the covenant Himself, a unilateral covenant, without Abraham’s input. Abraham simply believed what God established!
 - (i) In the covenant to Abraham only God speaks saying, “I will.” (unconditional!)
 - (ii) In the law covenant God commands, “Thou shalt!” (for example, see Exodus 20)
- C) (3:21-22) Paul provides the reasons why the law covenant is subordinate to the promise covenant.
 - 1) (3:21) First he asks, “Is the law, therefore opposed to the promises of God?”
 - (a) He answers, “Absolutely not!” (God gave both the promise and the law with two outcomes in mind. As we will see, the law shows the utter sinfulness of sin; the promise brings life!)
 - (b) But he makes it clear that the law cannot impart life.
 - (i) The law cannot save anyone. It cannot impart righteousness for eternal life.
 - (a) It cannot supply the necessary righteousness required by God.
 1. If it could, then Christ died for nothing, just as Galatians 2:21 declared!
 2. God is not the author of confusion. He does not offer an alternative way to be justified. It is only by faith in Jesus, and never by works of law.
 - 2) (3:22) The law cannot justify anyone but can only hold everyone as a captive prisoner of sin.
 - (a) The Scripture, through the law, has locked up everyone in a prison of sorts and cannot provide any way of escape from doom. The law is therefore subordinate to the promise.
 - (i) With no way of escape, then the law’s purpose is to drive a person to Christ alone!
 - (b) Paul concludes that the law, when having done its work of revealing an inescapable bondage to sin, will turn men to Christ, through whom the promise of righteousness is received by faith! That person is saved by God’s grace through faith, and not by trust in the law.

III) Application

- A) For our encouragement:
 - 1) God established a unilateral and unconditional covenant that is fulfilled in Christ.
 - (a) Everyone who trust in Him are heirs of the covenant of promise first given to Abraham.
 - (b) We, who have faith in Christ, are kept firmly in the blessing of the covenant by the indwelling Holy Spirit!