

Galatians – Lesson 22 “The Law vs. the Promise -Part 1”

Galatians 3:15-22

December 8, 2024

Introduction/Organization

- Having established so resoundingly that Christ became a curse for us so that we could live righteously by faith, Paul now turns to a few illustrations to help demonstrate the point:
 - A covenant or contract, like a trust (3:15-22)
 - Minor heirs held under custodians (3:23-4:10)
 - An allegory of two women (4:21-31)
- In this first illustration, Paul writes like a lawyer examining the terms of a contract

An example from everyday life (3:15-16)

- “Even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.” (3:15)
 - Greek word *diatheke* can mean any agreement whose terms are validated
 - Paul is setting up his argument as one examining the terms of a legal contract
 - Once a contract has been ratified, no one can simply annul it or add to it. Except how?
- “Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring.” (3:16)
 - The legal agreement was made between God and Abraham + his ‘offspring’
 - Remember in verse 7 that the sons of Abraham are those who believe. These are the inheritors of the promise, as described in Rom 9:6-8:
“For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but Through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.”
 - But Paul goes a step further in focusing the promise on a singular offspring
 - Greek word is *sperma*, referring to Gen 12:7 and other OT passages where the Hebrew word is *zera*:
 - both can mean “seed,” as in for scattering for planting, “offspring,” or “descendants,” depending on the context.
 - Paul is reinterpreting or refocusing Christ as THE Offspring, the sole beneficiary of the trust, and channel of God’s promised blessing
 - The Rabbinic Jewish nationalist view believed it was necessary to belong to the nation of Israel in order to receive the blessings promised to Abraham
 - How is this practice continued today among Christian churches?
 - More to come on this Offspring of Abraham next week

Some background on the promises and the covenants

- Covenant with Abraham
 - Promises extended to Abraham’s offspring (*zera*) in Gen. 12:7, 13:15, 24:7
 - Covenant with Abraham ratified (recall the cutting of the covenant) in Gen. 15

- Covenant at Sinai
 - This Covenant, brokered through Moses, first ratified at Mt. Sinai in Exo. 24:7-8:
"Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' 8 And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."
 - Covenant reaffirmed after the sin of the golden calf (Exo. 34:27-28)
 - Reiterated by Moses before crossing into the Promised Land in Deu. 4:13:
"And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone. 14 And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess."

Inheritance comes through the promises and not the law (3:17-18)

- "[T]he law... does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God..." (3:17)
 - The law, given as part of a covenant with the Hebrew people as they occupy the promised land, doesn't nullify the previous covenant with Abraham.
 - Why not? What would have to happen for this contract to be nullified?
- "For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise;" (3:18)
 - God gave the promise to Abraham
 - Therefore, the inheritors of the promises cannot receive them by following the law

Why then the law? (3:19-22)

- "It was added because of transgressions..." (3:19)
 - But wait— didn't Paul just say in verse 15 that no one could add anything to a contract?
 - What does he mean "because of transgressions"? Let's look at Romans:
 - Rom 5:13: *"[F]or sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law."*
 - Rom. 3:20: *"[T]hrough the law comes knowledge of sin."*
 - The law was added, to make us all aware of sin, as described in Rom. 7:7-8:
"Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For 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. For apart from the law, sin lies dead."
- Paul gives three arguments why the law is 'inferior' to the promise of the covenant:
 - It was added later because of sin
 - It was put in place temporarily
 - It was administered by an intermediary

- “An intermediary implies more than one, but God is one” (3:20)
 - This is considered by many to be one of the most obscure verses in all of Paul’s writings
 - Paul could be drawing a contrast between the law, given by an intermediary (angels and Moses) vs. the Abrahamic covenant, given directly by God himself
 - Or Paul could be anticipating an argument against the idea of an intermediary if Christ is the ultimate heir of the promise

- Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! (3:21-22)
 - Anticipating the objection, Paul reassures that the law is not contrary to the promise,
 - The law was put in place to make it clear that we are all prisoners of sin
 - How were *you* made aware of your need for Christ?

Next week, we will take a closer look at THE Offspring of Abraham