

LSB Galatians 3:15 - 19 **Why the Law then?**

15 Brothers, I speak in human terms: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. 16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. 17 And what I am saying is this: the Law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to abolish the promise. 18 For if the inheritance is by law, it is no longer by promise, but God has granted it to Abraham through promise. 19 Why the Law then? It was added because of trespasses, having been ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

We embark now on a very interesting and some would say complex section of scripture. And it embraces an enormous theme that has been a hot topic since Paul walked about on the earth to this very day.

That topic is within the confines of biblical christianity, the world at large could care less and in fact would think anyone who is concerned about these things is at best looney tooney or at worst, dangerous.

The topic, the theme for the next few weeks as we watch Paul correcting the heretical error that had descended upon the regions of galatia, is law and grace. Law verses grace.

How do we balance God's law given by Moses, with the gracious forgiveness purchased by the Lord, Jesus Christ? If salvation is by grace plus nothing, what do we do with Moses? The law of God.

Because Jesus famously said; *17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; Matt. 5*

But then Paul comes along and says;
10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse, for it is

written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to do them." 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident, for "The righteous shall live by faith." 12 However, the Law is not of faith; rather, "He who does them shall live by them." Gal3

Seems like we're darned if we don't and darned if we do. How do we understand and balance it all.

We'll talk about all of it, but to get us started in this section, let me set up for you the straw man that Paul is arguing against.

Paul has come in with both guns blaring against false and dangerous doctrines that salvation by grace alone is not enough. The judaizers had come from Jerusalem and they were teaching, yes, Jesus is the Messiah, but grace plus nothing isn't good enough for you to be saved.

You need to embrace Moses and keep the jewish laws, and then Jesus can save you. Salvation is by grace plus works of the law. All of the law. Ceremonial, Civil, Moral law must be kept in order to be saved by Jesus. Circumcision is necessary in order for gentiles to be saved, plus all the other stuff.

And Paul says; Absolutely NOT. And not only not necessary, but in the next chapters we will see that Paul will tell them, if you're doing stuff, to earn your salvation, getting circumcised, embracing jewish law, for salvation sake, Jesus can't save you. Salvation is by Grace alone.

But here comes the straw man. Paul anticipates a jewish argument. The judaizers will argue from history, yes, God made promises to Abraham, that's the Abrahamic covenant. It's a one sided covenant. God says; I will, I will, I will and there's no conditional premises at all. God tells Abraham I'm going to bless everybody, through your seed. Unconditional.

But then the judaizers will say, later on God added the conditions via Moses. God added conditions to His covenant with Abraham via Moses.

So if you want the Abraham blessing, you must also embrace Moses law. It's conditions added to the Abrahamic promises.

And Paul is going to argue in these first verses we'll look at this morning, Paul says, Baloney. Unconditional blessing is unconditional blessing. You don't come along later and add a bunch of conditions. Even we don't do that. And we're wicked. A righteous God most certainly doesn't promise things unconditionally and then later on, add a bunch of conditions.

15 Brothers, I speak in human terms: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.

Paul says, even human covenants don't play by those rules. Once a covenant is ratified, you don't add stuff.

In June of 1964, my dad went down to the Ford dealer and bought a brand new 1964½ Mustang. It was white. I was so excited! I just thought that was the coolest thing ever. Couldn't wait to ride around in that Mustang.

But then the unthinkable happened. The dealer called up my dad and said, Oops! We goofed! We can't possibly sell you that car for that price, we need the car back and / or we need to re-negotiate a new deal. In our favor.

I was only 12 years old but even as a child I thought to myself, that's the most bizarre behaviour I've ever heard of. Parties sign a contract of sale, everybody signs it, dealer and purchaser, it's notarized, you can't come back and say, sorry, we goofed. We want our car back. Who does that? That's the stupidest thing I ever heard of.

Well, dad told them to go pound sand. But they came and picked their car up. He had to buy a different one a few months later from a different dealer. That's bizarre behaviour. Wicked behaviour.

I'm sure if my dad had gotten a lawyer and sought relief in court, after a lot

of lost work days and lawyer fees, that ratified contract would have stood in his favor. But who has time and money to fight with thieves. He told them where to pick the car up if they wanted it. I think he got his trade-in back. A salmon pink-orange '59 Galaxie.

Even men don't break their contracts once they're ratified, normally. A contract is an agreement between parties. Once everyone signs, you don't get to add stuff to it. We'd like more money and like you to pay more per month please. Balderdash.

If wicked men don't get to pull that stuff, how much more so, a righteous God! That's Paul's argument. Even we don't add stuff to our contracts. Wicked us, we don't do that. How much more so a righteous God.

They were arguing, Yes God made an unconditional contract with Abraham, but yes, he came back 400+ years later and added the law to it. Nonsense. That's what vs 15 says;

15 Brothers, I speak in human terms: even though it is only a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it.

The unconditional covenant between God and Abraham was ratified in Genesis chapter 15. Vs. 8 *But Abram replied, "Lord GOD, how can I know that I will possess it?"*

9 And the LORD said to him, "Bring Me a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, along with a turtledove and a young pigeon."

10 So Abram brought all these to Him, split each of them down the middle, and laid the halves opposite each other. The birds, however, he did not cut in half.

This is how ancient binding covenants were ratified by blood. The animals would be split in two and put on two sides of an aisle and the participants would walk between the bloody carcasses. You don't split the turtledove and pigeon in half. Nothing but a pile of feathers.

11 And the birds of prey descended on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and suddenly great terror and darkness overwhelmed him.

13 Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will judge the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will depart with many possessions. 15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age. 16 In the fourth generation your descendants will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, behold, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch appeared and passed between the halves of the carcasses. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have given this land—from the river of Egypt to the great River Euphrates— 19 the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20 Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

Did Abraham walk between the carcasses. No. This covenant is binding only on God. Unconditional. Abraham has nothing to do with it other than to receive it's blessings.

This next part is fascinating to me, because we have an insider view here of how a polemical argument can be made using the intricacies of the ancient scriptures, right down to individual word tenses.

Here Paul will argue that the promise is to Abraham and to a single future seed. The future promised Messiah.

16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed.

In other words, all of the unconditional promise to Abraham is only directed to a single future seed from Abraham.

He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ.

We can take the time to look back to Genesis 17. Let me just read from that section;

*1 Now it happened that when Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him,
“I am God Almighty;
Walk before Me and be blameless,
2 so that I may confirm My covenant between Me and you,
And that I may multiply you exceedingly.”
3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God spoke with him, saying, 4
“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you,
And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.
5 And no longer shall your name be called Abram,
But your name shall be Abraham;
For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.
6 And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you,
and kings will go forth from you. 7 And I will establish My covenant
between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations
for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you. 8
And I will give to you and to your seed after you, the land of your
sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I
will be their God.” 9 God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you
shall keep My covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their
generations.*

Now if you go and check a good hebrew lexicon interliner that has all of the tenses of the nouns and verbs you will find that in the original Hebrew language the word seed that appears several times in that section is second person masculine singular. Exactly as Paul says.

Besides the lesson we are studying here, there is a second lesson for us.

We want to discover the truths about the promises to Abraham and how those work, to whom are they directed, how do they effect us, and all;

But we also have a lesson here by a master, that he didn't mean to give us, it wasn't his intent at the time, but we get to watch a master polemicist use the scriptures to argue for a truth by singling out and arguing for a single word's tenses.

Paul's argument is that the word seed is second person masculine singular. One seed. This isn't a blanket promise for the jewish race. The promise is between God, Abraham, and a singular future seed from Abraham. The Messiah. The Christ. The Holy ONE of Israel. The Lord Jesus.

In our era, it has become increasingly popular for false teachers to claim they are evangelical christians and then to claim that the scriptures are incomprehensible and also that anyone who would dare to say any of it means anything in exactitude, that person is committing the sin of pride.

Post-modernism is a phenomenon that sort of settled on the culture about the time that communism was crumbling in Russia and the Berlin wall came down. At the same era, all absolute truth was called into question and we decided, we can't really say anything is absolute truth, absolutely.

We have a generation that is saying, no one can know for certain what these ancient texts mean. And anyone who says they do, is arrogant and prideful. Rather we should all humbly accept that it's impossible to understand the scriptures, and just love everyone no matter what they say or do. How very inclusive. So inclusive that if I say I actually think I do know what it says, I'm excluded and judged as arrogant and proud.

That's all very high sounding isn't it. Except, Paul takes us back to a single word in a single text and argues that based on the original tense of the word, it can only mean one thing. Shame on you Paul. Don't you know how arrogant that is. Don't you understand that you cannot possibly understand?? Paul would say; Nonsense! And I do too!

So then, let's get back to Paul's polemic argument based on a single tense of a single word!

16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

The promise isn't to a plurality of seeds. It is to a singular seed. One man. Christ Jesus.

I have had jewish friends who dis-regard God, dis-regard God's law, dis-regard their own history, live like every other godless pagan, and rely on a false notion that they have a racial connection to Abraham and thus they are God's chosen people, and as such, will not be judged.

It's a DNA thing. I've got jewish DNA and thus I am excluded from judgement. I'm a son of Abraham. Do you realize, if the word seed had been plural instead of singular, they would be right. That one word tense excludes my jewish friend and includes me in the blessing. How about that! I will inherit the blessing because I'm in that singular blessed seed.

So then, there is an unconditional blessing given to Abraham, he's dead, and also to a single 'seed' of Abraham's offspring. Jesus. If you're "IN" Christ, you are in that unconditional blessing. That's how us gentiles get included. I'm hidden inside that single seed that was the recipient of the unconditional blessing.

Well, the judaizers are standing around saying, but, but, but, . . . what about the law then?? God added the law through Moses. They argue that the law is added to the original covenant. Paul says, no, wicked men don't add things, and certainly a holy God doesn't add conditions to His unconditional promise to Abraham and to a singular seed from Abraham.

17 And what I am saying is this: the Law, which came 430 years later, does

not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to abolish the promise.

God doesn't add conditions to His promise. The law doesn't invalidate the original promise. The law given through Moses is separate from the promise to Abraham and his seed.

18 For if the inheritance is by law, it is no longer by promise, but God has granted it to Abraham through promise.

The inheritance here is salvation. Blessing instead of cursing. That is the gospel given to Abraham. God chose Abraham out of a cursed world and for His purposes and His pleasure God unconditionally promised blessing to Abraham and to his seed, singular, that is Christ.

If salvation depends on righteousness self generated by keeping of God's laws, like Paul says here, that defeats an unconditional promise. And if God changes His mind and His promises are subject to change on His whim, we are all in a terrifying pickle!

But Paul, again, reassures us; *but God has granted it to Abraham through promise.*

That my friends is good news! Gospel good news. Because as we've talked about before, the law is a hopeless business. Actually it's me that's hopeless, not God's law. I am a hopeless sinner. If the inheritance is not by unconditional promise, hell's mouth is open, waiting for me to draw my final breath. I am a hopeless bankrupt sinner who only deserves hell.

19 Why the Law then? It was added because of trespasses, having been ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

We need fences. God graciously and lovingly gave us the law in order for us to thrive by it's blessing. We're like little children. We need restraints in

order to not bring ourselves harm.

Pam and I were semi-strict with our little ones. We would give clear instruction, clear commands, and if our kids willfully dis-obeyed what we knew they understood was prohibited or asked, the spanking stick came out.

And we were consistent. Make your calculation. Choose to disobey mom or dad, and you don't have to wonder for a minute whether or not you're little butt's gonna get some heat.

No inbalance. Never were kids more loved and enjoyed. But punishment was quick and consistent. We discovered that those boundaries, those fences caused our little ones to be more secure and happy than most of their friends.

God didn't give the law because He hates us. Far from it. God gave the law through grace and love for our own well-being. Look around you. Did our nation thrive more when we respected the 10 commandments? Or are we thriving more now that we've divorced God and set up a restraining order so He cannot even be on the same block as us?

19 Why the Law then? It was added because of trespasses, having been ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

For Israel, the law was more than just a moral code. Certainly that is part of Moses law, but for the 12 tribes, the law of Moses was also a civil law that made them distinct in all of the world. And it was a ceremonial law of blood offerings and washings and cleansings all of which were a picture of the promised Messiah who would fulfil all of those types, all of those pictures.

Paul says the law has an expiration date. *until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.*

The unconditional promise of blessing was for Abraham and for a singular descendent of Abraham. It is independent and separate from the Mosaic covenant of conditional blessing. The law of Moses is a conditional blessing for all who observe and keep them. It isn't salvific. Keeping the law of Moses doesn't save anyone. But it blesses those who embrace them. Temporally.

That's actually built into God's design of the universe. Culture's that for whatever the reason may be, follow God's moral laws, the ten commandments, can't help but thrive, whether they know God or not. It's like it's built into the world. Designed into the universes. Keep God's laws and thriving comes. Abandon God's laws and cursings come.

Interesting that we can discover mathematics and develop science and discover all sorts of things God designed. But no one seems to catch onto the other non physical laws of God and correlate them to sure benefits. We love our sin. We make up wild and bizarre tales to eliminate God. And we run quickly into sin that causes us untold pain and damage.

Science can discover gravity and describe why it is that jumping off of a tall building is best avoided. But leave the physical science behind and there is a sure set of standards just as black and white as mathematics and numbers, but we can't wait to jump off of tall buildings to sure death in the realms of our souls.

Moral science, God's moral laws, are beyond finding out . . . scientifically, methodically. Benefit through God's moral laws can only be revealed by God. They, unlike physical sciences, are beyond finding out, beyond physical discovery. God gave them to Moses. Things we could otherwise never find out on our own. Things that have blessing built in.

19 Why the Law then? It was added because of trespasses, having been ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.

The law of Moses was indeed a covenantal promise of God with Israel. Observe God's law, blessing will result. Ignore God's laws and cursings will come. Totally conditional. And Paul observes, that covenant had an expiration date. *until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made*

The promised seed is Jesus. His death on the cross fulfilled all of the ceremonial requirements of judaism. Once for all time. Sins are paid for in Him.

The civil law of God that separated Israel from the nations surrounding them is set aside by God in judgement. They murdered the promised Holy One. God scattered Israel to the four winds in judgement. Wandering persecuted judged Israel has no need of Moses civil law.

The moral law is completed in Jesus. He is the only person who kept God's law perfectly and totally. And He gives that righteousness freely to us. Positionally and practically.

I am positionally perfect before God because a righteousness not my own has been credited to my account. God flips open his book to Jim and my debt is cancelled and replaced with Christ's perfect righteousness.

Practically, here, in the nasty now and now, the indwelling Holy Spirit gives me the power to overcome the sin that still dwells within me. I have the ability, in Christ, for the first time, to actually keep God's moral law.

Everything's different after Jesus. Look down to vs. 27 of chapter 3. We'll look at it in more detail hopefully next week. *27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

God looks down from heaven at Jim, and He sees Christ. I am in Christ. I have put on Christ. I am clothed, covered with Christ.

The idea goes all the way back to Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve covered themselves with fig leaves. And God slaughtered animals to cover them with animal skins. Finally, now, I am covered with Christ. My embarrassing sinfulness is clothed with Christ.

What began in Genesis 3 with animal skins is full completed today, In Christ. He is my clothing. I am covered with His righteousness. *27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

That's my position in Christ. I am clothed with His righteousness, not my own. God looks at my account and sees only Jesus righteousness. Positional truth.

But let's get back down on earth to practical righteousness. Am I liable to keep the laws given to Moses? Jesus said not one jot or tittle would be eliminated. Right? Until all is completed.

Matt. 5:17 *“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

Theologians who work hard to rightly divide the truth help us categorize the law of Moses into 3 categorical groups. Ceremonial laws for Israel. Civil laws for the nation of Israel, and Moral law, morality that reflects God's character.

Ceremonial law, all of the religious ceremony of endless sacrifices and a river of blood literally flowing out of that temple, is completely fulfilled in the death of Jesus on the cross. All of those pictures, all of those types are complete in Him.

And it's fascinating to look at all of the ceremony and understand how each picture looked to the future Lamb of God who ultimately died once for all

time to complete all of the ceremonial law of Israel. Finished. In Christ.

What about the civil laws. All the minutia about boundaries and offerings and rules about how a society, a culture gets along with each other. Capital punishments for capital offenses, and on and on it goes. National laws unique to that Nation. Israel.

It had the purpose of ordering the nation of Israel to be uniquely ordered within the midst of the Godless world around them. Their civil code kept them uniquely separate from the rest of the world. We are Israel's tribes and sons and God gave us this civil code to live together with each other and to keep us unique and separate from those outside.

Those also have an expiration date. They became fulfilled, or perhaps hopelessly obsolete, after the crucifixion of the Holy One of Israel, as God destroyed that nation and sent jews fleeing, scattered all over the earth.

But we have a final category don't we. God's moral law. Moral codes. The ten commandments. The moral law is binding on christians. They have zero to do with attaining salvation, but they define a righteous God compels us to also be godly.

Let's end by momentarily looking at a single law in Leviticus chapter 20 and see if we can apply some biblical principals of rightly dividing the word of truth in 2023. Lev. 20:

10 'If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.

What do we do with that in 2023? Very quickly so you can see how we might divide this up.

We can divide this into two categories. Moral law defines adultery as sin. The civil law of the nation of Israel defined what those within the context

of the nation of Israel were required to do to those folks as a consequence of that moral sin. Death. It was a capital offense within the confines of the nation of Israel.

How does that translate to 2023. Adultery is still a moral sin that is of a nature serious enough that God ordered capital punishment for His nation. It's a very serious moral breach. But we live under the civil codes of the United States. We don't stone adulterers.

So the moral sin before God stands. No change. What results has changed. We are not bound by Israel's civil codes. And we could work our way through all of Moses law and make those distinctions. Ceremonial, Civil, Moral. God's morality is still binding on christians in 2023, unchanged.

Aren't you glad we have a Saviour who has clothed us in His righteousness.