

14. The Book of Galatians 3:15-18 (Topical)

Liberty From Law-Part 13

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We are studying the Book of Galatians here at Calvary on Sunday mornings—going through the book topically based on its main theme.

The main theme of Galatians is **liberty**—the liberty (or freedom) that is ours in Christ.

The book divides itself into 3 main areas of liberty that Paul brings up in this epistle—

- I. **Liberty from Lies**—verses 1:6-10
- II. **Liberty from Law**— verses 1:11-4:31
- III. **Liberty for Life**— verses 5:1-6:15

In our study we have entered into the second major section - "**Liberty from Law**" - which is really **liberty from religion and legalism** as a way of being made righteous in God's eyes.

- II. **Liberty from Law**— verses 1:1-4:31
 - A. The testimony of Paul— verses 1:11-2:10
 - B. The transgression of Peter— verses 2:11-21
 - C. The treachery of false prophets— verses 3:1-4
 - D. The truth of the Gospel— verses 3:5-9
 - E. The curse of the law—verses 3:10-14
 - F. **The covenant of promise**—verses 3:15-18

Galatians 3:14–18 (NKJV)

¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. ¹⁵ Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. ¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "*And to your Seed,*" who is Christ. ¹⁷ And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

The Bible is a book of promises—“exceedingly great and precious promises” as Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:4.

These promises have been given to us by God and become integral to our faith and therefore critical to our walk.

One author had this to say about the promises in the Bible—

“DL Moody in his book, “Prevailing Prayer,” tells a story about the promises of God. ‘The Bible is packed with so many promises it is hard to count them. One man tried, a schoolteacher named Everett R. Storms of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. He determined to count the promises in the Bible. He read through the Bible 26 times, so during his 27th reading, he took a year and a half and as he read, he counted all the promises. He came up with 7,487 promises made by Almighty God to humans. That is over 20 promises for each day throughout the whole year. Praise the Lord...’

What a joy to know we can count on God’s promises. Titus 1:2 tells us that God cannot lie, and Romans 4:21 tells us that what God has promised us He is able and willing to perform.

On the authority of the Word of God and immutable (unchangeable) character of God, we can be sure not one of those 7,487 promises will be broken!”

>>> The first place a formal promise appears in the Bible is in Genesis Chapter 9 after Noah’s Flood—

Genesis 9:12–17 (NKJV)

¹² And God said: “This *is* the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: ¹³ I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. ¹⁴ It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; ¹⁵ and I will remember My covenant which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth.” ¹⁷ And God said to Noah, “This *is* the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that *is* on the earth.”

REFLECTION: Can you think of a few promises God has made that apply to you?

I wanted you to notice that the word **covenant** is being used here as a *synonym* for a **promise.**

That’s important to understand because in the context of Galatians 3—that’s exactly the comparison that Paul is making. **Paul uses the word “promise” 7 times in the last 12 verses of Galatians 3**—with regard to the promise or promises that God gave to Abraham and his descendants in relation to the New Covenant—

Jeremiah 31:31–33 (NKJV)

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and

with the house of Judah—³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. ³³ But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV)

⁶ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He [Jesus Christ our great High Priest] is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

This new covenant was not going to be like the old covenant God made with Israel through Moses.

In the Mosaic covenant, God promised Israel blessings based on their obedience to the law—whereas in the new covenant, God promised us blessings based on our faith in Jesus.

This is critical to Paul’s argument that eternal life is a gift that God has promised to us through our faith and not something we earn by our works. That is the idea that Paul begins Chapter 3 with—

Galatians 3:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

He picks this thought up in verse 14—

Galatians 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

REFLECTION: Think about the time when you committed yourself to Jesus Christ and invited him into your heart as your Lord & Savior? Was this a very specific time or over time when you came to the Lord?

The “promise of the Spirit” is a reference to the Holy Spirit who moves into a person’s heart the moment they receive Jesus Christ as their Savior through faith—

Ephesians 1:13–14 (NKJV)

¹³ In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Again, Paul starts this chapter by asking the Galatians to remember how they got saved and received the Holy Spirit—was it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?

He reminds them that they got saved when they heard the gospel and received Jesus into their hearts by faith.

Paul is telling them (and us) that the gospel, if believed and accepted—was in reality a covenant that God was making with us based on a promise He made with Abraham—

Galatians 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant...

There are two kinds of covenants in the Bible—1) **bilateral**; and 2) **unilateral**.

- 1) **A bilateral covenant is a *conditional* covenant where two parties enter into an agreement (a promise) with each other to fulfill their part of the covenant.**

If either of the two fails to live up to their part of the covenant—the covenant is rendered null and void.

A bilateral covenant requires faithfulness on the part of *both* parties to keep the terms of the covenant that's why it is called a '*conditional*' covenant—there are conditions that must be fulfilled.

As I just said, an example of a bilateral covenant would be the Mosaic Covenant—a covenant that God said would either bring blessing or cursing *depending* on Israel's obedience or disobedience to God's law.

- 2) **A unilateral covenant is a one-party covenant or promise.**

It is *unconditional* because it only has one person making a promise to another—a promise that has no terms that they have to fulfill to receive the benefits of this kind of covenant.

>>> A good example of a unilateral covenant would be a will (as in 'last will and testament')—and that's what Paul has in mind here in Galatians 3:15—

Galatians 3:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant [his will], yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.

If your wealthy uncle dies and in his will he promised to leave you a million dollars—**you don't have to do anything to *earn* it—you just *receive* it.** It's a unilateral covenant which is a one-party covenant or promise that you have no conditions to fulfill to receive whatever he's promised to give to you upon his death.

What's more, after a person makes out a will and signs it—it is a legally binding contract so that no other person can alter or annul it.

>>> Paul's point is that—if a *human will* is a covenant that cannot be annulled, changed or broken by anyone except the person who made it—how much less can God's covenant be annulled, changed or broken by anyone except Him?! (see verse 17)

Galatians 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

Here Paul is quoting Genesis 22:17-18 where God promised Abraham that—

Genesis 22:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore...¹⁸ In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed..."

In Galatians 3:16 Paul points out that when God gave the promise to Abraham—He used the singular 'seed' and not the plural 'seeds.' Paul is telling us this meant that God wasn't referring the Jewish people in general (i.e., the 'seeds' of Abraham)—He was referring to one specific 'Seed' or Descendant of Abraham—the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In other words, God not only made this covenant with Abraham—but also with His Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul is telling us in Galatians 3 that through Jesus, Abraham's descendants would go beyond the Jewish people.

That all who believe in Jesus, the Savior of all mankind (Genesis 12:3), would be the spiritual children of Abraham by faith and members of the family of God made up of people from all the families of the earth (Revelation 5:9).

When the Father 'willed' this He made a covenant with Abraham and with His Son Jesus Christ—that upon the death of His Son eternal life would be inherited by all those who would receive it by faith in Jesus. Furthermore, Paul wants us to know that the covenant that God made with Abraham and Jesus predates the covenant that He made with Moses on Mt. Sinai—

Galatians 3:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.

Paul is saying that 430 years after God made a covenant with Abraham—He gave the Law to Israel through Moses (the Mosaic Covenant). The covenant that God made with Moses 430 years after His covenant with Abraham—can't change or annul the first covenant making that promise of no effect.

Galatians 3:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

The New Covenant God made with us thru Jesus—is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant—and is therefore, unilateral and unconditional just like the Abrahamic Covenant. God promised us eternal life if we put our faith in Jesus—but that promise isn't dependent on our faithfulness in keeping the Law (God's commandments).

In other words, we don't earn eternal life through our obedience to what God has commanded (Jesus did say if we love Him keep His commandments)—but obedience to God is always the result of salvation never the prerequisite for earning salvation.

The point is that in the New Covenant we receive God's promise of eternal life by believing in and receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior—

John 1:12 (NKJV)

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

If the New Covenant was a bilateral covenant dependent upon God to keep His part (give us eternal life) if we keep our part of the covenant (keep the law perfectly)—none of us would be saved.

Romans 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

If the promise of salvation was based on us perfectly keeping the law—that promise would be worthless because it would be based on conditions that no one would be able to meet.

- If God said, “*I promise to give you eternal life—if you jump across the Grand Canyon*”—that promise would be worthless because no one could meet that condition.
- The same would be true if God promised to give a person eternal life if they lived a sinless life—again that would be a worthless promise because no one could meet that condition.

But if God said (which He did) to you and me, “*I promise to give you eternal life—if you believe in My Son.*”

Well, that promise is attainable by everyone—because everyone can believe in Jesus!

REFLECTION: How might you explain salvation and eternal life to a new seeker or believer?

That’s why God could **promise** us eternal life the moment we put our faith in Jesus (1 John 5:13)—because it’s based on what **He did for us** and not on what **we do for Him** (which is why Jesus said, “*It is finished*” from the cross right before He died).

If salvation was by our works, He couldn’t have promised us eternal life (uninterrupted life for all eternity) from the moment we put our faith in Jesus—all He could have done was to say,

“We’ll see if you live a good enough life to earn the eternal life I’m offering—and if you’re good enough and work hard enough when you die, you’ll receive it” (bad illustration because salvation requires sinless perfection).

You see the fact that God promised eternal life to us instantly and forever the moment we put our faith in Jesus

testifies to the fact it is by grace and not by our works.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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