

Children of God Through Faith In Christ Jesus

Galatians 3:15-29

Key Verse: 3:26-27

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith...”

In today’s passage Paul helps us to see a bird’s eye view of God’s salvation work. We can find three main pillars: Abraham, Moses and Jesus Christ. Through these three figures, God’s plan is revealed progressively. God started salvation work through Abraham when he promised that all nations on earth would be blessed through his offspring. God fulfilled this promise through Jesus Christ. In the course of God’s salvation history, God gave the law through Moses. The purpose of the law is to expose sin as sin, and lead us to salvation in Christ. Both the promise and the law point to Jesus Christ. However, God’s history is based on his promise to Abraham, not the law. Paul explained God’s history to the Galatians so that they might know God’s intention to make people of all nations his children through faith in Christ. In Christ, there is no distinction based on race, gender, or social status. We are all children of God through faith in Christ. When we have this clear identity, we are blessed and can embrace all kinds of people in Christ.

I. The law does not set aside the promise (15-18)

In order to illustrate his point, Paul shared the example of a human covenant, and related it to God’s promise. The word “covenant” in verse 15 comes from a rather technical Greek word (diatheke) which can be translated “last will and testament.” We are familiar with a will. It is a legal document that governs the distribution of a deceased person’s estate to his heirs. While the estate owner is alive, he can revise his will as he pleases. He may want to reduce or increase the inheritance of heirs based on their behavior. However, after he dies, his will cannot be changed. Nothing can be added or taken away. It must be executed as written by the deceased.

In verses 16-18, Paul related this truth to God’s promise to Abraham. God gave many promises to Abraham, such as, **“I will make you into a great nation...I will make your name great,”** and, **“...to your offspring I will give this land...”** (Gen 12:2-3; 7). Yet, as Paul explains in Galatians, these promises all converge into one: **“...through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed...”** (Gen 12:3; 22:18). Paul says that “offspring” it is not plural but singular, and refers to one person, who is Christ (16). In giving his promise to Abraham, God looked forward to Christ. It was the promise of the gospel of grace to all nations. God wanted Abraham and his descendants to realize that he would

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keep this promise without fail. So he swore an oath. Usually, we swear by someone greater than ourselves. In a courtroom, witnesses put their hand on the Bible and swear to tell “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.” But God had no one greater to swear by. So he swore by himself. Hebrews 6:17 says, **“Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.”** God seriously and absolutely committed himself to keep his promise. The law came 430 years later. It does not set aside the promise (17). So the inheritance God gives does not depend on the law, but on a promise; it comes by God’s grace alone (18).

Since Paul took great pains to distinguish the promise and the law, it is worthwhile for us to consider the nature of both. In the promise God said, **“I will...I will...I will...”** But in the law of Moses, God said, **“You shall...You shall not...You shall...”** Upon this basis, John Stott commented: “The promise sets forth a religion of God—‘God’s plan,’ ‘God’s grace,’ ‘God’s initiative.’ But the law sets forth a religion of man—‘man’s duty,’ ‘man’s works,’ ‘man’s responsibility.’ The promise had only to be believed. But the law had to be obeyed. God’s dealings with Abraham were in the category of ‘promise,’ ‘grace’ and ‘faith.’ But God’s dealings with Moses were in the category of ‘law,’ ‘commandments,’ and ‘works.’ The conclusion to which Paul is leading is that the Christian religion is the religion of Abraham and not Moses, of promise and not law; and that Christians are enjoying today the promise which God made to Abraham centuries ago” Martin Luther said, “For unless the gospel be plainly discerned from the law, the true Christian doctrine cannot be kept sound and uncorrupt. But if this difference be well known, then is the true manner of justification also known, and then it is an easy matter to discern faith from works, Christ from Moses....” So, it is important for us to distinguish between law and promise. It is important to remember that a Christian’s relationship with God is founded upon the grace of his salvation through Christ. God’s grace is the “safety net” of our soul, and the “bottom line” beyond which nothing can pass. God’s grace will not allow us to fall beyond remedy. We go up and down, rise and fall, succeed and fail. Yet, through it all, God holds us in his arms of grace. This is our blessed assurance. This gives us hope, like an anchor for our souls, that is steadfast and certain no matter how stormy our lives may be (Heb 6:19).

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II. The purpose of the law (19-25)

In verses 19-25 there are two questions. These questions were probably raised by the Judaizers. In order to answer them, Paul taught the Galatians the role of the law in God's work and history.

The first question is, "Why, then, was the law given at all?" Actually, many of us have this question. "If we are saved only by faith in Jesus, why do we need the law? Why have I struggled so hard to live a holy life? Why did I receive so much training to live rightly before God? Has it all been in vain?" With this sense of problem, let's see why the law was given.

Paul's answer was very clear. Look at verse 19b. **"It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come."** In order to understand this verse it helps to know when the law was given to Israel, and what their situation was. According to Genesis, God led the Israelites to Egypt in Jacob's time. God's purpose was to make them a great nation. They suffered as slaves under Pharaoh. Then God delivered them by his mighty acts of judgment, some 430 years later (Ex 12:41). God led his redeemed people to Mount Sinai and gave them the law in order to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). They needed the law, because even though they were free, they still had the mentality of slaves. In reviewing Exodus, we find that they were ungrateful and ready to complain. They were impatient, easily angered, and often fought each other. They were greedy and sexually immoral in many ways--even through incest, and with animals. They quickly forgot God, fell into idolatry, and engaged in wild orgy parties. The problem was that they did not have a consciousness of sin. They can be compared to people with a terminal disease who are totally unaware of it. So God gave them the law to help them recognize sin as sin. When they properly diagnosed the problem they could realize that only God could help them. They could come to God as sinners for forgiveness and cleansing, which was offered through the sacrificial system - a shadow of Jesus' atonement. Now we understand why God gave them the law. The role of the law was not to save them from their sins, but to provoke, expose, and condemn sin so that they might come to God for help. As they did so, they could be trained and sanctified and grow as God's holy people.

In verses 19c-20 Paul draws out a contrast between the law and the promise. This sharpens his argument that the promise is weightier than the law. In the NLT, these verses read, **"God gave his law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people. Now a mediator is helpful if more than**

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one party must reach an agreement. But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when he gave his promise to Abraham.” We can find two points of contrast. First of all, the law was given indirectly through angels and a mediator, before it finally came to the people. At that time, God warned Moses not to let the Israelites go up the mountain to see him, or he would break out against them and many would perish (Ex 19:20-22). God is holy. If sinful men meet the holy God directly, they will perish. So they need a mediator. This emphasizes the distance between God and man. However, God spoke the promise to Abraham directly. God was close to Abraham. As a second contrast, the law was conditional. God and the people both had something to fulfill. If either party failed, the covenant would be nullified. On the other hand, God’s promise to Abraham was unconditional. God did not require anything more of Abraham than that he believe the promise. God took full and one-sided responsibility to fulfill the promise. God kept his promise by sending Jesus Christ. So the promise is superior to the law in substance and effectiveness.

The second question is, “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?” The implication of this question is that if we are saved by faith alone, the law is in opposition to the promise and we can disregard it totally. What does Paul say? **“Absolutely not!”** The law and the promise are not opposed to each other. In fact, they work together according to God’s intended purpose. Yet the role of each is different. The law does not produce righteousness, but conviction of sin and condemnation. The law brings a guilty verdict to all people on earth, so that mankind may realize there is no way out apart from the Savior. Verse 22a says, **“Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin....”** Romans 3:10b says, **“There is no one righteous, not even one.”** Romans 3:20 says, **“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”** This leads to the promise. The promise is that salvation will be given freely by grace to anyone who believes in Christ (22b-23). While the power of sin and the law are like a prison, faith in Christ is like a key. Faith opens the door and sets the prisoner free. Verse 24 says, **“So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.”** When we have faith in Jesus, we are no longer under the law (25). So we see that the law and the promise are not contradictory, they are complimentary; we need both. But the promise is foundational.

III. We are all one in Christ Jesus (26-29)

Thus far Paul has reviewed how God worked through the promise to Abraham and the law of Moses. We have seen how both the promise and the law

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point to Jesus Christ. Now we will consider what Christ has done. Paul proclaims a marvelous blessing on those who believe.

Let's read verse 26. **“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith...”** It is an amazing proclamation! According to the law, it was impossible for anyone to become a child of God. Man is born as a slave to sin. His position as a slave cannot be changed. Though his living situation may improve, his slave status cannot be changed. We were always under the condemnation of the law. We were guilty and fearful without remedy. This is still the present condition of those who don't believe in Jesus. They try to be saved by works: daily prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage, and so on. However, they are greatly burdened, without peace or joy. This is the condition of all who rely on keeping the law to be righteous.

But now faith has come (25). Through faith we are set free from bondage to sin and the law. Through faith we become children of God. In Christ Jesus we are all children of God through faith (26). When we simply believe in Christ Jesus, God gives us amazing grace to become his children. John 1:12 says, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” The greatest blessing through faith in Christ Jesus is to become children of God. God not only forgives all our sins, but makes us his children. This is not just the improvement of our situation, such as becoming rich, getting accepted to Harvard, being healed from a disease, winning a prestigious award, or marrying the most suitable person. But it is a fundamental change within us which brings us out of the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of light. It also changes us from poor beggars into privileged children. Our status is changed from slaves to children. We have many ups and downs. Sometimes we make mistakes and fail. However, God never cuts us off from being his children. Even though we fall short, we are still his precious children. This happens when we just believe in Jesus alone. What a blessing to become his children! It is totally out of God's love for us. 1 John 3:1 says, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are!”

Verse 27 further explains the meaning of faith in Christ through the metaphors of baptism and changing our clothing: **“...for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** Baptism into Christ, as explained in Romans 6:3-5, means we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. It means the death of our old sinful nature and the birth of a new life through the power of the Risen Christ. Our inner person has fundamentally

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changed through a new spiritual birth as God's children. Though this new birth has happened by God's grace, we need to live out our faith in daily life. It is like changing clothes. We take off our old dirty garments and put on new clean garments (Ro 13:14). Just as we change our clothes every day, we can put on Christ every day and live a new life in him. Ephesians 4:22-24 says, **“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

Now we can see ourselves as God's children through faith in Christ. We must also see others in the same way. So verses 28-29 say, **“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”** Our new identity as God's children supersedes any other human consideration. Distinctions based on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, social status, wealth, education, appearance and so on become like spices. They make life interesting. But they are secondary. In essence, all who have faith in Christ are God's children and dear family members. It is wonderful, but not always easy to practice.

Dr. John Perkins, an African American, was born in New Hebron, Mississippi in 1930. His family members were sharecroppers and he grew up in grinding poverty. His brother died in his arms after being shot by a white deputy for no good reason. After moving to California, he met Jesus personally and began to live a Christian life. Later, he returned to Mississippi to work for the social and spiritual progress of his people. One night he was arrested without a charge and brutally beaten almost to death by white deputies. He said that at that moment, if he had had an atomic bomb, he would have blown up everyone around him out of his sense of vengeance. He realized that in his own soul there was a monster of racism and hatred. He could see the image of Satan in himself. So he began to seek Christ's grace for his own inner transformation. Through painful struggle, Christ began to set him free. Eventually, he could look upon white people with understanding and compassion. He often sings, “Red, yellow, black or white, they are precious in his sight; Jesus loves the little children of the world.” And he ministers to many different people throughout the USA with the love of God. Today, even among Christians, there is still discrimination based on race, gender and social status. This does not please God. God wants all of his children to be one in Christ Jesus, not just in theory but in truth and practice.

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In today's passage we have learned that God's promise of salvation gives us undying hope and is fundamental to our relationship with him. We also learned that we are all children of God through faith in Christ. Let's accept this grace with faith. Let's see other believers as precious family members of our one Savior Jesus Christ, and our one Father God.