Galatians 3:10-25 "The Law And The Promise"

**Introduction: What Do You Rely Upon?** Every relationship relies upon something. In your relationship with God, do you rely on observing the law or do you rely upon the promise of God? How do you know? Trials can be one way to discover what you are truly relying upon. Whatever you look to for comfort when life is hard is what you rely upon. Whatever you appeal to as the reason God owes you is what you are relying upon.

**I. The Importance Of Your Reliance:** In this section Paul is contrasting two different reliances, two different ways of relating to God: by a law-agreement, or by a promise agreement. The false teachers were saying that while God related to Abraham by means of a promise-agreement, things changed when Moses came on the scene. They said that God now related to His people by means of a law-agreement.

- **Paul uses the word “law” in different ways in his writings** (sometimes meaning the Old Testament, sometimes meaning the 10 Commandments), but here he means the law as a principle of life, a way of living by relying on our law-keeping. Older Christian writers often emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the law (the commands of God) and the gospel (the promise of God) because the practical implications of confusion about this are huge!

- **Those who rely on the law are under a curse! (vs. 10-12)** Truly, to rely on the law is to be under a curse, literally and experientially (vs. 10) because the law can never comfort us by saying "good job" it can only ask "Is that all?" and demand more! Once you start down the road of law-relying, you have to keep it up perfectly!

- **And, the law has no power to change us or give us life (vs. 21)**. Too often we look to the law for comfort (trying to derive comfort from our law-keeping), and/or we look to it for the power to change (thinking that doing the right things and developing good habits will change our heart). But the law can neither comfort us or change us! Unfortunately way too much of the teaching about living the Christian life that is popular in evangelical circles amounts to teaching people to look to the law for comfort and power, and ends up frustrating people who can’t make it work. Relying on the law brings a curse into your life.

- **We must be able to distinguish law and gospel to live as a Christian**. John Colquhoun (19th century Scottish pastor) explains, "To know the difference between the law and the gospel is of the utmost importance to the faith, holiness, and comfort of every true Christian... If an exercised and disquieted Christian [i.e. one who is being tempted and thrown into doubt and confusion] does not distinctly know the difference between the law and the gospel, he cannot attain to solid tranquility or established comfort of soul. He will always be in danger of building his hope and comfort partly -- if not wholly -- upon his own graces and performances, instead of grounding them wholly on the surety-righteousness of Jesus Christ; and so he shall be perpetually disquieted by anxious and desponding fear. For since the law knows nothing of pardon of sin, the transgressions which he is daily committing will be greater grounds of fear to him than his graces and performances can be of hope..."

- **I love John Bunyan’s little verse explaining the law and gospel difference**: “Run and work the law demands, but gives me neither feet nor hands A sweeter sound the gospel brings, it bids me fly and gives me wings.”

- **The gospel brings life because Jesus destroyed the curse!** The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has become our substitute and taken the curse/condemnation that failing to keep the law demands. The only way to get out from under this curse is to flee to Jesus by faith and get credit for what He suffered and earned.

- **So What Does This Have To Do With Abraham And Moses? (vs. 15-18)** Paul is arguing that the Law given under Moses does not negate the basic "promise" way of relating to God that was spoken to Abraham. Like human contracts, you can't add to an already established agreement in a way that totally changes the nature of the agreement! (This is what the false teachers were in effect saying the Law given under Moses did to the promise given to Abraham.) But Paul says no! The purpose of the Law is to lead us to Christ, the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham! If you miss this, you miss the true nature of the Bible and the gospel!

**II. Law-Relating And Promise-Relating**

- **The Difference Between The Two:** In a promise-agreement, everything depends on the promisor, they are the only one who must perform. It would be like me saying, "I have $1 million, and I am going to give it to you." All that is needed for you to get the money is for me to do my part. In a law-agreement, both parties must do their part. It would be like me saying "I'll give you $1 million, but you must do this work for me." It may be an extraordinary wage for the work done, but this arrangement depends on both parties keeping their
part of the bargain, and thus it totally changes the basic nature of the relationship. Money can come by either way, but it cannot come by both! (vs. 18!) Because if it has any law in it at all, it is a law-agreement!

- So which is the gospel, a law-agreement or a promise-agreement? Should we interpret Abraham by Moses or Moses by Abraham? Paul builds his case by means of two points: the chronological order, and the fact that the promise to Abraham says "seed" not "seeds." First, he argues that since the promise was given first and the agreement between God and Abraham was set up and ratified as a promise-agreement, it can't be changed by something that happened 430 years later! Whatever the Law's purpose is, it must fit within the context already established by the promise. And second, as Paul wrestles with this he finds a clue in the word seed used in Genesis 15:5. He sees that the key to the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham (which is not just a promise about some farmland in Palestine -- for how could that bless the whole world?) is that it will be fulfilled through one person, Christ! Thus the Law given under Moses must be a means to an end, not an end in itself! The promise is not set aside by the Law, rather the Law is part of God's way of bringing the promise to fulfillment in Christ!

### III. This Teaches Us The True Nature Of The Gospel

The blessing comes to us not by a law agreement (in which both God and I perform) but by a promise agreement in which God alone performs! In Genesis 15 we see one of the clearest pictures there is that the gospel is a promise-agreement in which only one performs. God tells Abraham to get some animals, and then Abraham cuts them up (because he knows an agreement is going to be made and this is how contracts were signed in the Ancient world. cf. Jer 34:18) But what is astonishing is that God puts Abraham into a deep sleep and He walks between the pieces alone! This is a promise agreement because only one person "signs" the contract, in fact God never requires Abraham to walk between the pieces, ever! Salvation is not a cooperative effort, it does not matter what you do, God walks alone through the pieces!

But even greater than that, the gospel is that God walks alone through the pieces (and in doing so He is saying, "May I be ripped apart if I don't keep my promise"), we break the agreement (not God) and then God breaks Himself on the cross. He alone pays what we owe because He signed the agreement by Himself! This is what a surety is, a person who agrees to pay whatever you owe (sort of like a cosigner.) Jesus is our surety! As the hymn "Arise My Soul Arise" declares “Before the throne my surety stands, my name is written on His hands.” The gospel is a promise that God signs and gives to you - everything demanded is paid for by Christ. Salvation is absolutely by grace alone, and always has been!

### III. This Teaches Us The True Purpose Of The Law (vs. 19-25)

The Law is to lead us to Christ, not to give us a new way to be saved. In fact the Law tells us we can't keep it by giving us the sacrificial system as part of the Law! It was added to drive us to despair and to keep us dependent upon the promise of redemption, and it still functions in this way! (While Paul doesn't mention it here, the Law also shows us how we can love God, though it can't give us the power to do so.) And the promise that God will give us new life shows us that the law demands more than just superficial, external “obedience” too.

As Tim Keller says, "The Law shows us the need for the promise, and the promise shows us the scope of the Law, and only those trusting in the promise can really face what the Law really demands! The only people who love the Law (see Ps 119), and who can seek to obey it without it crushing them, are those who understand the gospel! These are the ones who are free to fail, free to reach for the moon! [To not be "under law" vs. 25, means to not be under its condemnation, more on this later!]

### IV. This Teaches Us The True View Of The Bible

If you believe the Bible is full of contradictions, you'll never understand Moses or Abraham, and you'll never understand the gospel. God is just and gracious, if you think that is a contradiction, you don't get the gospel. The Bible is not a morass of stories and ideas, it has one central theme which is very clear, yet very hard to believe -- because it seems too good to be true! And notice, Paul builds this whole argument on the word "seed", so do you think inerrancy matters? You bet it does! Theories like JEPD (the documentary hypothesis) say the different sources have conflicting messages, but Paul says no! Moses and the Abraham agree and fit together perfectly!

### V. This Teaches Us How To Pray – Prayer Is Engaged By The Promises Of God!

Do you pray? Why not? Most Christians struggle with prayer because they are relying on their law-keeping for their relationship with God and thus feel they have no right to ask God for much of anything. And, to make matters worse, they feel that they are doing a terrible job of praying and feel too guilty to approach God much at all. But when we understand that God is our Father who delights in His children because of the righteousness of Jesus and who promises and delights to give us blessings beyond measure, it changes how you pray!