

Galatians 3:15-29

INTERPRETATION

Vs. 15-18 - These first four verses are the tie in to the previous 14 and the next 11. Paul explains in vs. 15 how once someone makes a covenant they don't take out parts of the covenant or add parts to it. You don't make a covenant with your boss at work saying that you will be at work on Monday, then on Saturday you tell your boss, well, I will work as long as it is not raining, or I will work as long as I get paid overtime for half the day. It's like what Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:37), "Let your yes be yes, and your no be no." There is no reason to add to a covenant nor can you legitimately add or take away from a covenant because then you are changing the covenant and ultimately breaking the original covenant.

Vs. 16 - Paul is likely referring back to Genesis 22:18 - "In your *seed* all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Paul even explains himself, that "seed" means Christ. Paul would likely know this interpretation due to his extensive knowledge of the OT and Jewish Law/Beliefs. Therefore, when God promises Abraham "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." God is saying that through Christ all the nations will be blessed, which we now understand as all nations are blessed with the gift of salvation in Christ.

Vs. 17 - this verse is pretty cool. Paul is furthering his thoughts, and throwing one my idea back at the Judaizers. God promised Abraham all these things, blessed Abraham, called him righteous, etc. Yet, the law didn't come for another 430 years. So what did God have to judge Abraham on? FAITH!!! God promised Abraham and made a covenant with him based on his faithfulness to God, not on how good he followed the law. The law was given 430 years later as a "school bus driver", which I will explain at verses 24-25.

Vs. 18 - the inheritance is speaking of the blessings inherited by Abraham and his children (literal and spiritual), based on the promise, which is justification and glorification. God does not justify us or glorify us through the law, but through the promise of the Spirit through faith (v. 14) to Abraham.

Vs. 19 - why was the law added? (REALLY, ASK the question) We were already sinners well before the law was added, so why was the law added. It was added to show us our sin. Paul writes in Romans 7:7 that he would not have known what sin was if it wasn't for the law. And the law was not "added" to the promise... Paul is not contradicting himself, rather, the law was given to come alongside the promise and work in tandem with the promise until the seed, Christ, came.

One of the commentaries I read points out that this verse contains 4 elements regarding the law's inferiority to the promise... 1. it was given later, 2. it increased transgressions (which I don't completely see in the passage, however, with the rebellious, sinful nature of humans is very possible. People often break laws to feel rebellious. It is theorized that if things like marijuana weren't illegal less people would do them because they are no longer "cool" because they aren't illegal, allowing one to show of his/her rebellious side... 3. it was only until Christ, the seed, came, 4. it was given through an intermediary (Moses... and the passage says "the angels")

"having been ordained through angels..." - this phrase was extremely familiar to Paul (and may have stuck with him his entire life). Stephen said this phrase at the end of his speech to the Sanhedrin before they stoned him... which Paul was there for and almost certainly would have heard the speech as well. WOW!!!

Vs. 20 - there are some varieties of interpretations of this verse. Paul is stating that when a mediator is used there must be at least two parties... you don't mediate for one person. However, God is only one, meaning that the promise was given directly to Abraham, without a mediator, giving God the responsibility to fulfill the promise. However, with the Mosaic covenant (the law), our sinful nature makes it impossible for us to fulfill our part of the covenant. Either way, this just furthers Paul's point that the promise is superior to the law... 1. because it did not need a mediator (it was face-to-face), 2. it does not require humans to try (unsuccessfully) to fulfill a part of the covenant. In Genesis 12, God

never tells Abraham that he must do something to be blessed... He says "go, leave your country... I **will** make you a great nation... bless those who bless you, curse those who curse you..."

Vs. 21 - Another rhetorical question (following the one in vs. 19)... the phrase "the Law" is not referring to Mosaic law, but rather to mankind's attempt to earn God's favor (which we talked about 2 weeks ago, what "laws" do you follow to please God?). So, what Paul is really asking is... "Are our attempts to please God contradict the promises of God?" Paul answers, no, the Law (Mosaic or our own "laws") work in tandem with God's grace. The law shows humans what we are doing wrong so that we may ask forgiveness from our sins, while grace and faith bring about salvation and justification. The law does not make us righteous, but helps us to recognize our faults so that we may ask for forgiveness, have faith, and become righteous.

Vs. 22 - I'd just like to point out that the Scripture was written after the promise to Abraham (most think Moses wrote the Torah). The Scripture permanently convicts man of his disobedience. Paul is showing the impossibility of being justified by keeping the Law, that all are under sin, so only grace and faith can be used to gain salvation. One commentary considers "shut up" to mean "under condemnation, as in a prison" and uses that definition to compare Isaiah 24:22, "They will be herded together, like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison, and be punished after many days." to the freedom that we have in Christ. This is the Good News and it should be freeing. It is through God's promise, through faith in Christ, that we believe and are granted salvation... NOT through the impossible task of following the law

Vs. 23 - This verse goes back to the idea of a jail... being kept in custody, being condemned, hidden, to the faith until it was revealed in Christ. And enters into Paul's analogy of the "tutor" which is better explained as "child guardian"

An analogy -

Picture, if you will, a raging tiger trapped behind bars. The bars were introduced because the tiger's wild impulses make him dangerous to all. Would anyone expect the bars to tame the tiger? Of course not! That is not the purpose of bars; they are to restrain. What happens, then, if someone does succeed in taming the tiger, using a different principle than putting him in a cage? The bars can be removed! There is no longer any use for them.

Richards, L., & Richards, L. O. (1987). The teacher's commentary (903). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Vs. 24-25 -I found the word "tutor" (NASB) was more likely to mean a "child guardian", an intelligent slave who took their master's children to and from school. They would be there most of the day, doing a little teaching, some protecting, prohibiting, and disciplining; just taking care of the kids during the day.

I will focus on one aspect of that job to create an analogy, that is, the bus driver. Paul is saying that the law is like a bus driver. For the Jews, the bus driver (the law) took them to the destination, the school, where they could learn from the head teacher, Christ, and believe in Him and His teachings. Now, while the Jews were on the bus, they were subject to the rules of the bus driver (the law). The bus driver may even teach them a little, give them some good life lessons, and some good rules for life that should always be followed. While some rules only need to be applied while on the bus. Which is like the law; there are many OT laws that we still need to follow, but there are also plenty that were for the Jews only. However, once the bus reaches the destination, the bus driver is no longer in charge, Christ, the teacher, is. And to further the analogy, God the Father is like the superintendent, He brought in the bus driver, meaning, He created the law, to drive the bus to the school for the OT Jews.

Therefore, as the law was that "child guardian", that "bus driver" that leads us to Christ so that we may be justified by faith (what does justified mean again?). So, it brings us ultimately to the judge (one might say superintendent to fit my analogy), who deems us innocent of our crime... which in this case is "crimes" meaning all of our sin.

Vs. 26 - pretty basic... those of us who have accepted God's promise, which is faith in Christ, and therefore, believe in Him, have been justified and are now sons (and daughters) of God through faith in Christ! AMEN!!!

Vs. 27 - this is not a physical baptism, because then it would appear that Paul is contradicting himself. If Paul said that all had to be baptized, he is just creating another law, just like the Judaizers who claimed that all had to be circumcised. This is a figurative baptism, the baptism of the Spirit onto believers. The physical act of baptism is not required to have faith, but does help in that it is a public confession of faith, it is a person's public claim that they are a Christian and will be following Christ for the rest of their life.

The "putting on" is the idea of becoming Christ-like, putting on the characteristics of God, which will thereby produce the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Chapter 5. It may also be an analogy to the Roman rite of passage when a boy traded his childhood toga for an adult toga, thereby becoming a full citizen. In the same way, believers would be trading their old, sinful toga, for a new, adult, righteous toga that symbolizes our faith and Christ and our belief in God's promise and that we are justified as sons of God, full, adopted heirs of God's family.

Vs. 28 - Paul is taking down all barriers that previously separated people, particularly the Jews. Greeks were not given the law, creating the distinction, which the Judaizers tried to exploit. Plus, foreigners, Gentiles, had completely different laws for how Jews were to treat them as opposed to fellow Jews. Slaves were the same way. They had different laws and weren't treated as well as regular Jews. Same with women versus men. Women weren't allowed in certain places, they weren't allowed certain things, they weren't even allowed to testify in court. Even in this time women weren't allowed to associate with men. The Samaritan woman at the well was stunned that Christ would even talk to her since he was a Jew, a man, and a Rabbi, teacher. Paul is saying that those boundaries are gone in Christ. That we are all one in Christ, we are all heirs if we just believe in Christ. There are no boundaries to God's love and mercy and who can be saved.

Vs. 29 - This is the "final nail in the Judaizers coffin". Paul goes back to his argument in the previous section, that those who believe in Christ are Abraham's descendants because just as Abraham was deemed righteous because of his faith, so will all (including Gentiles) who believe be called sons of Abraham and deemed righteous just as he was. This also further takes out the distinctions mentioned in vs. 28. The only "distinction" now is between those who believe in Christ and are therefore Abraham's descendants and heirs of God and those who do not accept Christ's gift and salvation through Christ. There is no more Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, in Christ, because we all have the same opportunity to believe! AMEN!!!

APPLICATION

I need to beware of when I try and change covenants to fit my desires.

I need to not create boundaries within God's family. Yes, there are different parts of the body that are distinct, but those various parts are based on the gifts God has given us, not based on worldly divisions (Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female, etc.)

I need to not make laws that hinder me from fully glorifying God

I believe that the law is important, therefore I must never forget that the law serves a purpose and needs to be used and studied as well as Christ's teachings and the NT

I am a son of God... remember that, live like it (word and deed)

I, like the law, am inferior and imperfect, which needs to affect how I live

I am still important and have a purpose even though I am inferior

I need to be learning from the teacher, not just from the tutor.