

The Promise

If our message is, “Come to Jesus to have a wonderful life,”
then what happens when things go wrong?

When things seem to go wrong in people’s lives then it seems that people too often leave the faith and are angry at God – for breaking His promises.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones answers our modern-day evangelistic methods,
“A gospel which merely says ‘Come to Jesus,’ and offers Him as a Friend and offers a marvelous new life, without convincing of sin, is not New Testament evangelism. True evangelism ... must always start by preaching the Law.”¹

In today’s Scripture Paul connects the Promises of God,
and corrects the Galatian’s view of the Purposes of God’s Law.

15. Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: 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. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

18. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Gal. 3:15-18

I. Promises

In these verses Paul shows that the promise God made to Abraham is valid.

In verses 1-14 Paul proves from the Old Testament Scriptures that Abraham was justified by faith apart from the Law, and that every other believer is justified the same way.

Going back to Abraham, the Father of faith, Paul has demonstrated that Abraham was justified by his faith, that is, believing the promise of God.

¹ Ray Comfort, *The Way of the Master*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), p. 34.

Abrahamic Covenant: In Bible school we had a class called the Pentateuch in which we read the first five books of Moses and underlined every verse that mentioned the Covenants. We used a lot of ink in that assignment.

Genesis 15 records that God made a covenant with Abraham, (then Abram),

“Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.” Abram said, O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.” Then the Word of the Lord came to him saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.”

And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens,
and count the stars, if you are able to count them.”

And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

Then he believed in the Lord;
and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15:1-6)

Paul writes referring to the heir,

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. (Gal. 3:16)

The covenant heir of Abraham was Christ. We participate in the covenant by becoming a fellow heir with Christ through faith in him.

“Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.”
Gal. 3:7

Next Paul shifts to the topic of the Law by way of contrast to the promise.

II. Law

¹⁷. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.

¹⁸. For if the inheritance is based on law,
it is no longer based on a promise;
but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Gal. 3:15-18

Paul reiterates for his readers that the Law didn't change the covenant God made with Abraham. He fulfilled it in Jesus Christ and then granted to all who are justified by faith.

Abraham's inheritance came the promise.

- ^{18.} For if the inheritance is based on law,
it is no longer based on a promise;
God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise
(Gal. 3:18)

An inheritance is not earned but simply received,
and to work for that which is already guaranteed is foolish and unnecessary.
There are two possibilities of gaining God's promised inheritance:
One is by God's law and man's works
and the other is by God grace and man's faith.

Man cannot succeed in perfectly keeping the law,
and God cannot fail in perfectly keeping the promise.

Then Paul asks a critical question:

"In light of God's promise, why did He give the Law?"

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

If everything is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, then why was the Law necessary?

- Because of sin.

Three figures used for the Law: A revealer of sin, a prison, and a guardian.

The Law is a Revealer of Sin

It was added because of transgressions... (v. 19)

Transgressions – parabasis – 'stepping over the boundary'

“The purpose of the law was to demonstrate to man his total sinfulness, his inability to please God by his own works, and his need for mercy and grace. The Law was added to show the depth of man’s transgressions against God. It was given to drive him to desperate guilt and the awareness of his need for the Deliverer.”²

How does the law fit in with the promise?

They seem to be in opposition to one another.

²¹. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. (Gal. 3:21)

The law was never given to take the place of the promise and impart life. It was given to show everyone their sinfulness and their need of grace.

Paul wrote of his own experience with the Law,

“...I would not have come to know sin except through the Law... when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died ... for sin taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore, did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.” (Rom. 7:7-13)

The Law shows people their true state.

Suppose you were to dust a table in your living room and think it is dust-free. If you were to pull back the curtain and let in the early morning sunlight, you will more than likely see dust still sitting on the table. The sunlight did not create the dust, it merely exposed it. The same is true of God’s holy Law. It pulls back the heavy curtain of God’s Holy of Holies and shines on the sinner’s heart. The Law shows him his true state before God.

The law first reveals sin then it convicts the sinner of sin.

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), p. 86.

Someone under the Law's conviction becomes a 'convict'.
This is the meaning of being "under the law."

22. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

23. But before faith came we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

The Law is a Prison

It holds people captive until they turn to Christ.

the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin

Shut up – sunkleio – strong term meaning "to lock up securely,"
"to enclose on all sides with no way of escape"

Kept in custody – *This is the conviction of the conscience and the Holy Spirit.*

The sense of condemnation and guilt and knowledge of coming judgment.

"Not until a person smashes himself against the demands of the law and the accusations of conscience does he recognize his helplessness and see his need for a Savior. Not until the law has arrested and imprisoned him and sentenced him to death will he be driven to despair in himself and turn to Jesus Christ."³

Our contemporary view of prisons keeps us from grasping the depth of despair surrounding the Law as a prison. A better description would be

- a death-row cell where someone waits for eternal execution.

Someone is either in Christ or under the Law!

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Romans 5:20-21

³ Ibid, pp. 88-89.

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase;
 but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,
 so that as sin reigned in death,
 even so grace would reign through righteousness
 to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Billy Graham described the job of the evangelist today:
 to bring the bad news that someone is lost,
 then the good news that they can be found in Christ.

Grace is meaningless to the one who doesn't know that he needs it.

In the first chapter of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* he writes,
 As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a
 certain place where was a den, and laid me down in that place
 to sleep; and as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and
 behold, I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain
 place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand,
 and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him
 open the book, and read therein; and as he read, he wept and
 trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out
 with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?"

A short while later the man encountered Evangelist, who asked,
 "Wherefore dost thou cry?" Pilgrim answered, "Sir, I perceive by the book in my
 hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment."
 Evangelist then pointed the pilgrim toward a gate in the distance and to a light
 beyond it and a hill. With the great burden on his back and the book in his hand,
 Pilgrim started off toward the hill, crying out, "Life! Life! Eternal life!"

The burden on Pilgrim's back was his sin, the book in his hand was the
 Bible, and the hill toward which he journeyed was Calvary. It was in reading God's
 Word that he learned God's law condemned him to death and hell because of his
 sin, and it was that knowledge of sin and judgment that drove Him to the cross of
 Christ, where the penalty for his sin was paid in full and complete forgiveness
 offered.⁴

⁴ Ibid. p. 93.

What is the good effect of the Law? It shows him his guilty helplessness, his moral and spiritual degeneracy, his fearful danger, and his need of a deliverer. The impossible demands of the law are not designed to save but to condemn sinners and drive them toward the Savior.

The Law of God creates pain. When we have an injury pain protects us from injuring ourselves more. It's a warning that more damage is coming if you keep pushing yourself. Many athletes have learned that hard lesson...

God's saving purpose:

“...the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal. 3:22).

A person who says he wants salvation but refuses to recognize and repent of his sin deceives himself. Salvation is deliverance from sin, and a person cannot want to keep his sin and at the same time want to be free from it. He cannot truly want the new Christ-life of righteousness without renouncing the old self-life of sin.

That's where the Law comes in: “But we know that the Law is good, if someone uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane...” (1 Tim. 1:8-11)

The law reveals sin, imprisons sinners and...

The Law is a Guardian

24. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.

25. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

26. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

- The Law leads us to Christ.
- Through faith he is no longer under the Law.
- All who place their faith in Christ become a sons of God.

Tutor – paidagogos – wasn't a teacher or schoolmaster, but was a slave employed by Greek or Roman families to supervise young boys in behalf of their parents.

They took them to school, made sure they studied and trained them in obedience. They were strict disciplinarians, scolding and whipping as they felt necessary. His purpose was to care for the child until he grew into adulthood.

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ,
that we may be justified by faith.

D. L. Moody said, "The Law can only chase a man to Calvary, no further."

The purpose of the law:

Reveal sin

Imprison the sinner

Be a Guardian that brings them to Christ.

Two primary questions:

Have you put your faith in Christ for salvation, apart from any works?

Have you come to understand that the message of the gospel is more than a promise of a better life?