

Galatians 3 pt. 3 v.15-20

Paul has been contending earnestly for the liberty that is found in Jesus Christ by systematically challenging a false reliance on the Levitical Law. Gentile believers in the region of Galatia were being deceived into thinking that in order to achieve holiness, or perfection, they had to adopt the customs and regulations of their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Their freedom in Christ mattered to Paul, who was himself Jewish, so he spends the greater part of this letter educating them on the reality of God's word, it's historic requirements, and its present and future implications.

V.15 Paul continues his instruction on God's promises by using a human illustration - a human covenant, a testament, contract, or will.

Paul is using something that many people would understand - the drawing up of an agreement between two or more parties in a systematic, legal, way that was ratified by those parties and held within it certain expectations, promises, prohibitions, and so forth that were to be executed, or carried out.

If that contract/covenant is confirmed, or put in force, then there is no longer room for changes or to just wave it away. The time for that has passed. It is considered a legally binding document on each party.

One can walk away, violate, or transgress from such contracts but there is often a steep penalty associated with that - and the same is true for the covenant that Paul is talking about here - God's covenant. Specifically, Paul is talking about God's covenant with Abraham.

Where Paul is leading us in a very systematic fashion is to see that Jesus Christ was part of God's first Covenant with Abraham.

The whole topic of covenants, contracts, testaments, etc is quite broad and quite deep and is an interesting study in itself - biblically speaking.

There were many covenants between God and His people.

It is fruitful for the Bible student to study each of them in depth because they each speak to the final covenant - the covenant of Christ.

Here is what one text says on the whole subject that I think succinctly gives us our bearings as we navigate Paul's words:

“Covenant language is more prominent in the Old Testament, which reflects its futuristic character as “a story in search of an ending.” The language of divine kinship (e.g., “father,” “son”) emerges in the New Testament, because Christ's fulfillment of the Old Covenant forges familial bonds of divine communion with all humanity...God's “fatherly plan” for his family advances at every stage of salvation history through a series of

divine covenants with chosen mediators: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and ultimately Jesus Christ.” -Hahn, S. (2016). [Covenant](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

In verse 16 Paul develops his illustration regarding this covenant heart of God.

He focuses his efforts on the covenant of Abraham. This is important because the Galatian Christians were adopting the methodology of the Jewish people, so that they might participate in the fullness of faith as “sons and daughters of Abraham.” That is where they were being told that true faith was - as an heir to the covenants of the ancient Fathers.

As we will see, that is not untrue - they are heirs to covenants of the ancient Fathers, but their manner and means of approaching their inheritance was askew. They sought to make themselves children of the promise by works of the flesh.

This could never make them heirs, it was the promise itself that they longed for which brought them into the family of God in the first place.

Paul does some very brief exegesis on God’s promise to Abraham (Abram) found in Genesis.

[Gen 12:7 NKJV] 7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your **descendants** I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

The original language is the singular Hebrew word for seed which the NKJV renders as descendants (plural). The Septuagint (Greek OT) renders this term in the dative, singular - σπέρματι - [to] seed.

Paul wants to draw this point out that God's promise was to Abraham's seed, singular - and while we may want to understand that as the multitude of descendants that comprised Israel, and while that promise may in fact be layered, words have meanings and God communicated to Abraham about a singular Seed - who Paul identifies as Christ.

So even in the Old Covenants we see the singularly unique person of Christ represented to God's people.

V.17-18 Retracing his steps regarding the fact that a ratified covenant cannot be changed or annulled as he states in verse 15 Paul declares that the Law, which came much later, did not/cannot, void God's promise to Abraham.

That's not how God works! We need to understand that. God's words are true, His promises and His judgments are everlasting. He does not revoke His promises or change His mind if He is feeling moody.

[Psa 33:11 NKJV] 11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations.

[Psa 119:89-90 NKJV] ...Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.
90 Your faithfulness [endures] to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides.

[Isa 40:8 NKJV] 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."

[Rom 11:29 NKJV] 29 For the gifts and the calling of God [are] irrevocable.

If God has declared it then it shall be. Whether that is a covenant promise or the Law or grace - or the holy intersection of all of those things - they shall stand.

Just because Israel was given the Law after their deliverance from Egypt did not invalidate the original promise to Abraham.

These things go together. They are complementary rather than competitive. So many of our seeming theological conundrums are cleared up by

understanding that we have to hold more than one idea in our head at the same time.

The covenant with Abraham AND the law AND Christ existed together until they were FULFILLED in Christ according to the terms set forth by the one who instituted these covenants.

Paul is fighting back against the idea that the Law supersedes God's promise to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham's Seed - Christ.

This might have been a natural thought since the Law came later, kind of like Covenant 2.0.

But that is not the case - the Promise stands, and the Law stood beside it.

"For what purpose?", one might ask. Paul addresses that in verse 19 - it seems like a logical question.

V.19 Why did God give His people the Law, the Commandments through Moses as their mediator? Because of their righteousness? Their intrinsic goodness? Because all people are naturally good, and kind, and helpful?

Not at all! The Law was given to God's covenant people, the Israelites, because of transgressions - violations against His perfect holiness.

Or, as written by JFB: "...to make men more fully conscious of their "sins,"
-Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 331). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Transgressions were the norm and already happening apart from a written, codified law.

Consider the state of the God's people, even as they are delivered from slavery in Egypt, what do they do next?

[Exo 32:1 NKJV] 1 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for [as for] this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

So quick were they to abandon God who had delivered them. So quick they were to turn to wickedness.

This is the state of mankind apart from God's goodness. We are ugly, vain, hateful, and wretched to one another and ourselves. We are quick to forget God's goodness, and quick to create our own gods.

Yet God has endured with us even to the present day in His mercy.

Even before the flood of Noah mankind's heart was dark.

[Gen 6:5-6 NKJV] 5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man [was] great in the earth, and [that] every intent of the thoughts of his heart [was] only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

Mankind needed a law - they needed a map and compass, some documentation, not to show them the way to redemption but to show them how lost they were.

So that when they examine the Book, the map and compass of their faith, they might fully realize how far they were from their destination.

This is true for us as well.

V.20 - has been called one of the most obscure verses in the New Testament. It seems to be a parenthetical comment from Paul that could itself require additional study to understand the fullness of what his point is.

Here's what we know relative to Paul's assertion in verse 20, and its bearing on our discussion.

We know that when God made a covenant with Abraham there was no mediator at all, no go between. God came to Abraham and initiated a one way covenant on account of Abraham's faith.

We know that God gave the law to Moses, Paul indicates that God did so by the hands of angels. Not only did Moses serve as a mediator between Israel and God, but Moses was mediated between God and himself through angels.

[Act 7:53 NKJV] Stephen speaks of those, "who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept [it]."

That author of Hebrews seems to confirm this view as well:

[Heb 2:2-3 NKJV] For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard [Him],

Moreover, the Law itself required a mediatorial office in the person of the High Priest who mediated between God and man.

What all of this is telling us is of man's separation from God, and the necessity for a mediator in order to come close to Him.

The purpose of a mediator is to bring two parties to common ground. So there are three parties in any contractual dispute. Those parties consist of: the wronged, the one who has done the wrong, and the mediator to stand between them and make reconciliation.

Job spoke prophetically about this office: [Job 9:33 NKJV] 33 Nor is there any mediator between us, [Who] may lay his hand on us both.

And Paul ties all of this together - pointing to Jesus Christ when he says, "but God is one."

This is important for us to understand doctrinally because some, having read this verse, are mightily challenged for many reasons.

The first of which is that some have been taught their entire lives that they need somebody to represent them to God. Entire religions are based on this notion - that we still require a priest to represent God to us, and to represent us to God. In this line of thinking the mediatorial office of the Law is still retained. People still require a priest to approach God for them. We know from God's word that this requirement no longer exists in any capacity - we are all priests (and priestesses) in God's kingdom, serving under the one High Priest - Jesus Christ.

[1Pe 2:9 NKJV] 9 But you [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

The Apostle John, while praising the Lord in Revelation writes about how Jesus: [Rev 1:5-6 NKJV]...loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, ...

Another cause for puzzled looks with regards to Paul's writing in verse 20 might be that the sharp Bible student thinks correctly, "There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim 2:5)

So true! So we swing back around to Paul's thought - "but God is ONE!" Jesus Christ is God, equal in authority, power, and glory. And He has laid hold of us to bring us onto common ground with the Father.

There is unity there that cannot be denied and is so central to our faith that the idea of God as the mediator between Himself and his transgressing children has been communicated since Abraham when God made the promise Himself. The Law then pointed to the need for a mediator. Finally, Jesus Christ stands in the gap as ONE with the Father, who has both fulfilled the promise to Abraham, and has fulfilled the Law completely in His body so that we might not be crushed under its weight.

[Heb 9:15 NKJV] ... He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.