**Galatians 3:15-20**

**Soli Deo Gloria**

On October 31st. 2017, the year I began to preach through Galatians Christianity celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Protestant reformation. The reformation began in earnest on October 31st 1517 when Martin Luther posted his ninety-five thesis against Roman Catholicism. There were other men and women before and after Luther who worked to bring Christianity back to the Bible, but Luther opened the flood gate.

And there were five summarizing statements that came out of the Reformation called in Latin “Sola” for alone. They are:

1. Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone, the Bible is the only authority on what to believe and how to behave.
2. Sola Gratia – grace alone, we are saved by God’s grace alone.
3. Sola Fide – faith alone, we are saved by God’s grace alone through faith in Christ alone.
4. Solus Christus – Christ alone, Jesus Christ alone is our Savior, Lord and King.
5. Soli Deo Gloria – glory to God alone.

These five statements could all flow from the truths revealed in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. The apostle was hammering home these truths, because the false teachers in Galatia were perverting these truths. To Scripture alone they added tradition. To faith and grace alone they added works. To Christ alone they added the Old Testament law. And to God’s glory alone they added their own self-righteousness.

Rules and laws can be very good, as is the Old Testament law. They reveal what is important to us as a society or a family. Laws provide boundaries for proper behavior. But laws and rules do not create the obedience they demand. Love on the other hand will compel us to do what a law could never do.

So the apostle Paul’s response to the legalistic teachers was that salvation has always been by God’s grace alone through faith alone, even in the Old Testament. And when God promised Abraham that he and his descendants would inherit the world, and then through his offspring all the world would be blessed, that promise came hundreds of years before God gave His law to Moses. And that promise cannot be changed or annulled. But a good question now comes up. What purpose then does the law serve? That is the question asked and answered in our present study. So let’s begin.

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men:

Though *it is* only a man’s covenant,

yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds

to it.

(Galatians 3:15)

When we make a covenant or a promise or make our last will and testament we expect it to be fulfilled. God made a covenant of unconditional grace to Abraham. He said “I will bless you and give you all the land you see to you and your descendants. And all the world will be blessed in you.”[[1]](#footnote-1) God made this promise to Abraham and Abraham believed God and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness. Then hundreds of years later God gave His law to Moses. But that law did not overturn God’s promise of pure grace.

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men:

Though *it is* only a man’s covenant,

yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or

adds to it. **16**Now to Abraham and his

Seed were the promises made. He does

not say, “And to seeds,” as of many,

but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who

is Christ.

(Galatians 3:15, 16)

This quote is from Genesis 12:7. And the singular form of the Hebrew word for “seed”, like in English can be used in a collective sense. But in some of the most important Old Testament passages the word for “seed” refers to Abraham’s greatest descendant, Jesus Christ.[[2]](#footnote-2) Jesus is the one who will receive authority to rule the world and through Christ the world will be blessed. And everyone who is united to Christ by faith, even Old Testament believers who hoped for his birth, will share in all that Jesus Christ inherits.

And this I say, *that* the law, which was

four hundred and thirty years later,

cannot annul the covenant that was

confirmed before by God in Christ,

that it should make the promise of

no effect.

(Galatians 3:17)

The phrase “in Christ” is not in the best manuscripts. But the point here is that God’s promise is irrevocable. Even the law does not change the promise. There is a technicality issue here about when the law was given. The law was actually given to Moses 645 years after God made His promise to Abraham. But the promise was repeated to Abraham’s son Isaac and then to Jacob. And the last time it was repeated to Jacob it was 430 years before the law was given.

And the point here is that God was not playing games with Abraham when He made His gracious promise. God did not say to Abraham, “If you are good and righteous and sinless I will give you the world and bless all the families of the earth.” The promise was not conditional on Abraham’s works, but on his faith.

And this I say, *that* the law, which was

four hundred and thirty years later,

cannot annul the covenant that was

confirmed before by God in Christ,

that it should make the promise of no

effect. **18**For if the inheritance *is* of the

law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God

gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

(Galatians 3:17, 18)

If following the law was necessary for salvation and the inheritance, then Abraham would have lost out because he died hundreds of years before the law came. There is no middle ground between works and grace and law and promises. An inheritance by definition is not something that is worked for, but something that is granted. Now comes the crucial question.

What purpose then *does* the law *serve?*

It was added because of transgressions,

till the Seed should come to whom the

promise was made; *and it was* appointed

through angels by the hand of a mediator.

**20**Now a mediator does not *mediate* for

one *only,* but God is one.

(Galatians 3:19, 20)

If the law of Moses did not add anything or remove anything from God’s promise to Abraham, then why was it given? The law was given that we might understand what sin is. It was added to make wrong doing a legal offense. And knowing then how horrible and destructive sin is to us and how offensive it is to God, the law should drive us to seek God’s mercy.

According to Romans 3:19 the law was given that every mouth may be stopped and all the world made guilty before God. All of us like to say “I am a good person. I do the best I can. In fact I am a better person than most people.” But is there any one of us who could say to God, “If you judge me by my works and by Your law You will find me perfect”?

The second point Paul makes is that when God gave the law to Moses it came through a mediator, through angels. And all the people ratified the law by agreeing to it. If the people did so and so then God would bless them. But God’s promise to Abraham was face to face. And the only one who ratified the covenant was God. In the law God said to the people, “You shall do this and don’t do that.” In the promise God made to Abraham He said, “I will, I will, I will.”

*Is* the law then against the promises of God?

Certainly not! For if there had been a law

given which could have given life, truly

righteousness would have been by the law.

(Galatians 3:21)

The Old Testament law is not working against God’s promise to Abraham. God gave both the law and the promise. The law reveals sin and it sets up boundaries for behavior, but it cannot save you.

But the Scripture has confined all

under sin, that the promise by faith

in Jesus Christ might be given to

those who believe.

(Galatians 3:22)

Sin keeps all of us in a jail cell awaiting execution for we are all, on our own, condemned sinners. But when we place our faith in Jesus Christ, who was our substitute and was condemned in our place, we are set free. Some people do not like the idea of God lumping all of us as condemned sinners. Some people think they are more moral and good than other people.

But suppose you and I wanted to go to the Chicago Art Museum. And the price of admission is $1.00. If I have 50 cents and you have 70 cents you are 20 cents better than me, but neither of us is going into the museum. God demands absolute righteousness to gain everlasting life in His kingdom and none of us can pay the admission price. So John 3:16 tells us that, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

But the Scripture has confined all

under sin, that the promise by faith

in Jesus Christ might be given to

those who believe. **23**But before

faith came, we were kept under

guard by the law, kept for the faith

which would afterward be revealed.

**24**Therefore the law was our tutor *to*

*bring us* to Christ, that we might be

justified by faith. **25**But after faith has

come, we are no longer under a tutor.

(Galatians 3:22-25)

Paul was speaking to the Jews here. The Jews had the law, the Gentiles did not. The law was a “tutor” or a guardian until Christ came. The words “*to bring us* to” are not in the text. The law was simply a guardian until Christ came. The Greek word translated “tutor” is *paidagogos*. It referred to a slave whose job it was to take care of a child until that child reached adulthood and could inherit his estate.

Most young people looked forward to the day when they were set free from their custodian and received their inheritance. Coming to faith in Christ Jews are set free from the law and gentiles are brought from lawlessness to the higher law of love. And we all become adult sons who can receive our inheritance.

For you are all sons of God through

faith in Christ Jesus. **27**For as many of

you as were baptized into Christ have

put on Christ. **28**There is neither Jew

nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,

there is neither male nor female; for you

are all one in Christ Jesus.

(Galatians 3:26, 27)

The reason why we are all called “sons of God” no matter if we are male or female is because in Paul’s day only adult sons received an inheritance. And if clothes make the man, as they say, then we are all dressed up to the max! Baptism here does not refer to water. If you are baptized into water, you put on water. But we have been baptized or immersed into Christ. It is you in a Christ suit!

When God see you He sees Christ. And God is no longer our Judge concerning the law; He is our Father in the family. And in the family we belong to God, he loves us. And we belong to one another and we should love one another. We are all of equal value before God and we should all be of equal value to one another.

There is neither Jew nor Greek,

there is neither slave nor free,

there is neither male nor female;

for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

**29**And if you *are* Christ’s, then you

are Abraham’s seed, and heirs

according to the promise.

(Galatians 3:28, 29)

God’s Word is not saying that there are no longer any natural distinctions between us. A man is still a man and a woman is still a woman. I may have come from a Jewish background or a Gentile back ground. We remain servants or masters. But as to our place in the family of God we are all equal. We all have been given different gifts to serve. But we are all legal adults in God’s family and we can receive our inheritance.

We are in Abraham’s family; we are his seed spiritually. Thus we are heirs of the promise God made to Abraham and his seed. We have God’s love and mercy and wisdom now. And when Christ returns we will receive everlasting life and glory in his kingdom on a renewed earth. And we will be with our father Abraham. Won’t he be surprised to see all his descendants who are more that the sands by the sea and the stars in the sky?

This is so radical. The Jews saw the Gentiles as nobodies. The Gentiles despised the Jews as self-righteous, arrogant people. Men had some rights and women had none. And slaves were considered merely tools. But because of Jesus Christ we are all someone special before God. How then should we live? We have an answer in Titus.

For the grace of God that brings

salvation has appeared to all men,

**12**teaching us that, denying ungodliness

and worldly lusts, we should live soberly,

righteously, and godly in the present age,

**13**looking for the blessed hope and glorious

appearing of our great God and Savior

Jesus Christ, **14**who gave Himself for us,

that He might redeem us from every

lawless deed and purify for Himself

*His* own special people, zealous for

good works.

(Titus 2:11-14)

If you think you are a nobody who lives in a ghetto, without hope, you will live like a nobody. If you know you are a child of the King and live in a palace, you will think and live like a prince or princess. We are set to inherit the world to come. So focus on the blessed hope of Christ’s return and be a person who is zealous of good works. And may all glory go to God alone—Soli Deo Gloria!

1. Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14, 15; 15:9, 10, 17, 18; 22:18; 24:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Genesis 3:15; 22:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)