

18. The Book of Galatians 3:19-25 (Topical)

Liberty From Law-Part 17

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(5-26-24)

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We have been studying the Book of Galatians here at Calvary on Sunday mornings—but instead of going through the book verse by verse we decided to study it topically based on its main theme.

The main theme of Galatians is **liberty**—the liberty (or freedom) that is ours in Christ.

In our study this morning, we find ourselves in the second main division of the book—“**Liberty from Law.**”

To start this morning, I'd like to go back to Galatians 3:14-18 and a section dealing with the covenant of promise—

F. The Covenant of Promise—verses 14-18

Galatians 3:14–15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the **promise of the Spirit through faith.** ¹⁵ 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.*

Covenants in the Bible are very important to understand—since God calls Himself a ‘*covenant keeping God.*’

There are two kinds of covenants in the Bible—**1) bilateral;** and **2) unilateral.**

- 1) **A bilateral covenant** is a *conditional* covenant where two parties enter into an agreement (a promise) with each other to fulfill their part of the covenant—if either of the two fails to live up to their part of the covenant—the covenant is rendered null and void.

A bilateral covenant requires faithfulness on the part of *both* parties to keep the terms of the covenant, that's why it is called a ‘*conditional*’ covenant—there are conditions that must be fulfilled.

- 2) **A unilateral covenant** is a one-party covenant or promise—which means it is unconditional.

It is *unconditional* because it only has one person making a promise to another—a promise that has no terms that they have to fulfill to receive the benefits of this kind of covenant (think of a ‘last will and testament’).

The Bible speaks of 7 different covenants—

1. The Adamic Covenant.
2. The Noahic.
3. The Abrahamic.

4. The Land Covenant.
5. The Davidic.
6. The Mosaic.
7. The New Covenant.

Six of the seven covenants are *unconditional*—the only covenant that is *conditional* is the Mosaic Covenant. Most of the covenants God has made with man have some kind of *sign* attached to them—for example:

- *The sign of the Noahic covenant is the rainbow.*
- *The sign of the Abrahamic covenant is circumcision.*
- *The sign of the Mosaic covenant is the Sabbath.*
- *The sign of the New Covenant is water baptism.*

I just want to define these 4 this morning:

The Noahic Covenant was an unconditional covenant that God made with Noah—and by extension with all mankind.

After the Flood, God promised humanity that He would never again destroy all life on earth with a Flood (see Genesis chapter 9).

The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3, 6-7; 13:14-17; 15; 17:1-14; 22:15-18).

In this covenant, God promised many things to Abraham:

- *He promised that He would make Abraham's name great (Genesis 12:2).*
- *Abraham would have numerous physical descendants (Genesis 13:16), and that he would be the father of a multitude of nations (Genesis 17:4-5).*
- *God also made promises regarding a nation called Israel—in fact, the geographical boundaries of the Abrahamic Covenant are laid out on more than one occasion in the book of Genesis (12:7; 13:14-15; 15:18-21).*
- *Another provision in the Abrahamic Covenant is that the families of the world will be blessed through the physical line of Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 22:18)—a reference to the Messiah, who would come from the line of Abraham and be the Savior of all mankind.*

The Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 11 and other places).

The Mosaic Covenant that God made with Israel through Moses was a conditional covenant that God said would either bring blessing or cursing depending on Israel's obedience or disobedience to God's law.

The Law contained 613 commandments (which included the Ten Commandments—Exodus 20). The history books of the Old Testament (Joshua–Esther) detail how Israel succeeded at obeying the Law or how Israel

failed at obeying the Law. [Deuteronomy 11:26-28](#) details the blessing/cursing terms of this covenant.

The New Covenant ([Jeremiah 31:31-33](#); [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#)). The seeds (promises) of the New Covenant were *planted* in the Abrahamic Covenant—but eventually found its ultimate fulfillment in the Church with the covenant that God made with both Jew and Gentile believers through Jesus Christ.

In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law of Moses ([Matthew 5:17](#)) and die for sinners—and God promised to forgive sin by grace through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Under the New Covenant, God promised to send His Holy Spirit to live within each believer in Christ—giving them a new heart with His laws written in it. This would allow them to obey God from the heart instead of from outward tablets of stone where His laws had been previously inscribed under the Mosaic Covenant.

It is the New Covenant under Christ, entered into by faith that Paul is defending against the Judaizer’s perverted ‘gospel’ of faith plus works in the first 4 chapters of Galatians. This New Covenant was not going to be like the Old Covenant God made with Israel through Moses.

In the Mosaic covenant, God promised Israel blessings based on their obedience to the Law—whereas in the New Covenant, God promised us blessings based on our faith in Jesus.

This is critical to Paul’s argument that eternal life is a gift that God has promised to us through our faith and not something we earn by our works. Again, Paul starts this chapter by asking the Galatians to remember how they got saved and received the Holy Spirit—*was it by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith?*

He reminds them that they got saved when they heard the gospel and received Jesus into their hearts by faith. Paul is telling them (and us) that the gospel if believed and accepted—is in reality a covenant that God is making with us based on a promise He gave to Abraham—

Genesis 22:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore...¹⁸ In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed..."

The New Covenant is far better than the Mosaic Covenant—

Hebrews 8:6 (NKJV)

⁶ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He [Jesus Christ our great High Priest] is also Mediator of a better covenant [*unconditional*], which was established on better promises [*acquired by faith not works*].

G. The Purpose of the Law—verses 19-25

Galatians 3:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ **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.**

“Till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made”

As we have already said—the Law was meant to *prepare* us for the work of the Messiah—it was given till the Seed (Jesus) should come. It isn’t that the Law of Moses was revoked when Jesus came (Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Law, not destroy it in Matthew 5:17)—instead, the Law was replaced in the life of a believer in Christ

as the basis for approaching God and having fellowship with Him. Paul tells us concerning the Law of Moses that—**“It was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.”**

According to ancient traditions (that Paul says are true)—the Law (all 613 commandments not just the Ten) was delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai by angels.

The covenant that God made with Israel on Mt. Sinai was a *bilateral* (conditional) covenant (promise)—and Moses was the mediator between God and the nation—

Deuteronomy 5:5 (NKJV)

⁵ I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain...

The New Covenant that God made with us is a *unilateral* (unconditional) promise and therefore since it only depends on one person to keep their promise (God)—we don’t need a mediator:

Galatians 3:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ **Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only*, but God is one.**

Israel needed a mediator between them and God because they were not worthy to come to God directly—so Moses became that mediator because the covenant was dependent on both Israel and God to keep their promise (Israel to obey the law and God to bless the nation).

In the Abrahamic Covenant God made a unilateral covenant with Abraham to give him many descendants (make them children of God possessing eternal life) if they (we) would just believe in Messiah and receive Him as Savior—that covenant found its fulfillment in the New Covenant.

Under the New Covenant we don’t need a man to be our mediator because—we have no terms to keep, no conditions to fulfill—God promises us eternal life if we simply believe in His Son!

One author said—

*“If there was only one contracting party, and he made an unconditional promise, requiring nothing from the other party, there would be no need of a mediator. The fact that the law required a mediator implied that man must keep his part of the agreement. This was the weakness of the law; it called for obedience from those who did not have the power to give it. When **God** made His promise to Abraham, He was the sole contracting Party. This was the strength of the promise: everything depended on God and nothing on man. No mediator was involved, because none was needed.”*

Jesus is our Mediator who has made us worthy to come to God directly through His death for our sins and as such we don’t need any other mediator but Him—

1 Timothy 2:5 (NKJV)

⁵ For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus,

Jesus is our Mediator in the New Covenant who puts His hands on both God and man connecting us with each other allowing us to have fellowship with one another.

In the Old Testament, Job lamented that there was no mediator who could bridge the gap by laying his hands on both God and man—

Job 9:33 (NKJV)

³³ Nor is there any mediator between us, *Who* may lay his hand on us both.

**But now under the New Covenant Jesus Christ has done that very thing—
by being our Savior and Great High Priest.**

In the Latin, the word ‘priest’ literally means ‘*bridge-builder*.’

Jesus Christ allowed us access into the presence of God by ‘*laying His cross*’ over the gulf that sin had opened up between God and fallen men and women—thus building a bridge so that we could come into His presence and have fellowship with Him.

Galatians 3:21a (NKJV)

²¹ ***Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not!***

When Paul mentions “**the law**” in verse 21 he is referring to the Mosaic Covenant—and when he refers to “**the promises of God**” he’s talking about the New Covenant.

First of all, he wants his Jewish readers to understand that he’s not putting down the Law—he doesn’t want them to think that he’s saying that the law is something evil that’s standing in the way of us receiving God’s promises—

Galatians 3:21 (NKJV)

²¹ ***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.***

He wants his readers to know that the law is God’s perfect standard of righteousness—

Romans 7:7, 12 (NKJV)

⁷ What shall we say then? *Is the law sin?* Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “*You shall not covet*” ...

¹² Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Paul wants us to know that God’s laws are not something evil that are standing in the way of us receiving God’s promise—on the contrary God used the Law to bring us to the promise!

No doubt, Paul’s readers would have asked themselves—how? (he tells us how in verses 22-25—but first):

Romans 3:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, *for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

- A person won’t see their need for a Savior if they don’t first see themselves as a sinner.
- The problem is not with God’s law—the problem has always been with our inability to keep those laws perfectly for salvation. Yet Paul goes on to tell us that the Law was actually a friend to us, and not an enemy.

Sure, the Law condemned us because of our sins—but it also protected us in some ways from sin.

Galatians 3:22 (NKJV)

²² But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Paul paints a picture of us being in prison before we got saved—the bars of the cell are ‘sin’ keeping us ‘confined.’

‘**The Scripture**’ (written law of God) put us in the prison, because it pointed out our sinful condition. So, there we sat imprisoned by sin, and the law couldn’t help us, because—the law put us into the prison!

Some protest and say, “I’m not a prisoner to sin!”

Well, there’s a simple way to prove it: stop sinning! (“I’m not a slave to cigarettes!”—quit smoking and we’ll see!) You’ll realize very quickly that you are in fact a prisoner of sin! The law imprisons us, but only faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ can set us free.

Galatians 3:22–23 (NKJV)

²² 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 [in other words, ‘before we were saved by faith; before we lived our lives by faith’] we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.

Here, Paul uses a different word and a different idea than when he wrote “**the Scripture has confined all under sin**” in verse 21.

The idea behind ‘**confined**’ is ‘imprisonment’—the idea behind ‘**under guard**’ is protective custody. There is a sense in which we were imprisoned by our own sin under the law—but there is also another sense in which it guarded us in protective custody.

One author answers the question, “*How does the law protect us?*”—

“It protects us by showing us God’s heart. It protects us by showing us the best way to live. It protects us by showing what should be approved and disapproved among men. It protects us by providing a foundation for civil law. In these ways and more, we were kept under guard by the law.”

Galatians 3:24–25 (NKJV)

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.

Here Paul uses an illustration that was familiar to all his readers—the child guardian.

In many wealthy Roman and Greek households back then—well-educated slaves took the children to and from school and watched over them during the day. Sometimes they would teach the children, sometimes they would protect and prohibit, and sometimes they would even discipline.

This is what Paul means by **tutor** (Galatians 3:24)—but please do not read into this word our modern idea of a schoolteacher.

The Greek is ‘paidogogos’. The transliteration of the Greek would give us our word *pedagogue* (‘pedagog’)—which literally means, “*a child conductor*.”

Warren Wiersbe—

“By using this illustration, Paul is saying several things about the Jews and their Law. First, he is saying that the Jews were not born through the Law, but rather were brought up by the Law. The slave was not the child’s father; he was the child’s guardian and disciplinarian. So, the Law did not give life to Israel; it regulated life. The Judaizers taught that the Law was necessary for life and righteousness, and Paul’s argument shows their error.

But the second thing Paul says is even more important: the work of the guardian was preparation for the child’s maturity. Once the child came of age, he no longer needed the guardian. So, the Law was a preparation for the nation of Israel until the coming of the promised Seed, Jesus Christ.”

Galatians 3:25 (NKJV)

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

➤ *What purpose does the law have in my life after I get saved?*

No purpose. The purpose of the law was to take us by the hand (like a tutor), and bring us to Jesus—**by teaching us that we could never keep the law for righteousness.** Once the law does its job and shows us our sin, our inability to keep the law for righteousness, and drives us to Christ for His righteousness—the purpose of the law in our lives has been fulfilled!

In our study from last time, we sought to answer the question:

➤ *“Is a Christian still under the Law?”*

The conclusion we came to based on what Paul has presented in both Galatians and Romans is—**No!** As Christians we are now in Christ and as such, we are partakers of everything Jesus accomplished.

He fulfilled the law and since we are in Him the law has been fulfilled in us as well.

Now *that doesn’t mean that the law has been abolished or done away with.* It’s still in operation and doing its job in the lives of unbelievers (Romans 3:20)—but it has no further purpose in the life of a believer in Christ anymore:

1 Timothy 1:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸ But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers...

The Law was only intended for unbelievers to drive them to Christ. After they get saved, they no longer need external laws (with punishments attached to them) to make them obey God. Because they now have the Holy Spirit living inside of them who has given them a new heart with God’s laws written in it—and obeying God out of love and not because of law is the joy of their hearts!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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