

ANOTHER GREAT QUESTION (vv. 21-22)

In verses 21 and 22, Paul asks another great question. “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God?” We fully expect Paul to answer, “Absolutely!” But he surprises us by answering, “Not in the least.” Law and promise serve different functions, but they work together in God’s plan to bring us to Christ.

VERSES 21-22 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²² But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

1. According to Paul, what is the major liability of the Law?
2. What do you think Paul means when he says, “Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin?”
3. How does the promise set us free from the power of sin?

Run, John, run, the law commands,
But gives us neither feet nor hands,
Far better news the gospel brings:
It bids us fly and gives us wings

JOHN BUNYAN



360 DISCUSSION 03.26.17

LAW AND PROMISE GALATIANS 3:15-22



In his book, “The Cure,” John Lynch tells us that early in our walk with Christ we come to a fork in the road. The sign pointing in one direction reads, “Pleasing God.” The sign pointing in the other direction reads, “Trusting God.”

Instinctively we choose the first road. “Pleasing God” seems to be the obvious choice. The road leads us to a room where everyone seems to have their act together, but the more you linger the more plastic they seem to become. They all wear masks. Their lives are all too perfect. Their stories seem a bit phony. Finally, you realize that all your attempts to “Please God” only lead to frustration, and more profound spiritual hunger.

In a moment of utter defeat you leave the room, drag yourself back to the fork in the road, and reluctantly choose the path labeled “Trusting God.” This road also leads to a room. This room is a lot more messy than the first room. Everyone in the room has obvious flaws and deep wounds. While these people are not nearly as attractive as the people in the first room, they seem to be far more real, far more alive, far more joyful. They seem to realize that God loves them. More than loves them—He delights in them. He is crazy about them. He doesn’t love them any more when their behavior is at its best or love them any less when it is at its very worst. They don’t feel the need to wear a mask. They are honest with God and they are honest with each other.

Paul labels our well meaning efforts to “Please God,” “Law.” This path is marked by our vain attempts to earn God’s approval and secure his affection. On the other hand, Paul tells us that the path of “Trusting God” is marked “Promise.” We simply rest in the blessings God freely gives us through faith in Christ.

AN EXAMPLE FROM EVERYDAY LIFE (vv. 15-18)

Paul argues from the lesser to the greater. If a human covenant cannot be set aside or broken, how much more reliable are God's covenants and promises.

Paul tells us four key things about the promise given to Abraham: (1) The promises of God cannot be set aside (2) All of God's promises find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ; (3) the law in no way adds to or takes away from the promise; and finally (4) we receive God's blessing as a sheer gift of God's grace through faith in Christ.

VERSES 15-18 Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

1. Why is it important to know that the promises of God are sure?
2. What is the significance of Paul's claim that all of God's promises are ultimately fulfilled in Christ?
3. What is the basic principle of grace?
4. What is the basic principle of the law?
5. Why is it important not to confuse God's promise (grace) with law (our ability to please God and earn his affection)?

A GREAT QUESTION (vv. 19-20)

Paul anticipates an obvious question: "If God's Covenant with Abraham, is far more foundational than the Law, then why did God even bother to give us the law?" Paul's answer comes in two parts. God gave us the law because of our sinful hearts, and he gave us the law in order to bring us to the end of ourselves and lead us to Christ.

VERSES 19-20: Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

1. While the Bible uses a number of different words to describe sin, the word transgression describes a willful breach of God's revealed will.
 - a. What are some of the different ways the law addresses transgression?
 - b. Which of these are most important to you? Why?
2. There was a marked difference between God's promises to Abraham and the giving of the Law. In the giving of the Law, God obligated himself to the people, and the people in turn obligated themselves to God. Two parties were involved. In God's covenant with Abraham, God sealed the promise by obligating himself to Abraham, while asking nothing more of Abraham than to believe his promises?
 - a. What are some ways we try to obligate ourselves to God, and obligate God to us?
 - b. Why are these ultimately doomed for failure?
 - c. What happens when we lean into God's faithfulness, rather than relying on our ability to please God and earn his affection?



360 BIBLE STUDIES 03.26.17

PAUL'S STUDY NOTES | GALATIANS 3:15-22

ESSENCE OF THE TEXT: Paul tells us that the promise made to Abraham was not set aside by the law, but that the law was added because of transgressions until the coming of Christ.

ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

I. Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life.

- A. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.
- B. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to your seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed, meaning one person, who is Christ.
 - 1. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.
 - 2. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

II. Why then was the law given at all?

- A. It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.
- B. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party, but God is one.

III. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promise?

- A. Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, the righteousness would have certainly come by the law.
- B. But scripture has locked everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

COMMENTARY

The law given to Moses could not alter the promise God had already given to Abraham. It served a different purpose. NIVSB

¹⁵ Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.

By addressing the Galatians as ἀδελφοί, for the first time since 1:11 and in marked contrast to “You foolish Galatians!” (3:1), Paul expresses “both frustrated affection and gentle coercion” (Dunn 1993a: 181). He thereby draws attention to the importance of the argument in the following verses. MOO

Utilizing an argument “from the lesser to the greater” (i.e., what is true of agreements in the human realm is all the more true of an agreement between God and humanity). EXPOSITOR'SP

¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ.

The covenant with Abraham was characterized by “promises,” signifying what God would bring to pass by his grace. The term “promises” calls attention to God’s work rather than to what is attained through human effort. The promises given to Abraham included land and universal blessing, and they were given specifically to his “offspring” (Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–5; 17:4–8; 18:18; 22:17–18; 26:4). SCHREINER

The word ἐπαγγελία (epangelia, promise) occurs only seven times in the LXX and never in the patriarchal narratives, but it describes very well the way in which God takes the initiative to hold out the prospect of blessings—of land, of numerous descendants, and of the extension of blessing to other nations—to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–5; 17:1–8; 22:15–18) and to the other patriarchs (Gen. 26:1–5; 28:13–15; 35:11–12). “Promise” is especially associated with these patriarchal promises throughout the NT (Acts 13:23, 32; 26:6; Rom. 4:13, 14, 16, 20; 9:4, 8, 9; 15:8; Heb. 6:12, 15, 17; 7:6; 11:9, 13, 17). The plural ἐπαγγελίαι (epangeliai) here in verse 16 (and also in v. 21) may therefore connote the several provisions of the promise or the several reiterations of the promise; in any case, the plural does not function any differently for Paul than the singular. MOO

Scripture uses the singular “seed” where a plural (e.g., “children”) would have been possible. God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 13:15; 17:8; 24:7) finds its unique fulfillment in Christ—though (as Gal 3:29 adds) it includes those who belong to Christ. NIVSB

These covenant promises, Paul writes, were spoken to Abraham and his “seed.” Though the term was used within Judaism to refer to Abraham’s descendants as a united entity, Paul uses the inherent singularity of the collective noun spermata (GK 5065, “seed” (Hebrew zeraʿ, GK 2446) to make reference to one individual, Jesus Christ. Christ is the authentic son of Abraham, the true Seed through whom all the nations would be blessed. EXPOSITOR'S

To whom were these inviolable promises made? Paul finds significance in the singular form of the word “offspring” (σπέρματι) and distinguishes it sharply from the plural “offsprings” (σπέρμασιν). The distinction drawn is surprising since “offspring” is a collective singular. Nor is Paul ignorant of this fact, for he uses the singular “offspring” (σπέρμα) as a collective just a few verses later (3:29). SCHREINER

In applying this analogy to the relationship of the Abrahamic covenant to the Mosaic law, Paul realizes that he must first prove that the Abrahamic covenant applies to the Christian era. He does this by means of a special form of interpretation (then quite common), in which he sees in “seed” (which could be either singular or plural) a “corporate solidarity” in Christ. That is, Christ is the “seed” about whom God made promises, and all those who are “in Christ” are also the “seed” (v. 29). This provides an important clarification, for readers of the Bible might be led to think that the “seed of Abraham” refers to all Israelites and,

furthermore, they might wonder how it is that Paul can claim that Gentiles are under the covenant of Abraham. By stating that Christ is the “seed,” Paul interprets Genesis 13:15 and 24:7 in a Christian manner and reveals that the Abrahamic covenant is the one that climaxes in Christ and those who believe in him. MCKNIGHT

Daube finds precedence for Paul’s interpretation particularly in a midrash on Gen 21:12, where the seed refers to Isaac. Daube thinks midrashic influence is substantiated by the following: (1) Paul’s use of rabbinic chronology (430 years); (2) the reference to the promise of land for Abraham; (3) the certain fulfillment of the promise; (4) his understanding of the noun “offspring”; and (5) the notion that Isaac prefigured the Messiah. Daube concludes that the reference to a singular with the noun “seed” is defensible from the evidence. SCHREINER

It seems, however, that Paul’s interpretation is plausible from the OT apart from the midrashim. The promise of redemption in Gen 3:15, which reaches back to the beginning of the OT story, is not restricted to a collective fulfillment. The word “seed” may refer to a singular person, such as Seth in Gen 4:25. Isaac himself, in the narrative of Genesis, was the singular seed of Abraham (Gen 21:12), and Paul distinguishes elsewhere between Isaac and Ishmael, seeing only Isaac as the true offspring (Rom 9:6–9). Furthermore, the promise articulated in Gen 3:15 is fulfilled through a singular descendant of David. Wilcox has shown that the promised seed of Abraham was related to the promise of an offspring of David who would rule over Israel. Therefore, we have a canonical precedent for the limitation of the seed to a singular, and the reference to David prepares the way for the notion of corporate solidarity. SCHREINER

But what are we to make of Paul’s claim about the significance of the singular form of the word σπέρμα in his Genesis citation: οὐ λέγει· καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὥς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἀλλ’ ὥς ἐφ’ ἑνός· καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός (ou legei: kai tois spermasin, hōs epi pollōn all’ hōs eph’ henos; kai tō spermati sou, hos estin Christos, it does not say: “and to seeds,” as if it were referring to many, but, as if referring to one; [it says] “and to your seed,” who is Christ). This exegetical move seems to be an obvious example of forced interpretation in order to make a point: for σπέρμα, being a collective noun, while singular in form, is plural in meaning (like our term “people”). But four things need to be noted about what Paul is doing here. First, what may be forced or unconvincing to a modern reader would not necessarily have been perceived that way in Paul’s context. In fact, what Paul does here is quite in line with certain kinds of rabbinic interpretation. Second, Paul makes clear in this very context that he understands the collective sense of σπέρμα; see verse 29: “If you [plural ὑμεῖς, hymeis] belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed [σπέρμα], heirs according to the promise.” Third, there is good reason to think that some of the promise texts in Genesis do, in fact, use σπέρμα as a semantic singular, referring to Isaac, Abraham’s immediate “seed,” or “descendant.” Fourth, Paul’s application of the “seed” language to Christ may also reflect the later traditions about a “seed” of David; for example, see 2 Sam. 7:12, where σπέρμα refers to David’s immediate descendant, Solomon, but ultimately to the Messiah who would come from David’s line: “When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom” (Dunn 1993a: 184; Mussner 1988: 238–39; Hays 2000: 264). Genesis itself suggests that its “seed” language has ultimate reference to this “seed” of David (Alexander 1989: 19; cf. also Sailhamer 2009: 473–81, 535–36). These considerations suggest that, while Paul’s claim resembles Jewish interpretation of his day at the level of his exegetical technique, he is, in fact, operating with certain hermeneutical axioms that provide warrant for his interpretation. Especially important is Paul’s reading of salvation history as the story of how God’s promises become concentrated in one person, Christ, the seed, through whom those promises become applicable to a worldwide people. The claim, therefore, that “Paul is using the Old Testament in a way that has nothing to do with how the Old Testament is to be understood in its original context” (Enns 2005: 137) assumes an understanding of “original context” that severs the text from its larger theological and salvation-historical context—a questionable Christian way of reading the Scriptures. MOO

To sum up: Paul reads the Genesis promises in light of the story line of the OT, which narrows the promise down to a son of David and finds its fulfillment in the one man, Jesus of Nazareth. The “offspring” texts should be interpreted, then, in terms of corporate representation. Jesus is the representative offspring of Abraham and David and the fulfillment of the original redemptive promise in Gen 3:15. Thus, the promise should be conceived typologically, for the offspring promises have their final fulfillment in Christ, so that the offspring promises in the OT point forward to and anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ. SCHREINER

So why does Paul connect Jesus with the promises to Abraham here? He does so to emphasize that the age of fulfillment has arrived. The promises made to Abraham have become a reality in Jesus Christ. They always pointed to the one offspring, Christ Jesus. Hence, to move backward in salvation history to the Mosaic law and covenant is a serious mistake. SCHREINER

17 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

The Mosaic legislation could not supersede the Abrahamic covenant, and the promise is not replaced by nomistic legal requirements. Interpreting the Abrahamic covenant through the lens of the Mosaic, as insisted on by the Judaizers, understands God’s redemptive purposes exactly backward, according to Paul. EXPOSITOR’S

The rabbis did not typically read the Scriptures in terms of its overall story line but mined the OT for truths wherever they were found. It is likely that Paul’s opponents maintained that the Mosaic covenant supplemented and “defined” the Abrahamic. Paul argues, however, that the chronology in which the story unfolds is fundamental for reading Scripture rightly. The Abrahamic covenant and its promises preceded the Mosaic covenant (and the giving of the law) by 430 years. The covenant with Abraham, then, takes precedence, and the law functions as a subordinate and interim covenant that cannot invalidate the terms of the Abrahamic covenant. SCHREINER

In other words, the Abrahamic covenant focuses on what God does for his people in saving them, while the Mosaic covenant accents human obedience. The Abrahamic covenant celebrates God’s work in delivering his people, whereas the Mosaic summons human beings to keep the law. SCHREINER

18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

That is, on human observance of the law. The inheritance would thus no longer depend solely on God’s promise and grace. In that sense, law and promise (or grace) are exclusive alternatives. NIVSB

Here Paul ties the promise to “inheritance,” the concept of God’s blessing. Inheritance was for the most part material in Jewish history, but it was also understood to be more than material possession in the land. It was also considered to include specific nonmaterial elements, such as God’s favor and relationship with him (cf. Ge 27). Given Paul’s argument relative to the promise and the Abrahamic covenant, these blessings are undoubtedly at the forefront of his thought here. And, Paul says, these spiritual blessings are obtained through God’s gracious promise, not law. EXPOSITOR’S

In the OT the term “inheritance” (κληρονομία) and its corresponding verb “to inherit” refers to the Land of Promise pledged to Abraham (Gen 15:3–5; 17:8; 21:10; 22:17; 28:4). The term is especially prominent in Joshua in terms of the apportionment of the land (Josh 11:23; 12:6; 13:1; 18:7, 20, 28; 19:1, 8, 9, 10, etc.). The promise of the inheritance cannot be restricted ultimately to Canaan

but anticipates inheriting the world (Pss 22:27–28; 47:7–9; 72:8–11; Zeph 3:9–10; cf. also Sir 44:21; Jub. 22:14; 32:19; 2 Bar. 14:13; 51:3; 1 En. 5:7). Elsewhere Paul asserts that Abraham is heir of the world (Rom 4:13). The expectation of a new world, a transformed universe, accords with what we find elsewhere in the NT (Heb 11:10, 13–16; 13:14; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1–22:5). To speak of an inheritance, then, is another way of describing the possession of eschatological salvation. SCHREINER

It is this nature of promise that Paul highlights in order to show why the inheritance cannot be based on the law. As Paul has explained in Gal. 3:12, “law” operates according to the principle of doing: it demands works. And as Paul makes clear elsewhere, grace and works are antithetical. In fact, Paul’s logic in this verse is very similar to his logic in Rom. 4:4–5, where he argues that Abraham could not have been justified by works because, if he had, his status before God would not be based on grace. Explicit in his argument there and implicit here is the fact that God always operates with his sinful creatures on the basis of grace (see also Rom. 11:6: “And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace”) MOO

Paul’s argument runs contrary to many Jewish traditions holding that the law is eternal (e.g., Josephus, Ag. Ap. 2.277: “our Law at least remains immortal”; Jub. 1.27; Wis. 18:4; 2 Esd. [4 Ezra] 9:37). Paul, on the other hand, insists that the law had a definite beginning: it was “added” (προστέθη, prosetethē, from προστίθημι)—that is, in light of verse 17, it was introduced into salvation history “four hundred and thirty years” after the promise. The implied subject of the passive verb is God (Wallace 1990: 235), in contrast to those who argue that Paul in these verses seeks to disassociate the law from God (e.g., Hübner 1984: 26; de Boer 2011: 228–29). If the law has a definite beginning, it also—and this is more directly relevant to the Galatian situation—has a definite end: it was to be in force only “until the seed to whom it was promised came” (ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπηγγέλται, achris hou elthē to sperma hō epēngeltai) MOO

¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

Furthermore, the argument from analogy (vv. 15–18) was only an illustration of what Paul had already argued: that the Galatians themselves experienced everything good by faith rather than works (vv. 1–5), that Abraham himself was justified by faith (vv. 6–9), and that those under the law were under a curse (vv. 10–14). It is no wonder Paul had to pause and clarify the basis for everything: the law was never intended by God to do what the Judaizers were asking it to do, nor was it ever intended to be the socially restricting instrument it had become. MCKNIGHT

If the inheritance is by promise rather than by law, so that the two are incompatible in terms of gaining life, and if the law was given in such a way as to underline its inferiority, does the law stand in opposition to God’s promises (marked by a “therefore” [οὖν], 3:21)? From the previous argument we might expect Paul to say, “Yes, indeed.” Instead, he categorically rejects such an idea. The law is not contrary to the promises, but it does have a different function. Contrary to the promise, the law cannot produce life (3:21). Instead (“but,” [ἀλλά]), Scripture has enclosed all under sin, so that the promise of the eschatological inheritance is given only to those who put their faith in Christ Jesus (3:22). SCHREINER

Sin” is worthy of punishment; but the particular form of sin known as “transgression” evokes greater punishment because it involves conscious violation of a known law of God. MOO

May suggest that fear of the punishments prescribed by the law served to prevent some transgressions from taking place; more likely Paul’s point is that the law, in spelling out God’s requirements, revealed the rebellion against God implicit in its transgression (Rom 7:7–11) and thus how “utterly sinful” sin really is (Rom 7:13; cf. Rom 5:20). NIVSB

The law was necessary, he says, “because of transgressions”—i.e., because humanity is fallen and sinful, and that sin must both be restrained and shown to be sin, God gave the law to Israel, his “chosen” covenant people. As succinctly stated by Fung, 159, the law was given “to make wrongdoing a legal offense.” Paul’s point, in other words, is not that the law itself is evil or that it created sin but that the law revealed the true nature of humanity’s unlawful deeds. The law was never given to bring anyone to righteousness (as legalistically interpreted) or to perfection (as nomistically interpreted; cf. Longenecker, 139). Quite to the contrary: the law demonstrated one’s sinfulness. The law was “added” as a temporary, subordinate restriction to the promise, placed on humanity until “the Seed,” Christ, should come (cf. Burton, 188; Bruce, 176). The validity of the law as a revelatory agent ceased at the coming of Christ, who is the consummate revelation of God’s character and person (cf. Jn 1:14, 18; 14:7–10; Heb 1:1–4) and the fulfiller of the law (Mt 5:17–20). EXPOSITOR'S

Did God add the law because the people were sinning, or did the people suddenly learn that they were sinning because God gave the law? Later Paul states that the law does not give life (vv. 21–22) but is a teacher (v. 24); elsewhere he says that “through the law we become conscious of sin” (Rom. 3:20; cf. 7:7) and that when there is no law there is no sin (4:15; cf. 5:13). Romans 5:20 states that “the law was added so that the trespass might increase” (cf. 7:13). Thus, I conclude with many who see the purpose of the law as being that it was given in order to reveal certain kinds of behavior as sinful. MCKNIGHT

Hence, there is no reason to think that the law is envisioned as restraining sin here. Quite the opposite. As in Rom 5:20, the law was given to increase transgressions. Such a perspective fits with the history of Israel, for life under law did not lead to a law-abiding society. Instead, sin reigned in Israel, and as a result both the northern and southern kingdoms were sent into exile. SCHREINER

The idea that the law increased the reign of sin in Israel until the coming of the Christ, however, fits with the OT story of Israel’s life under the law. Furthermore, it was noted above that Paul links being “under law” (cf. 3:23) with being under the power of sin, and hence the upsurge of sin under the law is preferable. By showing that the law could not curb sin, God revealed that the only answer to the power of sin is the coming of the Messiah. SCHREINER

The first purpose of the law was to multiply transgressions so that it would be evident that the law itself is not the answer to the sin problem. The second comment on the purpose of the law is articulated here: The law was never intended to be in force forever, for it is subordinate to what God had promised. Hence, when the promised offspring arrived, i.e., Jesus the Christ, the law’s jurisdiction ended. The law, then, was always intended as an interim arrangement. SCHREINER

The law, which preceded Christ’s coming, revealed the power and depth of human sin, and thus the greatness of the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus is set in bold relief. SCHREINER

The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

Both Israel and God had obligations under the covenant mediated by Moses: God would bless Israel if they obeyed his commandments (an unfulfilled condition). But the promise God gave to Abraham was one-sided in its obligation: God made a commitment, and he would fulfill it. NIVSB

The underlying assumption here is that an arrangement between a person and God that has mediators is inferior to an arrangement that has no mediators, because the latter arrangement is directly from God. MCKNIGHT

The promise arrangement, on the other hand, involves “one” party, God, who initiates the arrangement (with faith itself being more of an acceptance of the arrangement than a true requirement for enactment). MOO

The subordinate role of the law continues to be Paul’s theme, as is shown by its mediation from angels. By way of contrast, the promise was given directly to Abraham, and hence the covenant with Abraham receives priority. SCHREINER

Mediation also implies a contract between God and Israel. Therefore, the promises of the covenant were dependent on both parties fulfilling their responsibilities. The Sinai covenant failed because Israel did not do what was demanded and broke the stipulations of the covenant. The promise given to Abraham, by contrast, is dependent on God alone. And since it depends on his promise and is not contingent, it will certainly be fulfilled. SCHREINER

Paul also appeals to the oneness of God in Rom 3:30 to underscore that there is one way of salvation. It is intriguing that both in Romans and here in Galatians the oneness of God is introduced where Paul defends the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God apart from the law. Since there is one God, there is one way of salvation. Inasmuch as the law did not and could not accomplish salvation, it is inferior to the promise. SCHREINER

The law and the promise fit together in the economy of God’s plan, but they play different roles. The law, though representing God’s will, was not a source of life. In Judaism the law was seen as the pathway to life: “the more study of the Law the more life” (m. ’Abot 2:7; cf. Sir 45:5; 4 Ezra 14:30). A second class, contrary-to-fact condition is used here to explain that the law did not and could not produce life. The law revealed how people should live, but it did not provide the power to enable human beings to live in a way that pleases God. Righteousness would have indeed been through the law if human beings had been able to keep its prescriptions. SCHREINER

21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

Furthermore, the promise and the law operated on different principles. Under the promise the inheritance is obtained as a gift of God’s grace, whereas under the law the promise is secured through human obedience. SCHREINER

No amount of law or identity as one who observes the law can remedy one’s condition. If law could have ameliorated that situation, Paul asserts, righteousness before God would have been based on law and Christ would not have suffered in and on humanity’s behalf (cf. 2:21). As it is, all humanity is condemned by law, in order that all humanity may potentially be made heirs of the promise that comes by faith (3:22; cf. Ro 5:12–21). EXPOSITOR’S

22 But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

CONCLUSION

John Piper refers, in a sermon, to a poem of John Bunyan that beautifully captures the difference between the law and the gospel: Run, John, run, the law commands; But gives us neither feet nor hands, Far better news the gospel brings: It bids us fly and gives us wings. SCHREINER

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