

Galatians 3:15-18

Introduction: Paul reminds us of God's logical explanation for the means of salvation to be grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The addition of the Law after the promise to Abraham doesn't eliminate the promise.

A basic rule of EVERYDAY LIFE—3:15 (an argument from the lesser [3:15] to the greater [3:16])

- 1) Illustration defended—¹⁵ *Brothers, I am speaking according to [κατά] man:*
 - a) i.e. This is a basic human principle
- 2) Illustration explained—*even if it is a man's covenant [διαθήκη],*
 - a) Once it's put into effect—*yet when it has been ratified* [pf. pass. ptc. κυρώω],
 - b) You can't change it—*no one annuls* [pres. act. ind. ἀθετέω] *it or makes additions* [pres. dep. ind. ἐπιδιατάσσομαι] *to it.*
 - i) In Greek law, wills were both sealed and irrevocable. One could not impose new conditions or remove an heir, even if one added a supplement. These wills were confirmed by their deposit with municipal records office. If a new will interfered with an older one, it was rejected. [Keener]
- 3) The sealed word of men is binding on both parties. It is unchangeable.
 - a) If contracts can be easily broken simply because someone wants out of their obligations, the world would be full of chaos.

A basic rule of GRAMMAR, especially a figure of speech—3:16

- 1) Statement—¹⁶ *Now, to Abraham and his descendant [σπέρμα] the promises [ἐπαγγελία] (cf. 3:14) were spoken.*
 - a) A immediate recipient (Abraham) and an ultimate fulfiller (Christ).
- 2) Clarification—*He (the God who spoke the promises) does not say, "And to descendants [σπέρμασιν]," as of many, but as of one, "And to your descendant [σπέρματι]," who is Christ. (cf. Genesis 17:8; Matthew 1:1)*
 - a) However, seeing fulfillment of the promise in Christ does not negate fulfillment to others as well.
 - i) Cf. 3:29; Romans 4:16—Paul's emphasis on the singular/plural concept for NT believers
 - ii) Cf. Genesis 17:8; 48:4—God promised Abraham's seed an everlasting possession of the land of Canaan

A basic rule of CHRONOLOGY—3:17 (Paul's main point of this paragraph; application of 3:15)

- 1) Statement—¹⁷ *And I say this:*
- 2) Truth about the inability of the Law—*that the law,*
 - a) When did the Law come? *that came four hundred thirty years later, (than the ratification of the promise to Jacob in Genesis 46:1-4) (cf. Exodus 12:40-41)*
 - b) What can the Law not do? ... *cannot annul* [ἀκυρώω] *a covenant* [διαθήκη] *that was previously ratified* [pf. pass. ptc. προκυρώω] *by* [ὑπό] *God in* [εἰς] *Christ,*

- c) Why would the Law seek annulment of the ratified covenant? *so as to* [εἰς] *put an end to* [aor. act. inf. καταργέω] *the promise* [ἐπαγγελία].
- 3) To attempt to add legal conditions to an unconditional covenant violates the principle behind the making of covenants. You cannot interpret the covenant with Abraham through the lens of the Law.
- 4) The Law cannot add or subtract from God's first and only way of salvation. [Boice]

A basic rule of INHERITANCE—3:18 (law and promise are incompatible)

- 1) Assumption for the sake of argument—¹⁸ *For ...*
 - a) If ...—*if* [εἰ, 1st class condition, assumed true for the sake of argument] *the inheritance* [κληρονομία] (i.e. the blessings) *is from* [ἐκ] *the law*,
 - i) Which contains commands to be obeyed
 - b) Then ...—*it is no longer from* [ἐκ] *the promise* [ἐπαγγελία],
 - c) If the source of the inheritance has become the Law, then the promise no longer has any significance. [Magill]
 - 2) Clincher argument—*but God has (graciously) granted it* [pf. dep. ind. χαρίζομαι] *to Abraham by way of* [διὰ] *a promise* [ἐπαγγελία].
 - a) God's covenant with Abraham is both covenant and promise. God will not retract His earlier promise based on faith. Abraham did not have to earn this promise; it was graciously given to him by God. cf. Romans 4:13
 - 3) The principle of works contradicts grace. When a person works he gets what he earns. In saving grace a person receives what he did not earn.

Consider this example from Pastor Ryken: A student came to a professor in despair and confided that he was a practicing homosexual. "I feel like a slave," the young person lamented. The teacher responded with the loving truth, "You are a slave." He then began to teach him about gaining freedom from sin through faith in Jesus Christ.

This was so attractive to the student that he wanted to become a Christian himself. But one thing held him back: he thought he was not good enough for God. How could God forgive him for everything he had done. He said, "First I must become a Christian like you. Then God will love me."

The teacher responded, "I am not a Christian like me, either. I am no better than you are, except for the love and power of God. He loves you now as you are." This is the grace of God, that he does not deal with us on the basis of our performance, but on the basis of his promise.

Take-home truth: To Abraham God said, "I will. I will." To Moses God said, "You shall. You shall." To us God says, "I have done and I will do."