

## The Inferiority of the Law

Scripture: Galatians 3:15–22

Code: 48-17

We are committed to deal with the Scripture as it's laid out, and the amazing reality is that the letter of Galatians, for example, and for that matter, the rest of the New Testament was written to new believers in the case of the epistles of Paul to new believers who were Gentiles and had no real experience with the Old Testament at all. And in a very brief time after the gospel had been preached to them and he had ministered to them, he would write letters back to them that are profound, that have very carefully crafted and sometimes complex arguments that are predicated on deep thinking about the truth.

The precious treasures of Scripture are not to be found lying on the surface, and I think we've learned that through the years. It isn't just for the sake of the information we glean by focusing and thinking carefully, it's for the relationship that we glean; it's so that we can know our God more fully, and so that we can believe more firmly the doctrines that are revealed here.

Some might think that it would be enough for Paul to say, "Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone apart from works," and that would be it; that salvation is by faith without works. He says that in Ephesians 2: "For by grace are you saved through faith, not of works." And some might say, "Well, that's enough; I get the message." But that is not how the Scriptures deal with that issue, because there will inevitably be arguments raised against the gospel of grace and faith.

The apostle Paul, in particular, has been chosen by God to write very carefully designed insights into the truth of the gospel. We also know that the gospel is incessantly assaulted and attacked. It was in his day; it is today; it has always been so. We have in the Word of God all that we need, nothing is left out. We have all that we need to understand the gospel and to have our confidence in the gospel clearly and firmly established.

Now true Christians can be and are foolishly bewitched. That's what we read in chapter 3 of Galatians and verse 1: "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" They had become bewitched over the gospel, the gospel which they themselves had actually believed and by which they had been saved. But some Jews had come from Jerusalem to Galatia to the various churches in the southern part of that region, and they had said, "Faith is not enough. You have to adhere to the law of Moses, circumcision, Mosaic prescriptions. Salvation is faith plus works."

Paul is shocked that they have so quickly accepted this. Chapter 1, verse 6: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel." And a different gospel is one that adds works to faith. "It's really not another gospel;" – verse 7 says – "only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we've said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed, *anathema!*" Damnation is pronounced on anyone who tampers with the true gospel.

Now we have been looking at this for a number of weeks, and we will continue to do that. And I know some of you are saying, “Where do I sign? I’m in. I buy it. I’m convinced.” But Paul is unrelenting in his arguments. He needs to seal this with an unbreakable seal in the understanding of his readers, and our understanding as well. And I remind you, he is writing to Christians to make sure that they are not bewitched into believing that a false gospel is acceptable.

Now let me just back up to the earlier part of chapter 3. Paul is writing in verse 3 to those who have begun by the Spirit. These are true believers. They have begun by the Spirit, or in the Spirit. But they are bewitched. They are foolishly bewitched into accepting the legitimacy of a false gospel even though they are believers. They are, verses 6 through 9 tell us, true sons of Abraham. The end of verse 7, they are the true sons of Abraham. Abraham is the sort of prototypical father of all who believe, because Abraham believed God, and he was justified by faith, way back in Genesis 15. So all who are justified by faith are in a sense the spiritual sons of Abraham. So we’re talking about believers justified by faith apart from works as Abraham was.

In fact, Paul says in verse 10, “Anyone who tries to be justified by works is going to be under a curse; for as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse.” If you try to come to God by your works, your morality, your religion, you are cursed. Only those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will be justified. Verse 11: “The righteous man shall live by faith.” And then in verse 14, he says, “In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

Paul had always preached the gospel of faith alone. The Judaizers had come trying to force people to believe that it was faith and works. That is a damning heresy that must be condemned; and that’s what Paul is doing.

Well, they would raise an argument and they would say, “Well, wait a minute. What about the law of Moses? What about the law of Moses? God gave the law of Moses. Abraham was saved by faith; but when God gave the law of Moses four hundred and thirty years after the last restatement of the Abrahamic covenant to Jacob, God gave the law of Moses. Didn’t he then change the plan for salvation? Didn’t it go from being faith before the law to works by the law? Isn’t that the purpose of the law; or isn’t it at least a combination of the faith of Abraham and adherence to the law of Moses?”

And that was the Jewish notion. They would give honor to Abraham and Abraham’s faith, and then they would give an equal and parallel honor to Moses and the law. Paul wants to point out that the law was never intended to be a way of salvation. That would make conflict between the promise and the law. There would be two competing ways of salvation. And so Paul writes, starting in verse 15, these following words. Follow as I read.

“Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He doesn’t say, ‘To seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

“Why the law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the law then contrary or in conflict with the promises of God? May it never be! For is a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

This is an incredibly careful and thoughtful argument. Paul is comparing the superiority of the promise in verses 15 to 18 with the inferiority of the law in verses 19 to 22.

Now remember what we said about the promise. The promise came to Abraham. It was divine, and therefore unconditional. It was eternal, and therefore irrevocable. It was gracious and therefore undeserved. The promise is the promise God gave to Abraham, starting in Genesis 12 and repeating it a number of times to the other patriarchs, that God would bless, that God would bring salvation. He demonstrated in Abraham's case. Abraham is justified by faith. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness, Genesis 15:6. So God made promises of blessing and salvation through Abraham to the world.

Later on in the Old Testament you will remember God also made promises to David. Second Samuel 7 said that from David's loins sometime in the future would come a king, the greatest king, the Messiah, who would reign and rule over the throne of David, and it would be global and, ultimately, everlasting. So that the Abrahamic covenant also encompasses the Davidic promise of the Savior. In the Abrahamic covenant the Savior is the seed. In the Davidic covenant the Savior is the Messiah, the King.

And then the prophets talked about a new covenant, and in the new covenant God would forgive people's sins, and transform them, taking out the stony heart and giving them a heart of flesh and giving them His Holy Spirit, which describes regeneration and the new birth. So out of the Abrahamic covenant comes the promise of salvation. That promise is brought into reality by the one who is the seed of David, the King. And His work brings about forgiveness of sin made possible because of His own death on the cross as a substitute for sinners. And therefore, God can bring forgiveness. So there's a flow of the Abrahamic covenant that embraces the Davidic covenant, that embraces the new covenant. And all of those covenants resolve in Christ.

Christ is the seed, as verse 16 says. Christ is the seed of Abraham, and all who are blessed are blessed in Christ. Christ is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. He is the great son of David, the great final King of kings. And Christ is the one who ratifies and fulfills the new covenant, as He said in the upper room when He lifted the cup, “This is My blood of the new covenant shed for you.”

So the promise to Abraham, the promise to David, and the promise to the prophets of the new covenant all bound up in God's eternal, unconditional grace, sovereign grace. The promise is superior, and it all resolves in Christ. And I have to show you that.

Second Corinthians 1:20, one simple statement. Listen: “For as many as are the promises of God,” – listen again – “as many as are the promises of God,” which is to say, “As many promises as God has made, in Him they are yes. In Christ they are yes.” All the promises of God are in Christ. He is the

seed of Abraham. He is the son of David. He is the ratifying Redeemer of the new covenant. “As many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God.”

What a great verse, 2 Corinthians 1:20. “Through Him is our Amen to the glory of God.” Everything God promised to Abraham and all those in Abraham’s line, everything He promised to David and all who would be influenced through the Davidic covenant, everything He promised in the new covenant – Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 36 – all of that is fulfilled in Christ. In Him all the promises of God are Amen.

Now I want to extend this a little bit in your thinking. Turn in your Bible to the thirteenth chapter of the book of Acts, thirteenth chapter of the book of Acts. I want you to understand this, it’s such incredibly blessed truth.

In verse 32 of Acts 13, as the apostle Paul is speaking he says this, verse 32: “We preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers.” So he says, “Look, the gospel that I preach is connected to the promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. I’m preaching the promise to the fathers.” The Mosaic covenant clearly didn’t cancel that, because that’s still the gospel. “We preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus.” Again, He fulfilled the promise in that He raised up Jesus.

As it is also written in the second Psalm, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.” He is the one who fulfills the Abrahamic covenant to the fathers the promise. He is the one who fulfills the Davidic covenant as well.

As it also says in another psalm, “You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, was laid among his fathers and underwent decay. But he whom God raised did not undergo decay.”

So the promise to David was not fulfilled in David, but in greater than David, David’s son, the Messiah. “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” And if you read Jeremiah 31, the one compelling promise in the new covenant is the forgiveness of sin.

So in Christ is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, in Christ is the fulfillment of the promise to David, in Christ is the fulfillment of the promise in the new covenant. And verse 39, “Through Him” – the one we have proclaimed to you – “everyone who believes is freed from all things,” – and here he introduces the Mosaic covenant – “from which you could not be freed through the law of Moses.”

The Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, the new covenant, that’s a path of salvation. The law of Moses, the covenant with Moses plays no role in salvation; he couldn’t set you free. The law can’t do that.

Now in Romans 15, a couple of verses, verse 8: “I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy.”

There it is. Christ is the servant to the circumcision, the Jews, on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to Abraham and the others, and for the Gentiles to glorify God. Christ then is the one who confirms the promise to Abraham. He is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

Now I need to show you a couple of other locations in Hebrews. The first one is in chapter 6. “We don’t want you to be sluggish,” – verse 12 says, and I would agree with that. “We don’t want you to be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

And then he goes right back in verse 13, the writer of Hebrews, “For when God made the promise to Abraham,” – now we’re back again in Genesis to the Abrahamic covenant – “since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.’” And that’s taken out of Genesis 22:17, where God repeats His promise to Abraham right at the time that he was about to slaughter Isaac. So God made a promise to Abraham. God made a promise to Abraham.

“And so, having patiently waited,” – verse 15 – “he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose,” – and again, I told you the promise is divine, and therefore it is unalterable, unalterable, eternal. It is therefore irrevocable; and it is gracious, and therefore undeserved. And God has made a promise to Abraham, through Abraham, all being ratified in the person and work of Christ.

So God is demonstrating the unchangeableness of His purpose. He made a promise, and then gave an oath; and the oath was, “I will bless you; I will multiply you.” He made an oath with Himself the unconditional covenant, so that by those two unchangeable things – a promise and an oath – in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. The hope we have is an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast, and one which enters within the veil where Jesus has entered as forerunner for us.

Here’s the point. We have laid hold of the full benefits of the promise of God to Abraham when we have laid hold of Christ. We have an anchor of the soul when we are connected to Christ. We take hold of Him as our hope. All the promises to Abraham that embrace the promises to David, that embrace the new covenant are all in Christ. And when we lay hold of Christ we lay hold of all those promises. There’s nothing there about the Mosaic law.

There was in Acts 13, and what it said was the Mosaic law plays no part in this. And over in chapter 9 of Hebrews, verse 15, it says about the Lord Jesus that, “He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant,” – that means His death covered all who believed in the old covenant. In other words, His death efficaciously went backwards as much as it went forward. “A death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant. Those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

Again, the promise to Abraham was of an eternal inheritance, ratified, and over and over again by repetition to the patriarchs, embellished by the promise to David of the great King, and brought to really its apex in the new covenant; and it all points to Christ. It all points to Christ. All Abrahamic

blessings, all Davidic blessing, all new covenant blessings are in Jesus Christ and Him alone. Now let's go back to Galatians.

The Galatians will have to choose. They'll have to choose. Either salvation is by faith and the promise from God, or by the demands of the law, not both. And Scripture is clear that the law of Moses plays no role in the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and to David and to the prophets in the new covenant.

In fact, go back to verse 18. "If the inheritance" – meaning the original promises, the salvation promises. "If the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise." Literally, God gave it, *kecharistai*, from the verb *charizomai*, which is from *charis*, grace, which says, in effect, God has grace-gifted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

God granted it by a promise, not by law. The inheritance is not based on keeping the law, not based on circumcision, not based on moral works; no, it's based on a promise that God grace-gifted to Abraham and through Abraham to all who believe. God shows which of the two is the correct way. The complete inheritance, with all the blessings and the promise, are given as a grace gift through faith. You see the extremes to which the apostle goes to make this clear, because it is such an assaulted doctrine.

Whatever view the Judaizers taught, the fact was God granted salvation and justification to Abraham by the promise of faith, not the deeds of the law. The law didn't even exist then. It came four hundred and thirty years after the final statement of the covenant with Abraham to Jacob, and six hundred years after Abraham. The promise then is superior: superior by its confirmation, as we saw in the last passage; superior by its Christ-centeredness; superior by its chronology, it came before the Mosaic law; and superior by its completeness, its completeness. The law doesn't nullify the promise. So to every sinner who trusts in Christ alone apart from works, the promise comes, the inheritance comes, apart from any merit, any good works, any religion, any circumcision, baptism.

Now that brings up the question that leads us to the last part of this section: "Why the law? Why the law?" Verse 19: "Why the law then?" And Paul is creating his own argument here, because he knows what the Jews will say. So he has an imaginary Jew in mind asking the question, "Why the law?" So he goes from the superiority of the promise to the inferiority of the law. The inferiority of the law is his subject, starting in verse 19. You're going to find this, I think, very fascinating.

Now the law is inferior for three reasons, Paul says, three reasons. Reason number one: It has an inferior purpose. It has an inferior purpose.

Why then the law? Well, Scripture lays out – and I read some of it to you in reading from Romans 7 today – Scripture lays out a number of reasons for the law. We would say, number one, it defines sin. Romans 7, you remember what Paul said? "I didn't know anything about coveting until I saw the law, and it said, 'Do not covet.'" So the law, which is purely a reflection of the holy and moral and morally righteous character of God defines sin.

Now we would know about some sins, obviously, because we have the law of God written in the heart. But the full range of the law of God gives us a picture of God's complete righteousness and

everything that offends Him, everything. And it's not just the behaviors, it's the attitudes as well. So the first purpose of the law is to define sin. And Paul says, "Yes, it defines sin for me."

The second purpose of the law – and this is an interesting one – is to excite sin, to excite sin. He says, "The law" – Romans 7 – "stirred up coveting in me." When God says, "Don't do this," something in our fallen nature makes that more attractive than what's not forbidden. So the law not only defines sin, it has a way of exciting sin in us.

But the law does something even beyond that. The law also declares that sin is not just something wrong because of what it does to us and what it does to other people, it is wrong because it is rebellion against God. The law of God says, "This is what I require." And now I know that sin is not just bad because of what it does to me because of its effects on me or the people around me, what it does to devastate my life and my relationships; but far more significantly than that, it is what it does to God. That's why David in Psalm 51 says, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." So the law says, "You have rebelled against God, and God is the Judge, and God will hold you accountable, and God will punish sin." There is a judge. There is a judge.

If you're going to live the way we've been seeing people living in the news media the last week or so in Hollywood, if you're going to live that way, you'd better be an atheist, you'd better be an atheist, at least for the sake of your momentary ability to live such a life. But know this: God is there. And whether you believed in Him has nothing to do with the fact that He is Judge. But if you're going to get away with that for a lifetime, if that's how you want to live, conveniently you'd better be an atheist, at least for a while. But the law says, "There is God, and He has a will, and He has rules, and He has standards; and if you break them, you are under divine condemnation."

Now we know those things about the law, that's familiar to us. We know that the law defines sin, we know that the law excites sin, and we know that the law declares that we are in rebellion against God whom we continuously offend, who will hold us to account for those offenses, and punish us.

But there's something else here beyond that that I think is the main idea. Look at what Paul says in verse 19. "Why the law then? It was added because of transgressions." What does that mean? It was added, you might say, to bring about transgressions, or to manifest transgressions.

Now, did transgressions exist before the law, before Moses received the law on Mount Sinai? Did sin exist? Of course, all the way back to the fall. But people didn't have a full definition of sin. They didn't really understand fully the revelation of the holiness of God so that they would understand that they were in rebellion against Him in violating His law. But they would have some sense of that, because there was religion and there was even sacrifice offered to God before the law.

But there's one thing that the law did that hadn't been done, and here's what it is. The law proved when it was given that it could not save anybody. Let me tell you what I mean by that.

Take the law of God, give it to the best people with the highest potential; that would be the Jews, right, the people chosen by God who received the blessings of God, the promises of God, the prophets of God, the providences of God, those who were theoretically the worshipers of the one true God. They were monotheists in a world of polytheism. Give it to the best people, the people who were chosen by God, who had God in their history, whose identity was connected to God; give them

the law.

You might say, “Well, if God’s going to hold the whole world accountable for the law, why did He just give it to them?” It’s coming; listen. Give those people who had the most potential because they had the best circumstances, the best conditions, and the best connections to God; give them the law, and see if it can save them. And what did they do? They devastated the law of God.

Exodus 24, they all say, “We will obey, we will obey, we will obey,” and there’s this big ceremony where big, wide bowls full of blood were sloshed all over the people, splattered with blood as they were letting blood sort of be the indicator of their covenant with God: “We will obey, we will obey, we will obey.” And you know the story of Israel, right? Disobedience, disobedience, defection, apostasy, judgment, exile – so it goes.

The history of Israel proves this: the law can’t save. That’s the point. That’s why the law had to be written down. And in its absolute righteousness, the law is holy, just, and good. And you can give it to the people with the most potential, and they can’t be saved by it. Whether it’s the law laid out in its details – I’m talking the moral law, not the civil and ceremonial law – or whether it’s the law summed up in the Ten Commandments, they can’t even keep the first commandment, to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. They cannot keep the commandment to have no other gods, make no idols; they did all of that, and they wreaked havoc on the rest of the Ten Commandments.

The law was given to demonstrate to the whole world that nobody can be saved by the law. The people who had the best circumstances couldn’t do it; that’s not possible. So not only do you see the revelation of sin in its fullest definition, not only do you see the exacerbation of corruption by sin literally inciting itself, not only do you see the fact that we are declared to be rebels against God who are now under His judgment; but the history of the law from Moses to Jesus is a historical period of time in which over all of those hundreds of years there is proof positive that the law can’t save. In fact, with the law, the whole nation went apostate, and all that was left was a small remnant of those who believed, and by faith were saved. And the conclusion of Paul in Romans 3, “By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified.”

The law’s purpose then is inferior; it’s not to cure sin, it’s to curse the sinner. It’s not to cure sin, it’s to curse sinners. But it has one more purpose. Once you realize the definition of sin, once sin has been excited in your life by the very presence of the law, once you have come to the reality that you are literally a rebel against the Holy God of the universe – and you will not be held guiltless – once you understand that the law won’t save you, the final thing the law does comes into play, and it’s in verse 24: “Therefore the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.” The full work of the law drives you to the Redeemer, just pound your chest, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner,” to cry out for forgiveness as one unworthy to the God who justifies the ungodly, who know they’re ungodly.

Romans 4:15 says, “The law brings about wrath.” Satan would want you to prove yourself holy by the law. Did you hear that? Satan would want you to try to prove yourself holy by the law, which God gave to prove yourself unholy.

Martin Luther made a great statement. Listen to this: “The person who can distinguish between the



law and grace can thank God and know himself to be a true Christian.” Profound. If you can’t distinguish between the law and grace, you can’t know yourself to be a true Christian. All true Christians who know they’re true Christians make the distinction between the law and grace.

So, the law was temporary. Go back to verse 19. Go to the end of the verse: “until the seed” – who is Christ back in verse 16 – “until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.”

Again, the seed is the one who is promised, and the seed is the one to whom the promise is made; and it’s only when we’re in Him, in Christ, that all the blessings are ours. What a marvelous statement. The law was added because of the transgression until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. The law is temporary, it’s temporary; that’s why it all disappeared. It was temporary. Didn’t have a lasting purpose. It proved what it needed to prove, and it proved at the most dramatic level that it can’t save. It proved that.

Jesus comes, and now we read in Hebrews 8, “He has obtained a more excellent ministry by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.” If that covenant, Mosaic covenant had been faultless there would have been no occasion for the second. But it was faulty.

At the end of chapter 8 a new covenant. He has made the first obsolete. Whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. The write of Hebrews says, “In the first century” – watch – “all the elements of the old covenant are disappearing, they’re disappearing.” The veil in the temple was rent when Jesus was crucified; Holy of Holies was exposed.

Not long after that, the Romans came and destroyed the temple, and smashed it to the ground. All the records were lost. People don’t know, even to this day, what tribe they’re in anymore. The priesthood is gone. The sacrificial system is gone. The whole thing came down. Doesn’t mean God’s moral law has change, but the Mosaic framing of it was only for illustration’s sake to demonstrate that no people, even the chosen people of God, can be saved by that law.

If there are people who call themselves Christians and they think salvation is by faith and works, they don’t understand the difference between law and grace; and in the words of Luther, they cannot know themselves to be true Christians. The law was only until Christ. Doesn’t mean God’s moral standards have changed, because everything that’s true of god is reiterated in the New Testament.

And Jesus even made it deeper, didn’t He? It’s not just the outside in the Sermon on the Mount, it’s the inside. But the law was for a time, and it was to point us to Christ. It was to make a people desperate for the Savior.

Look at Israel. The law should have prepared them for Christ. They were living in such defiance of the law of God that they thought Christ was from hell. The law designed to point to a Savior. And for some it did, a small remnant: Joseph, Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, Anna, Simeon, the disciples – a hundred and twenty by the Day of Pentecost. The rest of the nation, they had taken the law and used it to convince themselves they were holy, which is the final demonstration that all the law will do is turn you into a damned hypocrite.

So the law is inferior because of its purpose. This is stunning truth, by the way, you can imagine for

the Jews to hear this – stunning, stunning truth. The law is inferior, secondly, because of its mediators.

Back to verse 19. “The law was ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator. The law was ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator.” God – that’s His law, His holy law – comes to angels, from angels to Moses, from Moses to the people. Moses comes down from the mountain, he’s got the law.

The mediators are inferior, they’re created beings. The angels are created beings; Moses is a created being. The promise came directly from God. The promise came, Genesis 12: “The Lord says to Abram,” and then the Lord talks to him again and again and again. And in chapter 18 of Genesis, the Lord comes to dinner at Abram’s house. He comes to dinner at Abram’s house, and He talks to him as to a friend, because this is promise. This is not a threat. This is the promise, the divine, eternal, gracious promise of salvation.

But when it comes to the law, God is hidden in the distance, God is hidden in the distance. And if you go back to Exodus 19, and you remember what it was like when the law came – we can start at verse 18: “Mount Sinai was in smoke because the Lord descended on it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the Lord spoke to Moses, ‘Go down, warn the people, that they do not break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. Let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, or else the Lord will break out against them.’” Verse 23: “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai. ‘Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it,’” so forth. This is a frightening scene.

In Deuteronomy chapter 33, a more familiar scene. Moses meets God, but it’s only Moses. But God’s not alone. Verse 1: “This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death.” So God gave it to Moses, mediated it through Moses, and then he gave it to the people.

But when God came to Moses, he said, “The Lord came from Sinai, and shone on them from Seir; He shown forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones;” – angels – “at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.” This is a picture of God coming down to give the law with thousands and thousands of angels, and flashing, terrifying lightning.

Moses wants to see God, and God says, “You can’t see Me and live, you would incinerate.” So He tucks him in a mountain and lets a little of His afterglow go by. But God is hidden in the giving of the law. Even Moses only sees God in these fearful terms.

Psalm 68:17, “The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness.” I don’t know what was going on in Sinai beyond that; but when God came down to give the law there were ten thousand, ten thousand times ten thousand holy angels surrounding Him as He came down in a terrifying display, a display that was so blazing in its brilliance that it stayed on the face of Moses, even though he only saw a tiny portion of the glory of God.

In the New Testament in the book of Acts chapter 7, Stephen is preaching. In verse 38, he says, talking about Moses, “Moses is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai;” – so not only were there thousands and thousands of angels, but there was an angel in particular who spoke for God to Moses – “and he received living oracles to pass on to you.” From God, to angels, to Moses, to the people.

Stephen says in that same chapter, “You who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it. You received it ordained by angels, yet you didn’t keep it.”

Hebrews 2:2, “If the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”

So it had mediators. It’s inferior because of its created mediators. Angels are created beings, Moses was only a man. But in the case of Abram, God came and spoke to him face to face as to a friend. God comes very personally even now in salvation, doesn’t He? God comes personally in salvation.

The promise is firsthand from God, the threat is thirdhand. The promise of salvation by faith is so precious to the heart of God that He came directly to Abram; and He comes directly to every person who believes. This is what makes Roman Catholicism so aberrational, mediators all over the place: priests, saints, Mary, all kinds of fake, false mediators everywhere.

This is more like Moses and the law than it is like God and the promise. God comes personally to everyone who believes. Moses was great; God was far greater. The Galileans must not let the Judaizers exalt Moses to the level of God.

Then he says in verse 20, this ought to be clear, “Now a mediator is not for one party only.” You don’t need a mediator if it’s just you, right? You know, that’s pretty obvious. A mediator is not for one; you don’t need a mediator. So God didn’t need a mediator to bring His promise to us, because it’s a covenant He made with Himself. It’s an unconditional, divine, eternal, gracious promise of salvation.

And that’s what verse 20 says, “whereas God is only one.” You only need a mediator if it’s a deal between two. And the law was God through the angels, to Moses, to the people. And you’d better keep this law. All these mediators telling you for God, you had better keep this law or you will die. That is inferior to the promise, because the promise is unconditional, unilateral, and eternal. The promise is far better than the law.

And finally, as to its accomplishment, as to its accomplishment. Not only its purpose in mediators, as to its accomplishments.

Verse 21: “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Is the law in conflict?” “Are you going to say the law is one way of salvation, the promise in faith is another way of salvation?” That’s what he’s saying. “Are these in conflict with each other? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life,” – eternal life, spiritual life – “then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.”

But the history of Israel and the history of the law proves that does not happen. The law was never able to impart spiritual life, eternal life. If it had been able, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the presence of the law over all those centuries proves the opposite. So as to the accomplishments the law can't bring life. Second Corinthians 3:6, "The law kills, the Spirit gives life. The law kills, the Spirit gives life."

Is the law in conflict? No, *m genoito*, strong negative. No, no, no. No law can give life. If so, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But what comes out of law is not righteousness, but unrighteousness. "O wretched man that I am!"

Verse 22 ends it: "The Scripture has shut up everyone under sin. The Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

What did the law do? Put us in prison, locked us up. Verse 23 says it put us in custody, took us prisoner; that's what the law did. Sin is the jailer, it chained us; and every sin that we commit tightens the chains, until at last they are completely crushed.

No, the law is not an alternate way of salvation in conflict with faith. The law took everybody prisoner. "Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the law," chapter 3, verse 10, in order that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Are you getting it? By faith to those who believe. Simple trust embraces all the promises of God when it embraces Christ. Not until the law and conscience and the work of the Holy Spirit has bruised and crushed us do we admit the need of the gospel to bind up our wounds, not until the law has arrested us and imprisoned us and put us in chains will we long for the Christ who will set us free, not until the law has sentenced us, condemned us, and executed us will we run to Christ to receive new life. When the law has done all of that it becomes our tutor that leads us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Father, we're grateful for Your Word again this morning. It's really just overwhelming, the power of its truth. It is so heavy, so weighty; and yet for us, we don't feel the weight, because Christ has borne our burdens, and the Scripture brings us joy and thanksgiving. Thank You for Your truth, gospel truth that saves us. Now use us to proclaim this, we pray in our Savior's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).