

The Promises Of God Are Yes And Amen In Christ, And Nothing Can Disannul Or Change Them.

Text: Gal 3:15-22

Suggested Hymns:

270, 822, 327, 330, 271

1) The Law Was Not Given To Make The Promise Of
No Effect

2) The Law Was Added Because Of Transgressions

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Galatians 3:15–22, 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.*

¹⁶ *Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.*

¹⁷ *And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

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

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

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The purpose of St. Paul in writing the epistle to the Galatian churches was to counteract the evil influence of false teachers who were perverting the Gospel of Christ.

Paul had proclaimed the Gospel that he had received by the revelation of Jesus Christ.¹ For example we read in Galatians 3:13, ¹³ *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).*

And Galatians 2:16, ¹⁶ *knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*

The false teachers troubled the Galatians by destroying the very essence of Christianity, insisting upon the necessity of circumcision, and submission, and obedience to the Law. As a result of this “different gospel”² the Galatians, who “had been running well,”³ were falling away from Christ, misled, and deprived of the liberty with which Christ had made them free. They were now entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

We read in Galatians 3:1, ¹ *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?*

And in Galatians 5:1, ¹ *Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

And also in Galatians 5:7–10, ⁷ *You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?* ⁸ *This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.* ⁹ *A little leaven leavens the whole lump.* ¹⁰ *I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.*

History repeats itself wherever the doctrine of justification by faith is preached. As then, so it is now. Paul is our illustrious example of a faithful pastor, able to exhort by sound doctrine and to stop the mouths of vain talkers and deceivers.

One of the deceptive, appealing arguments of false teachers is: “*If sinners were to be justified by faith only, God would not have given the Law through Moses.*”

In our days false teachers argue: *“Christ would not have preached the Sermon on the Mount if the way of salvation were only faith in Christ.”*

How are such objections and reasonings to be met and refuted that the truth of Christ may prevail to the glory of God and the enduring comfort of poor sinners? The answer is, *The Promises of God Are Yes and Amen in Christ, and Nothing can Disannul or Change Them.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Law Was Not Given To Make The Promise Of No Effect.

The promise of God to Abraham was this Gospel message as we read in Galatians 3:8-9, ⁸ *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.”* ⁹ *So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.*

And in our text we read, ¹⁶ *Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.*

The blessings of righteousness and the heavenly inheritance, justification, and glorification, were purchased and prepared by the redemption of Christ, who is our Righteousness and Hope. These blessings are promised, offered, and freely given to Abraham and to those who are blessed with him.

Who are they? Abraham believed God and received. He obtained the blessings, and with Abraham all those who are of faith are also blessed. They are the children of the faithful Abraham. Not by their own deeds, but by faith in Christ. This is the promise. It is the covenant of grace that God made with Abraham. Our text says that *God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

Therefore the tax-collector was blessed. God was merciful, and gracious to him. By the merited grace and favour of God he was justified. We read in Luke 18:14, ¹⁴ *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Likewise Paul as we read in Philippians 3:9, *not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.*

The hymnist wrote,⁴

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress,
Wherein before my God I'll stand
When I shall reach the heav'nly land.

This is beautifully expressed in Isaiah 61:10, ¹⁰ *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

And in John 3:16, ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Did God Himself disannul this promise and make it of no effect by giving the Law? In His holy Law of the commandments He says in Galatians 3:12, ¹² *Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."*

The false teachers would say to the Galatians, *"Paul's Gospel is not the final promise and covenant of God; the Law of Moses, the covenant of circumcision and of the other works of the Law, must be observed by you if you hope to inherit eternal life."*

To this Paul replies: "No; the Law cannot disannul or make of no effect the promise of God, because the Law was not given until four hundred and thirty years after the promise had been given to Abraham.

If it had been God's purpose that sinners obtain the blessings of righteousness and inheritance by works of the Law, He would not have waited four hundred and thirty years to reveal it.

Whatever God's purpose, it surely cannot have been this, that His promise be annulled. His promise is yes and amen, not only for a few hundred years, but for all time. God is the same yesterday and today and forever, like Jesus Himself, to whom the promise pointed to and who is the meritorious cause of all the promised blessings. He is our Righteousness, our Peace, our Hope, and our Life."

That the Law was not meant to annul the promise was also indicated by the manner in which it was given, namely, through a mediator, Moses, ²⁰ *Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.*

But the promise was given by God Himself, who is One, who did not make use of a mediator in dealing with Abraham. And, taking an illustration from a human transaction of every day occurrence, *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.*

Paul shows that, if a man's covenant is not meddled with or annulled by additions, conditions, or other changes, but left unaltered, once it has been agreed to and confirmed, then certainly God's covenant has not been annulled by the Law given four hundred thirty years later. It is unchangeable; it is yes and amen.

Here Paul invites us to think of how a will works, particularly in two aspects. First, a will by definition is a formal document in which the maker expresses his final wishes and desires. He states how he wants to distribute things of value to his heirs. A will is essentially a promise to give property or goods.

A second thing to note is the binding nature of a properly made will, or covenant. The maker of the will can change things as much as he wants, but if it has been duly established and the maker of the will dies, then others cannot arbitrarily change the stipulations of the will to suit their own fancies. These two features of a will, or covenant, have significance in the important doctrinal matter that Paul wishes to illustrate.

God's covenant with Abraham was a promise. The apostle points out that the heart and core of God's covenant with Abraham was the promise of a Saviour who would be one of his descendants.

We recall that after Abraham died, his descendants, namely Jacob and his family moved to Egypt and stayed there for roughly the next four centuries. Here they grew to be a great nation, as promised, but they also fell into bondage to the Egyptians until they were freed by God under Moses' leadership.

After they were delivered, they journeyed to Mount Sinai, where God gave them the Law. It was the ceremonies and rituals of this law that the Judaisers were urging the Galatians to keep, as an addition to the simple trust in the Gospel promise Paul had proclaimed.

Paul points out that the Judaisers were misapplying the Mosaic Law and acting like dishonest heirs who tamper with the conditions of a will, in their case God's original covenant with Abraham.

We have noted that a will is a person's formal promise to give property or goods to his heirs. It is a gift to them, not something they still need to earn or buy. Paul rightly asserts, "If the inheritance depends on the law [i.e. doing some required thing], then it no longer depends on a promise [i.e. receiving it freely as a gift]."

If the executor of a will told an heir, "You have been named as the recipient of your uncle's farm, but you will have to pay a thousand dollars an acre to get it or work ten years for it," the heir would cry foul, and rightly so.

Paul makes it clear that the same holds true in the spiritual realm. He says, "God in His grace gave it [the inheritance of salvation] to Abraham through a promise." Paul was right in preaching to the Galatians a message of salvation purely by grace, a free gift from God, because that is how God gave it to Abraham.

The Judaisers messed it up by suggesting that in addition to believing in Christ, certain ceremonies had to be kept and some rituals needed to be observed if one was to be sure of salvation.

It is a common mistake, one still made by Christian religious leaders who advocate faith in Christ, but then require works of penance, urge the performance of certain tasks, or look for monetary contributions at a prescribed level or for any other required "law-work." Relying on our performance nullifies God's grace. Law and Gospel do not mix.

God's promise of salvation is free and it is unchangeable; it is yes and amen.

2. The Law Was Added Because Of Transgressions.

But is not the Law against the promises? What was God's purpose in giving the Law if He did not intend to disannul the promise and expect us to keep the commandments and to obtain the blessings through our works? The answer: The Law was added because of transgressions.

God knows that all people are sinners, transgressors, who cannot be justified by their works. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We are dead in

trespasses and sins. We are all imprisoned under sin, and all the laws that might be given could not bring us to life and enable us to do, to fulfil, to keep perfectly, the demands of a holy Law that requires spotless righteousness in thought, word, and deed.

The Law promises blessings if and only if it is kept. Note well, not if you try to keep it, but if you actually and perfectly keep it. Who would expect the omniscient God to annul His promises of grace and righteousness and life and to cherish the vain hope that a person could save himself by the deeds of the Law? No one.

On the contrary, the Law was given for the very purpose of making manifest the sin-fulness, the iniquity, transgression, and sin, the very rebellion and enmity of man against God and His holy will.

The Law shows the utter hopelessness of mankind under sin, so long as the Law convicts and curses and condemns it says: *“You are cursed and lost because you have not kept, and cannot keep, the holy demands.”*

But the unconditional grace and promise of the Gospel of Christ, who redeemed us from the curse of the Law, says to the alarmed sinner: Fear not! Be of good cheer! Believe in the unchangeable promise, *‘The just shall live by faith.’*

Remember what you learnt in Confirmation. The Law shows us our sin. The Gospel shows us our Saviour. C. F. W. Walther wrote a book called, *“The proper distinction between Law and Gospel”* which has 25 theses. Thesis 4 states, *“The Law-Gospel distinction is the only means for a correct understanding of Scripture.”*

So in summary, believe in the Seed of Abraham, as Abraham believed in the promise of the Messiah, so you will be justified with faithful Abraham; and being justified, you have peace, comfort, joy and hope, and all the blessings now and forever.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁵

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Galatians 1:12

² Gal 1:6

³ Galatians 5:7

⁴ Hymn 327

⁵ Hymn 330