

## “Covenant Theology”

### Galatians 3:15-29

Galatians 3:15 “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. 23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 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. 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (New King James)

In Galatians 3:15-29, the Apostle Paul provides an overview of three covenants: The Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the new covenant or the Covenant of Christ.

Galatians 3:15: “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.”

In verse 14, the Apostle Paul just told us that Christ redeemed us, Christ became a curse for us, Christ was crucified for us, so “that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Here we see that the Lord is a Covenant-keeping Lord. In the Old Testament, the covenant name for God was Yahweh, or YHWH, or Jehovah, or LORD, which we might translate as “Covenant Lord.” The covenant relationship between God and His people is often summarized in this formula: “I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Gen. 17:8; Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10).

Humanly-speaking, once a covenant is confirmed, it cannot be changed. Interestingly, the Papacy has invented annulments to the covenant of marriage. But these words were written before the Papacy added these un-Biblical traditions.

Galatians 3:16: "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."

Whenever the Bible talks about "the promise" or "promises," it is usually referring to the Abrahamic covenant. Paul explains that the promises of the Abrahamic covenant were made to one Seed, who is Christ. So Christ is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

Did you know that the Abrahamic covenant is an everlasting covenant?

God said in Genesis 17:7: "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you" (cf. Gen. 17:13, 19; 1 Chron. 16:17; Ps. 105:10). Elsewhere, in the Old Testament we read of this "everlasting covenant."

Christ is referred to as the "Seed." The Gospel of Christ was first preached in Genesis 3:15, where God said, "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

Paul encouraged the Romans that: "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20).

So the new covenant or the Covenant of Christ is the continuation and fulfillment of the everlasting covenant that God made with Abraham.

However, approximately 430 years after Abraham, God established another covenant, often referred to as "the old covenant" with Moses, which is often referred to as "the law."

Galatians 3:17: "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."

The law given to Moses on two tablets of stone at Mount Sinai (or Horeb), as well as the civil and ceremonial laws of the old covenant cannot annul the covenant of grace, which God confirmed before "by God in Christ." Did you hear that? The Abrahamic covenant was confirmed "by God in Christ." Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is eternal; He existed in the time of Abraham. And the covenant of grace or "the promise" was in effect under "the law" or the Mosaic Covenant, and it is in effect today "in Christ" in the new covenant. The covenant made with Abraham was "confirmed before by God in Christ," because Christ is the Seed of Abraham. All those saved from the time of Abraham to Christ were saved by Christ alone. And so all believers in all ages are saved by faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.

The law was always subservient to the promise, which was freely given by God's grace alone.

Galatians 3:18: "For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise."

You cannot be justified by obedience to the works of the law. Neither was any Jew under the old covenant saved by keeping the works of the law. Romans 4:14 says, "For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect." Romans 4:16 concludes, "Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law [the Jews], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham [both Jew and Gentile], who is the father of us all." Romans 4:13 adds, "For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."

All believers, both Jew and Gentile, are the children of Abraham, the man of faith.

The promise is of faith, while the law has respect to works. John Calvin remarks, "Faith receives what is freely given, but to works a reward is paid."

The Westminster Confession of Faith explains the two dispensations of the covenant of grace (Abraham), which we call the old covenant (Moses) and the new covenant (Christ).

WCF 7.5 This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel;(1) under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come,(2) which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah,(3) by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.(4) (1)2 Cor. 3:6,7,8,9. (2)Heb. 8,9 & 10; Rom. 4:11; Col. 2:11,12; 1 Cor. 5:7. (3)1 Cor. 10:1,2,3,4; Heb. 11:13; John 8:56. (4)Gal. 3:7,8,9,14.

WCF 7.6 Under the gospel, when Christ the substance(1) was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper,(2) which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fulness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy,(3) to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles;(4) and is called the New Testament.(5) There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.(6) (1)Col. 2:17. (2)Matt. 28:19,20; 1 Cor. 11:23,24,25. (3)Heb. 12:22-27; Jer. 31:33,34. (4)Matt. 28:19; Eph. 2:15-19. (5)Luke 22:20. (6)Gal. 3:14,16; Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:21,22,23,30; Ps. 32:1; Rom. 4:3,6,16,17,23,24; Heb. 13:8.

Galatians 3:19: “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.

The Ten Commandments are a summary of God’s eternal moral law; they are binding on all people in every generation. However, the law of Moses includes circumcision, the Passover, dietary laws, ceremonial laws, ceremonial worship, and civil laws that were only binding on the Jews prior to the coming of Christ.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-18: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

The law was given to show men and women their transgressions. In Romans 3:20, Paul tells us “by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.” The purpose of the law was “that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful” (Rom. 7:13). Paul adds, “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20).

English Puritan Matthew Henry commented, “. . . though the law, considered as the law of nature, is always in force, and still continues to be of use to convince men of sin and to restrain them from it, yet we are now no longer under the bondage and terror of the legal covenant. The law then was not intended to discover another way of justification, different from that revealed by the promise, but only to lead men to see their need of the promise, by showing them the sinfulness of sin, and to point them to Christ, through whom alone they could be pardoned and justified” (p. 2298).

Note that Paul adds that the law was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. In Acts 7:53, the martyr Stephen told the Jews that they had “received the law by the direction of angels” but had “not kept it.” The mediator may refer to Moses and/or Christ.

Galatians 3:20: “Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only*, but God is one.”

Paul appears to again be speaking in human terms about the mediator of a covenant. Just as God previously made a covenant with the Jews, so now He has made a covenant that includes the Gentiles. In Deuteronomy 6:4, often known as the Shema Yisrael prayer, Moses wrote, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!” God is one; thus Jews and Christians are monotheists. We don’t worship many gods. There is only one, true God! At the same time, He is three in person—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So the Apostle Paul tell us in Ephesians 4:4-5: “*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

Galatians 3:21: “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.”

There is no contradiction between the law and the Gospel. The law given to Moses cannot annul the covenant of grace, the covenant made with Abraham, which “was confirmed” 430 years earlier “by God in Christ.”

Speaking hypothetically, Paul says that if a law had been given which could have given life, righteousness would have been by the law. But that is impossible because of man’s fallen nature. Jesus said, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). James warned in James 2:10: “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.”

Galatians 3:22: “But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

Ever since Adam’s fall in the Garden of Eden, every human being who has ever lived has been born “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). We are not just sick; God says we are born spiritually “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). God says, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). “*There is* none who does good, No, not one” (Ps. 14:3).

Remember that earlier in this chapter Paul warned, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written [in Deuteronomy 27:26], “Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” (Gal. 3:10). Since no man or woman is sinless, we are all doomed to hell, unless we trust in the only Savior and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our only hope is to trust in the Seed of Abraham, Jesus the Messiah. We must place our only hope for salvation in “the promise by faith in Jesus Christ.” Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

Galatians 3:23-25: “But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

Faith is nothing new to the New Testament. In Hebrews, chapter 11, we read of the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the harlot Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets, and others.

However, faith had not yet been so clearly manifested as under the gospel. So Paul is speaking in relative terms, not absolute terms. Under the old covenant, faith was more obscure. If the old covenant believers lived under the light of the moon; we live under

the light of the noon-day sun by comparison. They had types and shadows in the legal observance; we have the substance, the fulfillment, the antitype, who is Christ.

John Calvin comments, "Whatever might be the amount of darkness under the law, the fathers were not ignorant of the road in which they ought to walk. Though the dawn is not equal to the splendor of noon, yet, as it is sufficient to direct a journey, travelers do not wait until the sun is fully risen. Their portion of light resembled the dawn, which was enough to preserve them from all error, and guide them to everlasting blessedness. . . .

In the imposing services of the Mosaic ritual, every thing that was presented to the eye bore an impress of Christ. The law, in short, was nothing else than an immense variety of exercises, in which the worshippers were led by the hand to Christ."

So we need the law to show the sinfulness of our sin, to make us sorrowful for our sins, and to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith, just like the old covenant believers were. By showing us God's righteousness, the law convinces us of our own unrighteousness and unworthiness. As we look at the Ten Commandments, it is like standing before a mirror and seeing how far distant we are from true righteousness. It is impossible for us to earn God's favor or save ourselves. We must trust in the merits of the only sinless Man who ever lived, the only Savior who was perfectly holy and fully God, the only Savior who could take away our sin and guilt and nail it to the Cross.

When we place our trust in Christ alone for salvation, our sins are reckoned to Christ's account, and His perfect righteousness is reckoned to our account. Theologians call this "double imputation." If we belong to Christ, we are clothed with a "robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10).

And yet the law is still of importance to us as Christians today, for "all Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Galatians 3:26-27: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

As Christians, we have all received an eternal inheritance. We are members of the household of God. God is our Father, and we are His children. We are "all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

In heaven, there will be no denominations or divisions among believers. There is only one family of God, one Church, one body of Christ.

When we are born again we are "baptized" in the Holy Spirit. We are in union with Christ. Romans 6:5 says, "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection."

Water baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, as we put on Christ when we are born again. We put on His perfect righteousness, which is imputed to us by faith alone. We have been cleansed, purified, washed, and set apart as holy unto the Lord.

Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Paul is not saying that any of these distinctions are untrue. Of course, God created us differently. What he is saying is that spiritually, in Christ, the differences of sex, race, ethnicity, and social status are meaningless. God does not favor any group above another. In Christ, we are all one. Black and white, Hispanic and Asian, rich and poor, male and female, we are all one in Christ. The Gospel is freely offered to everyone, without exception. God so loved "the world" that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Christ has "redeemed us to God by [His] blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

Galatians 3:29: "And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

What makes someone a child of Abraham? Jewish ethnicity? Circumcision? Obedience to the law of Moses? Keeping the Passover?

As a Christian, how do you answer this question? If you are a Christian, you must not only consult the Old Testament book of Genesis. You must listen to what God revealed in the New Testament. And here in the New Testament book of Galatians, God explicitly and clearly defines who a child of Abraham is... according to God!

Abraham's seed is those who belong to Christ. If you are in Christ, whether you are Jew or Greek, black or white, Hispanic or Asian, whatever... If you are in Christ, then you are a child of Abraham. You are the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). You are "heirs according to the promise" made to Abraham in Genesis, chapter 17.

In Genesis 15:5-6, God brought Abram outside and said, "'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.'" And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." In other words, Abram was justified by faith alone.

The everlasting covenant of grace was revealed to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-9:

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. "And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in

their generations, **for an everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and your descendants after you. "Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations" (emphasis added).

And so today, everyone who belongs to Christ is a child of Abraham and a true Jew, a member of God's covenant people, the Israel of God, the Church of Jesus Christ.