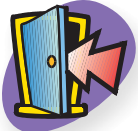


Galatians



“Why the Law?”

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

St. Paul began chapter 3 with a question for his Galatian friends: How did you get the Holy Spirit? There was only one answer to that question—when they heard the gospel, with its promise of forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ Jesus, they believed that it was true. They put their faith in God to bring it to fulfillment. They were baptized, and they received the Holy Spirit. St. Paul began with their own experience of a changed relationship with God coming through *faith* to convince them to forget about circumcision. He showed how even Abraham, the Father of the Jews, pleased God by his faith, at a time when circumcision didn’t even exist for the Jews. He introduced them to some Old Testament Scriptures to strengthen his case. Those who are righteous before God have always had to rely on God’s promise of blessing and not on their ability to perfectly keep the law. The law does offer blessing, but it also brings down a curse on those who don’t keep it in its entirety. An honest, humble Jew would have to live in some fear of this curse.

Now St. Paul will continue his argument, but not without first bridging the gap between the promise God made to Abraham to bless his offspring and the curse that all who are under the law must admit is their due (3:13-14). He will address head-on the difference between the covenants God made with Abraham and Moses, showing the priority of one over the other (3:15-18). That is bound to provoke a question. What was the purpose of the covenant God made with Moses (3:19-24)? He will demonstrate that what the Judaizers have offered the Galatians through circumcision is theirs anyway through faith (3:25-end).

Be sure to re-read Gal. 3:1-12 before you read the second half of the chapter. Then read through this passage all at once, answering the questions that follow.



GALATIANS 3:13-29

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree —” 14 that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

15 To give a human example, brethren: no one annuls even a man’s will, or adds to it, once it has been ratified. 16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many; but, referring to one, “And to your offspring,” which is Christ. 17 This is what I mean: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. 18 For if the inheritance is by the law, it is no longer by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary. 20 Now an intermediary implies more than one; but God is one. 21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. 22 But the scripture





GALATIANS 3:13-29 (cont.)

consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. 24 So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 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 offspring, heirs according to promise.



Questions on the Text

CHRIST REDEEMS THE CURSED READ GAL. 3:13-14

1. **At the end of the last lesson, we could see that a tension had developed between God's promise of blessing to Abraham and the problem presented by the Law of Moses. In these verses, Paul refers to the redemptive work of Christ. Why is this such a logical place for him to mention it?**
2. **Read Deut. 21:22-23, which Paul quotes in vs. 13. The apostles regularly referred to the crucifixion as Christ being "hung on a tree" (see Acts 5:30; 10:39). Why is this quote from the Old Testament especially powerful to further Paul's line of argument?**
3. **Paul again refers to the blessing of Abraham in vs. 14. How does he describe the "blessing" that the Gentiles will receive?**
4. **You can see that throughout the first half of chapter 3, Paul has shifted attention away from the Law of Moses to the promises God made to Abraham. Why?**

In this next part of chapter 3, Paul aims to demonstrate that what we are beginning to suspect is actually true—the covenant God made with Abraham is superior to the covenant He made with Moses.

THE LAW AND THE PROMISE READ GAL. 3:15-18

[Note: Before you can answer questions on this passage, you need to know some textual information about the choice of words in this translation (other translations may differ). First, in vs. 15, the text should read "covenant," not "will." It is clear from the context that "will" is a poor reading, because Paul is writing about a document or agreement that cannot be changed once it's ratified. That would only be true of a covenant; a will can be changed again and again. Second, in vs. 16, Paul is quoting Gen. 12:7, in which God makes a promise to Abraham and his descendants. The word in Hebrew is like the English word "offspring." It can be either singular or plural. You might like to see a comment from *The Navarre Bible* on this verse: "In Gen. 12:7 this offspring has a plural, collective sense. In fact there is no contradiction, given that Christ is the Head of the Church and forms one single body with it (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12; Col. 1:18). That is why St. Irenaeus says that the Church is the offspring of Abraham (cf. *Against heresies*, 32,2) and St. Augustine adds that by presenting Christ as the offspring of Abraham, all Christians are being included in him" (*The Navarre Bible: St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans and Galatians*, p. 189)].





Questions on the Text (cont.)

5. ***Paul has been working hard to show the difference between the covenant God made with Abraham, which was given in a promise, and the covenant God made with Moses, which required performance. One brings a curse and one brings a blessing. One takes precedence over the other. Which one, and why, according to these verses?***
6. ***The promise God made to Abraham was to him and his offspring (see note above). That implies that Abraham will bequeath this “blessing” to his sons and that they will pass it along as an inheritance (which is exactly what the descendants of Abraham did). Why does Paul suggest that it is not possible for this inheritance (the blessing Abraham bequeathed to his offspring) to come to the Jews through the Law of Moses?***
7. ***Paul has kept us focused on the promise of God to Abraham as the source of blessing (being pleasing to Him) for both Jew and Gentile. On the basis of this promise of God to him, Pope John Paul II has compared Abraham to the Virgin Mary. How are they similar?***

A natural question arises: If God always intended to do something wonderful for us based on a promise (grace), why the law? This is a very important question in Paul’s argument. If one has followed carefully what he has been saying, this becomes a pivotal issue. Why did God make that covenant with Moses? If that law cannot justify us, what does it do?

WHY THE LAW?

READ GAL. 3:19-24

8. ***Paul says the law was given “because of transgressions.” What do you think that means?***
9. ***In the last part of vs. 19, Paul returns to the comparison between the Mosaic covenant and the one made with Abraham. He says the covenant with Moses was “ordained by angels through an intermediary.” According to Jewish tradition, the Law was promulgated on Mount Sinai through angels (see Acts 7:53). Who is the intermediary? What does Paul say is implicit in the presence of an intermediary when a covenant is being made, in vs. 20?***
10. ***Now Paul returns to the question about the value of the law. The best way to understand the beginning of vs. 21 is like this: “Is the law in rivalry with the promises of God? Is the law a competing system for making us pleasing to God?” How does Paul answer that?***
11. ***What purposes did the law serve (see vss. 23, 24)?***
12. ***God allowed Israel to live for hundreds of years under the yoke of the Law (the Law was given to Moses in about 1400 B.C.) Does that make you ask any questions?***

The Mosaic law had a function and a goal—it prepared Israel for and pointed towards the Messiah, the One who would end their bondage to sin and set them free, making them heirs of Abraham’s promise. Paul now turns his attention to the law’s fulfillment.





Questions on the Text (cont.)

SONS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH
READ GAL. 3:25-END

13. *Why does the law no longer serve as a custodian?*
 14. *What initiated the Galatians into the life of Christ (vs. 27)?*
 15. *In vs. 28, is Paul saying that there are no differences between the various pairs he has listed? What is the point he is making?*
 16. *For the Galatians who have faith, who does Paul say has become their father? What is their great heritage?*
 17. *If God said, about Jesus, "This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased," and if, by your faith and baptism, you "have put on Christ," then what great gift do you hold in your arms?*
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Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text in the lesson. Or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these:

1. *If you have a crucifix in your home or in your church, quietly sit before it and read very slowly Gal. 3:13-14. What is the Lord saying to you? What do you want to say to Him?*
2. *Life with God always begins with receiving a promise of blessing from Him. Each new day can begin that way (this is particularly true in the Mass, which begins and ends with a blessing). This week, start every day by remembering God's promises of blessing to you. Review them consciously. Then plan the rest of your day. Does it make a difference?*
3. *Israel had to learn humility and obedience through the centuries of its history. What is happening in your life now that is teaching those to you?*





Opportunities for Additional Study

For the student who wishes to reflect more deeply on the passage in the lesson, consider these:

Points to Ponder

Our study of Galatians has given us many opportunities to reflect on the bounteous promise that God made to Abraham, a promise of blessing that would reach through all time and space. In order to fully understand the promise, it is helpful to return to the Garden of Eden for some reflection. In the first chapters of Genesis, we have a wonderful picture of the blessedness of all creation. God made it all good. He made it all for Himself to enjoy. The human beings, male and female, were the crown of His creation, being made in His own image and ruling over the earth the way He ruled over the cosmos. Everything and everyone pleased Him.

In the account of the Fall of man (**Gen. 3**), we can recognize two problems, if we pay attention to the details. First, even in the bliss of the Garden before he had done anything wrong, man had an enemy who hated him and wanted him dead. The serpent appears as God's enemy and man's as well. He succeeds in tempting the humans to disobey God. Then the second problem kicks in. Adam and Eve undergo death. Their bodies remain alive and active, but their relationship with God dies. This has immediate and obvious consequences. Whereas once they enjoyed blessed communion with Him as He spoke to them freely about what He wanted them to do and what He would provide for them (**Gen. 2:26-31**), after their disobedience, the sound of His voice strikes terror in them, making them want to hide from Him (**Gen. 3:8-10**). Whereas once the sight of Eve made Adam exclaim with joyful recognition that she was the one he'd been looking for all his life (**Gen. 2:23**), after the Fall he blames her for his own disobedience (**Gen. 3:12**).

In the space of just a few chapters, the harmony and joy of the Garden collapses into chaos. Will things ever be put right? If so, how and when?

Before we get out of chapter 3, man's most vexing problem has a promised resolution. God Himself addresses man's enemy, the serpent, and pronounces an ironic curse on him. Why ironic? Because God tells the serpent that although the humans looked contemptible to him, it will be through a human woman and her offspring that a battle will rage (**Gen. 3:15**). Through them, he will be dealt a head blow.

So Problem #1 gets Promise #1—anyone reading the first few chapters of Genesis without knowing the rest of the story would know to be on the lookout for an unusual woman and son (no father mentioned) who would be outside of the influence of the serpent, God's enemy. The offspring, in particular, would be one to watch for, since he's obviously going to be human (born of a woman) but will have power to defeat the serpent, a feat that one would imagine only divinity could accomplish.

If God promises to eventually knock out man's enemy, taking care of Problem #1, what about Problem #2? Man's relationship with God has died. A radical, systemic change has taken place inside of him. He looks the same on the outside, but in fact he is afraid of the One Who created him and is at odds with the one who was created to help him. And that's not even mentioning the fact that he is in league with God's enemy. Is there any hope given in Genesis that man's *condition* can be changed? Although there is no direct promise to that effect—yet—there is hope. Notice that God punishes Adam and Eve by cursing the circumstances of their lives. Is this hopeful?? Yes, because a punishment is always given in the hope of rehabilitation. Why do parents punish their children when they disobey? Is it because they despise them and never want to see them again? No, it is because the parents want their children to choose good behavior and not bad. If they choose the bad instead of the good, parents punish them in the hope that *next time* they will choose the good on their own. The punishment really stems from the parents' love for their children, not hatred.

Not only does God punish Adam and Eve, which is a hopeful sign that He loves them and has not given up on them, but He also expels them from the Garden so that they won't eat of the Tree of Life and live in their chaotic and disordered state forever (**Gen. 3:21-24**). This leads us to ask a question. If God sends them out because their condition is bad, does He have in mind to someday let them back in when their condition is good?

Interesting question, isn't it? If you keep it in mind as you read through the next few chapters of Genesis, what will your reaction be when you hit **Gen. 12:1** and read about the incredible promise God makes to Abram? You'd have to say, "There it is! That's Promise #2 for Problem #2!" And you'd be right. In this promise of "blessing," God lays out His plan to change man's condition from one of spiritual death to one that is *pleasing* to Him. It is not explicitly stated that way in the promise, but as soon as God says He will bless, bless, bless, we





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

understand what that means. So now man is in possession of two promises of God to rectify the tragedy of the Garden. Someday God will defeat man's enemy and change man's condition. Perhaps then he will be able to return to the Garden, where he is "blessed," well-pleasing to God, and where he can freely eat of the Tree of Life.

Sound familiar?

Catechism Connection

Excerpted from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Gal. 3:14 – “Besides the proper name of ‘Holy Spirit,’ which is most frequently used in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, we also find in St. Paul the titles: the Spirit of promise, the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, and the Spirit of God—and, in St. Peter, the Spirit of glory.” (693)

“Against all human hope, God promises descendants to Abraham, as the fruit of faith and of the power of the Holy Spirit. In Abraham’s progeny all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This progeny will be Christ himself, in whom the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will ‘gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.’ God commits himself by his own solemn oath to giving his beloved Son and ‘the promised Holy Spirit...[who is] the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.” (706)

Gal. 3:24 – “Going even further, Jesus perfects the dietary law, so important in Jewish daily life, by revealing its pedagogical meaning through a divine interpretation: ‘Whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him...(Thus he declared all foods clean.). What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts.’ In presenting with divine authority the definitive interpretation of the Law, Jesus found himself confronted by certain teachers of the Law who did not accept his interpretation of the Law, guaranteed though it was by the divine signs that accompanied it. This was the case especially with the sabbath laws, for he recalls often with rabbinical arguments, that the sabbath rest is not violated by serving God and neighbor, which his own healings did.”(582)

“This divine pedagogy appears especially in the gift of the Law. God gave the letter of the Law as a ‘pedagogue’ to lead his people towards Christ. But the Law’s powerlessness to save man deprived of the divine ‘likeness,’ along with the growing awareness of sin that it imparts, enkindles a desire for the Holy Spirit. The lamentations of the Psalms bear witness to this.” (708)

“According to Christian tradition, the Law is holy, spiritual, and good, yet still imperfect. Like a tutor it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give the strength, the grace of the Spirit, to fulfill it. Because of sin, which it cannot remove, it remains a law of bondage. According to St. Paul, its special function is to denounce and disclose sin, which constitutes a ‘law of concupiscence’ in the human heart. However, the Law remains the first stage on the way to the kingdom. It prepares and disposes the chosen people and each Christian for conversion and faith in the Savior God. It provides a teaching which endures for ever, like the Word of God.” (1963)

Gal. 3:27-28 – “The body’s unity does not do away with the diversity of its members: ‘In the building up of Christ’s Body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church.’ The unity of the Mystical Body produces and stimulates charity among the faithful: ‘From this it follows that if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with him, and if one member is honored, all the members together rejoice.’ Finally, the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions: ‘For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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.’” (791)

“According to the Apostle Paul, the believer enters through Baptism into communion with Christ’s death, is buried with him, and rises with him: ‘Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.’ (Rom. 6:3-4) The baptized have ‘put on Christ.’ Through the Holy Spirit, Baptism is a bath that purifies, justifies, and sanctifies.” (1227)



Summary

Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

1. The fullness of God's promise of blessing to Abraham and his descendants, as well as everyone on earth, can only be realized when the curse of the Law has been faced and removed. This is what Christ did for us in His own body when He was "hung on a tree" to die in our place.
2. The promise that God made to bless Abraham is superior to the covenant He made with Moses because (a) it came first and cannot be revoked by anything that comes later (b) it is a promise of blessing out of the wealth of God's kindness, not based on performance or keeping a contract (c) it was not mediated by anyone.
3. God gave the law to Moses to restrain and reveal sin. It codified the kind of behavior that men know in their consciences is right, good, and true, whether they've ever heard of Moses or not. The law was good, but it could not give life. It was not able to change the sinful nature of man, which prevents him from perfectly obeying it. The law prepared Israel for the coming of the Messiah, who would break their bondage, not to foreign domination (as some thought) but to the power of sin.
4. The law looked forward to the coming of Christ. When He appeared, the law's function ended. Jesus made possible the complete fulfillment of God's promise of blessing to Abraham, not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles as well. All are now sons of Abraham and sons of God by *faith*.

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God Bless,

Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

