

“Covenant, Promise, Faith – and Law Properly Viewed”

Christian Liberty

Galatians 3:15-29

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Background:

- Issue of Judaizers and grounds for justification
- An unhelpful & polarizing dichotomy: legalism vs. antinomianism
- Keeping Law in perspective: neither dismissing it (Mt.5:17 - 19) nor attempting to practice it for the purpose of earning one's justification (Rom 7:9 - 10)

Text:

- An analogy & general premise: *legal agreements* (such as a ‘last will & testament’ or a covenant) are routinely respected by people and human laws (v.15)
- Specific application of analogy: God made a promise to Abraham and to his seed – and if singular, this means to Jesus (v.16) —→ this is an *agreement* too (though called here a “promise”)
- Mosaic Law also a respected agreement/covenant made nearly half-mil later; so – what does one make of two covenants simultaneously in effect? (vv.17-18)
- Explanation: Law “added” because of sin (v.19) – yet it cannot grant life (—→ v.21b)
- Likely meaning (v.20): involvement of a mediator implies two parties are involved, hence God authors Law but mankind is the subject of its fulfillment
- Divine Law plays essential role, but because it cannot impart life (v.21) it was used to “imprison” people in their sin (v.22) till arrival of the fullness of faith (v.23)
- Put another way (with another analogy): Law like tutor that points and trains in the direction of a subject (v.24) until full disclosure of that subject (Christ)
- Bringing it all together: now that the subject has arrived, no tutoring needed (v.25); and furthermore, everyone in Christ is a child of God (v.26) – through faith
- Every son & daughter of God via faith is baptized into and clothed by Christ (v.27)
- No ethnic, legal or gender distinctions *of the above status* for believers (v.28); remember, there *are* differences in people but not with respect to union with Christ
- By implication: true offspring of Abraham are people of faith & promise (v.29) (in parallel treatment at Rom 3:27 - 4:25; see also Rom 9:6 - 8)

For Us Today:

- We need Law (it expresses God's character) but can never be justified by it
- God commends respect for human promises, even in routine aspects of life (e.g. property, resources, activities, agreements & relationships)
- At a time when our country is diminishing its view of the value of life, can you see some implications of Galatians 3:28?