

"Covenant, Promise, Faith and Law Properly Viewed"

Christian Liberty

Galatians 3:15-29

Dr. Jonathan Watt

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Jonathan: Before you're too impressed, because I don't want you to be on this,--

Transcriber's Note: Dr. Watt shows a picture of himself outside of Windsor Castle. He and 8 other scholars translated a new Bible, Modern English Version (MEV) and were about to present it to the Queen of England on the 400th Anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible.

Jonathan: We're actually at Windsor Castle for the presentation.

Transcriber's Note: A presentation of a Bible to the Queen of England.

Jonathan: And you've got to remember. (I shouldn't say "remember," because you don't know this.) I actually lived in England when I was young. My mother's side was all British. My dad and I and the ancestors, etc., were Australian. But I lived in England at two different points growing up.

So my mother, who was actually within a couple of years of the age of the Queen, of course thinks very highly of the royal family. And I thought, "Well, this is great. I'm going to get to meet her and go to Windsor Castle." And it was reasonable for me to expect that she would be there for the presentation. And from where we were standing, she was one building over.

We were in this beautiful, beautiful building. We would all call it a cathedral. Remember, the *cathedra* is literally the seat of a bishop. So most of us think of a cathedral in terms of its architecture. And you could have called it that. She was in the next building over the Stone Tower, or something like that.

And I'm thinking, "you know, a hundred yards." And I could have gone back to Mom and said, "Mom, guess who I met!" (*Laughter.*) I was still looking. I was mildly resentful. (*Laughter.*)

The weekend that I was there I'm staying at an inn just a couple hundred yards just outside the wall of Windsor Castle, which has been the home for roughly seven hundred years for British royalty. And I'm in this inn, and I'm looking at the beautiful beams and construction. This gentleman does architecture. I've done anti-architecture. I've done demolition. (*Laughter.*) I've done a lot of tearing down. What you guys construct I destroy. But I've seen a lot of old beams.

By the way, the oldest beams I've ever seen are probably second century Roman beams—gorgeous, but laid out to rot at the Golden Dome, when they did some repair on the Al Auxa mosque, and they just—Anyway, that's another story. That's going to get me even more bitter.

So back to Windsor Castle! So if you wonder what really goes on in the minds of people, I'm about to admit to you that it's not so good. (*Laughter.*) So anyway, I'm at Windsor. We spent a couple days in the city and out of the town, and it's a beautiful, beautiful place. And I was enjoying it.

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And I'm staying there and I'm looking at these beams. And I was thinking, "This is a pretty old place!" And I said to them, "You know something? I'm just kind of curious. How old is this?"

They said, "It's about seven hundred years old. It was actually originally a stable that was then converted to an inn."

I thought, "My goodness! Seven hundred!" It was one of the oldest operating places I've ever been in. And they serve breakfast. I get there and you sort of serve yourself. And I'm looking around where I can sit down. There are a lot of modern chairs. But I look over, and I really like oak Puritan furniture. I don't own any, but I can drool over it at museums. *(Laughter.)* I mean, there's this bench! There's this carved English oak bench. It's around four hundred years old, give or take a few. I'm looking and thinking, "I could have breakfast sitting on that bench, you know?"

And I'm sitting down. And I'm thinking, "I could spill my breakfast cereal on this, and there would be nothing anyone could do about it." *(Laughter.)* "And it's my right, you know?" I didn't, actually. But the thought crossed my mind. That's the only respect in which I'm like God. I'm no respecter of persons. *(Laughter.)*

Anyway, hey, we're on Galatians 3, starting at verse 15 this morning. And may I ask just a curiosity question, nothing more than that? What translation do you typically use? How many of you like the NIV? I know that's immensely popular? Could you raise your hands? That's actually a good thing. About two-thirds of you. What about the NASB? There is a bunch of hard core NASB guys. And that's still my study Bible. And I like that because it's a slightly more literal translation from the Greek.

That's not necessarily a good thing, by the way. Because we all think that it's just like the Greek. Not so. No language can be just like another language. It doesn't work that way. There are degrees of similarity and degrees of difference. But I like it because it's relatively more close. But the down side is that it does tend to be a bit wooden.

Are there any ESV people? I brought the ESV with me this morning. So you guys will feel right at home. I like much of it.

You can't like everything. You can't even necessarily like doing something the way you might do it one time of your life. Then later on you may adjust and change it differently.

By the way, one of my disappointments with the MEV is when I had a hand in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts and Thessalonians. And in the Gospels I wanted to make everything Lake Galilee. I don't want to break anyone's heart, but there is no Sea of Galilee. There never has been. There never will be.

Participant: Oh!

Jonathan: Yeah! See, you're going to throw out your Bible now, aren't you? *(Laughter.)* A sea is salt water; a lake is fresh water. And it's got water coming in from the Jordan to the north. *(Unclear.)* You have fresh water coming in from an outlet going south down to the main part of the Jordan River, which by the way is a very squiggly river. It travels sixty miles. But in fact it's between ninety and a hundred twenty miles traveled. It's such a serpentine little thing. And then it gets down to the Dead Sea. And of course, the Dead Sea is really dead—salt and all that kind of stuff.

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But anyway, I wanted to switch everything to Lake Galilee, because I thought, "You know, come on! This is the 21st century. It's time for some honesty." And I'm afraid I'm pretty sure that it's still "Sea," (*laughter*), because, to the people who translate it, the word could mean either. And they thought it was a big thing. So, by the way, the little villages are called "towns." And towns are called "cities." And hills are called "mountains." And the little dribble we know as the Jordan is really more like an oversized stream. It really is. That becomes the River Jordan. It's like super sizing your meal at Burger King. (*Laughter.*) You pay a bit extra and everything gets larger.

So if I've broken your hearts this morning, you had it coming to you. (*Laughter.*) Let me just say that right now. By the way, thank you very much. No strings attached, and thank you.

So we're going to start with Galatians 3:15. If you are one of those hard core NASB people, you may have looked at this already. And by the way, if you did, I can almost guarantee that at some point you said, "Huh?" (*Laughter.*) And by the way there is one verse in there, no matter the translation, we understand the words and everything. But how does it fit the flow? We'll talk about it when we get to it.

The ESV actually does a really nice job in my opinion. I'm actually going to read out of the ESV this morning because it helps the flow. Any translation of anything from any language to any language is always, to a small degree, an interpretation. I'm not a post-modern relativist. Don't take it that far. That's not what I'm saying. But I'm saying that words operate a little bit differently in different languages.

By the way, let me just give you one very good example. English is a Germanic language. It's descended from German, as the German people in 449 A.D. moved over to England and decided to stay there. And so we're actually a Germanic language.

So take the word *gift* in English. You all know what a gift is. Does anyone know what *gift* in German means. It means *poison*.

Participant: No!

Jonathan: I'm dead serious. I'm a hundred per cent serious on that. And the old English word for *knight*, like a knight in shining armor, is what it means in English today. But in German today it means *boy*. So words change. Meanings and usage and functions change. The structures of the language as well as the meanings shift. I'm not saying it's radical. I'm not saying that you can't understand people. I'm just saying that you always have to be a little bit interpretative.

There's a wonderful little Italian statement. "*Tradatore, tradatore,*" which means "Translation is like a trader." Unfortunately, it gives away some of what was probably in the minds of the original people. And you have to just sort of work with them and live with that.

And the same goes for English. When someone says to you, "I hate such and such a translation!! They didn't know what they were doing!", it's probably not true. They probably knew what they were doing. They were working on a set of presuppositions, maybe thinking about a certain audience. And that would be true for anybody who is doing this kind of stuff.

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So I think the ESV is helpful here. And it will still give us some challenges. Before I read, I'm intentionally saying this. Remember that we've said that the Bible, and particularly in writings like the Epistles, has what we call *occasional documents*. They are dealing with specific people in certain places at particular times, dealing with special needs. And they are not only working out of what the needs of those places are, like the people in southern Galatia, which is where we think this goes. But also, then, what is it that's in Paul's mind as an inspired apostle, saying, "I need to convey certain things that are true, and they're real." And so he has got his set of ideas, the things that have to be conveyed. And at the same time, he's thinking, "And what's the situation out there that I need to address?", which we said overlaps with us because we're human beings; we're believers. But we're not the same people. So it's to them; it's not to us. So what we do is we understand what it is to them. Then we can come and say, "Okay. Now what do we want to do with this for us?"

I've given you all that in part to summarize where we've been the last couple weeks, but in part to say I've very true of what we're about to read here. In one sense, you're going to say, "Haven't we already been here?" And you're right; we have. But what is he also bringing in that's renewed? Okay, so it's a little bit of both, right?

So Galatians 3:15. If you look back for a moment, he has talked about righteousness by faith, the work of the Spirit, where law does and doesn't serve? What does it do. We said that we're not going to dump it. What does it do? But also, what doesn't it do? Now he's going to elaborate.

"To give a human example, brothers, even with a manmade covenant." Now if you want to put "agreement" in there, or "testimony," as if the word would cover a covenant agreement. The NATO Treaty is a covenant agreement. Marriage is a covenant agreement. Your last will and testament in the Bible sense would be covered by this as well.

"Even with a manmade covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified." You know, that's a general statement of truth.

"Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his Offspring. It does not say 'to offsprings', referring to many, but referring to One."

This is a little tricky because it sort of is to many, but it's also to one. Anyway, Paul is working with something. And we'll see what he is going to work with.

"And to your Offspring', who is Christ. This is what I mean. The law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward." Now by the way, we could spend a whole block of time talking about the day. I'm going to completely ignore that this morning. It takes a bit of a step. I know it's a question mark. Why 430? Isn't it a bit different? I'm just going to intentionally leave it and we'll talk about it some other time.

"So the law, which came four hundred thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise. But God gave it"—this covenant—"to Abraham by a promise."

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"Well, why then the law?" That's a reasonable question. *"It was added because of transgressions until the Offspring should come to whom the promise has been made. And it was put in place through angels by an intermediary."*

By the way, this is another interesting study for another time. It ties in with Hebrews by the way. The same theme shows up in Hebrews.

"Now an intermediary implies more than one." With an intermediary, you have to have two parties. *"But God is one."*

"So is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not!" Or possibly it could be "God forbid!" *"For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin."* I'm happy with another translation. *"Locked up everything," "contained everything under sin so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."*

"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." That idea of being clothed with Christ comes up in Colossians and other passages as well.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female. You are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to promise."

Father, thank You for giving us this, because it gives us heaven's way of seeing us. We probably have degrees of being able to see it ourselves and accepting it ourselves and really growing with it. We like to take more of that in—to be a child of God, to really be a part of this eternal, cosmic family. I can't imagine anything else that would rank on an even level with that. And no wonder You say that there are no distinctions in there. It's just very special, and we'd like to grow in that this morning. Help us to do that. I'd like to pray. Maybe there might be gentlemen here for who this simply may not be on their radar. They think of their own immediate circumstances and families, which are natural places to start, but may have never been able to see what it would be like to be brought into such a family. And those of us who have experienced that would like to pray for those who possibly haven't. And if there are any men like that this morning, would You please speak to them meaningfully. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jonathan: So we've done our background stuff. I want to remind you of just one other thing from the background piece that's on your outline. You'll remember that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount back in Matthew chapter five that *"I did not come to abolish the Law."* And we have been noting that there are extremes. The one extreme that is in Paul's day that we're going to be touching on in a couple points is with people who are called the Judaizers. We've talked about them. You've talked about them before I came around. They were people who were saying that if you are coming to Christ, even from another background, you sort of have to become Jewish before you become Christian. We said that we don't want that extreme.

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We noted last week that for those of us living in the 21st century, which is all of us, we're actually facing the opposite. You never hear that. I shouldn't say *never*. That's not true. You rarely hear that. What you hear is the other extreme, which is, hey, I'm no longer under law. Therefore I can do what I want and you can't judge me. That's the standard line. And we said that we don't want that extreme either. That's the one we're taken with. If Paul were writing to people today, he would be writing a number of different things—the same truth set, but a different set of emphases.

But we're having to step into the first. So what's his line of thinking? Let's sort of meander down through these verses. Let's spend a few moments with each of them and just get to see the line of thinking. We're going to see some familiar things. There will be some new pieces sewn in along the way.

And he starts off with what we'll call a general premise okay?—a general statement that when a legal agreement goes into effect,—this is a general statement. It's stipulations and contents. They tinker with it. Both parties agree that they want to adjust it. No problem. But the general statement is that one party or outside source does not have the right, normally speaking, to come along and just say, "Hey, we're going to cut a few pieces out over here and add a few stipulations over here." It just doesn't generally work.

By the way, what do you get when that does in fact happen? Yes, you have a lawsuit, you know? (*Laughter.*) Somebody somewhere is not going to be happy because they went in on this.

By the way, it's interesting. I don't know, I guess I was sort of reflecting fresh on this. It is interesting how the Bible shows incredible respect for what are often sort of human initiated promises. For example, Psalm 15 asks the question. Who is going to live on God's holy hill? And one of the things it says—I'm paraphrasing a little bit, but the issue is there!—someone who keeps his promises, someone who says to somebody else, "I'm going to do this. I'm going to be involved in this way," and that sort of thing. And then he works to follow through on that. It has a very high regard for the promises that people make.

So the first thing is that legal agreements like a last will and testament, a covenant arrangement, are generally very highly respected by God. And actually, human beings will generally work on the same kind of premise. It's kind of easy to see. You can fill in the blanks on things that you have been promised and you've followed through on.

By the way, I've only been involved in lawsuits as a plaintiff a couple times. In the first I was actually in college and I was part of a class action suit in upstate New York. I had just become a citizen of the United States. I was getting a chance in 1976. Was 1976 the actual election where Carter was elected? Was that '76? I think it was '76.

Participant: Yes.

Jonathan: And I was eager to become an active participant in America in that regard. There were dozens of us who were students up in Syracuse. And the Election Commission prevented us from registering to vote. And a lawyer picked up on this. He said, "No charge. I'll represent all of you. We'll do a class action suit."

And we all voted. If I could go back, I would have voted for the other guy. (*Laughter.*) But you know, it's a little late to change that now. (*Laughter.*) But the point is, look.

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We've got legal precedence. The Election Commission is violating the laws it's supposed to operate under. The commissioner didn't really have anything to stand on except that he didn't like the idea of so many students coming. We had a medium-sized city, and a huge percentage of those were students. He didn't like that, because he knew they were going to tend to vote in a certain pattern block, and he didn't like that. So he figured that. I assume he figured that. Anyway, the point was that you've got to respect the law. Okay, no surprise.

So let's go a little bit further. And I'm going to be going back and forth between the NASB and the ESV. If you're thinking that makes me mentally disturbed, it probably does. *(Laughter.)* There's nothing I can do about it.

All right. So now a specific application is what you get in verse 16 and a little bit beyond that. So promises were made to Abraham. In other words, God has a covenant arrangement, all right? And in a covenant arrangement, as we all know, people are obligated to each other in various ways. So therefore God is obligated to Abraham. We all know that Abraham is obligated to try and do what God wants him to do.

But this is interesting. Paul is actually emphasizing the other side—God's obligation to us. Most of us would hesitate to say to God, "You owe me." That's not a good attitude to have. *(Laughter.)* But in one sense it's appropriate to say, "Wait! You know, God has promised certain things." So that's why you look for the way certain things will work out, because you say, "I think this is consistent with what He promised."

All right. So what did He promise? He made a promise. Now there's an interesting little piece of tricky exegesis here. It's not "to your seeds," but "to your Seed." And what Paul is getting at here is that in one sense Abraham's promise is to anyone who is either in Abraham's line, or by faith like Abraham, as he says later. But Paul is going to get a little subset in there, namely a particular Seed.

The first time we ran into a particular seed in the Bible was where in the Bible? Where is the first mention—

Participant: Genesis.

Jonathan: Genesis.

Participant: Genesis 3:15.

Jonathan: Got it. Okay. It's what we call the *protoevangel*, okay—the first mention of the good news. And it says there that the Seed of the woman will do battle with evil. He will be injured, but will inflict a more lethal injury on His opponent. That's the first time we get a hint of that. We all know that. I've often wondered how much Adam and Eve understand that. It's a fair question. I don't know the answer. They couldn't know even close to what we know. I just don't know how much they did know.

The same with Abraham. How much does he realize in that there is something special through a promised son? He actually gets some of it; there's no question about it, because he has been through a lot. If someone promises you something, (and let's take Abraham's point of view.) "God promised me a son. Oh, you know what I could do?" This is the age old presumption. It's always the woman's fault. *(Laughter.)* Right? So therefore he could be doing what a lot of people in ancient Near Eastern societies were doing.

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By the way, marriage covenants in Near Eastern societies sometimes said this. "If she fails to produce a male heir for him, she shall present one of her handmaidens to him so he can have kids through the handmaiden." And then those kids legally become those of the woman of the house—plus the man. That's actually written in some ancient marriage covenants, which is kind of scary. But I'm just saying that's it's interesting how we've kind of come the long way around.

Okay. So back to this. Abraham is thinking in a way that fits his culture. We all think like our culture. That's good and bad. And he's thinking, "Okay. God has promised me a kid. Ah, I know how to make it happen. I've got Hagar." So he's thinking at least within the framework of his culture. It's something that's not seen the same way as we see it. That doesn't make it good. It just means that it's not seen the same way, except that that's not the way God is planning to do it. That's my point. That's probably Paul's point as well.

Abraham knows that God makes promises. So Abraham is sometimes trying to sort of do his part to make the promise come true. (*Laughter.*) Right? And we may not do it that particular way. We have other ways of doing it.

By the way, I speak to those of you who are men. Excuse me, who are fathers. You're all men! (*Laughter.*) There are a lot of us who want to do this with our kids. You know that. We say, "I think I know how my kids should turn out. And so I'm going to force, control, cajole." You know, each person's personality plays itself out in different ways. But we're going to produce "the right kid." Unfortunately, some of the Christian literature fuels that, whether they intend to or not. Do this, and you'll produce good kids. And that's not consistent with it. We have responsibilities for our kids. But that's not the same as trying to engineer the results of the promise. And some of us have to learn that the hard way, which is okay.

All right. So the agreements are made specifically with a view to the Seed, Jesus. Let's come down a little bit further.

So he goes on in verses 17 and 18 to elaborate. "*So what I am saying is this.*" The law, which came at this later period of time does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified. Let me just take what he's getting at and put it in other terms. God has this covenant with Abraham in round figures. Let me just do round figures, okay? In round figures, it's somewhere just after 2000 B.C. So here is God's promise to Abraham. You can see it in Genesis 12, 15 and 17. You'll be blessed. You'll be a blessing to others. You'll get land. You'll have this child. These are all sewn in there.

Now you go half a millennium later with round figures and you've got the covenant with Moses with this massive law component. It's the same group of people, the descendants of Abraham. It's not like there's one ethnic group here and another one halfway around the world. In fact, it's the same land they're going to be brought from this time. As you look at the map, Abraham is brought from way over to the East down this way. In Exodus, they're already down here. They've overshot their destination. Now they've got to come back a few hundred miles. We've all done that when we didn't stop to ask for directions. (*Laughter.*)

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So wait a minute. What do you do now with two covenants—the covenant with Abraham and the covenant with Moses? This is a reasonable question, especially when you're following the analogy that everyone can say, that when you have a covenant with someone, you don't re-engineer it.

By the way, just to highlight this, imagine saying to your wife, or your wife saying to you, "Hey, you know, we've been married thirty years. I've had just a few thoughts. I think we need to adjust a couple things, okay? And I want you to sign on the dotted line with me." And then he starts to say, "We'll change this and we'll change this. This promise here, that's going to be ditched. But there's a new promise you're going to have to agree to." All of us would say, "No, I don't think so." Normally, you just don't do that.

Okay. So we're on the same page. So the question is what do you do with two covenants? That's a fair question. They seem to be simultaneously in effect. Look at his point in verse 18. If inheritance is based on law, then it's not based on promise. In other words, if you go Mosaic, you can't be Abrahamic. And if you're going Abrahamic, then what's the role of the Mosaic? We've got to make sense of this. It's a reasonable, logical question to ask.

Let me add a comment. I'm just going to do this in a couple places. I like to go to Herman Ritterbos. He's helpful; he's clarifying. This is his wording. He's paraphrasing Paul's stuff. "If the fulfillment of the law must add something to the achievement of salvation, then the promise" (as promised, that is), "as an unconditional grant of God's salvation is no longer the source and supporting reason of the promised good."

It would be like saying to your kids, (none of us would do this)—but it would be like saying to your kids, "Hey, you know, when you graduate from high school, I'm going to help you go to college." And then, when the kid has just started college, you suddenly say, "By the way, I'm going to add in a few extra stipulations. I want the lawn cut at least every other week. I want my car washed. I want my house painted." You start all of this. And then you add all these extras in. That's law, you see. You're saying, "Oh yes, I promised you this. But now I'm going to add this." And you say, "There's something out of place there."

All right. We're involved in a divine covenant. Let's go on a little bit further. So that's verse 18. Verse 19, which we've been looking at—I'm sorry, that was 18. Here's 19. *"Why the law, then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the Seed"*—that's the allusion back to Jesus—*"until the Seed should come to whom the promise had been made."*

All right. Again, just one more piece from Ritterbos. It's very short. This is great. Why law? Answer: (my words.) Because we need to know how to live sanely. If there's no law, if there's no God-ordained law, everything is relative—everything.

We like a little bit of flexibility. A degree of cultural difference is healthy and normal. No problem; I'm not against that. It's a statement of fact; there it is. But if everything is relative, we've got massive problems, okay? We need law.

But here's Ritterbos. "The law is most certainly of God. But the power to keep it was not given along with it." That's a beautiful statement. Let me say it one more time. "The law is most certainly of God. But the power to keep it was not given along with it."

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As we said the other day, we need it. And the other is, we can't live with it. It's a can't live with it, can't live without it kind of thing. So there we go.

So where is he going to go? We've got two covenants. We need them; we die with them. So what is he going to make of it all? Now we're down to verse twenty. *"A mediator is not for one party only, whereas God is only one."*

Ritterbos was quite funny. Based on the number that had been in the previous verse, four hundred and thirty years, Ritterbos gives a standard joke in the circles he was running in. He's got a Dutch name, so he's going to hear jokes I never hear because I don't understand Dutch. Nobody does, right? *(Laughter.)* All my in-laws are Dutch.

Anyway, he said that there are four hundred thirty interpretations of this verse. *(Laughter.)* And it's not so much understanding what it says. We can all say, "You don't have a mediator. You don't have a mediator with yourself." By the way, if you do, you need some counseling. *(Laughter.)* No I don't! Yes, I do! *(Laughter.)*

So we know that a mediator applies to two parties. We're clear on the general statement. That's nice. But why he tucks it in here, that's the bigger question. And when Ritterbos proposes an idea—and I'm not positive that he's right. But it's saying that you've got two parties involved. God authors the law, but mankind is the subject of its fulfillment. Maybe he's just saying, "Look, this is the way it is. Remember, we're all in this together."

Let's move on to verse 21. *"So is the law contrary to the promises of God?"* This, by the way, is a fair question. And even though he's going to say, "No, it's not," it is a fair question, because you wonder about how these things work together. And given the situation he's writing about, there is that significant contingent which is saying, "Hey, I'll tell you how these things are working together. God makes His promises. You need faith like Abraham. And you've got to do these things that the law says so that the faith, blending with your obedience, generates a synthesized salvation." Okay?

Let me say it one more time. The people he was addressing were saying, "Yes, I believe in faith like Abraham. But we've got to add to it our best efforts."

And how do you know what your best efforts should be? Ask God what they are. You do the Law. And together these things blend like a synthetic blend of oil. It's all the different pieces coming together. And that will be what gives us salvation.

And Paul, as you well know, is saying, "Oh, no, no, no! Not at all!"

Then the question is this. Well then, what is law for? What does it give us?

Well, verse 22. Think of Scripture generically. Think of it in Paul's sense of the laws of God, okay? *"The Scripture has shut up all men under sin."* In other words, law says to people, "Reckon with what you are. And register that you don't match up to God. You cannot match up to God." As we've said, you need law to guide you in that. But you will not do it the way you want to do it, much less the way God wants it done.

Okay. Leading on to verse 23. *"So before faith came."* Now remember, the Old Testament is a piece of faith. There's a super simplification based on this verse which says that the Old Testament is all about law. The New Testament is all about faith. And you can see that if you go that way, you've got a pretty schizophrenic approach to the Bible. And that's got a whole set of problems and we just don't want to go there.

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But before faith came, in all of its aspects, faith focused on Jesus specifically. And various things which go with that have simply been held under what Paul calls elsewhere "the mystery." Mystery shows up in a number of his letters. The mysteries are the things of God kept hidden for a time, at least relatively concealed until the fullness of time when these things come out.

So we're kept in custody. It's an interesting metaphor, isn't it? For some, he just said, "People, you need it." And then he says, "By the way, you're in custody. You're imprisoned by it." Well, imprisoned in a good way. It shuts you up to faith which is later to be opened up and revealed in all of its glory.

Verse 24. The law is a tutor. We all know what a tutor is, right? The tutor doesn't generate new material. The tutor takes the material that's there and points to the subject. Or in this case the tutor, being the law as he's using the metaphor, points us to the mind of God, all right? So it's pointing us there. And every time you go to the mind of God, you realize—and I mean this seriously—many of us realize this. Oh, I'm not the God of my life that I thought I was.

Not a lot of people will say it so bluntly. By the way, when I lived in New England, I lived just down the road from Harvard University. The Harvard Divinity School has been the home of some pretty extreme ideas in various forms. And one of the bumper stickers I always used to see on a very regular basis around that area would say things like this. "Release your inner god" or "release your inner goddess." You know, that's a very particular kind of an encouragement to people. And this says—sorry to break your heart!—but, you know, okay.

So let's come down to the end. Verse 25. "*But now that faith has come,*"—qualified, at least to begin with—"*now that faith has come, we are no longer under the tutor.*" In what way are we no longer under the law? We are no longer under its curse. But remember, Jesus also says, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law.*" So there's a balance in there.

Okay, we're no longer under that. We're no longer under the tutor, "*because you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*" And there's this whole new experience.

By the way, the ethics are the same, like in the Old Testament. "*Thou shalt not steal*" doesn't get dumped. Hey, you're a Christian! Go ahead and have at it! Take all your neighbor's goods! (*Laughter.*) We all know it isn't that way and common sense says that. But we're not under the curse of the law, and there's probably more to be said. But that's a minimum.

Okay. "*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*" Every son and daughter of God by faith is baptized. And the metaphor in verse 27 is "*clothed with Christ.*" It comes up in Colossians. It comes up elsewhere.

It's a very interesting picture—being clothed with Jesus. That's one of the ways in which we're no longer under law.

Participant: A question for you, Jonathan. When you say that Christ didn't come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, and right before you said that, you talked about the curse. So in a sense is the fulfillment of the Law a curse—that in order to fulfill the Law, you have to be cursed?

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Jonathan: No. It's a very fair question. Let me go back to the way He says it in Matthew five. *"I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."* Because other parts of the Bible talk about Jesus fulfilling the promises of the Old Testament, there is a sense in which Jesus, coming to be and to do what He did, fulfills the promise. However, the terminology of the day, as the rabbis were teaching, the phrase "to fulfill the law" actually means to show someone how to live it out well.

Participant: Okay. Right.

Jonathan: So that other aspect is probably more of what He is getting at in Matthew five.

Participant: But from our perspective, we would never live it out completely. So we would be under the Law, which might be under a curse. Is that—

Jonathan: Yes.

Participant: Okay.

Jonathan: That's not what he's getting at in Matthew five, but that is absolutely true and consistent. We haven't studied, we don't have time to study Romans four. But in Romans four and this passage, that's exactly it.

And then just briefly, and we'll pull this together here promptly. There's a really nice oft quoted piece that should be oft quoted. Of course, sometimes it's off quoted. *(Laughter.)* And I want us to be careful how we do that. It's verse 28, because if we're all baptized into Christ and we're all clothed with Christ, *"there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave or freeman, neither male nor female. You are all one in Christ Jesus,"* and Abraham's offspring.

What this says is that, with regard to your standing in Christ, and your experience in Christ—something by the way that Joel 2 predicted—everybody has the potential, regardless of where they've come from or who they are—male/female, high or low status in society, slave or free, Jew/Gentile, it doesn't matter—everybody can experience the presence and the filling of God equally.

You could take this in a way that says, "Well, everything that you do I can do, because, after all, we're one in Christ." **Transcriber's Note:** Jonathan points to Tom Hansz in the audience.

Jonathan: By the way, I'm going to start doing your job because I like being in architecture. And Galatians 3:28 says that there's no difference between us. He's just kind of looking like "and you're nuts!" *(Laughter.)* And he's correct! *(Laughter.)* You can take that passage in ways that are probably not intended. By the way, there are lots of differences—task differences, calling differences, skill and gift differences, personality differences. And I say this cautiously, but I have said it a couple of times this morning. Not to every degree, but to many degrees cultural differences are neither here nor there. There are many things about culture which are flexible. As Paul says, he has this flexibility. "I am all things to all men. I can move between cultures to adjust things the way they do it to a large degree." Not to a total degree, because there are certain things cultures do where you say, "I actually have no right doing it."

For example, if you were to transport back to ancient Near Eastern society four thousand years ago, that would not then give you the right to construct a marriage

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contract such as what I was quoting a little bit earlier. But a lot of things in your life would change. There are cultural differences, and there is a degree that is quite acceptable.

Anyway, we have differences, but not with regard to our standing in Christ. *"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."*

By the way, the negative or flip side of this is in Romans four and Romans nine. Romans nine is a passage on that tough topic of predestination. And one of the things that Paul just tucks in there. He says, "Look." *"Not all Israel is Israel."* Now what he means is that you can be part of an ethnic lineage and not be what that blessing was about, which is supposed to be about promise and faith, among other things. Yes?

Participant: It works the other way around, too. Not all of the true Israel are Jews.

Jonathan: Exactly. Correct. Okay? So that's where we go. So a couple things and then we'll bring it together here. So we've said, and we are still with it, that we need law for the reasons we've all studied. It expresses God's character. I really like Ritterbos. Let me just read that little saying from Ritterbos. "The law is most certainly from God. But the power to keep it was not given along with it." That's very helpful.

And it is interesting how God respects human promises and encourages us to do the same thing. I know there are extreme cases where there is some qualifying consideration. I get that. But you know, with property, resources, agreements and relationships, there are so many things where when someone has made a promise and entered into it, and all the parties have entered into it, then they should be respected.

And then number three. This summer has been a summer to break our hearts, hasn't it? Of course, I didn't know when I had this about what was going to happen yesterday in France. They said that this truck, by the way, careened for a mile, killing people along a mile, before it was finally—

Participant: My goodness!

Jonathan: I don't know if it crashed on its own or if the guy was shot and killed. But whichever it was, I mean this has just been a phenomenal year of lawlessness. And even though ISIS is the primary party we think about in that, there are other lawless people of all kinds out there, violent people. And they're out there around the world, and they're in America. And many of them consider themselves Americans. It's been just heartbreaking.

So I guess I'll leave you with a question. I won't really have time to say it out loud. But at this time in our country, in all its lostness, one thing you can say about all of it is that, as our country increases what it understands freedom to be,—I'm all in favor of freedom; I hope you are, too!—but how I understand what freedom means probably differs from others. How you understand it may differ. I like the way Alexander Solzhenitsyn put it at Harvard's graduation forty years ago. "It's the leeway to do the right thing." That's freedom. We said that last week.

At a time when America is expanding and encouraging its sort of licentious view of freedom, it seems in some kind of corresponding relationship that perhaps it's diminishing in its valuation of human life. Frankly, if I'm going to push my right to act the way I want, it is probably going to impinge, it quite possibly will impinge negatively on you. So as I raise myself up in that spirit, of necessity that will have to bring you down

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a few notches. So I can flex and you can absorb. And it seems to me that that's what's going on in a society that has benefited from this. This is why my family came here. I mean, we saw the opportunities of America. It's a great place to be.

Implications of Galatians 3:28: All One in Christ. I can imagine a lot of good places to go with that. It just won't be this morning that we're talking about it. If there are maybe one or two comments or questions, we'll take those. Please?

Participant: Doesn't Paul also say that the purpose of the law is to be a schoolmaster?

Jonathan: Absolutely—a tutor.

Participant: To show us our need for a Savior. And I don't think that's only for nonbelievers. That's for believers too.

Jonathan: Everybody, absolutely. Otherwise if we become believers, we think, "Now I've sort of advanced beyond that stage." And we are advancing in some ways. On the other hand, we are still human beings affected by sin that we are. And that's Romans seven. Romans and Galatians have a lot in common, don't they? Yes?

Participant: Speaking of the attributes of God and His justice, the aim of the law is to shine a brighter light on the justice of God. And the New Testament sheds light upon the love of God.

Jonathan: I think I heard you. Could you speak louder?

Participant: Oh, okay. Do you feel that the two attributes of God—His justice and His love—that the law shines a brighter light on God's justice, whereas the gospel tends to show us a brighter light on God's love?

Jonathan: I like the way you put that, because what you're not saying is that one is all of justice and one is all of love. But you're saying that there's a relative degree of prominence. I like the way that was put—to shine a brighter light. I like that metaphor. It seems to make sense.

Participant: I'm trying to make sense of this bridge that Paul is building, I think, between the law and faith. Is he saying that what Christ did was to enable us to keep the spirit of the law and focus on that, rather than the letter of the law that the Jews were trying to adhere to and couldn't?

Jonathan: Many Jews were trying to do that. I would actually go a step further. Yes to what you said. But remember, there's also this thing in the New Testament about the imputation of Christ's righteousness. On some legal level that God sees, we have it. I mean we can truly say, which is what you're emphasizing, that we are acquiring the spirit of what Christ's righteousness is. But Paul says we are, that we have the righteousness of Christ. So at some legal level we have what you just said. And we have more.

Participant: So Christ enables us to keep the law.

Jonathan: Yes.

Participant: Not just to attempt to keep the spirit of it.

Jonathan: Can I give you my analogy to this, because I like metaphors to the degree that it helps. Metaphors have limited usage. So use them to the degree that it helps, but don't push them too far. But my analogy would be the governor's pardon.

Let's assume that a criminal is legitimately convicted of a genuine crime he really committed. He's legally sentenced and he is serving time. And the governor, for whatever

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reason, says, "Okay. You've got the pardon. We consider time having been satisfied so well that it's really almost as if you've never done it. And so you're free and clear to walk out. And no one can come back to you legally and say, 'Hey, you really need to be back in the big house.'"

So now, at that point, we all know very well that some people will use their newfound freedom to start to be able to do good things they didn't do before. I know a lot of people like that. Chuck Colson is one of the greatest modern historical examples of that. And we also know that recidivism is very high. So someone who has been granted a pardon (as justification arises; it fits the analogy anyway)—may still in fact use that leverage to go and do bad things once again.

But at least from a state's point of view, they've been granted legal righteousness. And then it's still up to them to make good on the spirit as well as the letter of it. And thus we've been granted.

Well, thank you. I like you. It has been fun working with you guys. I've got to tell you. This Friday morning at 6:30 business—I do have some questions about you guys. *(Laughter.)* That's okay. I'll suspend judgment because the Bible tells me not to be judgmental. *(Laughter.)* You're fun to work with. I'd stay up all night if I had half a chance. It's the getting up part that's hard. *(Laughter.)*

It's a pleasure to work with you guys. Blessings on you and good things for the future. I'm glad you have a guy like Bruce Bickel to work with. That's great, too. Blessings.

Participant: Amen. *(Applause.)*