

## “Law vs Promise” Part 1

### Christian Liberty

Galatians 3:15-22

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**Mark:** I didn’t realize you could have so much fun at 6:30 in the morning. *(Laughter.)* And I know this is a nondenominational group. But I know who all the back row Baptists are. *(Laughter.)* I can recognize the Baptists, unless all denominations have their version of that, right? Is that how it works? *(Laughter.)*

It’s good to be with you, men. Let’s kind of just dive in.

I was given the second half of Galatians chapter three to look at. And I know that when you have different teachers teaching through one book you get all kinds of stuff I’m sure—all kinds of good stuff, and sometimes systematic, and you have someone dipping in here and dipping in there, different approaches and things. So I’ll pray, and then we’ll just kind of walk through the outline, okay? Let’s do that.

Let’s pray together. Father, this is indeed Your word, and we need to hear from You what man’s words don’t do. And reveal the Word of life Himself, Jesus Christ, to us. We know that this isn’t just dead words on a page, but that by Your Spirit You communicate life. You reveal the Word of life Himself. And so we ask for that this morning in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Mark:** So in the second half of Galatians three, we’re just going to do, and what we’ll consider together, is the paragraph from verse 15-22. If you’ve seen the outline, let’s start at about forty thousand feet. *(Laughter.)* And then kind of bury down, all right? If you’ve heard it before, just remember that repetition aids learning. If every new speaker has been saying the same thing, that’s only good, okay? So let’s start at forty thousand feet, at the background part.

Think about it in concentric circles. The big circle is the big idea behind the book, then the chapter idea level, and then the small inner circle, like a bulls-eye, the paragraph idea that we’ll be considering. So let’s start at the forty thousand foot level.

The book of Galatians has a big question lurking behind it. It’s actually a two-part question that drove Paul to write. And that is this. Who are the people of God? And how do you become one? What defines the people of God?

That’s why you hear all this family talk about Abraham as you read through it. Abraham comes up over and over and over, and it’s about family. It’s about national boundaries. Who’s in? Who’s in the family of God?

So it’s a *who* question. And if you rearrange the letters a little bit, it’s the *how* question. How do you become a part of the family of God?

And there is a group of people—the generic name is Judaizers—saying that you become the people of God, yes, by faith in the resurrected Christ. But you’ve also got to be Jewish, become Jewish—circumcision, dietary laws, all those Jewish things. So they’re saying that they have bad math. They have a bad equation: faith plus works of the law equals salvation.

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And Paul is not having it, right? You see chapter 1 verses 6-9, this other gospel. He’s furious! And he’s angry! And he suggests all types of mutilation for this person who teaches another gospel to undergo. (*Laughter.*) Because their bad math is actually something to be condemned, right, because the right math is: Jesus plus nothing equals everything. That’s the salvation logic.

So that’s kind of the big picture. Those are some of the big ideas hovering. Who are the people of God and how do you get in, if you’re not a part? And the gospel is the message that tells us how a person gets in. Are we justified by works of the law—you know, our performance, our duty, our Jewish identity? Or are we justified by faith in the faithful work of Jesus Christ? Does that engraft us into the family? That’s the big issue behind it at the book level.

At the chapter level, Paul does all kinds of things in chapters one and two. In chapter three, he really starts pressing the case for why inclusion in the family, or justification before God, or becoming righteous, or whatever language you want to use to frame it, how that is superior to law, to works. He starts pressing the case by comparing those two—why it’s faith, why it’s promise, and not works, and not law that brings a person into the people of God.

And here’s how he does it. You know, he’s a good debater. He makes good arguments. In chapter three, in those first few verses 1-5, (and I know you talked about verses 1 and 2 last week—bewitching), he argues from the personal experience of the Galatian believers. He says, “Who bewitched you? Didn’t your eyes see Jesus?” Verse 2: “It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. And let me ask you only this. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer?”

He’s making an appeal to their own experience to argue that it’s not works of the law. It’s not those things that made you a part of the people of God. It’s not those things that brought salvation. It was faith in Jesus Christ. And he’s appealing to their experience.

Now I don’t know if you’re the feeler type, or the cognitive type, or whatever. But experience is an intricate and basic part of our humanity, right?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Mark:** God uses it. The Spirit works in our experience. We’re not just brains on a stick. God does things in our actual life and our experience. And Paul is appealing to that in the first five verses.

And in verses 6-12 he’s making a historical argument. He’s appealing back to Abraham. That’s like us. If we want to make arguments about what America should be, who do we appeal to? We appeal to the Founding Fathers. We appeal to the Federalist Papers and our founding documents and things like that. That’s what you do. You look back to who wrote the documents to define who you are, who your nation is.

And Paul is constantly appealing to history and particularly to Abraham. What happened to Abraham? What did God do to Abraham? Did he become the father of Israel? Was he justified by anything that he did? Or was it his believing? And Paul is emphatic to say that Abraham believed. He didn’t work. The work wasn’t what brought him in. But it was faith.

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Did you go back and read Genesis 12:1-3 at all? Have you sat in a little bit of the soil of the Abrahamic promise, exactly what God said to Abraham? Maybe we should look at that really quickly. Go to Genesis chapter twelve. It’s just good to know when Paul is referring to the promise, when he’s referring to Abraham, this is what he has in mind. Many times, if not most of the time, when he refers to Abraham, he has this promise that God made to Abraham.

I’ll read chapter 12, verses 1-3. *“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”*

**Participant:** Amen.

**Mark:** So this is the first statement of the promise. It reoccurs in chapter 15 and then in chapter 17 again, I believe. This is what Paul has in mind, what God said to Abraham here. And notice that it is indeed a promise. There are no conditions in what God says here. He says, “This is what I will do. Abraham, you may be a screw-up—in fact, you are. You can’t be faithful to me. But here’s what I’m definitely going to do. I will bless you and you will become a blessing to the world, to the families of the world.”

**Participant:** Amen.

**Mark:** “This is what I am going to unconditionally make happen.”

So that brings us to *promise*. I’m sorry, I’m jumping ahead there. Before we get to our passage, the final argument was the Christological argument, an appeal to what Christ did, not what we do. What did Christ do in verses 13 and 14 of chapter three? He satisfied the demands of the law. He became a curse for us, right? The law can only curse you. It can’t give you life. We’re going to see that in a second. It can just make you angry. It can show you what God expects. It can define what is good. But it can’t give you the power to carry it out. But Christ satisfied the demands of the law so that we don’t have to.

So Paul makes a personal experiential argument in the first paragraph of chapter three, a historical argument appealing to Abraham, and then he appeals directly to what Christ did, a Christological argument in verses 13 and 14. And then we come to this paragraph here, the Biblical argument for the passage we’ll be considering, 15-22. Any comments or questions on that? Yes?

**Participant:** One thing about the law. Martin Luther uses the expression. “The law is a mirror that shows you who you really are.”

**Mark:** Absolutely.

**Participant:** That’s something. We don’t like that. *(Laughter.)*

**Mark:** No. When I was coming up to 79 and I was going 60, and then that sign hits you. 50! *(Laughter.)* It showed me that I wanted to get here on time. *(Laughter.)* But I needed to slow down, right? The law definitely does that. It shows us what we’re not.

Okay, this paragraph, chapter 3, verses 15-22. It’s law and promise. Paul is preparing them and contrasting those two things. He’s going back and forth between the law and the promise. Promise occurs eight times in that little passage. Law occurs six times.

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And the big point he wants to make in that little section is that the promise is greater than the law. What God says He will do unconditionally is greater than what we are called to do conditionally.

And he jumps in, just arguing from personal experience with the Galatians. “You have done this. Weren’t you completely saved by the Spirit, not by the law?” Then the historical argument related to Abraham. Then a Christological argument. Here is what Christ did.

Now he gives an example. He gives a good illustration. There’s nothing like a good illustration to clarify things, to take the abstract and the obscure and just make it clear.

And he appeals to something. It says “*covenant*” here, in my version. It says, “*To give a human example, brothers, even with a man-made covenant.*” I don’t know what your version may say. But he’s basically talking about a will, a testament. And the argument is that once that is ratified, or notarized in our legal terminology, once those terms are set, they don’t change. You can go to court and argue over it. But you’re arguing over what the intent of the will itself was, right? So it doesn’t change.

Let me read this paragraph. I’m talking through it. I’ll read verses 15-18.

*“To give a human example, brothers, even with a manmade covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.”* So once it’s set, it’s set. *“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his Offspring. It does not say ‘to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘and to your Offspring,’ who is Christ. This is what I mean. The law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise. But God gave it to Abraham by a promise.”*

You know, Paul’s arguments are so dense, so tight, but basically this is what he is saying. God made a promise to Abraham back there in Genesis chapter twelve. He gave the law to Moses four hundred and thirty years later. You’ve got the promise. You’ve got the law. But just because the law came, the promise is not invalidated.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Mark:** Those were the terms that God set four centuries prior. So the giving of the law doesn’t make that null and void, right? Isn’t that Paul’s argument? The terms do not change. God said, “I will do this.” He is not now saying that because He gave the law to Moses that you have to do it, that you have to carry it out. That’s Paul’s argument, to say that we’re included on the basis of promise, not works and law. So the promise is greater than the law. And it’s because the promise came before the law. It has unchanged terms. So whatever comes after it can’t overturn what came before. In fact, Paul says that. *“For if the inheritance comes by the law, then it no longer comes by promise. But God gave it to Abraham by a promise.”*

And that would raise a question, particularly if you were Jewish. This would raise a big question in your mind. Okay, so what’s the point of the law? If the promise is the real deal, if that is the grounds on which we are included because God said He would include us by Jesus, because of Jesus’ faithfulness and us believing that, if those are the grounds for inclusion in this family, why the law?

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And that’s what Paul actually says then in verse 19. *“Why then the law?”* What’s the purpose of the law? It’s a very natural question. If promise is greater than law, does that make law pointless?

And Paul’s answer is, *“It was added because of transgressions.”* Now what does that mean? It was added because of transgressions.

Actually, we already spoke about this.

**Participant:** It’s your speed limit sign.

**Mark:** Yes. *(Laughter.)* The law names sin. Wouldn’t you love it if there were no speed limit signs? Then you could tell the policeman that there was no sign. How would I know what the speed limit is? But because we have signs or laws, they name sin. They tell us when we fail, how we fail. That’s what the law does. It names transgressions. Transgressions mean that you go off line. You’re not going straight. You go off line. You transgress. You go off the path.

But it doesn’t just reveal. There’s an internal element to this. It doesn’t just name a sin objectively. It doesn’t just define transgressions. It doesn’t just reveal. It actually reviles us too, doesn’t it? The law actually provokes.

**Participant:** There you go.

**Mark:** It reveals and it reviles. Now Paul says this. He did not know sin, right, until it said, *“Thou shalt not covet.”* And then what did sin do? It revived. It made him covet. So one of the things the law does is that it doesn’t just objectively name what is right versus what’s wrong. It actually provokes us. It actually reveals something about our fallen nature, what it means to be the sons of Adam after the Fall. So it reveals but it also reviles. And you can mark Romans 7 for that. It’s a very powerful, poignant illustration of Paul being autobiographical with sin and how the law works. Yes?

**Participant:** It says here that the law was added because of transgressions. Could you elaborate on that? When was it added? Is he talking about the giving of it at Sinai? I mean the law is eternal, right? God’s law has always—

**Mark:** The law as a reflection of God’s character is eternal. But Sinai was the revelation of the law to us. It says that down in the next verses, that it was given through angels.

**Participant:** Yes.

**Mark:** When you read the giving of the law, there are no angels there. But when you read Acts 7, Stephen talks about it. He says “angels” or “intermediaries” in one of the passages there.

So when he’s talking about law, there are dual aspects there. There is that eternal aspect, what is always true. Adam had law, right? He couldn’t eat from the tree. That’s a law. He had a conscience too, a God-given conscience wired into him. But he didn’t have the Mosaic code. We didn’t have the Mosaic code till Sinai.

So there’s a sense in which you’re less guilty without a manifest express law than you are with it. Yet Paul argues that because God has given us a conscience and written the law on our hearts, we’re still guilty. So whether you’re Jewish and you have the Mosaic code and you’re raised up with phylacteries and all the laws, or you’re not, you’re both equally guilty, although there’s some difference there if you don’t grow up with it.

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So I think it's both, Don. I think that there's that eternal aspect. But there is also specifically the historical giving at Sinai. Yes, sir?

**Participant:** Romans 5:13. *“For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given. But sin is not counted where there is no law.”*

**Mark:** Right. Yes.

**Second Participant:** But sin is counted where there is no law.

**Mark:** Yes, but not in the exact same way. In Romans 2 it says that you can do the law without the law. Gentiles do that.

**Participant:** Right. Yes.

**Mark:** But he indicts the Jews for having the law. I'm sure that some theologians have finely tuned what the difference is in terms of guilt when you have the law versus when you don't have it. Yes?

**Participant:** The law is kind of a double-edged sword, too. On the one hand, it's a form of grace in the sense that it shows us that we're sinners.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** But on the other hand, if we ignore it, it brings greater condemnation.

**Mark:** Yes. That's very true. Does Paul seem schizophrenic sometimes? He's not. He says that the law is good in 1 Timothy and Romans. But he also says that it's insufficient. And when you try to use it for a purpose for which it's not made, it's bad. You actually misuse it.

And here it's talking about misuse. If you use the law to try to become part of the people of God, if you use the law for justification, you're misusing it, because it can't be used that way, even though it's essentially good. It's like when you use a baseball bat to fight. No, baseball bats are for playing baseball. Don't misuse it. Use it for the purpose for which it was created.

And here he's saying that it was added because of transgressions. There are all types of debate on that. I'm opting with those who say that it's in order to name transgressions in order to put a name on it and define it. Yes?

**Participant:** Not to send us down a rabbit trail. But at the same time the Gentiles had the Code of Hammurabi, right?

**Mark:** They did, yes. And it looks a bit like the Ten commandments?

**Participant:** Right.

**Mark:** But those things obviously came out of divine revelation. They didn't just come up with that.

**Second Participant:** I think the thing here is that people generally want to go towards the law in that “hey, I'm good because I keep the law.”

**Mark:** Yes, there is that.

**Participant:** Wrong! You are not righteous because you keep the law.

**Mark:** Correct.

**Participant:** You're righteous because you believe the covenant of God. And sometimes we tend to think that in God's library there is a book stating the law. It's always been there. I like what you said, though. It's an expression of God's character.

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And it’s not an eternal issue. It came because of our transgressions. Here’s how bad you are. I’ll show you.

**Mark:** Right. Boy, we could just talk about the law and the contours of it. Paul is pointing out how it names sin for us here because of transgressions. So it’s one little slice. It names transgressions. And you’ll see why he points that out here in a second, why that aspect is particularly important, the sin naming. Here’s the speed limit. You’re going over it—that aspect of it, right? I mean that it is essentially a good thing. It reveals pitfalls. It tells us what the good is. He relates that here.

So *“the law was added because of transgressions, until the Offspring should come to whom the promise had been made—until Jesus came, lived, died, was resurrected.* So somehow this law is getting us somewhere. Naming transgressions is just the first part. It’s leading somewhere.

Verses 21 and 22 show is that. The relationship. So the big point is that the promise is greater than the law. But the law still has a purpose.

Okay, then. So what’s the relationship then between the promise and the law? *“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! 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, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”*

Let’s just pull two strands out of those two verses that show the way the law and the promise relate. The law is not purposeless. Even though God’s promise is more determinative—it happened first and it can’t be annulled—of course that doesn’t make the law purposeless.

Okay. So how are they actually related? Two strands there, right? He says that if the law could bring life, it would have. The implication is that it doesn’t bring life. What does that mean? It leaves a sense of lifelessness, an inability.

So here you are, left with this inability. What do you do with that sense of inability? You haven’t measured up. Jews haven’t measured up to the law. Gentiles, generic believers, you’re incapable. We can’t even measure up to our own standard.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Mark:** Putting the law aside for a second, just imagine your own personal to do list. *(Laughter.)* Starting with what time you need to get up in the morning and what you need to do, and your honey do list, and all these kinds of things. Just think about your own personal law that you have. How many of you are actually able to meet up to just that? *(Laughter.)*

**Participant:** Right.

**Mark:** We can’t do it.

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Mark:** So it reveals our inability. That’s the flip side of it doesn’t give life. It can’t give life. To say that it doesn’t bring life is to say that it reveals lifelessness and an inability.

But the promise by faith brings life. And I think Paul kind of summarizes this. The law kills. But the Spirit brings life. So one sets you up for the need of the other.

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And that’s the second strand. Law leads man to see and seek the promise by faith.

And I’m really leaning heavily on just how the Puritans read this, and how lots of Reformed theologians have read this. Basically, just below this, Paul is going to say that the law was a guardian. It was a schoolmaster. So there was this period of law. Israel is under law. And that was setting them up. That was setting the people of God up for the revelation of Christ and the promise by faith. It was setting them up to understand the promise.

It’s just like we can’t understand the good news of the gospel if we don’t know the bad news.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Mark:** Good news doesn’t make sense if you don’t live in a situation of bad news. You need the context. So the law is the context that sets people up, that trains us to understand our need. And then the promise makes sense, because you’ve already seen it.

It’s like when Tom Brady said years ago, “You know, is this all there is?” He was on top of the world at that point. And I think this is one of the reasons you see so many high level people turn to Christ, because their personal law fails them, what they are looking for. And it’s on steroids. And they realize that the law they thought would bring life just doesn’t. And so they reach an end very quickly. It’s kind of an accelerated sense of being tutored by law till they realize, “You know, I need something else.”

So I think there’s kind of an inner logic of that. The law leads man to see and to seek the promise by faith. What’s the language of Paul here? *“But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”*

So the relationship is law revealing sin, setting us up, revealing what real bad news is, and then getting the good news. It makes the good news intelligible. That’s part of the logic there. Any comments on that?

**Participant:** Mark?

**Mark:** Yes?

**Participant:** I’ve been thinking a lot about this. What you’re teaching is very helpful. You’ve pointed out some things I hadn’t seen up to this point. I mean one of the things you pointed out is that the promise or the will, once it’s verified, is unbreakable.

**Mark:** Right.

**Participant:** Except if the person who wrote the will breaks it.

**Mark:** Hmm. Yes.

**Participant:** Or if that person is found to be mentally incompetent. That’s why wills often start with “being of sound mind and body.”

**Mark:** Right.

**Participant:** So that really draws into the question of do we have a God who changes His mind? And do we have a God who is competent?

**Mark:** Mm, yes!

**Participant:** It’s even a deeper question about who God is.

**Mark:** Yes. Oh, definitely. Thank you for that. I should have mentioned that we know He’s committed to it. He doesn’t change His mind. Do you know why? Blood.



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**Participant:** Blood. Okay.

**Mark:** He seals these in blood.

**Participant:** Right. But he can still change His mind.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** I mean, he’s not obliged to. We all take for granted the unchangeableness of God. But it’s a relatively novel thought if you look at the cultures of the world. I’ve done a lot of study on Irish mythology.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** I’ve seen shape shifting, where you never really know for sure what happens in nature, because things are always changing. The nature of things is unpredictable. We kind of take for granted that they are. I mean, science is based on facts that are predictable.

**Mark:** Yes. Contingencies, patterns.

**Participant:** But for the longest time in human history that has not been the assumption.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** And what we’re saying is our God is not a shape shifter. He’s permanent and eternal.

**Mark:** Yes. And I really do think that the fact that He seals these things in blood reminds me of that passage in Genesis where God promises Abraham and He walks through the divided parts.

**Participant:** Genesis 15.

**Mark:** Yes. It’s basically, “Do this to me.” It’s the ancient Near Eastern way of invoking a curse on me. “Do this to Me. Split Me in half. Cut Me off if I don’t accomplish and fulfill what I said I’m going to do. A bond in blood is part of this way we see God saying, “My promises are immutable.”

**Participant:** He, Mark?

**Mark:** Yes?

**Participant:** To that point, a verse that has always troubled me is in Hebrews 6, where it says, “*So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His purpose, He guaranteed it with an oath.*”

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** “*So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement.*” What are those two unchangeable things?

**Mark:** (*laughing.*) I’d have to go pull out a commentary. (*Laughter.*)

**Participant:** I thought you would be referring to it. I don’t know either.

**Mark:** Would one of them be that He can’t lie? The other would be the inability to sin.

**Participant:** So by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie. I’m wondering. Is he referring to the Son and the Holy Spirit? Is this a Trinitarian reference?

**Mark:** I don’t know.

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**Participant:** Or is it just to Himself, that He made an oath, and like Ted said, it’s cast in blood, so He can’t lie. It’s a promise.

**Second Participant:** He said it was cast in blood. I made that point. But the other thing I said was that it’s cast in His character.

**Mark:** Right.

**Participant:** Oh, His character. Okay.

**Mark:** He can’t lie, yes.

**Second Participant:** He cannot lie and He doesn’t change.

**Mark:** Right. That’s good.

**Second Participant:** He’s not like the Mormon god who changes.

**Mark:** Yes, or like capricious Greek mythology gods.

**Second Participant:** I mean, it’s shot right through history. And like I said, we take that idea about God for granted. But it’s a novel thought.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm. Yes?

**Participant:** Well, yes. And we wouldn’t know these things unless they were revealed.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** Inwardly and outwardly.

**Mark:** Absolutely. On that point about God not changing, let’s make three quick applications here.

**Participant:** Okay.

**Mark:** And I want to apply relating to God by law or relating to another person by law, and relating to God by promise or relating to another person by promise, because this is all about how the Judaizers thought that you relate to God. Do you relate to Him on the basis of law or promise? Even though they said promise plus law, that’s really law, because if you don’t do the law, you don’t get the promise. So it’s really law versus promise, right?

And I want to call that contractual versus covenantal relating. And let’s put it at a personal level, men. Contractual—we know what that is. I will be in relationship with you so long as you keep the terms. I want you to fix my house up. Here are the terms of the contract. If you don’t do this, I’m going to quit the job and get my money back. We will continue this relationship so long as the terms of the contract are met, right? That’s how you relate to law.

Or, I went to New York for a good while. And you know, this is so long as this relationship is beneficial. You do for me; I’ll do for you. You scratch my back; I’ll scratch yours. That’s one way of relating.

Covenant says, “I’m in this.” A covenant is a promise you make that I will be there in five years, regardless of the storms that come. It’s : *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* So there’s even blood in that, blood in a relational kind of way. I’m in this even if it means that I have to give up my life.

**Participant:** Could it also be followed as a very intimate relationship?

**Mark:** Yes, I think—

**Participant:** It talks about Christ being the Groom and His church being the bride.

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**Mark:** Oh, absolutely. That’s covenantal, too. Yes, because a marriage is a covenant. It’s a promise you make about the future, not just that moment.

**Participant:** Yes, and I think it’s important that you make the distinction. It’s not a contract.

**Mark:** Right.

**Participant:** It’s like a will.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** A will is set down. Now you go and find out what’s in it for me.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** It’s life insurance.

**Mark:** And it’s important in 2016, where athletes break contracts. You know, we just have a very contractual world, right. It’s very contractual. Covenants look strange. Yes?

**Participant:** As I read Galatians, I think the heart of it is 2:20.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** 2:19 says, *“For the sake of the law I died to the law. ... For it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

**Mark:** Yes. Right.

**Participant:** So there’s the blood. There’s the contract. There’s the relationship. In Judaism the law is an end in itself. The contract is an end in itself.

**Mark:** Right.

**Participant:** If you do the work on my house, that’s all I care about you for. Just do the work on my house and I don’t care. Do whatever else you want with your life. But the relationship, the covenant, is a bond between ourselves in love unto God. Now Christ lives in us. So I’m led by Christ, and no longer led by the external law.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** I mean that is the great wonder. And that’s the way by which all the world, all the families of the world would be blessed.

**Mark:** Right.

**Participant:** Because now it’s not by Jewish background. But because Christ is in me I—we—become sons of the living God. It’s just a remarkable thing. And then how do we keep that going? We read our Scripture and everything. So now we’re going to search the Scripture. And over and over and over, the message is that this is something new. You have a relationship with God, and this Scripture tells you that this is the mirror, as Luther said. This is the way in which we have access and a relationship with God.

**Mark:** Right.

**Participant:** And all that other language can be put aside, just like you said, right? It’s Christ plus nothing equals everything.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** And it’s not Christ out there. It’s Christ in here.

**Participant:** I appreciate you mentioning 2:20. Part of the covenant is in this, like Sig was pointing to—Christ in us. We live by the faith of Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. There’s a deep intimacy and covenantal relationship.

## *“Law vs Promise” Part 1*

The second point there. You kind of brought it up about all the Jewish stuff put aside here. The Judaizers are basically saying that to be a part of the family of God, you’ve got to become Jewish. Get circumcised. Take on these dietary codes. Basically, they’re saying that Christianity, being a part of Christ’s family, has a Jewish culture to it.

And Paul is saying, “No!” And you know what that raises for us, men,. Is this. Think of the churches you’re in. I’m going to give you a test here. I assume most of you are in wholly English speaking, white Anglo-Saxon churches, right? What if a whole group of first language Spanish immigrants moved in and became a part of your church? How would you culturally handle that? Is our English speaking culture so essential to being a part of the people of God that we demand a certain kind of cultural uniformity?

**Participant:** Good point.

**Mark:** And the world is changing! So this really raises the specter of do we make demands culturally to become a part of the people of God?

Let’s take it at a theological level. And I say, in that instance of the immigrants, that if you don’t accommodate a group of people who speak another language, if you make them have to learn English before they can understand your sermons, then you are demanding that they become something culturally before they can become fully engrafted into the people of God in your assembly. It’s something to think about, all right?

Cultural preferences. Don’t say no! The multinational, multi-ethnic family of Abraham doesn’t have one culture. It doesn’t even have the culture that God used to be the vehicle to bring Christianity into the world—the Jewish culture, Judaism. So this really gets down to an issue of preferences.

And you can talk about all kinds of in group things. A lot of churches are just upper middle class people. A lot of churches are blue collar. Are there these cultural demands that we make, and even silently. We don’t announce it. There’s no marquee on the church that says you have to be a white collar professional to be a part of this church, or that you need to be this or that. No marquee says that. They all say that all are welcome. But there’s a certain way these things work out such that we have these kinds of unspoken demands that you become like this. There are a lot of issues here to think about. I’m sorry. I’m going on. Am I over?

**Participant:** Mark, I think it would be worth taking the time to unpack what you just said. I’m trying to think of all the implications of that.

**Mark:** Oh!

**Participant:** Because, I mean you can go into a church and there’s no sign up front.

**Mark:** Right.

**Participant:** But you can just tell by the way the people talk, dress, how the pastor holds himself. It may say, “This church is not part of my group,” or “this church isn’t welcoming you.”

**Mark:** Yes. You know, I’m not saying to become all things to all men, because you can’t do that. That’s chaos.

**Participant:** I think it works both ways. The person walking in may feel uncomfortable because he doesn’t understand the language.

**Mark:** Right.

## *“Law vs Promise” Part 1*

**Participant:** So they go and find a place where they fit in. That’s usually how it goes.

**Mark:** Yes.

**Participant:** Now a church can be a little bit put-offish to people if they don’t understand it. But that’s normal human behavior. We should be marching against that, showing love to everybody.

**Mark:** The basic point is be attentive to insisting on a cultural preference. Be attentive to that. I can’t name all the implications of that. There are just too many. Be attentive to that. We don’t give up our culture. We are cultured beings. I can’t help but speak English. I can’t help but be a Western Pennsylvanian. But I can be attentive to this fact. Am I insisting that in order to be part of the family of God in this particular church, you have to become so and so. Am I insisting on that?

And that’s going to be worked out in different ways. In our context we have people who speak Spanish. So we’re trying to accommodate that by having someone translate and work out other things, and sing a song in Spanish and have two languages. Yes.

**Participant:** Shouldn’t the church, being truly Bible believing, be a culture in and to itself?

**Mark:** Absolutely. It is.

**Participant:** We learn the ways of Christ. We love one another. We’re going to find a way to bridge that gap.

**Mark:** Yes. I totally agree with that. The church has a culture. But I’m saying, be attentive to that when a different culture comes in. I’m saying, be self-conscious about our culture, and what we’re insisting finally.

I think we’re out of time. Should we pray? How do we close?

**Participant:** Yes, that’s usually how we do it.

**Mark:** I’ll go into the third point next week and jump into the lesson. Okay. Let’s pray together. Father, thank You for Your word. Whatever has been chaff and dross, blow that away. Burn it off. Whatever has been perfect and pure, unadulterated Word, cause it to sink into our hearts. This is rich stuff You’ve given to us, Lord, and we don’t want to overlook it. We don’t want to see it and what it reveals about us and then not attend to it. And Lord, show us the power. Cause us to live in the reality of the promise You’ve given to us by faith in Christ. Would You help us not to be exasperated by all of our striving to be perfect, to meet other people’s standards, to meet our own standards? Lord, would You deliver us from the depression of failing? Would You give us a powerful glimpse of grace and the reality that You’ve included us in Your family by faith, not by our works, and that our justification and our sense of being right is completely tied to what Jesus has done on our behalf, and our believing and accepting that, not on our ability to be perfectly like Jesus, but to be what we aspire to be. Lord, refresh us in these things. Make the argument from Galatians come to life in a powerful and profound way. Help us when we insist in those unseen ways in which we insist on people becoming like us, instead of laying down our own lives, our own preferences. So help us, Lord. Help these men throughout the rest of this day. This is a stewardship and gift that You’ve given to us. This is the day that You have made, Lord. Give us the grace to rejoice in it and go forth. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Men:** Amen. *(Applause.)*