

Grace Didn't Die
Clarification About God's Plan
Galatians 3:7-18

Introduction: There is an old story of a family who cooked a salt-cured ham every year to celebrate Christmas. When they did, they cut the ham in half and cooked it in two different pots. One Christmas, a young woman in the family was given the responsibility and honor of cooking the ham for the first time. She was so excited to be entrusted to prepare the featured meat for their annual family feast. A salt-cured ham is a relatively expensive piece of meat, especially one big enough to feed everybody in a large family, so the pressure was on to ensure she didn't ruin it.

Finally, the day came to begin preparing the large piece of meat for their large multi-generation family. A salt-cured ham has to be simmered for many hours to thoroughly cook the meat and cook out enough of the salt to make it palatable for the person eating it. For days, she had soaked the ham in a huge pot she had recently purchased. Twice a day for two days, she drained the water and replaced it, each time lowering the concentration of salt in the ham, and as she did, she decided to go ahead and cook the ham in the same pot. Now, for as long as anybody could remember, the women in their family had cut the ham in half and cooked it in two pots. But, the young woman didn't see any need to do it given she had a pot big enough to cook the entire ham all at once, and, if she could pull it off, the presentation would be stunning as their huge family gathered around their huge table with a huge ham in the middle of the table for them to consume as they feasted together in celebration of the birth of Christ!

About the time the water started simmering, the young woman's mother arrived at her house and entered the kitchen, only to see the huge ham in one huge pot. The young woman's mother immediately became irritated. Her daughter was going to ruin the centerpiece of the feast! Who in the world cooks a ham in one pot? The way they had always done it was to cut the ham in half and cook it in two pots, so clearly, her daughter was going to ruin the ham if she didn't!

The young woman and her mother ended up in a heated debate over the subject. The young woman kept asking why, and the mother kept answering, "Because that's how my mother told me to cook it." The young woman would respond with, "Well, why did grandma cut the ham in half and cook it in two pots?" After bantering back and forth, her mother finally admitted that she didn't know why but offered a solution to resolve their seemingly endless argument. "Let's go ask my mom," said the young woman's mother.

So, they went to the grandmother's house, explained the controversy, and then asked her why she cut the ham in half and put it in two pots. To their dismay, she said, "I did it because that's how my mother did it." Now, the grandmother's mom was very old and didn't cook much anymore, but she was very excited to attend the annual family Christmas feast to be with her huge family and eat some of the salt-cured ham, which they only ate at Christmas. As she sat in her rocking chair beside a warm fireplace in her house, three generations of her descendants entered the room. She couldn't help but notice that her

daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter came into the room with a clear look of concern and a hint of anxiousness. They had been wrestling with this problem for hours.

How should ham be cooked? What would the mother and grandmother do with this young woman trying to cook the ham without cutting it in half and cooking it in two pots? Why couldn't this young woman understand she was about to ruin Christmas? They placed their hopes in the great-grandmother to straighten her out.

After a few moments of polite inquiries, the mother and grandmother carefully posed the question to the great-grandmother, "Why did you cut the ham in half and cook it in two pots?" Without hesitation, the great-grandmother said, "Oh, I never owned a pot big enough to cook the entire ham, so I had to cut it in half and cook it in two pots."

It turns out that ham was never meant to be cut in half; she just didn't have a pot big enough to do it! The great-grandmother, sensing their anxiety over the controversy, then reminded them that how the ham got cooked, nor even the ham itself mattered. The ham wasn't the point of their annual Christmas feast. The centerpiece of the feast was celebrating the birth of Jesus together, the one who truly made their family whole!

This is how tradition works. Traditions are things we have repeated for so long that we no longer ask why; instead, we do them because it's what we've done. Eventually, however, somewhere along the line, the simplicity of doing it because it's what we've done gets elevated to a new status. It's no longer the simple repeating of a previous act but an act of loyalty to those who have done it before me! As such, it's seen as an arrogant, unethical, and possibly even immoral action even to consider doing anything other than what was previously done! The thing practiced has now become the thing honored and worthy of it!

It seems universal human nature that whatever is repeated long enough will eventually become sacred, so much so that the tradition itself becomes the point as opposed to whatever it originally pointed to. In the case of Israel, this is precisely what happened with the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law was never the point, but it became a tradition that they eventually got confused as the point, so much so that when its purpose was accomplished in leading Israel to the point, the Jews deeply struggled to let go of it to grab ahold of the point—the promise!

Therefore, in Galatians 3, Paul is trying to make sure his readers understand the difference between the promise (the point!) and the Mosaic Law because people insisted that they were living in sin if they didn't keep the Law and the traditions surrounding it! Specifically,

Proposition: In Galatians 3:7-18 Paul makes three fundamental clarifications about the promise of God to Abraham.

The first fundamental clarification is in verses seven through nine.

(1) God's promise was never an ethnic group but for people from every ethnic group. (3:7-9)

- A. When God called Abraham, he made a promise to Him about what He was going to do in and through Him. As a part of that, God said,
- B. **3 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." (Genesis 3:3)**
- C. In Galatians 3:7-9 Paul goes back to that very part of the promise to make this clarification. Paul writes,
- D. **7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.**
- E. First and foremost, one of the central problems was that so many of the Jews, including those who were converting to faith in Christ, considered themselves to be the promise rather than the ones who were to receive it. However, even if they didn't view themselves as the promise, they most certainly had come to believe they were the exclusive receivers of the promise, so much so that if you wanted to receive the promise of God, you had to become Jewish. However, to become Jewish meant you had to live according to the Law of Moses and the traditions that surrounded it. This is where the Judaizers in the first-century church were creating a mess.
- F. The irony was, however, that the Law and its traditions were never what made them truly and distinctly Jewish, that is, family members of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is why Paul wrote,
- G. **7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. (3:7)**
- H. As a reminder, the context of verse seven is what Paul pointed out in the previous verses: that the believers in Galatia had not been filled with the Spirit of God (the testimony that they are saved) because they had obeyed the Law of Moses or began practicing traditions created by it, but rather when they repented and believed in the person of Jesus and what He had done for them (faith). Paul then shocked his readers when he said, in actuality, what truly made the descendants of Abraham true descendants of Abraham was not in sharing his DNA but in sharing Abraham's faith! Specifically, Paul is referring to what we read about in Genesis 15.
- I. **1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said,**

"Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." 4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)

- J. The faith of Abraham was a faith that trusted God to be who He said He is ("I am your shield") and to do what He said He would do. In this way, the true tradition that Abraham handed down was not the Mosaic Law and its traditions, which hadn't even been given yet, but faith! What was handed down by Abraham was a tradition of faith in God—nothing else! There was no law or traditions associated with it, just a raw and plain reality of truly trusting God to be who He says He is and do what He says He will do, and as such, surrendering to Him (faith) because of it. It's why Paul later wrote,

- K. **8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:8-9)**

- L. Notice that it's all about genuinely believing that Christ is God (Lord) and trusting in what He has done in His death and resurrection. It's not simply a matter of intellectual agreement but that which defines who you are and how you live ("believe in your heart").

- M. So, putting this all together means that the defining thing that Abraham handed down was certainly not Laws and traditions that didn't even exist yet, but in addition, it wasn't his genetics either; it was his faith! Therefore, what truly associates a person with Abraham is not their genetics but their faith, and as such, that means the promise given to Abraham is shared not with those who are his genetic descendants but those who share in what enabled Abraham to participate in the promises as well—faith! Therefore, those who are not genetic descendants of Abraham get to be a part of the promise made to Abraham if they share the faith in God that Abraham had.

- N. **8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." 9 So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith."**

- O. In other words, if the promise was accessed through genetics, that is, through being in the right ethnic group, then the promise could never be given to people of every nation, which would make God a liar! But being the promise comes by

grace through faith, the promise can be shared with anybody who will repent and believe, regardless of what ethnic group they are a part of.

- P. If we share in the faith that Abraham had in God, in that we, like Abraham, we genuinely believe in what God has revealed about Himself and His work in Christ, then we get to share in the participation of the promise that God made with Abraham—period! God’s promise was NEVER an ethnic group, but that the promise would bless people from every ethnic group!

The second fundamental clarification is in verses ten through fourteen.

(2) God’s promise was never to earn but to participate. (3:10-14)

- A. **10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." 12 But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.**
- B. Let me go back through the passage and explain Paul’s argument.
- C. **10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."**
 - 1. The Law of Moses required total obedience to receive its promised blessings (Deuteronomy 27:26, Jeremiah 11:3-5). However, if you disobey any part of the Law, you will be under its curse. Therefore, given mankind’s natural inclination to disobey God, combined with the hundreds of laws in the Mosaic Law, meant that nobody would ever truly be able to earn its benefits but would instead always be under its curse. This reality becomes even more discouraging once you read Christ’s explanation of the true expectations of God within the Law He gave Moses for the Jewish people. For instance, Jesus said,
 - 2. **27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)**

3. So the point is that ultimately, the Mosaic Law created a situation where nobody would have the right to claim the blessings in it, much less earn the right to lay claim to the promises God made to Abraham, because nobody actually obeyed it! The reality is that everybody disobeyed it and, as such, by order of the Law they were trying to obey, were stuck under its condemnation rather than its blessings! Therefore, the Law leaves everybody who tries to live by it under its condemnation rather than its blessing. Paul then expounds on this idea in the next verse.

D. 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

1. Paul said it's "evident" that no one is justified to receive the promise of God because of their works. In other words, it is OBVIOUS that nobody would ever be justified in claiming its blessings because it's obvious to anybody who actually objectively thinks about the law that nobody can ever meet its standards!
2. For instance, the most basic command in the Law is to love the Lord with ALL our heart (Deuteronomy 6:5), which turns out to be the most impossible command of all. Everyone with any ounce of self-awareness well knows that there is always a measure of selfishness within our love, and as such, we never love God with all our heart, nor do we ever love anybody else that way because the only one we could likely ever love with ALL our heart is ourselves!
3. Again, Abraham wasn't justified to participate in God's promises because he accomplished something; rather, he was declared righteous when he finally repented and believed in God, and even that belief was flawed.
4. Faith is not a method of earning the right to do something but a method of participating in something that somebody else is doing for you and, thus, how the righteous live in Christ. Living by faith is not earning the right to receive His blessings but trusting and obeying Him because He's given us His blessing!
5. When you read Genesis 15, right after God declares Abraham righteous, Abraham's faith begins to waiver again! Furthermore, God was already fulfilling His promise to Abraham before Abraham even believed God, which was the biggest reason of all for Abraham to believe God to be who He claimed to be and, as such, do what He said He was going to do!
6. So, a faith relationship with God should never be confused with a LAW relationship with God. As a matter of fact, that's precisely what Paul says next,

E. 12 But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

1. Paul then shows that the very arrangement of the Mosaic Law was not of faith anyway. The covenant God made with the Jewish people in the Mosaic Law was actually because they lacked any willingness to have faith (more on that in the following sermon). So, God made a temporary arrangement with them (again, more on that in the next sermon) that had nothing to do with faith! If the Law had nothing whatsoever to do with faith and the only way to be identified with Abraham and the promise God made to Abraham is to have the faith of Abraham, then the Mosaic Law never had anything to do with it anyway!
2. That doesn't mean people under the Law couldn't also have faith in God, but rather that the relationship God made with the Jewish people in The Law had nothing to do with faith and everything to do with a reciprocal process whereby they received blessings if they got it all right and curses if they got any of it wrong.
3. The Law is, by nature, a method of earning something. Whether it be blessings or punishment, the very essence of a law arrangement is that it's a method of justly earning whichever! Faith, however, is not at all a method of earning but of participating.
4. A law relationship with God is one obsessed with getting the ham cooked right, or the event will fail. A faith relationship with God is focused on being with the people coming to the event, ham or no ham. In fact, they don't even need a ham because they can just come together and worship God!
5. However, God did make a covenant through Moses with the Jewish people that obligated them to obey it—The Law. They were not given a choice. God condemned the Jewish people to be under the Covenant of Law because they refused to follow Him into the promised land otherwise. They rejected faith, so God gave them a Law (again, more on that in the next sermon!) that would drag them into the promised land and to the promise! But that arrangement had an end date, and that end date came at the moment of Christ's death. Paul then states,

F. 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

1. The Mosaic Law created a separation between the Gentiles and the Jews. Even Gentiles who converted to Judaism were never entirely accepted

because, in the Law, being a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was part of the reciprocal relationship.

2. But, to the more significant point, the Law was a reciprocal relationship to receive benefits of land and physical prosperity in this world that is separated from God, but nowhere did it overcome the curse that left man separated from God. The Law provided no pathway or even promise to resolve this problem; it provided only land, political peace, and financial prosperity for the Jewish people in the land God gave them.
3. Therefore, the law left the Jewish people and the rest of mankind in a situation where even the Jewish people were ironically incapable of fulfilling the most fundamental of all the Laws in the Mosaic Law—Love God!
4. Therefore, the ultimate promise turns out to not be land in the Middle East, but rather, the promise of one who would restore us to an abiding relationship with God! The ultimate promise, then, is not the provisions of the Mosaic Law but the promise of the God IN us—The Holy Spirit. The Spirit was never a promised result of the Law, but a promise of God made possible because of another promise of God (Jesus) who became the curse sin for us; that is, Jesus took upon himself the separation man was condemned under since Adam and in so doing Jesus met all the standards of God's expectations for us to receive the promise, leaving us with only one thing to do—participate in the promise (faith!)

This leads us straight to the third fundamental clarification.

(3) God's promise of an inheritance was never a reward but a gift. (3:15-18)

- A. This clarification expounds on the previous and, in doing so, offers an illustration and an explanation that takes us deeper into what Paul just wrote. Paul writes,
- B. **15 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified.**

Note: This means that the covenant God made with the Jewish people through Moses cannot nullify or add to what God promised to Abraham.

- C. **16 Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to off springs," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. 17 This is what I mean: the law, which came years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.**

1. So whatever God promised in the law, it couldn't replace or add to what God had already promised to Abraham. However, this isn't a problem because

Paul points out that God didn't refer to "off springs" but a singular "offspring" and that promised "offspring" is Christ!

2. The promise wasn't something that would be earned by the law but someone given by God—His eternal Son!

D. 18 For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

1. The fact of the matter is that if our relationship with God, the true inheritance, comes through us earning the right to have it, then the promise God made to Abraham was nullified, which makes God unethical and untrustworthy ... which is not possible for Him to be!
2. Therefore, we are left with only one conclusion: The Mosaic Law was never the way to earn an inheritance from God, neither in context to the land he gave the Jewish people nor to the relationship with the Father we all have through Christ. It was all because of God's promise—period!
3. Everything we have from God is by His Grace and, as such, to His praise alone. It's why Paul later wrote this to the church in Ephesus,
4. **1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1-10)**

Challenge: Do you see your status and relationship with God as something you have to earn and keep or something to participate in?

You will never flourish in a relationship you feel like you have to earn the right to be in and stay in. You will always wonder if you've done enough to earn the reward you want or if you are being wronged by not receiving enough of what you feel you earned! However, when a relationship is given to simply enjoy and participate in, then it totally changes

everything about how that relationship works! It's not that you aren't loyal to the one who gave you the right to have a relationship with them, but your life is no longer about earning the right to be in the relationship and instead is about just being in the relationship! It's not about making the ham for the feast the right way or even having a ham for the feast; it's not even having a feast, but rather, it's entirely about being with the people who are coming to the feast and celebrating the one who has brought us together—Jesus!