

The second greatest story ever told... is of a father and his children... in Luke 15. ... We just saw from our reading of it... that this remarkable father had two sons. ... The younger son took his inheritance... humiliated his father... left for a far country.... And squandered it all away. ... He broke every one of the rules the father had made for righteousness and appropriateness for sons. ... The older son did everything he was told. ... He was responsible... hardworking... and dedicated. ...

But...! ... Neither one of them gained or lost his father's love... by the way he lived. ... The son who went to the far country came back to see a father gazing down the road... hoping for his return. ... When he came home... his father loved him. ... And the older son... who succeeded every day of his life... heard his father remind him, "*We have always been together, and all that I have is yours.*"

The second greatest story ever told is about something much deeper... truer... and more beautiful... than **performance**... It is about unconditional love... And that is how God the Father loves you and I.

Our relationship with Him is based on a **promise**... *not* a **deal**. ... Have you ever considered what the difference is... between a promise and a deal...? ... Our realizing this difference... will dramatically affect the way we will relate to God. ... Showing you this difference... is my goal in taking you to today's passage.

A promise and a deal are not the same thing. They both have usefulness, but they apply to different issues. The best example of this that I can think of occurs in parenting. ... Parents make promises to their children... from

the beginning... without even thinking about it. ... I remember holding our first-born child... Stacie... in my arms for the first time.... Once I got over the fear of dropping her on her head... by mistake... I immediately started telling her how much I love her. ... Then... that night... I went home and wrote a letter to her. ... I wrote about all my hopes and dreams... the wonderful possibilities and the future that Patti and I wanted to provide (if God gave us the grace to do so). ... Of course I knew... that if Stacie ever read it... it would be years later. I certainly didn't expect a response from her just yet. And I was **not** making a deal with her. ... I was not writing, "*If you do certain things, then I'll do this for you.*"

Because Patti worked... while I studied and went to seminary... I spent a lot of time with our newborn during the day. ... Patti would often say... that I changed more diapers than she did. ... I had a routine whenever I would change her diaper... that always included singing children's Christian songs... one hand holding her to the change-table and the other hand doing silly hand motions that go with the song.

*"Oh is the flag flown high from the castle of your heart... from the castle of your heart... from the castle of your heart... O is the flag flown high from the castle of your heart... for the King is in residence there... Let it fly from the sky... let the whole world know... let the whole world know... let the whole world know... let it fly from the sky.. let the whole world know... that the King is in residence there..."*

And then usually with tears... I would talk to her about my hope that she would grow up to be a woman of God... allowing the King the fullest residence in her heart. ... Many mornings and afternoons I would walk around holding Stacie... talking to her... dreaming dreams for her... making promises to her...telling her how much I loved her. ... She didn't know what

I was saying. ... She seemed to delight in the hand motions and singing. But as a father you can't help but start with love... promising all that you want to give.

That's exactly what our heavenly Father did for us. He made a **promise** to Abraham... before he ever asked for anything from anyone. "*Abraham, I will bless you. You will be a blessing to the world. Your children will be as the stars in the heavens. Your life will be worth more than you can imagine.*" All Abraham had to do was say thank you and believe it. God never said, "*Abraham, I'll do this if you do that.*" It was a **promise**, not a deal.

Then, 430 years later... God also made a deal with the physical descendants of Abraham. ... Making a deal is also something you find yourself doing in parenting. ... In a deal... you've got your part to play...

When our kids got older... and liked going to Christian concerts... we took on a janitorial job as a family... for a couple of summers. With the money we earned... we would attend "Spirit West Coast" in Monterey, California... for a week of camping and concerts with all their favorite bands. ...We made a deal with our children... that they had to clean the buildings with us... and work hard with great attitudes... before I would buy the tickets to Spirit West Coast.

In any case... a deal has usefulness. ... There are important things that need to be arranged... especially for little ones. Whenever our kids got an allowance or money from their grandparents... they had three jars that the money had to be divided between. A certain percent had to go into a

savings jar... a certain percent had to go into "God's money jar"... and whatever was left they could spend however... and whenever they wanted.

Before they grow up and are old enough to handle everything themselves, our kids need restrictions. ...They need discipline... consequences... hard lines drawn. ... We don't start out wise or good or true. ... We start out arrogant and self-centered and silly.

In the same way... we are about to learn from our passage today... that the law came in as an instructor... "because of transgressions." ... The people of God had been "locked up" under the law. ... We are told "no."

The law awakens in us awareness of realities... that we had no notion of before. ... We make discoveries about our own selfishness and failure.

So the law is a very good thing... but it never gives life! ... It never makes you well. ... It doesn't establish a relationship with God. ... It doesn't justify you. ... It doesn't forgive you. ... The Spirit of God doesn't come into anyone's life because they did a better job of succeeding in the deal. ... The promise is the only way we get life.

Now... my children... and I am sure your children were like this too... could always tell if you change a promise into a deal. ... They are on to it... in no time AT ALL !!!! ... They are legal scholars who know the fine points fairness!

On one occasion... Patti and I decided to utilize an opportunity that Cheerios had... to take our family to Disneyland... and stay for 3 nights in the Disneyland Hotel... With this special offer... we saw that we could

afford it. Boy... were the kids excited when we promised them the trip! (Man! So was I !!!) ... .. I kept that promise. We still had to scrimp and save... but we were able to do it. ... .. But suppose I had subsequently tried to change the promise into a deal: "*I'll take you to Disneyland if you memorize 25 verses of Scripture... word perfect!*" ... Even though memorizing God's Word is a good thing to do... It would have been met with outrage! ... "*That's not fair! How can you withhold something from us that you promised without condition?*"

That's the logic Paul is applying in our passage this morning. ... God has given something away already. ... He is not coming back later... and attaching conditions to it.

It is our hearing... and believing Him... acknowledging Him... and glorying in His love... that leads to life. ... The deal... (or the **law**)... has another purpose. ... We need the law mostly because of our immaturity. ... We need restrictions... negatives... buffeting... and hurt... until we're old enough to trust God... until our faith has grown to a place where it's a real and living thing to us. ... But when we are old enough to be mature children of God... then the law's usefulness is over.

### **Galatians 3:15-29**

Paul anticipated a question... that those who wanted the Galatians to become Jews... (obedient to the laws God gave them...) might raise at this point. ... Paul could just hear them saying... Well... Paul... we would agree that Abraham was justified by his faith... but the subsequent coming of the

law... changed the basis for gaining salvation. Obviously... faith was not enough... so God gave them the Law... several years later.

So... Paul... in answering this point that he anticipated they would make... turned to an example from daily life.

People know that in an irrevocable agreement... no one can set aside or amend any part of it. ... If that is the case with human contracts... how much more is it true of divine contracts? ... God's promises always stand... no matter what changes occur. ... He always keeps His promises.

Paul's point was not that God couldn't change his covenant with us... but that God didn't ever change the covenant established between Himself and us. ... God's divine promise was made to Abraham... long before the giving of the law to Moses. ... As such... it was a binding agreement not to be changed or annulled.

### **Galatians 3:15**

Suppose you make a contract with a man to pay him two thousand dollars to plant grass... build flower beds... install outdoor lights... and install a sprinkler system in your yard. ... Everything gets properly signed on the dotted line of a legitimate contract. ... Then two months later as he is nearly finished... you tell him that he also needs to build a 20 x 30 tool shed for you... for the same amount of money. ... How do you think he is going to respond? He might say... "*Wait a minute, we agreed to the terms of a contract.*" ... How far would you get in saying "*Well, I've changed*

*that" ...? He'd respond, "Oh, no, you don't! You can't change your contract after it has been made."*

Now... if that is true about the way **man** does business... how much more true would it be of God... Who has a much *greater* sense of fairness... than we do. ... And a better track record of keeping His word!

### **Galatians 3:16**

Abraham is arguably... apart from Christ... the greatest human figure in recorded history. ... He is the one who began the salvation story.

In Adam's sin... we lost God's intimate presence... and we also lost humanity's purpose for living. ... When God came to Abraham, He said, "*I will bless you. I will give you Myself and I will make you a blessing to the world. I'm going to give your life meaning again.*" ... Abraham is the fountainhead from which salvation has flowed to every generation since.

And another thing to notice here is that in the final analysis... God made this covenant of promise with Abraham *through Christ*... so that the only two parties who can make any changes... are God the Father... and God the Son.

### **Galatians 3:17-18**

People do not need to work to attain what has been **promised** to them. Instead... God gave it to Abraham... and to his Seed... as a promise. God gave the promise because He loved Abraham... not because Abraham earned it. ... It was a promise... and not a deal.

Even though God gave a promise... of great things... to Abraham... God did not demand of Abraham to obey the law. ... In fact... as Paul has shown... the law was not even around - it came 430 years later. This must mean that the way to inherit the blessing of Abraham (which the Judaizers and Galatians both want dearly to inherit) is the way Abraham got it - by faith in God's promises.

A legitimate question then... is this... "*What was the purpose of the law?*" If it has been true from the beginning that this promise to Abraham... also makes **us** heirs... if we simply believe it... ... then why was there any need for this new arrangement to be made... by which God gave a set of rules ?

### **Galatians 3:19**

The law "was designed to restrain fallen human nature. If no restrictions were ever placed on unregenerate wills... then sinners would manifest their position in every conceivable evil practice. ... The intent of the law... therefore... was to reduce the amount of sin that could be committed"

But the function of the law was temporary. It was not permanent. When the Messiah... "the Seed" came... the law ended.

Now... When God gave the Law to Israel... He did it by means of angels... and through the mediation of Moses. ... This means that the nation received the Law third-hand... from God... to angels... to Moses.

But when God made His covenant with Abraham... He did it personally... without a mediator. ... This promise to Abraham was superior to the Law that was given to Moses.



God was revealing to Abraham... all that He would do for him and his descendants. A mediator stands between two parties and helps them to agree... Moses mediated this Law to the Israelites... because they needed help to agree.

But there was no need for a mediator in Abraham's case... God was making a Fatherly promise... not a deal... So it did not need any help to get him... or us... to agree. ... There was no need for a go-between.

### **Galatians 3:20**

The Apostle Paul was a well-trained Jewish Lawyer... a Pharisee trained by his nation's best – Gamaliel. What he is doing... is proving his case... thoroughly. ... He leaves no wiggle room... whatsoever... for anyone to believe that we must somehow earn our favor with God.

God acted on His own... when He made His promise to Abraham. ...There was no mediator. The promises were given and would be kept by God... regardless of the actions of people. ...Thus... the promise is superior to the law... because the promise is from God alone... It is meant for eternity... and it would not be broken.

The law and its mediator... Moses... were temporary... preparatory arrangements designed to confirm the truth of God's ultimate desire to relate directly with His creatures. ... .. Paul did not put down Moses... but showed the primacy of Christ's way of faith... over the law.

And Paul... the Lawyer... can almost hear the Judaizers shouting the question: "*Is the Law then against the promises of God?*" ... Is God contradicting Himself? ... Does His right hand not know what His left hand is doing? ... So Paul replies to this question... in verse 21... before they can ask it. ... Paul reveals his deep insight into the ways and purposes of God. ... He does not say that the Law *contradicts* the promise... but rather that it *cooperates* with the promise... in fulfilling the purposes of God.

### **Galatians 3:22-23**

Certainly the Law of Moses regulated the lives of the Jewish people, but it did not and could not provide *spiritual* life to the people. ... Israel was under the protective custody of **the Law**. ... God was... by this... shielding His people from the evil heathen rites surrounding them.

Until people could put their faith in that Savior... the law kept them in a kind of protective custody. ... In a sense... it kept people out of trouble... kept them away from the evil... into which their natures might otherwise have led them headlong... It kept them until faith in Christ would be revealed.

We often read in the Old Testament how Israel looked at all the other nations... and wanted to be just like them. ... And they attempted it over and over. ... But the Law constrained them... it purposely made them different... with ceremonies and moral regulations that slowed it down. ... It constrained... just like a strict parent... who sometimes hears their child whine... "*But everyone else gets to...*"

The faith... which came later... set people free from the law... But now we have a desire to obey God... wholeheartedly... out of love for Him.

Paul wrote that the whole world is trapped under the domination of sin. Once people recognize this... and give up their attempts to please God by their own works... the way is prepared for them to receive God's grace... through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Galatians 3:24-25**

Here Paul uses an illustration that was familiar to all his readers—the child guardian. ... The word... “guardian”... paidagōgos... is difficult to render into English... since there is no exact parallel to this position in modern society. ... But if you have seen “The Sound of Music”... this word can probably be represented by what we see in the strict governess’ before Julie Andrews arrived.

The word really means a child-leader... a child-director... and was the name applied in ancient Greek households... to a slave who had the care of the minor children. ... He was to watch over the morals of the children... protect them from association with others... who were not fit for his companionship... and take them... day by day... from the house... to the schoolroom. ... He would turn them over to the schoolmaster... but at the end of the day... the paidagogos would get them and bring them back home again."

This illustrates the work of the law before Christ came. It was simply a protector from corruption in conduct. "As long as the people lived in obedience... in any measure to that law... they were saved from a great

deal of wickedness and evil." Thus the law "*kept*" and "*shut up*" mankind - until Christ came.

Based on his argument... because these things are true... Paul now moves on for us to understand how it should make a difference in the way we see ourselves. ... This will spill over into the next chapter of Galatians... and then he will delve into how these truths ought to affect our behavior.

But... because faith has always been God's plan from the start... because "**promise**" has always been primary over "*deal*"... none of us have any special status over others. You and have not earned... or been born into... any special privilege... and neither have I.

### **Galatians 3:26-28**

The phrase *put on Christ* (in verse 27) refers to a change of garments. The believer has laid aside the dirty garments of self-effort and sin... and by faith... received the robes of righteousness in Christ. ... But to the Galatians... this idea of "changing clothes" would have an additional meaning. ... When the Roman child came of age... he took off his characteristic childhood garments... and put on the representative toga of the adult citizen.

The Law made a big deal about such things as nationality... ethnicity... social status... and gender difference. It had regulations for you... depending on where you fit in to each of these categories. So the Law perpetuated these distinctions. ... But God... in His grace... has declared that these things are of no value (or handicap) when it comes to our

spiritual relationship to God through Christ. ... All labels are secondary among those who share Jesus in common.

The barriers broken down in this verse... may not seem so radical to our day... but they were astounding in ancient Roman culture. ... This made Christianity unique and attractive — it valued each individual... yet it provided a unified body. ... All believers are one in Christ Jesus. ... All are equally valuable to God. ... Differences arise in gifts... in function... in abilities... but all are one in Christ.

It's our natural inclination to feel uncomfortable around people who are different from us... and to gravitate toward those who are similar to us. But when we allow our differences to separate us from our fellow believers... we are disregarding clear biblical teaching.

Make a point to seek out... and appreciate people who are not just like you... and your friends. ... You may find that you have a lot in common with them.

### **Galatians 3:29**

With this... Paul states the main point of his argument: ... those who belong to Christ... are part of Abraham's family... and hence they do not need to be circumcised... to become part of God's people.

... ..

So what lessons are there for us in this text? ... I'd like to mention several... in closing. ... First... God has purposefully devoted over a thousand years of history (from Moses to Christ)... ... a long period of time

that is meant for our instruction. ... It is to help us see ourselves in the failures of Israel. ... God wants you and I to see the exceeding sinfulness of Israel ... and all of their pride ... which diminished their understanding of what God was really doing. ... Through Paul's argument... it makes perfect sense to us... now. ... And God wants us to see all of that... as a mirror to our own souls. ... We need to see the depth and subtlety of our own pride and insubordination. Therefore, we should look and be appalled in the mirror of Israel's misunderstanding of God's law. And we should admit that there are yet roots of independence and pride and areas of distrust toward God that we must dig out. ... .. How much of God's plan for our lives are we missing because of our own prideful misunderstandings...? ... In brokenness before God... we must regularly ask Him to show us our own. ... And please don't assume that you don't have any. We all do.

Second, we should cherish Christ and adore the grace that opened our hearts to receive him. The lesson of the law is that we are utterly dependent on grace to remove our heart of stone and give us a soft heart of faith and love. Contrition, humility, lowliness, gratitude—let your heart be filled with these as you recall, "Where sin abounded, grace much more abounded" (Romans 5:20).

Third... I will finish the same way I began this morning... Our relationship with God is based on a **promise**... *not* a **deal**. ...