

Galatians Chapter 3 – John Karmelich

1. For those of you who have been reading my commentaries for a while, you should know by now that one of my favorite questions to discuss is the issue of, "I believe Jesus is God, now what"? I thought for once I should ask the negative view of that question: I believe in Jesus, now what do I not do? To make it shorter, my lesson title is simply "not do". The good news is that this is not any sort of lecture on avoiding some sort of sin. All of us have our weaknesses and I don't have to remind each of us of those weaknesses. As I keep reading Galatians Chapter 3, I realized Paul is warning us about what to "not do". The key point here is about learning to just trust in Jesus for both salvation and guidance and not try to trust in how we act even as believers.
 - a) To explain this better, note that Verse 11 of this chapter contains what I consider to be the most important verse of the book. It is "The just shall live by faith". This is a quote from the Old Testament (Habakkuk 2:4b, King James Version). I explained in detail back when I wrote about chapter one. The point is that the book of Galatians focuses on how those of us who are Christians exactly do live by faith in Jesus as God.
 - b) The problem with living by faith is we constantly want to do things to add on top of that faith. For example, we often want to do things to prove to God or say, our friends what a good person we are. Think about it this way: Do you ever discuss your sins at church or do you bring up the good things you did recently? My point is that it is a natural instinct to want to talk about oneself in a positive way. We may or may not be aware of it, but at that moment we are working on building up our own ego. I am not talking about when we say things to encourage each other. This book and this chapter in particular focus on when we effectively think, "I am trusting in my ability to please God over and above my faith that Jesus is God and that He is in charge of my life." That is the "not do". The not do is when we are trying to prove to God how worthy we are to be with him.
2. At this point, let me do what I normally do and summarize the arguments made in this chapter. First Paul makes accusations against the Christians living in Galatia that they are trusting in their ability to please God and not simply have faith that Jesus is God. It is important to state that Paul never says the Galatians have lost their salvation. Paul is simply saying what they were doing at that moment is not the way that God has called Christians to live. Paul remembers how when he was in that region miracles occurred and lives changed simply because they did trust in Jesus as God. The danger for all us Christians is when we start making the efforts to please God based on what we have accomplished and not just trust in Jesus to guide our lives. To put it simply know that our salvation is not dependent upon how we act at any given moment.
 - a) Remember that Paul is speaking to a bunch of Christians from a non-Jewish background. This group is not intimately familiar with the Old Testament. Despite that Paul, or others must have taught this group some aspects about the Old Testament at the least in order to explain who Jesus was and His background. I mention all of this as Paul tells the story of Abraham from the Old Testament as an example of why we as Christians do need to live by faith alone that Jesus is God.
 - b) The short version of Abraham's story as it relates here to Galatians is that Paul brings up the point as stated in the book of Genesis that Abraham was considered righteous before God just for believing that He exists. Paul goes on to state that the Old Testament set of laws did not come into 430 years later. Paul's point is that Abraham was considered to be right in God's eyes long before the Old Testament laws were even introduced. The point for you and me is simply that the Old Testament itself teaches that one is saved by their faith in God alone. Trying to please God by obeying those set of laws does not mix with the idea living by faith alone that Jesus is God. Remember that Paul wrote this letter to contradict Jews in Galatia trying to get them to trust in God's laws for their salvation.

- c) Paul then goes on to explain the purpose of God's laws. They were formally written to be observed to show us what are our shortcomings before God. To say it another way those laws do show us what are God's standards for perfection. We can either never violate any of those rules even once and be saved or we can trust in God's perfect payment for all of our sins and not have to worry about violating those laws anymore.
 - d) Remember that God laid out those laws and Jesus did not come on the scene until roughly 1,500 years later to show the world how impossible it is to be fully obedient to those laws. The fact that Israel failed to obey all those laws throughout their history as a nation shows us how impossible it is to please God based solely on trusting in those laws.
 - e) It would probably help at this point to remember why Paul wrote Galatians in the first place. Paul got word that there were people from Jewish backgrounds that were among the Galatian people teaching them that they must become Jewish in order to believe in Jesus as the Promised Messiah. There were two main reasons for teaching this idea. The first is that these Jewish people were worried that people would just believe in Jesus and then go sin all they want. They were worried that these Christians would give people a bad impression about God if they sinned all they wanted. To state the obvious, Christians are not called to live a sinful life, but to care about one's relationship with Him based on our trust that Jesus did die for our sins and not based on willpower to be obedient to Him.
 - i) The second issue that was important for Jewish people is in effect the question of, "If one just believes in Jesus in order to be saved, does that mean God is done with the nation of Israel?" The short answer is no as I've explained in the last lesson.
 - ii) That leads me to Paul's final point in the chapter. Paul essentially says that as far as God is concerned, there is neither Jews or non-Jews. There is neither men nor women. There is only saved or non-saved. To state the obvious, there are times and places to properly classify people as either being men or women or say if one has a Jewish or non-Jewish background. That is not Paul's point. His point is that as far as being saved, there is only faith in Jesus as God and that's it.
 - iii) If one reads this chapter alone, one could see the argument that God could be done with the Nation of Israel. That is why it is important to go through the entire bible to understand that God is not finished with Israel as a nation. I find that idea to be most clear in the New Testament in Paul's letter to the Romans, Chapter 11.
3. This leads me back to my lesson title called "not do". What one has to learn to "not do" once one believes that Jesus did die for our sins, He is God and He is guiding our lives. To "not do" is to trust in our to please God and not just trust in Him to guide our lives. My job over the rest of this lesson is to give us examples and explain further what we are not to do. With that said, Verse 1.
4. Chapter 3, Verse 1: You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.
- a) To understand this first verse. Remember that Paul personally lead a lot of those people to know Jesus. Yet here is Paul at this point in the letter chewing them out. Paul is not saying they have lost their salvation, but that they are now going down the wrong path by trusting in their own ability to please God after they have heard the Gospel message.
 - b) One should also understand the biblical word "fool". It does not just mean someone is not very smart as it does today. It refers to the type of person who doesn't believe that God exists in the first place. It is like calling someone an atheist.
 - i) Didn't Jesus teach that if we call someone a fool we are in danger of being thrown in hell? (See Matthew 5:22.) Did Paul just violate what Jesus taught? Jesus' point is that only God the Father knows who is going to hell and we as humans do not know who is and who is not saved. Paul here in Galatians is not saying that they are going to hell for their actions, but simply wasting their witness as Christians.
 - ii) It would be like telling a Christian, "You are still saved, but you are wasting your time trusting in your works and not just trusting in God to guide your lives."

- c) All of that leads to the second point about Verse 1. The point is that Paul clearly laid out the Gospel message to the churches that Paul started in that region. This is not saying that the Galatians were eyewitnesses to the crucifixion as some translations imply. The text is making the point that the Galatians did get the concept they were saved by faith alone by trusting that Jesus did die for their sins. It is also about accepting the idea that now Jesus is in heaven as He accomplished all of what God the Father required of Him.
- i) I think this would be a good time to explain how Jesus is fully God and fully man at the same time. My favorite illustration on this comes from Jon Curson: He tells this made up story on that topic: God is showing Jesus a planet made up of dogs. God the Father says to Jesus, go to that planet and tell those dogs how much I love them. However, those dogs will reject your message and kill you. That is all right because I will resurrect you. However, after you are resurrected, you will always be a dog even though you will be with Me and always be my son. Oh, and by the way, you are going to that planet as a small Chihuahua. ☺
 - a) That is sort of why Jesus is always fully man and fully God at same time.
 - ii) There, while that image is fresh in our minds, I can come back to Paul's point that the Galatian people got the idea that Jesus is God, that Jesus dies for their sins and they don't have to add anything over and above that message.
5. Verse 2: I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?
- a) Ok, we are back to the topic of "not do". Paul's point is that the Galatians did receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when Paul was there among them. Paul witnessed lives changed and the evidence of the Holy Spirit working in their lives. The "not do" was that Paul got a report back from that region that these same Christians were trying to add to that free gift by doing good things in order to prove to God how worthy they were to be saved. That in effect is why Paul is calling them foolish. Not that they are losing their salvation, but just that they were wasting the gift that God had given them. Let me explain that better:
 - i) Let us start with the question, how do we know when someone else is saved? Didn't you just say earlier that only God the Father knows who is and who is not saved? Isn't that why Jesus tells us not to call people fools in the first place? Yet here is Paul definitely calling the Galatians foolish for believing that they could add to what Jesus has already done in their lives.
 - ii) This comes back to the issue of judgment. We can't judge salvation, but we can and should judge people's behavior. If you think about it, we do that all the time. We as Christians are called to judge who should and should not be among our own fellowship groups based on what people claim they believe and how they act.
 - iii) There is a famous story of an 18th Century train robber who loved to go to church and repent often about how he acted. Then he would still go back to robbing the trains. In other words, there was no repentance. Whether or not he was actually saved is God's business. Ours is to judge behavior and that is the point here.
 - iv) All of that does lead me back to the topic of the Spirit of God. Jesus said in John 14:26 and 15:26 that the Holy Spirit will come upon believers after Jesus left them. I am sure that is what Paul taught the Galatians. Paul's point is not that God has taken away the Holy Spirit from them. It is just that those Galatian Christians were not trusting in God at that point, but just trusting in their good works.
 - b) It might help to explain this another way. There are two things about God I have learned and accept as true: The first is God loves us too much to leave us alone. God puts people and ideas in front of us to draw us to Him. The second idea is that He never violates our free will. It would be like God saying, "I am not going to force you to obey Me, but I will make your life better if you do and make your life more difficult when we turn from Me."

- i) The Galatians at this point did believe in Jesus as God. They did believe He died for their sins and is resurrected. They did believe Jesus could guide their lives. By Paul's own definition, they were saved. The issue was their free will at that time. The Galatians were now trying to show God by their efforts how worthy they are to be saved. That is what Paul is warning them and us about here in these verses.
 - ii) Let me give an illustration here and then we can move on. It would be like me telling you that in order to be saved, God wants to see us doing things for Him. God needs to see us work hard to make a difference for Jesus. We need to prove to God how worthy we are to be saved in the first place. My response is that there is nothing wrong about doing those good works. The question is "why" and not "how much". If we do those things out of gratitude for our salvation, that is a good thing. If we are doing that in order to prove our value to God that is where we will eventually fail every time. That is the "not do" that I am preaching here.
6. Verse 4: Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing? ⁵ Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?
- a) Paul is saying in effect, consider our conduct before we were saved. At that time, we may have had an idea that a single God exists, or back then a belief in multiple gods that were common in that culture. However one believed, we avoided trying to do the right things in order to please whatever god we did believe in. The point is one suffered in the sense that one worked hard in effect to try to please whatever god one did believe in.
 - b) Paul preached to them in effect, you can't earn God's love by working hard. You cannot be good enough for God by how hard you work. If God is perfect by definition, then He must already know all things including whatever sins you are thinking about committing let alone actually committing. By accepting that God Himself has already paid the entire price Himself for our sins, we don't have to work hard to earn His love and respect. That is the "not do" that Paul is focusing upon within this text.
 - c) That leads to Verse 5. If the Galatians needed physical proof that what Paul said is true, they got it through miracles and evidence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. I have found that God does some of His best little miracles for new believers. It is God's way of telling people to learn to trust Him to guide their lives. I have to admit it's always fun to go hang around new Christians and watch how God works such miracles in their lives. If one is in a church where there are not any (not many, but any) newer believers, one has to question whether or not that church is making a difference for Jesus or not.
 - i) Meanwhile Paul is preaching about miracles. Paul's point is that long before any of them started to try to prove their worth to God, He did miracles amongst them.
 - ii) We have no ideas what those miracles were, but if history is any indication, I'm guessing that somebody in their midst got miraculously cured of some illness or some infirmity. I know this happens in groups of newer Christians. That is God's way of verifying to them that He is real and in their midst. I've personally heard the testimony of missionaries who tell similar types of stories.
 - iii) Paul's point is essentially, "did those miracles occur because of the efforts made to prove to God how good you were or just because we believe Jesus is God?"
 - d) At this point, let me address the veteran Christians for the moment. Let's say those of us who have been believers for awhile are familiar with how newer believers do receive such cute little miracles for God to validate His message as authentic and get people to learn to trust Him more with their lives. What if we already trust that Jesus is God and we are trusting that He guides our lives. Why should we read further? I have found that all of us need to remind ourselves regularly of the danger of starting to trust in our own works and not God alone. It is too easy in life to get our focus back on ourselves and try to prove to God how worthy we are to please Him. That is a danger all of us Christians face.

7. Verse 6: Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
⁷Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." ⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.
- a) Ok, time for a new block of verses. Paul is still on the same topic of learning to trust in Jesus payment alone for our salvation and not try to prove our value to Him. In order for Paul to make his case, he does what any good religious Jewish person would do: He uses an Old Testament example of someone who had faith in God.
 - b) Next, remember that Paul was speaking to a non-Jewish audience. I suspect when Paul was amongst them, he taught them who Abraham was. For a Jewish person, when one thinks of the word faith, one thinks of Abraham. He is not only considered the father of the Jewish nation, but one who strictly trusted in God based on faith alone.
 - c) OK then, so why bring up Abraham to a non-Jewish audience? To explain to them how even the man most associated with the word faith in the Old Testament was not justified (that means "just as if he never sinned") by faith. Did Abraham ever sin? The bible does record a number of sins that Abraham committed. At the same time, Genesis 15:6 tells us that Abraham was considered righteous (that is justified) before God just because he did believe that God existed. Verse 6 above is a quote of Genesis 15:6.
 - d) That leads to the big question: What did Abraham have faith in? Was it just a matter that Abraham believed that a single God existed and watches over our world? That's part of it, but that is not the whole picture. The key point is that Abraham trusted in our God to guide his life and resurrect him just because he had that faith in His existence.
 - e) This leads to Verse 7: To explain, we have to go back to Genesis again. In Genesis 18:18 it says that all nations will be blessed through Abraham. The question is if Abraham is the common ancestor of all Jewish people how will all nations be blessed through him?
 - i) It is the idea that just as Abraham had faith that God existed and desires to guide his life, so we can learn to trust that same God to guide our lives as well.
 - ii) The text is not teaching that to believe in Jesus means that we do literally become descendants of Abraham. It just means that God desires to bless our lives just as He did blessed Abraham's life.
 - iii) But didn't Abraham have lots of stuff? I'm not blessed that way. Remember that only some biblical characters had that type of financial blessing. That is not what the text is talking about here. The idea of a blessing in this sense is about having the privilege of having the same God that created the universe also in effect at our disposal to guide us to live as He wants us to live to make a difference for Him. That is a wonderful blessing that should never be taken lightly.
 - f) With all of that said, let us return to the Galatian people themselves. They were dealing with religious Jewish people in their midst who were essentially saying something like, "If you really want God to be pleased with your life, you need to be doing this or that."
 - i) In effect, they were breaking out the circumcision knives and saying one has to be a religious Jew in order to believe that Jesus died for one's sins.
 - ii) That brings me to the lesson title. We all need to regularly consider the topic of what is it we should "not do" in order to try to prove ourselves to God? This has nothing to do with doing good works out of gratitude for what God has already done for us. I'm only condemning the idea of trying to prove our worth to Him.
 - iii) To be honest, this is a constant danger that all of us, myself included have to watch as it is way too easy to get our focus off of God and onto what it is we are trying to accomplish at any one moment in time. It is the danger of thinking, "God, look at me right now. You must be so proud of what I am doing at this moment".
 - iv) The reality is God can't love us any more than He already does right now

8. Verse 10: All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."
- a) From this verse until near the end of the chapter, the text gets into the question of if only trusting in Jesus saves us, what is the purpose of God's laws? To say it another way, why should I try to be a good person if it doesn't affect my eternal destiny? Paul will answer that question, but as I implied, it is going to require most of the chapter in order to get to that answer. In the meantime, let me just focus on Verse 10 here.
 - b) Verse 10 is essentially saying that those who are trying to be saved by keeping those laws are cursed by them, whether they realize it or not. Verse 10 is a quote from the law itself, and specifically from Deuteronomy 27:26. If one reads that passage in this same version of the bible, it is a little different. That is because Paul was thinking either in the original Hebrew or the popular Greek translation at that time. Either way, it is the same thought.
 - c) That leads to the question of if failure to keep all of the Old Testament laws was a curse, then why have them in the first place? The intent of the laws was to teach us what were God's standards for right and wrong. Paul's point is not that those laws are bad things. What he is saying is that God's rules are in effect, but if you are going to live by those set of laws, you must obey all of them.
 - d) It might be best to explain this another way: Have you ever met someone who said that they try to live by the 10 Commandments? Ask such a person if they have ever lied even once? Ask them if they were ever so angry at someone they thought about killing them? Then mention this verse here from Deuteronomy. The point of course, is that no one has the ability to perfectly keep those laws.
 - i) Let me try it one more way: How can we know for sure that God does forgive us of all our sins? How can we know for sure whether or not God grades on a curve? The only thing that all of us can know for sure about how we God judges is if we accept the idea that God is perfect. If He is perfect, then He must be perfect in His judgment. Therefore, we can either accept the idea of being perfectly forgiven, or try to prove to God how right we are based on our own curved standards.
 - ii) I can hear everyone say, this is basic stuff. I already am trusting in Jesus for the complete payment of my sins. Why should I care about all of this stuff? That is because someone may walk up to us and tell us how they try to be a good person or how they try to follow a specific set of rules like the 10 Commandments. We can then respond with the idea of being imperfect doesn't cut it with a perfect God. That is Paul's point here in Verse 10.
 - iii) The next time we start thinking God must be impressed with how we are acting at this moment we can recall something like this verse that reminds us that we can be cursed when we try to prove ourselves to Him. It does not mean that we lose our salvation if we start thinking this way. It just means that it is time for us to get our relationship right with God by remembering it is all up to Him and that's that.
9. Verse 11: Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will 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 hung on a tree."
- a) Speaking of quoting the Old Testament, Paul is just getting warmed up. In Verse 11, Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4. The key point is that to trust God means to have faith in Him.
 - b) In Verse 12, Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5. The idea of that verse is if one thinks that one is a good person by obeying the law, one better obey all of them perfectly.
 - c) Finally in Verse 13, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 21:23. The idea is Jesus was cursed when He hung on pieces of wood. In Jewish thought, that means he was cursed by that act.
 - d) I'll come back to all of these. First, notice that Paul is not shy about quoting verses from the Old Testament to a Gentile audience who probably doesn't know it very well.

- e) My first point to consider is that since Paul does not believe Christians should have to be subject to the Old Testament laws, he sure quotes them a lot to explain their significance and why it is we as Gentile Christians should understand those laws. With that said, I can now talk about each of these laws and why Paul specifically brought them up here.
- f) Now let us come back to what I consider the key verse in the entire book, the quote from Habakkuk that says, "The just shall live by faith". The main point to remember about this verse is that God considers us in good standing before Him simply because we do have faith that He exists, that Jesus did die for our sins and He can and will guide us if we are willing to submit to that belief and let Him guide us.
 - i) Does that mean we should never study the Old Testament or learn more about the God we worship? Of course not. The more one learns about the God we worship, the more one appreciates our relationship with Him. As most of you know, I love to teach the Old Testament. However, it needs to be understood in the light of the New Testament. That is what Paul is doing by giving these quotes here.
 - ii) In effect, Paul is giving a topical bible study here by quoting from all over the Old Testament and explaining those principals that needs to be applied to our lives.
 - iii) Again, this does not mean we avoid doing good things in life. The issue is always about our motivation. If we are making an effort to say, helping others deal with a difficult situation or in some way make a difference for God, the question is are we doing it out of gratitude for our salvation, or to prove our worth to God? The point is when we try to justify our lives are worthwhile by our works, it may please our ego, but as far as God is concerned, it does not affect our eternal relationship with Him. Again, if we believe that God is perfect, how can He learn? How can He be proud of our efforts if He already knows all things? That is why we are to live by faith in His existence, and not try to do things in order to justify that relationship with Him.
- g) Meanwhile, I have two more verses to discuss. In Verse 12, Paul states a quote that says in effect, "If you are going to live by obeying all of those laws, you better do that." To say it another way, if you want to prove to God how worthy you are to obey all of the Old Testament commandments, you better obey all of them "to the letter" and no letting up.
 - i) This comes back to the classic joke that there are two ways to be saved. The first is to never sin even once and tell Jesus to move over. The second is to trust in Jesus' complete payment for our sins.
 - ii) But what about the Old Testament system of making animal sacrifices in order to seek forgiveness of one's sins. For starters, there is no official Jewish temple that exists today, so those sacrifices can't be made. Next, what about sins that we do that we are not aware that we do? What about the Jewish rituals performed today where Jewish people simply confess and repent of their sins? Christians confess their sins, so what is the difference between our confessions and their confessions?
 - a) The difference is Christians are still trusting in Jesus complete payment for our sins in order to be in right standing before God. The Jewish ritual of confessing one's sins may relief guilt, but it still comes down to the issue of asking, am I trusting in my ability to prove myself to God, or am I trusting in the fact of Jesus complete payment of my sins and nothing else?
 - b) So why confess our sins if Jesus has made a complete payment for them? It is to realize that God's way of living is the best thing for our lives, period. That is why He encourages confession and turning from sin.
- h) Finally, let me talk about Verse 13. Does that verse say that God in effect wrote that Old Testament verse about anyone who hangs on a tree being cursed for Jesus? In effect, yes. A reason Jesus was silent before Pontius Pilate is because Jesus understood that mankind is guilty of sin and no confession of a sinless Jesus can make up for that fact.

- i) Does this verse (13) about being hung on a tree mean that the Jewish people who wanted Jesus dead wanted this method, because they understood that curse? Yes it does. The issue of course, is about refusing to accept His payment for one's sins and they thought by Jesus dying this way, God could never accept that payment because God curses anyone who hung on a tree.
 - ii) So if the Old Testament has a decree that say anyone who is cursed should hang on a tree, how can Jesus death save us? The answer is that curse on Jesus was in effect meant for our sins and us. He became that curse so that we can live forever.
 - i) If one is thinking, I sort of know all of this, why should I care? let me answer. To start, it is to remember that we can't prove our worth to God no matter how hard we try. Even if that has sunk in for the moment, it is way to easy to slip back in the mind set of trying to prove to God and to others how worthy we are by our efforts. It is important to regularly remind us of the importance of "The just shall live by faith" because to be honest, our egos constantly get in the way of that fact. Meanwhile, Verse 14.
10. Verse 14: He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.
- a) One of the great questions to ponder in life is "Why did God bother?" If God wants us to trust in Him and have His Spirit upon our lives to guide our lives, what does God get out of the deal? If God is perfect, then by definition, He doesn't need anything.
 - i) The way I answer that question is that if somebody loves do something, they do it just because they want to, and not just say for the money or fame. Someone who just loves to play a musical instrument or say, paint does it because first of all, they just love to do it. If God loves people, then He wants to redeem us, just because He loves us and not for any other incentive. That is why there is such a long time gap between Jesus 1st and 2nd Comings to gather as many believers as possible.
 - b) Believe it or not, that thought does lead us back to Verse 14. The reason that God blessed Abraham hundreds of years before the Jewish law was formalized was to show all of us is so that we can have that love relationship with Him. He desires that simply by trusting in His complete payment for all of our sins. Again, we can't earn His respect by how we live out our lives. Did Abraham realize all of that? Of course not. However, that was God's plan and He set it in motion by telling us that Abraham was saved by faith just because he did trust in God to guide his life.
 - i) The point that Paul is getting at is in effect, just as Abraham was declared to be in right standing before God just by believing in Him, so we too have our own right standing before God just by trusting in His complete payment for our sins. All the efforts we make over and above that should be out of gratitude for that salvation and again, not to try to prove to God our worthiness to be with Him forever.
11. Verse 15: Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.
- a) Just as I love to give examples and illustrations to explain the scriptures, so Paul himself is doing that in these verses. To explain Paul's point, I need to explain what is a "covenant".
 - i) Another word for covenant is a contract. If I agree do something in exchange for you to pay me to do that something, that agreement is a contract or a covenant. If I just agree to do something and there is nothing you have to do in exchange for that promise, that in effect is a "one way" covenant or contract. An example of a one way human covenant is say, our government works to prosecute murders and put them in jail, there is nothing we can do to affect that "one way" agreement.
 - b) That concept of a "one way" contract is that God made a promise to Abraham that his seed (a polite bible term for his sperm), singular will bless all people.

- c) If one knows the story of Abraham, he didn't have any children until he was almost 100 years of age. He did not have his own child through his first wife until that age. If one knows Genesis, Abraham had more than one son. My point is that Paul is making a big deal about the concept that in Genesis 22:18, the text clearly says to his "seed" and not to all of Abraham's sons. Paul's point is that the Promised Messiah (king) that will one day rule over this world will also be a descendant of Abraham.
 - i) If one reads the first line of the New Testament, the point is made that Jesus is the son of Abraham and the Son of David. I'll save the David discussion for another day, but simply say that a promise was made to David that his descendant would be the promised Messiah. In effect, both of these men got the same promise.
 - ii) So why is this important for us to learn? It is to get the idea that long before the Old Testament laws were ever put in place, God made a promise to Abraham that the Promised Messiah (who we call Jesus) would come to pay the price of the sins for the world. To state this concept another way, God in effect promised Abraham that Jesus would one day come to pay the price for all sins. The Law can't negate that promise. That promise is in effect a "one way" contract by God to all that trust in that promise whether they lived before or after the actual event took place.
 - d) That is why the great purpose of God's laws is to show us how short we come before Him and we can't earn His respect based on our efforts. In effect, the history of the nation of Israel is a history of failure for them collectively to keep those laws. Just as it is a failure on our part to try to prove to God how worthy we can be by our efforts to please Him.
 - e) With that said, the summary point of this verse is that God's promise to Abraham that his seed (singular) points to Jesus is not affected by God's laws that came many years later. Speaking of that topic, Verse 17:
12. Verse 17: What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.
- a) The more I think about it, the more it impresses me how Paul knew his Old Testament Scriptures and how well he knew the time line of events. More importantly, it impressed me how much Paul wanted to teach all of these facts to a non-Jewish audience. With that said, his point here in these verses is simply that God's promise to Abraham came many centuries before the Old Testament law was written.
 - b) To understand these verses, one has to read them in context of the surrounding verses. In other words, the focus here is not on the laws of the Old Testament themselves. It is on the fact that God's promise to Abraham came centuries before the law was formally given.
 - i) The point being is that God made an unconditional promise to bless Abraham and that all people that trust in God and the specific "seed" (specific descendant of His) will be blessed. In other words Abraham had faith that God would guide his life, He exists and He will resurrect Abraham after he died. That in effect is what we as Christians trust in, the fact that Abraham's seed really did live as a human, really was resurrected from the dead, really did die for our sins and really can guide us.
 - c) This means that how we act as Christians is not dependant upon the Old Testament laws. Let's be honest, Paul quotes them in this chapter and Paul believes those laws are a guide to us as to how we live our lives. At the same time, we don't get points with God based on whether or not we are perfectly obedient to Him. It is the best way for us to live when we do live by what they teach, but all of those laws must be understood in comparison to what Jesus for us on the cross. That is the main idea here.
 - d) This leads to the next logical question: If obeying all of those laws does not save us, then what is the purpose of those laws to begin with? That is the question that Paul brings up beginning in the next verse.

13. Verse 19: What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.²⁰ A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.
- a) To answer the question of why does God's laws exist, consider the question that if I said to you, there is a man named Jesus who died for your sins and that's that. You might say, well good for Him, but what is a sin? Why should I care that Jesus died for me? What is the reason for that death? That is why the law was necessary.
 - i) This reminds me of another classic joke on this topic. Let's suppose you are on an airline as a passenger. A stewardess comes to your seat and offers you a rolled up parachute to use as a pillow. You may or may not take it, depending upon if you think it will make you more comfortable. Now what if the airline pilot makes an announcement that the plane is running out of fuel is going to crash. We are going to want to have the same parachute because our lives now depend upon it. Having that parachute is a little like our dependence upon Jesus. We don't understand the value of having it unless we understand that the "law" kills us without it.
 - b) Paul then switches to the question of how do we know this set of laws is from God? One has to remember that Paul is speaking to a non-Jewish audience. Therefore, one needs to explain how we know this set of laws is ordained by God Himself. In what is considered one of the strangest references in the letter, Paul brings up the point that angels were with the transfer of God's laws to Moses. Paul was probably thinking of Deuteronomy 33:2. In that verse, it mentions that when the law was delivered to Moses, there were thousands of saints present at that event. That's Paul's strange way of saying, "how do we know the law is from God, well, there were thousands of angels present at that event".
 - i) If that reference isn't strange enough, then Paul talks about Moses, who received those laws. Moses is the "mediator" referred to in Verse 20. What Paul is saying is that Moses is not special for writing the laws, but Moses is only special in that God choose him to deliver those set of laws to us.
 - ii) Like I said, this is considered one of the strangest references in the bible.
 - iii) Let me try answering that question my own way: how do we know that those set of laws are God ordained, and not something that Moses or someone else wrote? The answer comes back to how do we know the bible is the word of God or not?
 - iv) The related answer is the Old Testament is full of predictions about the future that can't be explained any other way. It predicts about the coming Messiah centuries before it happens. It predicts about nation of Israel being conquered and coming back together as a nation again many centuries before it happened. Consider that in the history of the world, no nation has ever been conquered, scattered and then became a nation again, except for Israel, which pulled it off twice in history. That simple idea is proof alone that the laws are God ordained.
 - c) Meanwhile, back to the text. Why does the text end with "God is one"? I suppose it is to emphasize the fact that the angels and Moses who were part of that transfer of that law and these two entities are not God, but just that God Himself is "God". That is a strange reference, but it is there to emphasize the fact that God Himself ordained that law and not the other one's that were there on the scene.
 - i) This leads to one of the great questions of history. How can God become man and still be God at the same time? That issue has prevented multitudes of people from accepting Jesus as God. In other words, how can God be one as Paul writes here in Galatians and yet Paul clearly believes that Jesus is God. Know that the word "trinity" is not in the bible. It is a term that the early church made up to describe the concept that the Spirit of God, God the Father and God the Son are all part of "one", but at the same time each is a separate entity. The answer is that it is an unexplainable mystery that Christians accept as truth.

- ii) Let me give my favorite two favorite "proof verses" on the trinity and then I will move on to finish the lesson. The first is in the book of Genesis, one of the names uses for God is in the "plural form". It even reads that way in English. Consider the verse that says, "Let us make man in our image". (Genesis 1:26). The question is who is God speaking to? If one says, "the angels", that means that angels were involved in the creation process and not part of what is created. That is why God is in effect speaking to Himself in plural form in that verse.
 - iii) My second proof of this is from the "Great Commission". That is when Jesus after He was resurrected said to go into the world and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
 - a) That sentence is from Matthew 28:19. Notice the word name is singular.
 - b) In other words it doesn't say the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When Jesus said name, it is singular, implying unity of those three entities.
 - c) Hey, if Paul can make a big deal how Abraham's "seed" is singular and not in the plural form, I can make a big deal how "name" is in singular form.
14. Verse 21: Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²²But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.
- a) Let's assume by now that all of us accept the idea that God's promise to Abraham came a long time before the law was given and at the same, the law was given by God to us.
 - b) With that assumption made, Paul's next point is another question: Do God's laws in any way nullify His promises to us through Abraham? Remember Paul is fighting against the concept that we can be "right" in God's eyes by obeying those laws. In effect, Paul is back to the issue of why is the law here in the first place if we can be saved and blessed by God just by trusting in His existence and His complete payment for our sins?
 - i) The basic answer is that the law teaches us how guilty we are before God. It is like my parachute example. Unless we understand the value of having that parachute, we don't get its value to us at that moment on an airplane.
 - ii) As I read this passage, I kept thinking about a famous Christian pastor who was on the radio for years, who past away a few decades past. (Walter Martin). He used to preach, "If they won't listen to Jesus, give them Moses". His point was in effect if people don't believe the good news of Jesus dying for one's sins, then give them the bad news of the law condemning us for our sins. That essentially is what Paul is saying here in these verses. That the Old Testament laws were necessary in order to show us what is "sin" to begin with.
 - c) Before I move on, people always wonder about those people who never have heard God's laws. How will they be judged? The answer is fairly. I am convinced that God will judge all of us fairly based on what they do know or should be aware of about His existence and then judge them fairly. Do I believe there will be people in heaven that have never heard of Jesus? Yes I do. That is how I explain babies who die at birth. As I preach all the time, who gets into heaven is God's business. Our job is the "great commission" which is about telling others about Jesus and helping others to grow closer to Him in our lives.
 - d) Meanwhile, back to the law itself: Its main function is to teach us that all people are in effect "sin positive". It's a disease we are all born with. The point is without God's Spirit, we don't have the willpower to overcome sin. That is what Israel as a nation has taught us and that is what we easily learn in life when we try on our own to be pleasing to God.
 - i) Let's try this another way: Did we have to learn that stealing is wrong, or do we just know that on our own? The fact that we instinctively know that stealing is wrong is it's own proof that God puts the basic concept of "the law" in our hearts.
 - ii) That simple point leads us perfectly to the next verse. Speaking of which:

15. Verse 23: Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.
- a) Here's a question to consider: Why was there such a long time gap between the time the laws were first given to Moses and the time Jesus died for our sins? A similar question is why was there such a long time gap between when Adam and Eve sinned and Jesus came to die for all of our sins? My best answer is that God wanted to show the world how it is impossible to be pleasing to Him first, by just knowing He exists like Adam, and next how impossible it is to please Him just by knowing what are His rules for us to live by.
 - b) To say this another way, the nation of Israel's collective failure to keep that set of laws is our proof of how impossible it is to keep them in the first place. Are you saying that no one was saved until Jesus died for our sins? Of course not. God always judges us fairly based on what we do know or should know based on how and when we lived. With that said, anyone who lives in a society where someone is free to study the bible has no excuse before God because knowledge about Jesus resurrection is available for us to learn.
 - c) To keep it simple, the purpose of the laws is to show us that we need that parachute who we call Jesus in order to survive that plane crash called death that all of us will experience. What Paul wants us to not do is try to add to that "parachute" by doing good things to try to prove to God how worthy we are before Him. That is this entire lesson in a nutshell.
 - d) Let me come back one last time to all of us who know this stuff. Why should we care? It is because it is way too easy for us to slip back into the "Hey God, look at me right now" mode of thinking. We all need to be reminded occasionally that life is "all Him" and we can't add anything to that.
 - e) That leads me back to "The Law". Is the law needed today or not? Yes in the sense that it shows us what sin is and how to live a life pleasing to God. No in the sense that we can't be more perfect by obeying that law. Like I have said several times now in this study of Galatians, we are free to sin all we want. The question for us is how much do we want to?
 - f) Meanwhile, we are ready for the last four verses of this chapter:
16. Verse 26: You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.
- a) I can actually summarize all of this in a single thought: It doesn't matter what is one's sex, nationality, if one is a slave or not when it comes to being saved. Either you are saved, or you are not. God's laws can point you in the right direction, but they can't save you. It is only our trust in Jesus that actually saves us.
 - b) The final verse says in effect if we believe in Jesus, then we too are in effect part of that single "seed" descendant of Abraham as we become one with Jesus as a single entity.
 - c) I could give a long lecture here how we become "one" with Jesus, but I have already given a long set of notes and I'll have to save that for another day. My short version is that I do believe we exist in more than three dimensions in heaven. That is how all saved people can be "one" and be separate at the same time. That is how billions of people can all "fit" into heaven at the same time. My proof text is that Jesus walked into a locked room after He was resurrected. (See John 20:19 and 20:26).
 - d) Back to the text one final time: So how do we know are part of this club? It is not a matter of being baptized just the right way or saying a prayer a specific way. It is only a matter of believing in one's heart that Jesus is God, He was and is human, He did die for our sins and He can and does want to guide our lives. If we believe that, it doesn't matter is our background, as Paul is saying here, we are saved, period. Speaking of "period", I am way overdue to wrap up this lesson here. Let me end with my closing prayer and come back to what it is God wants us to "not do" as we trust in Him to guide our lives.

17. Father, we are grateful that we don't have to please You by how we live. Help us to remember that You can't love us any more than You do right now. Help us to use our time and the gifts You have given us to make a difference for You not because we have to, but just because it is the best way to live out our lives. May we trust in Your power to "not do" any good works to impress others or to impress You. Help us make a difference in the world simply out of gratitude for what You have already done for us. Guide us today, as we don't know what You have planned for our future, but You do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen