

## Study: Galatians 3:15 - 4:7, The Covenant and The Law

*Leader's Note: Why do we need rules? Specifically, what do the Old Testament laws have to do with Jesus? In this study, we take a look at how Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the Old Testament laws. This passage ties together Paul's whole argument in the book of Galatians, and also informs how we as Christians should interpret the Bible. The passage will be divided into six "parts". Feel free to split these over multiple weeks if needed. Also, you may want to read the entire passage out loud as a group at the start to give an idea of how it all fits together.*

**Icebreaker Question:** Do you tend to be someone who carefully follows "the rules," or someone who challenges "the rules" regularly?

**Pray to open your time in God's Word.**

### Part 1 - The Covenant (Galatians 3:15-16)

<sup>15</sup> Brothers and sisters, 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. <sup>16</sup> The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

#### Key Terms

##### **Covenant**

An irrevocable agreement between parties.

##### **Promise**

When used in this text, it refers to the ultimate benefits of the covenant God made with Abraham (land, descendants, righteousness, and blessing/inheritance).

##### **Seed**

This word in the original context of Genesis 12:7 could be singular or plural. Here, however, Paul is interpreting it as referring explicitly to Jesus.

**Ask the Group:** Describe the covenant between God and Abraham (See Genesis 12:1-7 and Genesis 15 for more information.). What did Abraham do? What did God do?

*Possible Answers: In the case of Abraham, God made a covenant to bless Abraham, and Abraham put his faith in God.*

**Ask the Group:** Is there anyone in your life with whom you have made a covenant, or something like it? What were the conditions of that covenant?

*Possible Answers: Marriage, adoption.*

## Part 2 - The Law (Galatians 3:17-18)

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

### Key Term

#### **Law**

In the New Testament, the term law is used to refer to the code that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai and, at times, to the entire Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible).

**Ask the Group:** What is the inheritance that is mentioned here? What is it based on?

*Possible Answer: The inheritance mentioned here is the same as the blessings promised to Abraham above, which are based on God's faithfulness to His covenant, and on Abraham's faith.*

**Ask the Group:** Oftentimes we lose sight of what our inheritance in Christ is based upon. Can you think of a time when you tried to earn God's favor?

- What led you to do so?
- How do we fight against the desire to pursue an approach to God that's based on the "law"?

## Part 3 - Why the law? (Galatians 3:19-20)

<sup>19</sup> Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. <sup>20</sup> A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

Note: The phrase "It was added because of transgressions" linguistically could also mean "it was added for the purpose of revealing transgressions."

**Ask the Group:** Put the following events on a timeline. When does the law's "effectiveness" end?

What implications does this have?

- Jesus comes
- Abraham receives the promise
- Israel commits transgressions
- The law is given

*Possible Answers: Abraham → Israel's transgressions → The law is given → Jesus comes. This implies that the law wasn't "effective" anymore after Jesus came.*

## Part 4 - Law vs. Covenant? (Galatians 3:21-22)

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

**Ask the Group:** What is the purpose of the Old Testament laws?

- What value do they hold for us as believers in Jesus today?

*Leader's Note: These are BIG questions, and while important, don't let them derail your study! Possible Answers: The OT laws are meant to make us aware of sin, but not to deliver us from it. Only Jesus can do that, as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Thus, by looking at the OT, we become convicted of sin; however, we are under no obligation to uphold OT law because Jesus has paid the penalty of the law for us. Now, the Spirit lives in us and it is in obedience to the Spirit that we seek to honor God by doing things that are right (the original goal of the law). This obedience does NOT earn us favor from God.*

### **Part 5 - It all comes back to Jesus (Galatians 3:23-29)**

<sup>23</sup> Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

<sup>26</sup> So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

**Ask the Group:** How does Jesus fulfill God's promise to Abraham?

*Possible Answer: Since Abraham had faith in God, others who have faith in God are also Abraham's descendants. This is possible because Jesus (one of Abraham's descendants) is the "seed" referred to in Genesis 12, and because Jesus paid the penalty for the transgressions mentioned earlier, independently of the system of the law.*

**Ask the Group:** Paul says that, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". In light of Paul's argument with the Galatians, what does this mean?

*Possible Answer: Specifically, it means that the Galatian Gentile Christians shouldn't need to follow Jewish customs in order to follow Christ. Also, it means that other social situations (such as slavery, or the culture of male dominance) should not restrict people from following Jesus and receiving the full blessings of the Spirit.*

### **Part 6 - Who's your Daddy? (Galatians 4:1-7)**

<sup>1</sup> What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. <sup>2</sup> The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. <sup>3</sup> So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. <sup>6</sup> Because you are his sons, God sent the

*Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”<sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.*

**Ask the Group:** Describe a time when you received a meaningful gift. Why do you think the gift was given at that time, and not earlier?

*Possible Answer: Because they knew it was the best time for it, when it would be received and appreciated appropriately.*

Key Term

**Abba**

An intimate term for God as Father.

**Ask the Group:** Do you have the kind of relationship with God that allows you to call Him “Abba, Father”?

- What gets in the way of you having that kind of relationship with God?
- What is one step you can take towards pursuing greater intimacy with God this week?

**Ask the Group:** What is our community application of this passage?

*Leader’s Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.*