

THE PROMISE, THE LAW, AND THE GOSPEL

One of the most important issues in the first century church was the status of Gentile believers. Almost all of Paul's letters addressed the problem (even his epistle to the Philippians). He wrote **Romans** and **Galatians** for that specific purpose. **Romans** emphasizes that all are saved by the grace of God, apart from the law, through the gospel of Christ. **Galatians** strongly warns not to add the law to the gospel as part of God's plan of salvation.

Galatians can be divided into three parts, each part containing two chapters:

The Gospel of Christ 1-2

The Promise of Christ 3-4

The Spirit of Christ 5-6

The Gospel of Christ

Paul asserts his authority as an apostle and the divine inspiration of the gospel he preaches (**1:1,11-24**). He rebukes the Galatians for turning away from the true gospel and following another gospel which is not from God (**1:6-9**).

Paul explains that the revelations he received were directly from Jesus. He did not depend upon any other apostle for his learning or doctrine (**1:15-24**).

This is why he mentions his steadfast consistency on the question of Judaism in **chapter 2**. He already had the truth, and the other apostles agreed with his teachings and gave their approval (**2:1-10**).

Unfortunately, Peter was not consistent when he went to Antioch. He associated with Gentile Christians (according to the gospel but contrary to the law of Moses) until certain disciples came from Jerusalem. Then he withdrew himself, so Paul rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy. This event in **2:11-21** also reinforces Paul's truth of the gospel.

The Promise of Christ

Chapters 3 & 4 are the meat of the book where Paul deals with the issue. He explains the relationship between the promise to Abraham, the law given to Moses, and the gospel of Christ.

He reminds them that the Spirit was given through faith (the gospel) and not through the law (**3:1-5**). Next, he brings Abraham into the picture by stating that Abraham was justified by faith (**v. 6, Gen. 15:6**). Those who believe as Abraham believed are sons of Abraham (**3:6-9**).

The promise to Abraham is the gospel in prophecy (**v.8**). The object of faith in the promise is the seed of Abraham. The object of our faith from the gospel is Christ. He is the seed of Abraham (**v.16**) and the fulfillment of the promise. By faith, we are children of God and heirs of the promise to Abraham (**3:26-29**).

The Jews were confused over the purpose of the law. Paul explains by the Spirit how the law fit into God's plan. First, he notes what the law could not do for the Jews. It could not save those who broke it; instead, they would be cursed (**3:10-14**). The law did not fulfill God's plan, nor was it "Plan B" (**3:14-18**).

So why did God give the law? It was added because of transgressions until the seed should come (**v.19**). It was God's way to show their need for a Savior from the sins they were already committing. The law prophesied the coming of the Messiah, and spread the faith in the true and living God throughout the pagan world. Jesus came at the perfect time (**4:4**).

Paul uses two illustrations to explain the law (**3:22-4:7** and **4:21-31**). In both, the law is a slave of the Master. In the first illustration, the law is a slave that teaches the child of the Master. When the child is full-grown, he is no longer under the authority of the slave who taught him (**4:1-7**). He enjoys all the rights as an heir of the Master.

In the second illustration, the offspring (Ishmael) of the slave (Hagar) is under bondage. The slave offspring **and his mother** are **cast out**. He does not inherit anything from Abraham, though he was Abraham's physical descendant and born first. Isaac was the child by promise (and by Abraham's faith).

The Jews today are Abraham's physical descendants, but they have no inheritance in Christ until they believe in Christ. God has rejected the physical but unbelieving and disobedient Jews. God has also removed their "mother," the law of Moses. The chosen people of God today are the offspring of the gospel of Christ from Mt. Zion, whether they are physical Jews or Gentiles.

The Spirit of Christ

So Paul warns that living under the law is living under a yoke of bondage. One cuts himself off from Christ and falls from grace by choosing to follow any part of the law (**5:1-6**).

The Judaizing teachers were violating the law they were trying to impose on the Gentiles. If one follows the gospel by faith and obedience, he will bear the fruit of the Spirit and not cause trouble to the Gentile brethren (**5:7-26**).

The letter ends with Paul encouraging us to help each other spiritually and physically and sowing to the Spirit (**6:1-10**).