

## Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 7-2-17

July 2 we will study Galatians 3:15-25. Discussion questions are:

1. Why does grace scare some folks? Does it ever scare you?
2. What is the essential difference in law and promise?
3. Which of the “systems” of salvation do you prefer: Law in Exodus 19:5, 7-8 or Promise in Genesis 15:3, 5-6?
4. In the sermon today Bud said, *“I have met very few people in my life who, if you listen to them talk long enough, will not eventually reveal that they believe they will go to Heaven if they have done enough and lived good enough.”*
  - a. Has that been your experience?
  - b. Which of the 2 sons in the parable of the Prodigal Son best illustrates, “I will go to Heaven if I have done enough and lived good enough.”?
5. The following verses contain an answer. What is the question?
  - a. 17-18 – (Does the law change the promise?)
  - b. 19-20 – (Is the law greater than the promise?)
  - c. 21-24 – (Does law contradict grace?)
6. What is the principle of priority? (vs. 17 – Law came before promise.)
7. What is the principle of mutual exclusiveness? (vs. 18 – Law and grace are mutually exclusive.)
8. What are 2 purposes of the law given in 19a and 24?
  - a. 19a – Law reveals sin
  - b. 25 – Law leads us to Christ

Sermon: *Would You Rather Saved by Law or Grace?*

To understand Galatians 3 we need to start with Exodus 19. I know that sounds a little weird but stay with me on this.

An extremely claustrophobic lady was taking her wheel chair bound friend to visit her friend in the hospital. When they got there the claustrophobic lady was filled with anxiety when she learned the patient was on the eighth floor and she would have to ride in one of those closed, confining elevators. Being a good friend she took a deep breath, got on the elevator with her friend and punched number eight. It seemed like an eternity for the elevator to get to the eighth floor and the doors to open. She took her friend down to her friend’s room and left her there intending to come back in a couple of hours and pick her up. She got back on the elevator to go down and looked for number one which she assumed was the floor she came in on. To her dismay the numbers went from eight to two. There was no floor number one. There was an “M” and “L”. She thought, “I guess that stands for “main” and “lower”. She assumed she must have come in on the main floor so she pushed “M”. The doors closed and her claustrophobia surrounded her like a dark cloud. Her heart pounded as she watched the numbers go from eight on down until finally the “M” button lit up and a little chime sounded. Then the “M” light went off and the elevator stopped. Little did she know “M” stood for mezzanine. She also did not know the elevator had doors on both the front which she was facing and the back.

Behind her was a door that opened onto the mezzanine. The front door doesn't open onto the mezzanine. She stood there as the elevator stopped. She did not hear the door behind her open. She stared at the door in front of her. It did not open. She thought, "My worst nightmare has just come true. I'm trapped in an elevator. I can't stand this." She saw a crack of light at the bottom of the door in front of her so she got on her hands and knees and cupped her hands against that crack and began hollering, "Help! Help me! Help me!" A man entered the elevator off the now open mezzanine entrance, saw her on her hands and knees hollering and simply said, "What's the problem?"

For some reason I always think of that story every time I preach on grace. Because that lady in the elevator reminds me of us. She is claustrophobic about elevators like we are about grace. So claustrophobic she can't enjoy the ride. I want to plead with you this morning to relax. We are not going to lower the standards of what the Bible teaches. We are not going to encourage people to believe in cheap grace. We are not going to encourage anyone to continue in sin so that grace may abound. So will you just relax and enjoy the ride. If you do, you stand a good chance of coming out of this series on Galatians with an intense ability to resist sin and you will live according to a higher standard than you have ever lived in your life. You will find yourself more obedient to the commands of God. If you decide to close your mind to the grace message of Galatians you will spend an inordinate amount of your time on your knees pleading with God, "Save me! Save me!" when you are not even lost.

There are two concepts in the Bible of how God has tried to help us. Those two concepts are called "law" and "promise". Sometimes "promise" is called "grace". They are the two primary ways God has tried to help mankind since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden.

"Law" is illustrated in Exodus 19. Watch for the word "if" because the most important word in any law system is the word "if". Listen to Exodus 19:5, 7-8: Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession....So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." That is a classic example of law. What makes law work is condition. If you keep the conditions of the law then you are innocent of breaking the law.

"Promise" is illustrated in Genesis 15. Notice the lack of conditions; the absence of the word "if" as a condition of God's blessing. Listen to Genesis 15:3, 5-6: Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.".... (God) took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. What do you do with a promise? You accept it. What do you do with a law? You keep it. Every believer must decide at some point which of those two systems is the way God works in your life. Does He work primarily by your accepting His promise or primarily by your keeping His laws? I realize those overlap. All people who accept the promises of God want to also obey God's laws.

But the issue you must see is that one of those systems dominates your thinking about your salvation. So be honest with yourself for a moment and answer, “Which of those two systems do I see as the primary way I am going to get to Heaven?” Will I get to go to Heaven because God said I would or because youI have done enough to get there?

I have met very few people in my life who, if you listen to them talk long enough, will not eventually reveal that they believe they will go to Heaven if they have done enough and lived good enough. That is the very issue the entire book of Galatians is trying to deal with. Nobody ever lives good enough or obeys enough commands.

It is so important for you to learn to look at salvation like Abram looked at the stars. When he looked up at the stars, God said, “That’s how many descendants you are going to have!” All Abram does is say, “I believe you God!” And God credited that to him as righteousness. Doesn’t that sound too good to be true? Here’s a news flash – **everything about God is too good to be true.**

Out of the ancient discussion of promise versus law, the book of Galatians is born. Let me give you a simple technique for understanding Paul’s letters, which can be a bit technical at times. When you read Paul’s letters you are reading the answers. The task of the reader is to discover what the question is. It’s a bit like listening to one half of a telephone call. If you walk in my office and I’m on the phone and you hear me say this, “5:30 is good for me. I think hamburgers would be great. Probably about 6 of us.” I just gave you the answer. Did you figure out the question? You probably got most of the question. You figured out I and 5 other people are going to eat hamburgers at 5:30 somewhere. You do not know who is calling or why they wanted to know the menu or the size of the crowd. But you know generally what the question was by listening to the answer.

Our task in Galatians is to discover the question by reading the answers. This morning I want you to see just one of three questions Paul is answering about salvation. Paul takes 6 chapters to say, “Salvation is about promise, not law keeping.” As he contends for that principle there are those in Paul’s audience who question everything he says. So listen to one of their questions, then hear his answer.

People with strong Jewish backgrounds are contending that a person goes to Heaven by his success in keeping the law. If you do a good enough job you get to go to Heaven when you die. If you don’t do a good enough job, you don’t get to go to Heaven when you die. So they ask some questions to try and prove salvation is essentially by law keeping not simply by accepting a promise.

Their first question flows out of the following assumption: “The promise was given to Abraham. Then 430 years later the law came. So what happened was the law changed the promise.” When Moses came along God quit dealing with people by promise and grace and started dealing with people by demanding they keep the law good enough. So, didn’t law change promise? (That’s the question Paul will answer.) Paul’s answer is, “It’s not that way with human laws. If two people make a contract, a third person can’t

come along and say ‘I want to change their contract.’ God made a contract with Abraham and Moses can’t come along and change it.” So Paul’s answer is, “No, law cannot change promise.” In verses 17 and 18 he says there are two principles that make it impossible for law to change promise:

### THE PRINCIPLE OF PRIORITY

Galatians 3:17 – “The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.”

The principle of priority is, “Which came first?” If God makes a covenant 430 years before He makes a law, that covenant has priority because it is the original covenant with God. That covenant continued all the way up through the work of Jesus. That’s his point in verse 16, “That is how it is with the promises God made to Abraham and his descendant. The promises were not made to many descendants, but only to one, and that one is Christ. – Galatians 3:16 Whatever the law was doing, it was a parenthesis. It was not something God intended from the beginning.

The second reason that the law cannot change promise is because of a principle called

### THE PRINCIPLE OF MUTUAL EXCLUSIVENESS

“For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.” – Galatians 3:18

The inheritance Abraham received – he either received it because God promised it or because it was a law and Abraham kept it good enough to deserve it. Which was it? Law and grace are mutually exclusive. The Bible does not teach, “Let’s have a little grace and a little law because we gotta have both.” Law and grace are polar opposites. They are totally different systems. And you have to choose one or the other. Either you are going to Heaven by the Exodus method, “If you keep my commandments you are my people....” or the Genesis method, “See the stars? That’s how many offspring you will have. You believe it and it will happen.”

You have to choose between those two systems. You cannot blend them. A father says to his son, “I am going to give you the family business if you will stay in the business 10 years and if you will show an increasing profit every year for 10 years.” That is a law. A promise is, “Son, you can have the family business.” There is a huge difference in those systems. With one you have to perform. With the other you inherit.

Paul’s approach is kind of complicated. Frankly I find it a lot easier to listen to how Jesus taught the same thing. He did it by telling a story. *“Once there was a man who had two sons....”* You know the story – the Prodigal Son story. One son wastes a lot of his life and all his inheritance in wild living. When he comes home, his father runs to accept him home and immediately restores him to his position as a son who will one day receive an inheritance. He is saved by the grace of a forgiving Father. He receives what

he does not deserve. The other son speaks from a mindset that we earn the Father's love. He says, "*All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.*" Do you see the difference? One son is accepted because his father is full of grace; the other son expects to be accepted because he deserves it for working so hard and being so obedient. In each case the son's behavior flows out of his view of the father. One of them sees the father as full of grace; the other sees the father as full of law. One of them, at the lowest point in his life, remembers a father full of grace. The other son, who has never missed a day of work, sees grace as a character flaw in his father. Let me ask you a question, from that point on which of those two boys lived the happier life? The one who experienced grace or the one who kept the law? Which one enjoyed the ride?

I ask you this morning to think about how you feel about your own salvation – your own journey toward eternity. Are you enjoying the ride? Are you secure in Christ? If you aren't you really need to take a hard look at which of the two systems of salvation you believe in – salvation by grace or salvation by law keeping. Only one of those systems brings peace. Is the system you believe in bringing you peace?