

▶ GLENSTONE CHAPEL ◀  
**Community Group Bible Study Guide**

**Passage: Galatians 3:15-25**  
**For use May 4-10, 2008** (sermon for May 11<sup>1</sup>)

**QUESTIONS TO USE IN GROUP  
(OR INDIVIDUAL) STUDY**

**LAUNCHING**

1. Have you ever been named in someone's will and received some inheritance as a result? How did it feel to be the recipient?
2. When have you been "burned" when someone failed to live up to her/his end of a contract? Consider a business or personal transaction, even school situations. *Do not share unless you have dealt with the bitterness that normally accompanies this experience.*
3. You know the familiar fantasy about receiving an inheritance from a "rich uncle"? Just imagine inheriting a million dollars. How do you think you would react? Choose **one, share with the group if you wish:**  
\_\_\_ A. "I'd faint. Simply couldn't deal with it."  
\_\_\_ B. "I'd laugh. Maybe to hide my nervousness?"  
\_\_\_ C. "I'd cry. It would just be one more heavy burden to bear and I'm already too busy."  
\_\_\_ D. "I'd call my stock broker and my tax-guy real fast."  
\_\_\_ E. "I'd keep it quiet, bank it and think a long time what to do with it."  
\_\_\_ F. "I don't have any uncles!"  
\_\_\_ G. Another option? \_\_\_\_\_

**UNDERSTANDING Galatians 3:15-25**

1. If anyone in the group has professional legal experience (as an attorney, paralegal, etc.), ask that person to read the passage aloud. Ask others to identify the people included (**fill in blanks below**).
2. ["Who's who?"] Identify all the "players on the stage" for greater understanding.
  - Paul. \_\_\_\_\_
  - "Brothers." \_\_\_\_\_
  - God. \_\_\_\_\_
  - Abraham. \_\_\_\_\_
  - Angels. \_\_\_\_\_
  - Humankind. \_\_\_\_\_
  - Jesus Christ. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Discuss: "What is the parallel point Paul makes between the types of covenants (wills) people make,

<sup>1</sup>Mothers' Day!!!

and the covenant -promise (3:8) God made to Abraham?"<sup>2</sup>

4. **Read aloud** the passage again. This time divide everyone else into "listening teams": (1) what is said about "promises"? (2) About "Law"? (3) About "faith"? [Allow teams to confer a few minutes before reporting.] Ask the "listening teams" to report on what they observed .

A. "Promises." Who was doing the promising? What was promised? To whom?

B. "Law." Why was the Law given?<sup>3</sup> What is the Christian's relationship to the Old Testament Law?<sup>4</sup>

C. "Faith." How does faith illuminate 'Law' and 'Promise'?

5. **Discuss:** "How is relating to God by the Law like being kept in prison, or scolded by a harsh disciplinarian (vss. 22-25)? How does Christ change all this? Why then would anyone go back to the Law?"<sup>5</sup>

6. How did Paul **feel** about going back under the Law regime? How strongly did he feel it?

**REFLECTING on Gal. 3:15-25**

1. "What experience showed you that keeping rules was not the way to obtain God's mercy?"<sup>6</sup>
2. Promises made by humans can potentially be disappointing and hurtful, but God's Promises are trustworthy. As a matter of praise, invite several to share about a recent experience they've had of God's faithfulness.

3. **How much harder** is it to stop living under the restraints of the Law, but instead to follow 1 Cor. 10:31? "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

**FURTHER REFLECTION (on your own)**

- "When is it difficult for you to admit to God that you have a need or problem?"
- "When is it difficult for you to ask others for help?"
- "What would help you allow both God and others to help you?"<sup>7</sup>

**Feedback, please! E-mail Dan at [NananDrDan@aol.com](mailto:NananDrDan@aol.com)**

**FOR PERSONAL PREPARATION**

<sup>2</sup>*Serendipity Bible for Groups*, page 1520.

<sup>3</sup>"Why is the Law unable to set aside or add to the Promises spoken to Abraham? (vss 15-18) ,"from the *NIV Quiet-Time Bible*, page 1432.

<sup>4</sup>"How does a clear grasp of God's law help us to realize our need for Christ? (vss. 22-25) ,"from the *NIV Quiet-Time Bible*, page 1432.

<sup>5</sup>*Serendipity Bible for Groups*, page 1520.

<sup>6</sup>*1 John, Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 48.

<sup>7</sup>*NIV Quiet-Time Bible*, page 1432.

**Passage: Galatians 3:15-25**

**1. What is a 'covenant'?** A contract, a treaty, a promise, a pledge. "God so ordered the life of man [humankind in Eden] that the covenant idea should develop there as one of the pillars of social life, and after it had so developed, He formally introduced it as an expression of the existing relation between Himself and man. . . . A covenant . . . may be of the nature of . . . an arrangement imposed by a superior party on one that is inferior and accepted by the latter. . . . God graciously condescended to come down to the level of man, and to honor him by dealing with him more or less on the footing of equality."<sup>8</sup>□

**2. For your reflection:** Which of the following titles for this passage would seem most fitting? Check one (✓) or write your own.

- \_\_\_ Exposing Our Needs (*The NIV Quiet Time Bible*)
- \_\_\_ The Promise Was Not Set Aside by Law, Nor Was It Opposed by Law (*Huttar*)
- \_\_\_ Jews and Gentiles Are Saved by Faith (*TEV*)
- \_\_\_ The Law and the Promise (*CEV*)
- \_\_\_ Your title?: \_\_\_\_\_.

**3. Who's who** in this passage? Ponder all the **"players** on the stage."

- **Paul.** The writer; theologian; church-planter; former Pharisee.
- **Galatian believers,** "brothers." Through faith in Jesus Christ, had received the Promise (vs. 22); had been prisoners of the Law before Jesus came (vs. 23); were justified by faith (vs. 24).
- **God.** Spoke to Abraham; "established" (vs. 17) the Covenant; gave the Law; ". . . an unchangeable God does not arbitrarily alter the essential nature of a covenant once confirmed. . . ."<sup>9</sup>
- **Abraham.** By grace (vs. 18), had received a solemn Promise from God.
- **Angels.** Instrumental in the giving of the Law to Moses who served as the mediator between Israel and God. (Cf. Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2)
- **Humankind.** "A prisoner of sin" (vs. 22).
- **Jesus Christ.** The one Seed (vs. 16) = "the Seed" (vs. 19) who was promised (Gen. 3:15; Gen. 12:7).

**4. ". . . an example from everyday life"** (vs. 15).

- "In his appeal to reason, Paul points to judicial practices by way of analogy."<sup>10</sup>
- "Paul . . . asks the Galatians to think about **how wills are made.** His point is that once established no one can alter a will. Likewise the Covenant given by God to Abraham cannot be altered. So the Law which was given to Moses several centuries later has no impact on this Covenant-Promise."<sup>11</sup>

**5. ". . . a human covenant. . . "** (vs. 15).

- "Once someone agrees to something, no one else can change or cancel the agreement." (*CEV*)
- "Akin to a last will and testament in which one's descendants are promised certain things. In this case the blessings promised to the children of Abraham are, according to Paul, justification by faith and the gift of the Spirit (vss. 10-14)."<sup>12</sup>
- "Under Roman law a 'testator could add a codicil at any time that he chose, but after his death (or before it, for that matter) nobody else might do so."<sup>13</sup>
- ". . . it is not lawful to break covenants and contracts which are justly made, and are according to law among men, neither may anything be added to them."<sup>14</sup>

- "Just as a human last will and testament cannot easily be nullified, so it is with God's testamental Promise with Abraham. It cannot be thought of as being replaced by the Law."<sup>15</sup>

**6. "The promises"** (vs. 16).

- ". . . the Covenant of grace is a Covenant established with those who are in Christ."<sup>16</sup>
- ". . . in the Covenant of grace man is enabled to meet [the requirements of the covenant] only by the regenerating and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit."<sup>17</sup>
- "The promised blessings came to Abraham's true children, not because they earned them via law-keeping . . . but because they came by grace without conditions."<sup>18</sup>

**7. ". . . spoken to Abraham and to his seed."** (vs. 16).

- ". . . the Promise of God does not find fulfillment in all of Abraham's descendants without distinction, but only in those who, like Abraham, are people of faith."<sup>19</sup>
- "The Promises of the Covenant were to the seed, as well as to Abraham, and hence did not terminate with his death."<sup>20</sup>
- "The whole spiritual seed of Abraham concentrates in Christ."<sup>21</sup>
- "The seed promised to Abraham is Christ and those that are identify with Christ are the real heirs of the Covenant."<sup>22</sup>

**8. ". . . 'your seed meaning one person. . . '"** (vs. 16).

<sup>12</sup> *John, Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 49.

<sup>13</sup> [Bruce, Commentary on Galatians, as quoted in *1 John, Galatians*, Serendipity House,, page 49.]

<sup>14</sup> *Geneva Bible*

<sup>15</sup> *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 93.

<sup>16</sup> *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 274

<sup>17</sup> *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 264.

<sup>18</sup> *1 John, Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 49

<sup>19</sup> *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 92.

<sup>20</sup> *People's New Testament Commentary*.

<sup>21</sup> *People's New Testament Commentary*.

<sup>22</sup> *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 279.

<sup>8</sup> *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, pages 263-264.

<sup>9</sup> *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 297.

<sup>10</sup> *1 John, Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 49

<sup>11</sup> *1 John, Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 49

- "... designs all Abraham's spiritual seed, both Jews and Gentiles; who are all one in Christ, and so Abraham's seed and heirs according to the Promise; hence there is no room for the objection of the Jew to the apostle's application of this passage to Christ. . . ."23

- "... both the Jews and the Gentiles grow together in one body of the seed of Abraham, in Christ alone, so that all are one in Christ, as it is afterward declared in Gal. 3:28. Paul does not speak of Christ's person, but of two peoples, who grew together in one, in Christ."24

**9. "... does not set aside the covenant"** (vs. 17).

- "... the Law, in spite of its God-ordained origin, should never, Paul maintains, be thought of as somehow a replacement for the Promise. . . . The Law is a supplement to the Promise, not a replacement for it."25

- "... the Law has not annulled or altered the Covenant."26

- "... because the Law constituted for Israel an explicit reminder of the demands of the covenant of works, there was a greater danger of mistaking the way of the Law for the way of salvation."27

- "... the Law was not intended to supplant but to serve the gracious ends of the Promise. . . ."28

- The fact that the Law came a long time after the Promise shows it was secondary.<sup>29</sup>

- "... if a man's covenant (being authenticated) is firm and strong, much more is God's Covenant. Therefore the Law was not given to cancel the Promise made to Abraham with respect of Christ, that is to say, the end of which depended upon Christ. . . . the Promise is of itself firm and strong, it was also confirmed by virtue of being in place for a long time, that is, for 430 years, so that it could in no way be broken."30

**10. God gave Abraham a Promise** (vs. 18).

- "God's promises to Abraham had nothing to do with law or obligations. It was a pure gift without conditions."31

- "[Paul's ] Gospel stands in continuity with the Promise made to Abraham."32

- "... the way Abraham obtained salvation is typical for New Testament believers, no matter whether they

be Jews or Gentiles. . . the covenant with Abraham is still in force."33

- "Law and Promise exclude each other. The legal heir receives his inheritance by law, if there be no will; one not a legal heir may receive it by the promise of a will."34

**11. "... the purpose of the Law?"** (vs. 19).

- "... a twofold purpose in connection with the covenant of grace: (1) to increase the consciousness of sin (vs. 19); and (2) to be a tutor unto Christ (vs. 24)."<sup>35</sup>

- "... through the coming of Christ it received its full accomplishment, and came to an end; the ceremonial law was utterly abolished, and the moral law ceased to be a covenant of works, though it continues a rule of walk and conversation. . . ."36

- "There is Law and Gospel in the Old Testament, and there is Law and Gospel in the New. . . . the Law seeks to awaken in the heart of man contrition on account of sin, while the Gospel aims at the awakening of saving faith in Jesus Christ."<sup>37</sup>

- "... to teach them to look to Christ. . . . That men might understand by discovering their sins that they are only saved by the grace of God. . . ."38

- "... for the sake of restraining transgressions; which had there been no Law, men would not have been accountable for them; and they would have gone into them without fear, and with impunity; but the Law was given, to lay a restraint on men, by forbidding such and such things, on pain of death; and also for the detecting, discovering, and making known transgressions, what they are, their nature and consequences. . . ."39

**12. The Law could not give life.** (vs. 21).

- "[Paul's ] Gospel stands . . . in some discontinuity with the Law given through Moses."<sup>40</sup>

- God would not have given "... His only-begotten Son . . . unnecessarily . . . [the cross was] the only possible means to the salvation of sinful man."<sup>41</sup>

- "... Christ would not have been sacrificed if the Law could have given life."<sup>42</sup>

**13. "The whole world is a prisoner of sin"** (vs. 22).

- "The Bible clearly teaches . . . the universal sinfulness of man."<sup>43</sup>

**14. "... to lead us to Christ"** (vs. 24).

23 *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

24 *Geneva Bible*

25 *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 92.

26 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, , page 279.

27 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 279.

28 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 297

29 *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 93

30 *Geneva Bible*

31 *1 John, Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 49.

32 *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 90.

33 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 278.

34 *People's New Testament Commentary*.

35 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 298.

36 *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

37 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 612.

38 *Geneva Bible*

39 *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, by John Gill.

40 *Galatians*, by David K. Huttar, page 90.

41 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 371, quoting A.A. Hodge

42 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 371

43 *Systematic Theology*, by L. Berkhof, page 240.

- "[pedagogue] . . . the slave employed in Greek and Roman families of the better class in charge of the boy from about six to sixteen . . . watched his behavior at home and attended him when he went away from home as to school. Christ is our Schoolmaster and the Law as pedagogue kept watch over us till we came to Christ."<sup>44</sup>
- "The Law cannot impart life, but it does reveal the bondage of people to sin and thus drives them to faith as their only hope. [The Law] . . . 'looked after us' until Christ came, whereupon its task was finished."<sup>45</sup>

**Information for community group leaders:**

- Gal. 3:26-4:7 (or 20), to be studied, May 11-17; sermon on May 18
- Gal. 4:8-31, to be studied, May 18-24; sermon on May 25

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<sup>44</sup> *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, by A. T. Robertson.

<sup>45</sup> *John, Galatians*, Serendipity House, page 49.