

Series: Galatians	Reference: Galatians 3:15-29	Title: Modus Operandi	Date: 04.30.23
Website Writeup:			
Do you share law or grace with others? Are you a rule-keeper who judges others by how well they keep the rules, or a grace-giver overflowing with good favor & forgiveness? We must remember, only the God of all grace saves. Our witness must be focused on His grace.			

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So, Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians because some Pharisaic believers insisted Paul wasn't being complete with the Gospel. That in order to be saved, you had to also keep the law, specifically, they pressed circumcision as the Old Testament sign of the covenant. So, in chapter 1, Paul laid out the good news of God's grace - Jesus died for our sins.

In chapter 2, Paul explains we aren't saved by the law, but by faith in Jesus. Jesus took on the curse of the law so that by faith in Him we might be set free (Gal. 3:10-14). Today Paul will tell us this message of salvation by grace through faith is nothing new, that it predates the law, since the promise of righteousness through faith was made to Abraham before God even gave Israel the law (vv15-18). Grace has always been God's modus operandi.

Here's your question today...Do you share law or grace with others? Are you a rule-keeper who judges others by how well they keep the rules, or a grace-giver overflowing with good favor & forgiveness? We must remember, only the God of all grace saves & our witness must be focused on His grace.

Turn with me to p796 in your pew Bibles to Galatians 3:15-29...*Brothers & 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.*

Stop there a moment...When Kim & I married, we stood before God & community making a sacred covenant promise to each other. Additionally, when I negotiated the terms for the lease of this space, we signed that with an understanding between two parties that nothing could change the promise we made.

Paul's making this argument here when he says that just as with a human document where nothing can be added or taken away, it is the same with God's promise; that He made a promise with humanity which can't be broken.

It continues...

¹⁶The promises were spoken to Abraham & to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God & thus do away with the promise. ¹⁸For 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.

¹⁹Why, 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 & entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

²¹Is 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 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.

²³Before 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. ²⁴So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

²⁶So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male & 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.

It's easy to see what he's referring to when talking about a human covenant, but in this set of verses there are some very confusing things. For instance, this idea of 'Seed'.

He's referring to the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 12, which is also reiterated in other places. There were four parts to the promise God gave to Abram (aka Abraham) in Genesis 12. Seed or offspring in the singular | Promised Land | Israel (both man & nation) will be blessed (his descendants will be numerous) | Israel (both man & nation) will be a blessing to all nations (people/ethnic groups). In this sense God gives light to Abraham that the Messiah will come through his lineage.

It's interesting, Abraham was just a man chosen by God. An Iraqi, called out of the Ur of Chaldeans. His background was that he probably worshipped a local deity. A pagan without the Scriptures, the Temple, right orthodoxy & doctrine, or much to go on at all, possibly a few creation & flood stories. He knew very little about God, if anything at all. He probably had very strange views on end-times, angels, or theology as a whole - but God chose him, made a promise to him, and Abraham believed God. And the interesting result was that it was credited to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6).

Romans 4:2-3 says... *If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about - but not before God. ³What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."* And to this issue of circumcision he writes in the same chapter...*Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as*

righteousness. ¹⁰Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

This should be a comfort - God chooses not based on knowledge or merit, but because He calls & chooses. All that's necessary on our part is to believe Him, and He credits righteousness as a result.

A lot of people will say they 'believe IN God'. But very few will say they 'believe God', there's a difference. We can't make God to fit our desires, or to shape Him for ourselves. God has clearly revealed Himself in Creation, Scripture & Christ. All that's left is, we believe Him, not what we'd like Him to be. Abraham believed God, trusted in what God said in the four parts of the covenantal promise.

The other confusing thing in this set of verses is in v20 - *A mediator does not just represent one party but God is one.* R.C. Sproul was asked, If you had just one verse what would it be? His response was Genesis 15:17...*When the sun had set & darkness had fallen, a smoking fire-pot with a blazing torch appeared & passed between the pieces.* To understand this idea of 'one party' in Galatians 3, we have to understand the covenant process God was making with Abraham in Genesis 15:17.

During the days of Abraham if a king conquered another they'd 'cut' a covenant - not 'make' a covenant, but 'cut' a covenant (Suzerain/Vassal Treaty). The Conquering Sovereign King would make a covenant with a subordinate Vassal King. They'd sacrifice some animals, cut them in two & lay the two halves opposite each other making a bloody aisle. Then the two parties would walk down the middle of this aisle reciting their promise to each other as a covenantal promise. They were saying, "If I break our covenant, may I be like these animals." A promise dependent on both parties keeping their side of the bargain.

So, let's read around Genesis 15:17. V9 says...⁹*So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat & a ram, each three years old, along with a dove & a young pigeon."*
¹⁰*Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two & arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. ¹²As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick & dreadful darkness came over him.*

Jumping to v17...¹⁷*When the sun had set & darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared & passed between the pieces. ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram & said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.*

Genesis 15 states, God as sovereign king cut a covenant with Abraham as the vassal. It's a reiteration of the promises in Genesis 12. But the interesting thing is that when it came time to walk the aisle, Abraham was in a deep sleep off to the side. God alone, represented by the smoking fire-pot & a burning torch, walked the aisle cutting the covenant by Himself without Abraham's participation.

God is saying, *'I make this covenant with you as one party. The whole covenant is therefore based on my Word, my Promise & not your ability to hold up your end of the bargain.'* This covenant wasn't based on Abraham's behavior. God's saying, *'I'm placing all my deity on the line as the sovereign king in this relationship to uphold this promise to you.'* Very Gospel-like of God!

So, to summarize, Paul's saying, God chooses, not based on merit, as He chose Abraham, an old Iraqi guy with probably some whacky ideas. And Abraham believed God's promise to him, not just in God. Likewise so should we. God chose us, sacrificed Himself on that cross to pay for our sin & credited His righteousness to us - we believe this, allowing that Truth to govern every aspect of life. Knowing, atonement happened on the cross which has nothing to do with what I do to be right with God, or to even stay in His good graces after the fact. It's all dependent on God, not me.

Then, Paul adds very adeptly, *"The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God & thus do away with the promise. 18For 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."*

To base your relationship with God on the Law takes two parties, one party sets the standard as sovereign king, and the other keeps it as vassal king. But the Promise/Covenant was confirmed 430 years before Moses received the Law, and the Law can't nullify the Promise because God's Word can't be broken. By grace, God promised that it was He who cut & kept the covenant with His people, not based on our merit or performance.

Paul uses the term inheritance. If I'm promised an inheritance by my father in his will, did I do anything but be his son & believe he promised that inheritance? No. But if someone comes to me & says, "I have no descendants & will die soon, IF you take care of me well, THEN I will give you an inheritance," that's a conditional statement based on performance. But God's promise isn't conditional. He promised to Abraham, and likewise to us, we're His children by faith - we believe Him. All that is His, is ours, based only on God's grace accepted through faith. The Promise came first & can't be broken; He never said IF you obey my Law, THEN you'll have the inheritance. This is why Paul says, *'...but God is one'*, in v20. The promise depends on one person, therefore it's based on a relationship established by grace through faith & not performance.

He then says in v19...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. And also in v22, 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. ²³Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. ²⁴So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*

In Indonesia we had house help. I loved it, all I had to was say, “Naah, minta teh!” And my helper, Naah, would reply, “Iyo Pak, ‘bentar Pak.” And, magically my tea would appear on my desk, made to my liking - heaven! My wife doesn’t do that! Socially we were forced to employ someone in the neighborhood, it was the kind thing to do. At first there was Ibu Titi, then Ibu Yanti, then Ucu, Hannah, and finally Naah. All of them hold a special place in our hearts. They didn’t only clean the house, but watched our children as well.

Paul equates the Law with a *pedagogue* in v24, a sort of nanny/tutor. The Law as pedagogue charged with the discipline, protection & leading of a child to school. One with moral input, guiding a child into adulthood. The Law, he says is like this, leading us into adult life of faith, revealing God’s standard. But at some point the child grows & is released from the nanny with lessons learned which carry into adulthood.

Scripture tells us, the Law of God is written on our hearts, we naturally know right from wrong in many cases. However, the Law, more clearly detailed in Scripture, was instituted as one which would lead us to Christ & instruct us on God’s standard. The Law, by defining sin more clearly & revealing sin in us, would take us by the hand & bring us to the point of realizing we need a Savior. We’re not living in a world where we can just choose not to sin. Paul makes it deathly clear, we’re prisoners, locked away in sin awaiting release. That release comes only through faith in Christ.

So, God’s promising an inheritance in a grace-based father/child relationship. He says concerning His Law, “Since you are my children, loved & accepted by me, the Law is my standard for living, but you can’t live that standard without me, my grace will grow you over time into my likeness by convicting you via this standard.” Law & Grace working hand-in-hand for development - Grace empowering us to strive towards God’s standard. The Law is good, originating from God, defining His standard to which we attain. Daily reminding us of our need for grace found in the cross.

So, if I’m trusting in something other than God’s Grace, then I’m breaking the 1st commandment of His Law, “*You shall have no other Gods before me.*” If I trust in my looks, the way I dress, my eloquence, skills, money, drugs, sex, alcohol, attention from others, or anything to make me feel secure or give me identity; if I seek *comfort, approval, control, or power* to find security/identity, the Gospel says I’ve set myself up as a my own god. And, until I can bring that unhealthy desire to the cross crucifying the old self, I’m breaking God’s 1st commandment – and it’s interesting that if you read Exodus 20, God’s law in the Ten Commandments, we find it summarizes all of God’s Old Testament commands, and that if we break any of the other 10, we automatically breaking the first.

We may think freedom is having no standards, and would be the answer in achieving personal & communal peace. But what we find is that even the most liberal & progressive communities have standards, which, if broken, there’s hell to pay.

The question of freedom isn't a life without morality or rules to live by, but rather, who gets to set those standards, and is there grace when they're not achieved? The Christians answer is 'God in Christ' to both questions - philosophically & logically this is the only way it can be, otherwise there'll always be warring & disunity because individuals & communities can't agree on standards - that's why we refer to God's rule as the Kingdom of Peace - the world united under His standard, governed by grace.

Tim Keller says, those Christians who live trying to justify their existence by the Law are the most insecure, angry, frustrated people around, even more so than those outside the Church.¹ And yet, so many in the church live as if they have to prove themselves to God & others it sometimes makes the Church a mean & hostile place. The reason is, so many of us aren't living out of the true gospel with God & others. In theological terms, we don't trust in Christ's righteousness, but instead pursue our own. If a person is living by the Law, they're not only frustrated, angry & insecure, but they most definitely will develop a secret sin life. Living by the Law produces more legalism in some, and licentiousness in others.

So, if we want true community, we live by grace! It starts in your own heart. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40... 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Two commandments which summarize the 10 in Exodus 20. The first encompass commandments 1-4 concerning our relationship with God. The second encompasses commandments 6-10, concerning our relationships with each other in light of our standing with God. If we love God with all our heart, soul & mind, do you think it's possible to live in anger, secret sin, frustration, etc...? No. If you're loving your neighbor as yourself, don't you think you'll be leading them by grace towards the cross instead of belittling them & making them feel worse about themselves? If we want others to see & know the grace of Christ, it must be modeled among ourselves.

Meditate on the richness of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 this week. Confess where you haven't been loving God or others. Make amends where necessary. Resist the urge to say, "I'm sorry for this thing, but...!" (Scratch your 'but's') Love God by loving His commandments, striving towards holiness in His standards. Love others by extending grace as you've been extended grace. Take your sin to the cross, crucify it - find freedom in Christ again! Believe God. Love God. Love your neighbor.

Because we don't want to be hard-nosed rule-keepers who judge others by how well they keep the rules. We want to be grace-givers, overflowing with good favor & forgiveness. Only the God of all grace saves. Our witness must be focused on the father/child relationship governed by His grace.

¹ p64/66-67 Galatians Leaders Guide