

The Covenants, Grace, And Law (Part 26)

Galatians (C)

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 21-Oct-95; Sermon #204

In the sermon that I gave prior to the Feast of Tabernacles, we saw further evidence that Judaism was not the true religion that God gave through Moses. In reality, it was merely a state religion that consisted of a number of sects, all of which (from everything we are able to tell) drew on the Bible but largely consisted of very poor interpretations of Scripture gathered over the centuries. Several of those sects were very strict in their approach to life. There is a notation of this in Acts 26:5, where Paul said:

Acts 26:5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest [as it says in the King James] sects of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

The Pharisees were strict, but wrong. That is, wrong in their interpretation of the Scriptures. They were wrong primarily because their strictness was more in the area of ritual purity and morality than true spirituality and their ethics regarding life. Both by Jesus' and by Paul's testimony, these people were not living according to God's commandments as a way of life. I want to reinforce that right at the beginning of this sermon, where Paul makes that very clear:

Galatians 6:13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

That is very clear. And a number of years earlier, Jesus said virtually the same thing; and it is recorded in a couple of different places.

Mark 7:7-8 "Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandments of God, you hold the tradition of men as the washing of pots and cups; and many other such like things you do."

Mark 7:1 makes it very clear that He was speaking to the Pharisees. These people were zealously and religiously adhering to Halakah, which was a book of interpretation of both the written law (given at Mt. Sinai) and a collection of verbal laws (passed from one

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

generation to the next for centuries of time). This law they elevated to divine status. In so doing, they rejected the commandments of God.

When some in the Jewish faith merged their zealous practice of Halakah with Gnostic concepts, they became a persuasive and persistent enemy of the church. Gnosticism played a significant role in the background of what Paul wrote in the book of Galatians.

Upon arriving home from the Feast, I found the following quote in the preface of a book that was given to me as a gift during the Feast. This is from a book titled "Ancient Judaism" by Irving M. Zeitlin. The purpose of this book is to prove that Judaism gave birth to western rationalism. (Hang on to that word "rationalism.") In order to do so, the author thought it necessary to show some differences between Judaism and other oriental religions. Here is his statement, made on page 10 of the preface, about Gnosis.

The general character of Asian religion," Weber concluded, "was a form of Gnosis." That is, knowledge in the spiritual mystically acquired. [Not from God, but "mystically acquired."] Gnosis was the single path to the highest holiness and the highest practice. This knowledge, writes Weber, is not a rational implement of empirical science such as made possible the rational domination of nature and man, as in the occident [meaning, the west]. Rather, it is a means of mystical and magical domination of the self and the world. It is attained by an intensive training of the body and spirit, either through asceticism or and as a rule through strict methodological meditation.

Think about that in terms of the New Age religion. Continuing the quote:

The Gnostic doctrine gave rise to a redemption aristocracy where such mystical knowledge was necessarily esoteric and charismatic [think of Pentecostalism], hence not accessible or communicable to everyone.

The holy and the God-like were attained by an emptying of the experience of this world. Psychic peace, not restlessness, was God-like. Asiatic religion, placing more emphasis on this life, lead to a pronounced other-worldliness. That this magical anti-rational view of the world had a profound impact on every aspect of an individual's conduct could not be doubted. Magic was employed to achieve every conceivable object.

I want you to turn to Acts 8, so you can get a bit of a handle on what the background is

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

here. It was not merely Judaism. This took place in Samaria, which of course, was part of Palestine.

Acts 8:9-13 And there was a certain man, called Simon, which before time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched [Hang on to that word, because we are going to see it in Galatians 3. Simon bewitched...] the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one. To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also. And when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Here we have the earliest indication of Gnosticism as being a religion—or at least a philosophy, a way of life that eventually became a religion—having an impact on the Christian church. Gnosticism was mystical and charismatic, not rational. *Rational* means "relating to, based upon, or agreeable to reason." *Mystical* means "having a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence." Gnosticism was ascetic and exclusivist; and it relied heavily on magic.

When you combine those elements with the zeal of the Jews, you would have a religion that was undoubtedly appealing to a fairly large segment of the Christian church. What Paul goes on to show in the book of Galatians is that these Jews and the primary racial group that is in the background here—or, we might say the foreground of the book of Galatians—are not Gentiles. They were Jews. They were Jews who were practicing Halakah; but also Jews who had been heavily influenced by Gnosticism, and had made it a part of their worship routine. That is, a part of their life.

What these Jews' belief and practice did, though, was effectively circumvent God's sovereignty regarding our calling, and Christ's death—and therefore the Father's grace regarding justification. It did this because the mysticism and asceticism subtly shifted the person's approach to God and his acceptability before Him on the qualities achieved through his mystical, charismatic, magical, and ascetic experiences in law keeping. That is, the works—the works of the flesh.

In addition to that, the Bible clearly shows that **justification** is a judicial act by our Father in heaven, which He graciously gives, based upon the sacrifice of Christ and our faith in

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the same. However, the Father's grace and Christ's sacrifice do not nullify *works*! If it did, then it establishes a conflict with scriptures like James 2:20-24, where James makes it very clear that faith without works is dead. It also makes a conflict with Romans 2:13, where the same Paul who wrote the book of Galatians says that the doers of the law will be justified.

Faith and works are not mutually exclusive. If **faith** is truly a part of a person's character makeup, it will reveal itself through the conduct of the person's life; and, at the same time, the works will reveal who and what a person has faith in.

Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

As I explained to you in that previous sermon, a much better translation that catches the essence of what Paul said is that *a man is not justified through works of the law except through faith in Jesus Christ, or but by means of faith in Jesus Christ*. What Paul is saying is that works are of value when joined with faith in Jesus Christ. That clearly shows that **when works are combined with faith** there is positive value to them.

I might add here that, since righteousness comes by faith in Jesus Christ, in reality it comes by the faith of Jesus Christ because it is Christ's righteousness that is imputed to us for the purpose of justification. He achieved that righteousness by perfect law keeping through His faith in God. We will explain that a little bit more later.

Law keeping—that is, keeping God's laws—is for us both (1) a duty and (2) an expression of love towards God and man. John says:

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments [Keeping God's commandments is love.]: and His commandments are not grievous.

You apply these principles as we are going through here, in the book of Galatians, to that statement right there; and it is showing that the keeping of the commandments is an expression of love towards God. But let us add another principle to that, a very familiar one in Romans 5:

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Romans 5:5 The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

If the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit, then that love expresses itself back to God in a loving keeping of His laws—in a willing and yielded submission to Him; and, at the same time, as an outward expression of our concern for our fellow man. And that, in a very broad way, is what *works* are. That is all there is to it. That is, the kind of works that God's Spirit will produce in us, if our faith truly is in the Father and the Son.

What is wrong with that? Nothing! It is perfectly rational. It is not achieved by asceticism. It is not achieved by magic. It is not achieved by working ourselves into a state of excitability, or a state of profound stupor that looks like meditation.

What the keeping of God's commandments (or, in a broader and more general statement, the law of God) does is that it produces evidence of what—and, more importantly who—we believe. Therefore, we can conclude that works—including the keeping of the Ten Commandments—of and by themselves can neither justify nor save us because we have already sinned; but this does not mean that they are of no value. We simply cannot use them to make up for what has been done in the past (1) because the penalty is overwhelmingly powerful and (2) because of the simple and rational standard that what has been done is done and cannot be undone simply by a change of conduct.

If we murder somebody, it is done. It cannot be undone simply because we repent and therefore continue to never murder again. That does not resurrect the dead person, and it does not change the fact that we did what we did. And no amount of law keeping is going to make up for that. Instead, it takes something of awesome worth and purity, given in our stead, for God to pass over what we have done. That is, for Him to declare us righteous.

Justification, then, in a biblical sense implies a judicial act by the Judge—God. It does not, of and by itself, indicate even a change of conduct. God wants the change of conduct; but justification does not, of and by itself, indicate a change of conduct. However, that in no way means that one who has come to Christ should not change his conduct. One should immediately do so, as his part of the conversion process, because God is not merely trying to save us but also to prepare us for His kingdom.

Galatians 2:17-21 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

This introduces us to another Protestant "ditch" that we do not want to fall into. We want to be very careful to avoid it. That is their assertion that, because it is obvious that we cannot keep the law (because we sin from time to time), Christ kept it for us. "Christ did it all," they say. And in so saying, what they do is provide some with a justification for not even trying to keep it and others with a justification for being passive and careless in their keeping of it.

In these five verses, Paul makes a not so subtle beginning towards showing that the law is far from being done away, and that we have a very serious obligation to give our all in obedience to it if Christ lives in us and the fruit of God's Spirit is going to be produced in our lives.

Look at verse 17 again.

Galatians 2:17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

Paul's response here is to a question that he anticipated would naturally fall on the heels of what he was teaching as part of the gospel. To paraphrase it, he said: "Just because we are justified by faith and then found to be sinning, that absolutely does not make Christ a minister who encourages or endorses sin." It is not Christ's fault that we sin. And He does not justify us to give us the opportunity to sin.

Now we will turn to a couple of places where Paul made this extremely clear. Go back to the book of Romans. These Jews that he was now confronting would think, "Well, since we are justified by faith, you are saying that we do not have to keep the law." But that is not what Paul is saying at all.

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

He means ***spiritually dead***. He means buried in the waters of baptism.

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him ...

That is, symbolically having died. And so our death is a type of His death.

Romans 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Justification by grace through faith does not give anybody license to break God's law. The point is: We cannot make up for what we have done in the past by law keeping. It is that simple. That does not excuse us from keeping the law of God.

Romans 6:11-12 Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof.

As Paul explains in chapter 7, when he came to understand the law of God, sin revived and Paul died. Not literally; but the law revealed to Paul that he was a sinner, that he was under the curse of the law, and he was as good as a dead man. So he repented. But the past was not forgiven until the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was applied to his sins. When that occurred, Paul symbolically revived—he was resurrected; and he was alive unto God through the application of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That is, through God's grace in allowing that sacrifice to pay the penalty that Paul otherwise would have had to pay by him dying. Because of this, he then says:

Romans 6:12-15 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield you your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? [Paul says.] Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

That is pretty clear! That is the application of what Paul is leading into here in Galatians 2:17. Christ has not freed us from the death penalty in order to turn us into lawbreakers.

Galatians 2:18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

Let me paraphrase that. Paul says, "If I repent and am mercifully forgiven by God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thus killing (destroying) the old man who did all of those sins, and then go back to that way of life again, I am the one that is at fault—not Christ. I make myself a transgressor. It is not Christ that makes me this way, or His way of life that teaches me or promotes sin in me. Not at all!"

Galatians 2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

This is another way of saying what he said there in Romans 7. He is saying, then, that the law plays a large part in our salvation in that it is through the law that we are revealed as sinners—that we might repent, and be justified, and thus made alive to God. If the law was not there to tell us what sin is, we could never repent. If the law were not there to set the standard, we would never have anything to shoot for. If the law were not there to show us "this is the way to live," we would have no clear path as to what is right.

And so the law, far from being done away, is there for our salvation—even though it cannot give us life, of and by itself. If you want clarification, you can tie this to Romans 7:7-9. And then Paul says, in Galatians 2:20, that he died. You connect this to Romans 6:1-6. He died then, because the law revealed that he was a sinner and claimed its due. He is alive now (that is, in the context here) only because he is joined with Christ. He has become a part of Christ's body.

Paul rose from baptism as a symbol of Christ's resurrection. And now he lives because of the faith of Jesus Christ, who made this all possible by what He did. Now Paul's life is different than when he was striving to be justified by the law. The law can condemn. The law can guide. But it cannot give one life. It cannot give one the power to keep it.

Galatians 2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Paul is saying there that, if the Gnostic Judaizers are right, then Christ died in vain. So let us sum up the last part of this chapter.

Romans 5:5-7 And hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength [without the spiritual strength to keep the law of God, when we were under condemnation—sinners, just waiting to be put to death], in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

That occurs from time to time in history, where somebody sacrifices their life for someone they love.

Romans 5:8-10 But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. [That is, while we were God's enemies, Christ died for us.] Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Hang on to that thought, and let us turn to John 14. Speaking to His disciples, Jesus said:

John 14:16 "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that it may abide with you forever."

John 14:20 "At that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."

Let us go back to justification again. Justification is a legal operation. It is a judicial decision by which our Father in heaven declares us righteous. When that occurs, we are now aligned with God on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. However, if we are going to be in

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

God's image—that is, truly in His likeness—then our righteousness must become **real!** That is, something lived. Something ingrained in our character, and not merely something legally imputed to us.

I hope I am making this clear. What I am beginning to show you here, from the writings of Paul, is that **righteousness** comes in two forms. What makes us acceptable before God is not something that we can achieve on our own. We have to have the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us, as though we were Christ, and accepted before God because He sees Christ's righteousness when He looks at us. I do not know how else to say it.

That is something we cannot earn. It is beyond us. Without that, we are what we really are. We are merely sinners who deserve death. So this is a judicial act. The first step in righteousness that makes us acceptable to God is something that He imputes to us. It is not earned. It is given on the basis of what Christ did.

However, righteousness does not end there. If it ended there, then God's whole purpose is a fake. It is a sham. There is nothing there. The Protestants find this acceptable, because they do not look upon themselves as being prepared for anything. They are going to go to heaven and just float around, doing nothing all day. But God is **preparing us**. God is creating Himself in us—so that we are in His likeness, in His image. Therefore, the righteousness has to be real—not something merely imputed, accounted where it does not in reality exist.

This is why you will find—in the writings of Paul, and Peter, and James, and John—all of those things about keeping the law of God, about remaining sinless, about growing in the grace and knowledge of God, and on, and on, and on where it seems to be contradictory. On the one hand, we do not have to keep the law. But, on the other hand, we have to keep the law. If we do not keep the law, so that it becomes a part of us—habit, our nature—then we will never be in God's image and we will never have His righteousness.

This is accomplished by our **utilization of the Holy Spirit**. This is why I began in Romans 5:5. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts because we have been justified by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and we have access to the Father in heaven; and He gives us His Spirit, by which His love, His nature, begins to activate the way that we live, the way that we think, the way that we act, the hope in our life, the direction it is headed in. It begins to change us!

Until that time, we had only the spirit of man that was completely under the domination

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

of the spirit of Satan the devil. If I can put it this way, in order for that spirit to make headway, we have to **voluntarily yield**—choose to use God's Spirit. That is not always easy, because the old nature keeps rearing its head. But unless we use that Spirit, the image of God will not be formed.

This is why I read to you John 14:16 and so forth. "I will give you the Spirit, and We will come and make Our abode in you." How does the Father and the Son live in us? By His Word! It is the essence of His mind as pertains to our salvation, as pertains to what purpose is being worked out in our lives. This book, called the Bible, contains the essence of the mind of God as pertaining to His purpose so that we can use it; and it empowers us to be prepared for His Kingdom.

His Word, then, is the part we are to follow on our pilgrimage there. This Book is the knowledge of Christ, and we are to use it. As we do, we will experience ***in principle*** the same things that Jesus Christ did. What that experience produces becomes a part of us—just as all that we experience before conversion is a part of us.

After conversion your life is experienced with the presence of the Spirit of God. But, and this is a big "but", the Holy Spirit is more than merely words. Jesus said:

John 6:63 "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

But the Holy Spirit is even more than that. It is ***the power of God***. God lives, and He is actively working in our lives to prepare us. He uses His "power from on high" to actively mold and shape events to produce characteristics in us that He desires. He intervenes, when necessary, to protect, to guide, to heal, and to chasten. He is actively working in our lives and He uses that power in our behalf in order to shape us to His end.

He is the Potter. We are the clay. And He expects from us *voluntary response*. Because we have surrendered, because we have His Spirit, because we have His purpose and understand it—He expects us to use those things to help us work towards that end, so that His righteousness is truly within us.

John 14:10 "Believe you not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwells in Me, He does the works."

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Jesus, of and by Himself, had no more power than anybody else—any other human being. But because the Father in heaven was actively, dynamically working in and through Jesus Christ; and Jesus was yielding to Him—whenever power was needed to heal, raise somebody from the dead, make food out of whatever, God did the miracle. Not Jesus Christ, God did it. He responded to Jesus' requests.

I hope I am making myself clear. This is what we need, if I can put it that way, to work towards.

Romans 5:9-10 Much more then, being now justified by His blood [This is where we are], we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

We shall be saved because He is living! And He is working in us in the same manner that the Father worked in Him. He is the mediator of God's Holy Spirit. He empowers His church. He responds to His church's needs. He corrects and chastens. And He gives His power to do whatever it needs to do.

I think a succinct statement in this regard is that Christ died for us, but He does not live for us. It cannot be that way. If He did, it would produce a failure in us to be prepared for anything.

Think about this. This principle is so simple. If you gave instructions to somebody on how to do something, and then you always do it for them, do they ever learn how to do the thing that you are instructing them? That is so simple.

God declares us righteous on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. He then instructs us through His Word, and His Word becomes a part of us. It is in us, and it is spirit; and it leads to life because it shows us where we need to repent. It guides us along the way. But it does not have the power, of and by itself, to give us life. It takes a living being to give us life. That living Being is in heaven, and He empowers us to live His way of life—so that by the time we get to His Kingdom, we will know how to do things, because He will have put us through the experience of living His way. And it will be "like [F]ather, like son."

All of this grows from the justification achieved because Christ had the faith to live as He did in complete obedience to our Father. And so it can be truly said that, since the strength of the law is sin (that is, I Corinthians 15) and sin kills, we live. That is, that we came up out of the waters of our baptism alive. We live by the faith of the Son of God

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

who loved us and gave Himself for us. It is, therefore, now our responsibility—our duty, our obligation—to strive with all of our being not again to bring the death penalty upon us, because Christ is not the minister of sin.

We have no permission to sin. But we do have complete permission, and complete cooperation, to strive for the righteousness that comes through the keeping of God's law empowered by the Spirit of God. That will produce the image of God.

Galatians 3:1-5 O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you [There is that word, bewitched], that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received you the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministers to you the Spirit, and works miracles among you, does He it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

I think this is very interesting in light of the quote given earlier in the sermon about Simon Magus, in Acts 8. In addition to what Paul writes in the first ten verses of chapter 4, he uses the word here translated "bewitched." Remember what he said in Galatians 4? He used the term "the elements of the world." He talked about these people keeping "days, months, times, and years." He called the things that they were doing the "weak and beggarly elements" of the world, where he so strongly alluded to demonism as being part and parcel of the problem that was going on there in Galatia. If you tie that together with Simon Magus and the fact that he was a magician, then you ought to be able to make a pretty clear tie between Acts 8 and what Paul wrote here in the book of Galatians.

Paul makes it very plain, at least to me, that there is Gnostic influence here; especially when he says in verse 3, "Are you now made perfect by the flesh?" That could very easily be a veiled reference to asceticism. And then there is his comment in verse 4 of having suffered many things in vain.

You might recall Elijah's experience with the 450 prophets of Baal. It says in that account, in I Kings 18, that the prophets of Baal cried aloud to their gods and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lances until blood gushed out upon them. I bring this out because God's law specifically forbids cutting the flesh in this sort of thing.

To the best of my knowledge, Halakah (though very stringent) was not of the nature as to bring suffering upon its adherents. Yet Paul clearly mentioned suffering. Halakah was not ascetic in its character. It certainly did not involve demonism or magic, and neither was it charismatic.

The cutting of the flesh is not implied in the context here in Galatians 3. I only brought that up as a biblical reference, showing that the Gentiles were far more likely to do such things as self-imposed suffering. Again, this is another implication of a Gnostic-Jewish syncretism.

Galatians 3:5-10 He therefore that ministers to you the Spirit, and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know you therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, "In you shall all nations be blessed." So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse. For it is written, "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

Paul again approaches the *faith and works* problem, argument, question, or whatever from yet another angle. This time, though, he uses Abraham as the model by which all his "children in the faith" also become "children of God." He begins by posing a question. I am going to paraphrase this. "Do miracles come by ritual?" (Again, there is a veiled illusion to magic.) "Do they come by incantation? Do they come by knowing certain formulas that may include even such things as cutting the flesh, or going through long periods of fasting—sufferings and so forth—in order to get God's attention?" That is, to show Him how righteous we are so that, out of pity, He will respond? No, it does not happen that way. Miracles come by a living God, who is actively working in our lives because He called us and we have faith in Him.

With that foundation, like a springboard Paul begins what turns into the preamble for a very controversial section of the book of Galatians. He then proceeds to state that it was through faith that Abraham was justified. It is good to remember at this point (because we never want to lose this) that Abraham not only believed *who God is*, but he also believed *what God said*. That is what set him apart from everybody else. His faith was not merely an intellectual agreement, but he also lived His faith.

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Abraham's works did not win him acceptance by God, but they did prove to God that he really did believe Him. So what Paul says, in verses 10 and 11, is that those who rely on their works to justify them are under the curse of the law. What is **the curse of the law**? It is the death penalty! And what he is saying in effect is, that they are still under the curse because justification by this means is impossible.

So powerful is the curse of the law that, when our sins were laid on the sinless Jesus Christ, the law claimed its due. Paul quoted this thing about the curse of the law from Deuteronomy 27:26 in order to counteract those who were troubling the church, because they were saying that their asceticism, magic, and all those other things (like keeping Halakah) can justify.

Galatians 3:12-14 And the law is not of faith: but, "The man that does them shall live in them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. For it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree." [This is why Christ did what He did.] That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Even though the law can guide a person on the right course of how to live, and can describe the character of God, it can condemn, and it can bring one guilty before God by an awareness of sin; but it does not possess the power to forgive. It does not possess the power to justify. It does not possess the power to give life.

It takes a living Personality—the Giver and the Enforcer of the law—to forgive, to justify, and to give life. The law can do nothing to reverse the condemnation—that is, the curse—once it is incurred through sin. But Christ took the curse upon Himself so that we do not have to bear our own punishment. And the Father, in His mercy, permits this death to apply for us. He forgives and justifies us, if we accept Christ's death on our behalf with true repentance and faith.

I said that Paul hits those questions from a different angle. Hitting it from this angle actually proves to be a preamble to a very difficult and controversial section.

Galatians 3:15-19 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannuls, or adds thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, "And to seeds," as to many; but as of one, "And to your Seed," which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

Pay particular attention here because we run into concepts that were not taught entirely correctly in the past; and this includes my teaching as well. First note that Abraham's experience with God has been the basis for what Paul wrote beginning all the way back in verse 6. It provides the basis right on through to the end of this chapter.

Galatians 3:29 And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed.

Abraham, and his experience and relationship with God—the basis of that relationship—is the basis for these difficult scriptures that begin here in verse 15. This is important because the subject material of verses 15-19 involves a covenant, promises, and a law being added.

Now questions arise. What was the law added to? Do not forget that the major subject Paul is explaining is built around the God/Abraham relationship. That in turn, by necessity, leads to the Old Covenant, which in turn leads to the New Covenant and our relationship with God. There is a progression here. God and Abraham, to the Old Covenant, to the New Covenant. That is why verse 29 ends the chapter the way does. If we are Christ's, then we are Abraham's seed. There is a direct connection between Abraham and us.

Abraham, remember, is the father of the faithful. So in verses 15-16, Paul begins by explaining that once a covenant is ratified by both parties, anything added later is not part of the original covenant. Is that clear? Once a covenant is ratified by both parties, anything added later is not part of the original covenant.

Therefore, what was added does not nullify or negate the starting point. What was the starting point? It was the God/Abraham relationship. That is what Paul is building on here. The starting point was God's purpose being worked out through Abraham and his descendants. That is, God's covenant and promises made to Abraham. And we are made to understand, by what Paul wrote, that those promises are still in effect.

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Then, in verse 17, I think Paul clearly calls the entire Old Covenant (please understand, not the covenant that God made with Abraham, but the Old Covenant that appears beginning in Exodus 20)—he calls the whole thing "**the law.**" Look at it.

Galatians 3:17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law...

That is the explanation for that other phrase. "*The covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law.*" He calls the whole Old Covenant "the law."

It is sometimes confusing to us because we tend to think of law in more specific terms. But when we examine Paul's use of "law" more carefully in the Bible, we find that he used this sometimes in the way we do. He will sometimes use it to indicate a specific law. Sometimes "law" in general. We saw that right at the beginning of this book. Paul just said, "law"—any law. Sometimes he is referring to the Ten Commandments. He will refer to the spiritual law. Sometimes he will refer to the Pentateuch, the first five books. Here, in Galatians 3:17, he calls the whole Old Covenant "**the law.**"

If we follow this, then, from the beginning of Galatians, Paul never differentiated between various laws in regards to justification. "It does not matter," he is saying, "what laws you keep. They cannot justify you." It does not matter if they are the Ten Commandments. It does not matter whether it is Halakah. It does not matter whether it is Gnostic laws. We cannot be justified by any law keeping!

Paul is using *the law* to symbolize the Old Covenant. In fact, he is using it synonymously with the Old Covenant. So the word "covenant" in verse 17 refers to the Mosaic Covenant. Let us connect that to verse 15. The Mosaic Covenant—the covenant that appears from Exodus 20 to Exodus 23, the Old Covenant—does not nullify the promises of God to Abraham.

Verse 18 then explains that, if our inheritance of the promises made to Abraham is given because we keep the rules and the regulations of the law, it nullifies God's promise because we have then earned it.

The next question is: Why did God even make the Old Covenant with Israel? And to what was it added? Well, the verse tells us that it was added because of sin. Because of sin, the Old Covenant was made with the entire nation of Israel—in addition to the covenant that God had already made with Abraham! Did you get that? It was made **in addition to** the covenant that God had already made with Abraham.

If the Israelites were living according to the covenant God made with Abraham, whose descendants they were, the Old Covenant would have been unnecessary. But consider what happened between Abraham and Moses. Let us go back to Genesis 15. Here there is a prophecy.

Genesis 15:13-16 And He said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge. And afterward shall they come out with great substance. [This is the coming out of Egypt.] And you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation [or "a" fourth generation, as it should read.] they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."

Genesis 17:1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be you perfect."

Does that sound like a New Covenant? Think about that.

Genesis 17:2-7 "And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly." And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. [Here come the promises.] Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you. And I will make you exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations..."

Did you hear that? "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations." They were already included within the covenant God made with Abraham! Even though they did not exist yet, they were included in that covenant.

Genesis 17:7 "...an everlasting covenant."

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

This almost sounds like the New Covenant. It involves eternity.

Genesis 17:7 "...for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto you, and to your seed after you."

"And I will be a God unto you, and you shall know Me."—Hebrews 8.

Genesis 17:8-11 "And I will give unto you, and to your seed after you, the land wherein you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." And God said unto Abraham, "You shall keep My covenant therefore, you, and your seed after you in their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your seed after you; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between Me and you."

Here is the starting point and the foundation that Paul is referring to in the book of Galatians. Consider what happened to Israel in Egypt, because that is what precipitated the making of the Old Covenant. They learned the way of the heathen so well that it was almost permanently ingrained in their national character and therefore their conduct. They had apparently completely lost the Sabbath, and God had to reveal it to them (in Exodus 16) before they even got to Mt. Sinai.

They received the offer of the Old Covenant, ratified it, and then (in Exodus 32) immediately fell into an idolatrous worship that they dedicated to the Lord. In the entire forty years, they never did get free of their Egyptian mentality.

There is an additional reason for the making of the Old Covenant. God was now forming Israel—the physical descendants of His servant, Abraham—into a nation; and civil laws were needed for their guidance, as well as regulations regarding the manner in which God desired to be worshipped.

Consider Abraham as a contrast to this.

Genesis 26:5 Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.

The Covenants, Grace, and Law (Part 26) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Abraham did what the Israelites failed to do in upholding their end of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. In other words, his descendants never did keep the covenant God made with Abraham. So God had to teach His laws all over again to Israel in order to prepare them for living in the land of Canaan—both as a nation, and as a people with whom He had made both a spiritual and physical covenant through Abraham. Remember the *race* and *grace* aspects of that covenant.

So the Old Covenant is seen as an additional covenant God made in order to bridge the gap, the expanse of time, until the Promisee (Christ) should come and institute the New Covenant, which is totally in harmony with the covenant God made with Abraham but expanded to include people of all nations and races becoming sons of Abraham, coheirs with Christ, and one with the Israelites (the physical descendants of Abraham).

So the law added, of verse 19, is not merely the sacrifices, the ceremonial law—but the entire Old Covenant. The Old Covenant's passing being now superceded by the New Covenant in no way negates the law of God appearing in the Old Covenant. It is good to remember that Abraham, with whom the original covenant was made, obeyed God's voice, kept His charge, His commandments, His statutes, and His laws.

Many of these things that Abraham did were part and parcel of the Old Covenant—both in letter and spirit. Under the New Covenant, we are responsible for obeying them in their letter where applicable, and always in their intent—which is out of love and concern for God and fellow man. In doing this with the Spirit of God, out of faith for Jesus Christ, this is what produces holiness and the image of God.