

Galatians 3:15-24

Introduction

I. What do you do to try to relieve the burden of your own failures/inadequacy/guilt?

We are tempted to try to solve the problem of our guilt outside of God

Temptation towards success and competence

Temptation towards beauty

Temptation towards making ourselves likable to others

The “Moral Temptation” (professor John Coe)

The temptation to ease our guilt/shame by trying to be good

Coe: “To try to relieve this burden ourselves apart from Christ is to enter into an incredible burden.” The constant attempt to be good enough, moral enough

The Passage

I. What’s the relationship between the law and the promise? (v. 15-18)

The main point: the law does not do away with the promise

A. The Promise to Abraham

1. The passages

See Gen 12:1-3: God promises blessing, “I will, I will, I will”

Gen 12:7: promised to Abraham’s “seed”

Gen 15:9-19: God enters an ancient covenantal ceremony with Abraham

2. The word “inheritance” (Gal 3:18)

Originally = the inheritance was tangible: land, descendants

But these physical blessings were pictures of a more important inheritance
= “blessing,” approval, acceptance, forgiveness, salvation

3. The word “seed” (Gal 3:16)

Christ is the ultimate seed/descendant of Abraham

All along God ultimately had Christ in mind when he made the promises

Jesus is the one who receives God’s promise/blessing

Jesus is one through whom all other descendants receive promise

B. The Law to Moses

Exodus 19:4-5: another covenant

Exodus 20: The 10 commandments + 600 more laws

C. A difference in focus

Abraham received a promise (“I will, I will, I will”) to be simply received by faith

Moses received a law (“Thou shalt, thou shalt, thou shalt”) to be obeyed

D. The Jews of Paul’s time

For 1500 years they’ve followed the law thinking that it’s in following the law that they are acceptable to God and distinguished from all other people. And they are now forcing Gentiles to follow the law to be accepted in the community

E. Paul's point

Acceptance never depended on keeping the law. It always depended on trusting in the promise and the promised Seed

v. 15: just as with a human covenant, the covenant to Moses doesn't annul the covenant to Abraham

Sum: We were never accepted by God by keeping the law

We always had to simply trust in His promise.

We always had to wait for the Seed who would make us acceptable

II. So, what was the purpose of the law? (v. 19-25)

Main point: The purpose of the law was to reveal our need for the Seed (Christ)

A. Reveal our need (v. 19: "because of transgressions")

1. The law exposes sin

There is already sin in our hearts (rebellion, selfishness, greed, lust) and the law just reveals what's already there (see Romans 7:7 and 4:15)

2. The law entices sin

The law actually provokes our sinful nature so that we're tempted to sin even more (see Romans 7:7-8, 7:5)

3. The law condemns sin

It shows God's perfect standard and reveals the consequences of our sin

4. So, the law shows us how sinful we are

John Stott: "The purpose of the law was to lift the lid off man's respectability and reveal what he is really like underneath—sinful, rebellious, guilty, under the judgment of God, and helpless to save himself."

5. This doesn't mean the law is sinful itself; it's just that the law is limited

v. 21: the law cannot "impart life"

The law can tell us what to do, but it can't help and empower us to do what it tells us to do.

So it ends up feeling like a very harsh presence in our lives

6. So the law "locks us up" in a prison that we can't escape (v. 22 and 23)

B. For the Seed

The law locks us up in a prison so that we'll recognize our need for a Savior

See v. 19b, 22b, 23b, 24

When we realize we're helpless to escape that prison, then when Christ comes to rescue us, we are ready for him and willing to let him help us

And he can rescue us because

1. He has perfectly fulfilled the law's demands

2. He has offered himself as the needed sacrifice for us for all the ways we couldn't keep the law.

Conclusion

I. Who is God, and what does He care about?

God gave us the law and allowed us to live under its weight for 1500 years before sending Christ. Maybe He really wanted to tell us something: "You can't do it on your own! Stop trying and trust in my salvation."

II. What is Christianity all about?

A. The Christian message is not, "you need to be good," but rather, "you can't be good." Stop trying to relieve the burden of your spiritual failures by trying to be good enough. Be yourself, and come to Jesus and trust him to relieve the burden.

B. When the world sees Christians, they shouldn't see a bunch of self-righteous rule followers but a bunch of broken, humble, grateful people

Discussion Questions

1. Opening questions: What struck you most about the sermon/the passage? What surprised you? What confused you? What did you disagree with?
2. What do you do to try to "relieve the burden" of your own failures/inadequacy/guilt? Can you relate to the "moral temptation?"
3. Discuss Tim Keller's statement: "There are two fundamental ways of trying to avoid our need for God. First, we can be very bad and break all the rules. Or, we can be very good and keep all the rules. In either case we don't need a savior."
4. Explain in your own words the relationship between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant according to Paul.
5. Paul's main point in v. 19-25 is that the purpose of the law was to "lock us up" and point out our desperate "need for the Seed (Jesus)." How do you square that understanding of the law with a passage like Psalm 119, which is basically a love letter about God's law?
6. The statement was made on Sunday: "Stop trying to be better than you are. Just be yourself and trust Jesus." Do you think that's wise Biblical counsel? Why or why not?