

## **Nothing but the Blood (Part 8)**

Galatians 3:15-25

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I have two childhood friends who were the best exemplars of genuine loyalty and friendship. After I abandoned them for a year to pursue a relationship with a girl, which didn't last, they still welcomed me back into their group. I didn't do anything to earn their reacceptance, but they knew that the best true relationships are unconditional, rather than quid pro quo. Likewise, as Paul reminds the Galatians, our relationship with God through Jesus is not based on what we do for God, but is unconditional. It is a gift given by the grace of God.

In Galatians 3:15-18 Paul contrasts the ideas of a promise (i.e., covenant with Abraham) and a contract (i.e., the Law given to Moses). Paul asserts that a contract based on works is not as powerful as God's promise based on grace. A contract consists of an offer, acceptance, and consideration. The offer of a special kind of relationship with God was made to Israel in Exodus 20, in which the nation's prosperity would be linked to their behavior, and so it came with the condition of obedience to the Law. The second generation after Exodus accepted the contract at Shechem in Joshua 24:14-25, even though Joshua tried to warn them that they would not be able to keep God's commands. The consideration in a contract is a deposit or down payment that guarantees that a party will honor a contract. It ensures the parties have "skin in the game," and for Israel that may very well have been their skin (circumcision). Paul questions why the Galatians would want to go back to the old contractual system that was based on merit, that was cold and heartless and operated under the principle of quid pro quo. Why would they want sanctification to be by works instead of faith? Perhaps they thought such a system was fair, but they failed to realize that a fair system would condemn us all because we couldn't meet our contractual obligations.

A promise on the other hand is far superior. A promise is one-sided and unconditional. God bears the entire burden of fulfilling the promise. In Genesis 15:5-17, God had Abram cut animals in half, as one would do to finalize a covenant. Normally both parties would walk between the halves of the animals, signifying that the other party has the right to cut them in half if they break the contract. But God alone walked through the animals, because this was not an ordinary contract. It was a one-sided contract, a promise. A promise is not cold, rigid, and hard like a contract, but it is soft, life-giving, and is made out of love. Verse 18 says that the promise

was made out of grace, a gift given to Abraham, received through faith. The work of sanctification is done by God alone, not by our effort. The transformation is a gift we receive by faith. All we have to do is believe in God's promise. Why would we want to go back to a contract based on works?

Most things in the world are merit-based, so it's easy to think that everything must be earned. For example many Christian couples treat the commands in Ephesians 5:22-33 as a cold contract. Husbands love their wives only if their wives submit to them, and wives submit only if their husbands love them self-sacrificially. This is why marriages break up so easily. But marriages reflect the relationship between Jesus and the Church, which is unconditional. Jesus loves us even when we are rebellious. Marriages are saved when someone is willing to accept the offence and love the other unconditionally. Marriage is a promise, not a contract. It should be based on love, commitment, and loyalty, just as our relationship with God is.

Finally, we see in v. 17 that a promise supersedes a contract. Just as a parent can't easily get away with sticking a condition on a promise made earlier, a later contract can never overturn an earlier promise. God still kept His promise to Abraham even though Israel failed to keep the contract of the Law. He remained faithful to preserve Israel and to bless the world through Israel, though Israel was faithless. And though a contract cannot negate a promise, a promise can negate a contract made earlier. If a parent decides to give despite a child not meeting the conditions, nobody would complain. Likewise when Israel didn't meet their contractual obligations, God could and often did still give out of grace what He was not contractually obligated to give. A promise is just better. So let us with faith hold on to God's promise of salvation and sanctification, which was achieved by Jesus' work on the cross, not by our own effort.