

Transitioning to our Epistle, then, Paul makes the clear point that **“even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified” (Gal 3:15)**. We know this to be true from things such as a will. A person’s will is a legal document. No one can change it except those under the law who are given the authority to do so. Paul notes that God’s **“promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring” (Gal 3:16)**. When he refers to the law coming 430 years after God’s promises to Abraham, he is referring to the Law of Moses given on Sinai. The amount of time that had lapsed was 430 years. This giving of the Law at Sinai didn’t, won’t, and can’t ever change God’s promises. If you can’t annul a man-made covenant, how much more so a God-made one. God promised Abraham, **“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be” (Gen 15:5)**.

Now, if there was something for Abraham to do in order to merit or warrant God’s promise to take effect that would be a righteousness of the law. But this covenant was one sided. It was *God’s* promise. Someone might say, “What about the covenant of circumcision?” which took place two chapters later in Genesis. No! Remember that circumcision wasn’t a thing the people had to do to earn God’s promises, but instead it was a **“sign of the covenant between (God) and (Abraham)” (Gen 17:11)**. In other words, it was a visual reminder of God’s promise!

God’s promise to Abraham had no conditions. So how did Abraham receive the promise that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the night sky? **Genesis 15:6, “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6)**. The Lord counted Abram’s faith as righteous. This then is a righteousness *of faith*; trusting God’s promise.

Go back to Galatians 3 and Paul poses a really good question. If righteousness comes by a promise, **v. 19, “Why then the law?”** It’s a really good question. If only the Gospel matters to receive the inheritance, what purpose does the law have? Paul answers his own question, **“It was because of transgressions.”** It’s because of sin; the Original Sin that affects all of humanity – the concupiscence that causes man only to desire to do that which is opposed to God’s will! The Law still remains necessary, just not for salvation. As Jesus teaches, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt 5:17)**. The law teaches us how to live in accordance with God’s will, but it does not justify us.

So what’s the distinction between the laws and the promises? Their purpose. The Law shows us our sins. The Gospel shows us our Savior. Paul asks at the end of our Epistle reading: **“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal 3:21-22)**.

If we think we have righteousness by any of the things we do, we are seeking after a righteousness of the Law, which according to God’s Word cannot give life. To tie it all together, we not only are unable to keep God’s Law perfectly or earn a righteousness of the law because of our sinful nature, but also a righteousness of the law cannot give life anyways!

To use a human example, no matter how often you drive I-90, you will never end up in Columbus, Ohio. You can get to Boston, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, even Seattle, but you’ll never end up in Columbus... You can try your entire life to get to heaven by the Law, but it will never take you anywhere but hell. By comparison, Paul concludes the Epistle today, “the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” Everything under sin is everything that pertains to the Law. The Law can never be a highway that goes to heaven. The Law, does however, show us a need for a Savior. This is why the Law is not contrary or opposed to the Gospel!

To go back to the human example, after driving for enough time on I-90, one will quickly learn that you need another road to get to Columbus. The Law shows us the need for that other road; a need for a Savior.

The righteousness of God comes by way of faith in the promise. Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6)**. Jesus is the highway – the only way – to heaven. He is that “other road” that gets us to the Promised Land. When you believe this, the inheritance of life eternal is yours. In Jesus’ name, Amen.