

The Book of Galatians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: The Promise and the Purpose of the Law

Galatians 3:15–25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This passage answers a question the previous chapters raise: if we are justified by faith and not by the works of the law, then what was the law for? Paul's answer establishes the relationship between the Abrahamic promise and the Mosaic law, and it carries significant doctrinal weight for how Christians understand the Old Testament. He argues that the promise came first and is permanent, that the law came later and was temporary, that the law was never able to give life or righteousness, and that its purpose was to expose sin and serve as a guardian leading God's people to Christ. The seed of the promise is Christ himself, in whom all God's promises are fulfilled.

For our heritage, this lesson is an important opportunity to teach the proper place of the old law. The law of Moses was holy and good, given by God for a season, and it has now been fulfilled in Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Christians are under the new covenant in Christ's blood, not under the old law as a system of justification. The teacher should help students avoid two errors at once: dragging believers back under the old law as the Judaizers did, and despising the Old Testament as if it were no longer the inspired and useful word of God.

Pastorally, the lesson invites students to trust God's promises and to grow into the maturity of those who belong to Christ. The God who kept his word to Abraham across the centuries keeps his word still, which steadies us in seasons of waiting. And the believer who grasps that the guardian's work is done can stop relating to God as a child under endless supervision and begin to live as a beloved, responsible heir. Aim at both confidence in God's faithfulness and maturity in the freedom Christ has won.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul argues that a ratified covenant cannot be annulled, and that the promise to Abraham, given 430 years before the law, was not canceled by the law (3:15–18). Why does the priority of the promise over the law matter so much, and what does it reveal about how God always intended to bless and save his people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes his case from the world of contracts. Even a human covenant, once ratified, cannot simply be set aside or added to by a third party. How much more, then, the covenant God made

with Abraham. That promise of blessing was given and ratified long before the law of Moses arrived, four hundred and thirty years before, and the later arrival of the law did not cancel the earlier promise.

Draw out the significance of the timeline. The Judaizers treated the law as the high point of God's plan and the path to blessing. Paul shows that the promise, not the law, was always primary. God's way of blessing the world, by grace received through faith, was established with Abraham and never revoked. The law was an addition for a purpose, not a replacement of the promise.

Explain what this reveals about God's intentions. From the very beginning, God planned to justify people by faith and to bless all nations through Abraham's seed. Salvation by grace through faith is not a backup plan or a New Testament innovation; it is the original and abiding purpose of God, woven into his dealings with humanity from Abraham onward.

Apply it to our confidence. Because our salvation rests on a promise God made and ratified, and not on a law we must keep, it is as secure as God's own faithfulness. Promises like this do not expire, and the God who made them does not change.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The permanence of the ratified Abrahamic promise (Galatians 3:15–17)
- The priority of promise over law in God's plan
- Salvation by grace through faith as God's original and abiding purpose
- The security of a salvation grounded in God's promise rather than our performance

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the promise came before the law?
- What does the priority of the promise reveal about God's intentions?
- How does resting on a promise make our salvation secure?

Question 2

Student Question:

God kept his promise to Abraham across centuries of waiting and apparent silence. Where do you find it hardest to trust God's promises when the fulfillment is delayed, and what does your impatience reveal about your view of him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the spotlight on our struggle to trust God when his promises seem delayed. Abraham waited decades for a son, and the fullness of the promise unfolded across centuries. God's timing rarely matches ours, and the gap between promise and fulfillment is where our faith is tested and formed.

Help students be honest about the forms their impatience takes. Delay can breed doubt, grumbling, or the temptation to take matters into our own hands, as Abraham himself did when he tried to secure the promise through Hagar. When God seems slow, we are tempted to conclude that he has forgotten, or that we must engineer the outcome ourselves.

Reframe the waiting. Scripture presents God's apparent delays not as neglect but as patience, and as the soil in which deep faith grows (2 Peter 3:9; James 1:3-4). The God who kept his word to Abraham across the centuries is not slow but faithful, working in the waiting in ways we cannot yet see.

Encourage a posture of trust. Invite students to name the specific delay that is testing them and to choose, in that area, to rest on God's character rather than his timetable. Faith does not demand to understand the schedule; it trusts the One who holds it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's faithfulness across delay and apparent silence
- Impatience as a symptom of distrust in God's timing
- Waiting as the soil where faith is tested and matured (James 1:3-4)
- Trusting God's character rather than demanding his timetable

Discussion Prompts

- Where is a delay currently testing your trust in God?
- What does your impatience reveal about how you see God?
- How can you rest in his character when his timing is hard?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul points out that the promise was made to Abraham's "offspring," singular, and that this seed is Christ (3:16). What does it mean that all of God's promises find their focus and fulfillment in Christ, and how should that shape the way we read the whole of Scripture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes a striking point about a single word. The promise was made to Abraham and to his offspring, and Paul observes that Scripture says offspring, singular, not offsprings. He concludes that the promise pointed ultimately to one person, and that person is Christ. All the lines of promise run forward to him.

Help students see the bigger truth this illustrates. The whole Old Testament is moving toward Christ. The promises to Abraham, the law, the sacrifices, the temple, the prophets, all of it finds its focus and fulfillment in Jesus (Luke 24:27; 2 Corinthians 1:20). He is the seed in whom the nations are blessed, the goal toward which the story was always heading.

Show how this shapes the way we read Scripture. We do not read the Old Testament as a disconnected collection of ancient stories and rules. We read it as the unfolding plan of God that culminates in Christ. Every promise of God finds its Yes in him, which means he is the key that unlocks the whole.

Bring it to worship. The astonishing thing is that God had Christ in view from the start. The promise to Abraham was, in the end, a promise about Jesus. When we trust him, we receive everything God pledged so long ago.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the singular seed who fulfills the Abrahamic promise (Galatians 3:16)
- The whole Old Testament moving toward and fulfilled in Christ (Luke 24:27)
- All God's promises finding their Yes in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20)
- A Christ-centered reading of Scripture

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the promise pointed to one seed, Christ?
- How does seeing Christ as the goal change how you read the Old Testament?
- How does it move you that God had Jesus in view from the start?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul insists the inheritance comes "by promise," as a gift, not "by the law" (3:18). Where are you still tempted to treat your relationship with God as something to be earned rather than received as a gift, and how would receiving it as gift change your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul draws a sharp line: the inheritance comes by promise, as a gift, not by the law, as a wage. This question asks where we still try to earn what God intends to give. The Judaizers wanted to convert the gift into a transaction, and the same instinct lives in us.

Help students notice the difference a gift makes. A wage produces pride when earned and resentment when withheld; a gift produces gratitude and humility. When we relate to God as employees trying to earn our keep, we live anxious and proud by turns. When we receive from him as heirs receiving an inheritance, we live grateful and secure.

Probe the specific areas where the earning instinct hides. Some try to earn God's love through religious performance, others through moral perfectionism, others through service that is really an attempt to secure his approval. The gift of the inheritance exposes all of these as unnecessary, even insulting to the Giver.

Call them to receive. The hardest thing for a self-reliant heart is to accept a gift it cannot repay. Yet that is precisely the posture the gospel requires and the posture that sets us free. Invite students to receive their standing with God as the pure gift it is.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The inheritance as a gift received, not a wage earned (Galatians 3:18)
- The difference between relating to God as employee and as heir
- Hidden forms of earning: performance, perfectionism, and approval-seeking service
- Receiving grace as the posture that humbles and frees

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you still try to earn what God wants to give?
- How does relating to God as an heir differ from relating as an employee?
- Why is receiving a gift so hard for a self-reliant heart?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul asks, “Why then the law?” and answers, “It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come” (3:19), adding that the law could not “give life” (3:21). What was the God-given purpose of the law, and what was the law never able to do?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul anticipates the obvious objection. If the law cannot justify, why did God give it? His answer is that the law was “added because of transgressions,” given for a purpose and for a season, “until the offspring should come.” The law was not the way of salvation; it was a temporary measure with a specific job to do.

Spell out what the law was meant to do. It defined sin clearly, restrained evil in society, and above all exposed human sinfulness, turning vague wrongdoing into clear transgression of God’s revealed will (Romans 3:20; 7:7). The law held up a mirror so that people could see how desperately they needed a Savior. It made the disease visible so that we would seek the cure.

Then state plainly what the law could not do. Paul says that if a law had been given that could give life, righteousness would indeed come by the law, but no such law exists. The law can command but cannot empower, can diagnose but cannot heal, can condemn but cannot justify. It was never designed to give life, and so it never could.

Help students hold the law in proper honor. To say the law cannot save is not to insult it; the law is holy, righteous, and good. It is simply to recognize its God-given role. The law does its best work when it drives us out of ourselves and toward Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The law added because of transgressions, for a purpose and a season (Galatians 3:19)
- The law's work of defining, restraining, and exposing sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7)
- The law's inability to give life or righteousness (Galatians 3:21)
- The goodness of the law within its God-given role

Discussion Prompts

- What jobs was the law given to do?
- Why could the law never give life or make us righteous?
- How does the law, rightly understood, point us to Christ?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul teaches that the law exposes sin and shuts us up under it (3:22). Are you willing to let God's word function as a mirror that shows you your own sin honestly, and what sin is it currently exposing that you would rather not see?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the law's mirror function into personal experience. Paul says Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, shutting up the whole world so that no one could claim innocence. The law was meant to be honest with us about ourselves, and the question is whether we will let it.

Help students see the temptation to dodge the mirror. We would rather compare ourselves to others, excuse our failings, or look away than let God's word show us the truth about our hearts. But a mirror we refuse to look into cannot help us. The law's exposing work is a severe mercy, meant to lead us to grace, not to crush us.

Invite a specific, honest moment. Without prying, encourage each student to name, at least to themselves and God, a sin the word has been exposing that they would rather not face. Naming it is the beginning of bringing it to Christ. Unnamed sin festers; confessed sin meets grace.

Point past the mirror to the Savior. The purpose of seeing our sin clearly is never despair but rescue. The same Scripture that shuts us up under sin opens the door to the promise given by faith in Jesus Christ. We look honestly at our sin only so that we will look fully at our Savior.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture's honest exposure of universal human sin (Galatians 3:22; Romans 3:23)
- The temptation to dodge the mirror through comparison and excuse
- Confession as the path from exposed sin to received grace (1 John 1:8-9)

- Conviction aimed at rescue, not despair

Discussion Prompts

- How do you tend to dodge the mirror of God's word?
- What sin has Scripture been exposing that you would rather not see?
- How does seeing your sin clearly lead you to Christ rather than to despair?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul describes the law as “our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith” (3:24). What does the image of the guardian or tutor teach about the law’s role in leading people to Christ, and why was it always meant to be temporary?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives the law a memorable title: it was “our guardian until Christ came.” The word pictures a trusted servant in the ancient household who supervised a child, enforced the rules, and walked the child to and from his lessons. The guardian’s authority was real but temporary, lasting only until the child grew up. So it was with the law.

Explain the role this image assigns to the law. As a guardian, the law disciplined and restrained God’s people, kept them within bounds, and led them toward the goal, which was Christ. Its purpose was not to be permanent but to prepare, to bring the people to the point where they could receive the promised One and be justified by faith in him.

Underline the word until. The guardian’s job had a built-in expiration. The law was always pointing beyond itself to a coming day, a coming faith, a coming Savior. To treat the law as the final destination would be like a grown adult still requiring an escort to walk to school. The law was the path, not the home.

Apply it to the Old Testament’s enduring value. Even though we are no longer under the guardian, the guardian’s lessons still instruct us. The law and the whole Old Testament were written for our learning (Romans 15:4), teaching us about God’s holiness, our sin, and our need for Christ. We honor the guardian by letting it lead us, as it always intended, to Jesus.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The law as a temporary guardian leading to Christ (Galatians 3:24)
- The disciplinary, preparatory role of the law for God’s people
- The built-in temporariness signaled by until Christ came
- The Old Testament’s enduring value for instruction (Romans 15:4)

Discussion Prompts

- What does the image of the guardian teach about the law's role?
- Why was the law always meant to be temporary?
- How can we still learn from the law even though we are not under it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says, "now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" (3:25). What does it mean to live in the maturity and freedom of those who belong to Christ, and how is that different from living as a child under constant supervision and rules?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul announces the turning point of the ages: "now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian." With the arrival of Christ, God's people have come of age. The era of the guardian has ended, and a new relationship has begun, marked not by the supervision of the law but by sonship and faith.

Help students grasp the maturity this describes. A child under a guardian relates to the household through rules and restrictions; a grown son relates through trust, love, and responsibility. The believer in Christ is not a child kept in line by external rules but a mature son or daughter, indwelt by the Spirit, living from the inside out.

Guard against a misunderstanding. This maturity is not the absence of obedience or moral seriousness; the grown son obeys more, not less, but from a different principle. Freedom from the guardian is not freedom from God's will; it is freedom from law as an external taskmaster, replaced by the inward leading of the Spirit and the law of love written on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 8:14).

Invite students into this maturity. Many believers still relate to God like children under a guardian, anxious about rules and fearful of punishment. The gospel calls them to grow up into the freedom and responsibility of those who belong to Christ, motivated by love rather than fear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The coming of Christ as the turning point from guardian to sonship
- Maturity in Christ: relating to God by faith and love, not external rule
- Freedom from the guardian as freedom from law as taskmaster, not from God's will
- The Spirit and the law written on the heart guiding the believer (Romans 8:14)

Discussion Prompts

- How is a grown son's relationship to the household different from a child's?
- Why is freedom from the guardian not freedom from obedience?

- Where do you still relate to God as a child under rules rather than a mature heir?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul teaches that the law was added for a season and has now done its work, so that believers are justified by faith and are no longer under it as a guardian (3:23–25). How should Christians relate to the law of Moses now that it has been fulfilled in Christ, honoring the Old Testament as God’s word and learning from it, yet living under the new covenant rather than going back under the old law?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question carries the heaviest doctrinal weight of the lesson, because it asks how Christians should now relate to the law of Moses. Paul has taught that the law was added for a season, did its appointed work, and has given way to faith in Christ, so that believers are no longer under it as a guardian. This means the old law is not our covenant. We live under the new covenant in Christ’s blood.

State the matter clearly for our heritage. The law of Moses, as a covenant and a system of justification, has been fulfilled and set aside in Christ. He came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17), and having fulfilled them, he established a new covenant, nailing the record of the old to the cross (Colossians 2:13–17; Hebrews 8:6–13). We are not bound to keep the Sabbath, the feasts, the sacrifices, or circumcision, because these belonged to the covenant that has passed. To go back under the old law as a means of righteousness is exactly the error Paul fights throughout Galatians.

Now guard the other side, so students do not despise the Old Testament. Although we are not under the old law as our covenant, all Scripture, including the law, remains the inspired and profitable word of God, written for our instruction (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Romans 15:4). The Old Testament reveals God’s character, exposes our sin, recounts his mighty acts, and points us to Christ. We read it with reverence and learn from it, even as we recognize that our covenant is the new one in Christ.

Help the teacher hold both truths in balance. The Christian is neither a legalist who drags the old law forward as a yoke, nor a person who throws away three quarters of the Bible. We honor the whole counsel of God, we treasure the Old Testament as Scripture, and we live under the new covenant, taking our marching orders from Christ and his apostles. This is the careful path between two ditches.

End in gratitude. What the law could only point to, Christ has provided. The guardian has handed us over to the Son. We keep the Old Testament open on our laps with thanksgiving, hearing in it the voice that always pointed forward to Jesus, and we live as people of the new and better covenant.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The old law fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:13–17)
- Christians under the new covenant in Christ's blood, not the old law (Hebrews 8:6–13)
- Against returning to the old law as a means of righteousness
- The whole Old Testament as inspired and profitable Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Romans 15:4)
- The balanced path between legalism and despising the Old Testament
- Christ and his apostles as the authority for the new covenant people

Discussion Prompts

- In what sense are Christians no longer under the law of Moses?
- How do we still value the Old Testament while living under the new covenant?
- What are the two ditches we must avoid in relating to the old law?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Christ, the promised seed, has come, and in him we are heirs rather than prisoners. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you, this week, to live as a grown-up heir of the promise rather than a captive under law.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the whole lesson into a single, hopeful identity: in Christ, the promised seed, we are heirs rather than prisoners. Paul has moved his readers from being shut up under law to being grown sons and daughters who inherit the promise. The lesson should end by inviting students to actually live in that new status.

Help students translate the doctrine into a concrete change. To live as an heir rather than a prisoner might mean trading anxious rule-keeping for grateful obedience, releasing a delayed promise into God's faithful hands, or finally receiving their standing with God as a gift rather than a wage. The aim is one specific movement from captivity to inheritance.

Connect maturity with responsibility. Heirs are not idle; they take up the family business with joy. Living as a grown son or daughter means embracing the responsibilities of the kingdom, not as a way to earn the inheritance, but as the natural life of those who have already received it.

Close in worship of the faithful God. He made a promise before we existed, kept it across the centuries, and fulfilled it in Christ at the cost of his own Son. Send students home secure in that faithfulness and ready to live as the heirs they have become.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Believers as heirs of the promise in Christ rather than prisoners under law
- Living from inheritance into grateful, responsible obedience
- Maturity in Christ expressed in taking up kingdom responsibility
- Worship grounded in the faithfulness of the promise-keeping God

Discussion Prompts

- What would it look like to live as an heir rather than a prisoner this week?
- How does being an heir lead to responsibility rather than idleness?
- How does God's faithfulness to his promise steady you today?