

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

October 7, 2018, Pastor Jeff Harrison

Standing (Galatians 3:15-29)

Introduction:

A. Car purchase shows temptation to earn standing

Good morning friends, as we turn to God's Word, let's ask for His help...

Early this year, my 2002 Mitsubishi sedan died a few times on the road, which is never fun. And as its problems and repair bills were mounting, the transmission died, a very expensive repair. The car was old, had 180,000 miles on it, and with apologies to the Mitsubishi Motor Company, was a model not exactly known for its reliability. So we sold it.

And thanks to the graciousness of the church, we had resources to get something more reliable and a truck to borrow as we shopped. After research and test drives, we got a 2016 Honda Civic.

Anytime you get a new car, it's a topic of conversation. And as I talked about it with some of you, I shared how the back seat was surprisingly large and would fit my kids as they grew, how it got good gas mileage, how we were really pleased with the deal we got, how I hoped to still be driving it into my 50s because of Civics' reliability, and how it was the base model. All true and meaningful factors in our purchase.

But somehow it never came up in those conversations that there were similar sized sedans that were a little cheaper that I decided not to get for reasons like that they weren't as fun to drive and didn't look as cool to me.

I think only sharing the practical reasons revealed some legalism. Legalism is the false teaching that you can earn favor with God or His people by following a set of laws. Legalism says, "I do this and I don't do that, and therefore I have good standing before God."

Now there's no Bible verse that says what kind of car a pastor should drive, but I was talking about my purchase as if pastors who drive 17 year old sedans have a better standing in God's kingdom than pastors driving a few year old sedans.

Now to be clear, none of you said any judgy things like, "that's a pretty new car, pastor." Yet I still shared only the practical reasons behind my purchase, a subtle attempt to maintain standing. As if faith in Jesus plus an old sedan was better than faith in Jesus plus a newer one.

B. We're tempted to try to earn standing

And I bet I'm not the only one here who's tried to earn standing before God or His people by living up to a law. I once heard another pastor¹ say that legalism is the screen saver of our hearts. That when we're idle, we just naturally return to legalism, like how an idle desktop computer returns to the screen saver.

Trying to earn standing before God and people by law keeping was an issue for the early church too. Jewish false teachers, called Judaizers, were telling Gentile Christians that if they wanted good standing they had to follow all 613 commands of the Old Testament law. Only then would they be really acceptable to God and to the Judaizers.

To give a few examples, that every Gentile Christian must wear only the kinds of clothing allowed in the law, and only eat the foods allowed in the law, and that the men must be circumcised. That Jesus plus Judaism led to good standing before God and His people.

Now you probably aren't worried about following all 613 commands in the Old Testament law to gain standing, God doesn't require that of Christians today. And maybe the kind of car you drive isn't an issue either, but perhaps you're tempted to think God is most pleased with parents who put their kids in public school, or in private school, or homeschool, and you judge parents who do differently.

Or maybe, when you walk in church, or a government office, you instinctively feel better than some people and less valuable than others. Or perhaps you feel Christians most passionate about justice issues have a better standing than Christians most passionate about prayer and Bible study, or vice versa.

Now when we try to earn standing through these kinds of things, it just makes life harder, and who needs that? For when we fail to live up to the laws, we can become anxious about our relationships, or despair that we're not measuring up, or view people as competition. And even when we follow the laws, we still lose. We can start thinking God owes us or become judgmental towards people not living up to our standards, a critic rather than a friend. We can even seek to control by pressuring people to live up to our laws.

C. Galatians 3 speaks about our standing

So how we think about our standing before God and people is important. And the Bible book of Galatians has important things to say about the subject. So if you've got a Bible, turn to the New Testament book of Galatians, chapter 3. Galatians chapter 3, verse 15. If you're new to

¹ Darrin Patrick

reading the Bible, the big numbers you see are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

I. Background to the conversation

A. Judaizers say standing earned by Jesus plus Judaism

The book of Galatians was written by Paul, a very key leader in the early church. Paul wrote the book to early churches located in modern day Turkey. Those Galatian churches experienced trouble from a group of Jewish false teachers called the Judaizers. The Judaizers were saying, “Gentile Christians, you’ll only have good standing with God and us if you become a Christian plus a Jew by following all the law.” These Judaizers wouldn’t even share a meal with the Gentile Christians unless they started following all the Jewish laws.

The Judaizers were legalists, and there were racial undertones here too, as the Jewish Judaizers were suggesting God is only really pleased with people who lived like Jews.

So Paul, the author of Galatians, strongly addresses this false teaching starting in chapter 2, so we’re picking things up here in the middle of his argument at chapter 3 verse 15, but I’ll explain as we go about this passage that has two repeated terms.

The first is promise, the terms *promise*, *promises*, or *promised* are mentioned in verse 16 and 17 and twice in verse 18 and in verse 19 and 21 and 22 and again in verse 29. The other concept is the Old Testament Law, all 613 commands, which is mentioned in verse 17 and 18 and twice in verse 19 and three times in verse 21, and in verses 23 and 24.

B. Abraham received promises by faith (3:15-16)

So let’s get started looking at promise and law in Galatians 3. You can follow along in your Bible or on the screen as I read starting in verse 15.

¹⁵ Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,”^[1] meaning one person, who is Christ.

Verse 15 notes that some covenants, once they’re established, can’t be changed. For example, when a person has a will and then it’s established by the person dying, you can’t then change the will.

And so Paul says in verse 16 that God established that kind of permanent covenant with a man named Abraham, who lived about 4,000 years ago. A covenant of promise. Now if you

ever come across a Bible passage that references another Scripture, like verse 16 does here, and you're not sure where it's from or what it's about, you can use the footnotes.

See the lowercase *i* next to the word *seed*? At the bottom of the page in my Bible there's a corresponding lowercase *i*, which references Genesis chapter 12, 13, and 24.

Those passages are about God promising to bless Abraham and bless the entire world through a descendant of Abraham's. And Abraham did not earn these promises from God. In fact, when God initiated these promises, Abraham's family worshipped false gods. So Abraham didn't earn the promise, it was a gift received by faith. Then over the rest of his life, Abraham had moments of great faithfulness and also committed horrible sins, yet God still reaffirmed these promises to Abraham multiple times. God established a never changing covenant of promise with Abraham.

C. Giving of law later does not negate promises

So that's the promise, and in verse 17 we see the other big idea, the Old Testament law.

¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

So over 400 years after Abraham, God gives the law to the Israelites through Moses. Clearly Abraham didn't have to follow the law to receive God's promise, because the law didn't even exist when Abraham was alive, and also the law wasn't given to change or break the promise.

II. Law has limitations

A. Law is not for inheritance, it shows what is sinful (3:18-19b)

As verse 18 says it:

¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

The way to inherit the blessing of Abraham is not by keeping the Old Testament law. That's not the law's purpose. Which raises a question, that verse 19 asks:

¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions.

Here in verse 19 Paul begins to explain the law's purpose, focusing on its limitations relative to the promise. First, Paul says that the law was added because of transgressions. The law plainly identifies what is sinful before God.

B. Law is only temporary and was not given directly (3:19c-20)

And the law was meant to operate only temporarily, as Paul goes on to say in verse 19 that the law was added only:

until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

Notice the first word: *until*. Unlike the promise to Abraham, the law's role is temporary, operative only until the promised Seed, who is Jesus, came.

Paul goes on to say:

The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator.²⁰ A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one.

With the promise, God gave it directly to Abraham. But with the law, God gave it to angels, who then gave it to Moses, who then gave it to the Israelites. So I think Paul might be making the point that the promise is more significant because it, unlike the law, came straight from God.

C. Law cannot give life (3:21)

But Paul doesn't want us to think he's disparaging the law, so in verse 21 he says:

²¹ Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

As verse 21 says, the law is not opposed to God's promise. If there was a law that could give life, it would be God's law given to God's people.

But no law can give life. Like the laws of our country, law can clarify what is wrong and restrain sin to some degree, but it can't give life. Law exposes what is wrong but lacks power to solve things.

And sometimes, because of our sinful nature, after we're exposed to law, we want to sin even more. You don't have to parent very long to realize that sometimes when you say, "Don't you do that..." it only makes your child want to do it more.

Law just can't impart life. Maybe you've heard a friend say, or have thought yourself, "I tried that Christianity thing, I went to church and tried to follow all the rules, but I couldn't, so I just gave up." I think Paul would say, "That's right, just knowing the law can't give you the desire to follow it."

D. Law restrains sin and exposes guilt (3:22-24a)

Rather, the law only shows us what is right and wrong and restrains sin to some degree. Follow along as we pick things up in verse 22.

²² But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

²³ Before the coming of this faith,^[1] we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian...

In verses 23 and 24 the law is described as something that once held God's people in custody and served as their guardian. In other words, the law restrained sin to some degree and showed people what is good, but as verse 22 says, we're all still "under the control of sin." Before God's holy law, we're all stand guilty.

The book *The Insanity of God* interviewed persecuted Christians in other countries, which included the story of a guilty man who used to wage a holy war in the name of another god, killing many in battle and also personally murdering over 100 people.

After a time, this man started having a dream, which the book describes.

It was a dream that came to him over and over. He dreamed of spots of blood on his hands. Night after night, he would have the same dream. Over time, the spots of blood grew larger. Eventually, he was dreaming the blood was running down and dropping off his arms. He realized that he was imagining the blood of all those people he killed. The dreams so vivid and disturbing that he dreaded falling asleep at night.

"I really thought that I was going insane," he told me. "And when I began to see the blood during my waking hours, I was even more upset. And no amount of washing or scrubbing with sand could get the blood off. I soon became convinced I was going insane."²

Now we might think, that guy murdered over a 100 people, of course he has blood on his hands. But we've all broken God's law, we all stand guilty. Even if you're coming to church, and reading the Bible and praying, and giving to charity, and volunteering your time, and working hard at your job, and loving your family and friends and neighbors well, and fighting injustice, the law still says, "guilty." Even if you then double your efforts, trying even harder to be good, the law still says, "Guilty, you stand condemned as a law breaker."

III. Promise is by faith

A. Jesus brought standing to all who believe (Gal 3:24b-25)

I know that's not the most popular thing to say in our culture, but the truth is that we all have blood on our hands before God. That man who killed so many went on to tell the author:

² From *The Insanity of God*, wording slightly altered.

“Then one night, the dream changed. As I stood there helplessly watching the blood run down my arms, I also saw in my dream a man standing before me. He was a man clothed in white with a scarred head. He also had scarred hands, a scarred side and scarred feet. The scarred man said, “I am Jesus, the Messiah and I can get the blood off – if you will just find me and believe in me.”³

Here, in the middle of verse 24, our passage brings the same beautiful offer, starting with the word *until*.

until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

As we stood guilty of treason, Jesus came to rescue us. He lived a perfect life in our place, on our behalf. Jesus fulfilling all the law’s requirements for us. And then Jesus took the penalty for all our law breaking on the cross. For every way you’ve ever hurt others, for every good thing you’ve failed to do, for every wicked thought you’ve ever had.

And Jesus didn’t bargain with us on the price, He paid it all, in love. So at the risk of getting personal here, where do you stand with God?

Our heart here at Northwest is for everyone to receive the good standing that only comes from Jesus. Anyone can get in on this incredible promise, trusting that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead. That Jesus gave up His standing, on the cross, to bring us back into good standing before God.

B. Believers are children of God, clothed with Christ (3:26-27)

Listen to how verses 26 and 27 describe our standing:

²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

For Jesus followers, our amazing standing is children of God, clothed with Christ. Like Abraham 4,000 years ago, we didn’t earn this standing by following the law, we received the promise by faith.

So those Gentiles of the early church didn’t need to get circumcised or avoid eating pork or follow any other external law to earn standing. For nothing can be added to Jesus’ finished work to finish it further.

³ Ibid, wording slightly altered.

Rather in response to Jesus' amazing grace and empowerment, we then love and serve, not to earn standing, but out of gratitude for the incredible standing He's gifted us. Grace is not opposed to effort, but it is utterly opposed to earning.

As the hymn writer John Newton said, "To see the law by Christ fulfilled, and hear His pardoning voice, transforms a slave into a child, and duty into choice."

C. Live out our secure standing (3:28-29)

And this standing before God by grace, through faith, then impacts how we relate with each other. As our memory verse says:

²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Of course, verse 28 doesn't literally mean there are no longer different races or socioeconomic statuses or genders in the church. Rather, how we relate to each other has changed because we all received our standing the same way. Church, we're all in this together, "one in Christ Jesus", as verse 28 says. Fellow heirs of God's promise, as verse 29 says.

And as fellow heirs, all totally undeserving fellow heirs by the way, it's ridiculous to seek a better standing than others in the church, whether around race, or socio economics, or gender. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female."

And there is also neither old sedan nor new sedan.

It's ridiculous to deem ourselves better or worse than others based on legalistic rules. The comparing and judging over laws have no place in the church, we can't earn any standing before God, and it insults the Savior who gifted us standing at such great cost.

Conclusion: Responding as we take the Lord's Supper

A. We're tempted to earn standing

We're tempted to earn standing through law keeping, it's the screen saver our hearts keep returning to. So let's help each other live out our standing in Jesus. May we help each other remember we all got in on this incredible promise by grace, and treat each other as fellow heirs, one in Jesus, no need to judge or compare based on legalism.

I think that's our next step this morning as a church, to together live out our standing in Jesus. As we ask God's Spirit now to help us live this way, we'll take the Lord's Supper.

In a minute we'll distribute the bread and juice. If you don't yet know Jesus as your Savior, please let the bread and cup pass and think about your standing. If you've murdered over a 100 people, you can still get in on this promise through coming to Jesus, trusting only He can provide standing before God.

And for Jesus followers, at Northwest we wait until all have been served the Lord's Supper so that we can eat and drink together as a symbol of our oneness. Now, let's pray... Ushers, please distribute the bread.

B. Story of slave freed encourages responding to our standing

I'd like to share a supposedly true story from back in the 1850s that I once heard from a missionary named Paris Reidhead.⁴

After making a fortune on gold in California, an Englishman decided to return home. He traveled overland to New Orleans, where he was going to catch a ship New York and then back to England. As he waited for his ship's departure, he walked around New Orleans, ending up at the slave auction. A young, beautiful girl was on the auction block. And two seedy characters kept heatedly bidding against each other for the woman, talking about the disgusting things they would do with her. And it turned the stomach of the rich Englishman. So as the bidding got really high, he just couldn't stand it, so he doubled the highest bid.

People were shocked, as this was the highest bid ever at that auction. The Englishman paid the hefty bill, and walked over to the young girl standing on the auction block. She shot him a look of hatred and spit full in his face, hissing, "I hate you." He said nothing, and after wiping his face he took her by the hand and led her to an office building. She couldn't read and didn't understand what was happening, as the man paid some money and insisted on something and then received some papers. He gave her the papers, saying, "Here, here are your manumission papers, they set you free." "I hate you!" she hissed. He said, "You don't understand, these papers set you free, no one owns you anymore."

She said, "What?! You paid twice as much for me as anyone else sold, I don't believe you." He says, "Yes, these papers give you your freedom." "Stop mister! Do you mean to say that you bought me to set me free?"

"Yes," he says, "That's why I bought you, to set you free." Tears stream down her face. She falls to her knees, puts her hands around his boots and through her tears she sobs, "Oh, you

⁴ It was from a sermon of his on Hebrews 1-2.

bought me to set me free. You bought me to set me free. You paid more for me than ever has been paid before, just to set me free.” And as tears continue to stream she looks up at him and exclaims, “Oh sir, all I want in life is to be your slave. You bought me, to set me free.”

Bread - This bread represents Christ’s body, broken for us. Eat it in joyful remembrance of the one Who bought you, to set you free.

Now let’s worship, giving our hearts to the One who bought us to set us free.

Cup – “To see the law by Christ fulfilled and hear His pardoning voice, transforms a slave into a child, and duty into choice.” This cup represents Christ’s blood, spilled for us. Drink it in joyful remembrance of Him.

Pray

Dismissal – Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.